



**Háskólinn
á Akureyri**

**The Polar Mediterranean: Past,
Present, and Future of a Social
Imaginary**

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The Polar Mediterranean: Past, Present, and Future of a Social Imaginary

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Abstract

The Arctic is a vast and sparsely populated region with a unique biodiversity, a rich geography, and a variety of local cultures. In historical terms, it is also a relatively newly-discovered territory, as far as Western and Southern societies are concerned. Its remoteness and inaccessibility have largely contributed to a prolonged lack of information regarding the region, making the Arctic an enigmatic place for a very long time. Thus, southern social imaginaries have typically conceived of the North as a frozen and inhospitable area, depriving it of much interest.

However, during the first part of the 20th century, the anthropologist and explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson unveiled many mysteries about the Arctic. Throughout his life and writings, he tried to modify at least as many inaccurate and now old-fashioned imaginings and imaginaries about the Arctic. A promoter of the North, he highlighted the potential and opportunities of this region, based on his empirical studies, personal experiences and extensive interactions with Native populations. Furthermore, Stefansson suggested that, in the upcoming future, the Arctic region could be seen as a place similar to the Mediterranean region: an important socio-cultural, economic and political hub.

The concept of the Polar Mediterranean Imaginary was thus proposed by him over a century ago, in 1920, and intended to give the Arctic a central role, due to its geostrategic location, which bridges the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean and connect three continents (Asia, America, and Europe). Notwithstanding his research and advocacy, the solidification of any new imaginary requires time and an efficient communication network in order to encroach upon and supersede previous ones. Past and present events (e.g., global conflicts, scientific and technologic developments) contribute as well to determining how the Arctic is shaped and understood today. In particular, the contemporary trends of globalization and climate change are making the North more and more connected and interconnected, especially through the rise of transpolar routes, which represent an opportunity for the affirmation of the Arctic's

central role, along the lines envisioned by Vilhjalmur Stefansson and his Polar Mediterranean Imaginary one hundred years ago.

To my family (Manuela, António, Madalena, Francisca and Pedro).

“From my village I see as much in the Universe as you can see from earth...
So my village is as big as any other land
Because I’m the size of what I see,
Not the size of my height...”

Alberto Caeiro, The Keeper of Flocks

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Acronyms / Abbreviations

Central Arctic Ocean – CAO

Cornelius Castoriadis – CC

Indigenous Peoples – IP

Northeast Passage – NEP

Northern Sea Route - NSR

Northwest Passage – NWP

Polar Mediterranean Imaginary – PMI

Transpolar Sea Route – TSR

Vilhjalmur Stefansson – VS

World War I – WWI

World War II – WW2

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1 Introduction

The Arctic is a remote region with a difficult access to its territory. In fact, it is considered a peripheral zone of the globe, distant from the largest and most influential urban centers. However, the distinct idea of a northmost zone has long been present in the Southern and Western imaginaries, whether as coldness, snow, blizzards, global warming, or polar bears. Such sets of ideas are correct, yet incomplete, and do not provide an accurate framework whereby to grasp what the Arctic actually is. Hence, this thesis intends to introduce the reader to a different imaginary, capable of facilitating the comprehension of the Arctic and its multiple players, especially as regards the southern and western populations of our planet. The concept of Polar Mediterranean Imaginary (hereby, PMI) is the chosen one, mostly because it utilizes creatively and insightfully the famous Mediterranean region, which is well-known for its history, culture, economy and long-lived political reality, but also to establish intriguing relations and parallelisms with the Arctic's present and future.

Each chapter follows a chronological sequence explaining how the Arctic has been perceived and comprehended throughout the centuries, until the conception of PMI was proposed in the early 20th century. In addition, different dimensions are approached in the chapters of this investigation, the North being itself a place allowing for multiple perspectives. In particular, the second chapter provides a short introduction regarding the very concepts of idea and, above all, of *socialimaginary*. This is meant to pave the ground for the presentation of PMI as such. The third chapter describes core events that occurred in the North after the decades during which the PMI was proposed and advocated by its creator; these events being significant occurrences that contributed to an increasing global interest in the Arctic region to shaping today's Arctic. The fourth chapter analyses the PMI's present, the impact of current global and environmental trends within the Arctic region, and how these trends keep triggering more and more the interest of non-Arctic players. The fifth chapter speculates on the Arctic's future in the medium- and long term, based on relevant features of its recent history, e.g., the rise of transpolar

corridors capable of connecting Arctic communities and cultures, whilst preserving their identity. Finally, the last chapter, recapitulates the main findings and conclusions of my research, raising possible questions for further thinking and intellectual inquiry.

Despite the seemingly esoteric subject, the motivations behind this research are founded in my profound curiosity about the PMI's author, Vilhjalmur Stefansson (hereafter VS), and how his largely correct predictions about the Arctic could be so far ahead of his time. VS focused on presenting a new and original conceptual frame of the Arctic, underlining the potentials and opportunities that he believed to be ready to be explored. At the same time, I was intrigued by the same author's sense of mission to promote a cooperative Arctic, where all its actors have important roles. Thereafter, I realized the necessity to seek out what had been done in the academic field regarding how the Arctic has been imagined and perceived. Lastly, I was fascinated by the inclusion of the Mediterranean paradigm, which would seem to compare, *prima facie*, two diametrically opposite regions of the world that, on closer scrutiny, do actually exhibit possible common points that could be insightful and useful *vis-à-vis* the Arctic's future.

In essence, this thesis aims, first of all, at presenting and analyzing the PMI, so as to determine whether it is a robust alternative for western and southern communities to understand the Arctic today. Furthermore, my research wishes to extrapolate the most important lessons that the Arctic communities can take for their future from the Mediterranean socio-historical context, to which VS compared their region. Secondly, the present work aims at revealing how the old Southern and Western social imaginaries about the North may have been conditioning the development of its political and economic dimensions, particularly since the region has become more and more attractive on a global scale.

1.1 Methodology

The qualitative approach characterising philosophical and historical studies provided me with the necessary tools whereby to investigate and understand how the Southern and Western imaginaries about the Arctic have been developing in history, peaking with VS' conception of PMI in the last century. The quantitative approach typical of the social sciences was used, instead, in

order to organize pertinent statistics and relevant empirical data, especially with regard to making plausible predictions about the Arctic's future.

A great part of the necessary information was collected by reading academic papers and reports from many different organizations, forums and governments. These data had to be related in some way to the PMI and, as a consequence, could be from many different scientific disciplines and study areas. The remaining part of the collected information was based directly upon VS' vast legacy of books, papers, speeches and interviews. In particular, an exhaustive reading of his books, reports, diary entries and (auto-)biographies was conducted, followed by the search of crucial quotes and key ideas allowing me to have the conceptual tools needed for developing some sensible reflections and, moreover, comparing VS' views with those arising from other sources about the Arctic.

The concept of PMI was used as a guiding light throughout the process. Indeed, by reading and gathering a considerable quantity of bibliographical information about VS and his perspectives, it was possible for me to find interesting ideas and quotes that could be used to formulate hypotheses about the Arctic's future. Nevertheless, the paucity of direct references in academia concerning the PMI made my research difficult to progress at times. In fact, in the Appendix A section is possible to check the crucial quotes taken from VS works. In a strange way, I found myself being an explorer, just like VS himself had been in his day.

I pursued my research in the same way as Vilhjalmur Stefansson did in his book *The Northward Course of Empire*, for I believed it reasonable to pursue my research in the same way as an established professional in the field. Thus, the research separated by chapters, each one tackling specific topics, following a chronological order. In the first chapter, is presented general data relevant to understand the past, the present and the future. Finally, the structure of the thesis was also based in the "Polar Law Textbook" which follows a sequence of chapters, subchapters and

I pursued my research in the same way as Natalia Loukacheva did in her book *Polar Law Textbook (2010)*, for I believed it reasonable to pursue my research in the same way as an established professional in the field. Thus, the research separated by chapters, each one tackling specific topics, following a logic sequence, attempting to provide a background for the theme, and similar structure for every chapter.

2 Polar Mediterranean Imaginary

This Chapter intends to provide the basic philosophical background for understanding the notions of *imagination* and *imaginary*. In particular, *social* imaginaries are the focus of my attention, insofar as they are based on the creative interaction of different possible personal ideas with the necessity of living communities to find and formulate shared *meaning*, so as to explain to themselves and others what has been unknown or unexplainable until that point. When we do not know something, in fact, the first step towards coming to know it is to *imagine* what it might be like, hence approaching imaginatively the unknown on the basis of the known.

Additionally, this Chapter provides also a brief introduction concerning the Arctic's own nature and history *qua* social imaginary of the West, meaning how this region has been typically imagined, i.e., conceived of and perceived, in the Western world, especially since the early stages of the Mediterranean civilization. As a matter of fact, for centuries, the northmost part of the globe was not easy to access, due to its unique environmental and geographical features, as well as the West's limited technology and scientific knowledge. The description of select historical milestones is included here, then, so as to comprehend how Arctic imaginaries were built and modified in the history of the West.

Finally, there follows my presentation of VS and, crucially, his concept of PMI. On the one hand, his unforgotten legacy consisted in providing pioneer information and ground-breaking reports about life in the Arctic, as well as suggesting an innovative social imaginary that actually predicted how the Arctic would come to be seen in his future, i.e., our present. On the other hand, a short description of important aspects of his life is also *de rigueur*, in order to explain what made him known as "the prophet of the North"¹.

2.1 What is an "imaginary"?

For a very large part, and as abstract as it may sound, human history is based on the events, decisions and interactions taken by a multiplicity of people in

¹ Earl Parker Hanson, *Stefansson, Prophet of the North* (Harper & bros 1941) 233–234.

countless different contexts. The motivations behind their decisions are innumerable, complex, intricately and even mysterious, but they are nonetheless rooted, to a significant extent, in the fundamental necessity of expressing *ideas*. The concept itself of idea is abstract and difficult to qualify. Nevertheless, it too is part and parcel of human evolution and of the human experience. “An idea. Resilient... highly contagious. Once an idea has taken hold of the brain it's almost impossible to eradicate.” This quote, which I derive from Christopher Nolan’s movie *Inception*, hints at the relevance of the impact of ideas and the inevitability of sharing them within a group, on whose background operate environmental forces that can require them to change certain behaviors and become better adapted. In this context, communication is the chief vehicle for transmitting messages and is an essential tool for social relations in micro-, meso- and macro dimensions ².

Homo sapiens is not the only species capable of communication. In fact, many other animals are able to communicate. However, unlike any other known species, *Homo sapiens* can generate a massive amount of information using a very limited number of sounds, gestures, and signs. In addition, the ability of storing different types of information and experiences, e.g., by the art of writing, allied with the capacity of expressing thoughts and ideas, i.e., our communicational skills, have had a tremendous impact on how human beings perceive and interact with the surrounding world. Steeped in complex systems of signs and symbols referring to other systems of signs and symbols, we are the most profoundly semiotic animal species in existence, as far as we know ³. The ability to create and manipulate layers of signs and symbols marked an evolutionary milestone known as the Cognitive Revolution, which is supposed to have happened about 70,000 years ago and made it possible for humanity to cooperate into a larger and larger scale and survive through complex organizational networks based upon communication: “Social cooperation is our key for survival and reproduction, in a band of 50

² The concept of idea quite complex and it relates different fields from history, philosophy, as well as psychology, anthropology and much else. It would be necessary to write another thesis only tackling these major topics. Hence for this research are only emphasized some crucial and brief points in order to help the reader to grasp, the notions of ‘imagination’ and ‘imaginary’.

³ Yuval N Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Vintage 2015) 26–46.

individuals there are 1225 one-on-one relations plus more complex social combinations.”⁴

The Cognitive Revolution’s main outcome is that it allowed humans to acquire enormous amounts of knowledge and to think critically about their surroundings, as well as about themselves, finding new and diverse solutions to the obstacles that they have kept encountering. For that, among other experts, linguists and anthropologists have often emphasized the importance of the creation of myths and fictions, which were fundamental to unite biological strangers together and make them work together, towards a common goal, in larger and larger social units expanding well beyond the initial family units. In other words, the development of ideas and abstract thought in general fostered the ability of connecting different people and putting human beings in control of many environmental variables that other species do not appear to possess⁵. To give some Arctic-related examples that local peoples, but also historians and anthropologists, would easily recognize: to store food by freezing it; building shelters capable to retain the heat inside; and trading different goods that are not available in a specific region.

Fictions of this ilk are an exclusive product of the human mind, which has the socially cultivated ability of attributing meaning to something that does not actually exist independently in the outside world, i.e., our imaginings, and effectively transmitting it to different people too. Despite the potentially immense philosophical intricacy of such abstract concepts, which a focused study immediately reveals, humanity has built, and is built upon, vast networks of such fictions, which are first and foremost utilized pragmatically rather than investigated theoretically, and that are the very basis of any extant collective or social imaginary⁶.

For instance, money and religion are two of the most successful human inventions ever made. Both of them are universally integrated in societies and have a central role in the daily life of most people. In fact, they are not a sheer biological reality, since they do not exist in nature by themselves, but they are rather creative outputs of imagination with an attached tapestry of symbolism that effectively helps millions of human beings to live their quotidian existence

⁴ *ibid* 26.

⁵ Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Harvard University Press 2010) 129–131.

⁶ *ibid* 178–189.

in enabling and constructive ways, more often than not ⁷. Certainly, there may be more tangible and biologically immediate components of money (e.g., cattle or chunks of building material used as currency) and religion (e.g., life-supporting rivers and pastures becoming sacred), but the relationships that human individuals and communities develop with them are profoundly symbolic ⁸. To a similar extent, the Arctic itself has often been seen as a frozen wasteland and as being utterly inhospitable, according to the meanings produced and projected by southern and, culturally speaking ⁹, Western/ized societies ¹⁰. For much of their recorded history, their governments and educated communities never looked to the Far North as an obvious opportunity to prosper. In other words, specific imaginaries were interiorized, and fictions were embedded, turned into rules or “truths” that took the Arctic as a region of the world without significant potential, and despite the fact that certain human communities had actually managed to survive there for numerous generations ¹¹.

By sharing conceptual-linguistic contents and, in essence, by believing in the same things for long stretches of time, cohesive communities have thus been able to follow the same rules and remain focused on common goals, in spite of deviations, secessions, divisions, disruptions and many other challenges. This continuity has also meant the achievement of structured and well-organized societies sharing collective *social imaginaries* ¹², which have bounded together innumerable individuals and facilitated their mutual relations, through a vast collection of activities that are exclusive to humans, ranging from the trading of agricultural and mining products during the Bronze

⁷ ‘Hay Festival 2015 - Yuval Noah Harari’ (*BBC Music Events*)

<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/events/effgwh/play/a9p2rz>> accessed 12 January 2022.

⁸ how “religion” would be so even if there were deities existing independently of us.

⁹ Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Friendly Arctic* (The Macmillan Company 1921) 10–13

<<http://archive.org/details/friendlyarctic017086mbp>> accessed 1 March 2021.

¹⁰ “West” and “Western” identify cultures originating from Western Europe in a geographic sense, there exist also many “Westernized” cultures across the globe, given the West’s pervasive influence over the past four centuries, e.g., the US and Australia.

¹¹ Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire (1922)* (The Macmillan Company 1924) 42–50.

¹² Steven Vertovec, “‘Diversity’ and the Social Imaginary’ (2012) 53 *European Journal of Sociology* 287, 305.

Age to today's scientific cooperation among scientists working remotely in different continents on some common project.

Furthermore, the capacity for the effective communication of ideas and knowledge also opened more options to the communities with regard to integrating and improving their collective imaginaries, acquiring new life-enabling praxes, and discarding life-disabling ones. For example, we can mention the introduction of the Salmon berry in the diet of an Alaskan Indigenous community, which acquired it from other Arctic Natives, who knew that such berries were edible. In spite of being so abundant in the region, the members of the Alaskan community at issue did not know that, for their imaginary had no room for it yet. Moreover, the reception of such information and its integration in the social imaginary took time, especially among the older members¹³.

2.1.1 Imagination and imaginaries

The existence and the processes typical of a collective imaginary are only possible if there is in place the imaginative capacity for generating abstract ideas by different individuals, and for successfully communicating those ideas among themselves or, if needed, to another group. At the same time, the way ideas are altered can change collective imaginaries and lead to cultural evolution through the acquisition of, say, new habits and foreign customs, but also cause all kinds of 'hiccups' and difficulties. It is important to bear in mind that the imaginaries are a product of collective efforts, not just individual ones, and, consequently, they spread and are created through communication networks¹⁴. A distinction between "imagination" and "imaginary" is essential for the comprehension of how semiotic fictions are created and engaged with by actual people and their communities.

The 20th-century philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis (hereafter "CC") put "imagination" at the very center of his understanding of reality. In particular, he suggested that there are important connections between the individual faculty of "imagination" (i.e., a person's ability to produce new images, hence ideas or concepts) and the social "imaginaries" (i.e., the complex symbolic networks that we also call "cultures"), without which no society and no

¹³ Stefansson (n 9) 64.

¹⁴ Harari (n 3) 26–42.

individual could ever survive as human. As a matter of fact, for CC, the human faculty of imagination is the basis of social organization and the possibility of autonomy, i.e., self-rule, both individually and socially¹⁵.

Based on this human capacity for producing images, which are the embryonic constituents of ideas or concepts, i.e., the “primordial cognition” of each individual, human societies can also become receptive to new ideas and new experiences, giving then some space to ongoing redefinitions of certain parts of the extant imaginaries that have been inherited from the past, whilst keeping other parts relatively stable, hence securing social order¹⁶. In other words, the imagination is the faculty of the individual psyche that allows a person us to produce new aspects of reality and, psychologically, it even precedes the distinction between that which is real and that which is fictitious. However, insofar as no individual can really grow up and develop in isolation, the imagination of each person is exposed, since the very start, to pervasive meaning-giving processes optimized by social institutions (e.g., traditional chants, lullabies, schooling), so that the individuals eventually abandon their primigenial and spontaneous images, for the largest part, in favor of those evolved and passed on within the socially recognized imaginary. This one, in turn, benefits from imagination (aka “primordial cognition”) in historic terms (i.e., some imaginative hominids, at some point, must have started the first social imaginary), developmental terms (i.e., the same process must happen again and again, with each and every new generation) and innovative terms (i.e., the capacity for creating new images, hence new ideas and concepts, does not disappear completely and can enrich societies with inventions and valuable feats of originality)¹⁷.

In this thesis, then, we will analyze how one man’s creative idea about the Arctic as a novel Mediterranean entered the Western social imaginaries and predicted, to some extent, their transformation.

¹⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, ‘Logic, Imagination, Reflection’ (1992) 49 *American Imago* 3, 22–24.

