



**Háskólinn
á Akureyri**
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Friends or Inferiors

Icelander's self image in the beginning of the 20th century and the portrayal of their foreign visitors

Author: Elísa Arnarsdóttir

**Final Project in School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Lokaverkefni við Hug- og félagsvísindasvið**



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**Final Project for 180 ETCS credit B.A-degree in School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Lokaverkefni til 180 eininga B.A-prófs við Hug-og félagsvísindasvið**

I hereby declare that this final-project is all my own work,
except as indicated in the text

Elísa Arnarsdóttir

Signature _____

I hereby declare that this final-project satisfies, in my opinion, requirements for a B.A-degree

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ABSTRACT

Icelanders had a very definite idea of themselves in the beginning of the 20th century. They had been very isolated for the first thousand years after the settlement in Iceland and used their history to build up a national identity. The foreigners that came to Iceland had a specific task in building this identity. They were used to portray stereotypes that would reassure Icelanders of their own idea about themselves. This was done by categorizing foreigners into two groups, the one Icelanders identified themselves with, the foreign “friend“, and the foreigners Icelanders did not identify themselves with, the “inferior”.

The main purpose of this BA-thesis is to look at how Icelanders saw foreigners in Iceland from the beginning of the 20th century, until the army set a base in Iceland in the 1940s and how it was reflected in the Icelandic media. More specifically, it will illustrate how Icelanders used the foreigners to help build and sustain a positive self image.

ÚTDRÁTTUR

Íslendingar höfðu mjög ákveðna mynd af sjálfum sér í byrjun 20. aldarinnar. Þeir höfðu verið mjög einangraðir fyrstu þúsund árin eftir landnám og notuðu söguna til að byggja upp þjóðernisvitund og þjóðarímynd. Útlendingar gegndu ákveðnu hlutverki í að byggja þessa þjóðarímynd. Íslendingar bjuggu til staðalmyndir af útlendingum sem gegndu því hlutverki að fullvissa Íslendinga um þeirra eigin hugmyndir um þá sjálfa. Það var gert með því að flokka útlendinga í tvo hópa, annars vegar þá útlendinga sem Íslendingar samsömuðu sig, erlendi “vinurinn”, hinsvegar þá útlendinga sem útlendingar samsömuðu sig ekki, þá “óæðri”.

Tilgangur þessarar BA ritgerðar er að rannsaka hvaða augum Íslendingar litu útlendinga á Íslandi í byrjun 20. aldarinnar, þar til herinn settist að á Íslandi á fimmta áratugnum og hvernig það birtist í Íslenskum fjölmiðlum. Nánar tiltekið, hvernig Íslendingar notuðu útlendinga til þess að byggja upp og halda í góða sjálfsmýnd.

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INTRODUCTION

Icelanders had a very definite idea of themselves in the beginning of the 20th century. They had been very isolated for the first thousand years after the settlement in Iceland and used their history to build up a national identity. The foreigners that came to Iceland had a specific task in building this identity. They were used to portray stereotypes that would reassure Icelanders of their own idea about themselves. This was done by categorizing foreigners into two groups, the one Icelanders identified themselves with, the foreign “friend“, and the foreigners Icelanders did not identify themselves with, the “inferior”.

The main purpose of this BA-thesis is to look at how Icelanders was foreigners in Iceland from the beginning of the 20th century until the army set a base in Iceland in the 1940s and how it was reflected in the Icelandic media. More specifically, it will illustrate how Icelanders used the foreigners to help build and sustain a positive self image.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is about the role and definition of stereotypes and medias’ part in shaping those images. The second chapter explains the Social identity theory. How people use stereotypes to build their self image, by comparing themselves, and the groups they believe they belong to, to others and other groups. The third chapter describes the self-image of the Icelandic nation. How Icelanders used history to build and maintain a good national identity, how they viewed themselves in the beginning of the 20th century, and also, the countrymen’s need for recognition in order for their positive self-image to sustain. The fourth chapter is about the image of the foreigner as a friend, the foreigners that helped Icelanders build a good self image. The last chapter is about the unwanted foreigners, the ones that Icelanders did not identify themselves with and were given a negative image so that by comparison Icelanders would look better.

CHAPTER ONE – STEREOTYPES

One's self image thrives only in one way, by comparing oneself to others. To understand how Icelanders built a positive self-image and how that is reflected in the image of foreigners in the media, it is important to understand the role and making of stereotypes. Firstly, media plays a major role in how people understand the world around them. Media shapes peoples images and ideas about foreigners. The less people know about other cultures and societies, the more the media influences them. Television, radio, newspapers and websites send a huge amount of messages that both directly and indirectly shape those images. The images may often give people a wrong idea about others as they simplify and generalize. This may lead to prejudice, that again strengthens the stereotypes.

