



**NORDIC PERSPECTIVES ON ENCOUNTERING  
FOREIGNNESS**

Edited by Anne Folke Henningsen, Leila Koivunen and Taina Syrjämaa



**NORDIC PERSPECTIVES ON ENCOUNTERING**

# **FOREIGNNESS**

Edited by Anne Folke Henningsen, Leila Koivunen and Taina Syrjämaa

Histories 1  
General History  
University of Turku

© 2009 authors

Printed by Wasa Graphics Oy, Vaasa

Layout: Akseli Salmi

English proof reading: Robert Collis

Cover image: The Indian Village at Copenhagen Zoo 1901.

Archives of the Zoological Garden, Copenhagen.

ISBN 978-951-29-4161-2 (print)

ISBN 978-951-29-4162-9 (PDF)

Histories 1

General History, University of Turku

ISSN 1798-6508

Introduction	7
<i>Christina Folke Ax</i> The Stranger You Know: Icelandic Perceptions of Danes in the Twentieth Century	13
<i>Taina Syrjämäa</i> Making Difference, Seeking Sameness Negotiating Finnishness and Foreignness in an Exhibition	27
<i>Leila Koivunen</i> Exemplary Foreignness Foreign Material Cultures in the Service of Finnish Taste and Industry in the 1870s	41
<i>Anne Folke Henningsen</i> Producing and Consuming Foreignness "Anthropological-Zoological Exhibitions" in Copenhagen	55
<i>Dag Hundstad</i> Foreign or Homegrown? The Creation of Coastal Leisure Culture in the South of Norway	71
<i>Laura Boxberg</i> At the Crossroads of Finnishness and Foreignness Finnish Participation in the Venice Biennale in 1954 and 1956	89
<i>Íris Ellenberger</i> Somewhere Between "Self" and "Other" Colonialism in Icelandic Historical Research	99
List of Authors	115



# Introduction

The foreign can be revered, produced, reproduced, submerged, feared or suppressed, but it has never failed to engage one way or the other. In this volume, a multidisciplinary research network Enfore (Encountering Foreignness – Nordic Perspectives since the Eighteenth Century) will focus on the cultural dynamics of “foreignness”. We will explore the complex phenomenon of the continuous negotiation between “ours” and “theirs” and the making of “our” place in the context of the wider world. We are using the concept of foreignness as an analytical tool for making visible this heterogeneous, variable and diverse phenomenon.

Foreignness is a relatively new concept, used only occasionally in disparate manners. For us foreignness is essentially an imagined quality, something which is considered to be related with that which is abroad. It can be actively produced in order to be consumed or exhibited, or to be kept at a distance. Foreignness can also be strategically claimed or actively dissolved as a significant element of identities. It can coincide with a physical, “real”, connection with foreign countries, but it may also exist separate of any such link. What matters is the

conception, the idea of attachment to that which is abroad.

We see foreignness as a subcategory of the more generic and widely used concept of otherness. Our approach is in many ways based on earlier studies on otherness; yet as a more restricted concept “foreignness” can help to explore cultural processes from a new angle. Our research will contribute to deconstructing the dichotomy of foreign versus indigenous by showing the subjectivity of foreignness and its liability to shifting meanings.

In this volume we will experiment by elaborating the concept of foreignness and adapting it to a series of Nordic case studies. By focusing on Nordic experiences of foreignness we want to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex phenomenon of cultural interaction that took place during the age of imperialism and nationalism. The theoretical framework of colonialism and globalization has been developed to explain cultural interaction from the perspective of the main colonizers, and has subsequently been questioned and remodeled from the perspective of the formerly colonized peoples. In this debate, the Nordic countries have remained somewhat marginal. Only recently has an interest awoken in Scandinavia to assess its role in these global processes. Its apparent detachment from the mainstream of imperialism and colonialism actually transpires to be a complicated entanglement of participation, (re)appropriation and agency.

We wish to study the much-debated questions of cultural interaction from the semi-peripheral position of the Nordic countries. The Nordic countries, which share many cultural aspects, but are not a monolithic entity, serve as a fruitful basis for analyzing such phenomena. Firstly, by analyzing foreignness as an element of national identity we will make visible the heterogeneity of the apparently homogeneous Nordic nation states. Secondly, by drawing on our findings within the Nordic context, we wish to contribute to an understanding of the general processional and dynamic character of foreignness and of the relationship between metropolitan centers and peripheral areas elsewhere in Europe and in the wider world.

Our co-operation as a network dates back to 2006, when the founding members of the group prepared a joint full-day session entitled "Encountering Foreign Worlds – Experiences at Home and Abroad" for the 26th Nordic Congress of Historians in Reykjavik. The conference took place in August 2007 and the proceedings of the session were published in the same year.<sup>1</sup> The funding received from the NOS-HS, Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and Social Sciences, made it possible to have a series of further meetings and discussions with an extended group in the form of three exploratory workshops, which were organized during 2008 and 2009 at the University of Turku in Finland. The format of the workshop series has facilitated deep and intensive co-operation,

in which all participants worked together to elaborate the key concept of foreignness. This working method has proved very efficient in developing and deepening ideas. Different research cases and scholarly perspectives represented in the group have been of crucial help in grasping the nuanced, multifaceted nature of foreignness, which otherwise easily eludes analysis. The working papers published in this volume are the result of these considerations and discussions.

The core group of the network consists of sixteen historians, anthropologists and ethnologists from all five Nordic countries and at various stages of their academic careers. In addition to the Nordic members, the network has had the pleasure of inviting prominent keynote speakers. Professors Annie E. Coombes, Benjamin Schmidt and Amanda Vickery have very generously shared their expertise and ideas with the group. The time span covered in the research of members stretches from the early modern period up to the present day and the research topics touch manifold fields, from missionary work, exhibitions and international tourism to port towns, minorities, immigration and consumer culture. Foreignness is studied as a phenomenon that is encountered and experienced both at home and abroad. In their studies, the participants use theoretical and methodological approaches derived from their own disciplines, as well as from other fields, such as museum and tourism studies, humanistic geography, art history and post-colonial studies. There is also a



strong interest among the members in the history of senses, performance studies, gender studies and material culture studies.

Foreignness is not an established research concept but the term has occasionally been used in previous studies of various disciplines – albeit often without exact definitions. In a recent article on British culinary practices and the assimilation of other cuisines into the traditional diet, for example, Delia Chiaro discusses foreignness as manifested by exotic foods.<sup>2</sup> The concept has also been used in the context of consumer culture, for instance to refer to the allure and impact of imported goods.<sup>3</sup> What is more, the assumed foreignness of international avant-garde movements – as seen from the perspective of national artistic circles – has been studied.<sup>4</sup> The term foreignness has also been used by Yael Ben-Zvi in analyzing eighteenth-century Native American captivity narratives and their construction of a sense of being foreign within the broader culture of the United States.<sup>5</sup> Besides these specific examples, the topic of foreignness has been approached in recent decades in a number of other studies, without being articulated with this precise concept. Many inspiring studies have been written, for example, about the representation of other regions and cultures, the mobility of people, objects and ideas, cultural encounters and multiculturalism.

The phenomenon has also been approached in the previous work of the group members. Earlier studies have focused on topics, such as the presence

and influence of foreign worlds at home as experienced in the form of flavours, food stuff, advertising, popular culture, museum collections and touristic themes.<sup>6</sup> The practices of constructing and maintaining the home in foreign environments have also been studied, as well as the responses of local people to the presence of foreigners.<sup>7</sup> In addition, group members have focused on the manners and mechanisms of representing things that are considered foreign.<sup>8</sup> Particular attention has also been given to mission studies, and the ways in which ideas about foreignness, difference, and sameness have been employed in missionary encounters.<sup>9</sup>

This anthology consists of seven articles written by members of the research network, thus presenting the work of approximately half the participants in the workshops. The topics under examination cover a broad scope with a great variety in terms of time period, geographical location and analytic strategies. A feature running through the volume is the un-fixed character of foreignness, which all the articles address, along with the mobile and negotiable aspects of the concept. Likewise, its productive qualities, in the sense of being something both produced and producing, is emphasized in many of the articles: foreignness undertakes a *job* in the social, political and cultural settings in which it is employed. One of the situations in which foreignness can be employed as a strategic tool is in the effort of semi-peripheral societies, such as the Nordic countries, to become more firmly established as part

of the center by re-enacting practices of the leading Western societies. Another way of employing foreignness could be in the valorization of specific phenomena by connecting them with foreignness, either for supportive or suppressive purposes.

In the first article of the anthology, Christina Folke Ax deals with the familiar stranger – Danes in twentieth-century Iceland – who assumed a curious position that was at one time very similar to the Icelanders and yet exerted a foreign presence in the country. Ax demonstrates how the Icelandic perception of the Danes as foreigners was intertwined with political and cultural changes. Taina Syrjämaa, in her article, analyses the ways in which Finnishness was constructed and presented at the first general exhibition of Finland in Helsinki in 1876, and points to the fact that not only the architects behind the exhibition, but also the general audience took part in this construction. The point that Syrjämaa makes is that neither Finnishness nor foreignness are stable categories: they are mutual constituents locked into one another in perpetually ongoing negotiations of meaning. Another exhibition practice, that of the collection and display of “exotic” objects in Finland in the 1870s, is the subject matter of Leila Koivunen’s article. Collection and exhibitions were seen as civilized and civilizing enterprises, and Koivunen argues that the organized display of foreign objects was part of an effort to distance Finland further away from the periphery and closer to the center of the Western world. Another form of exhibition of for-

eignness, but with similar effects, is studied in Anne Folke Henningsen’s article on ethnographic exhibitions in Copenhagen around 1900. The organizers of such shows emphasized the radical foreignness of the people on display in accordance with the exhibition practices of the leading European and North American countries, thus affiliating the Danes with the hegemonic powers of the world.

In his article, Dag Hundstad deals with the introduction of coastal tourism culture in southern Norway in the early twentieth century. The question Hundstad asks is whether such a culture was experienced as something foreign or as something familiar by the inhabitants of the region. It seems, however, that the leisure culture introduced consisted of both foreign and familiar aspects, and also that generational belonging might be an important factor in the experiences of this new culture of tourism. The foreign and the familiar are discussed in a different context in Laura Boxberg’s article on the Finnish contribution at the Venice Biennale in 1954 and 1956. The questions revolve around decisions about what constitutes Finnishness and foreignness in the Finnish arts, and what was considered desirable to display – “traditional” Finnish art or Finnish art influenced by “foreign” and international trends. In the last article, the anthology goes full circle when Íris Ellenberger reflects upon Iceland’s curious position as being somewhere between self and other in relation to Danish rule of the island. Ellenberger argues that it is necessary to scrutinize the ideas of same-

ness and foreignness that saturate the relationship between Iceland and Denmark if one is to understand and determine the special status of Iceland in the Danish colonial system.

Foreignness and familiarity, center and periphery, constructions and displays of foreignness all contribute at different levels in the articles, each of which helps us to understand the complex phenomenon of cultural interaction.

Turku and Copenhagen, 30 November 2009

Editors

- 1 *Encountering Foreign Worlds. Experiences at Home and Abroad. Proceedings from the 26th Nordic Congress of Historians Reykjavik 8–12 August 2007* (2007). Ed. by Christina Folke Ax, Anne Folke Henningsen, Niklas Thode Jensen, Leila Koivunen, Taina Syrjämaa. Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar 41. Reykjavik, Háskólaútgáfan.
- 2 Chiaro, Delia (2008) A Taste of Otherness. Eating and thinking globally. *European Journal of English Studies* Vol. 12, No. 2, 195–209.
- 3 *The Allure of the Foreign. Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (1997). Ed. by Benjamin Orlove. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press.
- 4 Mansback, S. A. (1998) The "Foreignness" of Classical Modern Art in Romania. *Art Bulletin* Vol. LXXX, No 3, 534–554.
- 5 Ben-Zvi, Yael (2008) Ethnology and the Production of Foreignness in Indian Captivity Narratives. *American Indian Quarterly*.
- 6 Syrjämaa, Taina (2001) Verbal and Visual Temptations – Omnipresence of Touristic Themes in Western 19th and 20th Century Daily Environment. *Tutkimusmatkalla pohjoiseen. Giuseppe Acerbin Nordkapin matkan 200-vuotissyposiumi*. Ed. by Eero Jarva, Markku Mäkiuoti, Timo Sironen. Oulu, Oulun yliopisto, 153–166; Syrjämaa, Taina (2000) Tourism as a Typical Cultural Phenomenon of Urban Consumer Society, *New Directions in Urban History. Aspects of European Art, Health, Tourism and Leisure since the Enlightenment*. Ed. by Peter Borsay, Gunther Hirschfelder, Ruth-E. Mohrmann. Münster, Waxmann, 177–202; Syrjämaa, Taina (2002) Napolilainen pannukakku. Toisenlaiset kansainväliset suhteet. *Dialogus. Historian taito*. Ed. by Meri Heinonen, Leila Koivunen, Sakari Ollitervo, Heli Paalumäki, Hannu Salmi, Janne Tunturi. Turku, Kirja Aurora, 223–235. Gustafsson Reinius, Lotten (2005) *Förfärliga och begärliga förefål. Om tingens roller på Stockholmsutställningen 1897 och Etnografiska missionsutställningen 1907*. Stockholm, Etnografiska museet.
- 7 Ax, Christina Folke (2008) Islændingene og de danske købmænd i Reykjavik 1770–1850, *Rejse gennem Islands historie – den danske forbindelse*. Søren Mentz (red.). Gads Forlag, 75–90.
- 8 Ellenberger, Íris (2008), Íslendingar í heimi framtíðarinnar. Kvikmyndir Vigfúsar Sigurgeirssonar og landkynningarvakningin 1935–40, *Þjóðin, landið og lýðveldið. Vigfús Sigurgeirsson ljósmyndari og kvikmyndagerðarmaður*. Ed. by Inga Lára Baldvinsdóttir. The National Museum of Iceland, 27–48; Ellenberger, Íris (2007) *Íslandskvikmyndir 1916–1966. Ímyndir, sjálfsmynd og vald*. Reykjavik, Háskólaútgáfan and Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands; Ellenberger, Íris (forthcoming in 2010) "A country of peace, of industry, of haunting beauty". Iceland on the silver screen. A collection of papers presented at the conference *Islande dans l'Imaginaire*. Presses universitaires de Caen; Koivunen, Leila (2009) *Visualizing Africa in Nineteenth-Century British Travel Accounts*. New York, Routledge.
- 9 Henningsen, Anne Folke (2008) Sydafrikanske William S. Mazwis Lebenslauf (ca. 1928). *1066. Tidsskrift for Historie*, 38. årgang nr. 4, 49–55; Henningsen, Anne Folke (2008) *Race, Rights, Religion: Interactions between White Missionaries and Black Congregants in the Moravian Mission Church in Eastern South Africa, c. 1870–1940*. University of Aarhus, unpublished PhD dissertation.

# The Stranger You Know

## Icelandic Perceptions of Danes in the Twentieth Century

*Christina Folke Ax*

For a long time, everything here that was not Icelandic was called Danish, and it was valuable to show off something Danish which was believed to be much better than something Icelandic. This way of thinking does to some extent still exist, though nowadays it is rather called “foreign” than Danish [...]. The tendency is that we look more and more to foreign countries and more and more cut our coat according to foreign cloth. [...] We, inhabitants of Þingeyjarsýsla, do not want our young women to become Danish Mistresses. We want them to be *Icelandic housewives* who know their calling and duties. We are and will be Icelandic, this we admit without blushing.<sup>1</sup>

As the quotation above from 1905 indicates, Denmark and “Danishness” played an important role in defining foreignness in Iceland. Thus, it illustrates that foreignness is sometimes interlocked with other characteristics – in this case Danishness – which

become synonymous with something foreign. It also underlines that foreignness is relative, in the sense that something becomes foreign because something else is not. It is through this difference that the foreign achieves its fascination and captures the imagination.

The aim of this article is to delve deeper into the Icelandic understanding of the “foreign” Danish elements in their society and to investigate how the colonial power and its representatives were perceived. Furthermore, the aim is to explore the ambiguities involved in describing something that is foreign and yet well-known and, finally, how general stereotypes were reflected in the way individual Danes living in Iceland were described.

Many sources, such as letters and literature, describe Denmark through the eyes of Icelanders. This article, however, relies on newspaper articles about Denmark and Danes printed in Icelandic newspapers. Along with Norwegians and Britons, Danes were the group of foreigners most often mentioned in Icelandic newspapers, thereby forming a stable point of reference through the entire century.<sup>2</sup> The impersonal descriptions in the newspaper articles are compared with the ones found in obituaries of individual Danes, who settled in Iceland during the decades leading up to and following Icelandic independence in 1944. Icelanders seem to have a special fondness for obituaries. The main newspaper, *Morgunblaðið*, dedicates several pages to what are often very long descriptions of the deceased.<sup>3</sup> The

obituaries are printed free of cost and are written by people who knew the deceased, such as grandchildren, friends of the family or former colleagues. They account for family connections of the deceased and go on to describe his or her character, appearance and personal history. The obituaries of the Danes follow the same pattern.

## Denmark and Iceland

In order to understand how Danishness came to be viewed as synonymous with foreignness it is important to examine the relationship between the two countries. Iceland became part of the Danish realm in 1383 and was governed from Copenhagen until the country gradually obtained larger degrees of self-determination during the twentieth century. The process culminated in the founding of the Icelandic Republic in 1944.

However, during most of the long history of Danish rule, Danes were absent from Icelandic society. Church officials were Icelanders and from the eighteenth century so too were secular officials. With a few exceptions the top officials were Danes, but only a few ever visited Iceland.<sup>4</sup> Due to a trade monopoly, which lasted from 1602 to 1787, all merchants were Danish, but until 1760 they were only allowed to stay in Iceland during the summer. Even after the ban was removed, they usually spent most of the year in Denmark.<sup>5</sup> From the end of the nine-

teenth century, the situation gradually changed. A larger number of Danes settled in Iceland and for most of the twentieth century they represented the largest group of immigrants, even though they did not count as such until after 1944.<sup>6</sup>

The absence of Danes in Icelandic everyday life did not mean that Icelanders were unfamiliar with Denmark. For hundreds of years, Copenhagen was the capital of Iceland, Danish was the language of government and Icelandic officials thus spoke Danish and were educated in Copenhagen. It was often considered prestigious to be able to speak Danish.<sup>7</sup> In addition, whilst merchants may not have spent much time in Iceland, they did bring with them a foreign building style for their warehouses and foreign products.<sup>8</sup> The author of the above-mentioned quote also points to the role of the merchants when he explains why Icelanders used to equate “foreign” with being Danish. During the twentieth century, Danish magazines and films also became popular, thereby adding to Icelandic knowledge of Denmark, Danes, and the Danish language.

## The Foreigner as a “known other”

Karen Oslund has argued convincingly that Icelanders occupied a position as “the known other” in the European imagination during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> The concept of the known other and the concept of foreignness are related,

because both can be used to handle multilayered meanings, paradoxes and the unstableness of the categories.

The concept of the “known other” draws on the extensive research that has been carried out on the colonial and oriental other. However, it tries to overcome the binary opposition that is inherent in the notion of the oriental or colonial other, but does not describe the position of the fringe areas very well. Karen Oslund explains that the North Atlantic region occupied an in-between position. Icelanders were neither completely part of “us” nor of “them”. As she writes:

There was no firm dividing line separating the known from the unknown, Europe from the Orient; rather, one got lost gradually, and, what was worse, unexpectedly. Places, one might expect to be “ordinary” were in fact “strange”, and what was made “exotic” in the imagination turned out on the journey to be disappointingly “normal”.<sup>10</sup>

To Icelanders, the Danes had a similar in-between status in the twentieth century, although Denmark and Danes represented the center and not the periphery. In Icelandic society, the Danes were foreigners because they were not Icelandic, and as such they belonged to the group of “others”. On the other hand, Iceland was connected to Denmark through political, economic, cultural and kinship ties, and Icelanders were familiar with the Danish language and Danish society. This previous knowledge meant that it was difficult to uphold firm categories and

any binary oppositions between foreign and familiar or “them” and “us”. Instead, the Danes occupied many different and changing positions as foreigners in Icelandic society, and Denmark and Danish signified many things according to the context. As will be demonstrated below, in some cases the foreignness of Danes was underlined, but in other cases attempts were made to undo their foreignness to some degree, or at least to contain it within an Icelandic context.

## Opressors and Modernizers

As stated above, the Icelandic understanding of Danes was full of paradoxes. On the one hand, Danishness represented education, and in some contexts a certain refinement; while on the other hand, Danes and Denmark represented the opponent in the struggle for self-determination. Danes were accused of having little interest in Iceland, caring more about money, and of having through the ages “sucked the blood and marrow” out of the nation.<sup>11</sup>

The writings that appeared in the Icelandic press during the first decades of the twentieth century were especially colourful, coinciding as they did with the establishment of home-rule in 1904 and the so-called sovereignty in union with the Danish king in 1918. A good example is the following description from 1905 regarding Danish interest in Iceland:

But Europe (especially Danes) will gladly exploit our country, have it as a “cormorant’s nest” for a small group of these ravenous mammon cormorants that do not thrive in their own country. However, our country has long fed such cormorants – on the initiative of our Danish rulers – first and foremost in stores, then in fisheries, and now they have started nesting in farming, finances and even at the waterfalls.<sup>12</sup>

This description of the Danes relates to the areas where Danes had long been dominant, such as trade as well as fledgling industries like banking and the exploitation of hydropower. These were areas that were important for the Icelanders to gain control over as part of an overall plan to create a modern, independent and self-sufficient state. This was particularly the case because the Danish government at the time argued that their reluctance to grant Iceland larger degrees of self-determination was based on the grounds that the colony lacked the necessary means to govern itself in the modern world.<sup>13</sup> During this period, however, Danes were accused of being “incompetent colonizers” and too happy with the way things were.<sup>14</sup> The ignorance of Icelandic conditions among Danish politicians was also a recurrent cause of complaint.

Paradoxically, the descriptions of greedy Danes existed side by side with descriptions of Denmark as a modern and educated nation – especially when it came to farming and farm-products. In many articles, Danes were praised for their hard work, which

had been the foundation for the development of the country. In 1938, Davið Áskelsson wrote:

The Danes are hard working, in many respects more hard working than Icelanders. And they are persevering and do not give up because of difficulties. They are quick to learn and good at understanding all things technical. They are economic, honest and have many qualities that the Icelanders perhaps lack to some extent. Few nations are their equal when it comes to improving industries, for instance, farming [...].<sup>15</sup>

Steingrímur Matthíasson, who travelled in Denmark in the 1930s, noted that he envied the Danes because they were more moderate than Icelanders in drinking and finances.<sup>16</sup>

Common to these descriptions is that they more often than not referred to the Danes in Denmark and sometimes to outstanding products of Danish origin. Danishness became instrumental in mirroring the qualities that the author felt were lacking in Icelanders or the country in general. This positive understanding of Denmark is also found later in the century, and several of the obituaries draw on this understanding of Danishness as a sign of education. They describe the deceased person as coming from a place with a more international air, as in the case of Lise Gíslason’s obituary, in which Danes are described as world citizens and yet “so nice and Danish.”<sup>17</sup>

The contrasting images of Danes are to a large extent founded on the position of the Danes as a



## MINNINGAR

## LISE GÍSLASON

† Lise Gíslason hjúkrunarfræðingur var fædd í Naksokv á Lálandi 26. febrúar 1920 í Danmörku. Hún lést í Borgarspítalunum 2. febrúar síðastliðinn. Foreldrar hennar voru Peter Sveistrup stórkaupmann og kona hans Ingeborg Helene fædd Mathiesen. Systkini hennar sem náðu fullorðinsaldri voru Aage, Inge og Bent, sem einn er eftirlifandi þeirra systkina. 8. september 1945 giftist Lise Ólafi Gíslasyni raftekniþræðingi. Hann var fæddur 14. júní 1913 á Húsavík, sonur hjómanna Gísla Péturssonar héraðsleknis og konu hans Aðalbjargar Jakobsdóttur. Ólafur var eigin rafteknistofu í Reykjavík í 45 ár. Hann lést 30. janúar 1994. Þau áttu eina dóttur, Evu, fædd 22.10. 1946, sem lengst



(farsóttir), síðan við geðveikisársaltan í Rískkov, Árósum, og eftir það við fæðingarskeiðlið Den kommunale Fødeinik til 1. jan. 1945. Lise fluttist með manni sínum til Íslands í febrúar 1946 og hóf að starfa eftir við hjúkrun 1955, við Heilsværðarstöð Reykjavíkur, í fyrstu við afleysingar, en síðan í föstu starfi þar til í apríl 1988.

Úttír Lise fór fram frá Laugarneskirkju.

stundum fóru víða um heiminn og hófðu frá mörgu að segja ef eftir var leitað. Áttvín höguðu því svo til að næstliðnum áratugum höfum við átt, margar ferðir saman austur á Eyrbakkna og þau voru úrvals samferðamenn.

Ég veit að ég mæli fyrir munn okkar frændfólksins og fjölskyldna okkar þegar ég nú á kveðjustundu þau fram aldurþakkir okkar til Lísu fyrir góða og trausta samfylgi og innleggar samúðarkveðjur til Evu og eftirlifandi systkina Lísu.

Gísli Ólafur Pétursson.

Nú eru þau bæði dánir vinn okkar Ólafur og Lise Gíslason, eigin kona hans.

Ólafur lést 30. janúar 1994 eða fyrir rímu ári, en Lise 2. febrúar sí. Lise, eins og við kölluðum hana ávallt, var ein þeirra vel gerðu erlendur aðila hér á landi, sem stofnaði sitt heimili með maka sínum og samdi sig að hlérendum síðum með alldó og umhyggju, eignaðist fljótt góða vini og setti sig við öblótari náttúruskilyrði en í hennar heimalandi.

Lise og Ólafur Gíslason voru mjög samrýnd hjón og báru mikla

umhyggju hvort fyrir öðru. Það sást vel þegar eitthvað hljótaði á. Þegar Ólafur var orðinn heilsautæpur var Lise, þrátt fyrir hennar mikla heilubrest síðustu árin, ávallt reiðubúin til að aðstoða Ólaf eftir því, sem hún frekast gat. Meðal annars sem hún gerði var að ganga með honum úti, þótt ekki væri nema spól í nágreinni heimilis þeirra, en slíkar göngur voru Ólafi bæði þort og ánægja.

Við það eins og svo margt annað, var Evu dóttir þeirra þeim sífellt mikil aðstoð, svo og vinir Ólafs, sem gengu oft með honum úti. Á síðustu gönguferð Ólafs var Lise með honum. Sú gönguferð var nöpur fyrir Lísu, eins og íslenskt veðurfar var þá líka, því Ólafur hné þá niður og var láttinn er komið við með hann á sjúkrahús. Þannig sá hún á eftir eiskulegum eiftmanni sínum, sem hafði verið hennar stóð og stytta í gegnum öll þeirra samvistari.

Við hjónin kynntumst Lísu og Ólafi fljótlega eftir að þau komu til landsins, skömmu eftir heimsstyrjöldina síðari og höfum því þekkt í nærlífi 50 ár. Öft höfum við góðast saman með þeim hjónum, dóttur þeirra og góðkunningingum. Með Lísu og Ólafi var aldrei annað en gleði, þótt of væri nokkur gáski með í spili meðan heilsa leyfði.

Vinsendin var hrein og ótvíræð. Þau var gott heim að sækja. Lise var hjúkrunarfræðingur og vann að starfi sínu í fjölda ára, bæði í Danmörku og hér á landi. Hún var mjög vel lúin í starfi enda sérstakur persónuleiki, sem aldrei lét sér um munn fara neitt misjafnt um nokkurn mann.

Okkur öllum, sem líður vel, er í ljóset þorð að að lífa áfram okkar líff hér á jörð. Við, sem erum orðin fullorðin, erum þó sífellt að missa vini, skylda og vandalaus. Þá verðum við ávallt vinnafærri, þótt aðrir yngri bættist í höpin, en það er önnur saga. Sú vinsend hefur ekki skapast með sömu lífsreytna, gleði eða sorgum, þótt hún sé góð og ómissandi. Með þessari lítil vinnakveðu sökkum við Lísu og biðjum styrks og blessunar fyrir Evu, dóttur hennar, sem nú hefur misst bæði foreldra sína á rímu ári.