¹⁶ Aris Komporozos-Athanasίου and Marianna Fotaki, ‘A Theory of Imagination for Organization Studies Using the Work of Cornelius Castoriadis’ (2015) 36 *Organization Studies* 321, 322 - 324.

¹⁷ Chiara Bottici, ‘Imagination, Imaginary, Imaginal: Towards a New Social Ontology?’ 2.

2.1.2 Imaginaries in the social sciences

The concept of “imaginary” has been gaining more and more influence in research and studies belonging to many different branches within the social sciences. Strauss, for one, defines it as “the capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is”¹⁸, i.e., fictional constructions that, effectively, regularly and inevitably take over the daily life of different groups of people and individuals, giving them a subtler and more accurate ‘map’ of the world that they inhabit. Social imaginaries are built to help in the organization of communities in a never-ending meaning-giving process, which keeps a symbolic network alive and kicking, and a vital instrument whereby to enable human life, both at the individual level and at the collective level¹⁹. The institution of a society presupposes the existence of collective imaginaries, which come armed with attributed and attributable meanings, leading to the generally accepted values and functioning forms of life of any community²⁰.

So basic is the primeval faculty at play that, even in the most oppressive environments where imagination is repressed, there is always a surviving space for personal creativity and individual ideas, though maybe not for their public expressions, which may have to wait long and fight hard to find a way to manifest themselves and perhaps shake what is considered correct²¹. Imagination is an innate human quality and is always present. Social imaginaries, for their part, rely upon individual imagination and require intersubjective interactions, all within a specific socio-environmental context, i.e., a historical people and their environment. Thus, collective imaginaries are never completely irreplaceable nor universal, since they are the result of dynamic relations and can be rearranged in time. Consequently, social imaginaries can be said to be the unifying yet mutable conceptions of identifiable societies. Metaphorically, CC compares the incessant flow of images, thoughts, ideas, and conflicts thereof, that any given socio-cultural imaginary exhibits in history with “successive formations of volcanic lava that

¹⁸ Claudia Strauss, ‘The Imaginary’ (2006) 6 *Anthropological Theory* 322, 324.

¹⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (MIT Press 1987) 117.

²⁰ Harari (n 3) 35–36.

²¹ CC was a Greek immigrant in France, he feared deportation, should he become *persona non grata* in that country. He published his works under a pseudonym for several years. His legacy mirrors his fight what he considered correct.

almost never entirely solidify”, for each imaginary may seem to “preserve itself”, but in fact “it never ceases to alter itself.”^{22 23}.

The relationship between human imagination and the imaginary is the present thesis’ starting point to understand how the Arctic has been variously conceived of, i.e., *imagined* or comprehended, especially by Western and Westernized societies throughout the centuries, i.e., from a remote and distant territory with very reduced contact with the southern regions, to the contemporary Arctic reality, marked by enormous socio-economic potentialities, or the Arctic’s own history and legacy, i.e., the imaginaries developed by its native communities. As we will explain, the West’s interest in the northernmost region of the planet has shifted quite abruptly, especially during the last two centuries. Thus, in keeping with CC’s own metaphor, new layers of lava have been erupting and modifying the composition of old imaginaries, engendering eventually new ones.

In particular, *we will emphasize the great 20th-century explorer and anthropologist VS, his feats of imagination, and even more so their astounding anticipation of today’s Western imaginaries about the Arctic*, since now these too can finally ‘see’ how it is possible “to settle the great question: Is the Arctic a barren waste incapable of supporting life, or is it a hostile only for those who persist in thinking and living like southerners?”²⁴.

2.2 The Arctic Imaginary

The variety of cultural networks established in the Arctic as a result of the interaction between diverse human communities has contributed to the construction of a variety of different perspectives regarding the region and its key players, thus making the Arctic into a complex social construct, rather than a mere geographical location. Cultural imaginaries are a creation of societies—hence our use of “social imaginaries”, in line with CC’s understanding—based on the rich and ongoing interplay of traditions, customs and information, i.e., shared ideas, as well as an attempt to comprehend and interpret the unknown

²² Komporozos-Athanasiou and Fotaki (n 16) 325.

²³ Castoriadis (n 19) 124.

²⁴ Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery; the Autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson* (1st edn, McGraw-Hill 1964) 166.

on the basis of the known. Imaginaries are not stable. As a matter of fact, they are constantly shifting, due to humanity itself being in a permanent state of flux and confrontation with new options, new data, and novel evolutions of the quintessentially creative human thought that, as explained, lives in each individual as well as in the semiotic networks that the individuals collectively maintain and modulate²⁵.

The Arctic is a region characterized by its unique features, ranging from its geographical remoteness from the world's centers of global socio-cultural power and harsh weather conditions to its richness in natural resources and extraordinary biodiversity. Composed politically today of 8 recognized States, the northmost territory of the globe can also be named "the Circumpolar North", since the region includes, in the shared imaginary of contemporary experts and key local actors, the Arctic and Subarctic zones²⁶. In truth, the Arctic itself does not have clear borders, because any such geographical determination results from the combination of geophysical, political, and social factors and conceptions.²⁷ All these culturally mediated forces have contributed to the construction of cultural ideas that define the historical Arctic imaginaries and determine the global understanding of the region as a region.

As a result, the Arctic can be seen from many different perspectives. On the one hand, the northernmost region of the globe is the home of different Indigenous groups²⁸ that established themselves in it many millennia ago, each group possessing their own perspectives and philosophies regarding their living place.²⁹ On the other hand, due to its remoteness and distant location from other civilizations and socio-economic hotspots, it is been an almost

²⁵ Philip E Steinberg and others, *Contesting the Arctic: Politics and Imaginaries in the Circumpolar North* (IBTauris 2015) 6–7.

²⁶ Lassi Heininen and Chris Southcott, *Globalization and the Circumpolar North* (University of Alaska Press 2010) 1.

²⁷ Dnn and A Nilsson, 'Arctic Pollution Issues: A State of the Arctic Environment Report' (1998) 21 Colonial Waterbirds 112, vii.

²⁸ Mary Durfee and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, *Arctic Governance in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group 2019) 9–11 <<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442235649/Arctic-Governance-in-a-Changing-World>> accessed 1 March 2021.

²⁹ Joan Nymand Larsen and Nordic Council of Ministers (eds), *Arctic Social Indicators: ASI II; Impletation* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2014) 23.

unreachable/impenetrable place that led many southerner cultures to “forget” altogether about its existence and focus on their proximities instead³⁰.

Indeed, to understand how the “Far North” became populated in the first place, it is necessary to understand how the primitive migratory routes came to pass. The migration of modern human beings (*Homo sapiens*) from Eastern Africa to Eurasian territories is supposed to have taken place around 100,000 BC. The settlement of this region resulted in a massive center of different groups with common ancestors, i.e., the so-called “Eurasian super family”.³¹ This marked the beginning of the branching of groups and the development of different cultural identities. Between 40,000 and 15,000 BC, various populations started to occupy the northern parts of Eurasia and, gradually, reached the Northern Circle territories either by boat or foot³². The exodus to the northmost regions was followed by the colonization of North America, done through the Bering Strait Bridge, which opened a new continent to civilization³³. Based on these migratory patterns, different groups took different paths, in what was a mixture between the shared instinct of survival, flexible adaptations to the features of the surrounding environments, and the creative development of unique techniques³⁴.

These migratory routes are hard to reconstruct and keep track of, not least because they happened thousands of years ago. Archeological, biometrical and linguistic experts have been working together to gather as much information as possible and find out how different peoples spread all around the globe, including its northernmost regions³⁵. Throughout the following chapters, I shall prioritize a European/Western perspective because, firstly, I need to pursue a manageable investigation in terms of both time and resources, especially as regards cultural imaginaries that have made an explicit use of the term “Arctic” in its various local declinations. Secondly, since the pivotal

³⁰ ‘Niels Einarsson - 2004 - Arctic Human Development Report.Pdf’ 22–26 <https://pame.is/mema/MEMAdatabase/349_Arctic%20Human%20Development%20Report.pdf> accessed 6 April 2021.

³¹ Patrick Manning and Tiffany Trimmer, *Migration in World History* (3rd edn, Routledge 2020) 31.

³² *ibid* 40–43.

³³ John McCannon, *A History of the Arctic: Nature, Exploration and Exploitation* (Reaktion Books 2013) 26–28.

³⁴ Manning and Trimmer (n 31) 48, 53.

³⁵ *ibid* 22–26.

imaginary discussed hereby (i.e., VS's PMI) results from Western ideas and historical experiences, it can be combined with other Arctic imaginaries, i.e., the Native Peoples' ones, only to a limited extent.

2.2.1 Unveiling the *Arktos*

To begin with, as regards the prevalent imaginary in Western culture, we should observe that the etymology of the name "Arctic" derives from the Greek word *arktos*, which means "bear", because the Ursa Major ("the Great Bear") is the constellation that applies to the polar region in the northern hemisphere, according to classical Graeco-Roman astronomy. In fact, it was during the apogee of the Greek Era that the Circumpolar North started to be imagined by important scholars and philosophers, who characterized the northernmost territories as inaccessible and remote places connoted with a mystical background³⁶.

Centered in the Mediterranean region, Classic Antiquity played an important role in determining the Western conception of the Arctic as an essentially unknown zone located at the outer limits of the human world. Reportedly, the first known contact with the Circumpolar territories was achieved by the Greek merchant and explorer, Pytheas of Massilia, who went sailing towards the north Atlantic. His odyssey culminated with the discovery of the Island of Thule, "the most septentrional of the Islands of Brittany."³⁷ Pytheas' new description of the northern region had a large impact on his contemporary intellectuals (mainly cosmographers), who contributed to shape a more detailed Arctic imaginary, which was evidently not the one that the local populations entertained. At the apogee of the Roman Empire, especially through the migratory fluxes to and from the 'barbaric' regions of the North, a few more mysteries were uncovered, more populations made contact with, and an increase in the knowledge about the septentrional areas of Europe facilitated

³⁶ Louis Rey, 'The Arctic Ocean: A "Polar Mediterranean"' in Louis Rey (ed), *The Arctic Ocean: The Hydrographic Environment and the Fate of Pollutants* (Palgrave Macmillan UK 1982) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-05919-5_1> accessed 2 March 2021.

³⁷ *ibid* 5.

³⁸. Nevertheless, the conception of the Arctic as an essentially unknown zone located at the outer limits of the human world persisted, to a great extent.

By the early days of the Middle Ages, during the 6th century AD, Irish monks sailed northwards the Atlantic, in order to find a suitable place to pray and live in pious seclusion. The scientific evidence regarding the presence of this religious community in Iceland, for one, is corroborated by the ash layers around the island highlighting the combined challenge of harsh winters, ice, and volcanic activity ³⁹. In addition, the presence of Irish monks is attested as well in the Viking era (9th and 10th century AD), which was rich in new discoveries all over the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans, where the Norsemen sailed, landed, and settled, notably in Iceland and Greenland, but also Vinland, which posterity will call “the New World”. The establishment of these settlements allowed a more frequent navigation of the northern oceanic routes and, consequently, the gradual development of a new and more accurate perspective about the Arctic region, at least from a strictly geographic perspective ⁴⁰.

Nevertheless, for many centuries, the West’s prevalent Arctic imaginary inherited from Greek and Roman times remained stable, up to the Renaissance, i.e., the so-called “Age of Discovery”, where long sailing explorations took place. Navigators such as Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Magellan opened the trend of maritime routes to new continents ready to be explored and, more often than not, plundered. The economic drive, combined with the renewed interest in the knowledge accumulated by Classic Antiquity about these regions of the world, and the legacies from older scholars and intellectuals, led to considerable improvements in the cartography of these regions. Thus, a more exact geographical grasp about the Arctic was built and, eventually, about the local inhabitants as well ⁴¹. The Western imaginary of the Arctic started to change, as a result.

After the 16th century, on the basis of the European trends in navigating the oceans and, from Europe’s point of view, in exploring entirely new regions of

³⁸ Federico Actite, ‘Ancient Rome and Icelandic Culture - A Brief Overview’ (2009) 4 *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* 1–2.

³⁹ Gunnar Karlsson and Anna Yates, *A Brief History of Iceland* (2012) 4.

⁴⁰ *ibid* 8–9.

⁴¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II: Volume I*, vol I (Fontana Press 1990) 226–230.

the globe, the one surrounding the North Pole got on the spotlight too. Explorers started trying to sail and study those seas, in order to understand what economic and scientific potentials and other opportunities there could be in the Arctic. For instance, the possibility of a transpolar route that could connect the North Atlantic to China gained considerable traction. This theory, despite being very ambitious, was eventually proved to be beyond reach, due to the very harsh weather conditions and the many geophysical obstacles encountered, above all, by Mercator. Likewise, other navigators could not successfully prove the existence of a north-west passage to the Pacific Ocean⁴².

Nonetheless, crucial achievements were also made and contributed to the Westerners' understanding of the septentrional regions of the globe. A vivid example was the discovery of the Spitzbergen archipelago by Wilhelm Barents, while navigating over the northern seas, which was named after him (Barents Sea). Although he himself could not return to his homeland, the newfound territories were integrated into the Arctic maps of the time⁴³. Barents' legacy highlights, once again, how imaginaries are progressively amplified and improved through the conscious attempt at proving and/or disproving theories and other hypotheses that, together with other cultural factors, modify societies' beliefs and general store of knowledge. As also VS' PMI testifies to, imagining different imaginaries can be a factor in bringing them about.

2.2.2 Reaching the North Pole

After the 19th century, reaching the North Pole became the main goal for the leading European Powers. Important expeditions were made in order to reach it and unveil the most 'mysterious' parts of the Arctic region. Notable efforts were made by Captain Parry, without success, to reach the North Pole in 1827 by walking on solid pack-ice. However, his failed attempt constituted a turntable for future Polar explorations, because Captain Parry and his crew, for the first time, used the wind not as an enemy but as an advantage to reach the Pole. Back then, in fact, Polar explorations were seen as dangerous and

⁴² Hanson (n 1) 182.

⁴³ RN Rudmose Brown, 'Spitsbergen, Terra Nullius' (1919) 7 *Geographical Review* 311, 311–312.

only possible during the summer and the beginning of fall. Therefore, his alternative approach was an important step towards a better understanding of the region and, in particular, of how the Arctic Ocean winds could be crucial for transportation across the ocean ⁴⁴.

Almost 70 years later, in 1893, Fridtjof Nansen voluntarily froze his ship *Fram* in north Siberia with the ultimate goal of drifting towards the north-west for 3 years, through the movement of ice masses, and reaching a latitude close to the Pole. Despite the failure of achieving the northernmost latitude, remarkable discoveries were made regarding the ocean's dynamics and the geophysical features of the region. It was only in 1909, when Robert Peary reached the pole by dog-sledge, that this long-sought goal was fulfilled. After that, the main objective became to cross the Arctic over air. The feat was performed in 1926 by the Italian Umberto Nobile, who flew his dirigible from the Spitsbergen archipelago to the Bering Strait, thus crossing the Pole. From that point onward, the Circumpolar regions were open to aerial exploration too.

All such endeavors contributed to a parallel evolution of thought in the 19th and 20th century, such that the focus moved onto crossing and exploring the Arctic *qua* valuable and possibly profitable destination *in se*, rather than as an instrumental route capable of facilitating the access from the Atlantic regions to the Orient ⁴⁵.

2.2.3 The Evolution of the Westernized Imaginary of the Arctic

New ideas that aim to take part of and reshape collective imaginaries have always had to face the hard challenge of conflicting with the embedded imaginaries, which can be said to possess an inertia of sorts. The Arctic region, as described above (2.2. section), is no exception. Throughout many centuries of Western history, in different circumstances, ideas concerning the potentialities of the North have come up, yet only to be disregarded. This trend is transversal to all historical periods: from the Classical Antiquity period, when Roman and Greek philosophers and other important players considered

⁴⁴ Stefansson (n 9) 2–4.

⁴⁵ Steinberg and others (n 25) 6.

the North an ‘inferior’ region when compared with the Mediterranean basin ⁴⁶, to the Moors, who have always shown great reservations about invading northern parts of Europe. The Mediterranean has always been an extremely rich hotspot where civilizations developed knowledge in multiple areas. However, they have always been apprehensive in what could happen if they moved up North ⁴⁷.

Furthermore, during the 18th century, in an episode known as “the paper war” between Great Britain and France, it was asked to France to surrender either Guadeloupe Archipelago (located in in the Caribbean Sea) or its Canadian territories. Back then, sugar cane was seen as an essential good for the European and American societies, and Guadeloupe had the adequate conditions to have large plantations of sugar cane, making it an important business hub. Consequently, the French Government preferred to give up their Canadian territories, since there were not as many profits to made therein as in the tropical archipelago. The hold of Guadeloupe was seen as far more profitable than the Canadian resources—a call that turned out to be a loss in the long term ^{48 49}.

Similarly, in 1867, there occurred the purchase of Alaska by the American government. Until then, Alaska had belonged to Russia. However, the Russian economic situation was critical, due the Crimean War (1853-1856). Therefore, the Tsar’s government was interested in selling it, and the Americans offered an acceptable proposition. This move, incidentally, was very contested by the political opposition of the US government of the day. Nevertheless, nowadays, it is clear that Alaska has proven to be very useful to American interests, with its fundamental geostrategic role in the Arctic region^{50 51 52}.

⁴⁶ Roman emperor Tacitus mentioned that people would never leave, by choice, the fertile shores of Africa and plains of Italy in order to go as far North as the Alps territories.

⁴⁷ Stefansson (n 11) 4.

⁴⁸ William L Grant, ‘Canada Versus Guadeloupe, An Episode of the Seven Years’ War’ (1912) 17 *The American Historical Review* 735, 735–742.

⁴⁹ Stefansson (n 11) 6–7.

⁵⁰ ‘Alaska Purchase | History, Cost, & Significance | Britannica’ <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Alaska-Purchase>> accessed 5 November 2021.

⁵¹ Stefansson (n 11) 3–9.

⁵² Frank A Golder, ‘The Purchase of Alaska’ (1920) 25 *The American Historical Review* 411.

All along, the Mediterranean region remained the place where the first Polar imaginaries were proposed by Western intellectuals and it remained the backbone for the prevalent contemporary imaginaries of the world at large, which are still the children of an inevitably Eurocentric historical process involving excitement, curiosity, great courage, but also cunning, cold economic calculation, and plenty of human cruelty. However, it is important to note that the genesis and evolution of such an ideological process were neither constant nor predictable. The Western imaginary of the Arctic was not fated. Instead, it was created by various players at different times, depending on specific contexts and necessities, none of which can be taken as an obvious given or a gift of history. Rather, the history of the imaginary development of the world's northernmost region is full of successes as well as failures, all of which contributed, either directly or indirectly, to the construction of a largely common and eventually consistent knowledge or, at least, of a widely shared set of assumptions, about the Arctic, which is itself an idea, in ultimate analysis.