Britannica encyclopedia (2011) defines a stereotype as “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; especially a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment”. Lippmann (1965) defined stereotypes as mental notions and images which control people's perception. He says that in a fast modern society where it may not be possible to get to know all the diversity of people, “we notice a trait which marks a type, and fill in the rest of the picture by means of stereotypes we carry about in our heads” (59).

Stereotyped beliefs and prejudice do not only spring from social conditioning but also from normal process of thinking. Stereotyping is a cognitive technique used to process the enormous amount of information people consume from the media and in daily life. People develop a set of social beliefs and understanding of people that are culturally or socially remote by categorizing, generalizing and organizing the information they get (McGarty et al, 2002). By doing so people manage to simplify their understanding of the world and structure their social interaction. Lippmann (1965) argued that stereotypes are in fact necessary for people to discern the world and without them, he claimed, it would be like a baby's “one great, blooming, buzzing confusion” (54). Social reality is mostly made out of large portions of unverified information that is shared by social groups.

One of the ways people simplify the world is by classifying objects into groups. Just like a biologist categorizes animals and plants, humans classify people. Knowing what group people belong to can easily give useful information about them. “Basketball players are tall” and “professors are smart” are examples of such categorization. Just like people cannot resist categorizing different colors, people cannot resist categorizing people into groups and they spontaneously classify them by race. People who have varying ancestry are often categorized as simply *black* or *white* (Hewstone et al, 1991). Such categorization by itself is not prejudice, but it can lead to it. In the beginning of the 20th century Icelanders categorized foreigners into two groups, the good foreigners, the “friends” of Iceland and the unwelcome foreigners, the “inferiors”. Stereotyping of foreigners is not necessarily done in order to understand the outside world, but primarily to strengthen ones’ self image.

CHAPTER TWO – THE SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

The reason why Icelanders categorized foreigners in this way can be explained by the social identity theory. Tajfel (1979) suggests that people evaluate themselves and others by the groups they belong to. Stereotypes, as expression of cognitive characteristics and social experiences, structure those groups. People build a feeling of belonging to a certain group that distinguishes between “us” from “them” and people who feel a strong social identity tend to do so more than others (Blascovich, 1997). Tajfel’s definition of a group is quite broad. People don’t necessarily have to personally know each other to be considered a group, being an Icelandic, a student or female is enough to be considered a part of a group. Tajfel (1978) specified four underlying principles of the social identity theory: Social categorization, social comparison, social identity and self-esteem. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), people contrast their own groups with other groups, but with a bias favorable to their own. People tend to overemphasize the advantages and superiority of their groups to get and sustain a positive social identity. By showing consensus with their own group, as well as discrimination against others, people also strive to provide themselves with a positive self-esteem.

The social identity theory is an interesting theory to explain the appearance of foreigners in the media as it may be an important motive for the way journalists portray foreigners. The

media feeds the audience information about foreigners which maintains and strengthens their social identity as Icelanders. According to the theory, the Icelandic media should give a positive image of foreigners that Icelanders identify themselves with, that is, as long as it helps them build a good self image and strengthens their self-esteem. On the other hand, the media should give a negative image of foreigners that they do not identify themselves with, in order to reach a positive social identity and build a good self-esteem. To be able to test the hypothesis it is important to understand Icelanders' self image.

CHAPTER THREE – ICELANDERS' SELF IMAGE

3.1 The making of Icelanders' self image

Icelanders built their self image on their history, which they trace back to the late 9th century when the first permanent settlers came to Iceland. According to Icelandic history books, the first settlers were Vikings from Norway. The Vikings are said to have fled from Norway because they were not keen to pay the taxes of the king, Harald "Fairhair". The image of a strong, independent Viking has played a big role in building Icelanders' self image. This image of the Viking is still held high as can be seen in a discourse held by President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson in 2005. There he claimed that the success Icelanders were getting in business was partly because of their Viking Heritage and he described Icelanders as independent, daring and aggressive (Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, 2005).

Nowadays, a more widely accepted explanation of the first settlement in Iceland is that Norway had become too populous and there was a lack of land. The law stipulated that the oldest son had reversionary rights and the younger brothers had no other choice than to search for land elsewhere (Árni Hermannsson et al, 2000). Another explanation is that Icelanders were outlawed criminals from Norway. Since these explanations do not support Icelanders positive self image, they are rarely mentioned in the public discourse.

