Mobility and Transnational Iceland

MOBILITY AND TRANSNATIONAL ICELAND

Current Transformations and Global Entanglements

Edited by
Kristín Loftsdóttir,
Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, and
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KRISTÍN LOFTSDÓTTIR
AND UNNUR DÍS SKAPTADÓTTIR

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a product of the project of excellence titled 'Mobility and Transnational Iceland.' The project sought to stimulate conversation between scholars in the social sciences working on mobility and to encourage new research on different kinds of mobility in relation to Iceland. The book showcases some of the diverse ways that mobility and transnationalism have characterized Iceland. It covers a wide spectrum of research from different disciplines and perspectives.

Mobility has intensified globally, accelerating in step with various technological innovations which have shaped Iceland as well. Increased mobility to and from Iceland must be contextualized within various social and economic changes, including Iceland becoming a member of the European Economic Area in 1994. This required various legal and institutional changes that have facilitated particular kinds of global mobility (Wade and Sigurgeirsdóttir 2011; Sigurjónsson and Mixa 2011). At the same time, these changes have also limited mobility, for example, due to restrictions for populations outside of Europe. A focus on spatial mobility has been an international trend in the last few decades, as the term 'mobility turn' reflects (see Salazar and Smart 2011; Urry 2000). In migration studies, this is seen, for example, in the development of transnational approaches that examine not only the causes of migration and settlement in a new society, but also temporary moves and continuing ties with countries of origin (Faist 2013; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). In Iceland, these theoretical discussions have become important in understanding the ongoing processes of diversification, and they are also significant because mobility to and from Iceland has often been downplayed (Loftsdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2009).

This book prioritizes research focusing on the present when analyzing mobility and Iceland even though some articles have a strong historical focus. By prioritizing the present, we are not downplaying the importance of mobility in the past, which has included various migrant mobilities, such as the migration of Icelandic people to South America (Eyþórsdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016) and North America in the 19th century (Kjartansson 1980), or the historic importance of migrant communities in shaping the country, for example, Danish migrants (Ellenberger 2016), musicians at the beginning of the 20th century (see Melsted 2016), or the Germans who arrived after WWII (Ísberg 2016).

This introduction seeks to position the different chapters of the book within larger scholarly discussions on mobility and summarize other research conducted on mobility in relation to Iceland. The introduction starts with an overview of some wider scholarly discussions of mobility and transnationalism. Then the discussion turns to mobility in Iceland, highlighting important changes, such as the economic liberalization in the 1990s and the economic crash of 2008, which have affected migration to and from the country as well as the various manifestations of mobility to and from Iceland. Furthermore, this overview contextualizes the chapters of the book in the wider scholarly exchange on migration in relation to Iceland. Although focusing on mobility and transnationalism, the theoretical approaches applied in the different chapters of the book are highly interdisciplinary. The authors come from diverse disciplines which are shaped by different methodological and theoretical concerns.

A WORLD OF MOBILITY AND TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS

In the past, mobility was often theorized as an abnormal condition rather than a constant feature of human life (Salizar and Smart 2011). However, recently, mobility research has focused not only on people and their different types of mobility e.g., economic migrants, refugees, expatriates, or tourists, but on "everything that exhibits both movement and stasis" (Mavhunga et al. 2016, 50). The concept transnationalism, comes out of research on globalization and mobility. It has been an important topic the last few decades. As with the concept of mobility, transnationalism appears in various contexts of different and intersecting phenomena (Vertovec 1999, 448). The transnational critique of methodological nationalism, furthermore, showed how scholars tended to prioritize the nation as the only relevant context (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Wimmer and Glick Schiller

2002) while ignoring the complexities of intersecting identities and subject positions (Anthias 2012). Moreover, some of the earlier celebratory views of globalization have been criticized for downplaying inequalities in migration trajectories, the growing importance of border control and securitization, and how boundary-making affects mobilities (Fassin 2011).

In anthropology, where the editors have their intellectual roots, globalization has been one avenue of thinking about mobilities and transnational connections. When many scholars began to emphasize globalization as a homogenizing force, anthropologists stressed the need to look at the different ways in which global forces were adapted and manipulated on the ground (Xavier et al. 2002). The concepts of global and local have been criticized for being used too often in reifying ways. As Moore (2004) has pointed out, these concepts should be seen as tools, or concept metaphors, as she calls them, to think through certain processes, rather than as descriptions of phenomena that exist separately from each other. One relevant globalizing force is neoliberalism. For some scholars, it has been useful in gaining deeper understanding of the current restructuring of the global economy (Jessop 2013). Neoliberal policies rationalize the withdrawal of the state from various welfare services (Schwegler 2008) and reconfigure ethnicity as “more corporate, more commodified” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 1). The neoliberal capitalist economy also organizes the mobility of people in a particular way, with an emphasis on flexible labor that must respond to the needs of the market (Harvey 2007). Neoliberalization involves a particular type of governing along with “political technology” that shapes the way reality is perceived (Árnason and Hafsteinsson 2018, 13).

Mobility is also an important backdrop in current discussions of multicultural societies, a term often used to capture diversity today. Integration has been a part of the discourse and policy of many European countries, even though the term itself has been used unsystematically within or across different boundaries (Brubaker 2001; Rytter 2018). Vertovec’s (2007) coining of the term ‘super-diversity’ seeks to draw attention to the complexities of the multiple configurations created by the intensified mobility that characterizes our present. Many scholars have criticized the concept of multiculturalism as being too reifying, with some pointing out that multiculturalism as such “provides a discursive space for debating questions of race, culture, legitimacy and belonging” (Lentin and Titley 2011). Some have also pointed out the links between neoliberalism and multiculturalism seen in a reconfigured multiculturalism to fit neoliberal sensibilities (Walsh 2014). Similarly, the discursive emphasis on the ‘crisis of multiculturalism,' which was prominent in the early 2000s, became a way to talk about some populations as unable to integrate and to express racism (Fortier 2007; Lentin and Titley 2011). Women are often viewed as crucial for integration in this discussion and consequently blamed for the lack of it (Andreassen 2016).

The scholarly emphasis on racism has pointed out how racism in the present is often embedded in the language of 'culture' and ethnicity (Balibar 1991; Harrison 2002, 150), Muslim migrants' cultures commonly being characterized as incompatible with Western or European ideals (Bunzl, 2005). There are concerns over growing nationalist tensions in northwestern Europe (Banks and Gingrich 2006), which are often transformed into hateful populism directed against different minority groups (Fekete 2018). One part of the growing hostility toward minority populations has been directed at refugees and asylum seekers. While countries outside Europe accept the highest numbers of asylum seekers and refugees (Koser 2011), the global north has experienced a strong sense of moral panic regarding this 'crisis of migration' (see Vacchiano 2013; Loftsdóttir, Smith and Hipfl 2018).