2.3 What is the Polar Mediterranean (Imaginary)?

The Icelandic-Canadian-American explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson introduced the concept of “Polar Mediterranean” in 1920, whereby he highlighted how the Arctic Ocean was a relatively navigable central space that united diverse coastal peoples in commerce and productive interaction. In other words, his perspective was a friendly one, based on a historically successful case of international human transactions at many levels, thanks primarily to a shared navigable sea. VS’ perspective stood in opposition to the ones that had been embraced by previous Arctic explorers, who had seen the region as merely hazardous for human survival, and certainly most dangerous from the point of view of navigation⁵³.

In his 1921 work *The Friendly Arctic*, Vilhjalmur Stefansson theorizes the discovery of the Arctic Region through the description of “four great successive stages” of Polar expeditions as a way to justify the ultimate purpose

⁵³ Stefansson (n 9) 29.

of his adventures and incursions to the North ⁵⁴. The first stage started approximately in 6000 to 4000 BC, with the migration of Scandinavians to northward Europe, while Eskimos ⁵⁵ and Mongol-like populations moved to North Asia and America looking for hunting grounds along the Polar shores. Furthermore, VS claims that the first Polar explorations must have had a very primordial character, due the fear of the unknown and poor knowledge of the region, hence the explorations were probably held only during summertime and the explorers had to be done by the beginning of the Fall season.

The following stage, starting the 19th century, is marked by the confrontation with the Arctic winter, that until then, was seen as dreadful. The explorers like Edward Parry (as mentioned in 2.2) had initiated a new era of adventure, helped by Eskimo knowledge and materials, contributing to a new view of the Circumpolar North. The discovery of new Arctic regions (i.e., islands) that allowed a better cartography of the region and, consequently the cementation of some maritime routes that were not very well-known.

The third stage was introduced as a period when there were already some relevant new Western experiences around the Arctic, resulting from expeditions done during the 19th century, a more accurate geographical frame of the North and its territories. Although they were not enough to allow consistent navigation (few captains being able to navigate in the northernmost waters), recognition (there still existed non-mapped zones) and interaction with the locals, important steps were taken in this direction. As a matter of fact, the wind and seasonal periods of winter and fall, once seen as not attractive for navigation, were, now, important added values to the ships and crews ⁵⁶.

Finally, the last stage described by VS is, indeed, the improvement of what was been done on previous incursions, i.e., in phase three of his fourfold account. VS's intention was to prove that through strong planning and effective preparation, it was possible to explore the whole region at any point in time, i.e., from summer to winter, with the adequate gear to move around and the necessary tools to get food and furs, following the example set by the local inhabitants, *inter alia*. In his view, a step-by-step approach where every group

⁵⁴ *ibid* 1.

⁵⁵ VS mentions, throughout his legacy, the "Eskimos" as the Natives of the Arctic, due his explorations and interactions with the American Arctic populations. Nowadays, such overgeneralizations are outdated.

⁵⁶ Stefansson (n 9) ch 1.

of explorers is prepared to face the unpredictable conditions was the key for surpassing all previous obstacles and allowing a thorough understanding of the region and its geo-cultural and climatic specificities ⁵⁷.

2.3.1 The Introduction of a New Imaginary

The discovery of the northernmost territories was progressive and somehow arbitrary. It constitutes a set of different attempts and achievements that, together, formed also the cultural ideas about the Arctic circulating in the West. Indeed, the discovery of more information regarding the northernmost territories opened the possibility for prior social imaginaries to be rethought, even if they were time-honored. VS, in particular, underlines the incoherence between the Arctic reality and the predominant Polar imaginaries of his time, meaning that the notorious depictions of the north as inaccessible and desolate were most inaccurate – “in the story I am telling is to «get across» to the reader the idea that if you are in an ordinary health and strength to shake off the influence of books and belief, you can find good reason to be as content and comfortable in the North as anywhere on earth” ⁵⁸.

Until then, there had circulated endless negative descriptions regarding the North and its many unappealing features, such as the cold, darkness ⁵⁹. VS even jokingly suggested the creation of a “National University of Polite Unlearning”, a concept created by one of VS’s teachers (Samuel Crothers) at Harvard University ⁶⁰. A place where people could go to clear up the wrong ideas acquired in school, at the university, or through the mass media. Despite the sarcastic tone of this concept, its critical focus was very precise. VS himself wanted to help the dissemination of a new Arctic imaginary. He intended it to be his legacy.

It is with this aim in mind that he devised the concept of “Polar Mediterranean” in order to present the Circumpolar North, not as a remote and inaccessible place, but rather as a friendly center connecting different cultures, territories and resources, so as to make human flourishing a concrete

⁵⁷ Stefansson (n 11) 1–6.

⁵⁸ Stefansson (n 9) 278.

⁵⁹ Hugh Robert Mill, ‘The Northward Course of Empire’ (1923) 111 *Nature* 839.

⁶⁰ Stefansson (n 11) 20–22.

possibility in this region.⁶¹- “[VS] visualized in the Arctic Sea as one great Mediterranean, not only in the sense that is a rather small ocean surrounded by populated lands, but also in the sense that it could be useful to the world as quick and relatively easy transportation route between import cities.”⁶².

VS adopts a positive posture regarding the upcoming events by comparing the discovery of circumnavigation of the globe with the new understanding of the Arctic that he promoted: “When the world was once known to be round, there was no difficulty in finding many navigators to sail around it. When the polar regions are once understood to be friendly and fruitful, men will quickly and easily penetrate their deepest recesses.”⁶³.

Based on these assumptions, contemporary academics have been taking this imaginary very seriously in order to understand the Arctic and its potential development in the upcoming decades. Indeed, in his works, VS writes of the advent of new transportation technologies (airplanes, submarines, ships and zeppelins)⁶⁴ that would facilitate the movement of people and goods, integrate diverse communities, enhance navigation across the ocean, and allow the region to emerge as a new epicenter of civilization⁶⁵.

In particular, VS focusses on those means of transportation that can act as facilitators in the achievement of an Arctic Mediterranean, even if official governments and Western society had not realized that such a process could be occurring: “Although realizing the applicability of both aircrafts and submarines to commerce and warfare in our own latitudes, we have not adequately realized their significance in solving after four hundred years the problem of the northwest passage and giving us at last a short route from Europe to Far East”⁶⁶. Moreover, his emphasis on the different economic activities that are possible to develop in the Arctic region suggests that the Far North is bound to become an indispensable economic, infrastructural, and

⁶¹ Klaus Dodds, ‘A Polar Mediterranean? Accessibility, Resources and Sovereignty in the Arctic Ocean’ (2010) 1 *Global Policy* 303, 308–310.

⁶² Hanson (n 1) 182.

⁶³ Stefansson (n 9) 6.

⁶⁴ In Vilhjalmur Stefansson book *The Northward Course of Empire (1922)* (n 30) he dedicates the chapter VII entirely to those matters.

⁶⁵ Kimberley Peters, *Water Worlds: Human Geographies of the Ocean* (Routledge 2016) ch 2.

⁶⁶ Stefansson (n 11) 172.

socio-cultural center for the South too ⁶⁷. Hence, based on all the above-mentioned aspects, one of the core references about PMI was written by VS: “A glance at a map of the northern hemisphere shows that in the Arctic Ocean is in effect a huge Mediterranean. It lies between its surrounding between Europe and Africa. It has in the past been looked as an impassible Mediterranean. In the near future it will not only become passable but will become a favorite route, at least at certain times of the year, safer, more comfortable, and much shorter than any route that lies over the oceans that separate the present- day centers of population” ⁶⁸. Throughout the research every aspect of this key-statement will be, properly approached and contextualized.

Western, primarily European, imaginaries had already shifted through the centuries, and they had undeniably offered a variety of perspectives and descriptions about how remote and sparsely populated the Arctic territories were ⁶⁹. Nonetheless, VS’s legacy is replete with reports that aim at challenging the ignorance of most, if not all, of them, as well as at unveiling much that was still unknown about the American Polar communities. Stefansson intended to confront a society that believed to have reached unprecedented peaks of scientific knowledge and technological achievements, and yet lacked adequate cultural knowledge regarding the neighboring Arctic region. In other words, he confronted inaccurate conceptions included in the Western/ized imaginaries made by academics ⁷⁰ in particular, and societies in general, also with respect to his own expeditions’ reports.

Throughout his notes, there transpires VS’ will to exposing wrong Arctic ideals such as “The eternal polar silence” ⁷¹ and “The Polar Ocean is without life” ⁷², and, therefore, offer a new perspective of a northmost region with a vast biodiversity fully capable of providing bountiful resources, not only to survive, but also to live well in the region itself. Furthermore, the concern of

⁶⁷ *ibid* 120.

⁶⁸ *ibid* 168.

⁶⁹ ‘Cities on Ice: Population Change in the Arctic | Nordregio’ <<https://nordregio.org/nordregio-magazine/issues/arctic-changes-and-challenges/cities-on-ice-population-change-in-the-arctic/>> accessed 9 December 2021.

⁷⁰ Vilhjalmur Stefansson (n 11) 128.

⁷¹ Vilhjalmur Stefansson (n 11) 20.

⁷² *ibid* 183.

offering a more accurate vision about the Circumpolar geography and culture ends up with his prophetic visions about the future potentialities of the Arctic Sea: “Whoever has any grasp at all of the great natural resources of the polar regions and of the conditions under which they are about to be developed, will have fascinating dreams about any number of other transpolar routes destined to come into common use whenever air travel itself becomes a commonplace in the more dangerous but already speculatively accepted routes between Liverpool and New York, San Francisco and Hawaii and Japan”⁷³.

The northward march by the Western/ized societies was one of the last achievements regarding the exploration of the planet. This delay is accurately highlighted by VS, i.e., the critical junction combining insufficiency of proper materials, inadequate knowledge, and inefficient solutions capable to successfully penetrate and recognize the North as a livable place with the “time-frozen” mentality regarding the Arctic imagined and endorsed by western populations many centuries ago. Such a situation, as VS wrote, “has been continuously retarded by two classes of obstacles, the real and the *imaginary*”⁷⁴. This capacity for recognising the centrality of imaginary forces in human affairs is a major achievement of VS’ legacy. By offering accurate reports and successful examples of human communities in the Far North, he was able to start a contemporary trend updating past imaginaries and replacing old ideas with new ones, which confirm the Arctic’s immense life-enabling potentialities.

2.3.2 Vilhjalmur Stefansson’s Mission

VS was more than an anthropologist. As a matter of fact, the scholarly literature about him states that his work as an adventurer overshadows his anthropological career and personal life⁷⁵. Still, his explorations were essential to establish a seminal yet stable contact with some isolated Arctic communities and to discover new places that were unknown by the Western nations. In particular, he dedicated an entire book to reporting in great detail his experiences with different communities of Indigenous People (IP) in the

⁷³ Stefansson (n 11) 202.

⁷⁴ *ibid* 70.

⁷⁵ Gísli Pálsson, *Travelling Passions: The Hidden Life of Vilhjalmur Stefansson* (UPNE 2005) 25.

northmost territories of Alaska and the Canadian Arctic from 1906 and 1913 (*My Life with the Eskimo*, 1913).

The preoccupation of introducing the Western nations to new conceptions of the Circumpolar region as a fundamental step for a more accurate understanding of it and, consequently, a transformation of old imaginaries, was central for VS in both his field research and writings. The interaction with Indigenous communities and his adventurous travels gained him quite a reputation, to the point that the Canadian-Icelandic poet Stephan G. Stephansson expressed vividly his admiration for VS's role in the expansion of the "human horizon" through his travels and explorations ⁷⁶.

VS published numerous notes that reveal some rather interesting and curious reflections about many Arctic exploration topics, such as, the diet in the North, the advantages of snow when compared with the rain, the importance of sled dogs in the northern communities ⁷⁷. However, his focus was only one: demystifying preconceived ideas preventing a new imaginary from being born. As a matter of fact, throughout his books and diaries, and whilst always keeping a visionary and pedagogical mindset, VS approaches issues that are elemental for life in the North and, parallelly, are not trivial for most of the southerners either – "is the Arctic region barren and its nature hostile to life or is it hostile merely to life of a southern type and to men who live like southerners." ⁷⁸. The importance of every season, as well as the importance of darkness and temperature into the daily life of any Arctic player ⁷⁹, are the basis of his arguments regarding the full potential of the Circumpolar North. Supported by these descriptions and observations, VS stresses the idea of taking one day at the time to the same extent as social imaginaries enter into a community, settling in the sustainability of the nature and available resources of the North – "Do not let worry over to-morrow's breakfast interfere with your appetite at dinner. The friendly Arctic will provide." ⁸⁰

VS was also concerned in giving speeches and conferences describing vividly his adventures, so as to reach effectively a very large and diverse

⁷⁶ *ibid* 43.

⁷⁷ Stefansson (n 9) 354–358.

⁷⁸ *ibid* 162.

⁷⁹ In the last part of the book "The Northward Course of Empire", in the chapter "Appendix – Why the Erroneous Ideas Persist", VS put ideas that he had been (re)using since 1922 and are present throughout all his bibliography.

⁸⁰ Stefansson (n 9) 205.

public, as well as commenting on a plethora of aspects concerning Arctic realities and explorations. For instance, VS offered some reflections about the typical personality of the Arctic explorers and their role, whether positive or negative, in the development of new ideas about the Polar region: “few of them have been scientists, and polar exploration has never been a science. It has been rather something between an art and a sport”⁸¹.

2.3.3 The Polar Mediterranean Conception

The PMI is a set of ideas originated in order to provide a dynamic and informed conception of the Arctic, promoting an interactive and constructive relation among all the involved players, immersed in their unique geo-cultural surroundings. VS was, to a certain extent, the decisive bridge between the past and the present beliefs about the Arctic, because he helped to enlarge the factual comprehension of the human component, the international divulgation of the region’s potentialities, and the creation of a new way of looking at all things Arctic, i.e., his PMI. That which used to be deemed to be an inaccessible and inhospitable zone, started to be seen as a hub connecting different cultures, States, and socio-economic realities. The Arctic Ocean resulting into a region “conceived as a land to promote peripheries and not a center”⁸².

Moreover, it is advisable to recognize once more that such a novel imaginary does not directly apply to the northern populations, but primarily to the many *outsiders* accessing the Arctic Ocean, chiefly to travel to another extra-polar location or transport goods over it. As a matter of fact, such transpolar routes have gained a prominent role for the generation of today’s Arctic imaginaries, which reflect VS’ PMI.⁸³

In order to stimulate the Western societies to think differently and more accurately about the Arctic, VS confronts multiple overgeneralized ideas. For instance, “one land in the north that is covered with glaciers and from it all the rest of the north”, i.e., the end-product of how Greenland was described by and to the Europeans since its rediscovery in the 18th century:

⁸¹ Vilhjalmur Stefansson (n 11) 31.

⁸² Steinberg and others (n 25) 8.

⁸³ Stefansson (n 11) 250–270.

Greenland is a mass of high mountains in a region of precipitation so heavy that the heat of summer does not suffice to thaw all the accumulated snows of winter, so they change into glacier ice that flows down the valleys into the sea and breaks off into the icebergs that are the delight and dread of the transatlantic tourist.⁸⁴

Historically, this iconic territory was, by far, the most popular amongst past European societies, due its proximity and contacts with the Old Continent, especially in the Middle Ages. Yet, in this way, ice-obsessed western imaginaries tended to assume that all Septentrional areas had similar features, forgetting notions and events that were part of their own histories⁸⁵.

In addition, VS also demonstrated how relative and misconceived are the ideas of remoteness and hostility of the northward territories, when compared with the southern background. To put it briefly: everything is relative and depends on how and where different communities embrace their own environment, thus generating a set of ideas that might not correspond to other contexts – for example, the exact same temperature brings different reactions to distinct people living in different environments. This simple fact was seen by VS as evidence that the Arctic was not in a permanent winter state and that societies not familiar with the Polar summers had misinterpreted its seasonal patterns⁸⁶. Current definitions could be different, then, and the Arctic summer argued to be present in a way that can be positively observed and, somehow, sensed on a personal as well as socio-cultural level. The local inhabitants are certainly attuned to it, as VS had had ample direct experience of.

VS invited his readers to consider phenomena such as the increased amount of daylight and the diversity of Arctic wildlife⁸⁷ and vegetation⁸⁸, the abundance of oceanic life⁸⁹, the extraordinary occurrences such as the northern lights⁹⁰, plus the enormous diversity in the effects of the local climate and the

⁸⁴ *ibid* 37–39.

⁸⁵ Stefansson (n 9) 12.

⁸⁶ Stefansson (n 11) 32–33.

⁸⁷ Vilhjalmur Stefansson's books and articles are full of descriptions concerning nature and biodiversity among the Arctic region, for this thesis were only selected few from "The Friendly Arctic" in order to corroborate the argument.

⁸⁸ Stefansson (n 9) 16.

⁸⁹ *ibid* 17, 132, 217, 331–333.

⁹⁰ *ibid* 415.

extant terrains ⁹¹. VS, interestingly, mentions also possible reasons why sweeping statements like those about Greenland persisted, even if they were outdated and definitely not valid in all Arctic regions, given that the Circumpolar North is not only composed of glaciers and ice sheets. VS-the-anthropologist uses detailed descriptions of his personal experiences on previous Arctic voyages, during different seasons, along with social interactions with Native Arctic communities, in order to demonstrate how inaccurate ‘common’ knowledge leads inevitably to grave misinterpretations.

VS emphasizes the necessity of introducing new data essential to create a solid structure of knowledge regarding an unknown territory. A remodulation of ancient socio-cultural imaginaries assumes a central role that can be achieved if and only if there are new data and a capacity for transmitting a message effectively. However, this a lengthy and complex process of demystification of well-established ideas: “If the average American or European university graduate has 10 ideas about the North, 9 of them are wrong. So far as the victims of American education are concerned, I know from experience. As to the Europeans, I judge them by their books and conversation” ^{92 93}.

To conclude, the past and the present are linked by the evolution of ideas, as these developments are sometimes translated into a new world offering more and more diverse opportunities, whether economic, socio-cultural, transportation-related or infrastructural. The PMI can still bring a fresh perspective towards the general understanding of the Arctic and the interactions among its human and institutional players. In particular, as VS depicts this reality in 1922: “the polar sea is like a hub from which continents radiate like the spokes of a wheel” ⁹⁴.

⁹¹ Vilhjalmur Stefansson (n 11) 11-12.

⁹² Stefansson (n 11) 20.

⁹³ *ibid* 22–41.

⁹⁴ Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Arctic as an air route to the future* – National Geographic Magazine, August 205-18.