Guðrún Soffía og Friðgeir Grímsson.

Lífstaða gleði alnar gleði er gleði þyr þvi, sem er alls ekki neitt, engu, sem manni er á valdi eða í vil, gleði yfir engu og gleði yfir öllu, gleði að vera til.

Sérstaka hryggð alnar hryggð er hryggð þyr þvi, sem er alls ekki neitt, óvinsid hugbóð, orðum og gjöf, hryggð yfir einhverri erindiseysa á óskjölnigri jörð.

Þessar ljóllurnir danska fjóskáldsins Axel Juel í þýðingum Magnúrs Ágseirssonar eiga vel við nú þegar vinkona mín og næst-um þvi frænka, Lise Gíslason, er öll. Ég segi næstum því vegna bjargfastrar sannteringar minnar um skyldleika okkar Lise. Lise Gíslason var ekkja frændna mín, Ólafi Gíslasonar raftekniþræðings, en hann lést 30. janúar á síðasta ári. Hann hafði átt við veikindi að stríðu, en honum hafði farið fram og ég man að ég gerði mér vonir um að hann myndi e.t.v. eiga nokkur ár eftir þrátt fyrir veikindi og háan aldur, en hann varð áttáræður h. 14. júní 1993. Þau hjónin héldu veglega veislu á hinu falliga heimili sínu og léku bæði á als öldi. Lise hafði orð á því að þetta myndi verða síðasta veislan sem hún héldi og reyndist hún þar sannspá. Lise Sveistrup Gíslason fæddist í Naksokv á Lálandi. Hún var fædd fyrir tímann ásamt tvíburarbróður sínum, en hann lést stuttu eftir fæðinguna. Lise var lögó í hitakassa og var henni vart hugað líf. Á þessum tíma voru ekkja miklir lífsöguleikar fyrir fyrirburða en eftir margra mánaða líffarbarðu hinnar agnarsmá stúlkun fengu foreldrar Lise hana heim.

Hún óst upp í Naksokv til 6 ára aldurs en þá fútti Sveistrup-fjölkyldan til Róskilde.

Lífsglefin var mikil og Lise sem vart var hugað líf í upphafi, varð aldrei misdægur. Hún sagði mér að það hefði verið til þessi teki hvað hún var sérstaklega hraust um stúlka. Hinn stundaði íþróttir og útivist og eins og hún sagði sjálf, „gat aldrei stoppað“. Það að þurfa þerjast fyrir lífi sínu í upphafi setur sítt mark á manneskj og það gefur henni vidd líffleitis í sáú sína. Það var einkennandi í fari Lise hvað hún gladdist – yfir engu og yfir öllu og bara því að vera til.

Öft er talað um hina sérkennilegu menningarskráningu í Danmörku og þau alþjóðlegu áhrif sem maður verður fyrir þar. Danir virðast vera svo miklir heimborgarar en samt svo danskir og huggulegir. Einhver orðið það svo að Danmörk væri hlið Skandinavíu inn í Evrópu og vissulega eru erlend áhrif áberandi í Danmörku svo sem í tungumáli, þar sem bregður fyrir frönskum, þýskum og enskum

áhrifum, — en sennilega eru Danir heimborgarar vegna þessara áhrifa.

Að hjúkrunarmálinu kofist Lise Ólafi Gíslasyni, raftekniþræðingi, Gísla Péturssonar leknis á Eyrbakkna, ömmubrórur mín, og Aðalbjargar Jakobsdóttur, afasystur minnar. Þau eignuðust eina dóttur, Evu, og lífir hún foreldra sína.

Lise bjó yfir öllum þeim kostum sem þrýða goðan Dana auk þeirra íslensku, því íslendingur varð hún og vildi vera. Hún var íslendingur með danska förtó.

Lise starfaði sem hjúkrunarkona hér í Reykjavík í 33 ár og átti þar afar farsælan lír. Hún lét líka til sín taka í félagsmálinum en hún var formaður Dansk vinkvæðubú á Íslandi um tíma.

Hún hafði lag á því — eins og við systkini sögðum — að vera boðberi gleðilegra tíðinda, því það var Lise sem sögði manni frá giftningum, barnsfeðingum, útíttum og utandlandsferðum sem áttu sér stað í okkar stóru fjölskyldu en eins og gengur er oft erftitt að fylgjast með atburðar og var því svo gaman að frögn hvað hún og þessir í fjölskyldunni voru að taka sér fyrir hendur.

Við unga fökkid í fjölskyldunni á sínum tíma nutum góðs af þessum eiginleikum Lísu — að tengja fökk í fjölskyldunni saman — og er mér minnstátt veisla mikil er þau hjónin héldu okkur og fengum við þar tækifæri til að kynnst og bindast vinnátvöndum. Ég hitti þar fólk sem var mér nýskýtt en sem ég hafði ekki haft tækifæri til að kynnst áður.

Eins og lökast oft með eldru fökkid er því ekkri eiginlegt að bera sorgir sínar á torg og svo var með Lísu.

Hún átti við veikindi að stríðu, hún síðari átt og þurfi að vera á lyfjum vegna þess, en þar var ekkri fyrir en rétt undir lokin sem ég gerði mér gætur fyrir hversu alvarleg þessi veikindi voru. Hún bar sig alltaf svo vel og mér finnst svo stutt síðan við vorum að hlæja og skemma okkur saman.

Lise og Ólafur voru bestu vinir foreldra mínna og reyndust þau möður minni ómetanlegu stóð við fráfall föður minns, en hann lést langt fyrir aldur fram. Mig langar að lokum til að þakka allt og allt og það að fá að vera vinur þessa sómálfóks. Ég vil víta dóttur þeirra Evu mína dýpsta samúð og bló Guð að gefa henni styrk í sorginni.

Margrét Arnadóttir.

The newspaper, Morgunblaðið, often devotes several pages to obituaries. Often, there is more than one obituary for every individual, which are written by relatives and friends as in the case of Lise Gíslason's obituary in Morgunblaðið 2.2.1995.



*The iconographic understanding of Denmark underlines the soft and fertile landscape which is formed by people and farming. The photo shows a scene from a village called Kikhavn. Photographed by Kenneth W. Jessen 2007.*

known other. They were not merely foreigners, but well-known foreigners. Thus, the image of Denmark as a country of progress signals that Danes came from a country that Icelanders could relate to and identify with – to some extent at least. Likewise, throughout the entire twentieth century Icelanders were able to differ between “good” and “bad” Danes. Even during the most heated debates in the

first decades of the century, those who wrote in Icelandic newspapers often underlined that the Danes being criticized only included government officials and some journalists, whereas there were others who were much more like Icelanders.

Not surprisingly, the strong emotions and the image of the Danes as oppressors gradually disappeared as Iceland obtained larger degrees of inde-



*In tourist brochures, Iceland is called the land of ice and fire. The untouched and unspoiled landscape is central to this description. The photo shows the coast at Strandir in the North-west of Iceland. Photographed by Kenneth W. Jessen 2007.*

pendence. In certain situations – especially concerning the return of the Icelandic manuscripts in the 1960s – the bad old times were recalled in newspapers. It is also still possible to find accounts of Danish atrocities, but they are mostly described as things in the past. Today, the descriptions are mostly more neutral and references to Denmark often appear on the sports pages.

## The Stereotypes

The stereotypes were not only tied to the political situation. Danes were – and are – supposed to have a range of different characteristics that set them apart from Icelanders. These stereotypes are found throughout the entire twentieth century. One of the areas where Danes are thought to be distinctive is in

their culinary habits. Icelanders call themselves *mör-lendingar*, referring to a special kind of fat, whereas the popular nickname for a Dane is *bauni*, or *baun-verji*, meaning a pea. This refers to a dish made from yellow peas that Icelanders regarded as the Danish national dish. An Icelander tried to correct this view among his countrymen in 1918: “In addition many Icelanders also think that the main food of the Danes is porridge made from yellow peas, a dish they hardly ever taste.”<sup>18</sup>

Although, Icelanders no longer believe that Danes live on yellow peas, food is still an important element when Danes are described in the obituaries — although there is more of an emphasis on a more distinguished diet. Edith Magnússon’s son-in-law, for instance, remembered her good sauce.<sup>19</sup> And Ella Marie Einarsson’s grandchildren mentioned in 1994 that she was “an excellent cook as Danes normally are”.<sup>20</sup> It is an interesting phenomenon because Icelandic housewives are also remembered for their skills in the kitchen, because cooking is connected to gender and because the meal is a way to express a sense of community and hospitality. In the case of Danish women, however, the fact that they are foreign means that their cooking takes on an extra dimension. In effect, the Danish woman is remembered for cooking in a special *Danish* way. Some obituaries mention that the deceased person learned to like Icelandic food. Here the contrast is between traditional Icelandic qualities and the refined quality of foreign culinary habits. In these

cases, food is part of a kind of rite of passage and signals that the person in question became part of the Icelandic community by acquiring a taste for the country’s food.

Another aspect of the difference between Icelanders and Danes centers on mentality. Danes are described as hard working, polite and especially cheerful. The majority of the obituaries mention the special Danish sense of humour and lightheartedness, and contrasts between the cheerful Danes and the serious Icelanders are also found in newspapers. Sometimes, it can be a bit too much, as can be seen in the following description from 1918: “They are cheerful, lighthearted and everything becomes a laughing matter. At parties the merrymaking and the noise often is so loud that it resembles the chirping from a bird cliff. They talk and laugh all at once.”<sup>21</sup>

The difference between the Danish and the Icelandic landscape often serves as a metaphor as well as an explanation for the difference between the two mentalities. Once again, the following description from 1918 epitomizes this sentiment:

I do not know if it is a Danish national character, what I found among the Danish peasants, a narrow way of thinking bound to the home. But I do not think it would be without foundation if it was so. The country does not offer a far view. There is hardly any view except from the towers that educated people have built for themselves but only a few have access to those.<sup>22</sup>

Twenty years later Davíð Áskelsson echoed this view:

The mentality and behavior of the Danes have to a large extent been formed by the landscape and the environment [...]. And they themselves are also flat. Their psyche resembles the lowlands. This is a fact that most (except the Danes) admit. Not to say that there are no geniuses in Denmark. But when you judge an entire nation, you judge on the grounds of the common people, "den brede Befolkning" as the Danes say. And I think there is a real difference in attitude in Denmark and Iceland [...]. Danes have no imagination. They cannot lift themselves above the mundane.<sup>23</sup>

The Danes may be merry and hard working, but they do not have the deep emotions and love of literature that the Icelanders do. In accordance with this view – and perhaps connected to it – the newspapers hardly ever mention Danish culture, unless it is to explain how it relies on Icelandic culture.

In the obituaries, landscape also plays an important part in the narrative – probably because it lends itself to underlining the change and journey that the person in question undertook in coming to Iceland. This is especially true in the cases when people made the journey during the first half of the century – when ships were the only means of transportation. In 1966, a former student of Marius Jessen, the headmaster of the machinist school, for example, wrote the following obituary, in which an attempt was made to describe such a journey: "He

is about 26 years old. Sealand is still in full summer bloom, the air is heavy with the smell of flowers, the breeze is warm, and the sea is like a mirror. [...] A week later he stands in the same spot and watches the white peaks of Iceland rise out of the waves of the ocean in happy sunshine. An awesome but cold view."<sup>24</sup> In the obituaries, the landscape is not something that influences the Danish mentality. Instead, it illustrates what they leave behind in Denmark: the comfortable, civilized and fertile land. In this manner the comparisons between the Icelandic and Danish landscapes also illustrate that foreignness is connected to a sense of distance – whether perceived or real. It is something, or someone, that comes from another place and for this reason is different from the person encountering it.

## Undoing Foreignness

The landscape, however, also serves as a way to describe the transformation that Danes undergo when they settle in Iceland and decide to stay. Again and again, the obituaries mention how the deceased person in question is awestruck by Icelandic nature:

He was immediately moved by the beauty of the country and travelled a lot with travel associations. He admired the grandeur of the mountains, the beauty of the waterfalls, and the wonderful silence in valleys and this shows how he steeped himself in the Icelandic landscape, a man who came from a country without moun-



*Thor Jensen was one of the most prominent Danish immigrants. He came to Iceland in 1878 to work for a Danish merchant in the Northern part of Iceland. He was deeply involved in the modernization of Iceland and became one of the most influential members of Icelandic society. (Óðinn, janúar-júní 1934.)*

tains. He had become a completely formed Icelander.<sup>25</sup>

The love of Icelandic nature is seen as the ticket to Icelandicness – he or she becomes “like one of us” through interaction with nature. Love and acceptance of Icelandic nature translates to love of the country. This reflects the Icelandic understanding of their national identity as connected to the landscape.

In these accounts, the transformation is often described by mentioning that a person became *landnámsmaður* or took *ásthóstur* to Iceland. The word *landnámsmaður* means settler and is most often seen in the obituaries from the first half of the twentieth century. The same word is used for the Scandinavians who originally settled in Iceland in the ninth century and maybe – consciously or not – a connection is made between the first settlers and the Danes helping to build a modern and independent society. This characteristic is predominantly ascribed to men. When Carl Olsen turned 85 in 1965, one of his former employees wrote that although “we Icelanders” had had some quarrels with Danes, they had to admit that many of their best settlers had come from Denmark and among them was Carl Olsen – who ended up becoming more Icelandic than most Icelanders.<sup>26</sup>

*Ásthóster*, on the other hand, is used in the case of both genders and means that the person took a liking to the country – the word itself consists of a combination of *ást*, meaning love, and *hóstur* mean-

ing to foster. The word in a way describes an adoption of the country and a cancellation of foreignness. At the same time, however, the obituaries stress that the person in question never forgot Denmark and states that they kept in touch with relatives. In continuation of this, it is also mentioned how people discovered that they missed Iceland when visiting Denmark. Thus, they have made a choice: their home is in Iceland and they want to be Icelandic.

This is a paradox, because it means that the foreignness is both undone while still existing. The fact that Danes who settle in Iceland can only become “like” the Icelanders or “more Icelandic than the rest of us” means that they still retain traces of foreignness. Whereas foreign commodities may lose their foreignness and simply become commodities, it is more difficult to overcome the foreignness of people. This means that their Danish origin is remembered in certain situations – sometimes in an unfavourable way as in 1937 when Thor Jensen and his sons – one of the most influential business families at the turn of the twentieth century – are described as the “Danish Jensen family” and as the heirs to the “Danish” monopoly merchants.<sup>27</sup> In this article, the foreignness of Thor Jensen and his sons is upheld, in spite of the fact that the father had lived in Iceland since he was 14 years old and was married to an Icelandic woman, thereby making his sons half-Icelandic. In 1963, almost twenty years after his death, Thor Jensen was characterized as “hinn síðasti mikli landnámsmaður” – the last great settler.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the

borderline between foreignness and indigeneness is not fixed. It shifts all the time and what was at one point foreign, loses its foreignness as it is (partially) incorporated into society.

## Conclusion

The Danes have played many roles in Icelandic society. Whether the Danes are portrayed in a positive or negative light, they act as the Icelandic other. During the first part of the twentieth century, they served as the counterpart in the struggle for independence. They were the representatives of an ignorant and unjust foreign power; they helped define Icelandicness as being *not* Danish. Everybody knew exactly what was wrong with the “Danish mistress” and why it was important to get an “Icelandic housewife”. The merry but somewhat narrow-minded Dane was different from the more serious Icelandic, with a broader view and a more deeply-rooted culture. However, Denmark and Danes could also be a model for change in Icelandic society. As Danes were foreign, and thus not part of Icelandic culture, they could act as a mirror to the Icelanders.

This, however, is not the whole story. In many of the newspaper articles and obituaries Icelanders refer to Danes as kinsmen or relatives using the terms *frændfólk* or *frændur*. The Danes were not simply foreigners like any other group of foreigners. Instead, they belonged to a special group of foreigners,

whom the Icelanders had some previous knowledge of, although also a lot of preconceived notions. They were a people, however, to whom Icelanders could identify with to some extent. Around the founding of the Icelandic Republic in 1944, many voiced the opinion in the newspapers that the Danes would surely understand the importance of being free, now they themselves were occupied by Nazi-Germany. And when Denmark was liberated on May 5th 1945, it was also celebrated in Iceland. Likewise, it was possible for a Dane who settled in Iceland to become a kind of honorary Icelander.

The Icelandic understanding of Danes and Danishness is filled with paradoxes, and it has changed as the two countries have grown apart and the knowledge of Danish language has dwindled, although many Icelanders still go to Denmark as tourists, students or to work. The categories are not stable and there is no firm dividing line. In that sense, Danes are truly a known other to the Icelanders.



- 1 Written by persons referring to themselves as inhabitants of Þingeyjarsýsla, a county in the Northeastern part of Iceland, in *Þjóðólfur* 2.6.1905. All the translations in this article are my own, with the help of Íris Ellenberger and Guðmundur Jónsson.
- 2 Digitized copies of most of the Icelandic newspapers can be found at: [www.timarit.is](http://www.timarit.is).
- 3 For an introduction to Icelandic obituaries, see, Koester, David (1995) Social and Temporal Dimensions in Icelandic Obituarial Discourse. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 5 (2), 157–182; Árnason, Arnar, Hafsteinsson, Sigurjón Baldur & Grétarsdóttir, Tinna (2003) Letters to the dead: obituaries and identity, memory and forgetting in Iceland. *Mortality*, Vol. I, No. 3, 268–284.
- 4 Gustafsson, Harald (1985) *Mellan Kung och Allmoge. Ämbetsmän, beslutsprocess och inflytande på 1700-talets Island*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis 33. Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 42–101; Hreinsson, Einar (2003) *Nätverk och nepotism. Den regionala förvaltningen på Island 1770–1870*. Göteborg, Intellecta DocuSys, 43–72.
- 5 Gunnarsson, Gísli (1983) *Monopoly Trade and Economic Stagnation: studies in the foreign trade of Iceland 1602 – 1787*. Lund, Skrifter utgivna av Ekonomisk-Historiska Föreningen vol. 38; Jónsson, Guðmundur (2006) Endalok dönsku verslunarinnar á Íslandi. *Saga* XLIV:2, 91–114.
- 6 When Icelandic became an autonomous nation within the Danish realm in 1918, Danes and Icelanders had equal rights.
- 7 Hauksdóttir, Auður (2001) *Lærerens dansk – elevernes strategier. Dansk som fremmedsprog i Island*. Hafnafjörður, TemaNord, 17–33.
- 8 Ax, Christina Folke (2008) Islændingene og de danske købmænd i Reykjavik 1770–1850. *Rejse gennem Islands historie – den danske forbindelse*. Ed by. Søren Mentz. København, Gads Forlag 2008, 75–90.
- 9 Oslund, Karen (2000) *Narrating the North: Scientific Exploration, Technological Management, and Colonial Politics in the North Atlantic Islands*. University of California, Los Angeles, unpublished PhD thesis, 88.
- 10 Oslund 2000, 13, 88.
- 11 Pseudonym Simplex in *Ingólfur* 8.1.1905.
- 12 Pseudonym N. N. in *Stefnir* 6.7.1900. The Icelandic word for cormorant can also mean a rascal.
- 13 Halfdánarsson, Guðmundur (2006) Severing the Ties – Iceland’s Journey from a Union with Denmark to a Nation-State. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 31, 237–254.
- 14 *Ingólfur* 16.10.1904.
- 15 Davíð Áskelsson in *Alþýðublaðið Sunnudagsblað* 1.5.1938.
- 16 *Alþýðublaðið* 16.1.1938.
- 17 Lise Gíslason’s obituary. *Morgunblaðið* 22.2.1995.
- 18 Þ. Th. in *Ársrit Hins Íslenska Fræðafelags í Kaupmannahöfn* 1.1.1918.
- 19 Edith Kristine Magnússon’s obituary. *Morgunblaðið* 21.3.2002.
- 20 Ella Marie Einarsson’s obituary. *Morgunblaðið* 12.10.1994.
- 21 *Tíminn* 11.5.1918.
- 22 Bjarni Ásgeirsson in *Tíminn* 11.5.1918.
- 23 Davíð Áskelsson in *Alþýðublaðið Sunnudagsblað* 1.5.1938.
- 24 M. E. Jessen’s obituary. *Morgunblaðið* 8.9.1966.
- 25 *Morgunblaðið* 22.10.1972.
- 26 *Morgunblaðið* 22.1.1965.
- 27 *Þjóðviljinn* 21.1.1937.
- 28 *Morgunblaðið* 3.12.1963.



# Making Difference, Seeking Sameness

## Negotiating Finnishness and Foreignness in an Exhibition

*Taina Syrjämaa*

In July 1876, the first “general exhibition of Finland” was inaugurated in Kaivopuisto Park in Helsinki. During the next two and a half months the exhibition was a major event in Finland attracting approximately 90,000 visitors, with its display of industrial and agricultural products, machinery, handicrafts, visual arts, a school section and ethnographic collections. Yet, the scale was naturally much more modest than in large international and world exhibitions<sup>1</sup> and it was, indeed, a *national* exhibition: intended for Finnish exhibitors and the Finnish public.

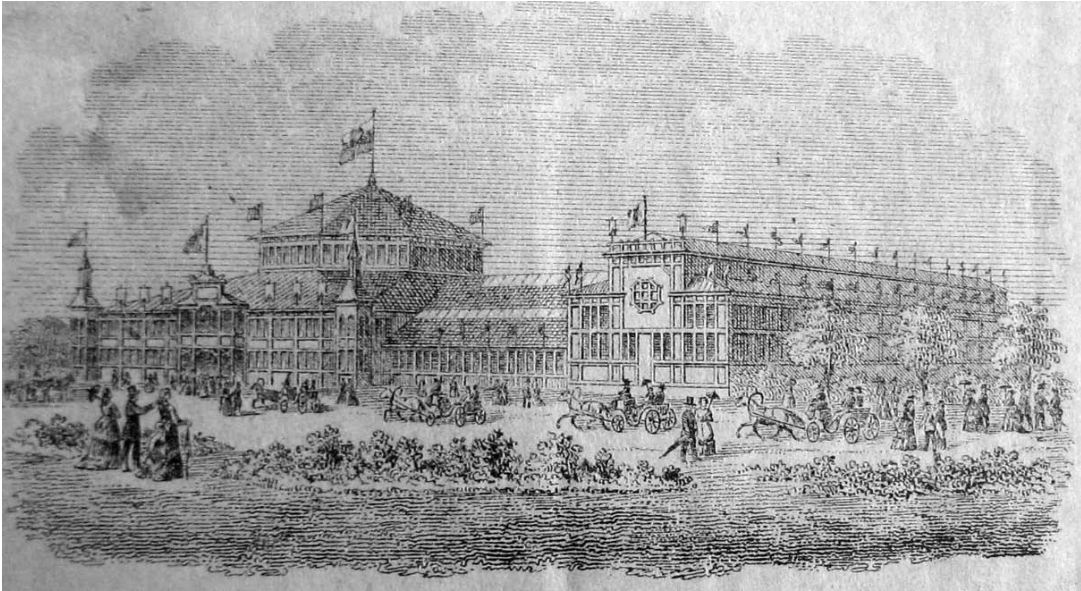
The “national” starting point of the exhibition is a fact but only in a very restricted sense. When analyzing the exhibition, it turns out to be characterized by a complex negotiation of what “national” and

“Finnish” actually mean and what is “international” and “foreign”. This paper aims at exploring these intertwined conceptions. The purpose is not to look for stable dichotomies, but to study the interaction and co-existence of two moieties with a shifting emphasis and varying degrees of evaluation and demarcation.

This paper draws on various research traditions and primarily combines cultural interpretations of nationalism and studies on exhibiting and gaze, such as studies on museums, world exhibitions and various commercial places. Last but not least, studies on lived space form an important theoretical starting point.

Benedict Anderson’s classical concept of nations as “imagined communities” is a useful starting point, as defining us versus others is fundamentally a cultural and mental process. Without the idea of and belief in “being us”, a community cannot exist.<sup>2</sup> Anderson’s own use of the concept can, however, be criticized for its fixed, practically teleological, view of the stages of the process leading to the formation of modern nations, as well as its very restricted manner of dealing with identities. Anderson’s concept of national identities seems to be too simplistic and one-dimensional, as he hardly takes into account the heterogeneity and complexity of the issue and the sliding demarcation between “national” and “foreign”, which are the focus of this research.

Another crucial starting point is Tony Bennett’s view on museum institutions and practices, which



*The pavilion was depicted on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue showing its central hall and a lateral aisle.*

have many parallels with exhibitions: the classification and exhibition of material objects was intended to enhance socially appreciated goals, such as the development of good behaviour, good taste and wider general knowledge. They can be defined as regularized places with normative rules for both the exhibitors and for visitors – whom Bennett calls “minds on legs” – and they also necessitate an appropriate cultural code for interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Bennett provides great insights regarding control and power from above as to the exploration of the roles of the

exhibits, in terms of their ordering and labeling. However, because of his Foucaultian starting point he does not pay much attention to the agency of visitors. Here we come to the third starting point of this paper — the concept of lived space — which draws on the Lefebvrian tradition and which has been especially elaborated by humanist geographers. It highlights the continuous interaction of human beings and their material environment, which means constant activity and creativity within the limits of a certain cultural framework.<sup>4</sup> No indi-

vidual can passively consume a ready-made place, but being, looking and walking are also creative and productive.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, the focus is on how Finnishness and foreignness were conceived, constructed and represented in the Helsinki exhibition, which was a lived space that was not only interpreted and influenced by its main architects but also by visitors. As this paper is related to an on-going research project, it is not possible to give the final results, but mainly to point to potential directions and the means to study these issues.

The exhibition was a grand event in Finland and was extensively covered in the national media. Numerous descriptions of exhibition visits were published in the national press, with some being so long that they formed a series that continued to be published for months. Most texts were written anonymously, but it can be deduced that in some cases they were written by professional journalists or at least by persons who were used to contributing to newspapers. Some texts were also produced by persons obviously unaccustomed to writing for publications.

As is so often the case with exhibition buildings, no physical remains of the pavilion itself have been preserved, but the adjacent restaurant that had been built in the 1830s, and which was connected to the pavilion, still exists as well as Kaivopuisto Park. The latter has, however, been thoroughly redesigned, with the trees that bounded the central

lane having been cut down, whilst on the ground of the pavilion there are now large trees. There are, however, some visual sources, which provide an idea of the composition of the exhibition. A series of photographs by Charles Riis depict both the exterior of the main pavilion and some portions of the interior.<sup>6</sup> Also some drawings, a map of the location of the pavilion in the park and a ground plan of the exhibition exist, as well as some exhibits, such as identifiable art works.

What is missing is the original documentation of the administrative board of the exhibition. Yet, the list of the members is quite revealing as it suggests the social networks and ideological and financial backgrounds of those behind the exhibition project. The remainder of the material, although rather fragmentary, can partly compensate for this lack of documentary evidence.<sup>7</sup> In this article, the analysis will be based on a comparative reading of the normative materials of the exhibitions, visual documentation and descriptive accounts of visits that were published in newspapers. Furthermore, the event will be placed in the context of international exhibition practices and ideals.

## A Nation in the World of Nations

In this section, the main theme is how the exhibition was seen as a proof of Finland being a nation that was capable of interacting among the larger com-



*The international exhibition genre was also manifested in the Helsinki exhibition interior, which included both purpose-made showcases and imposing compositions, large plants and decorative elements such as a cascade. On the wooden roof are visible a few windowpanes. (Helsinki City Museum, Picture Archives.)*

munity of nations. In other words: the exhibition was considered to be a crucial element in getting Finland recognition and acceptance as a national actor amidst its like – although the other could be considered to be bigger, older and more developed.

In a way, it is quite logical that the national exhibition should have at the same time had an international dimension. The role of such exhibitions was to act as a medium that could be utilized worldwide in order to make visible the progress of nations in terms of achievements, capacity and potential.<sup>8</sup> The practices and structures of nineteenth-century exhibitions were based on – and further emphasized – the conception of nations as basic, natural and indispensable human entities. Exhibitions were models of international operations, which were also considered to be applicable in a national setting. As one satisfied commentator wrote of the Helsinki exhibition: “[...] there have been these kinds of exhibition in almost all civilized countries.”<sup>9</sup> Exhibitions provided the means to construct and represent a nation; organizing an exhibition was deemed to be normal and expected.