In Europe, the Schengen Agreement has been important in shaping mobility through its emphasis on guarding Europe's external borders, those of the countries that are part of the Schengen Agreement, while facilitating mobility between the Schengen states, particularly labor migration. The Schengen Agreement thus means more restrictions for some populations in terms of travelling to Europe, while making international mobility much easier for those within the area (Garner 2017). Discourses focusing on the racial and cultural differences of migrants must be recognized as existing alongside mobile images and discourses of humanitarianism and international development (Loftsdóttir 2015, 2).

Another aspect of accelerated mobility that scholars have intensively focused on the last few years is the growth of tourism worldwide. Tourism involves mobility in a variety of ways: people travel for holidays and for religious or work purposes, but also to work in various services and recreational activities. These might involve different categories of tourists, and also those who work in the tourism sector, either through paid work or by volunteering (Uriely 2001; Wearing and McGehee 2013). Some tourists work on their holidays (working holiday), and the distinction is not always clear (Skaptadóttir and Rancew-Sikora 2016). Work in tourism is generally labor-intensive in that it requires a large work force, mostly in jobs that are low-paid and defined as unskilled (Uriely 2001).

Mobility in Iceland: An Overview

Since the 1990s, neoliberal policies have shaped various aspects of Icelandic society and mobilities (Árnarson and Hafsteinsson 2018; Loftsdóttir 2019). The 1990s were characterized by intensified interconnectedness through international financialization. The Icelandic stock market was created, for example, when the Icelandic Stock Exchange (Kauphöll Íslands) opened in the 1990s. In 1997, the privatization of the Icelandic banks began (Sigurjónsson and Mixa 2011). A strong economic boom characterized the early 2000s, but it ended disastrously, collapsing in 2008.

Significantly, the economic boom meant that migration to Iceland increased considerably. Before the mid-1990s, people with a migrant background made up less than 2% of the population, compared to 9% in 2009, the year after the crash. In 1994, with the establishment of the European Economic Area, Iceland and the other EFTA states became part of the European Union's single market, and Iceland joined the Schengen Agreement in 2001 (Skaptadóttir, Eydal and Sigurðardóttir 2012, 236–38). Consequently, Icelandic immigration laws were changed in 2002.

When new European member states joined the EU in 2004 and gained access to the Icelandic labor market in 2006, there were many job opportunities in Iceland, particularly in the service and construction sectors. At the time, the government emphasized large industrial projects (Skaptadóttir 2015, 176). Skaptadóttir (2015) has pointed out that this migration was largely driven by higher wages in Iceland, compared to the wages in the countries of origin. There was also a skewed gendered division of labor, with a higher percentage of migrant men than women coming to Iceland, because the available jobs were seen as being masculine. At the same time, it became increasingly difficult for people outside the EEA to access the Icelandic labor market.

Migration to Iceland from non-EU countries increased to join family members who had settled in Iceland before the labor market opened up to the new EU countries, and new immigrants could also get work permits as specialists (Skaptadóttir 2015, 177). One consequence of the influx of people seeking work was that migrants were commonly reduced to the status of 'foreign manpower' (*erlent vinnuafl*), the term used in public and official discourse in Iceland (Skaptadóttir 2015, 179). With a growing number of migrants settling in Iceland, the government became concerned about the migrants' adjustment to Icelandic society, reflecting the importance of models of adaptation (Rice 2007, 430). From the early 2000s, there was also an emphasis on the 'crisis of multiculturalism' (Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2009), reflecting the same prejudice and racism seen in neighboring countries (Loftsdóttir 2012).

The economic crash of 2008 had drastic consequences in Iceland, leading to growing anxiety and unemployment. Migration to Iceland diminished, but only briefly (Garðarsdóttir 2012). Some migrants experienced greater hostility. However, overall, anti-migration sentiment did not seem to increase significantly (Skaptadóttir 2010; Wojtyńska and Zielińska 2010, 8). The overall interest in migration and discussion of multiculturalism did, however, diminish considerably, as reflected in the declining media discourse focusing on immigration and multiculturalism. Instead, the focus shifted to the emigration of Icelanders (Wojtyńska, Skaptadóttir and Ólafs 2011).

Even though migration to Iceland slowed in the years after the crash, and some Icelanders and foreign nationals left the country, people with migrant backgrounds continued moving to Iceland during the recession (Garðarsdóttir 2012). Since then, with the growth of tourism, jobs in the construction and tourism sectors have multiplied, resulting in even faster growth in migration to the country, especially after 2015. In January 2019, foreign citizens comprised 12.4% of the population. In their chapter, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Ólöf Garðarsdóttir examine these demographic changes and focus on two migrant groups which reflect the different migration possibilities for those coming from the European Economic Area and persons from countries outside Europe. These authors trace the shift from Iceland being mostly an emigration country to an immigration country. Using the examples of the migrant trajectories of Poles and Filipinos, they reflect on changing borders and boundaries and how social and economic changes and transnational agreements affect migration developments.

Iceland has also been a part of wider discussions on diversity and prejudice, as Kristín Loftsdóttir maps out in her chapter. Racism and prejudice toward particular groups did not come with an increasing number of migrants. Iceland has been shaped by mobile ideas about diversity for a long time, including ideas revolving around culture and race (see Loftsdóttir in this book; see also Loftsdóttir 2014). Her chapter also shows the prevalence of racism in Iceland today, with the country being more strongly identified internationally as a white country. Research by Þóra Christiansen and Erla S. Kristjánsdóttir on educated migrants shows that they face many challenges at work, experience prejudice and commonly cannot make full use of their education. They frequently experience exclusion, based on their lack of fluency in Icelandic and Icelanders' intolerance of foreign accents (Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen 2017). In spite of these negative experiences, the chapter by Sigrún Ólafsdóttir shows that Icelanders' attitudes, based on data from European Social Survey, are generally positive toward migrants, compared to those of the general public in several other European countries. Moreover, Icelanders have become more positive over time. Icelanders, however, do differ in this regard. People with a university education are more positive than those with less education, and those with right-wing political views and older persons are more negative toward migrants.

The chapter by Christiansen and Kristjánsdóttir examines the experiences of immigrants with a university education. Their accounts show that they feel excluded and discriminated against at work. However, instead of addressing this discrimination, they focus on their professional identities as a source of strength. Kristján Þór Sigurðsson's focus on Muslims in Iceland speaks against the common stereotypes of Muslims in the country. His chapter illustrates the diversity of Muslim identities globally and how that manifests itself in Iceland. The chapter by Svala Guðmundsdóttir, Árelía Eydís Guðmundsdóttir and Auður Inga Ísleifsdóttir in this volume uses the perspective of resource management to gain an insight into the experiences of relatively privileged groups of migrants that arrive in Iceland to work in large multi-national companies.

Many studies have focused on the various aspects of transnational practices and migrants' continuing ties with their countries of origin in relation to labor migration, remittances and transnational families (Wojtyńska and Skaptadóttir 2020, Skaptadóttir 2019). In her chapter, Anna Wojtyńska examines yet another aspect of transnationalism, focusing on Polish migrants who organized the Black Protest in Iceland to oppose laws in Poland that would limit women's reproductive rights. She examines how this form of diaspora politics, where Polish migrants engaged Icelanders in the protest, instigated Icelanders' transnational entanglements.