To support Icelanders' self image as a strong, independent nation, the history of Icelanders has been presented as a struggle through plagues, natural disasters and poverty throughout the centuries.

3.2 Icelanders' self image at the turn of the 20th century

This image of the strong, independent man was prominent in Iceland in the beginning of the 20th century, since it helped Icelanders build a good national identity. The concept of nationality had been developing in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries and Icelanders developed their national identity as well. The political environment was changing and Icelanders were struggling to become independent from the Danish king. In this struggle, Icelanders emphasized their need to preserve one of Icelanders' historic heritages; the democratic heritage of Alþingi. Valtýr Guðmundsson (1902), the first history professor in Iceland and a congressman, wrote about Icelanders' self image in the beginning of the 20th century. He said that all Icelanders had "mature intelligence" and that they had a strong sense of identity. According to Valtýr (1902), Icelanders were rationalists and devoted democrats. They held Icelanders' right to the utmost and they had illimitable need for freedom. In 1906, when most Icelanders still lived in turf houses, a group of Icelandic intellectuals started a movement to make a monument depicting Ingólfur Arnarson, the first permanent settler in Iceland. Guðmundur Finnbogason, philosopher, held a discourse on that occasion. The discourse shows a good example of the sentiment Icelanders held about the nature of the Icelandic nation. Guðmundur believed that by making the monument, they had decided to be real Icelanders, true to themselves and their self image. Guðmundur (1906) said: "By raising his picture, it symbolizes ... that we all choose for ourselves his nature and characteristics, it signifies, that we all want to be Icelanders" (24). He said that the sculptor did well in showing Ingólfur, and thereby all Icelanders, characteristics: "He is a young man, good looking and aristocratic. His expression and attitude conveys strength and determination. He feels, he is a leader into the land of the future" (23).

3.3 Icelanders need for recognition

In the process of building a positive self image, foreigners became important, since they provided Icelanders need for outside recognition. By getting recognition and being distinguished by foreigners it helped creating and sustaining a good self image. That can be seen in various writings. One of those is a small article in *Vísir* in 1914 under the headline “Iceland abroad”. “A commander on the French warship “Lavoisier”, C. Brossier, held a discourse about Iceland this winter... there he described the country and the nation, the history and the literature, that he has studied himself the last two summers... the audience thought this was a great and new knowledge, since most of them did not know our country and nation... he plans to teach his nation even more about us” (Ísland erlendis, 1902). If the recognition came from prestigious people it was even more important, and all recognition, no matter how small, was appreciated and widely discussed. After Friedrich Nietzsche died in august 1900, Icelanders wrote highly about his newfound interest in Icelandic literature:

It was amongst other things a harm for the worlds understanding of our literature that he did not live longer. He recently started studying the Icelandic Sagas and he was very impressed by them. Somewhere there can be found writings where he implied that in all the worlds’ literature, there is nowhere to be found more savvy depictions and a hint of personage mind set than in the Icelandic sagas. And these words coming from that man mean something.

(Helgi Pjetursson, 1909).

Icelanders need for recognition promoted a stereotype of the foreigner. The positive recognition of Iceland became a valuable good, and the kind and wise foreigners turned into friends.

CHAPTER FOUR – “THE FRIENDS”

In the beginning of the 20th century, Icelanders stereotyped foreigners into two groups, each one of them was used to support Icelanders self image. The bigger group is the foreigner as a friend, the ones they identified themselves with and helped them building and sustaining a good self image.

4.1 “Íslandsvinir”

The Icelanders’ image of foreigners in Iceland as “friends” is reflected in the Icelandic term “Íslandsvinur” (e. Friend of Iceland). The term shows Icelanders need for recognition, as it was mostly used about someone who acknowledged Icelanders in some way. Looking at the foreigners as friends helped Icelanders sustaining a good self image and build a good image of the foreigners. The origin of the term and the original meaning is not certain, but examples of use of the term can be found in the media since 1827 (Hins íslenska Bókmentafélags, 1827).

A prime example of an early use of the term can be found in an article in *Þjóðólfur* from the year 1890. It is about an English writer and a traveler and says: “James Bryce. This man’s name is not familiar to people home in Iceland, but still he is the biggest and most respected friend of Iceland, that now lives in England. The poet William Morris, who is also a big friend of Iceland, might be familiar to some people though... [Bryce] was in Iceland in 1873 and learnt Icelandic ... he has written a masterful article about Iceland in an English magazine” (*Brjef frá Englandi*, 1890).