The idea of a national Finnish exhibition had already been contemplated in the 1860s, in the wake of the first major world exhibitions. The idea gained further impetus from the arrangements of the regionally significant exhibition in Stockholm in 1866.<sup>10</sup> The beginning of the decade had witnessed a boom in constructing and modifying Finnish institutional structures, such as the creation of the Finnish currency.<sup>11</sup> The exhibition could, however, not

be realized in the late 1860s as Finland experienced exceptionally dramatic crop failures, which claimed tens of thousands of victims and led to economic stagnation.<sup>12</sup>

When the situation stabilized, the idea of the exhibition was raised again in the 1870s. After it became apparent that the Finnish Senate would not take the leading role in the project, the exhibition was carried out as a private undertaking, based on the initiative and arrangements of a group of Finnish businessmen, engineers and architects.<sup>13</sup> The members of the board were naturally very well connected to the network of the Finnish business elite, but were also close to cultural and political circles. In fact, although public authorities were not officially involved in the exhibition, the general governor of Finland was the nominal head of the administrative board and he also declaimed the exhibition inauguration. Furthermore, Alexander III, the Russian emperor and the Grand Duke of Finland, visited the exhibition.

The basic characteristics of the Helsinki exhibition corresponded to the model for temporary exhibitions set up by previous international exhibitions, with the exhibits being classified in groups according to a categorization system used specifically for the occasion. The smaller items were placed in glass showcases with explanatory labels or piled into flamboyant compositions. Some of the largest exhibits were presented in a different manner, with a few machines displayed in motion to capture the public's attention and to thereby illustrate their use

in a more efficient way. Normative instructions for exhibitors and visitors were published as well as a catalogue<sup>14</sup> listing all the exhibits, which were assessed with prizes given out by a jury. Entrance to the exhibition area was restricted to those who had paid the entrance fee and the public was forbidden to touch the exhibits.

These practices had already been firmly established well before the Helsinki exhibition, although there was no single, uniform system that would have been adopted in all aspects and all cases. The most obvious source of inspiration for the organizers in Helsinki would have seemingly derived from the previous world exhibitions in Vienna in 1873 and Paris in 1867 as well as from the international exhibitions in St. Petersburg in 1870 and Stockholm in 1866.<sup>15</sup> The architect of the exhibition pavilion, Theodor Höijer, had visited the world exhibition in Vienna and also had many connections to Sweden.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it is also possible that there were older sources of influence. A number of influential Finns had visited the Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851, for example, and had contacts with Great Britain.<sup>17</sup> In actual fact some visitors compared the Finnish exhibition to previous international ones<sup>18</sup> – and also to the concurrent world exhibition in Philadelphia. Apparently many who had not personally visited a large exhibition still had some kind of idea about what to expect from an exhibition. This knowledge partly stemmed from media coverage of previous events.

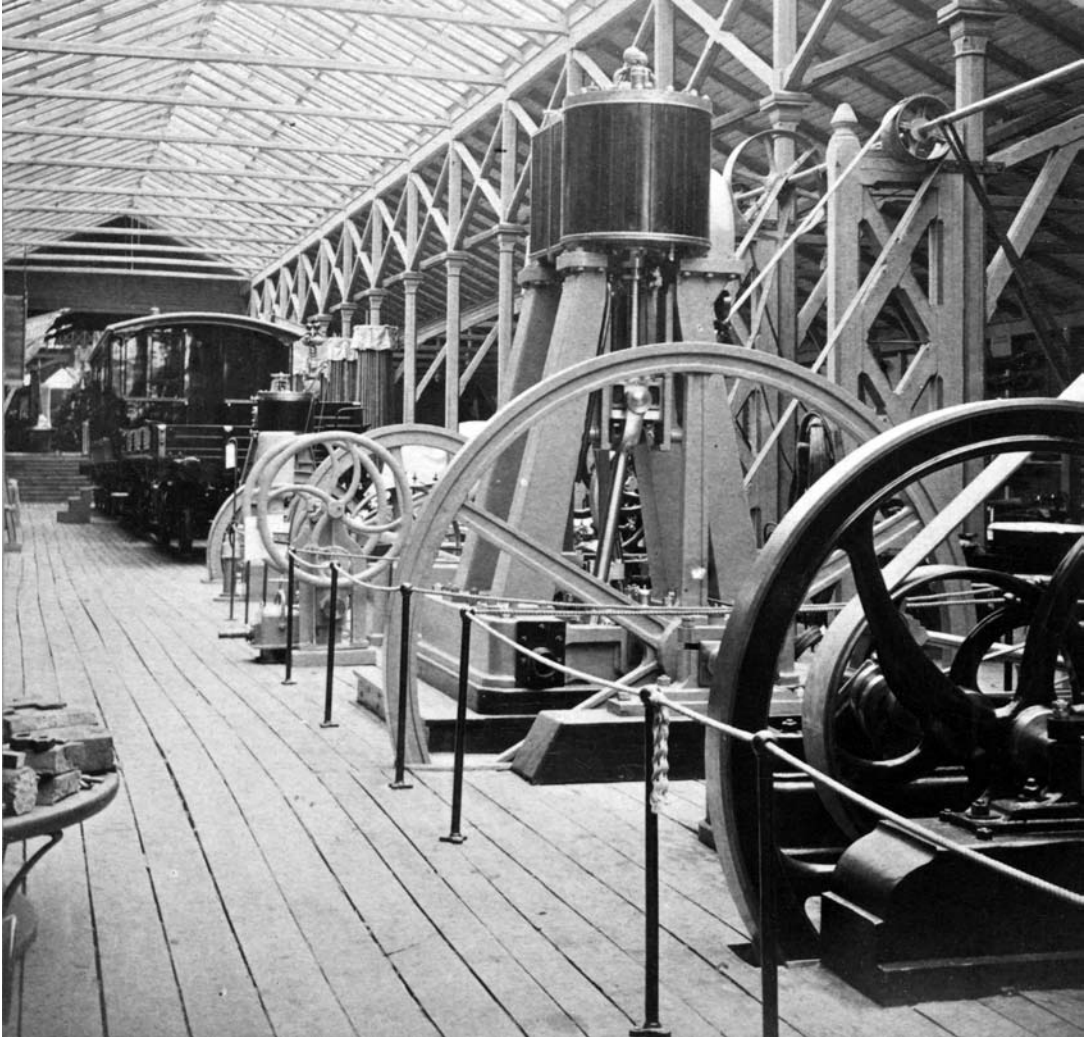
Efforts to establish Finland's status as a nation

was a dominant feature of the political agenda in the country at the time. This aspiration was also shared by a growing portion of the population and was further promoted by the founding of a national schooling system in the 1860s. In this context, it is understandable that fundamental sameness was sought with other European nations. A sense of Finnishness was crucial but this did not entail separation or isolation from the rest of Europe and the Western world. Thus, an international format for nation building was accepted without any critical considerations.

What is more surprising – and quite paradoxical – is that some visitors actually experienced a vivid sensation of entering the wider world when they stepped into the pavilion. Moreover, at the same time they sensed being observed and noted by the rest of the world.<sup>19</sup> Often comments on the Helsinki exhibition were confident but not very analytical: "The exhibition has elevated our nation to an 'art nation' in the eyes of foreigners."<sup>20</sup> This is partly high-sounding rhetoric, but it also suggests that a great deal of trust was placed in the positive impact of the exhibition.

The alleged internationality of the Helsinki exhibition is rather intriguing as the exhibitors were predominantly Finnish, ranging from the largest industrial companies to student unions and individual artists. Only a few foreign companies, which had local agents in Finland, contributed to the exhibition. And as foreign exhibits were absent, so too





*The Helsinki exhibition contained a machinery hall, which was customary for world exhibitions. It inspired many visitors to compare Finnish industrialism to the international situation and to yearn for “progress”. (Helsinki City Museum, Picture Archives.)*

were foreign visitors. Only rarely does one get any hint of foreign visitors and even more rarely that foreign journalists attended the exhibition.<sup>21</sup> However, according to some of the commentators, an ephemeral forum was opened in the wooden pavilion, which when entered allowed a visitor to assess the Finnish level of progress as compared to the rest of the world but, importantly, also to be noticed and assessed by others.

In this context, there was no opposition between Finnishness and the rest of the world. On the contrary, those believing in the national cause were eager to be accepted as equals among the community of nations. Another kind of perspective in defining us versus others emerges when the negotiations and demarcations are explored inside the exhibition categories and in connection with concrete exhibits.

### Finnishness vs. Foreignness – Making Differences?

The Helsinki exhibition was a juxtaposition of many kinds of materials and object, which accorded with the established international exhibition practices of the day. The exhibition was divided into fourteen classes, but the exhibits could actually be grouped into four main sets: 1) industrial machinery, products and raw material, 2) handicrafts, 3) visual arts and 4) ethnographical collections. In these categories, the process of negotiating and demarcating what was considered to be foreign and what was Finnish varied significantly. In some instances

a clear distinction was made between items considered to be Finnish or foreign, with their evaluation varying from positive to negative. There were also instances in which the Finnish and the foreign merged together, whereby demarcation was denied or ignored. One further aspect in this discussion was the nuanced nature of “foreignness” – or actually the lack of it. In most cases, the label “foreign” was used with no indication of a more exact national origin, although from the case in question it can be discerned that if deemed necessary a certain national attribute could have been given.

In the first and second cases, it is rather evident that foreign models were highly appreciated. Finnish writers were cheered by anything that they considered to be a proof of Finnish progress in this sector. However, they were unanimous in their readiness to admit that Finland was lagging behind the most industrialized countries. They were surprised if a Finnish product was at the same level as its foreign counterparts.<sup>22</sup> In this case, “foreign” was almost a synonym for “excellent”; something worth following and striving for. The ultimate goal was, however, not to become “foreign” but to reach more or less the same standards as the leading industrialized countries. In the handicraft industry there was a slightly different tone, as it was linked more to the “people” and its traditions, thus having a more nationalistic spirit.

An exceptionally acute observer noted in *Östra Finland* how impossible it was to draw a line be-

tween Finnish and foreign. When scrutinizing the exhibits he noted that in some cases, even when a product had been made in Finland, the workmen or the foremen were foreign or the raw materials had been imported.<sup>23</sup> The writer divided the exhibits into their invisible, even immaterial, constituents such as foreign expertise. This analysis reminds us of the way Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen describes the material co-existence of objects and human beings. He refers to Bruno Latour's views that the work and ideas of numerous people are embedded in single objects.<sup>24</sup> Yet, usually we do not see them, but we establish a relationship with the object without taking notice of its complex history.

In the third group – the visual arts – a sweet jumble of general European traditions and Finnish subjects, such as landscapes and stories from the *Kalevala*, seemed to reign. Many Finnish artists had travelled abroad, or had even settled permanently outside Finland, and they worked according to the major artistic trends of their time.<sup>25</sup> The juxtaposition of cupids and other antique deities with the heroes of the *Kalevala* – Väinämöinen and Kullervo – was not questioned. Finns had their own stories – boasting of a golden past was a classical element in nationalism – but the artists and the visitors seemed to share the opinion that the general European heritage also belonged to Finns. Especially interesting in this regard is to note the classical form of the *Kalevala* heroes: Carl Eneas Sjöstrand's two Kullervo statues, the infant Kullervo and Kullervo in manhood, or the ro-

mantic, rather Italianized features of the landscape setting of Väinämöinen in Robert Wilhelm Ekman's huge painting.<sup>26</sup> All these works had been produced prior to the 1870s, but they were not criticized for being too classical or not sufficiently Finnish.

A slight breach can be detected in one commentary, in which a sculpture of Aino, a female figure in the *Kalevala*, by Johannes Takanen, was praised for its beauty but was considered to be not as innocent as the depiction in the epic. Indeed, the characterization was deemed to be more akin to Venus or Psyche. Takanen was at the time living and working in Rome, which is also mentioned in the commentary.<sup>27</sup> This comment seems to indicate a perception that it is necessary to differentiate between the generally accepted and appreciated classical models and the way to represent the national epic. The breach is however a tiny one, with the mainstream of commentators making absolutely no demarcation between ours and theirs in the context of the visual arts. Finns considered it natural to claim a classical heritage, in the same way as other European nations had adopted it as part of their cultural patrimony.<sup>28</sup>

The last section to be briefly examined here is the ethnographical display, which presented Finnish folklore. In their respective home regions, the students' unions had been enthusiastically starting to collect daily utensils and garments used by peasants.<sup>29</sup> The collection was only in its infancy in 1876, but it attracted plenty of attention among the public. The regional exhibits were composed in

entire room settings, which were further enlivened by mannequins wearing local costumes. The display appealed to the public as a show; its composition differed greatly from the other sections of the exhibition and numerous commentators praised the vivid and lifelike impression. But what about Finnishness versus foreignness? To commentators this was a valuable national initiative to treasure and preserve Finnish folk traditions in a modernizing world. It also offered a benign, familiar setting for many who had had their heads befuddled with the sight of so many machines, brands and other novelties. No sense of foreignness was linked to these objects, mannequins and cottage-like settings – not even if it was reported that in some of the settings the mannequins were missing as their Swedish maker had failed to finish the work in time.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, not only the mannequins were Swedish imports, as the model for the ethnographic collection and exhibition came directly from Sweden. The curator of the Viipuri students' union, which took the initiative in the display, had a personal connection to Arthur Hazelius in Sweden, who in the early 1870s had founded his first collection of Swedish ethnographic artefacts.<sup>31</sup> In a Swedish language newspaper, a link to Hazelius' model was made,<sup>32</sup> but the question does not seem to have surfaced in the Finnish speaking media. In a way, it is understandable: what was clearly visible was a collection of objects, furniture and attire from the Finnish countryside. All these parts of the exhibition were presented as be-

ing from a certain region in Finland and also a story was embedded in the setting. Apparently, it was difficult to imagine something more Finnish.

On the other hand, it is somewhat puzzling that connections to foreign model(s) of ethnographical collections were hardly ever made. This is especially the case in regard to the fact that the combination of Swedish models and Finnish folklore was potentially a delicate issue. Finnish and Swedish folklore must have had many things in common due to their long shared history, but at the time of the Helsinki exhibition there was an on-going struggle between the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking population. There were two opposite conceptions of Finnishness: one connected it completely to the Finnish language, spoken by the great majority of the population but only a few among the elite; the other conceived Swedish as the link to how Finland was connected to European civilization and an indispensable part of the culture of the land.

In the exhibition, the Finnish-speaking visitors, who often came from the countryside, were critical of the "foreign" atmosphere in Helsinki as they had difficulties to obtain any information in Finnish. Even at the exhibition gates, buying a ticket was said to have been an almost insurmountable challenge, as the staff did not speak Finnish.<sup>33</sup> The inaugural festivities were performed only in Swedish – except for the General Governor who in the cosmopolitan manner of the Russian aristocracy spoke French – and even the exhibition catalogue

was available only in Swedish during the first month of the exhibition.

One commentator ironically remarked that even English pedigree cattle had Swedish names, such as Blomma, Snell and Björn.<sup>34</sup> Another commentator stated in a more bitter tone that he hoped that “the exhibition would look like a Finnish, not a Swedish exhibition.”<sup>35</sup> In this case, when the language spoken by the elite of the country was considered to be a foreign element, its presence – or dominance – in the exhibition aroused resentment. At this time, Finland had been officially separated from Sweden for only about seventy years after having formed a single realm for some seven hundred years. The general view was further complicated by the Finno-Russian relationship, although at the time of the exhibition the problems had not yet peaked. Indeed, the visit of the emperor was described in enthusiastic terms.<sup>36</sup>

One more feature in the ethnographic section that should be mentioned in this context was that it actually included a hint of exoticism. This was an important feature of foreignness at world exhibitions, but was largely lacking in the Helsinki exhibition. The comments regarding the presentation of the Sami folklore of Lapland differed notably from those of the cultural heritage in other Finnish regions. The construction of this display itself had been different from the very beginning, as there were no Sami students at the university who would have been able to assemble a collection of their own heritage. Thus, Finns could exercise their own colonial gaze on a

different population regarded to be at a lower level of “progress”. Yet, it must be acknowledged that this section was far from the main attraction: whilst the exhibits of other regions of Finland were very popular, the Sami exhibits were mentioned only in few descriptions.<sup>37</sup>

Foreignness was basically a counterpoint to Finnishness; they were seemingly two mutually exclusive categories. In practice, however, it is evident that a demarcation line was in motion all the time. Instead of fixed, permanent or clear-cut categories, it was a matter of negotiation to the extent that sometimes they merged together and no distinction was made. The value of foreignness could also vary from being very positive to very negative, depending on the context.

## Summary

In this paper, I have made a preliminary exploration of how Finnishness versus foreignness was conceived, constructed and represented at the Helsinki exhibition. The concept of foreignness has enabled us to make visible the cultural process of defining us versus others and its complex character which is liable to change and which is more a process of cultural negotiation than a stable category. Foreignness was not simply a result of having a place of origin outside Finland, but foreignness was in the eye of the beholder. This is one more way to question

the grand national narrations which have paid more attention to the construction of national unity than its continuous, multifaceted entanglement with the “foreign”.

The concept of foreignness is useful in this research context, but it has also its limitations. The pair “foreignness – Finnishness” seems to emphasize making a difference, but simultaneously there was also a constant quest for sameness. Therefore, I have also taken into account the “international” dimension. It brings another perspective to the same assortment of issues. Together they seem to be useful tools for studying mundane worldviews and the relationship between us – in this case Finns and Finland – and the wider world.

- 1 In Paris, for example, the number of visitors to the 1867 exhibition was over 9 million and in Vienna in 1873 about 7 million people attended.
- 2 Anderson, Benedict (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised and extended edition. London, Verso.
- 3 Bennett, Tony (1995) *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London & New York, Routledge.
- 4 See, for example, Soja, Edward W. (1996) *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford & Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell; Creswell, Tim (2004) *Place: A Short Introduction*. Malden, MA, Blackwell; Karjalainen, Pauli Tapani (1998) Kaupungin eri olomuotoja. *N & N filosofinen aikakauslehti* 1/98, [http://www.netn.fi/198/netn\\_198\\_kaup3.html](http://www.netn.fi/198/netn_198_kaup3.html). Cf. also Michel de Certeau's views on "consumption as another production" and on consumers' agency. Michel de Certeau (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, University of California Press.
- 5 Nineteenth-century exhibitors and visitors themselves could of course be convinced that visitors were only looking at something ready-made because of the then behavioural code, which stressed "objective" gaze as a civilized ideal and downplayed subjectivity and diffused agency.
- 6 Helsinki City Museum, Picture Archives.
- 7 In some correspondence, memoirs and in the records of the private bathing company that rented the lot to the exhibition, one can find brief references made to the arrangements. Also an official catalogue of the exhibits was published in Swedish and Finnish.
- 8 On the popular belief in progress and its construction and representation in world exhibitions, see Syrjämaa, Taina (2007) *Edistyksen luvattu maailma. Edistysusko maailmannäyttelyissä 1851–1915*. Helsinki, SKS.
- 9 Suomen yleinen näyttelö. *Hämäläinen* 24.8.1876.
- 10 On Finnish participation in international exhibitions, see Smeds, Kerstin (1996) *Helsingfors–Paris. Finland på världsutställningarna 1851–1900*. Helsingfors, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland & Finska Historiska Samfundet.
- 11 On nineteenth-century Finland, see Klinge, Matti (1997) *Keisarin Suomi*. Helsinki, Schildts; Starck, Laura & Tuomaala, Saara (eds.) (2006) *Modernisaatio ja Kansan kokemus Suomessa 1860–1960*. Helsinki, SKS.
- 12 Rönehholm, Harry (1945) *Markkinat messut ja näyttelyt*. Suomen Messut Osuuskunta, Helsinki, 41.
- 13 The basic outlines of the exhibition have been described in Rönehholm 1945, 41–56; Wasastjerna, Nils (1948) *Helsingfors tre kulturverk*. Söderström, Helsinki, 113–186 and Smeds 1996, 133–141. On the lived spatiality of this exhibition, see Syrjämaa, Taina (forthcoming) *Askeleita ja katseita Kaivopuistossa vuonna 1876. Näyttelypaviljonki uudenaikaisena kansainvälisen toiminnan ja tulkinnan tilana. Historiallinen Aikakauskirja 1/2010*.
- 14 *Allmänna Finska Utställningen i Helsingfors År 1876. Officiel katalog* (1876). Helsingfors, J. C. Frenckell & son; *Yleinen Suomen Näyttelö Helsingissä Vuonna 1876. Wirallinen luettelo* (1876). Helsinki, J. C. Frenckell ja Poika.
- 15 On the Finnish participation in these exhibitions, see Smeds 1996.
- 16 Viljo, Eeva Maija (1985) *Theodor Höijer. En arkitekt under den moderna storstadsarkitekturens genomsrottstid i Finland från 1870 till sekelskiftet*. Helsinki, Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 32–33. See also Höijer, Theodor (1910, 1983) *En självbiografisk uppsats från år 1910*. Helsingfors, Helsingfors-samfundet.
- 17 For example, Leonard Borgström, a member of the

- administrative board of the Helsinki exhibition, had studied in London in 1850–1853. He also maintained good connections to Great Britain as his wife was English. Ojala, Jari (2000) Borgström, Leonard (1832–1907). *Kansallisbiografia*, <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/>
- 18 Suomen yleinen näyttelö. *Hämäläinen* 24.8.1876.
- 19 Första Allmänna finska utställningen i Helsingfors. I. *Folkvännen* 5.7.1876; Suomen yleinen näyttely. I. *Uusi Suometar* 7.7.1876; Kuopiosta. *Tapio* 26.8.1876; Suomen yleisestä näyttelystä. *Ilmarinen* 30.8.1876.
- 20 Kuopiosta. *Tapio* 26.8.1876. Cf. In a newspaper based in Oulu, a writer warned that the entire world would consider the inhabitants of the Oulu region to be inefficient and wretched if they would not participate more efficiently and send exhibits to Helsinki. Yleiseen Suomen Teollisuusnäyttelöön Helsingissä. *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia* 11.3.1876.
- 21 Korrespondens. *Wiborgs Tidning* 7.10.1876; I de utländska tidningarna. *Folkvännen* 23.8.1876.
- 22 Expositionsbrief från Helsingfors. III. *Wiborgs Tidning* 24.8.1876; Kuopiosta. *Tapio* 26.8.1876; Suomen yleinen näyttely IX. *Uusi Suometar* 20.9.1876.
- 23 Allmänna expositionen i Helsingfors. *Östra Finland* 7.7.1876.
- 24 Lehtonen, Turo-Kimmo (2008) *Aineellinen yhteisö*. Helsinki, Tutkijaliitto, 25–26.
- 25 See Lundström, Marie-Sofie (2008) *Travelling in a Palimpsest. Finnish nineteenth-century painters' encounters with Spanish art and culture*. Helsinki, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters; Suvikumpu, Liisa (2009) *Kulttuurisia kohtaamisia. Suomalaiset kuvataiteilijat ja Rooma 1800-luvulla*. <http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/>
- 26 On Sjöstrand and Ekman see *Kalevala kuvissa*. 160 vuotta *Kalevalan innoittamaa suomalaista taidetta* (2009). Helsinki, Ateneumin taidemuseo & Valtion taidemuseo, 22–47.
- 27 Suomen yleinen näyttelö. *Hämäläinen* 31.8.1876.
- 28 On the British relationship to Rome and antiquity, see Vance, Norman (1997) *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*. Oxford & Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell Publishers.
- 29 Schvindt, Th. & Sirelius, U. T. (1922) *Suomen ylioppilasosakuntain kansatieteellinen museo vv. 1876–1893*. Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja XXXIII, Hämeenlinna, 3–12.
- 30 Suomen yleinen näyttelö 1876. V. *Satakunta* 23.9.1876.
- 31 Schvindt & Sirelius 1922, 3.
- 32 Till allm. utställningen. *Hufvudstadsbladet* 12.2.1876.
- 33 See for example Ensimmäinen Yleinen Näyttely Suomessa vuonna 1876. *Satakunta* 8.7.1876; Matka Helsingin näyttelöön. *Tapio* 5.8.1876. See also Allmänna finska utställningens öppnande. *Morgonbladet* 3.7.1876.
- 34 K-II-n: Helsingin näyttelystä sananen. *Satakunta* 30.9.1876.
- 35 Suomen ensimmäinen yleinen näyttelö Helsingissä. *Tampereen Sanomat* 22.8.1876.
- 36 Kejsarbesöket i Finland. *Wiborgs tidning* 11.7.1876; H. M. Keisarin käynti Helsingissä. *Karjalatar* 21.7.1876; Kirje Helsingistä elokuun 6 p:nä. *Satakunta* 12.8.1876.
- 37 Suomen yleinen näyttelö 1876. V. *Satakunta* 23.9.1876.



# Exemplary Foreignness

## Foreign Material Cultures in the Service of Finnish Taste and Industry in the 1870s

*Leila Koivunen*

In October 1873, only a couple of weeks before the closing of the world exhibition in Vienna, an initiative was taken in Finland to collect money to buy a large collection of objects that were on display in various departments of the exhibition. According to the organizers of this undertaking, Finnish working people, craftsmen, artisans and the public in general urgently needed to be introduced to good quality artefacts that were industrially produced and aesthetically pleasing. Therefore, it was decided to assemble a study collection of exemplary objects of foreign origin as soon as possible. It was also envisaged that this initial collection would form the basis of a museum of applied arts that was planned for Helsinki. The Vienna exhibition seemed to offer everything that was needed: a great variety of items

of applied arts from all over Europe as well as from other parts of the world. The required amount of money was raised at short notice and consequently approximately seven hundred objects were purchased, before being transported to Finland and put on display. This collection formed the foundation of the new Museum of Arts and Crafts, the predecessor of the present-day Design Museum, which was opened in Helsinki in April 1874.

This paper discusses the Vienna collecting project by focusing on the purposes of bringing objects of foreign origin to Finland and the intended functions of their foreignness. As part of a larger ongoing research project on the history of collecting and displaying non-Western material cultures in Finland (c. 1870s–1930s), the Vienna case serves here to demonstrate some of the issues related to Finland's attempts to position itself in relation to other nations and other material cultures. At the time of the Vienna world exhibition, Finland was not an independent country, being an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. Finland's position within the vast empire was fairly peripheral, but in the middle of the nineteenth century the state authorities took determined measures to encourage the development of industry – especially the lumber industry – in order to increase exports. The rise of industrialism coincided with a growing sense of national feeling, which manifested itself widely in Finnish society. Although Finland had been part of international trade for centuries, it was not in a



*The Vienna world exhibition was the must see event of its age. It attracted approximately 7 million visitors during the six months it was open. (von Lützow, Karl Friedrich Arnold (1875) Kunst und Kunstgewerbe auf der Wiener Weltausstellung 1873. Leipzig, E. A. Seemann.)*

position to establish extensive foreign connections of its own. Civil servants, scientists and members of the cultural elite travelled and absorbed influences in Europe and in Russia, but the non-Western world remained distant and unknown to most Finns. The possibility of seeing objects of non-Western origin was far from being an ordinary experience. The Historical Museum at the University of Helsinki had opened its doors to the public in 1872, but its collections – including a number of “exotica” from the Alaskan Inuit people and from the Far Asia – were primarily viewed by a very limited academic audience.<sup>1</sup>

This paper focuses on two related topics. The first part concentrates on the Vienna collecting project and its connections to the late nineteenth-century nationalist project to enhance Finnish industrial production. It aims at describing how the “foreignness” of objects was referred to and to question who needed them and for what purpose. During the acquisition project, special attention was paid to objects of oriental character and, consequently, a considerable amount of artefacts of Asian – or seemingly Asian – origin reached Helsinki, where they were put on public display. The latter part of the paper focuses on the motivation for collecting Asian and other non-Western material in Vienna, as well as the supposed effect this was perceived to have in Finland. Questions of origin and authenticity related to the artefacts will also be discussed.