Refugees are only a small percentage of the foreign population in Iceland, but a growing number of persons have claimed asylum in this country. Iceland has widely applied the Dublin Agreement to send asylum seekers back to the country where they first arrived, and Iceland's acceptance rate has been low (Tryggvadóttir and Skaptadóttir 2018). Erna K. Blöndal's chapter examines the importance of individual circumstances and different legal instruments in the EU and the jurisprudence of European courts when there is an evaluation of whether returning an asylum seeker to their first country of entry would go against the principle of non-refoulement. This is of importance in the Icelandic context because of international and European obligations, and because Icelandic legislation is, in many respects, based on EU and European human rights law. Because of Iceland's membership in Schengen, it participates in certain parts of EU cooperation, such as securing the EU's external borders.

Various scholars have stressed that larger populations of people with migrant backgrounds call for more coherent and clearer policies regarding migration. In Iceland, as elsewhere in Europe, these policies are often discussed from the angle of migrants integrating into Icelandic society. It is necessary to better understand how the Icelandic welfare system and its policies meet the needs of this diverse population of immigrants in order to make its services more accessible. The chapter by Guðbjörg Ottósdóttir, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Snæfríður Egilson examines the experiences of immigrant families with disabled children regarding employment, family care and services. They show that these families share many experiences with other migrant families because of their vulnerable work and housing situations and limited social network. These factors contribute to their lack of access to Icelandic society and often limit access to and knowledge of available services for their children – services that are often difficult to obtain due to the immigrant parents' long working days in low-income jobs.

The increasing number of adults with migrant backgrounds in Iceland means an increasing number of children born and raised in Iceland with migrant backgrounds (see Ragnarsdóttir 2007). The chapter by Lenka Formánková, Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds and Guðný Björk Eydal contributes to the discussion of government policies by comparing the family practices of Czech and Icelandic parents regarding the use of their parental leave and institutional childcare. They examine parental decisions and focus on the importance of care cultures in the transnational family context. They show that for Czech parents, the pre-migrant ideals of care play an important role in deciding on care arrangements for children who are not of school age although the parents do adapt to Icelandic family policies to varying degrees.

Mobility in Iceland has obviously never revolved solely around people coming to Iceland. Icelandic people have also migrated for various reasons, closely following trends in migration in the rest of Europe. People seeking experience and education outside Iceland have long shaped education in the country. As Garðarsdóttir pointed out (2012), a large majority of Icelanders who have emigrated for educational purposes return to Iceland. Kjartan Páll Sveinsson's chapter in this book shows how migration has been intrinsic to the Icelandic health system, with Icelandic doctors receiving necessary training and experience abroad. Sveinsson's analysis shows how this trend has made the number of doctors working in Iceland or returning to Iceland highly dependent on various factors that are perhaps not so obvious at first sight. The economic crash of 2008 when a large number of Icelandic people moved abroad to seek work opportunities, triggered labor-related emigration. Many went to Norway, which was affected relatively little by the crisis. There, they sought better economic opportunities than were available at the time in Iceland. For some Icelanders, the recent migration to Iceland during the boom years was a reference point for understanding migration in general, with some trying to position themselves in the Norwegian context as 'better' migrants than persons from other countries (Guðjónsdóttir 2014).

The economic crash also shaped various institutions. The Icelandic Coast Guard (ICG), for example, started participating in border control for Frontex to raise money for the agency. Eyrún Ólöf Sigurðardóttir and James Rice's chapter here explores this. Their contribution points out how the ICG sailed a very controversial and highly disputed route when it started patrolling Europe's borders, but the agency portrayed its activities as completely unpolitical: it was simply rescuing people in distress. Sigurðardóttir and Rice position this case in the framework of Icelandic exceptionalism, which was also important in Iceland's international engagements prior to the financial crash (Loftsdóttir 2014; Loftsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2010). Mobility in terms of Icelandic experts participating in various humanitarian and international development efforts increased considerably in the pre-crash period (Björnsdóttir 2011; Loftsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2010), with Iceland participating more intensively than before in various institutional collaborations in this sector (Þórhallsson 2005). Icelandic people living abroad have also created immigrant communities for various purposes. Their members often stick closely together (see, for example, Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013; Schram 2011).

One important part of the increased mobility to and from Iceland relates to the rapid growth of the tourism industry since 2010. After the economic crash, the government of Iceland embarked on a massive campaign to attract more tourists (Jóhannesson and Huijbens 2013; Loftsdóttir, Kjartansdóttir and Lund 2017). The tourism industry revolves around various kinds of mobilities, not just those of tourists and locals, and people are positioned quite differently in terms of power. Here, various stakeholders have often complained about the Icelandic government's lack of commitment to tourism development (Jóhannesson 2012, 179). Immigrants in precarious positions increasingly hold lower-paying jobs in the tourism industry – like low-paid work in general in Iceland. Young people seeking adventure and willing to work for little pay also hold some of these jobs (Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson 2016, 44–45). In their chapter, Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Jónína Einarsdóttir, and Ástrós Anna Klemensdóttir examine 'voluntourism' in Iceland and why young people work as volunteers in this country. The participants in their study came to Iceland to combine travel and work. Some were doing jobs that are generally not seen as voluntary jobs for companies that compete on the market where collective wage agreements exist. The study participants' primary goals, however, were to empower themselves and experience adventure, not to earn wages.

Tourism has affected Icelandic society in various and often unpredictable ways. One area where tourism has shaped Iceland's society is museums, which were also affected by the neoliberal logic of the late 20th century (Hafsteinsson 2014; Grenier and Hafsteinsson 2016). John Bodinger's article in this book shows how the tourism boom brought a new audience to the museums in Iceland. They are no longer speaking solely to the Icelandic nation or people living in Iceland but also to tourists, who see a visit to the National Museum as part of their experience of Iceland. Bodinger's focus on museums' engagement with the nation draws attention to the role of the museum as a place of local or national self-representation and one aspect of a particular type of branding of Iceland that has been pushed since the economic crash (Loftsdóttir 2019; Hafsteinsson 2014). Part of Iceland's reputation as a desirable tourism destination has, furthermore, been its position as an Arctic destination (Bailes et al. 2014). As such, the production of souvenirs has strongly branded Iceland (Lund, Kjartansdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016). Kristinn Schram and Katla Kjartansdóttir exemplify this process in their chapter, showing how the Arctic has featured highly in such presentations. As their discussion indicates, these representations have become tightly linked with different kinds of consumption and the mobilities of different populations.

As initially stated, this collection reflects the increasing importance of research on different forms of mobilities in relation to Iceland, both new research on this subject and increased recognition and awareness of how past mobilities have shaped the country and those living there. Our overview has focused on the late 20th and early 21st centuries when different forms of mobility have intensified. While this book only showcases part of the research being conducted, we have attempted in this introduction to show how these disparate cases demonstrate the various ways in which mobility and transnationalism have been important in Iceland.