Though the term was used about someone who had only been to Iceland, most of those who were called “Íslandsvinur” were men who had done something good for Iceland, either politically or culturally, or acknowledged Iceland in any way as described in *Vísir* in 1913 (*Stofnunartíldrög Íslandsvinafjelagsins*, 1913). One of them was Carl Kuchler, a German teacher, who got the title even before he arrived. In *Þjóðólfur* (1905) is written: “A new Guest, that Icelanders should welcome, is expected here in the coming June. That is the friend of Iceland, Master Carl Kuchler... many people should be familiar with him, especially because of his study

on Icelandic literature. He has written important research papers on Icelandic literature and translated various Icelandic novels into German” (Nýr gestur, 1905).

Icelanders wanted to look at foreigners in Iceland as friends and expressed that they actually expected them to be. P. Chr. Knutzon was a Danish merchant that was big in Icelandic commerce. In 1853, Knutzon and other merchants signed a protest letter about a new government bill about customs duty on import and export from Iceland. According to *Þjóðólfur* (1853), these laws would not affect the Danish commerce but do well to Icelanders. This was looked upon as a betrayal and Icelanders implied that Knutzon should do Icelanders good by sarcastically calling him a friend: “Old Knutzon has signed as good as all the complaints... that is a typical thing for him to do, the Íslandsvinur!!!”(Verzlunarmálið, 1853).

There are examples of other use of the term “Íslandsvinur” though it is not very common. In *Ísafold*, for example, in 1876, is written about an Icelandic poet, Guðmundur Hjaltason, who held a discourse about Iceland in Norway. In the article it is claimed that he held the discourse with help from “Íslandsvinir”, but there are no further explanations of the meaning of the term in that article. There have also been different “Íslandsvinafélag” (e. Society of Friends of Iceland) abroad. The “Íslandsvinafélag” in Germany aimed at “building up knowledge of and spiritual relationship to the small Nordic... Arian nation” (Fölsuð alþingishátíðarfrímerki, 1935). On the occasion of the establishment of the “Society of Friends of Iceland”, in 1913, the following was written about friends of Iceland: “Icelanders gave the name of honor “Íslandsvinir”, ... often to those that in words or work acknowledged the quality, beauty and remarkable characteristic features of Iceland, both in landscape, nationality, national life, history, literature, social system and its total influence – opposite the unfortunately too much ignorance, misrepresentations and prejudice of the country by many foreigners”(Stofnunartildrög Íslandsvinafjelagsins, 1913).

Recently the term has been used with different meanings. A group of people who “care about the nature of Iceland, culture, independence and democracy” (Samstaða í verki – Íslandsvinir ganga saman, 2006) referred to themselves as “Íslandsvinir” (e.friends of Iceland) and an Icelandic travel agency is also named Íslandsvinir (e. translation: Iceland Explorer). Even though the term has been used with various meanings, the main purpose was to claim the friendship from an outstanding person in order to reinforce Icelanders own image of themselves.

4.2 Georg Brandes and the student expedition

Every bit of recognition was very important to Icelanders, especially if it was coming from someone that was thought to be prestigious. Being recognized and valued by prestigious foreigners helped Icelanders build a good self image. One of those foreigners was Georg Brandes, who was thought of as one of Iceland's greatest friends. Georg Brandes was a Danish writer and a scholar who studied and spoke well of Icelandic literature, especially ancient literature. In 1900, he participated in the organization of a journey of 82 Danish undergraduates to Iceland. The journey was referred to as "the student expedition". In a letter that Georg Brandes wrote to the Icelandic newspapers on that occasion, he described how important the student expedition was for the relationship between the Danes and the Icelanders. Having a good image towards the Danes was very important to Icelanders and Brandes was thought to be helpful. They believed that Brandes' writings helped build a good image of them, and therefore, they valued his writings and the journey to Iceland. An article about the student expedition in *Þjóðólfur* (1900) illustrates this:

The travelers are expecting a lot of joy from the journey. It is certain that our compatriots will greet them with the usual hospitality and generosity as best they can. The Danish newspapers have never written better or more kindly about Icelanders. Dr. Georg Brandes – the well-known friend of Iceland – has unfortunately had to cancel his journey because of sickness. It can hardly be doubted that the Icelandic movement down here [in Denmark] ... is thanks to him and his warm, influential words about us.

(Útlendar fréttir, 1900).