## Collecting as a Civilized Activity

The most active proponent of the Vienna collecting project was Carl Gustaf Estlander (1834–1910), Professor of Aesthetics and Literature at the University of Helsinki and an influential figure in Finnish cultural life. In a similar manner to many of his contemporaries, Estlander had been worried about the quality and competitiveness of Finnish industrial production.<sup>2</sup> This discourse had been adopted from Western European countries, especially Britain, where the process of industrialization was in full swing and its effects on the aesthetic qualities of objects had already been discussed for decades. The solutions suggested by Estlander and some of his Finnish colleagues also closely resembled those already found in Britain. Estlander was an advocate of industrialism and firmly believed that national production would benefit from close co-operation with artists and designers. Therefore, he invited artists and craftsmen to join the common nationalist undertaking to develop products for Finnish consumers. He also resisted the traditional aristocracy of fine arts and insisted that artistic production should be made available for everybody for the sake of the common prosperity of society. During study tours in continental Europe and Britain in the 1860s and 1870s, Estlander visited several art schools and institutes in order to gather experience of the practices of combining artistic education and artefact production. He was especially impressed by the



*Colonel Walfried Spåre, Commissioner of the Finnish section at the Vienna exhibition, was responsible for selecting the artefacts to be sent to Finland. (Smeds 1996, 118.)*

Deutsches-Gewerbe-Museum in Berlin, Das Österreichische Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna and the South Kensington Museum in London, which he considered to be the most important and successful example of organizing artistic education. In 1887, Estlander established a similar initiative in the Ateneum building in Helsinki, which brought

together under one roof an educational institute for the fine and applied arts and a study collection.<sup>3</sup>

Two years prior to the Vienna world exhibition, Estlander had already taken his first step in this direction, when he oversaw the establishment of the Handicraft School (Slöjdskolan) in Helsinki. The model for the school had been adopted from abroad – the closest example being in Stockholm – where object collections often formed an integral part of such institutes and their activities. Thus, the next step in Estlander’s plan was to provide the school in Helsinki with a “museum or a sample collection of applied arts.”<sup>4</sup> Conveniently, the Vienna world exhibition, with exhibitors and artefacts from all over the world, was approaching and Estlander went to great lengths to promote the idea of obtaining a decent collection. He found an enthusiastic supporter and spokesman for his ideas in Colonel Walfried Spåre, the commissioner of the Finnish contribution to the Russian exhibits at the Vienna exhibition. Both Estlander and Spåre wrote newspaper articles and pamphlets trying to convince the reading public of the importance of the museum project. In October 1873, Spåre’s appeal in one of the main newspapers in Finland – *Helsingfors Dagblad* – resulted in a relatively spontaneous public fund-raising campaign, which provided him with enough resources to put the project into practice.<sup>5</sup>

In their writings, both Estlander and Spåre described the kind of characteristics the objects to be chosen were expected to possess. The most impor-

tant criterion was that artefacts had to be considered “exemplary” in one way or another. Estlander wrote that the selected items needed to be perfect examples of the object category or artistic technique they represented.<sup>6</sup> Walfried Spåre gave a more detailed list of the necessary constituents. According to him, all objects were to be of high quality, thereby indicating that they had been made by skilled persons who were diligent and capable of mastering challenging materials and techniques. Another important issue raised by Spåre was that the objects to be considered should conform to the conventions of “good taste”. Thus, beauty, perfection and solidity of form and sophistication of style were listed among the appreciated characteristics. The emphasis on good, widely shared and acknowledged taste did not mean, however, that other kinds of artistic expression were automatically rejected. Originality and innovative design features, as well independence of national style were also mentioned in Spåre’s list of desirable characteristics.<sup>7</sup>

C. G. Estlander also commented on the broad vision of the project. He emphasized that the prospective collection needed to be versatile and all-inclusive. However, he admitted that in practice this would mean something similar to the South Kensington Museum in London. According to him, an appropriate collection should include three categories of artefacts: modern mass-produced artefacts, historical objects and homemade everyday handicrafts, such as needlework and basketwork. When

put together, the selected objects were envisaged as being capable of demonstrating historical continuations and turning points.<sup>8</sup> Spåre agreed, but added that the richness and variety of objects from different cultures of the world – he especially mentioned Japan and China – needed to be brought together in order to be studied and contemplated.<sup>9</sup> It seems clear, however, that geographical coverage was not a major issue. A far more important criterion for collecting was to gather examples of as many different artistic techniques and alternative materials as possible. Estlander and Spåre both made long lists of different branches of applied arts that needed to be equally considered when selecting items to be purchased.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the origins of objects was not the primary criterion of selection and at least in principle Japanese porcelain or Indian textiles could be deemed as suitable for the collection as English pottery or Norwegian woodwork. It was equally important to make sure that all object categories were represented. This principle also governed the organizing of artefacts in the planned Finnish museum.<sup>11</sup>

Why was it so important for Estlander and others to acquire this kind of collection of foreign objects for display in Finland? What interest was it supposed to generate? Western artistic education traditionally rested on sample collections and the idea of learning by imitation. Artists and craftsmen from all over Europe thronged to Vienna and other international exhibitions in order to learn by looking, sketching, copying, asking questions and making

comparisons. Similarly, those who could not afford to travel hoped to be able to benefit from the importation of objects. It was also wished by Estlander that a sample collection of foreign objects exhibited in Finland would help local craftsmen to become more aware of (the defects of) their own style and taste and thereafter strive for new perspectives and better results.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it was hoped that encounters with objects of foreign origin would stimulate the development of national taste and style. Imitation itself was regarded as educational, but it was also envisaged that it would lead to independent experimentation, which still took international trends into consideration.

Estlander, and like-minded writers, trusted that the possibility of seeing foreign objects and new national products would also affect the taste of the general public. One of the main arguments in favour of the new collection was that it would contribute to the general standard of living among the population. This idea, influenced by conceptions of beauty and its beneficial effects on human life, was adopted from the European Arts and Crafts circles. Both Estlander and Spåre stressed the importance of beneficial aesthetic experiences, which they believed would bring happiness and joy to the lives of ordinary people, especially among the working-class. Estlander argued that with the adoption of elements of good taste, industrial workers' morals and intelligence could also be affected.<sup>13</sup> Spåre explained that the experience of seeing objects of

exemplary character served to awaken and deepen workers' devotion to their labour, thus leading to improved results.<sup>14</sup> For both writers, improvements to industrial production and the quality of life were matters of great national significance. National industry would become better equipped to respond to domestic needs and external pressures, and would perhaps even be capable of producing goods for export. This would bring general well-being to society, but also raise national awareness and pride among the people.<sup>15</sup> It was also pointed out that the education of lower classes in matters of good taste would bring them closer to educated elites. This would consequently increase national cohesion, which was perceived to be a crucial factor for the future of the nation.<sup>16</sup>

There was also another dimension in the relation between national identity and objects of foreign origin: namely collecting was described as an activity associated with civilization and knowledge. According to Estlander and Spåre, the Finnish nation should not lose the opportunity to prove that it was part of the civilized world and capable of assessing and evaluating other material cultures. By doing this, they clearly sought to position Finland as a separate nation that was identifiable with the Western world. Another active and influential proponent of the collecting project was A. F. Soldan, the Director of the Finnish Mint, who asked the rhetorical question of whether collecting and displaying foreign material cultures for the benefit of Finnish taste and indus-

try was something not suited to be implanted in the Finnish soil. He replied by underlining that although Finns had occasionally been compared to certain populations with arrested development, they were as capable as any other civilized people in adopting new methods and fashions.<sup>17</sup> Spåre also noted that collecting was an activity every civilized nation had to pursue in order to keep pace with general progress. He argued that a nation would soon be defeated if it was not “intelligent enough” to resist the pressures of foreign production.<sup>18</sup>

The Finnish collecting project in Vienna was loaded with high hopes and expectations. The collection to be obtained was entrusted with bringing joy to the lives of ordinary people, as well as enhancing national competitiveness and awareness. The gathering and owning of a sample collection held strong symbolic meaning: the collection seemed to prove that the Finns were part of the Western civilized world, capable of making informed choices and willing to develop themselves. The foreign attributes within the collection did not seem problematic or frightening. On the contrary, they were elements that could be admired and appreciated. What is more, foreignness could also be exploited and put into the service of the Finnish nation. No wonder that newspaper articles referred to the collection as a treasure.<sup>19</sup>

## Object Lessons from the Orient

As the Finnish Commissioner, Spåre had already arrived in Vienna several weeks before the opening of the world exhibition in May 1873. He had time to roam the vast exhibition area at the Prater, a park alongside the Danube, and see how the empty halls and galleries were turned into lively national departments and pavilions. In his exhibition reports, which were published in *Helsingfors Dagblad*, Spåre often described the main building, in which various national departments were arranged according to the relative global position of the country. Thus, the department of the United States was situated nearest to the Western Gate. After passing the departments of the West European countries, visitors entered the main rotunda that was occupied by Austria and Hungary. Visitors could then continue through the Greek, Russian, Egyptian and Turkish departments and finally end their tour at the Chinese and Japanese departments, which were situated nearest to the Eastern Gate. Spåre noted that this arrangement made it easy for visitors to orientate themselves.<sup>20</sup> The space was not evenly allocated, but was planned according to the alleged economic position and relevance of countries. In addition to occupying the most prominent space in the middle of the exhibition pavilion, Austria took the privilege of using nearly 15,000 square meters for its departments. France and Britain only had half this allocation, whilst all non-Western countries had



*A Chinese visiting card case made of ivory is one of the objects in which Asian motifs are combined with a Western function. (Design Museum, E17, Helsinki, photographed by Auvo Lukki.)*

to confine themselves to a space of less than one thousand square meters.<sup>21</sup>

In an article from May 1873, Spåre discussed the Western and Eastern parts of the exhibition pondering which one a visitor would prefer. In the “Oriental” part, he commented that visitors often hoped to

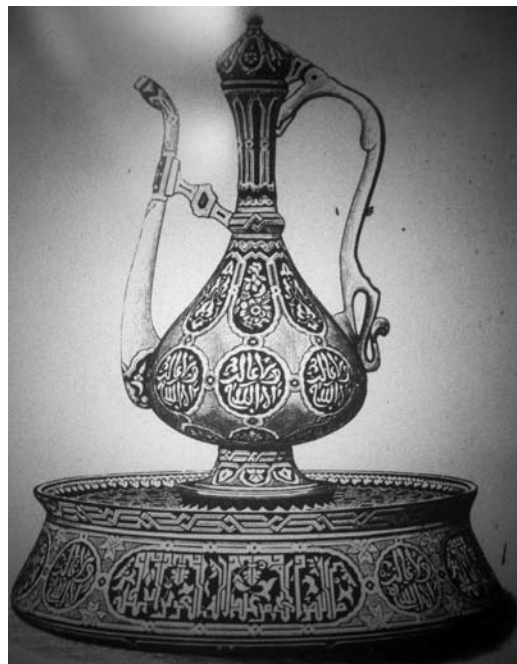
find a mystical land of fairytales with hidden treasures, but that even a single glance was enough to reveal that this was not to be the case. He remarked that the artefacts on display were of “strong ethnographic interest”, but were otherwise simple and primitive. Visitors should therefore direct their attention to the Western world, where “human intellect had reached the highest level” and affected fine and applied arts. For Spåre, China and Japan were the only exceptions to this division, with the department of the latter particularly attracting his attention.<sup>22</sup> Although a number of Japanese artefacts had found their way to Europe during the country’s two centuries of seclusion (1635–1853), the Vienna exhibition took place at a time when Japanese objects were flooding into Europe and a craze for everything Japanese was growing immensely.<sup>23</sup> Western arts had been stagnating for decades and had been mostly repeating earlier historical styles. Hence, it was widely hoped and believed in European artistic circles that Japanese arts would provide Western arts with long-awaited stimulation. Estlander also shared this idea, writing that evidence could be found at the Vienna exhibition that illustrated that a new style was finally evolving in Europe. He commented that countries that had been active in experimenting with the Oriental motifs – especially France and Britain – had become leaders of this new style.<sup>24</sup>

Although Estlander considered Oriental influence important to the renewal of Western arts in



general, he did not seem to be fully convinced of the necessity of bringing such artefacts to Finland. On the basis of correspondence between him and Spåre it seems that the latter was more enthusiastic in including “Oriental titbits” – as he called them – to the sample collection that was to be brought to Finland.<sup>25</sup> In one of his letters to Estlander, Spåre mentioned that he had begun his acquisitions at the Oriental departments. Spåre gave a practical reason for this choice, explaining that these regions were geographically located furthest from Finland, which made the acquisition of objects difficult and expensive. The collection of European artefacts could be supplemented more easily after the world exhibition.<sup>26</sup>

The exact number of objects brought from the Vienna exhibition to Finland is not known, and all items cannot be identified with certainty. It seems that Spåre, who was mainly responsible for acquisitions, did not keep any regular record of the items he purchased. At the opening of the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Helsinki in the spring of 1874, Spåre mentioned that the number of objects transported from Vienna to the museum was approximately 1500.<sup>27</sup> However, the first catalogue of the museum, only published in 1881, mentions that the number was only 732.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that the first figure also included artefacts that Spåre brought to his personal possession or received as gifts from other commissioners, but which were eventually not donated to the museum. It can be calculated on the basis of



*Many European factories imitated “Oriental styles” in their products. This “Turkish” flagon was made by Léon Parvillée in Paris. (von Lützow 1875.)*

the information found in the 1881 catalogue that approximately one third of the objects that were brought from Vienna to the museum were of non-Western origin. Half of these were from Japan. Other places mentioned in the catalogue include China, India, Morocco, Persia, Turkey and Asia Minor.

As mentioned earlier, Spåre supported the idea of a collection that would contain artefacts from

all over the world. According to him, this would make it possible to see the whole range of human development from primitive beginnings to mature civilizations.<sup>29</sup> In one of his articles, he followed the predominant evolutionary ideas and described art as one of the indicators of human development. Objects bore witness to the growing sense of beauty, and therefore even the crudest artistic expressions were of interest.<sup>30</sup> This idea did not seem to fit very well with the predominant objective of concentrating on items of exemplary value, and in practice the supposed cultural differences were not visible in the form of the collection. It is noteworthy that the non-Western objects that were eventually chosen were almost exclusively from Asia – and mainly from Japan and China. Most cultures of the world were not represented at all. This can be explained by the general enthusiasm for all things Japanese and Oriental, but also by underlying conceptions of the value and sophistication of various material cultures. Besides, most of Africa and Oceania, for instance, were not actually present at the exhibition. Imperial states, such as Britain and France, demonstrated in their departments how foreign raw materials were turned into industrial products, but the material cultures of colonies were not on display to any large extent.

Spåre had presented the idea of showing progress or historical development in the form of collections. Yet, this did not materialize in the collection he assembled in Finland, even within the Asian material. As with Western objects, high quality and

exemplary character seemed to be the most important criteria for selecting Japanese and Chinese items. All artefacts were primarily expected to serve as good models for Finnish artists and ordinary people in their quest for better taste. The idea that an independent, distinctive national style could be “found” or created by studying others predominates in contemporary discourse. This, however, included a strange paradox. The authenticity, purity and originality of Chinese and Japanese artefacts were commonly praised in Europe, as these characteristics were also believed to be able to drag Western arts out of the state of stagnation. In reality, however, the number of true masterpieces by traditional artists and craftsmen was limited. Most of the objects on display in Vienna and elsewhere in Europe were purpose-made and mass-produced for Western consumers. Chinese artists had for centuries produced porcelain and silk to meet demands and taste in the West and the Japanese were also quick to adopt the practice. The hybrid character of Asian objects did not seem to bother Europeans too much – and it has also been suggested that the “true nature” of objects was not generally known.<sup>31</sup> Another aspect in this hodgepodge of material cultures is the long tradition of producing *chinoiseries* in Europe, which was followed by a wave of *japonisme* in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Oriental styles and motifs had an enormous visual impact on the West: artefacts, ornaments, designs and shapes were imitated, replicated, utilized and reclaimed by Western artists.<sup>32</sup> These simultaneous practices in the East

and in the West made the question of origin and authenticity highly problematic.

The material gathered for the Finnish collection was also comprised of a mixture of Western and Eastern elements. On the one hand, many Japanese and Chinese objects were evidently produced for export. Among the selected items were to be found objects, such as the finely carved visiting card cases made from ivory and lacquered tobacco boxes, which seem Oriental in form but are purely Western in function. On the other hand, a considerable proportion of the artefacts of Western origin in the collection were produced to imitate Japanese, Oriental, Egyptian or other non-Western styles and fashions.<sup>33</sup> Neither Estlander nor Spåre dealt with these matters in their writings. However, in one of his articles, Spåre revealed an interesting aspect: he postulated that by combining Western skills with motifs and forms copied from Oriental artefacts, British and French craftsmen had been able to produce objects that exceeded the quality and sophistication of the originals.<sup>34</sup> In a later article he continued by arguing that French craftsmen had succeeded in bringing wealth to their home country by producing and exporting artefacts that accommodated the taste and styles of different cultures of the world.<sup>35</sup>

The ability of a nation to operate in this jungle of material cultures, which sought to create profitable hybrid products for international markets, was highly appreciated. Imitation and appropriation of non-Western material cultures were regarded as be-

ing important for the renewal of the arts in the West. Yet, these activities also seemed to include a sense of superiority hinting that Westerners were capable of improving the products of others and could then cash in by selling them worldwide. Thus, the foreignness of material cultures could be commercialized and adapted to different cultural settings. This play with foreign and familiar seemed to prove that Western producers were resourceful enough to manage in the middle of hybrid material worlds. Moreover, they were able to harness this foreignness to serve national interests. This is what Finland – eager to be perceived as a developed, civilized, Western nation – also wished to achieve.

- 1 Varjola, Pirjo (1981) Suomen kansallismuseon yleisetnografinen kokoelma. *Suomen museo* 1981, 55.
- 2 See also Smeds, Kerstin (1996) *Helsingfors-Paris. Finland på världsutställningarna 1851–1900*. Helsinki, Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland & Finska Historiska Samfundet, 112–114.
- 3 Pettersson, Susanna (2008) *Suomen Taideyhdistyksen Ateneumiin. Fredrik Cygnaeus, Carl Gustaf Estlander ja taidekokoelman roolit*. Helsinki, SKS, 187–229.
- 4 C. G. E[stlander]: Angående en välbehöflig anstalt. Första artikeln. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 19.6.1873.
- 5 Woirhaye, Helena (1982) *Suomen Taideteollisuusyhdistyksen museon varhaisvaiheet*. University of Helsinki, unpublished MA thesis, 32–37.
- 6 E[stlander] 19.6.1873.
- 7 [Spåre, Walfried:] Breffkort från Wien XV. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 8.10.1873.
- 8 E.[stlander] 19.6.1873.
- 9 [Spåre] 8.10.1873.
- 10 Estlander, C. G. (1871) *Den finska konstens och industrins utveckling hittills och hädanefter*. Helsingfors, K. E. Holms förlag, 24, 30–31; W. S[påre]: Något i Konst-Industrins intresse. III. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 29.5.1874.
- 11 See the catalogue, *Föreningen för konstfliten i Finland. Katalog öfver de konstindustriella samlingarna* (1881). Helsingfors, J. Simelii.
- 12 C. G. E[stlander]: Angående en välbehöflig anstalt. Andra artikeln. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 21.6.1873.
- 13 E[stlander] 19.6.1873. 21.6. See also W. S[påre]: Något i Konst-Industrins intresse III. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 29.5.1874. See also S[påre] 8.10.1873.
- 14 S[påre] 29.5.1874.
- 15 [Spåre] 8.10.1873.
- 16 Editorial. *Vikingen* 29.11.1873.
- 17 A. F. S[oldan]: Kan hemsljöden hafva gagn af ett museum för konstindustri? II. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 19.10.1873.
- 18 [Spåre, Walfried:] Något i Konst-Industrins intresse II. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 28.5.1874
- 19 S[oldan] 19.10.1873. See also Editorial. *Vikingen* 29.11.1873.
- 20 [Spåre, Walfried:] Breffkort IV. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 29.5.1873.
- 21 *Reports of the Commissioners of the United States to the International Exhibition held at Vienna, 1873* (1876). Washington D.C., Government printing office, vol. I, 70.
- 22 [Spåre, Walfried:] Breffkort V. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 4.6.1873.
- 23 Lambourne, Lionel (2005) *Japonisme. Cultural Crossings between Japan and the West*. London, Phaidon, 25–27. See also Watanabe, Toshio (1991) *High Victorian Japonisme*. Bern, Peter Lang, 101–107.
- 24 Estlander 1875, 58–61.
- 25 Walfried Spåre to C. G. Estlander, Vienna 30.7.1873. See also Spåre to Estlander, Vienna 18.10.1873. Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland (Helsinki), Carl Gustaf Estlander's collection, SLSA 252.7.
- 26 Spåre to Estlander, Vienna 18.10.1873. Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland (Helsinki), Carl Gustaf Estlander's collection, SLSA 252.7.
- 27 Museum för Konst-industri. *Helsingfors Dagblad* 30.5.1874.
- 28 *Föreningen för konstfliten i Finland. Katalog öfver de konstindustriella samlingarna* (1881).
- 29 Spåre to Estlander 18.10.1873. Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland (Helsinki), Carl Gustaf Estlander's collection, SLSA 252.7.
- 30 [Spåre] 4.6.1874.
- 31 Kortelainen, Anna (2002) *Albert Edelfeltin*

- fantasmagoria: nainen, "Japani", tavaratalo*. Helsinki, SKS, 74–77.
- 32 Jacobson, Dawn (1993) *Chinoiserie*. London, Phaidon. See also Lambourne 2005 and Wichmann, Siegfried (1981) *Japonisme. The Japanese Influence on Western art since 1858*. London, Thames and Hudson.
- 33 *Föreningen för konstfliten i Finland. Katalog öfver de konstindustriella samlingarna 1881*. See, for example, 44–47.
- 34 [Spåre] 4.6.1873.
- 35 [Spåre] 28.5.1874.



# Producing and Consuming Foreignness

## “Anthropological-Zoological Exhibitions” in Copenhagen

*Anne Folke Henningsen*

Ethnological show business thus promoted and perpetuated racism, pushing whites and blacks further apart by placing them in closer proximity. Africans were put on stage in order to distance them from the rest of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the people of Copenhagen were treated to a series of “anthropological-zoological exhibitions”, in which “exotic” people were put on display in the Tivoli amusement park and in the Zoo. This was by no means an exclusively Danish phenomenon. All over Europe people revelled in the marvels of the spectacle of foreignness (re)presented in such exhibitions, the presence of which would also have helped provide the people of semi-peripheral Copenhagen with a feeling of being part of a larger European trend. An affiliation could, thus, be appreciated with the practices of the

countries leading the “civilised” world.<sup>2</sup> One of the prime organizers of such shows in Europe was the German Carl Hagenbeck, who coined the phrase “anthropological-zoological exhibitions” and who supplied many of the “exotic” people for the early exhibitions in Copenhagen.<sup>3</sup> Artistic performances of music, dance, juggling, and fighting formed part of these exhibitions. However, equally – if not more – important and interesting to the crowd were the different daily tasks they were to perform in order to give the Europeans a peek into the everyday life of these people from foreign lands. In his recent study on Hagenbeck’s activities, Eric Ames describes this practice in the following terms:

The various groupings – such as families, caravans, work displays – were themselves gathered and rearranged in the idealized native village, a walk through environment, which also marked the culmination of the habitat idea in the context of human display [...]. The village formation encouraged spectators to regard the performers as members of a community (and not just a troupe), bolstering the idea of the *Völkerschau* [ethnographic exhibition] as “life” by dint of scope and scale.”<sup>4</sup>

Through such a framing of the display of “exotic” people, the organizers tried – slightly paradoxically – to convey an experience of the authentic *presentation* of natural foreignness rather than staged *representation*.

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the staging, production, consumption and attempt-



*The Indian Village at Copenhagen Zoo 1901. The display of “exotic” people in combination with animals was what Hagenbeck termed “anthropological-zoological exhibitions”. (A photograph from the archives of the Zoological Garden, Copenhagen.)*

ed undoing of foreignness in the anthropological-zoological shows in Copenhagen. In view of this, the paper is structured according to these headings. Throughout the analysis the trope of *authenticity* will play a major part. It will be considered both on the side of those producing foreignness — through the staging of shows that displayed racial authenticity —and also on the part of the public that consumed the foreignness produced. The public longed

for and craved (re)presentations of the authentically foreign people on display.

### The Production and Display of Foreignness

The shows were carefully constructed by the European organizers in order to put the authentic foreignness of the exhibited people on display. This



was carried out, for example, by creating “natural habitats” for the exhibited people to live and perform in. The racial and cultural authenticity of the people on display was important to the public and to the press. This is evident from press reports, which commented on the lack, or loss, of authenticity suffered by the exotic exhibits when they encountered European societies, a point that I shall return to later in the paper.

The staging of the foreign was by no means an exclusively Danish practice, as Pascal Blanchard shows when summing up the sentiments behind the ethnographic exhibitions in Europe: “The aim of these [human] zoos, exhibitions and parks was, essentially, to display the rare, the curious and the strange as expressions of the unusual and the different, set in opposition to a rational construction of the world that operated according to European standards.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the Danes involved in the production and staging of the anthropological-zoological exhibitions were in line with a larger European trend, which focussed on authentic and untouched elements of the foreign. In an article in the major Danish newspaper *Politiken*, the Indian caravan exhibited in Copenhagen Zoo in 1901 is described in ways that celebrate these features of the caravan:

Mr. Madsen [...] returned yesterday morning from his long journey, the aim of which was to provide the Zoological Garden with an *authentic* [Asian] Indian caravan [...] There can be no doubt that the caravan brought home by Mr.

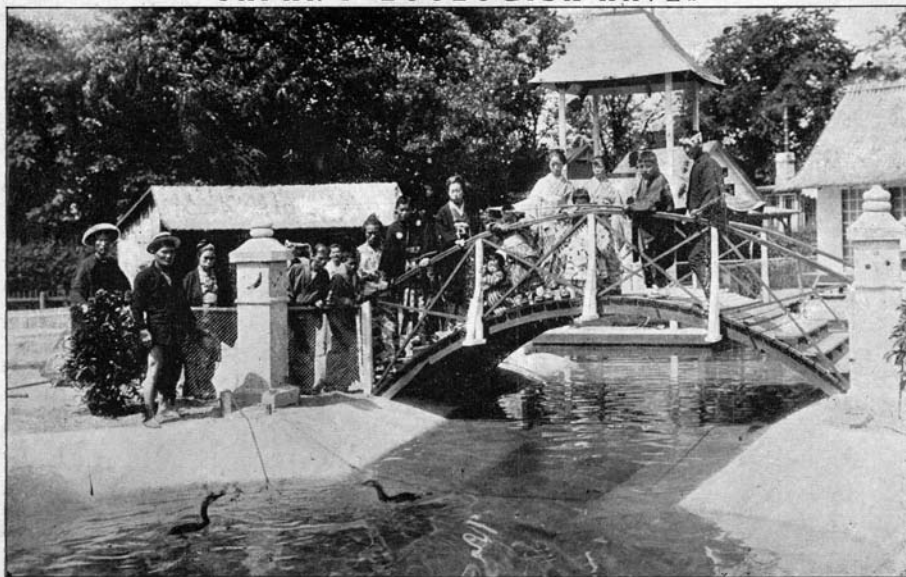
Madsen is the most noticeable, that has been visiting Copenhagen in a long while, because it is so untouched by Europe – only two of its thirty-one members have previously been outside India – and brings forth a message from a strange land and a strange culture, and because it has so much different, partly queer, and astonishing entertainment to offer.<sup>6</sup>

The same preoccupation with authenticity and foreignness can be seen in another report from the same newspaper, this time regarding the 1902 exhibitions of Japanese people in the city’s zoo and Chinese people in Tivoli:

Two acts in the Japanese people’s show in the Zoological Garden these days bring particular delight. No wonder, as they are both *strange* and *authentic*. The first is the Cormorant fisherman, the second the naked wrestlers. [...]. In [terms of] *authenticity*, they are equals of the Chinese actors in Tivoli. Together the two troupes show the contours of distant peoples, who are closing in on us every day. Thus, we have reason to give thanks to Tivoli and the Zoological Garden. Through great sacrifices the two institutions have succeeded in giving the Danish audience a living impression of the most numerous peoples of East Asia.<sup>7</sup>

This praise for the achievement of bringing “a living impression” of untouched foreign people to Copenhagen, for educational purposes, had also been the center of attention when *Politiken* reported on the Kirgiz caravan visiting Copenhagen in 1900:

JAPAN I »ZOOLOGISK HAVE«



Nr. 2. KORMORANFISKERI.