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Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and
Ólöf Garðarsdóttir

Becoming an Immigration Country
The Case of Iceland 1990–2019

Abstract

Since the late 1990s, Iceland has gone from being a country with only marginal immigration to having one of the highest immigration rates in Europe. At the height of the economic boom, prior to the recession that started in 2008, immigrants accounted for 8.6% of Iceland's population. After several years with lower immigration rates, the trend was reversed in 2011, and currently (2019), 14.1% of the population are immigrants. In this chapter we examine these demographic transformations and concurrent economic changes to show how Iceland changed from being primarily an emigration country to an immigration country. To shed further light on these changes, we look more closely at the migration trajectories of two immigrant groups of very different sizes: Poles, the largest group of immigrants from Europe, and Filipinos, the largest group coming from Asia. We examine the context of their migration from their respective countries and the Icelandic context into which they move in terms of ongoing social and economic transformations and transnational agreements. Our analysis shows that while Icelanders continue to be mobile, immigration to the country has changed drastically over the last two decades, with a rapid increase in the number of immigrants, and new nationalities from Europe (primarily Poland) becoming the most prominent immigrant groups. Migration from Poland and the Philippines, both of which began in a similar way, reflect global economic inequality and different opportunities for mobility, as well as different ways of moving to Iceland. Both groups have been employed largely in low-income jobs in a gendered labour market. After Poland joined the EU, migration from that country to Iceland both picked up speed and fluctuated more than migration from the Philippines.

Keywords: international migration, immigrants, sex ratio, Poles, Filipinos

Introduction

Until the end of the twentieth century, the immigration rate for Iceland was low, and the population was ethnically relatively homogenous. At the time, most of the people immigrating to Iceland came from the other Nordic countries and a handful of other Western states. During the 1990s, profound changes occurred in international migration patterns, with Iceland becoming part of the European Economic Area and a single labour market, as well as Iceland experiencing a growing need for workers in construction and other sectors (see also Chapter 1 in this volume). Immigration increased, and the profile of the immigrant population changed. In the first two decades of the 21st century, there has been a rapid increase in the immigrant population, especially since 2005. In 2008, at the height of the economic boom, immigrants (defined as persons born abroad whose parents were both born abroad) accounted for 8.6% of Iceland's population. Immigration slowed down during the economic crisis but has skyrocketed again, and in January of 2019, 14.1% of the population were immigrants (Statistics Iceland 2020a). In this chapter, we examine how Iceland changed from being primarily an emigration country to an immigration country. Almost two-thirds of the immigrant population of Iceland comes from European countries outside the Nordic region, and 12.7% from Asia (Statistics Iceland 2020a). The majority have come to Iceland to take low-income jobs in food production, construction, and services. To illustrate this transformation, we examine the migration trajectories of two immigrant groups of very different sizes, Poles, which comprise the largest group from Europe, and Filipinos the largest group from Asia.

We discuss the context of people's migration from these two countries in terms of the ongoing social and economic transformations that have occurred in Iceland, as well as changes in transnational agreements. We highlight the demographic components of the immigrant groups with regard to time of arrival, reason for migration, gender, and length of stay in Iceland. Our analysis is based on several research projects that examine the experience of migrants in Iceland since the 1990s, which have focused mainly on the experience of Poles and Filipinos, and on an analysis of statistical data from Statistics Iceland. We begin with a general description of the social and economic context of the changing migration patterns in Iceland and then exemplify the migration structure by comparing the migration flows from Poland and the Philippines.

The context of growing migration to Iceland

The development of international migration movements to Iceland has been different from that seen in the other Nordic states. Compared to these countries, immigration had relatively little importance for a long time. During the post-war period many Northern and Western European countries, including the Nordic countries, sought workers from abroad to take on jobs in their growing industry and services sectors (Castles 2006). Sweden, for example, had already begun recruiting foreign workers in the 1950s, and Denmark and Norway in the late 1960s. All these countries experienced growing international migration during the economic boom of the 1960s until the start of the oil crisis in the early 1970s. People arrived from different countries outside Northern and Western Europe, such as former Yugoslavia, Pakistan and Turkey, mainly to take on low-income jobs. After the halting of labour migration in the 1970s, immigrants to these countries increasingly arrived in the context of family reunification, or as refugees (Brochmann and Hagelund 2011).

Iceland did not experience labour migration in the 1950s and 1960s. The collapse of the herring industry in the late 1960s marked the beginning of a deep recession with high unemployment. Emigration increased, and in 1970, nine out of 1,000 inhabitants emigrated (see Figure 1). The most common destinations were the other Nordic countries, but a notable percentage emigrated to more distant places, such as Australia. With the emigration in the late 1960s, it became increasingly common for Icelandic citizens to live abroad for a brief period (Garðarsdóttir 2012). Figure 1 shows that the immigration rate for Icelandic citizens (i.e. return rate) has been high since that time, and a study by Statistics Iceland shows that more than 70% of Icelandic emigrants return within seven years of their departure (Harðarson 2010; Garðarsdóttir 2012).

Traditionally there have been migration flows between Iceland and the other Nordic countries, especially between Iceland and Denmark. Iceland was part of the Danish Realm until 1918, and some crown officials and merchants from Denmark did therefore settle in Iceland (Ellenberger 2013). Migration flows between Iceland and the other Nordic countries have remained important up to the present day. Iceland was occupied by the British, and later the American forces during World War II, and after the war Iceland signed a defence treaty with the United States, and from 1951 to 2006, the US military operated a naval air base in Iceland. Until the 1990s, immigration in Iceland was marked by these international relations. Thus, in 1986, 662 of the persons who immigrated to Iceland, or 44.1%, came from another Nordic country, 23.6% from Western Europe, and 18.1% from North America (mainly the USA) (Statistics Iceland 2020b).

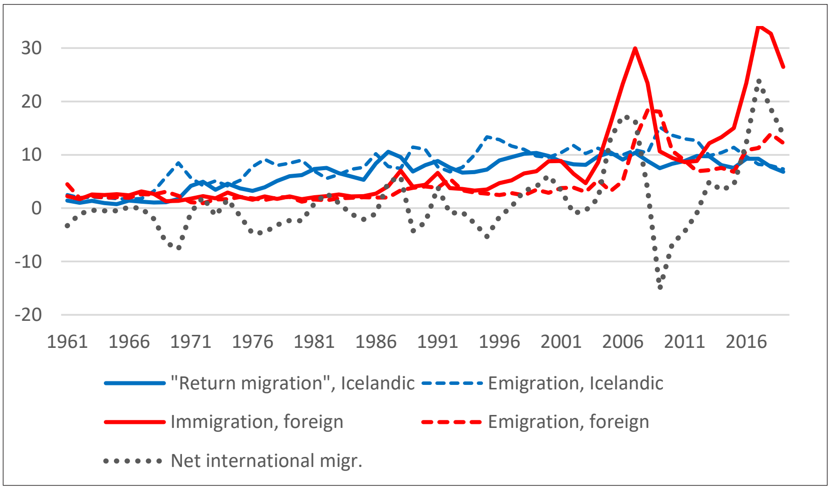

Figure 1. International migration of Icelandic and foreign citizens 1961–2019
Source: Statistics Iceland 2020b.