The friends of Iceland helped building a good image of Icelanders, to the foreigners as well as to the Icelanders themselves. In 1907, Brandes wrote two articles in the Danish paper *Politiken* where he mocked Icelanders' campaign for independence. Once mocked, Icelanders did not necessarily turn against Brandes. They were, on the other hand, surprised and expressed feelings of betrayal, losing their outmost respect for him. In *Frækorn* (1907) is written: "... The well known Danish writer Dr. Georg Brandes has recently written in the Danish paper *Politiken*,

where he makes a biting mockery of Iceland and Icelanders, especially of the freedom- and independence demands. Many Danish papers gobble up what Dr. Brandes says, and one could not expect something else than that Icelanders both here and in Copenhagen are resentful to him because of this”(Mikið níð um Ísland, 1907). *Pjóðviljinn* (1907) wrote that “... Icelanders did least expect that professor Georg Brandes would become a spokesman of that policy [against Icelanders independence]” (Háðgreinar G.Brandesar, 1907). Since the role of portraying foreigners as friends is primarily to reinforce the positive self image, his none compliance with his role is seen as betrayal. Eight years later there was still written about how Brandes had betrayed Iceland:

Even though many years have passed since Brandes wrote about our flag situation, it is very memorable to the most of us. Everybody had thought he was a good friend of Iceland and thought it was impossible, that such a spiritual man, like Brandes, would go so low as writing such a despicable article about the flag situation. I think that its ambience hurt us more than the words themselves ... Brandes has a big power over the pen, he writes sublime and generous articles. At first we can only see the wise man’s face, but suddenly there comes another not so enchanting face. – But Brandes is considered such a big man, that it’s worth it to pay attention to everything that could teach us something about him.

(Thora Friðriksson, 1915).

What was more important to Icelanders than their “friendship” with Brandes, was their image to the Danes. Both in *Frækorn* (1907) and *Pjóðviljinn* (1907) Icelanders wrote about how this would bring up a bad image of Iceland. In *Pjóðviljinn* (1907) it was written that such mocking articles could be a disfavor to Icelanders and make people believe that they were “so pretentious, that no attention should be given to [their] wishes” (Háðgreinar G.Brandesar, 1907).

The “friends of Iceland” were very important to Icelanders. If foreigners had been thought of and portrayed as “Íslandsvinur”, they still wanted to remain viewing them as such even after they had “betrayed” them. When Georg Brandes died in 1927, Icelanders wanted to remember him for what good he did to Iceland rather than for the bad things, and in the obituaries about him he was portrayed as a friend, and his love for Icelandic literature and the

good things he did were emphasized. He was said to have been one of the most talented men of the present and that he had thought that the “Danes could for the worlds sake not be without Icelanders (Georg Brandes, 1927). In a long and detailed article about Brandes in *Skírnir* (1927) he is spoken highly of and his love for Icelandic literature emphasized but his mockery minimized:

Brandes wrote often about ancient Icelandic literature and every time very kindly... He got to know a few Icelandic writers personally... and treated them all with benignancy. He studied Icelandic ancient literature and admired it much. When people started talking about a special Icelandic national flag and even a complete separation of the countries, Brand could not hold himself. He wrote two mocking articles about our campaign for independence... and those articles did not bring him dignity. Icelanders still stood strong after that, and it would be more honorable of us to remember the good things the great writer did for Icelandic literature, both directly and indirectly, rather than what he wrote about our situation in his lack of self control.

(Árni Pálsson, 1927).

4.3 The flag case

The flag case also illustrates well the role of stereotyping the foreigners into friends to create and sustain a positive self image. When foreigners caused damage to Icelanders self image, the image of the foreigners situated in Iceland did not necessarily change, as they blamed the damage they got on foreigners abroad. In June 1913, Einar Pjetursson was sailing a small boat by the Icelandic harbor. Icelanders were struggling for freedom from the Danes at that time and some Icelanders had started to use a blue and white flag as a symbol for Iceland. The flag had not been legalized and Iceland was still under the Danish flag. A Danish cruiser was patrolling the harbor and its commander, Rothe, called Einar over, took his flag and then let him go. This made a big fuzz in Iceland. No laws were said to stipulate that small boats, that were not required to have any flag, couldn't have the flag they wanted, and since the boat was in the harbor at the time where the

same law should acquire as on land, the boat owner should be allowed to flag any flag he wanted (S., 1913). Even though the case was small, it was a threat to Icelanders and their self image. The act was said to have “violated Icelanders’ national feeling” (Danskt afreksverk, 1913). On this day a lot of Danish flags were up, because ships were expected to enter the harbor from abroad. As the story flew quickly through Reykjavík, all Danish flags were soon pulled down (J. Ól., 1913) and the new Icelandic flag was pulled up widely across town, even in places that had no flag before (Danskt afreksverk, 1913).