Jul. Aagaard, Fot.

*The Japanese Village at Copenhagen Zoo in 1902. The man with the bare leg is the highly praised cormorant fisherman. (A photograph from the archives of the Zoological Garden, Copenhagen.)*

Copenhagen is the first city in which the Kirgiz perform. The town receives them, then, as primordial and uninfluenced by culture as is possibly attainable when one does not want to take the trouble of going to Asia oneself, and it [the town of Copenhagen] ought to show its appreciation of the great efforts that have been made in order to deliver unadulterated, living illustrations to a chapter of the ethnography worth reading.<sup>8</sup>

Two months later a new report on the Kirgiz caravan was printed in *Politiken*, this time written by W. Dreyer, who would ten years later translate Carl Hagenbeck's memoirs into Danish. The article contains a full description of the caravan and its performances, as well as Dreyer's evaluation.



*The construction of the large Kibitkas was an integral and popular part of the exhibition of Kirgiz people at Copenhagen Zoo in 1900. (A photograph from the archives of the Zoological Garden, Copenhagen.)*

The first noteworthy point of the article is the praise it heaped on the authenticity of the exhibited people. According to Dreyer, the show should not be seen as a mere circus performance, because what is interesting is the possibility of a peek into their everyday lives and not their various performances:

What is on offer is not and should not be acrobatic performances, neck breaking riding shows, or wonderful pantomimes. If one wants to see such, one goes to the circus, but if one wants to enjoy a – as far as possible – realistic image of a peculiar and foreign people's life, one will get no better opportunity than the one now on offer in the Zoological Garden.<sup>9</sup>

In the article Dreyer claims that the Kirgiz differ from the other “exotic” people usually on display in Copenhagen, because they are real, untainted “natural people”. Thus, one can learn about the true lives of the Kirgiz people from the exhibition. This statement bears out the contention that the anthropological-zoological exhibitions were staged in ways that encouraged the exhibited people to display what they *are*, rather than what they *do*, despite the fact that performances and shows were also part of the exhibitions. The features described as most interesting and educational were from everyday life practices, rather than the theatrical or circus-like performances.

This is similar to the invocation of what can be called racially defined anatomy. In his description of Kirgiz everyday life, Dreyer points to the colourful tents and loud music and explains why it must be so:

Upon entering one of the Kibitkas and letting the curtain drop behind you, you have as vivid a picture of Kirgiz life as you can wish for. [...] The surroundings are loud and colourful in the cosy room, because strong colours, often harshly juxtaposed, appeal to the eyes of the less developed and less “cultivated” person. His nerves are not as susceptible as ours, so the influences must be strong to make an impression on him. [...] The same can be said of his music: [...] the low, melodious [music], which appeals to our more finely-tuned ears, leave him completely untouched.<sup>10</sup>

Again, what is emphasized in the descriptions of the people on display are how they are determined by their nature, and how this nature is less developed and inferior to that of the Western spectators.

## Consumption of Foreignness

As hinted at in the introduction, the producers of the exhibitions and the anthropologists were not only interested in the racial authenticity of the exhibited people. The public spectators were also longing to encounter the authentic other. Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Ligtman invoke the metaphor of the marketplace to capture this process of mutual dependence in the scientific entertainment business of the nineteenth century:

We have, therefore, an image of a marketplace in which all sorts of scientific activities and experiences are on offer alongside the full range of other popular cultural forms. It is a powerful image because it gives agency not only to those who create and market their products but also and especially to those who choose between them: it recognizes the power of consumer choice as well as the shaping influence of the producers.<sup>11</sup>

The public longing for authenticity is difficult to prove beyond the reports by journalists or writers like Dreyer. However, as Bernth Lindfors has noted, European research carried out on the subject all

points to this same tendency: “Anthropologists as well as showmen sought to satisfy an ever-increasing public craving for authenticity.”<sup>12</sup> In a more specific context, Hilke Thode-Arora describes how in Carl Hagenbeck’s park in Germany, the public would be inclined to stay away from the exhibitions if the people on display did not meet their expectations regarding racial or ethnical features:

The German public appears to have had a fixed set of expectations concerning most ethnic shows, albeit more so for some than others. For example, in the case of American Indians, the Plains Indians met the expectations of the audiences and were a success, while those from the North-west coast failed to draw the crowds.<sup>13</sup>

This tendency can also be seen in Danish news coverage. The magazine *Hver 8. Dag*, for instance, published an article on the arrival and first dinner of the Chinese troupe in Tivoli in 1902, in which the Chinese people are reported to have refused to perform unless they were allowed to eat first in peace and quiet. The crowd was apparently unhappy with this situation, but the director of Tivoli, Mr. Lorentzen, quickly transformed the potentially difficult situation into proof of the authenticity of the Chinese people, which satisfies and thrills the spectators. He addresses the disappointed crowd, saying: “Why [...] will the Chinese not eat? Because they are *authentic* Chinese who have never before been outside of China, and therefore exceed everything we have ever seen of this kind”. The reporter contin-

ues that “Director L. transformed the impatience of the spectators into admiration [of the authenticity of the Chinese].”<sup>14</sup>

The public craving for authenticity can also be seen in the reports on the caravans. When, as described earlier, the public was encouraged to encounter the everyday life of the Kirgiz people in the zoo, they were advised to do so by entering the tents, *Kibitkas*, of the Kirgiz, which were their homes while in the zoo. One can only imagine the discomfort it must have engendered to always be on display and to never be able to have a moment’s privacy. Unfortunately, we have no reports of the experience of this by the Kirgiz people on display, but a similar situation occurred when Carl Hagenbeck exhibited a group of Canadian Inuits in Germany in 1880. Indeed, one of the exhibited people, Abraham Ulrikab, actually wrote a journal and thus gives us a glimpse into his experience of the forced “open house” exhibition:

To wipe the floor of our house was nearly impossible because of all the people. Although they were thrown out by our masters, others quickly took their place. [...] A lot of people wish to see our house, but it is impossible to be seen by all of them. [...] [Our masters] came to me and sent me to drive them out. So I did what I could. Taking my whip and my Greenland seal harpoon, I made myself terrible. [...] Others quickly shook hands with me when I chased them out. Others went and jumped over the fence because there were so many. [...] Ulrike [Abraham’s wife] had also locked our house from the inside and



*Inside the Kibitka of the Kirgiz blacksmith at Copenhagen Zoo in 1900. The possibility of entering the Kibitkas to see how the Kirgiz people lived was quite an attraction. Notice that the woman is breastfeeding the infant. Such displays of “untamed nature” were very important for the successful claim of authentic foreignness. (A photograph from the archives of the Zoological Garden, Copenhagen.)*

plugged up the entrance so that nobody would go in, and those who wanted to look in through the windows were pushed away with a piece of wood.<sup>15</sup>

Even though this sounds like a less authorized version of the open house exhibition style than the one experienced by the Kirgiz at the zoo in Copenhagen, it might still convey an idea of the level of discomfort experienced when your home is also your stage.

And so, when W. Dreyer encourages the public to “stroll about in the camp, look inside the Kibitkas, study the dark, loudly dressed men and women”, it is not an innocent suggestion. This practice probably affected the Kirgiz people, who were on constant display inside the tents more – and in a more negative fashion – than he would have imagined.<sup>16</sup>

### Attempted Undoing of Foreignness

Despite the production, staging and consumption of a fixed and stable foreignness, in terms of the exhibited people, this foreignness was at times at risk of becoming undone or dismantled, when the exhibited people suddenly seemed a bit too much like their audience. The potentially destabilizing effects of the apparently inappropriate feeling of familiarity with people on display were dealt with in two different ways by the writers who described the caravans: either to claim that they were – in the words of Trinh Minh-ha – “suffering pathetically from a ‘loss of authenticity’”<sup>17</sup> that was thought to define the very people on display, or they were displaying a threatening and dangerous appropriation of Western values and knowledge, with potentially devastating consequences.

The strategy of ridicule was widespread in Europe in relation to the exhibitions of exotic people. Thus, Hilke Thode-Arora writes of a group on display with Carl Hagenbeck in Germany:

The New Caledonians (Kanaks), who had been under contract a year earlier [1931], were already considered to have undergone too great a process of acculturation to present an exotic Other: they live on in the lore surrounding Hagenbeck as an unspectacular people who turned up in European dress rather than in the picturesque costumes likely to appeal to the public. As a consequence, South Sea garments had to be copied in a hurry from examples supplied by the Museum of Ethnology. To make matters worse, the boats which they were under contract to carve had capsized when they were launched, and the Hagenbeck employees found that the group had greater mastery of the foxtrot than of Pacific dances.<sup>18</sup>

Such occurrences were also present in the Danish context, where the strategy of ridicule was mainly – but not exclusively – employed by the satirical press. A report in the serious daily newspaper *Politiken* thus describes the unfortunate loss of authenticity in the caravans that had been exhibited in Copenhagen, prior to the exhibition in 1900 of the Kirgiz mentioned above:

Unfortunately, there has been something fishy about most of the “caravans”, or whatever they are called, that have reached us. Either they have partly or completely been composed of individuals who already in their home country had been influenced and most often tainted by the less fortunate side of civilization, which turns towards its limits, or they had been so long in America or Europe that they had lost their particular bloom.<sup>19</sup>

The reporter emphasizes the negative effect “civilization” is assumed to have on people who are unprepared for it, or who are encountering it in uncontrolled and unguided circumstances. Instead of being fresh and natural people, the reporter is left with the impression of them as a filthy group, who had learned nothing from the encounters with civilization, except vices such as begging.

Several other contemporary articles and texts focus on the negative aspects displayed by the exhibited people, such as losing their racial and/or cultural authenticity. Interestingly, the acquisition of European languages also plays a large part in these perceived negative aspects. In the illustrated magazine *Hver 8. Dag*, the Kirgiz caravan is praised as being a nice counterpoint to the previous ethnic exhibitions in Copenhagen, whose members displayed a lack of authenticity by speaking French or German:

The Kirgiz caravan possesses the particularly charming feature that it [has come] through Russian half-civilization and Middle-European full civilization without any of the two having had time to have any impact on it. [...] Mr. Wache has succeeded in transferring the characteristic representatives of an interesting people to us, without losing any of their original particularities. In this regard the troupe forms a delightful counterweight to the hordes of Negroes, who have haunted Copenhagen in the last few years, and in which the most advanced speak Berlinian German as well as Parisian French.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond the description of the ridiculously European “hordes of Negroes”, it is noteworthy that Russia is described as only being half-civilized, which is connected to the cultural classifications that Western Europeans and Americans were prone to make, with themselves on top.

The satirical magazine *Klods-Hans* has a more humorous take on the matter, and presents the following song about the Bedouins in Tivoli for the readers to enjoy:

In fogs of dust and heat  
The crowd in Tivoli wanders about.  
Three shots ring out, and the crowd  
Walks towards the exhibition area.  
Pays the entrance fee and then  
Taking turns at watching  
A “Tribe” completely as it is  
When at large in nature.

A horde of men and women  
Swarthy, half washed, half filthy  
Half civilized people who are speaking  
– O Allah – distinctly Berlinian German.

The brown clown, who is wooing  
The laughter and money of the crowd  
He is the proud master of the desert,  
The noble, the free Bedouin.<sup>21</sup>

And again in a text printed a week later the same message is conveyed: “Tivoli’s Board of Directors ensures us that the Bedouins really are authentic; they come straight from the Zoological Garden in Berlin. One could probably imagine Bedouins coming from



further away, but whatever! Bedouins and Berlinians – they are practically the same.”<sup>22</sup>

The critique of lost authenticity runs through all of these articles, be they serious or satirical, and it is clear that the loss is not only problematic; it is also the result of the somewhat pathetic mimicking act of the exhibited people, in which they try to take on cultures and languages that are not theirs to use. This message is also conveyed in an article in the popular-educational magazine *Frem*, which was edited at the time by the director of Copenhagen Zoo, Julius Schiøtt. It is an ethnographic article describing the Kirgiz way of life on the Steppe, and is thus not directly focused on people exhibited in Denmark, but I believe that it can help understand how the appropriation of Western technology by non-Western people, for example, could sometimes be seen as rather pathetic:

On the Steppe [...] the Kirgiz are leading their nomadic life just as before the Russian colonists settled among them. [...] But civilization closes in on them too, at times, in those slightly ridiculous forms, in which the higher culture coincidentally breaks through to barbaric people. One can see in the Kirgiz tent the women using a sewing machine.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear from these descriptions that the loss of racial authenticity, and the apparently inappropriate use of Western languages and technologies, was considered uninteresting and even pathetic or ridiculous by the Danish audience and press.

But the Danish public did not always consider loss of racial authenticity to be merely pathetic; at times adaptation to Western culture could also be perceived as threatening. In 1902 the journalist and historian C. C. Clausen published an article in *Hver 8. Dag*, under the headline “The Yellow Peril.” The article was a report from his visit to the Japanese village in Copenhagen Zoo, and reflects on the educational and political significance of the exhibition of Japanese people. As Clausen explains, the headline refers to Emperor Wilhelm’s assertion that the peril for Europe comes from the east, from Japan, a sentiment that he apparently seconds. He writes:

The danger, that he [Wilhelm] warned against, is there, and never have I felt it more acutely, more vividly, more personally, than the other day when I saw the Cormorant Fisherman from the Japanese troupe in the Zoological Gardens sitting hour after hour teaching himself English from a learner’s book. [...] Before me I saw in that moment the entire young, knowledgeable, progress-crazed Japan.<sup>24</sup>

The terrible peril lies in the young Japanese man trying to learn English; to appropriate a Western language for ill-willed purposes, one supposes, after reading Clausen’s article. But an even more frightening thing is the appearance of the Japanese fencer who – after having performed dressed in a coat of mail with a bamboo stick:

[He is seen] strolling in a European outfit. If you saw him in the streets you would mistake him

*A member of the Japanese caravan in Western attire, accompanied by a child in Japanese clothing. The use of Western technology, language and clothing among the Japanese at the exhibition was a cause for concern among members of the public. (A photograph from the archives of the Zoological Garden, Copenhagen.)*



for a Copenhagen worker in his best Sunday suit. He carries the clothing with ease, as if he and his fathers had been dressed after European fashion for centuries. All the agility of the Japanese people, its ability to appropriate a foreign culture, come to life in this fencer with his black coat, black trousers, walking cane and the English shag pipe in his mouth.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it is not merely the appropriation of the language, but also the dressing style that causes the reporter to take fright. One can sense his anxiety over the chameleon-like way in which these Japanese people can hardly be discerned from the Danish working class. But why is the appropriation of West-

ern language and style such a threat? The answer follows in the next segment of Clausen's article:

[The Japanese are] a danger, a serious danger to Europe. Everywhere else that the Europeans arrived they met uncultivated people, who stood aside, and were exterminated, or let themselves be suppressed; made into underlings or slaves for the strong Arians. For the first time the Arians have encountered a people, as intelligent as themselves, with a flexibility, a susceptibility, which far surpasses that of the Europeans. They learn our weapons-skills, they copy our machines, with their minimal requirements they are able to produce them far cheaper than us, they meet us on all the markets in the East, and then send their own goods into the European markets.<sup>26</sup>

So we see the reason why Clausen perceived that the Japanese posed such a threat to Danish and European societies: they are seen to be chameleon-like and are able to observe, learn and copy our languages, our ways and our technologies, and they turn it all against us. And just as with the pathetic mimicry of the "barbaric people" in the face of civilization, this deft appropriation of our civilization becomes something to point a warning finger at. However, this time the Europeans are under threat – interestingly, this is not considered pathetic – rather than the "exotic" people, who are looking and acting a bit too much like Europeans.

## Concluding Remarks

In this article we have seen how foreignness was emphasized in both the production and the consumption of anthropological-zoological exhibitions. The public spectators craved authentic foreignness and this was supplied by the directors of Copenhagen Zoo and Tivoli. Wittingly or unwittingly the foreignness of the people on display was used to construct, increase and insist on valorized difference between spectators and exhibited people. As Nigel Rothfels has argued, two elements were necessary in order for an exhibition of "savages" to be successful: that the audience was convinced of the authenticity of the people on display and that they were perceived as fundamentally different from, and inferior to, the European audience.<sup>27</sup> But as we have seen in the present analysis, a difference of difference was at work in the exhibitions: the Japanese on display were not perceived as inferior in the same way that the other "exotic" people were; the attraction of the Japanese exhibition was rather the glimpse of the skilful "yellow peril" it facilitated. This can be seen from the conclusion of C. C. Clausen's report, with its concerned, almost paranoid, tone:

All in all this, [Japanese] caravan seems to me the most educational of all the caravans that have visited Copenhagen. The others have consisted of half-civilized people, people of the past, the suppressed[;] this is a people of progress, of culture. The others have been interesting as curiosi-

ties, this is a piece of world history, alive before our eyes, even a piece of history of the future.<sup>28</sup>

But even though the difference between the exhibited people was clearly understood in terms of cultural and racial hierarchies, they were all displayed as emphatically foreign. The importance of keeping the foreigner foreign became clear when, in their attempts at undoing their foreignness — whether intentional or not — the people on display were perceived as either pathetically inauthentic or perilously successful in their appropriation of Western culture and technology.

- 1 Lindfors, Bernth (1999) Introduction. *Africans on Stage. Studies in Ethnological Show Business*. Ed. by Bernth Lindfors. Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, xii.
- 2 For studies on similar exhibitions in Europe, see for instance Rothfels, Nigel (2002) *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*. Baltimore & London, The Johns Hopkins University Press and Blanchard, Pascal et al. (eds.) (2008) *Human Zoos. Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press.
- 3 See Hagenbeck, Carl (1908) *Von Tieren und Menschen: Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen*. Berlin, Vita Deutsches Verlagshaus.
- 4 Ames, Eric (2008) *Carl Hagenbeck's Empires of Entertainment*. Seattle & London, University of Washington Press.
- 5 Blanchard, Pascal et al. (2008) From Scientific Racism to Popular and Colonial Racism in France and the West. *Human Zoos. Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*. Ed. by Pascal Blanchard et al. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 110.
- 6 Moustache: En indisk Karavane. *Politiken* 4.7.1901. My emphasis, AFH.
- 7 Ignotus: Japaneserne. *Politiken* 22.7.1902. My emphasis, AFH.
- 8 Kirgisere i Zoologisk Have. *Politiken* 1.7.1900.
- 9 Dreyer, W.: Kirgiserne i Zoologisk Have. *Politiken*. 25.8.1900.
- 10 Dreyer 25.8.1900.
- 11 Aileen Fyfe & Bernard Lightman (eds.) (2007) *Science in the Marketplace. Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences*. Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 11.
- 12 Lindfors 1999, xi.
- 13 Thode-Arora, Hilke (2008) Hagenbeck's European Tour'. *Human Zoos. Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*. Ed. by Pascal Blanchard et al. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 172.
- 14 Kina i Tivoli. *Hver 8. Dag* 15.6.1902. My emphasis, AFH.
- 15 Lutz, Hartmut (ed.) (2005) *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab*. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, diary entry "Saturday the 15th or 16th Oct.":
- 16 The personal impact of being put on display and of looking at others on display is very difficult to assess. The dynamics of the relationship between the observer and the observed is, however, one I will explore during the course of my work on the exhibitions in Tivoli and at Copenhagen Zoo. An interesting new book that deals with similar issues is Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie (2009) *Staring. How We Look*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 17 Minh-ha, Trinh (1986–1987) Difference: A Special Third World Women's Issue. *Discourse. Journal for theoretical studies in media and culture*, 22.
- 18 Thode-Arora 2008, 166–167.
- 19 Dreyer 25.8.1900. The last two words are not directly translated.
- 20 *Hver 8. Dag* 22.6.1900.
- 21 Pseudonym Thersites in *Klods-Hans* 14.7.1901.
- 22 *Klods-Hans*. 21.7.1901.
- 23 Pseudonym Prospero in *Frem* 14.12.1902.
- 24 *Hver 8. Dag* 10.8.1902.
- 25 *Hver 8. Dag* 10.8.1902.
- 26 *Hver 8. Dag* 10.8.1902.

- 27 Nigel Rothfels: *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London 2002, p. 194.
- 28 *Hver 8. Dag*, No. 45, August 10<sup>th</sup> 1902. The same analysis of the 'yellow peril' is brought to the fore by W. Dreyer in his book *The Victory March of the White Race* from 1910 (*Den hvide Races Sejrsgang*, Gyldendal 1910). Incidentally, Dreyer succeeded Schiøtt as director of Copenhagen Zoo after his death in 1910.

# Foreign or Homegrown?

## The Creation of Coastal Leisure Culture in the South of Norway

*Dag Hundstad*

This article deals with the invention of a recreational culture in the archipelago in the South of Norway in the interwar period. From the 1930s, this region was to most Norwegians mainly associated with sun and summer. In this period, elements such as beach life, cottages and small boats became engrained as cultural symbols of the region. This can be seen as a new form of coastal culture, which transformed perceptions of the coastal area from an arena for gathering resources and for transportation into a holiday landscape. The creation of a new recreational culture involved a complex relationship between traditional (endogenous) and foreign (exogenous) elements. In many respects this development was foreign to the coastal culture of the region, but some of the aspects of the new leisure culture had older roots. In this paper I will discuss different elements of the creation of a coastal recreational culture, with one particular question in mind: To what degree was this

new culture experienced as something foreign, or, alternatively, viewed as based on the local coastal culture? However, it is first necessary to ascertain the meaning of foreignness itself?

### Foreignness

In everyday language the word “foreign” is linked to the rather vague geographical term “abroad”. As such, it is often used as an essentialist phrase, separating “us” from “them” or “this” from “that”. This subject-object position is however not very fruitful in an academic context, and the geographical limitations do not fit very well into a post-modern world, where borders – if they exist – are crossed all the time.

The personal experience of foreignness seems to relate to context rather than to the actual geography, materiality, practice or person under consideration. From my point of view, “foreign” should therefore not be seen as an inherent quality, but as a state of mind. The concept of “foreignness” can be interpreted as a way of adjusting or changing our cognitive optics in a way that challenges our cultural vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> The effect of this is highly individual – the response can span a wide range of the emotional register. If a foreign element is introduced within a framework that we seem to control and can gain from (e.g. knowledge, stimuli or power), reactions can be marked by a sense of curiosity and joy. However, the sudden or strong impression

of foreignness in a less well-controlled context can lead to anger and fear. A sense of sadness can also arise when something new is introduced, one can perceive that something old is fading away.

Hence, the “foreign” is an aspect of a situation, or materiality, which is constantly being produced and undone. A well-known object or situation can suddenly be seen as “foreign” when the context or use is in a state of flux, but after it is naturalized the feeling of foreignness fades away. In an intercultural dialogue, foreignness should be seen as something relational and processual, which is constantly being negotiated. The study of the relationship between continuity and breaks is one of the main tasks of a historian. Using the concept of “foreignness” as an analytical tool makes it easier to understand the reception and naturalization of new practices.

Later in this paper, I will discuss to what degree the new recreational habits which developed in the South of Norway in the interwar period did involve an experience of foreignness. First it is necessary to give some contextual background about the South of Norway and the coastal tourism to the region.

## The South of Norway

The South of Norway is situated close to Skagerrak, which separates Denmark from Norway. In the age of tall ships, many vessels crossing between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea used the out ports of the

region.<sup>2</sup> In the nineteenth century there was much shipping in this part of Norway, and the region was then an important part of the international maritime economy.

From the 1870s, steamship traffic increased rapidly at the expense of the old fashioned tall ships. The shipping industry of the region was not financially capable of following this development, which demanded larger funds. Moreover, the steamships did not need to dock in the small out ports along the southern coast. This was a paradigm shift in the maritime culture of the region. The local financial basis was gone, which weakened the self-image of the population. There seemed to be no good alternatives to shipping. From 1890, many from the younger generation emigrated abroad.<sup>3</sup>

In 1902, the author Vilhelm Krag introduced a name for the region: “Sørlandet” –literally: “the Southern Land”. This was an attempt to raise regional consciousness in this part of Norway. The name was a success, and in the following decades, there were several attempts to raise Southern regionalism. Around 1930, however, the regionalist movement was beginning to fade away, their attempts of creating a more dynamic and political influential region proving not very effective.<sup>4</sup> There was however one aspect of their work which must be considered as a huge success: their effort to make the coast of the South of Norway a more popular tourist destination. This would probably not have been possible without a changing view of the maritime landscape in the preceding decades.



## Aesthetics

In the eighteenth century there was a romantic growth of taste of wilder aspects of nature that included both the mountains and the sea. As people grew tired of the picturesque, controlled idyll, there was a new hunt for the sublime, defined by the French philosopher Denis Diderot as “all that surprises the soul, all that creates a sense of fear.” There was a focus on drama, such as cliffs, stormy weather and shipwrecks, and such motives drew artists and writers to the shore.<sup>5</sup> It was however not until the last part of the nineteenth century, that the more idyllic aspects of the Norwegian coastal landscape were admired. In particular, the painter Amaldis Nielsen “discovered” the idyll of the South of Norway. His pictures fit well into the current trends of new romanticism, both in art and literature. The most important regional authors of the South of Norway, Vilhelm Krag and Gabriel Scott both had their breakthrough during the wave of new romanticism in the 1890s. They both gave melancholic descriptions of the grey archipelago, which corresponded to Nielsen’s paintings.<sup>6</sup>

Tourists, however, had not yet discovered the coast of the South of Norway. Norwegians did not have any interest in seaside resorts in the late nineteenth century. Instead, tourists concentrated on walking tours in the inland regions of the country, especially in the inner valleys. The coastal landscape was seen as dull and monotonous.<sup>7</sup>

This changed dramatically in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the 1930s, the Southern coastal landscape was no longer seen as “melancholic”, “sad”, “empty” and “romantic”, but as a joyous and boisterous place. It is typical for this period in general that both the images and the language of the coast became simpler and stronger. As the tourism historian John Towner has demonstrated, the Edwardian terms “breezy” and “bracing” were replaced by “sunshine” and “warmth”.<sup>8</sup> The slogan “Sun, summer, South” was adopted in the South of Norway, and from being a search for the picturesque or sublime tourism became seemingly more hedonistic. This “happy-go-lucky” association with the coast was a result of the dominant zeitgeist and deeper currents in the arts and fashion. It affected both tourists and the local population, with younger people being particularly keen to embrace the new outlook. In the case of the South of Norway, it was also connected to a general opening of the maritime landscape – both to tourists and to leisure activities for locals.

## A Summer Region

The development of seaside resorts during the last two hundred years is a global phenomenon. The trend was pioneered in Great Britain, where seaside resorts arose as early as the first part of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The first seaside resorts in Norway

Også husmoren  
skal ha følelse av ferie.  
Minst mulig matstell forlenger  
fritiden - god mat gir øket  
tilfredshet.

BJELLANDS HERMETIKK  
er rask å tilberede, næringsrik  
og i høi grad velsmakende.

**BJELLANDS**

Merbrader - Beefstek - Karbonader - Kjøttboller - Frikadeller -  
Beef a la Lapskaus - Frankfurter og Wienerpølser - Får i Kål -  
Erter, Kjøtt og Flesk - Lapskaus - Fiskeboller og Seikaker -

*Changing marketing campaigns in the beginning of the 1930s. In the first commercial (Fædrelandsvennen 2.7.1930), the product – canned fish and meat (Bjellands Hermetikk) – is linked to the concept of a summer holiday with the picture of an inland cabin in the woods. In the following year (Fædrelandsvennen 3.7.1931), the commercial for the same product has “gone to sea”, and the cabin is now a typical archipelago-style cabin with a pier and a boat. This is typical for the 1930s, when changing holiday patterns made many companies use maritime motives in their marketing.*

were the holiday societies, which developed around the spa resorts in the inner parts of the Oslo fjord in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the interwar period, and in particular from about 1930, the small towns scattered along the Southern coast were rapidly converted into seaside resorts. The South of Norway was now constructed as a brand and as a “summer and holiday region”. This was the result of several corresponding factors. Most important was probably the massive promotional travel campaign, aimed mainly at the population of Oslo. The promotion was arranged at a regional level. Meetings were held, there was a great deal of marketing, regional nights were aired on national broadcasting channels and a film was even produced to promote the region. There was also a pronounced focus on the recreational potential of the coast for local inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

In the same period there were many reports of the decline of traditional tourism in the inner valleys of the region, with its strong links to national romanticism and nation-building.<sup>11</sup> The young nation was now more confident, and it no longer felt the need to incorporate a nation-building project into every aspect of Norwegian life. In many ways inland tourism, with its roots in the late nineteenth century, seemed like a heavier and more serious form of tourism than the swinging beach and boat life unfolding in the south. The new generation of tourists was searching for sun, sand and fun; not for authentic, national or cultural impulses or strenuous hikes.