3 The Past of Polar Mediterranean Imaginary

This chapter aims to look at relevant events from around 1920 until the first decade of the 2000s, highlighting references and comments connected with VS' seminal imaginary, so that it will be possible to understand how the PMI has been absorbed by different Arctic stakeholders, whether fully aware of VS' role in its creation or not. Moreover, giving an account of these events will help to shape more accurate perspectives about both the present and the future of the Arctic region *qua* PM. Lastly, the attendant analysis of the historical past contributes to a better comprehension of how the PM was initially seen by VS himself and how its meaning has evolved among the Arctic communities and in academia.

Since the creation of the PMI, periods of international conflict, technological development and significant increase of academic research contributed to an exponential comprehension of what used to be thought of by non-indigenous observers as an inaccessible and unknown place, thus making the “Arctic not a unidimensional space”⁹⁵ but a place where multiple stakes and interests meet in a more interconnected and interactive way. The cumulative impact of these events has also provided a more accurate knowledge about the Arctic, turning it eventually into a dynamic center full of possibilities⁹⁶.

In this respect, it is important to have in mind the motivations of the States taking part in the development of Arctic explorations and expertise, since they had their own perceptions regarding how to benefit from the northernmost region of Earth. On top of that, the rising of the PMI-based friendly imaginary promotes their cooperation instead of confrontation, meaning that the Arctic should be primarily an open place for exchange of ideas, goods and services, hence similar to the Mediterranean Sea--even though there is certainly room for certain confrontations and conflicting political interests, as Mediterranean history can also exemplify.

⁹⁵ Níels Einarsson (ed), *Arctic Human Development Report* (Stefansson Arctic Institute 2004) 26.

⁹⁶ 'Nymand Larsen - 2014 - Arctic Human Development Report Regional Processe.Pdf' 33–34 <<http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:788965/FULLTEXT03.pdf>> accessed 26 May 2021.

During the first 80 years of its existence, VS's imaginary did not have many explicit references around academia nor in the public opinion, possibly due to the fact that the Arctic was still being 'discovered' and new information about it was taking time to circulate and become interiorized. The outcomes of explorations and all new discoveries, also in the field of ideas, have inevitably an adaptation period, and an anthropologist such as VS was aware of such a process. Therefore, he called for attention concerning the long-term implications of the Arctic pioneers' adventures: "because no one may see their commercial application, nor the lands he discovers valueless because corn will not thrive there, and water frontages cannot be subdivided into city lots with prospect of immediate sale. Their time will come."⁹⁷

In his career, VS gave numerous lectures and conferences throughout the US, Canada, and Europe, in order to share his discoveries and experiences to audiences that had only a rather primitive idea about the Arctic, its vastness, richness of resources and, most importantly, its inhabitants and their customs. Even after his campaigns, VS describes his mission as one of shifting mentalities: "I wanted to remain south to continue my campaign of education with regard the Arctic sections of geography textbooks, and in general to influence school and university teaching"⁹⁸.

Slowly, VS' mission in, around, about, and for the Arctic, had an undeniable impact. The process of assimilation of new data and new approaches led to the inclusion of the PMI within the larger available set of Arctic imaginaries⁹⁹.

3.1 Global Wars & Technology Advancements

Essentially, and as mentioned above in chapter 2.3., there were four stages of Arctic exploration, at least according to VS. It was only after the last transitional period that the PMI started to gain traction, because it was able to challenge the idea that, because of its frightful winters, it was impossible to do any kind of exploration or survive. Moreover, the local inhabitants' presence

⁹⁷ Stefansson (n 9) 73.

⁹⁸ Hanson (n 1) 178.

⁹⁹ The inclusion of PMI into new social imaginaries will be tracked in the upcoming chapters, tackling the present and future.

and cultural traditions motivated VS to pursue his socio-anthropological work, specifically because it consisted in unveiling the many ‘mysteries’ still surrounding such populations and, in particular, those of the American Arctic Natives ¹⁰⁰. Indeed, it was in his reports about these populations that VS mentioned the possibility of the Circumpolar region turning into an Arctic Mediterranean, i.e., a friendly and cooperative region which could evolve into an international hub rich in socio-cultural diversity: “Since I began to know the North, its beauty, freedom and friendliness have continually grown upon me. They were there from the first, but my eyes were holden and I could not see them” ¹⁰¹.

VS’s innovative idea was also brought about by his worries about international conflicts reaching further and further north. By the beginning of World War I (WW1), the Canadian-Icelandic explorer was unveiling, together with his crew, new northwest territories in Canada, whose populations, due to their remoteness and inexistent access to the news, were not aware of WW1, until captain Louis Lane update ¹⁰². That gave VS a palpable impression of how isolated the Arctic territory was from the rest of the world and called his attention to the future inclusion of the region in the international system¹⁰³.

WW1 was the first truly global event of the 20th century and served as a sorrowful basis for the following conflicts further on. Somehow, VS wanted to help his colleagues, audiences, and world leaders to conceive of the Arctic in an alternative way, indeed similarly to what had happened in the Mediterranean Sea and its millennia: a mixture of periods of relative peace and socio-economic flourishing, with conflict of interests that occasionally resulted in wars. As the historian Fernand Braudel underlines: “The rule has been Mediterranean civilization spreads far beyond its shores in great waves that are balanced by continual returns (...) The circulation of man and goods, both

¹⁰⁰ Michael Bravo, ‘North Pole by Michael Bravo from Reaktion Books’ 198 <<http://www.reaktionbooks.co.uk/display.asp?ISBN=9781789140088>> accessed 25 February 2021.

¹⁰¹ Stefansson (n 9) 258.

¹⁰² VS and his crew were exploring the region and did not know about the WW1 that was already in progress for an entire year. In fact, they were noticed by captain Louis Lane who intercepted them. Initially, captain Lane thought the crew would be starving, instead VS replied that he was “Hungry for news.” And, afterwards, he astoundingly asked “What war?” (Vilhjalmur Stefansson (n 3) 375).

¹⁰³ Stefansson (n 9) 375–377.

material and intangible, formed concentric ring round the Mediterranean. We should imagine hundred frontiers, not one, some political, some economic, and some cultural.”¹⁰⁴.

During the mid-1930s, the Soviet Union was the main State player regarding Arctic scientific research, having organized many well-manned expeditions navigating the Arctic Ocean and explorations of the northernmost islands. They used icebreakers and sent back meteorological, oceanographic and ionospheric observations to well-supported institutions further south, in order to understand the dynamics of the Arctic’s weather, its effective forecasting, its maritime features, while cultivating the cross-over of different areas of scientific expertise (e.g., oceanography, geology and geography)¹⁰⁵. In this way, it became possible for the Soviet Union to take the frontline of the North-Pole matters.

Important indications of this Arctic emphasis were the non-stop flights from Moscow to the Soviet east coast and, from there, to the US border, where a group of Soviet scientists spent 8 months camping in floating ice and providing important inputs on the maritime feasibility of the Arctic Sea for trade and transportation¹⁰⁶. Interestingly enough, VS contributed to the Soviet research in the Far North, insofar as his work *The Friendly Arctic* was considered an essential tool, accepted by the Russian scientists, and duly translated into their language. During the summer of 1937, an aircrew composed by 3 people flew over the North Pole with an ANT-25 airplane in a non-stopping flight from Moscow to southern California. That exploit had a big impact in conceiving of the utilization of the Arctic as a flight facility and a transitional point between continents and different regions. VS’ research and experiences were a matter of safety for these aviators. As mentioned by VS’s biographer Earl P. Hanson: “the men who first flew across the pole and to our West Coast stated in public, in New York, that they had taken with them a copy of the book for their comfort and greater safety in case they got into trouble”¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁴ Braudel (n 41) 170.

¹⁰⁵ Ronald E Doel and others, ‘Strategic Arctic Science: National Interests in Building Natural Knowledge – Interwar Era through the Cold War’ (2014) 44 *Journal of Historical Geography* 60, 67.

¹⁰⁶ Hanson (n 1) 179.

¹⁰⁷ Steinberg and others (n 25) 6–7.

In contrast, in the troubled West of the same era, there was little Arctic research pursued during the interwar period, despite the early-20th-century contributions of VS and other explorers. The economic instability resulting from the Great Depression heavily affected the western States of that time, limiting any possible investments in this remote region. On the contrary, the centralized economic system of the Soviets, who had been largely excluded from the global economic network since 1917, allowed them to be unaffected by the 1930s slump and, therefore, keep promoting Arctic research, which they regarded as pivotal in order to develop, both economically and socially, the vast northern areas of their massive country ¹⁰⁸.

3.1.1 The Examples of Greenland and Iceland as Geostrategic Points

The lack of interest in the Arctic's potentialities shifted once more, however, during World War II (WW2), when the United States (US) and Canada recognized Greenland and Iceland as essential strategic points, connecting the Old and the New continents ¹⁰⁹. In both cases (along with the Azores), they were declared as of utmost importance in 1946 by US Joint Chiefs of Staff's (JCS's) shortlist of essential bases ¹¹⁰.

The geography of the Greenlandic territory effectively corresponded as a junction between the two continents and, moreover, there were many and strategic added values attached to the control of that region. The settlement of Thule Air Base during the WW2 offered to the US and Canada a military advantage to control menaces from the Eastern part of the globe (Europe). In fact, according to Petersen, it was possible to highlight six functions regarding this base: an emergency landing strip, a weather station, a navigational aids station, an advanced radar station, a search and rescue station, and a base for sledge dog patrol units ¹¹¹.

Iceland's case is also a good example of the increasing relevance of the Arctic in the global affairs. In spite of being an isolated territory, this cold

¹⁰⁸ Ibid 61-62.

¹⁰⁹ Niels Einarsson (n 95) 207.

¹¹⁰ Nikolaj Petersen, 'SAC at Thule: Greenland in the U.S. Polar Strategy' (2011) 13 *Journal of Cold War Studies* 90, 92.

¹¹¹ *ibid* 98.

archipelago composed by one main island proved to be a fundamental transition point in the western military defense system, connecting the North Atlantic and the Arctic Ocean. Based on its specific geographical features, Iceland proved to be very important in bridging the American continent with the European continent ¹¹².

Back then, Iceland had a sovereign status but still maintained a union with Denmark. As a matter of fact, in 1939, both Germany and Great Britain showed interest in including Iceland as a military base. The Icelandic government refused any partnerships, insisting that the territory should remain neutral. Nevertheless, with the occupation of Denmark by the Germans, the British offered their assistance once again. Due to its geostrategic position, Iceland could not be neutral for much longer, which accelerated the arrival of the British in May 1940. In the following year, upon British suggestion¹¹³, Iceland invited the US to take over protection of the island, helping in the development of several infrastructures that facilitated the economic development of a country that, until that point, was among the poorest in Europe. On top of that, the occupation of Denmark by the Germans gave Iceland the chance to become a fully independent State ¹¹⁴.

During the Cold War, in October 1986, a Soviet-US meeting took place in Iceland, also known as the “Reykjavík summit”, between president Ronald Reagan and the general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, with the purpose of both countries attempting to eliminate nuclear weapons. Although no formal agreement was achieved, many historians and government officials, including Gorbachev himself, later considered that this meeting was a turning point in the Cold War ^{115 116}.

¹¹² Margret Bjorgulfsdottir, ‘The Paradox of a Neutral Ally: A Historical Overview of Iceland’s Participation in NATO’ (1989) 13 *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 71, 71–72.

¹¹³ Due being in many battle fronts against the Nazis, the British needed their troops elsewhere, so they proposed US to substitute them.

¹¹⁴ Bjorgulfsdottir (n 112) 73–75.

¹¹⁵ B Wayne Howell, ‘Reagan and Reykjavík: Arms Control, SDI, and the Argument from Human Rights’ (2008) 11 *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 389, 389–391.

¹¹⁶ ‘Reykjavík Summit of 1986 | United States–Soviet Union History | Britannica’ <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Reykjavik-summit-of-1986>> accessed 27 December 2021.

To sum up, 20th century global events opened many opportunities for Iceland (independency, infrastructure, and a political player of international political affairs). Isolation was a thing of the past. Iceland's fundamental strategic value was centered on it being a potential crossroad for maritime and aeronautic routes, which led the nation into another stage of international cooperation. Iceland also became a big promotor of global affairs and policymaking. As an independent State, Iceland intended to be an active player between different nations, organizations, and institutions ¹¹⁷.

The necessities of warfare, in other words, led to a turnover in these nations' imaginary of the Arctic, at least as regards large sectors of their political, military, and cultured elites. Simultaneously, in the western part of the North American continent, the US and Canada combined their strengths in order to build infrastructure along the border between Alaska and British Columbia, and to ensure a defensive control over the Aleutian Islands, which were threatened by the Japanese army following the well-known Pearl Harbor incident. This trend was maintained during the initial phase of the Cold War ¹¹⁸. As a matter of fact, in 1947, the US government called for attention among its allies on how far ahead Stalin's Soviet Union was, compared with other (Arctic) States in terms of expertise about the Arctic.¹¹⁹

3.1.2 Paradox Between War and Arctic Development – similarities with Mediterranean Region

The 20th century had clearly put the Arctic region on the map. Not only because of the two world wars, but also because relevant technological advancements contributed to a better knowledge and increased cooperation in the region, making the PMI a more viable option ¹²⁰. Natural sciences, across different areas (e.g., oceanography, geology, and geography), contributed as well to generate new knowledge and new perspectives about the Arctic. Moreover, with the development of better aerial and aquatic transportation

¹¹⁷ Bjorgulfsdottir (n 112) 91–93.

¹¹⁸ Doel and others (n 105) 68.

¹¹⁹ F. Ronne to Secretary of State [G. Marshall], 2 June 1947; V. Bush to J. Forrestal, 12 June 1947; and C.S. Piggot memo for Executive Secretary of the Joint Research and Development Board, 14 June 1947, all Box 227, folder 18, RG 330, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD.

¹²⁰ Durfee and Johnstone (n 28) 49.

vehicles, and with the building of modern infrastructure aimed at facilitating the further exploration of the northernmost regions, the Arctic became a military and geostrategic site ¹²¹.

‘Thanks’ to WW2 and the Cold War, the Arctic became a vital place for Arctic States such as the United States, the USSR and Canada, which aspired to influencing, if not controlling, all intercontinental movements of goods and peoples in the region, as well as preventing any possible territorial invasion from that part of the world. The increase of modern scientific knowledge and the age-old rationale of international conflicts ended up overlapping, to a great extent; the latter raising the necessity of being prepared to respond to outside menaces and knowing well the terrain of combat. A new paradigm of the Arctic was clearly brewing. Finally, among the outputs of scientific knowledge and strategic concerns stood out the Arctic States’ investments into infrastructures (e.g., airports, roads, buildings, harbors) that became valid promoters of regional development ¹²².

On the one hand, the American military base of Thule, located in the northern part of Greenland, was at an equidistant point between North America and Western Europe, and through its continued military surveillance and other strategic missions ended up having a decisive role in the European and North American defense system (NATO). The importance of Thule as a defensive line, as mentioned in 3.1.1., is still an example of agreement between 3 Arctic players (Greenland, Denmark, and the US). A relation that started as a bilateral agreement is, nowadays, a trilateral agreement, due to Greenland enjoying self-government ¹²³. Hence, this constitutes a case of foreign and security policies between Arctic players and how they can cooperate and organize themselves towards the inevitability of conflicts.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union could also take advantage of its consistent investments in scientific knowledge, acquired in the early decades of its history. Their example offers a clear perspective on how important the investment in the sciences can be, about which we still read so much today in the popular press and in ministerial reports. Due to the 20th century ideological

¹²¹ Stefansson (n 11) 199.

¹²² Doel and others (n 105) 63–66.

¹²³ ‘Ackrén - 2019 - From Bilateral to Trilateral Agreement the Case of Thule Air Base. Pdf’ 1–8 <https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2019/Scholarly-Papers/2_AY2019_Ackren.pdf> accessed 15 March 2022.

and political rivalry with the western societies, Soviet government “valued science more highly and allocated it a proportionally larger share of the national income than did contemporary governments in economically better developed and more prosperous countries.”¹²⁴. During the Cold-War period “United States, the National Manpower Council and the Commission on Human Resources and Advanced Training had been issuing warnings since the early 1950s that “Russia is already far advanced on a program of mass education, and by selecting the most competent pupils at each school level is educating greater and greater numbers of students through technical institutes, college and the university.”¹²⁵.

Warfare has probably been present since the beginning of large-scale civilisation. Periods of conflict brought the necessity of being informed and prepared/equipped to effectively respond to external menaces. Therefore, war has had an undeniable impact in the technological and scientific fields. Additionally, in the modern era, there has been developed an institutionalized mechanism for continuously and systematically innovating military technology¹²⁶. Under this perspective, the Arctic is not an exception. As seen in this chapter, international conflicts involving the North triggered States to invest and develop knowledge and technology to have valuable tools against other players, also in this part of the world.

Despite not being characterized by VS’ friendly approach, also these wars and confrontations highlighted how the Arctic had passed from a mere transition point to a geostrategic center, which the local States aimed to control in order to further their interests. The necessity of being prepared to secure the territory also led to an exponential development in different scientific fields and improved technologies that, ultimately, have facilitated the understanding of the Arctic¹²⁷.

To a certain extent, this process can be compared with many important moments in the history of the Mediterranean, where several civilizations had

¹²⁴ ‘The Phenomenon of Soviet Science’ 122 <<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdf/10.1086/591871>> accessed 15 March 2022.

¹²⁵ *ibid* 132.

¹²⁶ Alex Roland, ‘War and Technology - Foreign Policy Research Institute’ <<https://www.fpri.org/article/2009/02/war-and-technology/>> accessed 12 February 2022.

¹²⁷ Durfee and Johnstone (n 28) 107–108.

also conflicts or tense relations, which resulted nonetheless into additional cultural developments, fruitful diversity and productive crossovers of ideas. The rise and fall of different leading Mediterranean civilizations have certainly been a product and a producer of wars and political conflicts; nonetheless, dramatic occurrences like these are also part of the development of new solutions, new approaches, and new civilizations¹²⁸.

The combination of the natural features with human interactions has shaped how cultures and ideas develop¹²⁹. In other words, geography and climate are among the bases determining how different civilizations can interact, adapt and change, also as regards their social imaginaries. Examples include ancient Egypt, which was one of the world's first major civilizations and had a tremendous impact in many different areas (e.g., mathematics, medicine, engineering and agricultural techniques)¹³⁰. Similarly, the Phoenicians, who developed the first version of alphabet, later improved by the Greeks, also had a crucial role in the physical exploration and cultural enrichment of the Mediterranean region, as they sailed and established centers of commercial trade and religious worship from the Levant to the Atlantic coast of Iberia¹³¹. Not to mention Greeks and Romans, who shaped so many cultural, political ideas and values that are still embedded in the western/ized societies of our day—not least the alphabet in which this thesis is being written.