Icelanders were angry towards Danes because of the cruiser’s commander’s act, but surprisingly, neither the Danes that were in Iceland nor the commander on the cruiser were blamed. In *Reykjavík* it was written that “Seldom it is written about Iceland in Danish newspapers without stupid spitefulness and disdain shining through every word and syllable” and that you “would think... that no intellectual amongst our family nations would think it was honorable to mock and speak brutally about our step forward”. It is written that “it is obviously the goal of Danish newspapers to make their readers believe that Icelanders are a temperamental nation, half-untamed and half-fierce wretches and bums (Árni Pálsson, 1913). Though the Danes in Denmark and the Danish papers were said to be Icelanders’ enemies, the Danes in Iceland were still portrayed as friends. The solution was found in shifting the blame from the commander that compensated the flag onto the Danish government. “The commander took everything calmly. It could easily be seen that he felt that this was an unrighteous act, even though it was done because of orders “from above””(Fálka-herferðin, 1913). Rothe was said to have made a good impression, that he was a gentleman, that he had been more successful than his precursors and that it “was a shame, that this incident happened on his shift”(Fálka-herferðin, 1913). Rothe said himself that he was following law from Denmark that forbid Danish boats to flag any other flag than the Danish one and that he did not like it, but nevertheless, he had to follow his orders (Dönsku hervaldi beitt, 1913). The Icelandic newspapers said that he must have misunderstood his orders (J. Ól., 1913).

By not blaming the Danes situated in Iceland and shifting the blame to the Danes abroad, Danes in the country could be kept as Íslandsvinir, and the newspapers claimed that the Danes in Iceland had taken the country’s side in the case, and were just like Icelanders furious about the “Danish violence” (J. Ól., 1913). Danes in Iceland as well as other foreigners were said to have

compassion with Icelanders: “Foreigners, Danes as well as others, think that an unrighteous act has been done. That could amongst other things be seen by how sweetly they felt about pulling down the flag of their own nation” (Fálka-herferðin, 1913). To underline the friendship of Danes living in Iceland, it is even mentioned in *Reykjavík* (1913) that some Danes did not even attend the reception Rothe and his crew had later that night, though they had been invited (Danskt afreksverk, 1913).

Some papers even wanted to thank the Danes for the good they had done for Icelanders as a unified nation, and thereby for strengthening Icelanders self image as one independent nation. “The news went through town like a lightning. It was like it touched the heart of every man; these Danish men had in 30 minutes managed to do the thing that us Icelanders had not managed to do in half a century, to unify us under an *Icelandic flag*. It is like one man said: “Yesterday we had no flag, today we have one” (Danskt afreksverk, 1913). “The news put all Icelanders in the capital under the same hat and it didn’t stop there, but it dragged the Danes in the town over to the Icelanders group, even though their own fellow citizens were involved” (Dönsku hervaldi beitt, 1913).

4.4 The kings

Another example of the one sided perception of foreigners as *Íslandsvinir* can be seen in the portrayal of the Danish kings, after the visit of Christian IX. Icelanders were not always fond of the Danish king, but that changed when Christian IX came to Iceland in 1874. He was the first of the Danish kings visiting Iceland (Konungur vor, 1906). In that trip to Iceland he officially gave Icelanders their national constitution. By giving Icelanders more right and giving them the recognition they longed for, he strengthened Icelanders’ self image as a strong, independent nation. By this he gained a lot of respect and became a friend of Iceland:

Royalism has never been established here. But it cannot be doubted, that Icelanders have never cared about any king as much as they care about Christian IX. That is because of the change in our regime under his

governance, and the honor that he, the only one of our kings, showed us, when he visited us on the 1000 year anniversary of our nation. He obviously has a profound kindness towards Icelanders in his heart and has repeatedly shown it, and usually he shows it the most at rough times. Icelanders will never mention him in another way than as a good monarch and a noble friend of our country and nation.

(Konungur vor andaður, 1906)

Because of what Christian IX had done to strengthen Icelanders' self image, he was not only portrayed as a friend of the nation, but he was also thought of and portrayed as a good person and a family man. "He was a kind man in everything and supremely kind to kids... he played with his grand- and great grand children every day. In all appearance he was a mannerly king, but he did not like vanity and mannerism: he was moderate in eating and drinking, and especially thrifty on wine. All Icelanders loved him because he wished us well and visited us on our 1000 year anniversary" (Konungur vor, 1906). When his son, Frederik XIII, came to Iceland after his father's death in 1907, he was expected to be a friend just like his father "King Frederik is coming here bringing the same heartily good will as his father did to our country and our nation... Our nation sincerely wishes him a hearty welcome and welcomes him not only as their glorified king, but also as a good person, their friend" (Kongen kommer, 1907).