In the 1930s more and more tourists visited the region, mainly coming from the capital and the Eastern part of Norway. Yet, it should be stressed that the promotional campaign was not the only reason for the tourism boom. One important premise for the new development was the improved economical situation in this decade, compared to the 1920s. In addition, most people now had holidays – 12 days or more – and a larger part of the population could afford to travel.<sup>12</sup> Renting a cottage or a house on the Southern coast did not have to be very expensive and camping was introduced as an even cheaper alternative. Better communications, with buses, cruise ships, railways and private cars accentuated the existing trends.<sup>13</sup> However, it should be emphasized that new infrastructures not only created new tourist destinations, but were also the results of them. There is not a simple and determinist link between transport innovation and recreation and tourism.<sup>14</sup>

Foreign tourists also visited the region, although in relatively small numbers. Most of them were cruise ship-passengers, who only spent short periods on land. For the visitors from abroad, the South of Norway was not considered as the “real Norway”, with its fjords, glaciers and mountains.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the climate did not make it a summer paradise by the standards of people from continental Europe. For Norwegians, though, the Southern coast was fashionable, and proved to be an affordable alternative than travelling abroad to the Riviera. It was also considered healthy to spend the holiday at



I F E R I E N

skal man ha minst like meget,  
og minst like god mat som ellers,  
- men helst uten større matstell.

BJELLANDS  
kraftige og velsmakende Kjøtt-  
hermetikk er den rette feriekost.

Men be uttrykkelig om  
**BJELLANDS**

IKKE BARE DEST. - MEN BEDRE OG BEDRE

ARI-22

the coast – especially in the rural areas. It is almost breathtaking to see the way commercials in this period suddenly adapted to this change, and framed their message with bright pictures from holiday life in the south. Many new tourism organizations and tourist offices were established. They arranged boat trips and other excursions, provided information about cottages and houses that could be rented, and provided other information and help. The tourists were accommodated in hotels and boarding houses, but many of them also rented private rooms or houses.<sup>16</sup>

## Taking in Summer Guests

From the late nineteenth century it was a general trend that city dwellers moved to the countryside in the summer. This led to a very specific form of tourism, as the seaside became increasingly popular in the early twentieth century. The local owners of a house would move to a shack or outhouse, while they rented out their main building to summer guests, who mostly belonged to the urban upper middle-class. This kind of tourism had its heydays in the interwar period.<sup>17</sup>

The cultural exchange between these kind of summer guests and locals is an interesting phenomenon, which has yet to be thoroughly researched. It seems that the guests learned some practices from the locals, especially connected to boat life and fish-

ing, while the local population learned more about foreign practices, such as swimming and sun-bathing. However, to a certain extent the asymmetrical relationship between hosts and guests must have been restraining. It was probably the children and youths of families who were able to draw most knowledge out of the foreign experiences. A girl who grew up in the 1930s, for example, can still remember the astonishment she felt when she realized the summer guests used an embroidered table-cloth every day. She also recalls how annoyed she was when she had to run a long way to fetch a cream jug, because the visiting lady, who was married to a captain, did not want to use milk in her coffee.<sup>18</sup>

The accommodation of summer guests provided a valuable extra income for families in the archipelago, but it also involved much hard work — especially for the women. A woman recalls that in the summer of 1935 guests asked her mother if they could stay for one week more: “Mother said ‘yes’, but she cried a bit afterwards, even if she appreciated the guests.”<sup>19</sup> When economic conditions improved after the Second World War, taking in summer guests became less common as more people preferred to build their own cottages in the archipelago.

## Cottage Culture

If you travel to the Southern coast of Norway today, you will see cottages<sup>20</sup> of different standards scattered over almost the entire archipelago. At weekends and holiday periods, many locals and foreigners spend their time at cottages in this region. This cottage culture was an elite phenomenon in its early days.<sup>21</sup> Some of the first cottages in the archipelago were used for hunting – mostly seals or seabirds such as geese – but soon recreation became the main reason for the erection of cottages. The great boom came in the 1950s and 1960s, when a broader cross-section of the people benefited from an improved financial environment, and increased private ownership of cars made travel easier. Cottages could now be used for weekend trips, not just for longer holidays. Normal workers were then able to build cottages of a simpler standard. In the archipelago it is still possible to find cottages made of old fishing vessels, the barracks built by German soldiers during World War II, or even containers used to transport cars. Some of the cottages were used by local townspeople while they rented out their own houses to tourists. However, most of the cottages were built for recreational purposes by tourists and locals.<sup>22</sup>

The inspiration for building summer-houses and cottages with sea views probably came from the west coast of Sweden. Here the local population was astonished that the upper- middle class bought

property, which to them seemed worthless. For the locals, it was more important to have a house that was sheltered from the sea and wind.<sup>23</sup>

Cottage culture was new, but it had strong roots. Indeed, one of the most important roots was a general urge among the rural population to “keep it rough” in the summertime, when they would move to one of the shacks near the farm or into small cottages or dairies in the mountains, where the herd was kept. This was a tradition in both Norway and Sweden, and the move was associated with simplicity and freedom.<sup>24</sup> In the cottage a similar freedom and proximity to nature was felt, and more simple aesthetic standards were applied than in everyday life. For the urban upper class, the same urge for nature and simplicity seems to have been present, but this could also be seen as based on tradition. In the past, the rich had moved to their residences in the countryside during the hot summer months. This was both for leisure purposes, and to supervise the agricultural production that was necessary to keep a large household in the city.<sup>25</sup> In broad terms, the new cottage culture seems to have been little debated in the media. Discussion in the press was mainly concentrated on issues related to areal planning, not the cottage culture itself. Cottages were associated with safe and healthy family values, closeness to nature and were also strongly linked to national romanticism. In many ways building a cottage was a way of building the nation, and the archetype of the simple, wooden cottage with Norwegian flags

flapping in the wind could be seen as a reflection of the nation's past. It was also possible to see a small wooden boat, decked out with a Norwegian flag, when going down to a cottage's jetty.

## Small Boat Culture

In the 1930s the cottage, the jetty and the boat became three inseparable elements in both the maritime cultural landscape and in the Southern mindscape. The boat could be seen as the most important symbol for coastal culture and its materiality transcends all chronologies and geographies of maritime history. All use of the coast depended on the boat – for transport, for the use of power, for harvesting resources through fisheries, gathering or hunting and for leisure.

People have always made short leisure trips with rowing or sailing vessels in the southern archipelago. In 1788 it was said that every family in the city of Arendal, probably the bourgeoisie, had a leisure boat.<sup>26</sup> Yachting and informal regattas were among the oldest elements of the coastal leisure culture. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, yacht clubs were formed in the towns along the Southern coast, and formal regattas were held. In the early regattas, the vessels of pilots and fishing vessels could participate, although the social elite oversaw the running of the yachting clubs.<sup>27</sup>

The small boat culture, as it is known today, was a phenomenon that developed simultaneously with the motor industry, which was imported from abroad during the first years of the twentieth century. Motor-boats were hard to handle in their early days, but they soon became more reliable, and it was no longer necessary to have to rely on the wind or physical strength. As a result, boat trips became an institutionalized part of coastal life, and the number of leisure boats grew rapidly. In 1915, it was doubted whether there could be as many as 125 small boats in the city of Kristiansand. However, by 1933 there were reported to have been between 800 and 1200 boats in the city, which consequently put great pressure on the harbour facilities. Motorboat associations were formed, such as in Kristiansand in 1910, which campaigned for better and bigger harbours for the leisure boats. One of their arguments for this was that motorboat trips were beneficial to health, which should not be underestimated, especially on elderly people and children. For locals who could not afford to build a cottage, buying a small boat was a much cheaper way of using the maritime landscape.<sup>28</sup>

The number of boats rose on a yearly basis in the 1930s, when daytrips to the small islands in the archipelago became extremely fashionable. On Sundays, the small cities of Sørlandet were reputedly abandoned – everyone was said to be “island-jumping” in the archipelago. When sailing in order to enjoy an island picnic, *holmetur*, people brought

food baskets, coffee kettles for the fire and new technological gadgets, such as gramophones and cameras.<sup>29</sup> Tourists imitated the local practice of daytrips, and it went without saying that a coastal cabin should have a jetty with a boat. The new tourist offices could hire boats for visitors, but in the 1930s planned collective excursions were also undertaken.<sup>30</sup> Some more adventurous young people also started taking longer trips along the coastline, and even slept in their boats.<sup>31</sup> This is a common pastime today, but in the 1930s such trips were a foreign phenomenon, which were associated with the so-called *fanter*, people of Romani heritage, who lived in boats.

The fact that the motor-boat extended the range of the day-trippers caused some problems. The 1930s was a period of territorial negotiation in the archipelago. Referring to old traditional rules, the day-trippers anchored their boats in farmers' properties in the archipelago, which horrified some of the latter. Coastal farmers were not used to their property being used in this way. Although people from the whole coastline went for day trips, the unwanted visitors were always called "city people" in the newspapers. Casting city people as scapegoats was a way to alienate the intruders, who were accused of picking too many berries, leaving fences open, dropping litter and general disorder.<sup>32</sup>

Access to woods, fields, mountains, rivers, lakes and skerries, irrespective of who owns them, is an ancient, unwritten right in Norway. The Outdoor

Recreation Act of 1957 formally legalized the right of access for the public. In the interwar period, people in some cities, such as Grimstad and Kristiansand, predicted that there would be massive pressure on the coastal landscape in the foreseeable future. In the 1930s they formed associations to buy special parts of the archipelago to prevent them being privatized. Instead, they campaigned that they should be used by the "small boat people". In 1973, the government purchased vast areas for this purpose – the so-called archipelago park. These efforts were vital and kept large coastal areas open for public recreational use.<sup>33</sup>

For summer guests, fishing opportunities were important.<sup>34</sup> Recreational fishing was an element that was tied in with the old and new use of the maritime cultural landscape. Fishing has always been both associated with both hard work and recreation. From ancient times, the fishermen of the region had certain fisheries that were considered in terms of more or less leisure. In the South of Norway, this especially applied to the fishing of the Ballan wrasse (*Labrus bergylta*), but also fishing mackerel and lobster near the coast could be seen as recreation. Thus, the border between work and leisure was blurry. Peasants from inland also participated in these recreational fisheries, when there was not too much work to be done at the farm.<sup>35</sup>

The small boat culture tied together old and new practices and it united tourists and locals. Recreational use of the archipelago had old roots

among all sorts of coastal people, and the continuity in familiar practices, such as fishing and sailing, lessened the experience of foreignness related to the small boat culture. However, the extensive use of the archipelago was something new, and the conflict between “city-people” and farmers tells us that this culture had some controversial and foreign elements attached to it, even if the culture itself was “home-grown”. Another phenomenon also evolved in this period, which in contrast involved a much more profound experience of foreignness: beach culture.

## Beaches and Bathing

Since Dr. Richard Russell’s famous dissertation on sea-bathing in 1752, intellectuals and the wealthy had been well aware of the health advantages of the beach. The extended popularity of the beach in the nineteenth century had its roots in the changing appeal of seaside resorts vis-à-vis spas, the influence of health awareness and the need to escape urbanization and meet people from different backgrounds or classes. The beach was also a new arena for flirtation, although it was considered healthy for children to stay there. It was, however, not until the first decades of the twentieth century that the beach attained its current position – as a playground.<sup>36</sup>

In the interwar period, there was a new awareness of the potential of the beach all over the West-

ern world. The French and Italian Riviera was considered to be the archetype of a beach paradise on both sides of the Atlantic. The supposedly joyous beach culture, which was created in the 1920s, was strongly influenced by American trends. In Norwegian magazines from the 1930s, there is much talk of the Riviera. This must be considered largely as a utopian arena, where only a very small section of the Norwegian population could actually afford to travel.<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that a large number of young people from the South of Norway stayed in the New York area during the first decades of the century. Here they had the chance to experience the massive beach culture evolving on Coney Island, Long Beach and Jones Beach. A large proportion of these Norwegians went back to their homeland after some years of working and saving money, and brought back foreign cultural impulses.<sup>38</sup> Popular culture – both films and the expanding commercial market – contributed to the promotion of beach life back home.

It was not until the 1930s that beach life took off in the South of Norway. Before this, people took baths, but this was done in small bathing houses at inlets and other places, and the sexes were separated. Many of the local coastal dwellers never learned to swim. To them, the invention of beach culture was something distinctively foreign, and several people objected to the new beach culture out of moral and religious concerns. The main reason for this concern was the celebration of the body and the seemingly



# Hjemmets spalte. Juli



a. Badedrakt av ulltricot. b. Strand- pyjamas med bluse og trøje. Strand hatt av bast. c. Ærmeles kjole med bolero av mønstre voile. d. og e. Blomstret vaskekjoler for større og mindre pikebarn..

*Beach fashions in the summer of 1931 (Fædrelandsvennen 2.7.1931). A bathing suit made of a woolen tricot (A), beach pyjamas with a woolen blouse and shirt (B), a sleeveless dress with a bolero made of voile (C). The children are wearing washable dresses with floral patterns.*

shameless way men and women interacted at the beach.<sup>39</sup> In art and literature, the beach was seen as a melancholic setting, and there are many pictures of desolated beaches in the autumn. For the local population, the beaches served mainly as a resource for collecting sea-weed for fertilization.<sup>40</sup>

In 1931, *Urd*, a national magazine for women, reported from the long beach at Sjøsandén, near the town of Mandal, which is probably the best in the region. The journalist, encountering the beach, reported that it was probably the most beautiful beach in Norway, but she was disappointed by the atmosphere: "There are only a small number of people bathing here, mostly mothers and nannies with small children who are enjoying a pleasant and peaceful time. And almost all the bathers are locals". The journalist further explains that there had been plans to build a big, modern "bathing hotel", but that this has been thwarted by the local authorities who do not want to give the owners a license to serve alcohol. Hence, "no jazz orchestra would drown out the splashing waves, no coloured lights would spoil the bright summer night. [...] There is an idyllic calmness in the atmosphere of the beach, but how long will it last?"<sup>41</sup>

Even if the journalist was exaggerating, there was a dramatic shift the following year. In 1932, a large Boy Scout jamboree took place in Mandal, with 5,000 scouts from all over Norway. This attracted a huge amount of visitors, and in a single day it is estimated that 20,000 outsiders visited the

small town. The local organizers were well aware of the potential of the beach, and it was actively used during the days of the camp. The pictures of boy scouts bathing and sunbathing at the beach without doubt helped to wipe away some of the moral concerns about beach life. Both the locals and the visiting scouts and tourists had their eyes opened to the possibilities of the beach and beach life.<sup>42</sup>

In only a few years, during the early 1930s, the habit of using bathing houses was abandoned in the region, and so-called "free bathing", which did not separate the sexes, was generally accepted.<sup>43</sup> The rapidly changing beach fashions astonished conservatives. In the new beach environment, it was important to dress in a fashionable and daring manner, without being too provocative. In 1930, "beach pyjamas" were introduced to Norway. The very idea of beachwear was then fresh, stemming from the Riviera in 1928. In 1935 shorts and beach dresses were reported to have replaced the pyjamas. From 1936, so-called elastic "telescopic" bathing suits, which were made of rubber, were available on the market in Norway. They shaped themselves against the body, and replaced woolen bathing suits with skirts. The bravest bathers had already begun to use bras and bathing trunks. The colours of beach costumes were very bright, and made a woman's appearance even more foreign in the eyes of conservatives.<sup>44</sup> Sandals became common in the latter part of the 1930s, whereas it had hitherto been deemed inappropriate for women to show their toes. A fash-

ion journalist wrote in 1931 that “[...] not one out of 100 people have toes so delicate that you wish to take a close look at them on a daily basis”.<sup>45</sup> Some years later, a journalist from the same magazine reluctantly had to accept the fashion of wearing sandals without socks.<sup>46</sup>

For the older generation, young women seemed to show so much of their bodies that they might as well have no clothes on at all. Indeed, there were rumors in the newspapers about nude people at the beaches – it seemed that there were no rules anymore.<sup>47</sup> A girl growing up in the 1930s shows the confusion felt by many among the older generation in regard to the new bathing culture:

We used woolen bathing suits of course, with skirts. We were careful that nobody saw anything inappropriate. We also used bathing gowns. It was important to use sun-lotion after bathing. I remember one funny incident. Grandmother joined us once. She had never taken part in this new bathing life before. She had bought herself a bathing suit made of cotton. But she did not handle the art of undressing. Suddenly she stood there in the nude. Somebody yelled: “Nobody knows my ass in Hamburg” [local expression]. Grandmother never went sea bathing again.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1920s, the rise of the fashionable suntan was very important in the promotion of seaside resorts. It is symptomatic that the railway connection between the urban metropolises of San Francisco and Oakland to the beach paradise of Santa

Cruz was called the “Suntan Special”. Originating in Germany, the culture of sunbathing had strong ties to the naturalist movement. However, the practice was soon “tamed” and adapted to less controversial forms of leisure.<sup>49</sup> The very idea of sunbathing was imported to the South of Norway from abroad, and it is no wonder that it was seen as something foreign. Often sunbathers were called “niggers”. The same girl, who was cited above, recalls being scolded by her grandmother for being so “brown” and ugly, after spending hours sunbathing. To her generation, the female ideal was still to appear “white as milk”.<sup>50</sup>

The new beach culture was not self-explanatory – people had to learn how to be a bather or sunbather. In the newspapers and magazines, there was a great deal of focus on different considerations concerning the art of taking a bath or acquiring a suntan in a healthy way. Doctors were often used as authorities.<sup>51</sup>

Although beaches had always formed part of the landscape in the region, beach life introduced at least three new elements into regional coastal culture in the South of Norway: the concept of “free bathing”, provocative fashions and sunbathing. None of these elements had roots in the traditional coastal culture of the region, and to the locals involved they were marked by a strong sense of foreignness. For the younger generation, this was something new and exciting – for the older generation it was associated with a sense of the general dissolution of old norms.

## Conclusion

In the interwar period a new coastal culture emerged in the South of Norway. Thenceforth, the coastal landscape was used much more extensively for recreational purposes, both by tourists and locals. The result was that the image of the region changed, and became associated with the sun, sea and summer. Some of the new recreational practices had older roots, while some of them were to a greater extent associated with a feeling of foreignness. In both the "cottage culture" and the "small-boat culture" there were links between past and present practices, which made the new phenomena easier to accept and less controversial. In the "beach culture" which evolved in the 1930s, a much stronger feeling of foreignness was involved. The new beach culture drew on both French and American impulses and involved "free bathing", daring fashions and sunbathing. To most people, especially the younger generations, the new practices appeared to be new and exciting, but to conservative-minded they seemed both shocking and frightening. In sum, the new recreational coastal culture that developed in the South of Norway in the 1930s involved an interesting mix between foreign and "home-grown" elements. To understand the reception and the naturalization of the new practices, the concept of foreignness can be a useful tool.

- 1 On "mental glasses" and social optics, see Zerubavel, Eviatar (1997) *Social mindscapes. An invitation to cognitive sociology*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- 2 Hundstad, Dag (2004) *Sørlandske uthavnssamfunn – fra maritime monokulturer til fritidssamfunn*. University of Bergen, unpublished cand. philol. thesis; Hundstad, Dag (2005) Det sørlandske uthavnssamfunnet – en maritim monokultur. *Heimen*, no. 1.
- 3 Johnsen, Berit Eide (2001) *Rederistrategi i endringstid. Sørlandsk skipsfart fra seil til damp og motor, fra tre til jern og stål. 1875–1925*. Kristiansand, Norwegian Academic Press (*Studia humanitatis Bergensia* no. 14); Hundstad 2004.
- 4 Hundstad, Dag (2009) Regionsbygging i sør. *Regionen*. Ed. by Bjørg Seland. Kristiansand, Norwegian Academic Press, 59–92.
- 5 Löfgren, Orvar (1999) *On Holiday – A History of Vacationing*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 27, 112–116; Corbin, Alain (1994) *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside, 1750–1840*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 121 ff.
- 6 Hundstad 2009.
- 7 Hundstad 2009, 75–76; Nielsen, Yngvar (1891) *Nedenes Amt. Haandbog for Reisende. Udg. efter Foranstaltning af Arendals og Omegns Turistforening*. Christiania, Cammermeyer, 17, 24; *Fædrelandsvennen* 14.7.1930.
- 8 Towner, John (1996) *A historical geography of recreation and tourism in the western world, 1540–1940*. Chichester, Wiley, 215.
- 9 Towner 1996, 172.
- 10 Johnsen, Berit Eide (2008) Images of Sørlandet: The Skagerrak Coast of Norway – Representations and stereotypes, and the fight against them. *Touring the Past. Uses of History in Tourism*. Ed. by Auvo Kostianen and Taina Syrjämaa. Joensuu, The Finnish University Network for Tourism Studies; Sørlandslaget i Oslo gjennom 10 år, *Sørlandsheftet* 1932; Skjebstad, Gustav (1932) Sørlandslaget 1922–1932, *Sørlandsheftet*; Tønnessen, Joh. N (1974) *Kristiansands historie 1914–45*. I krigens århundre. Kristiansand, Christianssands sparebank, 269–270; *Fædrelandsvennen* 8.7.1930, 16.7.1930, 18.7.1931, 24.7.1931, 25.7.1931, 16.7.1932, 23.7.1932, 29.7.1933, 3.7.1934, 10.7.1934, 13.7.1934.
- 11 *Fædrelandsvennen* 5.7.1930, 16.7.1930, 19.7.1930, 28.7.1930, 17.7.1931, 18.7.1932, 30.7.1932, 14.7.1933, 15.7.1933, 25.7.1933, 14.7.1934, 15.7.1934.
- 12 Hodne, Ørnulf (1994) *Folk og fritid. En mellomkrigsstudie i norsk arbeiderbevegelse*. Oslo, Novus, 16.
- 13 Slettan, Bjørn (2006) *En industriby vokser fram. 1850–1950. Mandal bys historie*. Vol. 3, Mandal, Mandal kommune, 411; Tønnessen 1974, 262–272, 328; *Fædrelandsvennen* 25.07.1933; Den nye måten å feriere på. Leirsamlinger med biler og telter. *Urd* 26.8.1933; Hvorhen går ferieturen? I. Vi som sykler. *Urd* 16.6.1934; Jørgensen, Borghild: Camping. *Urd* 27.6.1936.
- 14 Löfgren 1999, 68; Towner 1996, 199–200.
- 15 *Fædrelandsvennen* 26.7.1934; Hundstad 2009, 69–70.
- 16 Abrahamsen, Olav Arild (1990) Fra innlands- til kystturisme. *Agder Historielags Årsskrift* 60: 11–13; Holte, Leiv (1990) "Christianssands og Oplands Turistforening" blir stiftet. *Agder Historielags Årsskrift* 60; *Grimstad bys historie. Paa kommunal foranstaltning utgit ved en komité* (1927). Grimstad, Grimstad Bymuseum, 612; Tønnessen 1974, 331; Slettan 2006, 411; *Fædrelandsvennen* 16.7.1937.
- 17 Abrahamsen 1990, 14; Sætra, Randi (1990) Sommergjester på Engholmen. *Agder Historielags Årsskrift* 60; Moi, Molla Skogsøy (1990) Sommergjester. *Agder Historielags Årsskrift* 60; Grindland, Kari (1990)

- "...at raade Bod paa og søge Erstatning for Tabet af Livskraften". Flekkerø Skjærgaardssanatorium 1903–1940. *Agder Historielags Årsskrift* 60, 65.
- 18 Moi 1990, 71–72.
- 19 Sætra 1990, 70.
- 20 It is here defined as "a rural second home in Europe or North America", Löfgren 1999, 131.
- 21 Hodne 1994, 25; Deres landsted i det grønne – og mitt i det blå. *Urd* 6.7.1935; En pen liten hytte med sengeplass for seks. *Urd* 13.6.1936.
- 22 *Fædrelandsvennen* 25.7.1933, 31.7.1934.
- 23 Löfgren 1999, 123.
- 24 Löfgren 1999, 126, 154.
- 25 See, for instance, Smith, Axel (1923) *Av en ældre Arendalsmands erindringer fra de sidste 50 aar (1870–1920). Arendal fra fortid til nutid. Utgit ved byens 200-aars jubileum som kjøbstad. 7. mai 1923*. Ed. by Fredrik Scheel. Kristiania, Gyldendalske Bokhandel, 649–650; Tønnessen 1974, 131.
- 26 Kaastrup, Sølvi (1990) Noen utdrag av utlendingers reisebeskrivelser fra Agder på 1700- og 1800-tallet. *Agder Historielags Årsskrift* 60, 18.
- 27 *Grimstad bys historie* (1927), 611–612; Dannevig, Birger (1973) *Arendal gjennom skiftende tider. 1528–1723–1973. Utgitt av Arendal kommune i anledning av 250-årsjubileet som kjøpstad 7. mai 1973*. Kragerø, Arendal kommune, 173; *Fædrelandsvennen* 7.7.1931.
- 28 *Fædrelandsvennen* 28.7.1930, 7.7.1931, 23.7.1931, 27.7.1932, 3.7.1933, 10.7.1933, 26.7.1933; Tønnessen 1974, 131.
- 29 Ulmo, Gulborg Songe (1986) *Husker du? Tvedestrand gjennom 150 år. 1836–1986. Jubileumsbok*. Ed. by Øyvind Bjorvatn and Knut Frognes. Tvedestrand, Historielaget for Dypvåg, Holt og Tvedestrand, 62; *Fædrelandsvennen* 7.7.1933, 8.7.1933, 10.7.1933, 28.7.1934, 31.7.1934; Hvor skal jeg tilbringe sommerferien? *Urd* 16.5.1931; Sommerintermessio. *Urd* 23.7.1932; Syrdahl, Gretha: St. Hanskveld i "Sørlandets Perle". *Urd* 20.6.1936.
- 30 *Fædrelandsvennen* 25.7.1933, 28.7.1934, 16.7.1937; Grindland 1990, 61; Moi 1990, 71.
- 31 På fribytterferd i våre hjemlige farvann. *Urd* 18.5.1935, 25.5.1935.
- 32 *Fædrelandsvennen* 28.7.1930, 29.7.1930, 27.7.1932, 29.7.1933, 7.7.1936.
- 33 Marmøy, Reidar (1997) *Grimstad – byen med skjærgården. Selskapet for Grimstad Bys Vel 1922–1997*, Grimstad, Selskapet for Grimstad Bys Vel; Tønnessen 1974, 332.
- 34 Grindland 1990, 61; *Fædrelandsvennen* 19.7.1932, 27.7.1932, 8.7.1933; På fribytterferd i våre hjemlige farvann. *Urd* 18.5.1935.
- 35 Hundstad, Dag (in print) *Harkmark – Bosetning og befolkning*.
- 36 Towner 1996, 201, 209; Löfgren 1999, 116–120. Also see Trysnes, Fie Skaar (1990) *Tvedestrands Bad*. Billigt sommerophold. Naturskjøn omegn. *Agder Historielags Årsskrift* 60; Grindland 1990.
- 37 Löfgren 1999, 170; Bjørnson, Else: Pyjamas-brev fra den italienske riviera. *Urd* 19.6.1931; Sommer ved middelhavet. Små rivierastemninger. *Urd* 4.7.1931; Vogt, Martha: Kunsten å reise. *Urd* 4.8.1934.
- 38 See, for instance, Mauk, David C. (1997) *The colony that rose from the sea. Norwegian maritime migration and community in Brooklyn 1850–1910*. Northfield, Minn. Norwegian-American Historical Association; Ringdal, Siv (2007) *Lapskaus Boulevard. Et gjensyn med det norske Brooklyn*. Oslo, Golden Slippers.
- 39 Abrahamsen 1990, 13; Slettan 2006, 413; Hoven, Einar Holmer (1946) *Slik var vår barndoms hvite by. Mandal*

- i gamle dager*. Oslo, Cappelen, 141; *Fædrelandsvennen* 16.7.1930.
- 40 Löfgren 1999, 123.
- 41 Meinich, Aslaug: Sommerbrev fra Mandal. *Urd* 1.8.1931. Also see *Fædrelandsvennen* 14.7.1931.
- 42 Hoven 1946, 141; Slettan 2006, 407–411; *Fædrelandsvennen* 5.7.1932, 8.7.1932, 11.7.1932, 25.7.1933.
- 43 *Fædrelandsvennen* 14.7.1931, 22.7.1931, 25.7.1933, 15.7.1934.
- 44 Grindland 1990, 65; *Fædrelandsvennen* 9.7.1930, 2.7.1931, 9.7.1934, 15.7.1934, 16.7.1934, 28.7.1934, 5.7.1935, 6.7.1935, 4.7.1936., 18.7.1936; Löfgren 1999, 227. Also see Sol, Donna: Sommerens strandpyjamas. *Urd* 11.6.1932; Sol, Donna: På ferie. *Urd* 8.7.1933; Sol, Donna: Vi reiser og bader. *Urd* 19.5.1934; Bull, Alette: Badedrakt eller solbadedrakt for unge damer. *Urd* 2.6.1934; Sol, Donna: Vi går i vannet. *Urd* 1.6.1935; Sol, Donna: Så tar vi oss en dukkert igjen – helst i en gummidrakt. *Urd* 13.6.1936; Sol, Donna: Londonerne tar sig en forfriskende dukkert i Bournemouth. *Urd* 29.5.1937; Sol, Donna: Sjø og strand frister i det fjerne. *Urd* 16.7.1938.
- 45 La brunheten passe til typen, og klærne til brunheten. *Urd* 25.7.1931. Also see Reisetøfler med etui – og badesko. *Urd* 12.5.1934.
- 46 Sol, Donna: Så tar vi oss en dukkert igjen – helst i en gummidrakt. *Urd* 13.6.1936. Also see Stygge tær gir mindreverdigthetskompleks. *Urd* 28.5.1938.
- 47 *Fædrelandsvennen* 10.7.1933, 26.7.1936.
- 48 Sætra 1990, 69.
- 49 Löfgren 1999, 222–223; La brunheten passe til typen, og klærne til brunheten. *Urd* 25.7.1931.
- 50 Sætra 1990, 68–69; Abrahamsen 1990, 13.
- 51 *Fædrelandsvennen* 2.7.1936; Hvor skal jeg tilbringe

sommerferien? *Urd* 16.5.1931; Barna og sommerferien. Et intervju med skolelæge dr. med. Lauriz Stoltenberg. *Urd* 16.6.1934; Mens solen stikker og huden svir. *Urd* 6.7.1935; Når barn bader—-. *Urd* 20.6.1936; Har håret fått en hard medfart i sjø og sol? *Urd* 22.8.1936; Arkina, Nina: Vær forsiktig med sol og solbad. *Urd* 26.6.1937; Sol bare sol! *Urd* 23.7.1938.