Figure 1 shows that the emigration and immigration rate for Icelandic citizens increased during the 1970s, but that it has been relatively stable at around 10 per 1,000 population since the 1980s.[1] The emigration rate is elevated during periods of recession, in addition to the late 1960s and early 1970s, emigration of Icelandic citizens increased during the crisis of the early 1990s and during the economic collapse of 2008, when the emigration level for Icelandic citizens was 15 per 1,000 population. In comparison to their Nordic neighbours, Icelandic citizens are highly mobile (Garðarsdóttir 2012).

Figure 1 shows that immigration (of foreign citizens) was of little importance until the 1990s. The net-immigration rate was close to 0 until the late 1980s (both the immigration and emigration rate for foreign citizens being around 2 per 1,000 population). In the late 1980s the immigration rate more than doubled, reaching almost 4 per 1,000 population. At the same time, the emigration of foreign citizens remained at a low level. However, the big shift did not occur until the mid-1990s, when there was a notable increase in immigration. This shift took place at the same time as major socio-economic transformations that resulted from a combination of various factors including deregulation of the financial sector and the privatization of fishing quotas, which lead to an economic boom, and concurrently the establishment of the European Economic Area (1994), which includes the EU and EFTA countries (Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016; see chapter 1 in this book). In the 1990s people increasingly arrived from more diverse countries than before, including states in Eastern and Central Europe and Asia. Many of these migrants were employed in fish processing plants in villages that had a history of seasonal labourers, both from other parts of Iceland and from abroad. Seasonal workers had formerly come mostly from the other Nordic countries, but also from South Africa, Australia and New Zealand (Júlíusdóttir, Skaptadóttir and Karlsdóttir 2013). The new groups of workers arriving in the 1990s came primarily from Poland, but also from other countries like the Philippines and Thailand. Since fish processing has traditionally been a women's occupation, more women than men came to work in the fish factories (Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska 2008). Women of these nationalities originally immigrated to Iceland to live with an Icelandic spouse, but they were instrumental in the chain migration of other people from their respective countries to Iceland. Migrants have generally been recruited for low-income jobs in food production, construction, and services (Skaptadóttir 2011). The assumption in Iceland regarding these workers was in many ways similar to that seen in other parts of Northern and Western Europe in the post WWII period: that these immigrants would return to their country of origin after a temporary stay (Rush and Martin 2008).

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[1] Observe that included in the figures on emigrating Icelandic citizens are immigrants who have been granted Icelandic citizenship.

Employment-related mobility to Iceland intensified greatly with the economic boom of the mid 2000s, especially after 2006, when persons from the new member states of the European Union (those that joined in the 2004 enlargement), including Poland and Lithuania, no longer needed to secure work permits before coming to Iceland. Being a member of the EEA, Iceland is part of the single EU labour market. During this period, the share of the immigrant population rose from 4.4% (2005) to 9.0% (2009) of the total population of Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2020a). Immigration peaked in 2007, when the immigration rate for foreign citizens came to 30 per 1,000 population. The same year, the emigration rate for foreign citizens was 13 per 1,000 (see Figure 1). A large share of these workers, or 36% of all foreign workers in 2007, were men employed in the construction industry (Sigurðsson and Arnarson 2011). At that time, there was a high demand for workers for large construction projects – including a power plant and an aluminium smelter in East Iceland and building projects in the capital area – which could not be met within Iceland.

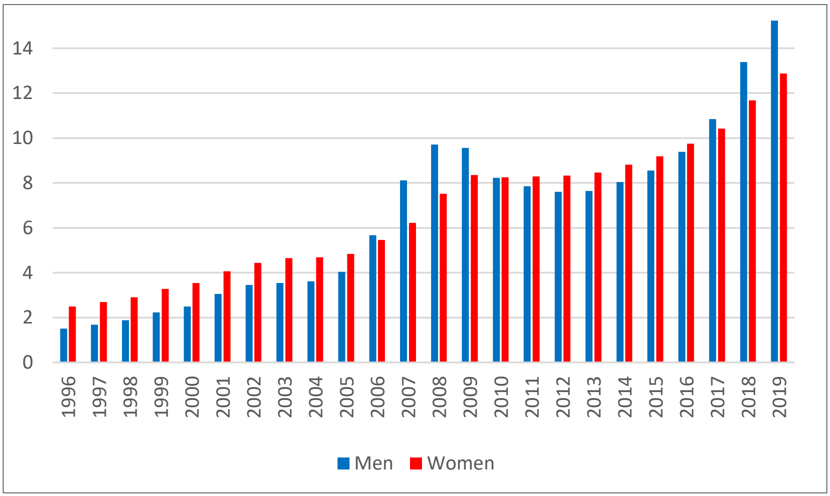


Figure 2. The immigrant population in Iceland by sex 1996–2019
Source: Statistics Iceland 2020a.

With the economic recession that started in 2008, the population of Iceland decreased somewhat, with both Icelandic and foreign citizens moving abroad. In 2009, net migration was negative for both Icelandic and foreign citizens, and the population declined by 0.5%. However, despite growing emigration, relatively large numbers of new immigrants still came to Iceland, and the immigration rate for foreign citizens was higher during the crisis than it had been in the early 2000s (see Figure 1) (Garðarsdóttir 2012).

Prior to the economic boom that began in 2005, women were more numerous than men in the immigrant population in Iceland. Figure 2 shows that in 2006, male immigrants already outnumbered women. During the recession, the percentage of female immigrants remained stable at a level of slightly more than 8% of all women in Iceland. At the same time, the proportion of male immigrants fell from 9.1% to 7.9% between 2008 and 2011. The collapse of Iceland's financial infrastructure affected male immigrants unfavourably, since many of them were employed in sectors like the construction industry, where companies were abruptly forced to cut back or shut down. In May 2010, 16.8% of Iceland's registered unemployed were foreign citizens. Approximately 90% of them were from European countries, primarily from Poland (Skaptadóttir 2015). Given the high unemployment among immigrants and the large number of recent arrivals, it is interesting that so few of them decided to leave the country (Garðarsdóttir and Bjarnason 2010).

Tourism played a central role in the economic recovery of Iceland. The growth of tourism created new jobs in that sector and in other areas such as construction and led to an increase in immigration (Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016). In 2019, foreign citizens made up 19% of the work force (Alþýðusamband Íslands 2019). In 2017 the immigration rate for foreign citizens rose to 34.2 per 1,000 population and exceeded the immigration rate observed at the peak of the economic boom in 2007 (see Figure 1). At that point, the male immigrant population outnumbered females (Figure 2).