CHAPTER FIVE – THE UNWELCOME FOREIGNER

Not all foreigners in Iceland were portrayed as friends. If no recognition could be expected from the foreigners, or Icelanders self image could not be strengthened by their recognition, they were often stereotyped in a negative way, or as inferiors. Giving foreigners a negative image, also strengthened Icelanders' self image as it allowed them to think of themselves as superior. Those foreigners that Icelanders did not identify themselves with were not welcome in the country. They were seen as a threat to the Viking heritage, Icelanders nationality and their language.

When Iceland started to get a little bit less isolated in the 20th century, with more frequent ships coming to Iceland, Icelanders started showing concern about this heritage. They thought it was “very important to make rules about foreigners entering Iceland” (Um daginn og veginn, 1920), and stop the “foreign proletariat, that threatened both language and nationality” (Dalamaður, 1919). Already in 1900, Icelanders were thinking about the unwelcome influence of the foreigners “...Here has to live a nation, with their special habits and a special behavior” (Guðmundur Friðjónsson, 1900).

5.1 The Jews

One group of unwanted foreigners were the Jewish people. Most of what Icelanders knew about Jews was from what was happening around Europe, and anti-Semitism was predominant in Iceland as it was in most other European countries. Very few Jews had come to Iceland before 1933, when a small group of Jews tried to find refuge in Iceland. Unlike most other foreigners that came to Iceland, the Jews were not welcome; “Of course does no decent nation want to have those riff-raffs, and neither do we” (Gjaldeyrismál, 1938). They were looked on as inferior people and criminals. An article in *Vísir* (1938) illustrates well the image the Jews were given:

“For the last three years, a lot of foreigners have come to the country, to look for a job or to find a permanent residence here. A big part of those people are Jews, that for some reason have left their previous residence. Most people think, that the coming of those people is not good, since their mind set is in all ways totally different from the thinking and disposition of Icelanders... All these men pay little local tax, but that says nothing about their properties or profit. Many people have heard about the Jew, that got sent out of the country not so long ago and had changed his properties into gold that he let his wife carry in big chains around her neck and arms. Such pieces of jewelry can often go around customs and currency counterchecks.

(Útlendingar í bænum, 1938).

Not only were they portrayed as inferiors and criminals, but they were often used as the bad guy in inspector stories, such as the Baron stories by Anthony Morton, that was serial in *Morgunblaðið* in 1938 (Anthony Morton, 1938), and as material for jokes, demeaning the Jews and making Icelanders feel better about themselves. One of those jokes was in *Fálkinn* in May 1938:

Two Jews meet and one said to the other, that he had insured his house for 100.000 krona for fire and burglary. – But haven't you insured your house for water floods? – How can you make a water flood? asked the other.

(Skrítlur, 1938).

5.2. THE ARMY

The British army occupied Iceland in May 1940. When the army first set foot on Iceland, the Icelandic papers mostly reported about the British occupation of buildings and described what they were doing. The army was not portrayed as a threat to Iceland's independence in the first news of the occupation: “[The army] took Hotel Borg and that is now the head quarters of the marines... then they put a guard by the radiotelegraph, the post office and also by Herkastalinn, Hotel Hekla, the British consulate in Hafnarstræti and all gas stations in town... the marines already this morning took many cars for their service... they took many trucks and they moved troops to Hvalfjörður, along with tents and supplies” (Bretar setja her á land, 1940).

5.2.1 The army as a friend

Since the recognition from the British, contrary to the Jews, was considered worth striving for, they were looked upon as genuine friends of the nation (Verkamaðurinn, 1941). In order for the Icelanders to make positive beliefs of the new foreign guest, they choose to view the army as their saviors from the Germans. A good example of how a good image of the British army was held

high, is an article from 1940 claiming that the army had come to Iceland to “prevent a German attack on the country” (Bretar setja her á land, 1940). To make the British look like a friend and identify themselves with them, Icelanders even compared themselves with the Brits by associating their situation to the Icelanders situation, their struggle for independence. Opposite to Germany, the Icelanders claimed, Great Britain was an “an old democratic country that [were] now fighting for their freedom, as well as their raison d’etre against the bloody savagery of the Nazism” (Friðfinnur Ólafsson, 1940). Much like Icelanders had been fighting for their freedom from the Danes.

Even though the army occupied various Icelandic buildings and vehicles, they were not seen as a robbers, freedom takers, etc. . The army’s positive image as friends of the nation was held despite the fact that early after the occupation, some papers did in fact point out that the army was a threat to Iceland’s independence (Verkamaðurinn, 1941). That viewpoint did not seem to get much approval.