# At the Crossroads of Finnishness and Foreignness

## Finnish Participation in the Venice Biennale in 1954 and 1956

*Laura Boxberg*

International art biennials are seen as important instruments in integrating a country into the international contemporary art world. The majority of shows emphasize the internationalist nature of cultural and artistic production and so they have often been compared to international mega-exhibitions, such as the world exhibitions, rather than to the more static platform offered by museums. The nature of the Venice Biennale (La Biennale di Venezia) has changed a lot during the twentieth century, even though the main concept is still to exhibit contemporary art in permanent national pavilions, as in 1895 when the first Biennale was opened in the Castello Gardens on the Eastern tip of Venice.<sup>1</sup> After the Second World War there was a tendency towards manifesting Western individualism through auto-

nous modernism and avant-garde art. These genres were considered to be politically neutral.<sup>2</sup> Early twentieth-century artists, such as Henri Matisse and Max Ernst, were highlighted in retrospective special exhibitions and were also awarded prizes. In the post-war Venice Biennale exhibitions the number of national pavilions increased and every pavilion had its national commissioner. However, each nation's choices as a representative artist were not necessarily in line with the Biennale's curatorial orientation.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I will examine the decisions that were made in the Finnish art world concerning Finnish participation in the Venice Biennale in 1954 and 1956. An emphasis will be placed on the question of Finnishness versus internationalism, and how the decisions were linked to the debate that prevailed in the Finnish art world in the beginning of the 1950s. To some extent previous research has viewed the 1950s as a coherent post-war period in Finnish art. However, some new Finnish organisations that spoke for modernism were founded as early as in the 1930s, such as the Association for Contemporary Art.<sup>4</sup> These organizations did some groundwork by familiarizing Finns with European avant-garde art. The 1950s was not by any means a united post-war period, but a time of different front lines between traditionalist and modernist viewpoints.<sup>5</sup> These views reflected on the decisions of Finnish committees that chose art for the Venice Biennale.

In this article the concept of foreignness is being brought up via the question of modernism in

the Finnish art world. In this context I see modernism in its broad meaning: as a new concept of thinking extending to different art forms, but also to art critique, exhibitions, as well as collecting and teaching art history. These new ideas and the widening of the art world encountered resistance, especially in established art world institutions and amongst critics. It was not exceptional at all that the writings of the 1950s claimed that Finland should consider very carefully whether it should take part at all in international art exhibitions.<sup>6</sup> Finnish participation in the Venice Biennale was infrequent and without any official standing committee before the post-war period. The artists that featured in the Biennale were those who for the most part lived and worked in France or in Italy. Their works were also paraded in these pavilions. Finland's position in the Biennale changed in 1954, when the period of official selection began. In 1956 Finland was awarded its own national pavilion designed by architect Alvar Aalto (1898–1976), in which the artworks were exhibited until 1962 when the long-awaited Nordic Pavilion was completed.<sup>7</sup>

Modernism, especially in abstract forms, was something foreign in the Finnish art world of the 1950s. The supposedly true Finnish form of art was usually defined though nature. It was possible in the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century that if an artist was not interested in depicting nature, he or she was very easily branded as unpatriotic.<sup>8</sup> This attitude prevailed to some

extent even into the 1950s, when Finland officially participated the Biennale for the first time.

## Finland as a Semi-Periphery Player in the International Art World

If Venice, with its Biennale, was one of the centers of the international art world in the 1950s, then Finland was both geographically and psychologically distant. Firstly, Finnish art contacts were made with Scandinavian countries, then secondly with old European art centers and finally with other parts of the world. Charlotte Bydler has examined the Swedish art world by referring to Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory.<sup>9</sup> She argues that Swedish art life in the 1950s was semi-peripheral, in that it relied on a global market for avant-garde art that was successively centered in Germany, France and the USA.<sup>10</sup> Following a similar scheme, it is conceivable that Finland can also be considered as a semi-peripheral country in the international art world of the 1950s.

Criteria and norms by which "good art" was defined were different in the Finnish art world: foreign merits were not crucial and the Finnish press did not write in great detail about foreign exhibitions even if Finnish art was exhibited. The Finnish art world was comprised of a small group of principal actors whose work overlapped in different fields of the art world. Informal networks were used to pass

both social and symbolic capital that was valuable in the art world.<sup>11</sup> The institution that was officially responsible for the connections to Venice was the Fine Arts Academy that was established in 1939. The other significant actor in the arrangements for the Biennale was the Association for Contemporary Art, led by Maire Gullichsen (1907–1990). The association had already established good contacts with the Italian art world by 1953, when a major exhibition of Italian twentieth-century art was produced by the association and held in Helsinki.<sup>12</sup>

The 1950s is seen as a decade when modernism – in the form of abstract art – made a breakthrough in Finland.<sup>13</sup> In Sweden, from where influences often came to Finland, modernism was to have a “second breakthrough” in the late 1940s and the hope of the non-representational art as a universal language was embodied in the form of concretism.<sup>14</sup> In Finland, the first modernists of the 1950s also adopted concretism as their main form of expression. The art criticism towards modernists was harsh and as Tuula Karjalainen suggests, the reason for this was the foreignness of the European art world. It is important to stress that many of the critics had not travelled as much as the artists after the war.<sup>15</sup> The main message raised was a concern about copying foreign models.<sup>16</sup> The traditionalists emphasized the content, and to some extent Finnishness over form. As Harri Kalha emphasizes, the international exhibitions of art and design were characterized by idealism; they were considered manifestations of culture

and a means of international image-creation for a small and relatively unknown country.<sup>17</sup>

## The Disappointment of 1954

The selections for the 1954 Venice Biennale were made by a special committee of the Fine Arts Academy. The representatives of the Academy were Onni Okkonen, its chairman and art historian, and Einari J. Vehmas, who went on to be a commissioner of the Finnish section at the Biennale. Both members were known for their traditionalist views. Indeed, Okkonen was probably the most vociferous spokesman for Finnish traditionalist art in the 1940s. According to him, internationalism had nothing to provide for Finnish art, and he warned Finnish artists not to be swayed by foreign influences.<sup>18</sup> Vehmas was more conciliatory in his opinions, even though he too wrote rather strongly worded critiques of early concretist exhibitions in the beginning of the 1950s.

The committee chose two artists to represent Finland at the 1954 Venice Biennale: the sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen (1894–1966) and the painter Tyko Sallinen (1879–1955). In the beginning of the 1950s Wäinö Aaltonen appeared as a veritable master and his reputation was based on the creation of nationalist symbols. At the close of the 1950s Aaltonen tried to move away from his classicist form and style, but in 1954 he seemed an obvious and non-controversial choice for the Biennale.<sup>19</sup> Selected works were

all from the 1910s and 1920s, as well as the paintings of Tyko Sallinen, so the selection was not at all about contemporary art.<sup>20</sup> The General Secretary of the Venice Biennale, Rodolfo Pallucchini had in earlier correspondence expressed a wish to see work by Sam Vanni (1908–1992) and Birger Carlstedt (1907–1975), who both were Swedish-speaking Finns and the leading figures in Finnish concretism.<sup>21</sup>

Einari J. Vehmas wrote to Rodolfo Pallucchini that the Fine Arts Academy had made its decision and added that the style of the artists that were selected to represent Finland were not completely contemporary. The tone of the letter is slightly apologetic. The reason for this may lie in the fact that Finland was about to participate for the first time and the Fine Arts Academy wanted to send something more seemingly Finnish than non-figurative and international painting. Vehmas adds that if the Academy had made its choice according to the hopes of the Biennale commission, ninety-two percent of the Finnish population would have missed out on representation.<sup>22</sup> From the tone of Vehmas's letter one can interpret that he only considered Finnish-speaking artists to be able to convey true Finnishness and thus represent Finland. The Swedish-speaking modernists represented foreignness in their own country and the Finnish art world.

In his preface to the Biennale catalogue, Vehmas predicts that the works of Tyko Sallinen might be too individualistic and too Finnish to find general acclaim in the international arena. On the other hand,

in the work of Wäinö Aaltonen, such as the famous statue of Paavo Nurmi, Vehmas, appreciates a true classic artist.<sup>23</sup> It is easy to discern that the nationalist emphasis in the preface is not paraded so obviously in the correspondence concerning the selection. In his draft copy of the preface, Vehmas associates Sallinen's art with the larger European current in art that wants to bring simpler and more natural expression to the canvas.<sup>24</sup> An interesting point about this draft is that part of it has been crossed out for some reason. It is possible that Vehmas tried to find some international significance in Sallinen's art, despite the general nationalist emphasis of Finland's participation.

As Harri Kalha has noted, the competitive nature of international exhibitions was emphasized in the 1950s, and those who succeeded became national heroes.<sup>25</sup> The Fine Arts Academy expected some visibility, but the Finnish press did not pay much attention to the 1954 Venice Biennale. As a matter of fact, the Fine Arts Academy was to a certain extent disappointed at the reception of the Finnish works. The annual report of the Academy notes that Finland participated in the Venice Biennale for the first time, but that it failed to attract much attention because of the disadvantageous location and the small amount of space allocated for their section.<sup>26</sup> The Finnish section was very compact, with just twenty artworks. This can be compared to Norway, for example, which displayed a retrospective exhibition of ninety-three works by Edvard Munch (1863–

1944). The Munch exhibition was the hit of the 1954 Biennale and it epitomized the Biennale's line of representing early European modern art. Both Finnish artists were so established in Finland that would have been extremely difficult for the Fine Arts Academy to simply ignore them. But Finland did not have widely recognized artists like Munch in its back pocket, even though Finnish design was experiencing its "golden age" at the time.<sup>27</sup>

### The Demand for Internationality

Discussions about a permanent Finnish pavilion for the Venice Biennale had been spasmodic prior to the 1954 Biennale, but they became more focussed afterwards as it became apparent that it was necessary to campaign for an improved pavilion. In 1954, Rodolfo Pallucchini had suggested that the Nordic countries could have a common pavilion, but according to one of the project's main organizers – Göran Schildt – Denmark was not interested in the proposal.<sup>28</sup> Schildt made it his business to be in contact with Venice and interceded with the Fine Arts Academy on behalf of an informal pavilion committee, who decided that Finland should have a pavilion of its own. However, the Fine Arts Academy could not provide adequate funding, so Maire Gullichsen, who had strong personal connections to the Finnish business world through her family relations, only promised that a Finnish pavilion would be vi-

able if some state subsidy could be provided in addition to the funds that she personally guaranteed on the behalf of the Association for Contemporary Art. The initiative was successful and Alvar Aalto's blue and white pavilion was located in the gardens next to the Hungarian pavilion.

Along with pavilion project, the Association for Contemporary Art had also discussed suitable artists for the pavilion. The decision had already been made unofficially at the end of 1955, when Göran Schildt suggested to Pallucchini that the painter Helene Schjerfbeck (1862–1946) should represent Finland in the new Finnish pavilion. Schildt emphasized that Schjerfbeck was probably the only Finnish artist who is capable of acquiring international success.<sup>29</sup> The demand for internationality now seemed rather strong. Finnish artists and art institutions with an international perspective were disappointed at Finnish participation at the 1954 Biennale, with the Association for Contemporary Art particularly wanting to bring up the idea of modern art. Maire Gullichsen, however, understood that the Association sometimes needed to co-operate with other institutions for its own legitimacy, even though they were representing another point of view. After all, the Fine Arts Academy approved the selection of Schjerfbeck, but demanded that the commissioner should be appointed from the Academy. Maire Gullichsen's contribution to the pavilion project was so strong that the Fine Arts Academy had to nominate her as a joint commissioner for the Finnish section.<sup>30</sup>



*The Finnish pavilion designed by Alvar Aalto was completed in 1956. (Alvar Aalto: The Finnish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Ed. by Timo Keinänen. Milan, Electa, 21. Original photograph: Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Photo Library, Venice.)*

For those involved with the entire organization of the Finnish biennial, Helene Schjerfbeck's works represented exceptional internationality in Finnish art. Schjerfbeck had died in 1946, but had posthumously enjoyed retrospective exhibitions in the USA, Canada and Sweden. The positive critique, especially from Sweden, confirmed her position as a suitable representative for Finland. Camilla Hjelm argues that by the end of the 1930s Schjerfbeck

was already regarded as being one of the most important Nordic artists.<sup>31</sup> With this success in mind, the Finnish biennale organizers expected acclaim in Venice. No one seemed to care anymore that Schjerfbeck had been part of the Swedish-speaking part of the Finnish population. Even though her representation is not particularly Finnish, no one saw foreignness in her artworks. Her late paintings are modernistic in style and some of her still lifes are

almost non-representational. In the catalogue text for the Finnish section, Schjerfbeck is described as an artist who followed her own path.<sup>32</sup> The contribution of the Association for Contemporary Arts to the 1956 Biennale guaranteed a certain shift in national emphasis to what was considered to be a more international outlook.

The works on display represented Schjerfbeck's whole career, from the end of the nineteenth century until 1945. The foreign press made some comments regarding Schjerfbeck's works, but according to later views the new pavilion overshadowed the exhibition itself.<sup>33</sup> Again the expectations and careful preparation of the organizers had not been realized, but the pavilion was still considered to be a success.

## Conclusions

According to Jeff Werner, the history of modernism is one of development. He writes about modernism from the perspective of the provinces and argues that as long as art historians continue to tell the history of Swedish modernism according to the same model that has been used for its international counterpart, it will look like a pale cousin from the countryside.<sup>34</sup> This of course also applies to Finnish modernism. The internationality and modernity in Schjerfbeck's works were visible to the Finnish art world, but at the Venice Biennale they seemed

somehow outdated. The Finnish biennial organizers were polarized into those who preferred Finnishness to international influences – or foreignness – and those who wanted Finland to be an integral part of the international art world. Both still wanted Finland to be present, and, if possible, successful in international art biennials; a semi-peripheral country could not afford to stay away.

In 1956 the commissioner of the Finnish section, Sakari Saarikivi wrote that the works of Aaltonen, Saarikivi and Schjerfbeck set the stage for the younger generation of Finnish artists that were about to be introduced at forthcoming biennials.<sup>35</sup> In the 1958 Venice Biennale, the selected works for Finland's section did not necessarily represent the avant-garde in their modernism, but the artists were younger and had travelled and studied in Europe. For the first time abstract art was approved, as the works of Ernst Mether-Borgström (1917–1996) were chosen for the Biennale. Again, the Finnish pavilion represented the requisite Finnishness in the 1958 exhibition. Sheltered by its blue and white colours, it was now possible for the artworks to have a dash of foreignness in them.

- 1 Bydler, Charlotte (2004) *The Global Art World Inc.* Uppsala, Uppsala University Library, 100–103.
- 2 Lindgren, Liisa (1996) *Elävä muoto. Traditio ja modernisuus 1940-luvun ja 1950-luvun suomalaisessa kuvanveistossa.* Helsinki, Valtion taidemuseo, 12.
- 3 Bydler 2004, 103.
- 4 Nykytaide – Nutidskonst ry.
- 5 Vieru, Elina (2000) Muodollisesti vapaa – noudattaa silti tyyliä ja tapaa. *1950-luku: vapautumisen aika.* Ed. by Pirkko Tuukkanen and Timo Valjakka. Helsinki, Suomen Taideyhdistys, 82.
- 6 See for example Okkonen, Onni (1956) Rooman näyttely. *Suomen taide. Vuosikirja 1954–1955.* Porvoo, WSOY, 83–84.
- 7 Keinänen, Timo (1992) Finland at the Venice Biennale. Finnish Artists at the Biennale: 1899–1990. *Alvar Aalto: The Finnish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.* Ed. by Timo Keinänen. Milan, Electa, 58–61.
- 8 Lukkarinen, Ville (2004) Kansallisen maiseman vertauskuvallisuus ja ympäristön tila. *Suomi-kuvasta mielenmaisemaan.* Ed. by Ville Lukkarinen and Annika Waenerberg. Helsinki, Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 32.
- 9 In Wallerstein's theory a world-system forms a whole that depends on all parts, including periphery and semi-periphery. In her book, *The Global Art World Inc.*, Bydler stresses also the social aspects of the common international labor market in a world-system. Bydler 2004, 33.
- 10 Bydler, Charlotte (2003) *Carlos Carpelán: caught between cosmopolitanism and periphery. Locating immigrants in Swedish artlife.* <http://www.relatio.se/pdf/Immigrant%20art%20paper%20CAA2003.pdf>
- 11 Linnovaara, Kristina (2008) *Makt, konst, elit – konstfältets positioner, relationer och resurser i 1940- och 1950-talens Helsingfors.* Helsingfors, Statens konstmuseum, 99.
- 12 Lindgren 1996, 94.
- 13 The early breakthrough of modernism in Finland can be dated to around 1912, but, as Camilla Hjelm emphasizes, Finnish modernism was more ascetic than the modernism of the Scandinavian expressionists. The most radical forms of modernism (Dadaism, Futurism, conceptual art or full-scale abstractism) never had held firm foothold in Finland. Hjelm, Camilla (2009) *Modernismens förespråkare – Gösta Stenman och hans konstsalong.* Helsingfors, Statens konstmuseum, 23–24.
- 14 Widenheim, Cecilia (2002) Utopia and Reality. Aspects of Modernism in Swedish Visual Art During the First Half of the Twentieth Century. *Utopia and Reality – Modernity in Sweden 1900–1960.* Ed. by Cecilia Widenheim. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 81.
- 15 Karjalainen, Tuula (2008) Sam Vanni taiteilijana. *Sam Vanni – opettaja ja esikuva.* Ed. by Tuija Kuutti. Helsinki, Helsingin kaupungin taidemuseo, 11–12.
- 16 Lindgren 1996, 172.
- 17 Kalha, Harri (1997) *Muotopuolen merenneidon pauloissa. Suomen taideteollisuuden kultakausi: mielikuvat, markkinointi, diskurssi.* Helsinki, Suomen historiallinen seura & Taideteollisuusmuseo, 277.
- 18 Karjalainen, Tuula (2006) Dukaattikiilpailut ja 1950-luvun modernismi. *Dukaatti. Suomen taideyhdistys 1846–2006.* Ed. by Raakel Kallio. Helsinki, WSOY, 172–173.
- 19 Lindgren 1996, 169–171.
- 20 XXVII Biennale di Venezia (1954) Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia, 215.
- 21 Letter of Rodolfo Pallucchini to A. Thesleff. Venice 23.2.1954. (Copy). The Central Art Archives. The Collection of Timo Keinänen. Material from The Venice



- Biennale 1898–2002.
- 22 A letter of Einari J. Vehmas to Rodolfo Pallucchini. Helsinki 27.4.1954. (Copy). The Central Art Archives. The Collection of Timo Keinänen. Material from The Venice Biennale 1898–2002.
- 23 XXVII Biennale di Venezia 1954, 214. The Finnish state commissioned a statue of Paavo Nurmi from Wäinö Aaltonen after the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, where Nurmi dominated the long distance running events. It quickly became a symbol for independent Finland and it became an essential tool for Finnish image building both at home and abroad.
- 24 The draft preface of the Biennale catalogue by Einari J. Vehmas. (Copy). The Central Art Archives. The Collection of Timo Keinänen. Material from The Venice Biennale 1898–2002.
- 25 Kalha 1997, 278.
- 26 Annual Report of The Fine Arts Academy 1954. (Copy). The Central Art Archives. The Collection of Timo Keinänen. Material from The Venice Biennale 1898–2002.
- 27 “The Miracle of Milan” is still seen as a success story in Finland. At the 1951 and 1954 Milan triennials, Finnish design was awarded a prize, which was seen as a national cultural project. Journalists latched on to this success: when foreign critics verbalized their perceptions, they exploited stereotypical concepts of Finnishness and the nature or climate of Finland. The same associations were used when the exhibitions were promoted in Milan. Finland was also seen as a Nordic “other” and “foreign” in a positive sense; stubborn and exotic but emotionally moving. See Kalha 1997, 276–285.
- 28 The letter of Göran Schildt to Rodolfo Pallucchini. Östersundom 28.10.1955. (Copy). The Central Art Archives. The Collection of Timo Keinänen. Material from The Venice Biennale 1898–2002.
- 29 The letter of Göran Schildt to Rodolfo Pallucchini. Östersundom 28.10.1955. (Copy). The Central Art Archives. The Collection of Timo Keinänen. Material from The Venice Biennale 1898–2002.
- 30 Linnovaara 2008, 92, 226–229.
- 31 Hjelm 2009, 225.
- 32 XXVII Biennale di Venezia (1956) Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia, 377.
- 33 Linnovaara 2008, 95; Keinänen 1992, 60.
- 34 Werner, Jeff (2002) Turnpikes and Blind Alleys. Modernism from the Perspective of the Provinces. *Utopia and Reality – Modernity in Sweden 1900–1960*. Ed. by Cecilia Widenheim. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 99.
- 35 Saarikivi, Sakari (1956) Suomi Venetsian Biennalessa. *Suomen taide. Vuosikirja 1955–1956*. Porvoo, WSOY, 102–103.



# Somewhere Between “Self” and “Other”

## Colonialism in Icelandic Historical Research

*Íris Ellenberger*

When describing Iceland’s position within the Danish realm between 1383 and 1944, it rarely occurs to Icelandic historians to employ the term “colony”. The elusive term “dependency” (*hjálanda*) is preferred, with any similarity with colonies near or far being dismissed outright. As a result, colonial and postcolonial theories are seldom used in historical research to explore Danish-Icelandic relations. However, work within other fields has revealed that Icelandic society did not operate in isolation, as it had a place within a system that promoted a certain kind of imaginary geography and racial hierarchy in order to justify the domination of a handful of countries over the rest of the world.

Within these systems Iceland was neither completely foreign nor completely familiar. It occupied a place somewhere on the border between the civi-

lized and the uncivilized. Rather than regarding foreignness – or sameness – as an actual state of being, this paper emphasizes its relational and contextual nature. The perception of foreignness depends as much on the position of the person doing the describing as the person being described. Iceland’s foreignness, along with its position within the imaginary hierarchy of colonial ideology, was therefore constantly being negotiated.

The term “colonialism” is one of those “fuzzy” terms used to designate types of power structure over the last few millennia, although usually referring to the European empires of the past five centuries. The lack of precise designation is perhaps one of the reasons for the very different strategies employed when exploring colonialism in the Icelandic context.

This paper briefly describes recent research on Iceland and its place within the “colonial world order”. It provides an overview of arguments for denying or promoting links between Iceland and *de facto* colonies and reveals different models and research traditions, which contribute to each position. The purpose of this paper is not to assess whether Iceland was a colony. Instead what follows is a step towards establishing an approach for exploring the role of ideas of foreignness or sameness as well as political and economic factors in order to enable the use of research tools from colonial and postcolonial theory, without ignoring the very real dissimilarities or similarities between Iceland and formal colonies.

## Iceland Under Foreign Rule

Iceland was settled by Nordic and Celtic settlers in the ninth century. The inhabitants remained a relatively independent political unit up until the late thirteenth century when they came to recognize the King of Norway as their monarch. In 1383 Iceland and Norway entered into the Kalmar Union with the Danish crown. Thus, Iceland became a part of the Danish realm and remained so until 1918, when the country gained sovereignty with the Danish king as head of state. In 1944, Iceland seceded from the monarchy and became an independent state.

In 1602, the Danish authorities established a trade monopoly in Iceland that was only abolished in 1787. However, Icelandic trade remained an oligopoly under Danish control up until 1855, when trade restrictions were completely lifted. Danish merchants still retained their power over Icelandic trade until the early twentieth century. No wonder that the Icelandic nationalistic movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took a certain aversion to the Danish merchants and portrayed them as greedy oppressors.

The nationalist movement also took it upon itself to redefine the status of Iceland. Jón Sigurðsson, the movement's legendary leader in the mid-nineteenth century, renounced the term colony as inappropriate. He preferred the term *hjálanda*<sup>1</sup> when describing Iceland's political position within the monarchy. He attested that Danish authorities

treated Iceland like a colony when it was a *biland* and should be treated as such. The Danish authorities agreed with this definition to a certain extent in order to defend themselves from the accusations that they treated the country as a colony. The term thus acquired a political dimension, which still seems to overshadow its analytic usage.

The term *biland* served as a strategic implement for the independence movement by distancing the country from the Danish colonies and planting the population tentatively within the category of Western nations. It seems to have not only been an attempt at redefining Iceland's political position, but also to reduce the degree of foreignness embedded in the term colony. Still, there has been little consensus through the ages about which term is appropriate. Both colony and *biland* were employed to describe Iceland, irrespective of their exact meaning. This was perhaps due to the confusion between the term's political and analytical dimensions, as well as to the apparent unclear signification in the nineteenth century of the term *biland*, as opposed to colony.<sup>2</sup> Considering this lack of definition, there has been surprisingly little debate on the position of Iceland within the colonial hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

## Colonialism as a Political Phenomenon

In a recent introduction to the concept of empire, Professor Stephen Howe identifies "two main lines



*Frederick VIII of Denmark and Iceland walks through a decorated gate during his visit to Iceland in 1907. The gate is decorated with the Danish flag and the emblems of both countries. (The National Museum of Iceland.)*

of division and dispute among students of modern empires". One concerns the emphasis on the power of the ruler versus the agency of the ruled; the other deals with the question of whether to view modern empires as cultural phenomena, or as political or economic entities.<sup>4</sup> As imperialism and colonialism are largely interconnected the question may also be said to apply to the latter. But Icelandic historical scholarship rarely takes the cultural aspects of colonial hegemony into account, confining it to the political and economic spheres and transforming certain characteristics into handy facts for disassociating Iceland from regular colonies.