Currently, most of the immigrant population in Iceland comes from countries within the EEA (European Economic Area), and again Poles continue to be the largest immigrant group. Traditionally, most immigrants to Iceland were born in Denmark, but in 1998, this group was replaced by Polish immigrants. While the number of immigrants from Denmark has remained relatively stable, the number of immigrants from Poland has increased exponentially. At the start of the economic recession in 2009, 40.4% of all immigrants in Iceland came from Poland (see Table 1). Since the 1990s, Filipinos have been one of the largest immigrant groups in Iceland, and they are the largest group from Asia.

Table 1. The immigrant population in Iceland, the proportion of immigrants born in Denmark, Poland, and the Philippines, and the ranking of those groups by size 1996–2019

	Immigrant population	Immigrants from Denmark		Immigrants from Poland		Immigrants from the Philippines	
	N	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
1996	5,357	13.7	1	6.4	4	4.6	8
1998	6,514	10.6	2	12.3	1	5.2	6
2001	10,073	7.3	2	15.6	1	6.6	4
2006	16,689	4.2	5	21.6	1	6.9	2
2007	22,109	3.3	8	29.6	1	5.6	2
2008	27,240	2.8	7	38.6	1	4.6	4
2012	25,440	2.5	8	36.3	1	5.4	3
2018	43,736	1.6	14	38.8	1	4.0	3
2019	50,272	1.4	14	38.1	1	3.9	3

Source: Statistics Iceland 2020a.

The initial immigration from Poland and the Philippines to Iceland

Poland and the Philippines, countries in different parts of the world, share a relatively strong culture of emigration (Goździak and Pawlak 2016; Barber 2008). In the 1970s and 1980s, Poles increasingly sought employment abroad, at first mostly in Eastern European countries. Emigration increased exponentially after Poland's restrictions on travel were lifted in 1989. During the transition period of the early 1990s, the unemployment rate was high (Napierala and Wojtyńska 2016). A small number of Poles were already living in Iceland at this time; some of them were metal workers employed in shipyards, and a few persons had moved to Iceland to live with an Icelandic partner (Wojtyńska 2011). Figure 3a shows that in the initial years of immigration from Poland to Iceland in the late 1980s, immigrants were few in number and mostly men. This trend was reversed in the 1990s when women from Poland outnumbered men.

Emigration has a long history in the Philippines, but since the Marcos regime in the 1970s, emigration has been part of an economic development strategy based on the remittances of exported labourers (Barber 2008; Mahler and Pessar 2006). Since the 1990s, more women than men have migrated from the Philippines to different countries as nurses or other health care professionals and domestic workers (Parreñas 2001). People from the Philippines started to migrate to Iceland at the same time as Poles, but unlike Poles, women have always been more numerous than men (Figure 3b).

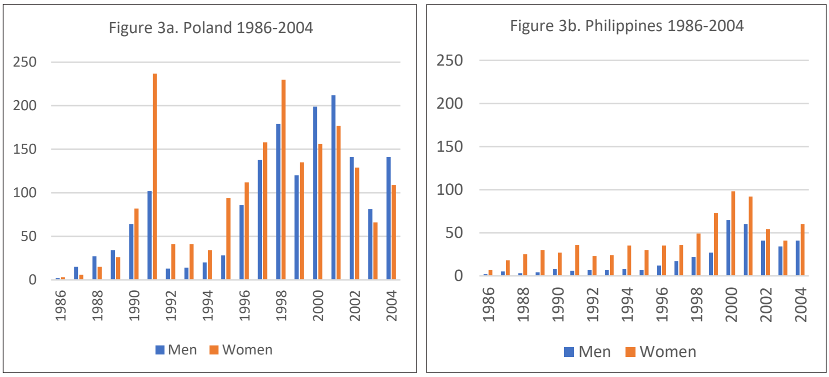


Figure 3a-b. Immigration from Poland and the Philippines by sex 1986–2004 (N)
Source: Statistics Iceland 2020a.

In the early years of growing migration to Iceland in the late 1990s, migration from Poland and the Philippines followed similar trajectories. Women from these countries who had arrived to join an Icelandic spouse played an active role in the recruitment of relatives and friends who followed in their footsteps. Thus, migration from Poland and the Philippines was clearly an example of chain migration, and this chain migration was initiated primarily by women (Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska 2008). Some companies began to recruit workers in Poland, and in the mid-1990s, Poles commonly arrived in small groups to work in fish processing plants in coastal towns (Skaptadóttir 2015). Filipinos came primarily due to connections in Iceland and frequently arrived with a relative or friend to work in fish processing. These migrants entered a gendered labour market, and both nationalities gradually moved into other food-processing or service-sector jobs, or work in the health sector (Júlíusdóttir et al. 2013; Napierala and Wojtyńska 2016).

Our analysis of the immigrant population from both counties also indicates that female immigrants were more likely to move permanently to Iceland than men. The proportion of female immigrants is thus less sensitive to economic fluctuations than is the case with males (see Figure 2). Figure 4 shows that in the late 1990s, the sex ratio (men per women) among immigrants from Poland and the Philippines was lower than in the immigrant population as a whole. When it comes to Filipinos, there were only 120

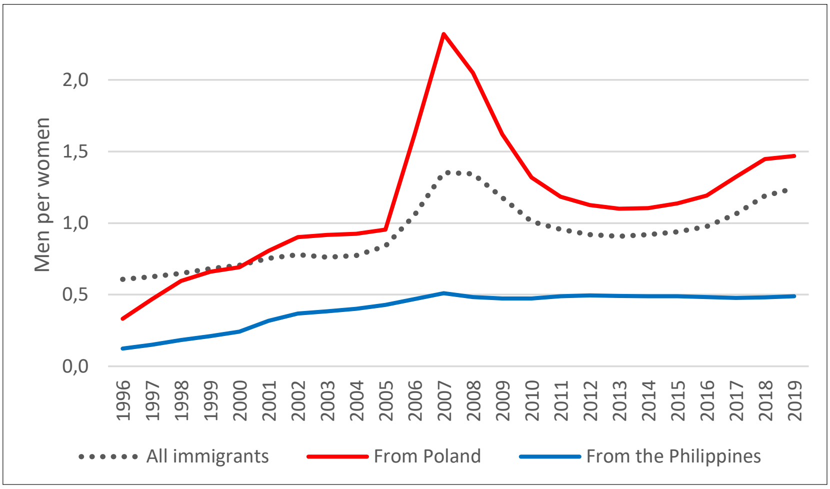


Figure 4. Sex ratio for the total immigrant population: immigrants from the Philippines and immigrants from Poland 1996–2019

Source: Statistics Iceland 2020a.