Lastly, we may want to consider the European Renaissance, a period that promoted scientific development and cultural-economic globalization, putting the Mediterranean basin, once again, at the frontline of human development in countless areas¹³². Albeit comprising terrible conflicts and horrible cruelty in various forms, all of these historical periods brought nevertheless new ideas, new perspectives, and mixed the extant imaginaries in creative ways, making it possible to establish connections and routes between different cultures and

¹²⁸ Braudel (n 41) 223.

¹²⁹ Richard W Clement, 'The Mediterranean: What, Why, and How' (2012) 20 *Mediterranean Studies* 114, 115.

¹³⁰ 'Ancient Egypt | History, Government, Culture, Map, & Facts | Britannica' <<https://www.britannica.com/place/ancient-Egypt>> accessed 22 February 2022.

¹³¹ 'Phoenicians and the Making of the Mediterranean' (*Popular history books*, 18 February 2022) <<https://popularhistorybooks.com/2022/02/18/phoenicians-and-the-making-of-the-mediterranean/>> accessed 20 February 2022.

¹³² Clement (n 129) 116.

places. Such being the way of the world, as far as it can be gauged, warts and all.

3.1.3 Other Arctic States

In addition to the big players, other Arctic States had their own distinctive interests and approaches concerning Polar matters, well before WW2. Sweden and Norway, in particular, saw the Arctic territory as an important space to promote their national and commercial influence. Norway, on the one hand, did this chiefly through diplomacy and the expansion of its sovereignty, which could guarantee access to valuable natural resources, especially fishing rights around the North Atlantic Islands (Jan Mayen and Svalbard, for instance). Sweden, on the other hand, took advantage of its strategic location by assuming a neutral political position and promoting Arctic policies aimed at international collaboration in scientific research, to which its universities and research educations would contribute in a crucial way¹³³.

With the Nazi occupation of Norway and Denmark, the strategies of many Arctic States got interrupted, while Swedish neutrality could still aspire to promoting its own. However, after WWII, Sweden and the other Nordic countries did not have the human and economic resources to keep pushing their envelope in the Arctic, and only later did they restart being important actors in the region¹³⁴. Meanwhile, a new conflict arose, the Cold War, and, with it, a sharp decline in the interactions between Circumpolar States, since there was a trenchant ideological division between those belonging to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)¹³⁵, and the Warsaw Treaty's leader, i.e., the Soviet Union. For their part, Finland and Sweden were non-aligned and kept a low-intensity level of cooperation with both sides¹³⁶.

¹³³ 'The History of the Nordic Region | Nordic Cooperation' <<https://www.norden.org/en/information/history-nordic-region>> accessed 9 March 2022.

¹³⁴ Doel and others (n 105) 72.

¹³⁵ Which includes the United States of America, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, and Norway

¹³⁶ Níels Einarsson (n 95) 207–208.

3.1.4 The End of Cold War as New Beginning

At a global level, it was not until the beginning of the end of the Cold War that the PMI had a more visible and tangible impact on international politics. As a matter of fact, it was the Soviet prime minister Mikhail Gorbachev who pointed out in 1987 that “The Arctic is not only the Arctic Ocean but also... the place where Eurasian, North American, and Asian Pacific regions meet, where the frontiers come close to one another and the interests of states... cross.”¹³⁷ . Also known as the *Murmansk Speech*, this statement reflects the way of thinking proposed by VS, 60 years earlier, whereby the Arctic territories should be seen as collaborating players rather than separate adversaries.

From a historical perspective, Gorbachev’s declaration marked the Soviet desire of ending the Cold War at large, as well as the decades of western and eastern separation and mistrust, and of underlining how States could and should rethink their *modus operandi*, i.e., being more cooperative. In this particular case, the Arctic could be used as a catalyzer to promote good diplomatic relations, due to its geographic features *qua* shared connection point across continents and nations. As mentioned in 3.1.1., the importance of the 1986 Reykjavík summit cannot be underestimated, for it was a turning point toward the reconciliation between the US and the Soviet Union.

The end of the Iron Curtain era was a key-event for a new period of opening and internationalism between East and West, notably thanks to the union of the two Germanies in 1990, the disappearance of the Berlin wall, and the engagement of the two former blocs in political, economic and social terms, which helped to develop a new cooperative and diplomatic reality¹³⁸. The end of the Cold War era brought peace and stability to the Arctic region. Gorbachev’s and Reagan’s visions and the ensuing diplomatic actions were, most definitely, turning points towards a friendlier Arctic, where peace and stability led to economic and social development among the local communities¹³⁹.

¹³⁷ Steinberg and others (n 25) 7.

¹³⁸ Tim Marshall, *Divided: Why We’re Living in an Age of Walls* (Elliott and Thompson Limited 2018) 177–183.

¹³⁹ Mary Durfee and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, *Arctic Governance in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group 2019) 3.

However, it is important to retain the awareness that the motivations behind the eventual increments in Arctic expertise were different between States and across historical phases as well as disciplinary areas. On the one hand, the development of the natural sciences offered more information about the real potential of the northernmost region in terms of resources and accessibility ¹⁴⁰. On the other hand, from a sociological point of view, the conflicts between different States, and the consequent militarization and colonization aiming at increased national security, labeled the Arctic as a decisive place, if not an attractive one, to some extent. In addition, this was also the beginning of the Indigenous Peoples' affirmation of their presence within the Arctic political panorama. All of these points constituted a "proto-Polar Mediterranean Imaginary" ¹⁴¹ because, in spite of the Circumpolar North not being yet a commercial and cultural hub, the whole region started to have major relevance in global society and shifted into a friendlier area of concrete interconnections and relations.

3.2 The Inclusion of the Indigenous Legacy

The "Far North" occupies approximately 8 percent of Earth's total surface and is the home of almost 4 million people, distributed along 8 States' territories ¹⁴². These zones have long been considered as national and global 'peripheries', due their distance from the respective State capitals and the world's biggest urban centers. However, these peripheral sites never stopped their mutual interactions. The Bering Strait Sea, for instance, has been a polar hotspot for many centuries and was the stage of "frequent travels and mutual visits between the two continents, trade, marriages, and occasionally warfare created an interacting network between indigenous societies, which both the US and Soviet governments acknowledged." ¹⁴³.

¹⁴⁰ Níels Einarsson (n 95) 24.

¹⁴¹ This is a personal concept that emerged while researching. Key-events that triggered major changes about how the Arctic should be imagined.

¹⁴² 'Arctic Pollution Issues: A State of the Arctic Environment Report | AMAP' <<https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/arctic-pollution-issues-a-state-of-the-arctic-environment-report/67>> accessed 5 March 2021.

¹⁴³ Níels Einarsson (n 95) 207.

The 20th century was marked by numerous events that neglect or even contradict notions such as those of human rights, inclusiveness of different identities, races, and genders, or allowing certain customs to be continued across generations. Also, in the Arctic, Indigenous Peoples are a good example of those many historical minorities that were left, more often than not, without a voice. Nevertheless, they kept representing the longest-live human identity and cultural legacy of what the Arctic actually is. In fact, they have been for many centuries the true, if not the only, transnational actors of the northmost region, with their own rights, territories and, fundamentally, a right to self-determination, whether acknowledged or not by later institutional actors in the Arctic region ¹⁴⁴. Moreover, they have been “Important actors in reducing the tension” ¹⁴⁵, even if, or perhaps because of the fact, that “their homelands are often of strategic importance, both in military terms and as a result of their natural resource endowments.”¹⁴⁶. The influence and role of Indigenous Peoples of the Circumpolar North in providing their unique approaches to solve regional problems started during the 1980s, a little before the end of the Cold War. In particular, environmental concerns and devolution of powers for more autonomous regions in Canada, Alaska and other Nordic regions accentuated the shifting mentality of a Northern identity, open to the search of a genuinely sustainable kind of cosmopolitan socio-economic development ¹⁴⁷.

Under this respect, VS was one of the first explorers to promote the increased knowledge and connection with the native populations, whose customs and traditions he adopted, whether for the sake of personal growth, scientific interest or mere survival: “He learned to live as an Eskimo whenever and wherever that was better and safer than living as a white intruder in Arctic.” ¹⁴⁸ To paraphrase a well-known adagio, when you are in the Arctic, do as the Arctic Peoples do.

By the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, the changed mindset regarding Indigenous populations started to turn at least some of the

¹⁴⁴ Joan Nymand Larsen (ed), *Arctic Human Development Report: Regional Processes and Global Linkages* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2014) 486.

¹⁴⁵ Níels Einarsson (n 95) 210.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Lassi Heininen, ‘The End of the Post-Cold War in the Arctic’ (2011) 40 *Nordia Geographical Publications* 31, 33–34.

¹⁴⁸ Hanson (n 1) 6.

extant tables. Through their “resiliency”¹⁴⁹, Indigenous Peoples from all over the Arctic have been capable to politically organize themselves and fighting for their interests and preservation of their legacy in the North. As a product of that organization, international recognition, the clarification of the Indigenous legal status and the recognition of their respective Human Rights have been, steadily, achieved¹⁵⁰.

Indigenous organizations have been flourishing and cooperating together, since they share common goals and concerns. Environmental matters, right to land and control over natural resources are an important part of their culture and identity, and constitute the basis to plan for a positive future. The creation of a variety of institutional networks have contributed for different Indigenous organizations to be in contact and, together, focus on such common interests (especially environmental, cultural and political matters). A direct consequence of such organizations is an increasement on cooperative reports, forums, and meetings, where the inputs brought by them can be heard and help into the decision-making process of the Arctic States in which these populations reside¹⁵¹.

3.3 The Transition to a Contemporary Arctic Imaginary

Despite the scarcity of actual references to VS’s PMI, the historical events materialized *de facto* his idea of the Arctic as a geostrategic point to connect peripheries rather than separating remote places¹⁵². Thus, the improved

¹⁴⁹ The word “Resiliency” is a very common concept within the Arctic itself, used in many reports and descriptions namely when referring Indigenous Peoples. It is always related with the capacity of the Arctic players in adapting to the demands brought by the rough environment, globalization, climate changes and other threats that menace their symbiosis with the surroundings.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Indigenous Peoples’ (Uni of Lapland)
<<https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples>>
accessed 9 March 2022.

¹⁵¹ ‘Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat (IPS) - Icelandic Arctic Cooperation Network’
<<https://arcticiceland.is/en/arctic-council/indigenous-peoples-secretariat>> accessed 15 June 2021.

¹⁵² Oran Young, ‘Governing the Arctic: From Cold War Theater to Mosaic of Cooperation’ (2005) 11 *Global Governance* 9, 10.

knowledge, accessibility, good diplomatic relations and, lastly, the recognition of the Indigenous communities as transnational Arctic players, became the basis for the contemporary mindset, which largely coincides with VS' PM imaginary, as this was proposed in the 1920s. Basic peace treaties and war resolutions were now part of the Arctic's past, and new trends were emerging, aiming to connect all the northern actors, as well as other potential players, for a more globalized and active peaceful region. Hopefully, the current war in Ukraine will not modify radically these trends, considering the central role played by Russia as an Arctic State.

From the first reference of PM (during the inter-war period) until the first decade of the 21st century, the North slowly became largely a zone of dialogue and cooperation, promoting all kinds of environmental protections and cooperative projects for sustainable development in the Arctic¹⁵³. The stability and conception of an interactive Arctic marks a shift from the State-power-focused perspective "into more 'sophisticated policy' on many fields of 'low politics'", where different actors are in constant dialogue and, consequently, peaceful negotiation¹⁵⁴.

It is important to underline the absence of an exact point in time where the PM imaginary can be said to have come into force, because, although the end of the Cold War marked an important milestone, at least insofar as the following decades (including the first part of the 21st century) are considered as part of the past, however recent. With the development of converging trends and helpful technologies, multiple Arctic events, forums and reports have blossomed after the end of the Cold War, emphasizing the beginning of a new era of collaboration and interconnection in which the Arctic States and related organizations have managed to talk to one another, despite some occasional flag-waving and electoral posturing, the most dramatic instance of which is probably the current war in Ukraine, the future impact of which cannot be predicted.

Initiatives focusing on Polar matters and respective strategies of cooperation have taken different shapes but are nevertheless legion. For example, we can list: the foundation of both the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991 (Rovaniemi Declaration) and the Arctic Council in 1996 (Ottawa Declaration), involving simple intergovernmental

¹⁵³ Niels Einarsson (n 95) 212.

¹⁵⁴ Heininen (n 147) 33.

agreements; the Northern Forum of 1991, giving voice to subnational subjects and their respective interests, usually different from their national governments; the Inuit Circumpolar Conference of 1977 and the International Arctic Science Committee of 1990; or even the launching of the University of the Arctic (2001), which did not have a governmental root but has constituted an important platform for the research, discussion, and promotion of Arctic-related matters, ranging from social work to natural science ¹⁵⁵.

To conclude, we can state that the past of PM imaginary is characterized by a long period of gradual unveiling of an old yet new region to the global southerners and, correspondingly, of increasing recognition of its potential as a strategic point for their geopolitical, economic, natural and socio-scientific aims. Shifting from threatened confrontation to ordinary cooperation, the *raison d'être* of VS' PM imaginary, i.e., making the Arctic a stage for peaceful cooperation *vis-à-vis* the many challenges of today's world, has both been played out in concrete institutional reality and built upon. Awareness of its deeper meaning and broader significance may be crucial for preserving the Arctic's identity and the well-being of its local actors, while at the same time meeting the difficulties that cannot but arise in the course of time.

¹⁵⁵ Young (n 152) 9.

4 The Present of Polar Mediterranean Imaginary

“The Mediterranean was certainly not within the measure of sixteenth-century man; it was only at the cost of much effort that the mastered its immense area, much as twentieth century man has found difficult to master the Pacific”¹⁵⁶ Based on this statement from the great French historian Fernand Braudel, we could conveniently rephrase it: “as man from the twenty-first century has been mastering the Arctic...”

Chapter 4 analyzes how the Arctic is currently understood by its players and how the process of making the North a germane instantiation of VS’ PMI needs time to solidify. Since VS’ first predictions in the 1920’s, in fact, more than a century had passed, and new challenges, opportunities and decisions based on the trends that he prophetically anticipated will force the populations of the North to readjust their lifestyle in order to keep their cultural identity alive.

Furthermore, the increased global networking and environmental shifts that are happening at a very accelerated pace in today’s world mean also that the societies that have stakes in the Arctic are permanently rearranging their imaginaries, and hence their policies, aims, praxes and institutions. Such a fluidity, inevitably, makes it hard for anyone to make credible predictions, however commonplace or even expected these may be in contemporary academia. I myself will play this game a little in the next Chapter, but I must warn the reader that all such forecasts must be taken with a large pinch of salt.

4.1 Globalization

Globalization is the process of increasing economic, political, and socio-cultural connections across our planet, where time and space are compressed due the increased efficiency of communication and, consequently, the transmission of information¹⁵⁷. Despite being considered a contemporary subject, globalizing phenomena have always been present in Western history,

¹⁵⁶ Braudel (n 41) 354.

¹⁵⁷ Nymand Larsen (n 144) 402.

as exemplified by the explorations of undiscovered parts of the world since the day of the Phoenician or Greek civilizations, including the long and tortuous history of the discovery of the far North.

VS is himself a vivid example of how globalization had already affected the Arctic for quite some time, and his legacy contributed crucial new data and pioneering reports towards the further unveiling of a less-and-less unknown region. In other words, the Canadian-Icelandic anthropologist helped in the creation of a stronger link between the North and southern societies that had limited, erroneous or no information regarding the Arctic. As explained, he made numerous predictions of a more connected Arctic reality, where different regions would be more accessible to different types of interaction. While feigning caution, he played the game of foreseeing the future that academics still play today. As he wrote: “I do not profess to see very far into the future, but...”¹⁵⁸

VS also recognized that globalization in the North would not only be a continuous process but, above all, a decisive one: “No human being of any race had set foot on the ice in this longitude so far from the coast of Alaska (...) We were about to settle the great question: Is the Arctic a barren waste incapable of supporting life, or is it a hostile only for those who persist in thinking and living like southerners?”¹⁵⁹. The reader should be able to figure out what the answer to this interrogative that VS’ explorations produced in the end.

However, the first use of the adjective “global” in English was in 1892 in the pages of *Harper’s Magazine* and, in 1961, the actual word “globalization” was introduced in *Webster’s Dictionary*, shifting the French concept of “mondialisation”¹⁶⁰. Notwithstanding these early forays, the widespread use across the world of the term “Globalization” began only after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent, if only partial, collapse of communism (Viet Nam and the People’s Republic of China are still around, as a matter of fact)¹⁶¹. This particular event led to a more specific, if not updated meaning, whereby “globalization” is strictly related to an improved connectivity through

¹⁵⁸ Stefansson (n 11) 66.

¹⁵⁹ Stefansson (n 24) 166.

¹⁶⁰ Jorge Nascimento Rodrigues and Tessaleno C Devezas, *Pioneers of Globalization: Why the Portuguese Surprised the World* (Centro Atlantico 2007) 25.

¹⁶¹ Roland Robertson and Kathleen E White, ‘What Is Globalization?’ in George Ritzer (ed), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2008) 55.

information and communication systems (including internet technologies) and expanded global trade networks based upon liberal-capitalist principles. The agency and effects of the global trend at issue embrace a wide spectrum of actors, among which are Arctic States, governments and peoples taking part in securing the resources required to meet their perceived socio-economic necessities, while also establishing different new relations and improved accessibility to information channels, whilst also falling back into barbaric warfare on some sad occasions.

4.1.1 Globalization as a Northern Trend

The far-Northern areas are influenced by the globalization phenomena to a similar extent as many other regions of the planet. Yet, the Arctic presents rather unique features that, together, influence the globalizing factors in highly specific ways. For one, its population is not concentrated in big cities, and there are only few urban centers with more than 100,000 inhabitants. For another, in the 8 Arctic nations, only Iceland is considered a fully Arctic nation, the rest being peripheral zones far away from their capitals and centers of national power ¹⁶². Thus, by being a vast and sparsely populated territory, the major challenge of the globalization forces at play is to have a robust and connective socio-economic and/or institutional structure capable to provide, on the one hand, assistance to the local population (e.g., healthcare, schools, mobility networks) and, on the other hand, to ensure the communication with those urban centers that can enhance the regional socio-economic development and the promotion of additional partnerships (e.g., tourism, mining projects, transcontinental shipping) . Furthermore, the fact of being a relatively newly discovered territory implies that the established networks within the Arctic and between non-Arctic players are still insufficiently rooted, and this leaves the North in a volatile grey area where globalization can either help to strengthen and enable a variety of opportunities towards the future, or erase the cultural legacy of the region and its Indigenous peoples.