Because of the good image that the Icelanders gave the army, the general message to Icelanders was that the Icelanders were supposed to greet the army as friends and show them respect (Friðfinnur Ólafsson, 1940). These friendly gestures towards the army resulted in a good association between the garrison and the Icelanders. Because Icelanders thought of the army as friendly guests, rather than unwanted foreigners, it is likely to have preserved and supported the Icelanders’ self-image much better than else. Because of this it seemed at first as the Icelandic nation, as well as their self-image, would cope well to the foreign army.

5.2.2 Changing views towards the army - “Stripped freedom” and “declining culture”

Very soon the discussion started to change. The viewpoint that Icelanders were being stripped their freedom, started to become louder. After some time, the British army, and later the American army as well, after they took over from the Brits in 1941, were not seen as much of friends of the Icelandic nation anymore but as a threat to Iceland’s independence and Iceland’s heritage. People started saying that the national culture was the most important thing that an independent nation could own. “The residence of a foreign army in the country threatens the

culture of the nation in many ways. But national culture is one of the strongest supports of its independence in the coming centuries” (Gylfi Þ. Gíslason, 1942). The influence of the Americans had on the Icelandic public was described as a threat:

It seems that there has been an ever grooving increase of American influence on the demeanor of people and the diction in the last times, especially young people. A big part of the youth seems for example to have quit greeting each other in Icelandic, but use instead a foreign interjection, that is senseless in that context, and says “Hello!”. And what about the idiotic outfits that are aped after American role-models? Young girls have chains around their ankles like Negro women in Africa “because it’s the latest trend in America”... It seems like some people cannot even hear an American pop-song without starting to wiggle in various gestures. All this is miserably stultifying and a danger to Icelanders national culture.

(Gylfi Þ. Gíslason, 1942)

The values Icelanders have are clearly expressed in the article. Just like the Jews were a threat to the Icelandic culture, the negro women were. Icelanders also got a chance to think of themselves as superior, by comparing the American culture to Negro women in Africa and demean the Americans by doing that.

5.2.3 “The situation”

At the same time was a discussion about the “situation”. The “situation” was a name given to the widespread relations between Icelandic women and the soldiers. The term itself demonstrates well how badly these intimate relationships were seen upon. Media coverage as early as from 1941 imply that over 500 women had had intimate relationships with the soldiers that year, and that was believed to be only about one-fifth of those who associated with the garrison (Eiga þær einar sökina?, 1941).

Even though the term “situation” was in fact a term that was aimed at blaming the Icelandic women, for their “inappropriate behavior”, the term “situation” was also used to downgrade the foreigners, as this example illustrates:

Now there are loud discussions about the indecency of the association of the Icelandic women and the foreign garrison. The newspapers in Reykjavík and the radio have been broadcasting horrifying stories about the viciousness of the Icelandic women (but there has nothing been said about the viciousness of the garrison)... The moral condition of those soldiers, that for example have sexual relations with 12 year old girls, are the least to say on a very low stage. Icelanders must require from the managers of the garrison, that they, as representatives of a civilized nation, make satisfactory disposals in consultation with the Icelandic government, to prevent the vicious situations, that have been appearing after the garrison made its residence here.

(Eiga þær einar sökina? 1941).

The image of the army as a friend turned around. Firstly, when Icelanders no longer got the positive recognition that they desired from these great democratic nations, Icelanders stopped seeing them as friends as they did not help Icelanders build a good self image. Secondly, seeing their women being swept away on their feet by the foreign army-soldiers in shiny uniforms was a threat to the Icelandic men’s self image. To minimize the harm caused by the “situation”, the soldiers were described as immoral pedophiles. Comparing themselves to this image of the army, Icelanders self image as a strong, independent Viking shined even brighter.

CONCLUSION

Icelanders still look at themselves as strong, independent Vikings as can be seen in the discourse held by Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson in London 2005. When the question about whether Iceland should join the European Union or not is discussed, many point out the lack of independence that joining the union would cause Icelanders.

The role of the foreigner as either a friend or an inferior is still alive in the 21st century. When well known foreigners come to Iceland they are most often named “Íslandsvinur” and when Icelanders are in doubt of their situation or they have been downgraded in foreign media, they try to get recognition from prestigious foreigners. Other foreigners on the other hand, such as Polish workers in Iceland, whos’ recognition would not help build and sustain Icelanders’ good self image, are often portrayed as inferiors, even criminals.

The widely used question, that every foreigner that comes to Iceland gets asked, illustrates perhaps Icelanders need for recognition better than anything else: “How do you like Iceland?”

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