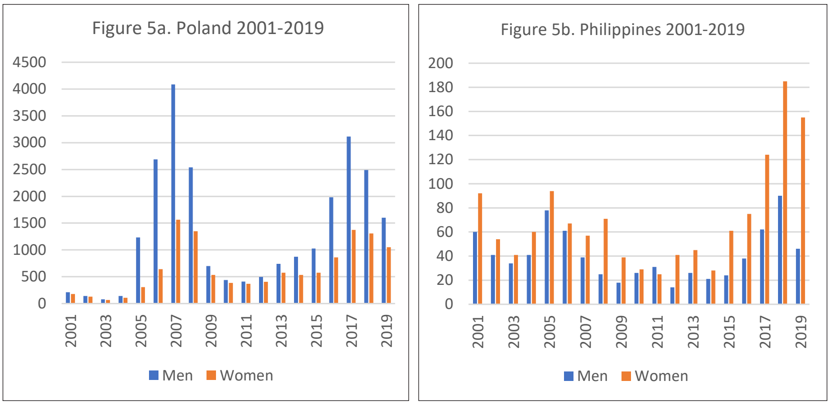
men per 1,000 women in 1996, compared to 470 Polish men per 1,000 women. For the immigrant population as a whole, there were 630 men per 1,000 women. In both populations, the sex ratio increased, and when Poland entered the EU in 2004, the number of men and women from Poland was almost identical. For immigrants from the Philippines, the number of women has been twice that of men since 2006. More women than men have arrived in Iceland from the Philippines every year since then, but Polish men began to arrive in larger numbers as early as 2000.

CHANGES IN MIGRATION IN THE MID-2000s

The transformations in Iceland in the mid-2000s: the economic boom occurring at the same time as the opening of the single labour market to new member states of the EU affected Poles and Filipinos very differently. After Poland became a member of the European Union in 2004, Poles gained access to the EU's single labour market, and the UK and Germany became popular destination countries (Salt and Okólski 2014). From May 2006, when the two-year delay of access to the Icelandic labour market expired, Poles no longer needed a work permit for Iceland. In 2006, with new EU member states entering this single labour market, it became difficult for citizens outside the EEA, such as people from the Philippines, to get a work permit in Iceland, despite an increased demand for labour (Sigurðsson and Arnarsson 2011; Bissat 2013). Thus, while the number of Poles skyrocketed after 2006, immigration from the Philippines declined after 2005 (compare Figures 5a and 5b). The drop was less noticeable among women than men. In general, the primary means for Filipinos to enter the country after 2005 was family reunification, as it was for other Asians (Bissat 2013). Poles on the other hand moved to Iceland in large numbers to take jobs in various sectors, for example, in the many ongoing construction projects, which explains the conspicuous rise in male immigrants from Poland during these years (2006, 2007, and 2008). Men were much more numerous than women among Polish immigrants during this economic boom (see Figure 5b).

AFTERMATH OF THE CRASH AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The recession, starting in October 2008, also affected the two groups discussed here differently. After the financial crash, a significant number of Poles left Iceland. Unemployment was higher among Poles than in the total population, as many had been employed in construction. With fewer



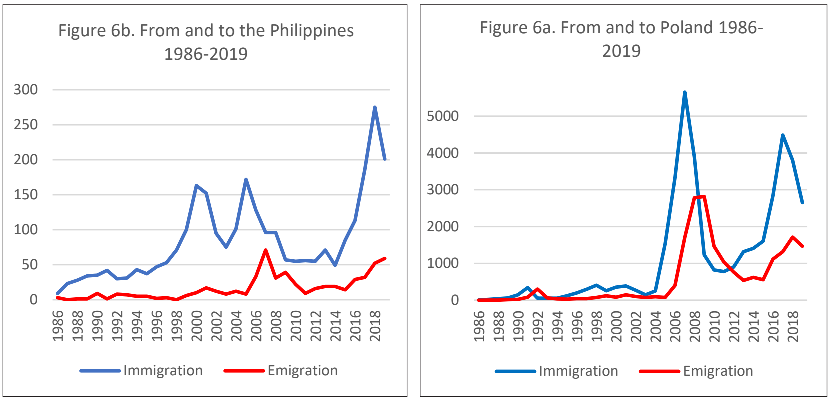
Figures 5a-b. Immigration from Poland and the Philippines by sex 2001–2019 (N) (OBS. DIFFERENT SCALES)
Source: Statistics Iceland 2020b.

Filipinos working in construction, they were less affected. Moreover, facing more border restrictions, they did not have the same opportunities to seek jobs elsewhere, and relatively few left Iceland. Although immigration from Poland and the Philippines to Iceland slowed down in both groups, it did continue, as can be seen in Figure 5a-b.

With the development of the tourism sector in recent years, Iceland has experienced increasing immigration like that seen in the mid-2000s. The great majority of workers who arrived in Iceland from 2015 to 2019 were from Poland. They were recruited for various sectors, such as tourism and the fast-growing construction industry. With restricted access to migration to Iceland, the Filipinos migrating to Iceland were much fewer in number. However, we can see from figure 6a that their immigration has also been picking up. Moreover, unlike Poles, where men remained more numerous after 2000, the number of Filipino women remained larger than men, as seen in table 5a, and a larger number of Filipino women than had been seen in any previous year moved to Iceland in 2016. They have, for example, been able to come as specialists (primarily nurses), au pairs and university students.

Icelandic citizenship – Staying or leaving?

Now that immigrants to Iceland have, within two decades, moved from comprising less than 2% of the population to more than 14%, questions arise if these are they are largely temporary migrants, or if people from Poland and the Philippines are settling in Iceland. Many studies have shown that Polish migrants usually intend to live abroad only temporarily. This notion of a temporary stay – although it might often be extended – is also shown in Icelandic studies (Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska 2008; Wojtyńska 2012). As members of the EU, Poles can seek employment in different countries in Europe, whereas Filipinos have limited options when considering a move abroad and less flexibility in this regard until they have taken Icelandic citizenship. In addition, more people from the Philippines than from Poland have Icelandic spouses.



Figures 6a-b. Immigration and emigration between Iceland and Poland / Philippines 1986–2019

Source: Statistics Iceland 2020c.

Figures 6a and b indicate that return migration has been more common among Poles than Filipinos. Emigration from Iceland to the Philippines has never exceeded immigration. In the case of Poland, on the other hand, emigration has exceeded immigration during periods of economic recession. This was the case during both the recession of the early 1990s and then in the wake of the economic collapse in 2008. Thus, during the years 2009–2011, the number of people leaving for Poland exceeded the number of immigrants from Poland.

There are some signs of persons in both groups staying for extended periods. Information from Statistics Iceland indicates that considerable shares of immigrants from the two countries have settled in Iceland. This applies especially to immigrants from the Philippines. Table 2 shows that almost two-thirds (64.8%) of all Filipinos have lived in Iceland for 10 years or more. The same is true for less than one-third (29.5%) of 16,970 immigrants from Poland.

Table 2. Immigrant population[1] from Poland and the Philippines January 2018

	Poles		Filipinos	
	N	%	N	%
Immigrant population – Total	16,970		1,754	
Immigrant population moving to Iceland before 2008	5,000	29.5	1,136	64.8
Immigrant population coming before 2008 with Icelandic citizenship	1,497	29.9	983	86.5

Source: Statistics Iceland 2019.