¹⁶² Nikolas Sellheim, 'The Scramble for the Poles. The Geopolitics of the Arctic and Antarctic. Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall. 2016. Cambridge: Polity Press. Xv + 212 p, Illustrated, Softcover. ISBN 978-0-7456-5245-0. \$24.95.' (2017) 53 *Polar Record* 635, 32–38.

From their perspective, the Arctic communities located in the same continent as other big metropolitan centers were largely undeveloped and unaware of other realities for a very long time, and it was only during the 20th century that firm social, cultural and economic connections started to take shape, and the expeditions of the late 19th century and first half of the 20th assumed a front-role in the launch of this process, which has peaked in today's new globalized era. As our author of reference wrote: "I, without going to sleep at all, had walked out of the twentieth century into the intellectual and cultural world of men and women of an age far earlier than (king) Arthur's" ¹⁶³.

The preservation of an ethnic identity is, paradoxically, clearly committed to its established traditions and customs but, at the same time, it may also be willing to be impacted by a globalized world, which can offer better chances for survival and/or well-being in many areas (e.g., medical expertise, hygiene standards, food preservation, old-age care). Globalization, for instance, has had an essential role in connecting and facilitating strategies towards a more united northern region, also as regards its historic inhabitants. A future with a much-improved access to life-enabling information (e.g., obstetrical knowledge) and expertise (e.g., garbage disposal) will help to setup new socio-cultural and institutional networks, which will also have a decisive impact in the Arctic development and, at the same time, in the preservation of its particular characteristics and populations, if this is pursued ^{164 165}.

If widely implemented and managed, the fulfillment of such potentialities can mirror a balanced synergy between the world-wide and region-wide levels, where northern communities maintain their pa identity while being well-adapted and prepared to the future challenges. This constitutes, of course, a positive scenario where every stakeholder is able to adapt to the current context and manages to take advantage of the multiple opportunities that come up. However, the future is open and unpredictable, which opens the possibilities of mismanagement and stagnancy, if not worse. So, my presentation of VS' PMI emerges in the attempt of potentiating positive opportunities and call for attention to possible obstacles towards a truly life-enabling development of the various Arctic communities.

¹⁶³ Stefansson (n 24) 114.

¹⁶⁴ Niels Einarsson (n 95) ch 3.

¹⁶⁵ Natalia Loukacheva (ed), *Polar Law Textbook: Natalia Loukacheva, Ed* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2010) 222.

Finally, the global trend requires time to be comprehended and to produce, effectively, visible changes in the communities. On the basis of VS expedition diaries, it is possible to observe that, during the beginning of the 20th century, the globalizing incursions into the inhospitable Arctic territories would take years, the communication with the headquarters was limited, and it could take entire seasons to obtain a proper response, mainly when compared with southern regions. For example, as mentioned in 3.1., the anthropologist took an entire year before knowing of the occurrence of World War I (“from the isolation and peace of the North, I had come to a place that received a wireless news bulletin every day at noon”) ¹⁶⁶.

4.1.2 Fields of Arctic Globalization

As it happens, the ongoing globalization of the North signifies today at least three main fields of global interdependency: economic, political, and socio-cultural. ¹⁶⁷ All three are mutually related.

Economic

The Arctic economy is a unique case around the globe, due to the geographical location and a privileged access to a considerable variety of natural resources – fisheries, forestry, oil, and gas ¹⁶⁸ – that constitute the backbone for the development of the regional and global economic systems, by providing the key-resources (primary sector) for manufacturing (secondary sector) in many areas. Therefore, the increased international interest in the exploration and exploitation of the Arctic resources makes the North a region of interest to many multinational companies, the decision-making and concerns of which are focused on international markets rather the local interests ¹⁶⁹.

For instance, the Klondike gold rush of 1896 – 1900 had, indeed, marked the beginning of mixing modern Arctic economic potentialities with broader globalization processes. Significantly, major transportation infrastructure

¹⁶⁶ Stefansson (n 24) 211.

¹⁶⁷ Tuomas Suutarinen, ‘Socio-Economic Restructuring of a Peripheral Mining Community in the Russian North’ (2013) 36 *Polar Geography* 326.

¹⁶⁸ Mary Durfee and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, *Arctic Governance in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group 2019) 119.

¹⁶⁹ Nymand Larsen (n 144) 403.

(steamship traffic and railways) was built with the goal of connecting Dawson City to the Pacific Ocean, and the construction of this network also encouraged other mining-related developments in the region ¹⁷⁰. A simple example of the importance of settling a connective chain among regions can pump the development of a region and create the base for future investments, which create opportunities (e.g., diverse employment options) as well as challenges (e.g., pollution).

It should be noted that small-scale economies have a hard time facing the competition of such big players and, also, engaging with such players does not always offer the same financial outcomes for the northern populations as they do for the southern ones or, at least, the individuals who reap the lion's share of these economic enterprises. At the same time, however, it is quite clear that the local Arctic communities will no longer settle for the kind of subsistence to which their ancestors were confined. Therefore, as written by a contemporary researcher: "A growing consensus is that social and economic development strategies in the Arctic must reconcile a postcolonial paradigm of the locally-oriented development and realities of contemporary capitalism, including pressures and competition imposed by globalization" ¹⁷¹.

Economic diversification within the Arctic territories has been judged to be a crucial element to ensure a robust local development and increase the capacity of resilience against potential economic crisis. Hence, the inclusion of non-mono-based industries not only provides diverse sources of income but, fundamentally, gives to the regions an identity and a variety of opportunities that can, for one, stop the migration of local inhabitants to more southern territories and/or urban centers ¹⁷².

The relation between leading economic powerhouses and governments' decision-making is very tight in actual practice, and it also includes clashes of competing interests and the cultural imperative of seeking profit above all else. On the one hand, then, the economy is supposed to be the basis for the pecuniary wealth and the overall development of a modern society. Therefore,

¹⁷⁰ Lee Huskey and Chris Southcott, "'That's Where My Money Goes': Resource Production and Financial Flows in the Yukon Economy' (2016) 6 *The Polar Journal* 11, 16.

¹⁷¹ Andrey Petrov, 'Exploring the Arctic's "Other Economies": Knowledge, Creativity and the New Frontier' (2016) 6 *The Polar Journal* 1, 55.

¹⁷² Nymand Larsen (n 144) 69–72.

it is in the governments' best interest to promote and welcome large private companies and their respective investments, in order to explore and exploit the local resources. On the other hand, it is crucial to guarantee a fair balance between the profits of the companies and the deeper needs of the affected communities, meaning that the local governments have to have a strong role in the process of decision-making to ensure policies that protect local human and cultural interests, as well as fostering a humane and sustainable regional development. As two contemporary researchers have written:

[A]s an economy grows, there are three factors that increase the local resident share. First, increasing scale provides more activities and services which make a community a more desirable place to live. Second, a growing market makes it possible for more and diverse firms to locate there. Finally, the scale of resource activity may by reducing costs have a positive effect on the development of further resource projects. The potential of future employment provides an important anchor for workers in the resource industries. ¹⁷³.

For example, “The Northern Slope Strategy” exemplifies the communion between local governments and major oil companies, and how the latter’s profits from the extraction of petroleum have had a positive impact in the overall economy and social developments of the region. The proceedings from the taxation of oil companies are aimed at solving the so-called “resource curse”, whereby countries and/or communities, also in the Arctic regions, can become victims of a nonrenewable single-resource-based economy ¹⁷⁴. Thus, the creation of “Institutions that secure a share of the value of resource production and spend these wisely are the basis for any Arctic development strategy. The North Slope strategy was built around the creation of two institutions, the NSB and the ASRC. The actions of these institutions will influence the long-term well-being of the local population.” ¹⁷⁵. The promotion of such policies gives to the locals more power in decision-making processes,

¹⁷³ Huskey and Southcott (n 170) 27.

¹⁷⁴ Suutarinen (n 167) 332–333.

¹⁷⁵ Lee Huskey, ‘An Arctic Development Strategy? The North Slope Inupiat and the Resource Curse’ (2018) 39 *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d’études du développement* 89, 5.

since they are the ones that, hopefully, may know what the wisest priorities for investment should be in their communities.

Economic globalization may also have an important and positive effect in the Arctic societies by increasing the speed and breadth of life-enabling development, international labor mobility and economic growth, including the tourism industry ¹⁷⁶. Already in VS works we can read countless references to the beauty and singularity of the far North, instead of its older trite description as “unhabitable and worthless” ¹⁷⁷. Thus, the perception, protection and promotion of features which are not possible to find anywhere else around the globe should become the very *raison d'être* whereby to raise the aesthetic and environmental awareness of the communities in the Arctic region, where places of special beauty are often regarded as possessing special spiritual or religious value as well ¹⁷⁸.

The appeal for economic investment all around the far North is economically justified by the geostrategic location of the Arctic Ocean and the possibility of the far North being an economic hub ideal for transportation, insofar as it connects 3 different continents and 2 oceans. However, to be ethically, legally and politically justified, global connections and profit-maximization by exploitation of the Arctic resources must also be able to secure the local populations' first needs, such as food and health-care services, as well as many secondary ones, lest they meet opposition and resistance. Remarkably, VS developed arguments on this subject in an almost prescient chapter devoted entirely to “Arctic Industries” and focusing on the economic future of the region and, crucially, on how its economic development largely depends on the solid development of local infrastructures: “Local food production is fundamental in every permanently occupied land. It furnishes a basis for a stable population, it makes easy the development of industries which, although based in minerals, cannot well flourish when all the food needed has to be brought from a great distance” ¹⁷⁹.

Other significant aspects, like avoiding resource leakages, improving the quality of services and infrastructures, and stimulating economic diversity within Polar communities, are also mentioned by VS as essential to a robust

¹⁷⁶ Nymand Larsen (n 144) 405.

¹⁷⁷ Stefansson (n 11) 71.

¹⁷⁸ Loukacheva (n 165) 222–226.

¹⁷⁹ Stefansson (n 11) 130.

Arctic economy and a sustainable development, i.e., one that is capable to safeguard the future of the region and its populations, meaning eventually that, with the globalization processes, the Arctic can be a territory willing as well as capable to offer good services and facilities, not only to the locals but to all the outlanders that may be in transit . VS, again, underlines the importance of settling sustainable structures to allow the Arctic economic prosperity: “the development of food production in the North is, therefore, the logical first step in the development of its mines and oil fields”¹⁸⁰.

Socio-cultural

The cultural and social impacts of globalization in the northern region are both delicate and complex processes, due primarily to the diversity of the local communities, spread out over a very large area, and sharing only some beliefs and priorities¹⁸¹. Therefore, the cultural heritage and extant social relations also have a relevant role to play in the development of today’s Arctic and can also give a unique portrait of what does actually mean to live in the North. VS seemed aware of such aspects, which include seemingly minor yet telling insights: “in fact, once I was properly dressed by the Eskimos, I found that the Arctic winter seemed more pleasant than winter in North Dakota”¹⁸². There exists now also a substantial difference in the demography between rural and urban centers, where remote regions tend to lack of a robust economy, typically resulting in the loss of inhabitants, the disappearance of their traditions and, consequently, the eventual vanishing of isolated communities that had successfully survived in those areas for innumerable generations. Such challenges demand a serious reflection and, possibly, much planning, in order to avoid the extinction of unique cultural legacies¹⁸³. To a certain extent, it is understandable that, even just to achieve the cooperative and peaceful paradigm of a relevant socio-cultural hub analogous to the Mediterranean region, the Arctic populations must have the same resilience that characterized them throughout centuries of relative isolation. Whether they like it or not, in fact, “Arctic cultures are influenced by southern rules and values”, and it is

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Nymand Larsen (n 144) 416.

¹⁸² Stefansson (n 24) 93.

¹⁸³ Nymand Larsen (n 144) 416.

highly unlikely that these influences will reduce or cease in the foreseeable future ¹⁸⁴.

It is not possible to dissociate the socio-cultural aspect of globalization and the IP living throughout the Circumpolar North. As a matter of fact, indigenous populations are spread out all over 7 of the 8 Arctic States (none is present in Iceland). These communities have been living in the Arctic for many centuries and their homelands do not exactly correspond to the boundaries of the modern Arctic states ¹⁸⁵. Their presence precedes the European (or American) colonizers, which confers them a singular status of a community that have engaged and created unique ethnic identities in the Arctic and its conspicuously different attributes – its biodiversity, landscapes, isolation, etc. Furthermore, the very concept of resilience and adaptability in the face of the challenges imposed by living in such a remote and unpredictable region, has also had a considerable weight in the indigenous legacy, cultural praxes, social organisation and belief-systems ¹⁸⁶. Their culture and traditions, i.e., their social imaginaries, are a product of centuries and multiple challenges faced in order to preserve the community. Any viable alliance between native knowledge and today's regional governments within the ongoing globalization trends must take care of integrating these long-lived imaginaries and promote a better adapted and responsive communities ¹⁸⁷. The alternative, which has been known to many Arctic populations, is a painful and tragic one. Hence, Arctic communities are resilient and a top-down approach where national governments impose their rules neglecting the history and legacy of communities it must not be option. Social imaginaries are an important tool to preserve the identity of cultural groups, especially in the current Arctic, the influence of globalization trend could also foster and intensify circumpolar connections ¹⁸⁸.

Historically, the world's indigenous peoples share a most significant common feature, i.e., the colonial experience ¹⁸⁹. The Arctic is no exception.

¹⁸⁴ Niels Einarsson (n 95) 45.

¹⁸⁵ Durfee and Johnstone (n 28) 52–54.

¹⁸⁶ Loukacheva (n 165) 174–176.

¹⁸⁷ Robin Bronen and others, 'Usteq: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Social and Physical Sciences to Coproduce Knowledge and Support Community-Based Adaptation' (2020) 43 *Polar Geography* 188, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Niels Einarsson (n 95) 84.

¹⁸⁹ Danish anthropologist Frank Sejersen cited in Durfee & Johnstone (2019).

When the colonial powers claimed the northern lands along with their resources, they undermined, sometimes forcibly, the native cultures and traditions ¹⁹⁰. Without going any deeper into this sorrowful subject, the PMI promotes the logic of globalization as a positive force, i.e., it conceives of more- and better-connected polar territories and human communities, involving constructively both Arctic and non-Arctic players. However, it is undeniable that Western customs and influences have often been reshaping, sometimes violently, the native traditions, values, ways of life and priorities. A colonialist approach and the subjugation of entire ethnic communities to remote central governments do not belong to a friendly and mutual interactive imaginary, which is what VS envisioned ¹⁹¹. Based on that, the inclusion of traditional/local knowledge in the socio-cultural identity of the Arctic is therefore a positive, if not morally mandatory, factor towards any promotion of globalization in the region.

To succeed, at least from a socio-cultural perspective that is sensitive towards human rights and human dignity, globalization must therefore be an inclusive and participation-based process, capable of considering all the different actors at play, and their own special history and relations. It is only in this way that it is possible to guarantee the balance between cultural heterogeneity and homogeneity in the Arctic, and avoid the immense cruelties witnessed in other historical settings marked by colonialism (e.g., the extermination and marginalisation of American natives, or the current human rights violations of minority populations in Burma and the PRC).

Political

As mentioned, the global interest in the Arctic has been increasing exponentially since the early 20th century, when VS and other explorers' expeditions were sponsored by national governments, academic and museum centers, all of which urged a more and more thorough and, at times, intrusive acquisition of information about the remote North and its inhabitants. Such a trend can be considered to be still at work in the contemporary politics of the Arctic, as also exemplified by the present thesis and the academic context in which it originates. On top of that, as was also shown, global wars and conflicts gave the North an important role as a geostrategic location. Parallely, the Arctic became a hotspot for the promotion of novel diplomatic relations and a

¹⁹⁰ Loukacheva (n 165) 135.

¹⁹¹ Stefansson (n 9) 423–425.

site where many governments feel the need of investing, creating infrastructure, and making policies to safeguard their northernmost territories and national interests.

As a matter of fact, in VS legacy, his lectures have the goal unveil the outputs of his expeditions and are also in connection with the promotion of the Arctic as a place of economic opportunity and investment as a resourceful territory namely for cattle breeding in the Arctic pasture lands (“musk oxen, caribou and reindeer”¹⁹²)¹⁹³. VS himself remained in contact with important figures of the political sphere, proposing ideas and suggestions for future investment and creation of South-North networks and, mostly, international relations, as a letter to the colonel Theodore Roosevelt evidences: “I thought would be of great importance to the world as whole and of special importance to those countries that have northerly possessions- the United States (Alaska), Canada, Denmark (Greenland), and Russia (Siberia)”¹⁹⁴.

The Mediterreanist approach of the Arctic suggested by the Icelandic-Canadian anthropologist was an original and anthropologically informed perspective that still fits in the international (and domestic) political relations of our day, since the northern nations share a lot of opportunities and similarities that could be explored and enhanced, whilst including the local inhabitants’ priorities and preoccupations in the picture¹⁹⁵. Naturally, locally oriented strategies towards regional development and protection of local interests are crucial for the future of the Arctic. On the one hand, more autonomous and regional governments reduce the dependency of external political and economic subjects. On the other hand, this autonomy itself can be seen as an investment aiming at facilitating a strategic development of each interested zone. Nevertheless, this is only achievable if there is an investment made by governmental entities that know what the priorities for the region are.

¹⁹² Stefansson (n 24) 223.

¹⁹³ This also emphasizes VS effort on informing national governments about the economic prospects of the Arctic and, how the investment in those fields could be beneficial for the economic growth of the region.

¹⁹⁴ Stefansson (n 11) 163.

¹⁹⁵ Hanson (n 1) 106–108.

As many reports indicate, as far as the local inhabitants are concerned, these priorities are education, infrastructure, and services ^{196 197}.

The “North Slope Strategy” appears, once again, as a telling solution and worthy example, whereby the regional governments are given competency for decision-making through the creation of two institutions (the North Slope Borough and the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation). The actions of these institutions will, inevitably, influence the long-term well-being of the local population ¹⁹⁸, and thereby instantiate a clear example of the mutual interrelation between the 3 globalization pillars hereby addressed.

The Relation of Environment with the Global Trend in the Arctic

With globalization, an increased consciousness about environmental issues has arisen and become a central topic of conversation among the Arctic actors. The world’s scientific communities and many institutional actors have thus promoted the creation of organizations focused specifically on safeguarding the integrity of the Arctic ecosystems from myopic, life-disabling conceptions of socio-economic ‘development’ that pollute the air that people breathe, the waters where they fish, the land grazed by their cattle, and the very bodies of those people and their offspring. These organizations are themselves a facet of the globalization trend because they unite knowledge, information and concerns that are important to both the North and South, even when the special focus of the research projects may be eminently local ¹⁹⁹. So, environmental matters are a main concern within the political and socio-cultural spheres because they have to be linked with policymaking and the northern lifestyles of the local communities ²⁰⁰.