One of these facts is Iceland's political position. Icelanders had representatives within the Danish administration from the eighteenth century. Additionally, Danish power in Iceland was weak, mostly because of the distance between the countries. The *stiftamtmaður* was the highest authority, usually a Dane who resided in Copenhagen until 1770 and in Iceland until 1873. The Icelandic officials were a virtual oligarchy, who could do as they pleased in internal affairs during the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> But one can also point out that recent research has revealed that the colonial control could be just as weak in British India during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the autonomy of the Icelandic official does not suffice to support the special status of Iceland compared to the colonies.

One must also look at the fact that Icelanders had representation at the advisory estate assemblies in the nineteenth century, whereas Greenland

and the Danish colonies in the West Indies did not. Additionally, the country gradually started moving towards independence. The ancient legislative assembly, the *Alþingi*, was resurrected in 1845 as a consulting assembly for the king. It acquired limited legislative authority in 1874, when Icelanders acquired their own constitution. Thus, Iceland was probably not in the same political position as *de jure* colonies towards the end of nineteenth century. For instance, Greenland, a trade colony during the eighteenth century, became the subject of a Danish civilizing mission during the nineteenth century with little or no talk of political representation.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the demand of Icelanders for independence further reduced their perceived foreignness. Their claim for political nationhood eroded the basis for their categorization among colonial subjects, usually perceived as apolitical children of nature.

Accordingly, Icelanders' claim to political autonomy was not dismissed outright. As the historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson has revealed, Icelanders sought the arguments for their demands in German nationalism and drew on thinkers, such as Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Herder argued that language was the main characteristic and foundation of nations, while Fichte stressed the importance of "original" languages. Consequently, Icelanders claimed to speak the original tongue of the Nordic people, making language and culture the basis of their demands for independence and political autonomy. The Danes

agreed, considering Icelanders the guardians of their own heritage.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Danes identified with a common past shared with Icelanders was one of the most common arguments for asserting Iceland's special status vis-à-vis other subjected countries. But, at the same time, by this manipulation of temporality, Iceland was viewed as static, frozen in the past. In this sense it was bracketed as a relatively typical colonial subject, as in evolutionary terms it was perceived as belonging to the past, while only the Western world could truly belong to the present.

Finally, the status and nature of the Danish monarchy must be taken into account. In 2004 the Danish historians Michael Brengsbo and Kurt Villads Jensen published a book on the Danish monarchy, entitled *Det danske imperium*. In an attempt to overthrow reigning ideas about Denmark as a small state, the authors identify Denmark as an empire as far back as 9 AD and up until the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The book caused some debate on the nature of the Danish monarchy. The historian Harald Gustafsson has argued that "conglomerate state" is a more appropriate term and should not be seen strictly as a subcategory of empire, since he fears that this would mask the conglomerate state's characteristics.<sup>10</sup>

The relevant point for our subject is that the reluctance among scholars to see Denmark as an empire at certain points in time disassociates the state from colonialist policy. This tendency is slowly changing though. For instance, in a recent article,

the Icelandic historian Anna Agnarsdóttir traces the development of the Danish state, with an emphasis on the political position of Iceland. She comes to the conclusion that Iceland had a special status within the Danish state because of the autonomy of Icelandic officials, economic gain, mutual heritage, prestige and other factors. She furthermore argues that between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries Denmark was an actual empire based on Stephen Howe's description of "extensive, far flung territories, far beyond the original 'homeland' of the ruler" with diverse populations.<sup>11</sup> Still, historians have generally avoided comparing Danish rule over its colonies with the most powerful empires, namely the British and French empires, which have commonly been associated with oppression and exploitation. The result being that Denmark is rarely considered a true empire, despite its far-flung colonial possessions.

From this evidence one is tempted to conclude that there is little doubt that Iceland was not a colony in political terms. Hence, if one looks at colonies from a strictly political point of view it is easy to see how Icelandic historians have to this day managed to avoid dealing with the question of the country's links with colonialism. But looking at colonialism as an economic phenomenon confounds the picture, as recent research has revealed that it is possible to argue that Iceland was an economic colony, at least for certain periods of time.

## Iceland: An economic or an internal colony?

When Icelandic nationalists employed the term *hjálanda* to describe the political status of Iceland their aim was political: to convince the public as well as the Danish administration that Iceland was being wrongly treated as a colony.<sup>12</sup> Danish trade often served as proof of such a treatment, especially the trade monopoly of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The ongoing control of Danish merchants over Icelandic trade was considered an example of Danish oppression during the heyday of the nationalist movement. This emphasis has lived on. The Icelandic historian Sigfús Haukur Andrésón has investigated the various agreements and changes on the organization of Icelandic trade during the early nineteenth century. He uses the term “colonial arrangement” (*nýlenduþyrirkomulag*) to describe Icelandic trade and the restrictions imposed in the years between 1787, when the trade monopoly was abolished, and 1855, when commercial freedom was attained.<sup>13</sup> Most now agree that the arrangement of Icelandic trade between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries was in line with reigning mercantilist ideas at the time. Still, mercantilism and colonialism were largely intertwined, leading the Icelandic economic historian Halldór Bjarnason to conclude that Iceland was an economic colony until the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

Bjarnason’s argument is partly based on the observation that no research to date has drawn out the

factors that made Iceland a dependency rather than a colony.<sup>15</sup> Bjarnason furthermore states in his PhD thesis that Iceland can be considered a colony from at least 1662, when Denmark’s “explicit formal dominance” over the country is compared to the unequal relations of power, which are at the core of informal imperialism and colonialism, and are defined as two components of imperialism proper.<sup>16</sup> He further argues that between 1886 and the early twentieth century, Iceland may be considered a “capitalist colony”, due to the hegemony of Danish merchants who controlled most of the financial capital in the country.<sup>17</sup>

The Icelandic historian Gunnar Karlsson is less explicit in his linking of Iceland and colonialism. He has used the model of “internal colonialism”, made popular by Michael Hechter,<sup>18</sup> to support his theory that the Icelandic nationalist movement was the reaction of an underdeveloped country to the modernization and development of the metropolis.<sup>19</sup> While the applications of internal colonialism might be valid, Hechter’s theory circumvents the question of the association between Iceland’s position and colonialism, since it was intended as an explanation of power relations between the metropolis and peripheral areas, not colonies.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, it is apparent that the economic and developmental spheres of historical research are more flexible when it comes to examining the influence of colonial ideology and policy on Iceland. On the downside, such an approach confines





*Caterers display the food served at a dinner in honor of Frederick VIII of Denmark during his visit to Iceland in 1907. Danes influenced Icelandic food culture to a considerable extent. They monopolized Icelandic bakeries and were influential in the meat processing industry. (The National Museum of Iceland.)*

colonialism to a limited number of spheres within Icelandic history. In order to account for the role of colonialism and imperialism in Iceland's development and construction we need to expand our view

to include the cultural and ideological aspects of these phenomena.

## Colonialism as a Cultural and Ideological Phenomenon

While Icelandic historians have been stressing the political and economic aspects of colonialism, colonial studies in the international arena have placed just as much emphasis on the cultural. This has influenced Icelandic historians to a very limited degree. Most notably, Anna Þorgrímsdóttir's postcolonial analysis of the display of Icelandic artefacts in the Danish National Museum reveals a present-day colonial mentality among Danish curators.<sup>21</sup> Þorgrímsdóttir also draws attention to the uneasy distinction between colony and dependency in an Icelandic context, stating that the uneven power relations between the two countries made the relationship colonial in nature.<sup>22</sup> She furthermore criticizes the indifference of Icelandic academics towards this display, which she considers a symptom of outdated nationalism and colonial ideology. In accordance with the theories of Edward Said, this serves as evidence of the remaining influence of colonialism after decolonization.<sup>23</sup>

Scholars have increasingly begun to investigate the construction of Iceland's foreignness or sameness in the eyes of outsiders, and have noted that it involved the active participation of both foreigners and Icelanders. The American historian Karen Oslund has investigated how, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, European travellers interpreted Icelandic nature on the basis of their

preconceptions and expectations, rather than their actual experiences. She juxtaposes the discourse on Iceland and the North Atlantic with that of colonialism in general and finds some interesting correspondences. This leads her to avoid categories such as "colony" and "nation" or "exotic" and "normal", in order to emphasize that the region bore the characteristics of all these terms in the European imagination.<sup>24</sup> At the same time she describes the various mechanics of a power structure fitting the description of "informal empire", or Jürgen Osterhammel's "colonialism without colonies". She therefore neither considers Iceland a formal colony nor does she deny the link between Iceland's status and the various ways in which colonialism influenced the power structure surrounding Iceland. This was manifested, for example, in Iceland's position within the colonial hierarchy.<sup>25</sup>

Scholars within other fields of study have increasingly started using postcolonial theory in order to shed light on Icelandic history. Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, an Icelandic literary scholar, has developed the term "Scandinavian orientalism"<sup>26</sup> in order to account for the many similarities between Edward Said's concept of orientalism and the foreign discourse on Iceland.<sup>27</sup> He has also revealed Iceland's role as a counter-identity for the development of Danish identity. He has shown how Danes contributed to the creation of a collective identity by defining Icelanders as everything that they were not.<sup>28</sup>

On a similar note the Icelandic anthropologist



*Smjörhúsið, The Butter House, in Reykjavík with staff. Smjörhúsið was a branch of the large Carl Schepler merchant house, based in Copenhagen. (The National Museum of Iceland.)*

Kristín Loftsdóttir has studied the construction of Icelandic identity through discourses on race, especially images of Africa in Icelandic magazines in the nineteenth century. Her work reveals that just as Icelanders served as a counter-identity for Danes,

so too did Africans play a role in the creation of Icelandic identity. The Icelandic discourse on Africa served as a tool for placing the country and its people firmly within a European orbit, as opposed to the colonies.<sup>29</sup>

Both Loftsdóttir and Jóhannsson have investigated Icelanders' reaction to the 1905 colonial exhibition in Copenhagen. The exhibition was supposed to represent Greenland and the colonies in the West Indies, as well as Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Icelandic students in Copenhagen and a number of prominent individuals protested against the exhibition on the grounds that Icelanders should not be put on display among subject peoples. According to Loftsdóttir and Jóhannsson, they were fully aware of the implications of being categorized alongside colonial subjects of other races.<sup>30</sup> The Danish ethnologist Bjarne Stoklund comes to a similar conclusion in an article on the colonial exhibition of 1905 and the "Danish" section at the 1900 Paris world exhibition, which featured Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Iceland. Stoklund concludes that the reason for the Icelander's reluctance to participate in these exhibitions, as opposed to the participation of Norway and Finland, both dependent states, in the Paris world exhibition of 1867, was the tendency to display Iceland not as a nation in the making but as a dependency mixed in with proper colonies.<sup>31</sup>

Jóhannsson stresses that there was a considerable difference between Icelandic-Danish relations and the relationship between Western empires and their colonies.<sup>32</sup> Icelanders were not only considered to be the keepers of Danish heritage, but also belonged to the same racial category. He states that even though "a colonial disposition" was a factor in the Danish discourse on early twentieth-century

Icelandic literature, it was shaped by nationalism and not racism.<sup>33</sup> While he is correct in distinguishing Europe's attitudes towards Iceland and traditional colonies, one must also be aware that such a clearly drawn line disguises, to a certain degree, the role of colonialism in the imagery and positioning of Iceland. In other words, Iceland is usually neither portrayed as a wholly European nation nor as a European colony, but somewhere in-between. If we are to paint an accurate picture of Iceland and its place in the international arena, we must not only investigate its political or economic position within the Danish realm. We must also look at its place – or places – in the imaginary geographies and cultural and racial hierarchies created in order to justify the rule of an imperial power over its colonies.

### Conclusions: Finding Iceland on the World Map

We have already traced the debate on Iceland as a colony in previous chapters and discussed the traits of colonialism in Danish-Icelandic relations. As we have seen, there is a tendency among Icelandic historians to look at colonialism in purely political and/or economic terms. This makes it easy to ignore the varied, but very real, position(s) of Iceland within a colonial hierarchy, which affected the country in various ways. In the case of Iceland, it is not always clear if this tendency stems from the impotence of the colony as an analytical category. Therefore, the

question arises as to whether the term colony, in the eyes of Icelandic historians, still functions on the political level to create an “undesirable” association between Iceland and *de facto* colonies. Still, economic historians have shown greater flexibility by dealing with lines of power and oppression, which are largely hidden when rights, political representation and degrees of autonomy are investigated in isolation. Thus, the economic approach is more open to considering the wider implications of an imperial world system for Iceland.

Non-Icelandic historians and Icelandic scholars within other fields of study have focused on the cultural and ideological aspects of colonialism with regard to Iceland. What emerges is a picture of a *border-nation*, characterized both by foreignness and familiarity, somewhere along a fuzzy line between “us” and “them”; the exact position depending on the location, attitudes and needs of those shaping the discourse at each point in history. In order to incorporate these different positions into historical research we need to emphasize that imperialism and colonialism contain inherently wide-reaching systems of thought created in order to justify European hegemony. This will do little to eradicate the many imprecise factors in these concepts, but it will help us to overcome the need to make Iceland comply with specific political or economic models. It will help us to stop asking the question as to whether Iceland was a colony. Instead, it can aid us in exploring the different ways in which colonial ideology

made its mark on Iceland as it influenced the country’s place within a hierarchical world order. The placement was an act of power that determined, and sometimes limited, the inhabitants’ abilities to participate in international politics, govern themselves and conduct their own business affairs.

As we have seen, some of the work already undertaken has revealed the contradictory and relational ways in which Iceland was positioned on a scale from foreign to familiar in the European imagination. One might add the similarities between filmic representations of Icelanders and of colonial subjects,<sup>34</sup> and the possible correlation between the emergence of natural history as a tool of imperial/colonial conquest and the increase in European scientific expeditions in Iceland during the eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup> These are examples of the application of various ideological tools used to justify an imperialist agenda. One of these was a hierarchy of races or civilizations, or a pecking order, which rated all peoples on a scale according to their likeness to white Europeans.<sup>36</sup> A related conceptual apparatus — imaginary geography, or geographies — has been used by Karen Oslund to describe how descriptions of the North Atlantic reflected the expectations of authors, rather than actual experiences. This was heavily influenced by the notion that the further one travelled from Europe, the less recognizable the surroundings became. Within this type of geography, Icelanders could either be a part of the European “self”, or in the same category as the colonial “other”, depend-

ing on which factors were the focus of the debate or discourse. Additionally, mental mapping is a concept employed by Larry Wolff to describe the process through which travellers created an association among Eastern European countries and, by comparing them to Western Europe, established “the development division of the continent”.<sup>37</sup> Iceland’s place on such mental maps is well worth exploring, not only with the purpose of analyzing the role of such models in the construction of an image of Iceland, but also the implications of that image for Iceland’s political history. Such an endeavor might help to reveal Iceland’s place – or places – within the power structure that was used to justify the power of European nations over their colonies.

Exploring the application of such ideological tools is not without its problems. Numerous questions have to be dealt with in order to create a meaningful deliberation on the relationship between Iceland and colonial thought. For instance, as Karen Oslund points out, “similarity” and “difference” were part of the same “ideological apparatus of colonialism”, but neither was a necessary element and both existed without it.<sup>38</sup> The act of “othering” is an essential part of the creation of group identity. The other can just as easily be the in next street or village as in a far away colony or an island in the middle of the North Atlantic. We must then carefully distinguish between othering as a function of colonial ideology and othering as the simple act of creating a counter-identity in order to confirm “our” distinc-

tive qualities.

Similarly, both Mary Louise Pratt and Michael Hechter have drawn attention to the fact that forces of power manifest themselves in similar ways in European descriptions of both colonies and places closer to home.<sup>39</sup> This calls for a careful consideration of the issues of power when examining the links between Iceland and imperial ideology. Did certain acts of power create similarities between Iceland and the colonies because they were manifested in similar ways? Or were they manifested in similar ways because they took place within the same ideological system? Both questions are important for the creation of knowledge about Iceland and its place within the web of power relations inherent in the imperial system.

What is needed, then, is to overcome the notion that colonies, dependencies and nations are mutually exclusive categories. We must instead take into account that colonial ideology affected the ways in which Iceland was seen or imagined, although not always in the same way or to the same degree. It influenced written and visual representations. The placement of the Icelandic exhibition on the grounds of a world exhibition, and the perceived abilities of the nation to participate in their own trade or to govern their own country, are but two examples. We must therefore look at the country’s political status within the Danish realm, and the links between colonial status and Danish trade power. However, we must also consider the position of Iceland within the hi-

erarchy and imaginary geographies, created under the auspices of imperialism in order to justify the power wielded in the name of colonial rule. Such an emphasis would not only create a fuller picture of Iceland's various positions, but it would also place them within an international context. Most importantly, it would enable the use of theories and tools from colonial and postcolonial theory, without the political implications hitherto associated with such usage and without ignoring the factors that make it hard to justify Iceland's place within the same categories as colonies.

- 1 In English dependency and in Danish *biland*.
- 2 For further discussion on the terms *biland* and colony in the Icelandic context, see Þorgrímsdóttir, Anna Þorbjörg (2003) Kontext och koloniala uttryck. Isländska föremål utställda i Danmarks nationalmuseum. University of Gothenburg, unpublished M.A. thesis; Bjarnason, Halldór (2004) The status of Iceland in the 19th century revisited: "Biland" or colony? Paper presented at the *25th Nordic Historians' Congress*, Stockholm.
- 3 There are a few exceptions to this rule, most notably the research carried out by Anna Þorbjörg Þorgrímsdóttir, Gunnar Karlsson and Halldór Bjarnason cited in the following chapters. See also, Sveinsson, Kristján (1997) Dansk kolonihistorieskriving fra *Vore gamle tropekolonier* med hovedvægt på genrens geografiske afgrænsning, kontinuitet og debatten om dens nuværende situation. University of Århus, unpublished research paper.
- 4 Howe, Stephen (2002) *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 20.
- 5 See, for example, Gustafsson, Harald (1985) *Mellan kung och allmoge - ämbetsmän, beslutsprocess och inflytande på 1700-talets Island*. Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International; Gustafsson, Harald (1994) *Political interaction in the old regime central power and local society in the eighteenth-century Nordic states*. Lund, Studentlitteratur.
- 6 See, for example, Brimnes, Niels (2003) Beyond Colonial Law: Indigenous Litigation and the Contestation of Property in the Mayor's Court in Late Eighteenth-Century Madras. *Modern Asian Studies* 37:3, 513–550; Brimnes, Niels (2004) Variolation, Vaccination and Popular Resistance in Early Colonial South India. *Medical History* 48:2, 199–228.
- 7 Marquardt, Ole (2006) Change and Continuity in Denmark's Greenland Policy 1721–1870. *Der Dänische Gesamtstaat. Ein unterschätztes Weltreich? The Oldenburg Monarchy. An Underestimated Empire?* Ed. by E. Heinzelmann, S. Robl, T. Riis. Kiel, Ludwig, 144–172.
- 8 Hálfðanarson, Guðmundur (2001) *Íslenska þjóðríkið – uppruni og endimörk*. Reykjavík, Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, Reykjavík Akademían, 197–198.
- 9 Bregnsbo, Michael & Jensen, Kurt Villads (2004) *Det danske imperium – storhed og fald*. [København], Aschehoug.
- 10 Gustafsson, Harald (2005) Ett attentat mot nationalhistorien. 1066. *Tidsskrift for historie* 35:4, 39; Gustafsson, Harald (1998) The Conglomerate State: A Perspective on State Formation in Early Modern Europe. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 23, 189–213.
- 11 Howe 2002, 13–15; Agnarsdóttir, Anna (2008) The Danish Empire: The Special Case of Iceland. *Europe and its Empires*. Ed. by M. N. Harris & C. Lévai. Pisa, Edizioni Plus Pisa University Press, 60.
- 12 Bjarnason 2004.
- 13 Andrésón, Sigfús Haukur (1997) Tilskipun um aukið verslunarfrelsi fyrir Ísland árið 1816 og tildrög hennar. *Saga* 35, 95–135; Andrésón, Sigfús Haukur (2001) Endurskoðun fríhöndlunarlaganna á árunum 1834–36 og aðdragandi hennar. *Saga* 39, 109–37.
- 14 Bjarnason, Halldór (2001) *The Foreign Trade in Iceland, 1870–1914: An Analysis of Trade Statistics and a Survey of its Implications for the Icelandic Economy*. University of Glasgow, unpublished PhD thesis; Bjarnason 2004.
- 15 Bjarnason 2004.
- 16 Bjarnason 2001, 370–371.
- 17 Bjarnason 2001, 372–374.
- 18 Hechter, Michael (1975) *Internal Colonialism: The*



- Celtic Fringe in British National Development*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 19 Karlsson, Gunnar (1995) *The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland. Ethnicity and Nation Building in the Nordic World*. Ed. by S. Tägil. London, Hurst & Company, 33–62.
- 20 Hechter 1975, 9–10, 34, 38–40, 341.
- 21 Þorgrímsdóttir 2003; Þorgrímsdóttir, Anna Þorbjörg (2006) Menningararfurinn og nýlenduhyggjan. Íslenskir forngrípír í dönsku safni. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum VII. Félagsvísindadeild. Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2006*. Ed. by Ú. Hauksson. Reykjavík, Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, 801–811.
- 22 Þorgrímsdóttir 2003, 27–29.
- 23 Þorgrímsdóttir 2006, 807.
- 24 Oslund 2000, 205.
- 25 Oslund 2000, 199.
- 26 Similarly, Peter Stadius has developed the concept of Northernization, which describes how the North came to possess certain characteristics (diligence, reason, sobriety and independence), opposed to the inhabitants of the South, while preserving their foreignness and peripheral status. See Stadius, Peter (2001) *Southern Perspectives on the North: Legends, Stereotypes, Images and Models. The Baltic Sea Area Studies: Northern Dimensions of Europe. Working Papers 3*. Gdansk, Balt Sea Net.
- 27 Jóhannsson, Jón Yngvi (2000) Scandinavian Orientalism. The Reception of Danish Icelandic Literature 1905–50, *Nordisk litteratur og mentalitet. Foredrag fra den 22. studiekongres i International Association for Scandinavian Studies (IASS) arrangeret af Føroyamálsdeild, Fróðskaparsetur Føroya, Færøernes Universitet 3.–9. august 1998*. Ed. by M. Marnersdóttir & J. Cramer. Tórshavn: Fróðskaparfélag, 254–261;
- Jóhannsson, Jón Yngvi (2001) “Jøklens Storm svaledede kulturtrætte Danmarks Pande”. Um fyrstu viðtökur dansk-íslenskra bókmennta í Danmörku. *Skírnir* 175, spring, 33–66.
- 28 Jóhannsson 2001.
- 29 Loftsdóttir, Kristín (2005) Bláir menn og eykonan Ísland. Kynjamyndir karlmennsku og Afríku á 19. öld. *Ritið* 5:2, 21–44; Loftsdóttir, Kristín (2008) Shades of otherness: representations of Africa in 19th-century Iceland. *Social Anthropology* 16:2, 172–186; Loftsdóttir, Kristín (2009) “Pure Manliness”: The Colonial Project and Africa’s Image in Nineteenth Century Iceland. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16, 271–293.
- 30 Loftsdóttir, Kristín (2002) Örheimurímyndunarlandsins. Framandleiki og vald í ljósi heimssýninganna. *TMM* 63:4: 52–61; Jóhannsson, Jón Yngvi (2003) Af reiðum Íslendingum. Deilur um Nýlendusýninguna 1905. *Þjóðerni í þúsund ár?* Ed. by J. Y. Jóhannsson, K. Ó. Proppé & S. Jakobsson. Reykjavík, Háskólaútgáfan, 135–150.
- 31 Stoklund, Bjarne (2008) *Island på udstilling. Paris 1900 og Tivoli 1905. Rejse gennem Islands historie – den danske forbildelse*. Ed. by S. Mentz. [Hillerød], Gads forlag, Det Nationalhistoriske museum på Frederiksborg slot, 144–162.
- 32 Jóhannsson 2001, 41.
- 33 Jóhannsson 2001, 40–41, 61–62.
- 34 Ellenberger, Íris (2007) *Íslandskvikmyndir 1916–1966. Ímyndir, sjálfsmýndogvald*. Reykjavík, Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, Háskólaútgáfan.
- 35 Pratt, Mary Louise (1992) *Imperial eyes. Travel writing and transculturation*. London, Routledge, 38–68; Ísleifsson, Sumarliði (1996) *Ísland framandi land*. Reykjavík, Mál og menning, 99–120.

- 36 Loftsdóttir 2008, 172–186.
- 37 Wolff, Larry (1994) Inventing Eastern Europe. *The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 6.
- 38 Oslund 2000, 198–199.
- 39 Hechter 1975; Pratt 1992, 10.

# List of Authors

**Christina Folke Ax** was educated in the Ethnology and History Department at the University of Copenhagen and wrote her PhD dissertation on the response of Icelandic peasants to reforms between 1700 and 1870. She is currently working as a researcher at The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute at the University of Iceland on a project centered on the role of Danes and Danish Culture in Iceland in the twentieth century.

**Laura Boxberg** is a doctoral student at the School of History, the University of Turku. At the moment she is working as a researcher in the project entitled "Empowerment and Disempowerment in Finland 1550–1980" funded by the Academy of Finland. Boxberg is interested in the internationalization of the Finnish art world in the 1950s and 1960s, international art biennials and other perennial exhibitions as well as the questions of center and periphery.

**Íris Ellenberger** is a PhD student at the Department of History and Philosophy at the University of Iceland, Reykjavík. She has researched the image of Ice-

land in documentary film and published a book on the subject. Her current field of study is the economic influence and social status of Danish migrants in Iceland between 1900 and 1970.

**Anne Folke Henningsen** is a postdoctoral fellow at the History Department of the Saxo Institute, The University of Copenhagen, where she is studying exhibitions of "exotic" people in Copenhagen between 1878 and 1902. Her PhD is on the political effects of Moravian mission activities in Eastern South Africa between 1870 and 1940, with a particular emphasis on racially and religiously defined rights and privileges and lack of same.

**Dag Hundstad** is a PhD candidate in history and affiliated with the "Region and Regionalisation" research program at the University of Bergen, Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion. He is currently working on a thesis on the construction of the Sørlandet region (the South of Norway). He has previously worked on local history and maritime history.

**Leila Koivunen** is a postdoctoral researcher and adjunct professor at the School of History, the University of Turku. Her PhD thesis focused on the European visualization of the African interior in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Her current research project, funded by the Academy of Finland, deals with the history of exhibiting “exotic” non-Western material cultures in Finland between the 1870s and the 1930s.

**Taina Syrjämaa** is an adjunct professor at the School of History, the University of Turku. Currently, she is working as a collegium researcher at the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies (TIAS). Her research interests are mainly linked to the study of urban history, exhibitions, consumer culture, the history of tourism and historical spatiality. Her most recent monograph focuses on the popular belief in progress as manifested and constructed in the world exhibitions between 1851 and 1915.

The foreign can be revered, produced, reproduced, submerged, feared or suppressed, but it has never failed to engage one way or the other. In this volume, a multidisciplinary research network Enfore (Encountering Foreignness – Nordic Perspectives since the Eighteenth Century) focuses on the cultural dynamics of “foreignness”. The authors explore the continuous negotiation between “ours” and “theirs” and the making of “our” place in the context of the wider world. They are using the concept of foreignness as an analytical tool for making visible this heterogeneous, variable and diverse phenomenon. Drawing on the findings within the Nordic context, the group will contribute to an understanding of the general processional and dynamic character of foreignness and of the relationship between metropolitan centers and peripheral areas elsewhere in Europe and in the wider world.

Histories 1  
General History  
University of Turku

ISBN 978-951-29-4161-2  
ISBN 978-951-29-4162-9 (pdf)  
ISSN 1798-6508