4.2 Networking the Arctic

The investments and effective policymaking for a developed Arctic are strongly sustained by contemporary research and academia, which can bring important inputs to the full comprehension of the region. The knowledge and

¹⁹⁶ Nymand Larsen (n 144) 255–259.

¹⁹⁷ Joan Nymand Larsen (ed), *Arctic Social Indicators: Follow-up to the Arctic Human Development Report* (Nordisk Ministerråd 2010) 305–3 08.

¹⁹⁸ Huskey (n 175) 5.

¹⁹⁹ Durfee and Johnstone (n 28) 248.

²⁰⁰ Bronen and others (n 187) 14–15.

data support the widespread interest in and, consequently, the likely opportunities for genuine life-enabling socio-economic development within the Arctic ²⁰¹. VS own writings hint at ways in which the Arctic peoples have been capable to accept and adjust to the presence of strangers, who are bound to become more and more numerous in the future, given also how “[t]he transpolar route will become more important decade by decade” ²⁰²

To put it another way, the globalization trend can be associated with VS’ concept of a “friendly Arctic” where the North is a positive pole of constructive convergence of different cultures and interests. The necessary skills may already be there. Once again, minor insights by VS may offer a window on these matters: “People were much alike, then, after all, though they came from a great distance. She would accordingly treat me as if I were one of their own people come to visit them afar - and in fact, I was one of their own people...” ²⁰³.

The interaction between native communities themselves is also a positive sign and example of local globalization that can be utilized to face the broader one unfolding today, because it depicts and maintains an Arctic identity, despite the local populations’ own differences. Another good example of the global trend among indigenous players, besides “the salmon berry” (mentioned on 2.1.), is how different Natives communities use their language and dialects to talk about their superstitions and other taboo matters for southerners. Such situation is described by VS: “these things are frowned on by the missionaries has gradually brought about Eskimo belief that, while they are true and efficacious, the ancient charms are wicked.” ²⁰⁴. In fact, due the Christianization in the northmost American territories had resulted in the oppression of “native old beliefs” – “they [the Eskimos] still hold these firm but they hold them in secret, talking about it in the Eskimo language while white men are present are known not to understand what they are saying.” ²⁰⁵. Thus, through the use of a regional language, different communities could communicate, helping to preserve, somehow, their identity. In a more

²⁰¹ Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov and others, ‘Scenarios for the Development of the Arctic Region (2020–2035)’ (2019) 35 Arctic and North 5, 13–15.

²⁰² Stefansson (n 11) 178.

²⁰³ Stefansson (n 24) 115.

²⁰⁴ Stefansson (n 9) 412.

²⁰⁵ *ibid* 409.

globalized world, a suggested “Pan-Arctic” community is necessary to connect different Northern communities with different cultures yet, with the will of preservation of their own heritage. Social imaginaries are a product of connective experiences, therefore if the Arctic players are better connected, they can hold globalization challenges by promoting their ideas and interests²⁰⁶.

The PMI was proposed with the idea of a united and cooperative Arctic region where different cultures and paradigms could meet, co-exist and cooperate, in order to develop the region. For that reason, time is a fundamental component for the construction of a new imaginary within local societies, hence it can take decades, or even centuries, for new concepts to be fully interiorized and made part of the local social imaginary. Reaching a sustainable development in the Far North, reconciling local economies and cultures with global ones, is therefore going to be a complex matter, to say the least²⁰⁷. VS, under this perspective, noted: “We have come to the northward limit commercial progress. There was many a pause but stop to the westward course of empire until we came to the place where East is West. In that sense only is there a northward limit to progress.” Whether this limit is mainly geographic, climatic or socio-cultural and political, future history will tell.

²⁰⁶ Níels Einarsson (n 95) 64.

²⁰⁷ Petrov (n 171) 55.

5 The Future of Polar Mediterranean Imaginary

The Arctic's future is not really predictable, for it depends on the interaction of far too many different variables, many of which are known to be unknown: pivotal social forces, novel political leaderships, unmitigated environmental catastrophes, sudden economic downturns, etc. Thus, observing current trends can only provide some tentative help in figuring out what might actually happen in the future ²⁰⁸.

In the Arctic case, I contend that the understanding of how today's environmental and economic trends are playing out is important to produce an overall idea of what the future of the region may be like, even if such an idea is bound to be hypothetical and cast in very broad strokes. After all, some predictions, however tentative, can prove to be more correct than others. VS's visions of the Arctic as a novel Mediterranean are a good example of a successful game of informed guessing. As a commentator noted: "his ideas were published only twenty years ago, and were then received as being so far ahead of their time as to be fantastic." ²⁰⁹. New perspectives may seem unrealistic, when first proposed. Nevertheless, even if they challenge the prevalent ones and insofar as they are based on solid knowledge, they may eventually gain the upper hand. Indeed, they may be capable of shifting social imaginaries in a relatively short period of time.

As regards the two that I defend, it should be observed that, on the one hand, globalization is a phenomenon that has already allowed many different parts of the globe to become intimately interconnected and interact closely with each other. The increased access to information, goods and services brought by this trend has been directly translated into more and more opportunities for the economic growth which directly affects the quality of life of northern communities by having increased access to different systems (healthcare, academic) and other goods that can improve their lifestyle as well. On the other hand, the effects of climate change are already being felt worldwide in

²⁰⁸ As a matter of fact, as described in Keynes' General Theory and John K. Galbraith's Economics of Innocent Fraud, both of them are accurate sources and fundament the uncertainty about the future of a globalized society strongly supported in economic systems.

²⁰⁹ Hanson (n 1) 230.

the present day, and some of these effects are going to modify dramatically Arctic biodiversity and geography, whatever enlightened ‘green’ policies may be implemented in the near future—or not. Among them, there will ensue the possibility of a better access to/within the North.

Thus, the present Chapter addresses the likely emergence of new shipping routes crossing the Arctic, facilitating also the communication and access among different parts of the region. As shown by the history of the Mediterranean basin, the hypothetical mastering of polar corridors could bring about very many different opportunities to Arctic and non-Arctic players that, as long as they adhere tacitly or openly to the inherent wisdom of VS’ PMI, can then make the Arctic into an important socio-cultural and political hub of the future, provided that humankind’s worse aptitudes for self-harm and gruesome conflict do not prevail.

5.1 The Meaning of “Route”

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, “route is a fixed path for regularly moving or delivering people or things”²¹⁰. In other words, the emergence of routes means that regions and peoples are bonded in a way that allows them to exchange different goods, services, and ideas. The formation of routes is a process that may require time to carry and distribute the many tangible and intangible goods at play, and *ipso facto* cement trades, routines, and perspectives. Technological advancements have also been historically a big contributor for the acceleration of globalization, because they can reduce the temporal window for the exchanges at issue, making information, goods and services more accessible in a shorter period of time²¹¹.

The Arctic is a good example of how the contemporary trend of globalization can affect a region very rapidly, especially when compared to previous historical periods (e.g., the Renaissance). On the one hand, the North is a relatively newly discovered region, where the presence of “western/ized people” has not been marked for a very long time. On the other hand, what

²¹⁰ ‘route’ <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pt/dicionario/ingles/route>> accessed 7 July 2021.

²¹¹ Eivind Heldaas Seland, ‘Writ in Water, Lines in Sand: Ancient Trade Routes, Models and Comparative Evidence’ (2015) 2 *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 1110272, 3.

once took decades or centuries to develop and communicate, now takes much less time to occur, thanks to significantly improved technology in the areas of transportation and telecommunication.

VS, as mentioned above, was a pioneer that not only established the first connection links between certain communities in the Arctic and the southern regions but, mostly, promoted innovative ideas, made insightful suggestions, and remarkably argute predictions. His concerns about the upcoming future were undeniably ahead of his time, and even though those thoughts cannot be considered totally accurate nowadays, they effectively mirror the eventual settlement of a new, modern and global route to the “Far North”. Indeed, VS recognized the growing arising of routes that would cross the North Pole and so become a crucial point of transit and trade: “The transpolar route will become more important decade by decade”²¹².

5.1.1 The example of the Mediterranean Sea

The geographical boundaries of the Mediterranean Sea are set by a coastline that extends from the Gibraltar Strait along Spain, southern France, around to Italy, Greece and Turkey, alongside Lebanon, Israel, and all the way back to Ceuta through the North African coastline. However, this region is more than its sea, or even its coastline, insofar as the radius of influence embraces the adjacent territories from its edges for millions of square kilometers in the hinterlands²¹³. From the early ages of Humanity, the Mediterranean area has been occupied by a great number of civilizations and, since then, even more settlements originated different communities with their own cultural identity and customs, many of which spread across the region in waves of commercial expansion, cultural interactions, and occasional conflicts²¹⁴. As Braudel wrote: “The different regions of Mediterranean are connected not by the water but by the peoples of the sea”²¹⁵.

The Mediterranean climate is also a matter that helps to understand the (almost) innate necessity of connectivity between the different local micro-

²¹² Stefansson (n 11) 178.

²¹³ David Abulafia, *The Mediterranean in History* (Getty Publications 2011) 11.

²¹⁴ David Attenborough, *The First Eden - The Mediterranean World and the Man* (1st edn, 1987) 58–61.

²¹⁵ Braudel (n 41) 276.

regions²¹⁶. In fact, the environmental conditions are, in a general way, defined with hot summers and warm, wet winters, without much frost. In addition, the unpredictable climate is responsible for triggering the interaction and consequent development within the Mediterranean micro-regions. Populations have therefore exploited extensively routes for services and goods, taking advantage of the extant possibilities since prehistoric times²¹⁷. The vastness and interconnectedness of cultural heritages is a remarkable aspect of the Mediterranean history because it became the basis of major future advancements, especially in terms of technologies, religions and philosophies (as described in 3.1.2.). Looking at the Mediterranean history, it is not possible to dissociate this process of cultural development with material aspects like the climate and geography. After all, the environment plays a decisive role in the interaction among communities. Based on the socio-cultural and biological diversity, the Mediterranean basin is a region that promotes seafaring and exchanges, as well as overall life and prosperity, to a significant extent.

Some pundits, in point of fact, have spoken of “a paradise” that gathers all the conditions for the development of humankind and respective populations. Tellingly, the concept “the first Eden” was used by David Attenborough in his 1987 TV series that refers to the Mediterranean history and its main features. As a result of the Mediterranean development, a diversity of civilizations flourished and expressed a wide cultural diversity, some of which remain very important and fundamental, with a remarkable influence on contemporary societies (e.g., Greek medicine and Roman jurisprudence).

The Mediterranean region is characterized by an agglomeration of fragmented landscapes that are interconnected²¹⁸. This variety of communities and the possibility for mutual communication led also to the promotion of three major religions within a relatively small area, underlining the richness of the social imaginaries in the region. Consequently, since its early civilizations’ times until the present, the Mediterranean has been as well in the spotlight for many political and socio-cultural conflicts, which embrace the ancient Roman

²¹⁶ Abulafia (n 213) 33.

²¹⁷ Anna Maria Mercuri and Laura Sadori, ‘Mediterranean Culture and Climatic Change: Past Patterns and Future Trends’ in Stefano Goffredo and Zvy Dubinsky (eds), *The Mediterranean Sea: Its history and present challenges* (Springer Netherlands 2014) 507 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6704-1_30> accessed 20 July 2021.

²¹⁸ Seland (n 211) 5.

supremacy, when the Mediterranean was called *Mare Nostrum* (“Our Sea”) as well as the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict²¹⁹.

To a certain extent, all of these conflicts translated into tensions and threats to the stability of the local communities. Even so, the Mediterranean region managed to be much more than a war zone without order nor boundaries. Indeed, due to the consistency of communications, it was possible to establish routes around the region capable of surviving terrible wars and centuries of mutual mistrust (e.g., between Christian and Muslim populations). The Sea and the adjacent rivers had the role of uniting, instead of disjoining²²⁰. They had a great influence on the development and could be seen as merchant and cultural highways that stimulated prosperity and growth. Well-established economic and cultural routes throughout the Mediterranean Sea could then play a function as well as mediators between the central territory and other regions or continents, i.e., a hub or transition point where other cultures could trade different goods and ideas.

Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Egyptians were the pioneers responsible for setting up stable commercial routes all over the Mediterranean, thus introducing paths for enduring communication over the different regions. Later, the Greeks and the Romans pushed further this interconnection and created an even more bonded sea. In fact, the Roman Empire, throughout its supremacy, had given a “considerable impetus to sea-borne commerce across the Mediterranean as the needs of the Empire were considerable and the Roman fleets stamped out piracy in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea”²²¹.

Rome imported cereals from Egypt and Africa and traded with China and India through the ports of Syria where the caravans arrived, or along the Nile, in a true and pioneering example of globalization and networking. After that, the Byzantine, Genoese, and Venetians became the experts in trading routes linking the “exotic goods” from Africa and the Orient to northern Europe, until the Portuguese, in the 15th and 16th century, discovered the maritime route through the ocean (the Cape Route), which caused the Mediterranean to lose

²¹⁹ GH Blake, ‘Settlement and Conflict in the Mediterranean World’ (1978) 3 Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 255–258.

²²⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel: Lectures on Philosophy: The Philosophy of History, The History of Philosophy, The Proofs of the Existence of God* (e-artnow 2019).

²²¹ J Quéguiner, ‘The Mediterranean as a Maritime Trade Route’ (1978) 3 Ocean Management 179, 180.

traffic and strategic centrality. Still, it regained relevancy with the creation of the Suez Canal in 1869, i.e., a more effective connection between East and West, that effectively resulted in a renewed boom of trading and commerce that continues today²²².

Although not being a part of the original Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal constituted an important mark in terms of globalization, because it made it possible to establish a shorter permanent connection between the European, Asian, and Eastern African continents. The biggest advantage was the reduction by almost a half the sailing distance to connect Europe and East Asia, when compared with the Cape of Good Hope's maritime route. Consequently, such a reduction could also save economic resources (e.g., fuel and personnel), allowing a faster and more efficient interaction between distant regions, with direct socio-economic results in the regions' development²²³. Nevertheless, throughout its stages, the Canal faced also different political and social conflicts, such as the two World Wars, the process of African and Asian decolonization, and the Suez Crisis of 1956, to name a few.

These events also had a direct impact in the cargo transportation and flux of ships in the Canal. However, the route was always able to adapt and prove itself as a reliable route towards the socio-economic development of many nations²²⁴. This shipping route is a clear evidence of how the trading routes have a relevant role in the globalization process and the consequent economic growth, which often translates into genuine human development, though not necessarily into environmentally sustainable praxes. As long as the world's productive system relies extensively on oil or coal and their derivatives, the planet's life-support systems are at risk of critical collapse²²⁵. And yet, in a somewhat tragic irony for our species and current civilization, the regular transport of these fuel sources is essential for the daily activities of any complex community of our time. Without that, people cannot travel as easily, companies are not able to trade as quickly, nor to offer their services to as wide a market, and organizations cannot promote their ideas as promptly. Indeed,

²²² Rodrigues and Devezas (n 160) 28–29.

²²³ Max E Fletcher, 'The Suez Canal and World Shipping, 1869-1914' (1958) 18 *The Journal of Economic History* 556, 557–560.

²²⁴ Quéguiner (n 221) 182–184.

²²⁵ Liam Wagner and others, 'Trading Off Global Fuel Supply, CO2 Emissions and Sustainable Development' (2016) 11 *PLOS ONE* e0149406, 12–15.

VS one century ago also stated: “The greatest commodity of the modern world is oil and we are now deeply concerned with oil lands.”²²⁶ underlining the importance of the Arctic and how the region would become more attractive from the economic point of view. This dependence in non-renewable sources, once again, strengthens how social imaginaries are connected with the economic dimension, since the idea of providing a valuable resource moves entire fields of business and infrastructure.

Even in current days, the Suez Canal constitutes a fundamental artery of communication between continents, and perturbations in the route have a massive impact in a globalized society. A visible example of that is the recent obstruction of the Canal, in March 2021, made by a huge container ship (*Ever Given*). Because of it, for 6 days, the maritime traffic was interrupted, which had massive costs for the global economy (“About 12% of global trade, around one million barrels of oil and roughly 8% of liquefied natural gas pass through the canal each day.”²²⁷). This underlines the inherent interconnections and dependency of societies on the global system and how valued are the quality and speed of transportation of goods and access to services.

5.1.2 The Transfer to the Arctic – the Natives’ example

In spite of being diametrically opposite under many respects, both the Mediterranean and the Arctic regions have similarities and nuances that allow them to be compared, as done creatively and insightfully by VS. This comparison is the core element of his PMI, because it aims to find those significant parallelisms that can help us to comprehend what could possibly happen in the future of the Arctic.

Historically, despite its conflicts and contradictions, the Mediterranean basin provided an ideal environment promoting trading and socio-cultural interactions through the establishment of routes over millennia. These paths proved essential for the regional and the global development of numerous societies and their imaginaries. To a relevant extent, the Arctic has the background and the potential to pursue a similar path, i.e., the transpolar routes, which would then be capable of offering reliable solutions to the modern and

²²⁶ Stefansson (n 11) 6.

²²⁷ ‘The Cost of the Suez Canal Blockage’ *BBC News* (29 March 2021) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56559073>> accessed 08 July 2021.

future times of the global community--as long as we are willing and able to pursue the socio-economic development of the region in an adaptative and sustainable way, i.e., such that it does not threaten peace, stability, and survival.

As frequently remarked in this thesis, the Arctic has been inhabited for several centuries by different Indigenous populations. They have developed unique methods of hunting, traveling, and living in singular weather- and geographical conditions, resulting in a rich tapestry of cultural legacies that, at times, have been very different from those of the western/ized and southern imaginaries ²²⁸. Nowadays, the Natives constitute about 10 percent of the Arctic population and are not seen as “passive recipients of change”, but as local actors working hard to find solutions and adapt to the current circumstances, in cooperation with local and national governments, international organizations and multinational companies ²²⁹.

We can therefore hope and dare to predict that, similarly to the diverse socio-cultural realities of the Mediterranean basin “as an agglomeration of interconnected micro-regions” ²³⁰, the Arctic ones can also adapt and become more and more connected, internally as well as outwardly. New imaginaries, where Indigenous legacies are included and duly considered, would certainly help to solidify the so-called “Arctic identity” that VS’ PMI promoted already, i.e., the constructive unity of its stakeholders and their beneficial mutual cooperation.

5.2 The (Unique) Case of Transpolar Routes

The climate and the environment play a pivotal role in how best to approach the transpolar routes. The Far North is a place with unique weather conditions, where the pervasiveness of ice and extreme coldness are allied to the remoteness from the world’s large urban centers. The environment has always been a challenge for the Arctic inhabitants—almost a way to prove their resilience and capacity of adaptation. At the same time, the ongoing global

²²⁸ Hanson (n 1) 6.

²²⁹ Mary Durfee and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, *Arctic Governance in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group 2019) 10.

²³⁰ Seland (n 211) 5.

warming is making new hypotheses and ideas come constantly to the surface concerning the utilization of the Arctic Ocean, primarily for navigation (shipping and transportation) and fishing ²³¹.

However, the rising of new transpolar corridors needs time and research to offer a consistent and safe alternative to the already existent navigable corridors (e.g., Suez and Panama Canal, Good Hope Route, to mention but a few) ²³². A strict relation between environmental shifts and globalization (i.e., its economic, social, and political dimensions) is thus traced in the concluding sections of this chapter, with the goal of inquiring into possible alternatives in the medium-/long-range future.

The predictions regarding the rising of transpolar routes started with VS and is part of the remarkable importance of his legacy. Even though his expectations are not an exact mirror of what happens nowadays, they nonetheless cleared the horizon, so to speak, substituting old socio-cultural and political imaginaries into a renewed portrait of the Far North, i.e., a region with a huge diversity of possibilities and far more accessible than it had been thought for centuries: “Accordingly, most of us will get a wider view of the commercial, political, and military future of the world when we realize that the airplane, the dirigible, and the submarine are about to turn the polar ocean into a Mediterranean and about to make England and Japan, Norway and Alaska, neighbors across the northern sea.” ²³³.

Essentially, VS had a highly original yet factually grounded perspective about the Arctic as a geo-cultural area of the planet moving steadily towards a globalized future, where every corner of the planet is more and more close to one another, especially if accessed through the North. By doing this, VS was establishing a new social imaginary. He openly pointed out to a conception of the North as a middle point that unites geographically opposite regions, instead of an inaccessible barrier or a wasteland.

Nevertheless, in concrete practice, the construction of these kinds of transpolar paths are long and sinuous because they depend on, *inter alia*,

²³¹ ‘Navigating the Future of Arctic Shipping’ (*Arctic Council*) <<https://arctic-council.org/news/navigating-the-future-of-arctic-shipping/>> accessed 23 March 2022.

²³² Mia M Bennett and others, ‘The Opening of the Transpolar Sea Route: Logistical, Geopolitical, Environmental, and Socioeconomic Impacts’ (2020) 121 *Marine Policy* 104178, 11–12.

²³³ Stefansson (n 11) 199.

willing external agents and their mutual relations, not to mention favorable trends in the climatic conditions (e.g., the reduced presence of ice and the right sea currents), as well as the global economic activities and the human and material infrastructures that are fundamental to setup a solid route ²³⁴.

Transpolar routes are not an entirely modern idea, at least as far as our civilization is concerned. They were first considered in the 16th century by British and Dutch explorers, who were excluded from Spanish and Portuguese imperial trade routes, and therefore sought Arctic passages as a possible alternative to trade with Asia, including a direct shortcut via the North Pole ²³⁵.

Today, the increasing reduction of permanent ice in the Arctic Ocean's waters is the main *raison d'être* for the re-emergence of the West's social imaginary comprising the quest for a transpolar route. Climate change is a worldwide trend that has a direct effect on the amount of ice present on both polar oceans, due to global warming, the causes of which are to be found in anthropogenic factors as well as natural variabilities, as indicated by several recent studies ²³⁶.

The Arctic has been experiencing the changes brought about by climate change about twice as fast as any other part of the globe. Specifically, "Arctic average temperature has risen almost twice the rate as the rest of the world in the past few decades" ²³⁷. As a direct result of this phenomenon, there has ensued a growing number of months that are considered "ice-free", which is a viable economic justification for conceiving of the Far North as allowing the settlement of new transpolar routes, using the Arctic Ocean as a mean for traveling and connecting different polar regions and the surrounding continents ²³⁸.

The rapid and general warming of the North Polar territories affects both land and ocean, and it is changing the geomorphology of the Arctic. This means that the geographic display of the regions is shifting, and it cannot be seen any longer as a frozen wasteland without any attractive and inaccessible natural resources, rather an easier zone to access and cross. The ice is melting

²³⁴ Albert Buixadé Farré and others, 'Commercial Arctic Shipping through the Northeast Passage: Routes, Resources, Governance, Technology, and Infrastructure' (2014) 37 *Polar Geography* 298, 301–316.

²³⁵ Bennett and others (n 232) 1.

²³⁶ 'Khon et al. - 2010 - Perspectives of Northern Sea Route and Northwest 766.

²³⁷ Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA). Slide 8.

²³⁸ Seland (n 211) 2–4.

rapidly, unveiling spaces that used to be covered permanently and were unknown or unreachable until now. Thus, in yet another tragic irony of our time, new economic activities directly related to the species-threatening climate change, such as mining, oil and gas extraction, have gained a new strength and importance in the region ²³⁹. Also, the sea life (fisheries) is exposed to a wider area where the fishing vessels can navigate and increase their catches ²⁴⁰.

There are different polar highways, all of them have the same goal although following different geographical directions and connecting different Arctic territories to southern regions. Hereby, are selected the different Transpolar Routes, that, according to studies and reports are the main transpolar corridors:

1) Northern Sea Route (NSR) - is the shortest and well-known corridor, connecting Europe to the Asian-Pacific region, along the Siberian Coast between Murmansk in Russia and Cape Dezhnev in Bering Strait. Academia has been comparing the potentialities with the Suez Canal and how beneficial could be the introduction of a shorter path. A constant growth in the traffic has been reported for the last 3 decades ²⁴¹. It is also known as the Northeast Passage (NEP).

2) Northwest Passage (NWP) - extends along the northern North American coast and through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. This shortens the transit distance from western Europe to the Far East by 9,000 km in comparison to the conventional Panama Canal transit route, and in September 2007 was completely ice-free ²⁴².

Furthermore, there is another polar corridor that, despite not having the importance of NSR and NWP, it is considered also an option due the climatic changes in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO).

²³⁹ Anne Tolvanen and others, 'Mining in the Arctic Environment – A Review from Ecological, Socioeconomic and Legal Perspectives' (2019) 233 *Journal of Environmental Management* 832, 832–834.

²⁴⁰ James D Reist and others, 'General Effects of Climate Change on Arctic Fishes and Fish Populations' (2006) 35 *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment* 370, 377–379.

²⁴¹ Yevgeny Aksenov and others, 'On the Future Navigability of Arctic Sea Routes: High-Resolution Projections of the Arctic Ocean and Sea Ice' (2017) 75 *Marine Policy* 300, 302.

²⁴² Khon et al. - 2010 - Perspectives of Northern Sea Route and Northwest 758.

3) Transpolar Sea Route (TSR) – bridges Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean through the North Pole. It revealed to be an alternative due the technologic development of nuclear icebreakers and military submarines. However, its popularity it largely depends on the absence of ice in the CAO and geopolitical frame ²⁴³.

5.2.1 New (ice-free) alternatives

The utilization of these paths has been growing significantly over the last 30 years and it is expectable to keep increasing. Based on the fact “the world’s shipping routes are already so congested that the development of northern shipping routes is not a question of if, but when.” ²⁴⁴, transpolar routes have a crucial role in the development of future alternatives.

Currently, the maritime traffic existent within the transpolar routes is mostly based on cargo ships and government vessels (including the icebreakers), yet private yachts and touristic related activities have been also increasing. The volume of transported cargo has been growing substantially year by year ²⁴⁵. Less distances to navigate are translated in less economic costs and fuel and, consequently, in a reduction of CO2 emissions. On the other hand, a reduction of the distance does not necessarily mean the fastest way due to the Arctic Ocean being covered by ice during wintertime and characterized by its unpredictable and harsh weather. Despite the reduction of the total amount of ice, the open water season is still very demanding, the heavy storms and fog have a direct impact in a reduction of navigation speed. Icebreakers and infrastructure used to ensure the security of navigation are costly, narrowing the number of escorted vessels at time ^{246 247}.

²⁴³ Bennett and others (n 232) 2, 11.

²⁴⁴ ‘Huebert et al. - Climate Change & International Security The Arcti.Pdf’ 1 <<https://www.c2es.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/arctic-security-report.pdf>> accessed 13 September 2021.

²⁴⁵ ‘Sea Routes and Ports in the Arctic’ (*Nordregio*, 16 January 2019) <<https://nordregio.org/maps/sea-routes-and-ports-in-the-arctic/>> accessed 7 September 2021.

²⁴⁶ Aksenov and others (n 241) 302–307.

²⁴⁷ ‘A Bridge Across Two Oceans: The Arctic Challenge to Panama Canal Shipping’ (*The Arctic Institute*, 7 January 2021) <<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/bridge-across-two-oceans-arctic-challenge-panama-canal-shipping/>> accessed 26 March 2022.

The northernmost corridors are in constant shifting, for instance, a substantial average reduction the total days to cross the NSR over the last 30 years (from 20 days in 1990 to 11 in 2013), during summertime, is a result of the global warming - less ice extent and thickness ²⁴⁸. In other words, the Arctic is tended to become ice-free by the end of the 21st century ²⁴⁹, opening the possibility of a fast-track towards more competitive and connected market/society. Attached with that, new political and diplomatic relations have come to surface due to the Arctic region being more accessible than it ever was ²⁵⁰.

5.2.2 Two Key Points and a Paradox

Indigenous Communities Enter in the Global Economy

Since early times in their history, Northern communities developed strategies to subsist in the Arctic environment ²⁵¹. Activities like caribou and reindeer herding, hunting and fishing have been the core of a lifestyle centered on community-based subsistence rather than increasing economic wealth for self-maximizing ‘atomic’ agents. However, with the appearance of new economic activities resulting from interaction with far-located governments and companies, there ensued a very different socio-economic reality in the North, which looks more and more like any other human community in the global market economy.

The exploration and mining of nonrenewable resources, such as oil and gas, gold, lead, zinc and diamonds, have already profoundly impacted the histories and livelihoods of Arctic peoples. Important, in this respect, is to underline that the roots of this development were often associated with colonization and exploitation, where the Arctic residents, who lacked recognized rights to resources and adequate weaponry to resist the onslaught, benefited little and paid substantial costs ²⁵². With growing attention given to indigenous land

²⁴⁸ Aksenov and others (n 241) 301.

²⁴⁹ Stephen J Vavrus and Marika M Holland, ‘When Will the Arctic Ocean Become Ice-Free?’ (2021) 53 *Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research* 217.

²⁵⁰ Mary Durfee and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, *Arctic Governance in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group 2019) 200.

²⁵¹ Stefansson (n 24) 106–113.

²⁵² Keith Storey and Heather Hall, ‘Dependence at a Distance: Labour Mobility and the Evolution of the Single Industry Town’ (2018) 62 *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien* 225, 226–228.

claims, resource rights, and self-determination, however, some Arctic peoples are now finding ways to engage productively in nonrenewable resource extraction²⁵³. Consequently, these improvements justify the importance of the creation of transpolar routes ready to benefit the North and its populations.

Harbor Infrastructure and Tourism

A robust transportation system also contributes to creating a more economically developed region capable of competing with the southern territories, primarily in terms of the cost effectiveness of shipping. The possible exploitation of numerous types of valuable economic resources and different alternatives of transporting them are also stark examples of the significance of climate change and globalization as undeniable trends in the contemporary Arctic. Sea communities capable of offering reliable harbour services and viable shipping infrastructure are bound to have a privileged role in the establishment of Polar maritime highways.

Moreover, the better accessibility of the Arctic region through such novel northern paths, combined with the aesthetic and environmental uniqueness of the Far North, could promote tourism too. This being the case, of course, for that period of time during which the climatic destabilization of the Earth's life support systems does not produce massive losses in terms of the Far North's own uniqueness and/or the ability of southern communities to engage in tourist activities.

Paradox Between the Arctic Communities Identity with the New Economic Opportunities

The socio-economic potentialities ascribable to the influence of warmer and warmer temperatures in a cold region such as the Arctic unveils a deeper paradox, which is rooted in the Arctic's ever-greater connection with the global market economy of today's world.

On the one hand, the Far North's local players are the direct victims of an ongoing process of climatic destabilization to which they hardly contributed with their long-lived socio-economic and cultural activities, which were not based in environmentally destructive structures for extraction, transformation,

²⁵³ Níels Einarsson (n 95) 122.

transportation, consumption and disposal of industrially produced for-profit goods and services.

On the other hand, perhaps more urgently than any other community on the planet, they are demanded to become all-the-more resilient and find strategies of adaptation to the new unstable circumstances, while also trying to safeguard their identity and legacy, if not the natural environment in which they originated and prospered for countless generations in a sustainable way ²⁵⁴. Thus, the likely future settlement of transpolar routes will come, simultaneously, as a further manifestation of the same destabilization and as a solution, inasmuch as it should prove capable of generating employment opportunities and capacity for spurring socio-economic growth. So, in the end, the appeal of transpolar routes is itself a somewhat paradoxical counterpoise between, on the one hand, the prospect of augmented effectiveness in commercial transportation and attendant pecuniary profits (less time, less costs) and, on the other hand, the greater uncertainty brought about by the increasing climatic and weather challenges, which together contribute to establishing additional ones, e.g., the more urgent need for ensuring the crews' safety and higher insurance premiums.

Balancing the environmental shifts with economic interests is, in short, critical, because both trends are happening in a very accelerated way, leaving the future very unpredictable and hard to make long-term efficient planning. Indeed, "The trouble with our times is that the future is not what it used to be." ²⁵⁵. In keeping with VS' optimistic PMI, we should better leave the door open for international diplomacy, constructive cooperation, life-enabling investment, and the wise exchange of scientific and traditional knowledge, so as to supplement national and regional governances, face the obstacles that are bound to show up, and fostering humane and humanity-friendly social imaginaries, such as his own PMI.

²⁵⁴ Nymand Larsen (n 144) 140.

²⁵⁵ A quote from de French poet Paul Valéry.

6 Conclusions

Despite its uncanny prophetic contents, VS' PMI is not particularly common as a topic in the scientific literature. As a matter of fact, it has but a few brief mentions in the academic studies about the Arctic, and almost all of them date from several decades after its initial reference (see Appendix A). On top of that, the available references do not offer a proper clarification of the context behind the imaginary at issue, meaning that they strictly point out the existence of a PMI but do not offer any detailed references to VS' writings and the theoretical and personal context behind the PMI. All such limitations notwithstanding, it was still possible for me to find key-points, quotes and considerations pertaining to the PMI, which I believe could be useful to all researchers wishing to provide apt descriptions and insightful presentations about the contemporary Arctic. Mark Twain said: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." Parallely, by understanding the importance of the Mediterranean and how it developed, the PMI can provide to the Arctic at least some of the required knowledge to be prepared for the future. With that information, Arctic players can have more tools to negotiate their interests and preserve their cultural identity.

To understand the Arctic, in fact, it is not enough to comprehend the interaction of genes, hormones, organisms, or of ice-sheets, glaciers and sea levels. It is also necessary to consider the interaction of ideas, images, and fantasies about the Arctic that have been accumulating in the evolution of social imaginaries within the Arctic region itself and outside it, i.e., how non-Arctic populations and players have conceived of the Arctic. The PMI was intended to give a more important role to the Arctic. Rather than being a military zone used by the Arctic States to control their borders and their neighbours, VS saw the real potential and benefits of having a much more thoroughly interconnected Arctic region. Evidently, his ideas for the North were far ahead of his time and were not seriously entertained by his fellow scholars for decades. Still, this fact did not stop him from promoting a new social imaginary. He was aware that such an ambitious project, i.e., that of shifting the old Arctic imaginaries of the southern communities, needed time to become a concrete reality ²⁵⁶. Today, whether aware of it or merely

²⁵⁶ Stefansson (n 11) 172.

expressing it, the world's business leaders, political strategists and students of all things Arctic are proving the PMI to have become, to a significant extent, the way in which the region's very future is commonly imagined.

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Appendix A

This section provides some key-quotes from Vilhjalmur Stefansson that make some reference to the existence of a Polar Mediterranean Imaginary. Despite the lack of direct references to the actual concept, it was also added some other references that might help to explain and be related with PMI:

“Although realizing the applicability of both aircrafts and submarines to commerce and warfare in our own latitudes, we have not adequately realized their significance in solving after four hundred years the problem of the northwest passage and giving us at last a short route from Europe to Far East” (p. 19, *The Northward Course of Empire*)

“Local food production is fundamental in every permanently occupied land. It furnishes a basis for a stable population, it makes easy the development of industries which, although based in minerals, cannot well flourish when all the food needed has to be brought from a great distance” (p. 130, *The Northward Course of Empire*).

“A glance at a map of the northern hemisphere shows that in the Arctic Ocean is in effect a huge Mediterranean. It lies between its surrounding between Europe and Africa. It has in the past been looked as an impassible Mediterranean. In the near future it will not only become passable but will become a favorite route, at least at certain times of the year, safer, more comfortable, and much shorter than any route that lies over the oceans that separate the present- day centers of population” (p. 168, *The Northward Course of Empire*).

“Accordingly, most of us will get a wider view of the commercial, political, and military future of the world when we realize that the airplane, the dirigible, and the submarine are about to turn the polar ocean into a Mediterranean and about to make England and Japan, Norway and Alaska, neighbors across the northern sea.” (p. 199, *The Northward Course of Empire*).

“Whoever has any grasp at all of the great natural resources of the polar regions and of the conditions under which they are about to be developed, will

have fascinating dreams about any number of other transpolar routes destined to come into common use whenever air travel itself becomes a commonplace in the more dangerous but already speculatively accepted routes between Liverpool and New York, San Francisco and Hawaii and Japan” (p. 202, *The Northward Course of Empire*).

“[VS] visualized in the Arctic Sea as one great Mediterranean, not only in the sense that is a rather small ocean surrounded by populated lands, but also in the sense that it could be useful to the world as quick and relatively easy transportation route between import cities.” (p. 182 *Prophet of the North* by Earl P. Hanson).

“When the world was once known to be round, there was no difficulty in finding many navigators to sail around it. When the polar regions are once understood to be friendly and fruitful, men will quickly and easily penetrate their deepest recesses.” (*The Friendly Arctic*, p. 6).

“Is the Arctic region barren and its nature hostile to life or is it hostile merely to life of a southern type and to men who live like southerners.” (*The Friendly Arctic*, p. 162).

“The polar sea is like a hub from which continents radiate like the spokes of a wheel” (*The Arctic as an air route to the future* – National Geographic Magazine, August 205-18).