[1] Immigrants are defined as persons born abroad with both parents born abroad

Another indication of settlement in a new country and different possibilities for mobility may be the major difference between these two groups when it comes to applying for Icelandic citizenship. Our dataset shows that it is more common for immigrants from the Philippines to take Icelandic citizenship than is the case with Poles. Both countries accept double citizenship, as does Iceland. Table 2 shows that 86.5% of immigrants from the Philippines who have been here for more than ten years have Icelandic citizenship, whereas the same applies to less than one-third of Polish immigrants in the same situation (29.9%).

CONCLUSION

Until the 1990s, Iceland differed from the other Nordic countries in that the immigration rate was relatively low compared to other Western countries. Since then, there has been a major increase in immigration, in step with ongoing economic transformations and increased demand for labour. While Icelanders have remained mobile, Iceland itself has been transforming into an immigration country. Currently, few countries in Europe have higher immigration rates than Iceland (Eurostat 2020). Unlike before, when immigrants to Iceland came mostly from the Nordic and other Western countries, people now come largely from countries in Eastern and Central Europe and Southeast Asia. Over two decades, Iceland has thus changed from being a relatively homogenous society to a society with people of diverse national backgrounds. Most immigrants are employed in low-income jobs, which reflects global economic inequalities.

This growing immigration to Iceland has been multifaceted, as can be seen when examining the immigration of Poles and Filipinos to Iceland. The migration of these two groups reflects the diverse mobility opportunities for people from different parts of the world (Castles 2010). Whereas people of these two nationalities had similar migration patterns until 2004, this changed when Poles gained access to the EU labour market, and since then, they have been by far the largest group of immigrants. Until the mid-2000s, there were more women than men of both nationalities coming to Iceland and taking on similar jobs, but since then, more men than women have arrived from Poland, whereas women have remained more numerous among Filipinos. While immigration from the Philippines remains quite stable, there is more flexibility in the emigration and immigration rates of Poles. This flexibility is depicted in the steep changes in migration rates discussed in this chapter. These differences, and the openness and closeness of borders also lead to Filipinos seeking longer-term stays in Iceland than Poles, which reflects the way in which closed borders might more likely result in long-term stays (de Haas et. al. 2018). These migration trajectories highlight the different opportunities for migration that are dependent on geopolitical position and transnational agreements, such as the EEA. Immigration from those two countries therefore reflects global disparities and unequal opportunities for mobility, which are reflected in different possibilities to seek employment in other countries.

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KRISTÍN LOFTSDÓTTIR

Racism and Racialization in Iceland

ABSTRACT

Racist ideas have long been important in explaining and understanding human diversity, with the present being no exception. This chapter focuses on how mobile and interlinked discourses of racial differences have shaped ideas about Iceland, as well as being a part of Icelandic self-perception. It underlines how scholars in Iceland drew on racist theories and describes the afterlife of highly transnational racist ideas in Iceland in the present. The chapter starts with an historical contextualization of racism in Iceland, stressing the mobility of bodies and racial ideas which jointly made ideas of race and diversity a part of common-sense knowledge in Iceland, and then moves on to the present, mapping out the interconnectedness and differences between Icelandic racializing discourses compared to similar discourses elsewhere. Finally, it points out how tourism has intensified the notion of the Icelandic body as a white body. The data foregrounding the chapter derives from several research projects that have focused on racialization in Iceland and the way racism has manifested itself in Iceland.

Keywords: Racism, whiteness, immigration, tourism, exceptionalism

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the way in which mobile and interlinked discourses of racial differences have shaped ideas in and about Iceland. Theories of racial differences emerged gradually following increasing European expansion after 1500, justifying dehumanizing practices and forceful expulsions of certain populations. During the 19th century, racism became a key to understanding human diversity, as scholars in different countries and across continents shared ideas and scientific 'results' that aimed to prove humanity could be divided into different racial groups with distinct, inherent characteristics (Keita and Kittles 1997). I will show how scholars in

Iceland drew on racist theories prevalent elsewhere in the global north, and I will discuss the afterlife of these highly transnational racist ideas in Iceland in the present.

I base my theoretical perspective on scholars who have emphasized the need to understand racism as simultaneously deeply transnational and situational, gaining meaning in particular places through intersecting with localized knowledge and understandings (Garner 2017; Essed and Trienekens 2008). Here, I especially tease out how racism is a mobile phenomenon that has been present for a long time in Iceland and continues to draw on and be shaped by wider discourses of diversity. For a long time, there has been a strong historical notion in Iceland emphasizing the nation's isolation from the rest of the world and implying that Iceland was outside historical processes that took place elsewhere (Loftsdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2016.) Positioning Iceland within critical theories that have addressed race and colonialism as a constituent in creating the modern world (Grosfoguel 2013) can contribute toward destabilizing strong national narratives that see Icelandic people and bodies as standing apart from international history. As an anthropologist and feminist, socially categorized as white, I find it important to take a critical stand and understand how Icelandic discourse and identity-building engages with larger geographies of power, whiteness and racism.

The data foregrounded in my discussion derives from several research projects that have focused on the racialization of Icelandic people and the way racism has manifested itself in Iceland (see Loftsdóttir 2019a, 2016, 2014). The concept of racialization is important, as it draws attention to the way the idea of race has to be made meaningful through different social processes where people stand in unequal power relations (Garner 2010, 19). In these projects, I have interviewed individuals in Icelandic society who have migrant backgrounds (men and women from the Balkan countries: from Lithuania and Latvia, and from different African states (including such diverse countries as South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Morocco, Nigeria, Angola, and Ghana) as well as native-born Icelanders in different contexts. Parts of these interviews were taken as a means of analysing wider global phenomena, such as the Icelandic economic crash (Loftsdóttir 2017), Iceland's participation in international development and peacekeeping (Loftsdóttir 2014) and the mobility of the nursery rhyme 'Ten Little Negroes' (Loftsdóttir 2016).

The discussion is divided into two parts. I start with historical contextualization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, stressing the mobility of bodies and racial ideas which jointly made ideas of race and diversity a part of common-sense knowledge in Iceland. This discussion examines the image of the nation as presented in Icelandic school textbooks and older periodicals and books. In the second part of the chapter, I move closer to the present and map out the interconnectedness and differences between Icelandic racializing discourses compared to similar discourses elsewhere. Finally, I point out how tourism has intensified the notion of the Icelandic body as a white body, and what it means to have a non-white body in Iceland.

ICELAND IN THE WORLD OF COLONIALISM

A crucial part of the nationalistic narrative in Iceland has been a strong emphasis on Iceland's isolation from the rest of the world. Anthropologists, historians and other scholars in the humanities and social sciences have, for the last two decades, worked to debunk this mythical notion of Iceland's past. As outlined in the introduction to this book, they have demonstrated Iceland's connections to various transnational phenomena. One aspect of this myth of isolation was a lack of interest in placing Iceland within a wider context of colonial histories and racism. Political organization in Iceland was shaped by various ideological changes in a larger European context, such as religious disputes, as well as ideas associated with the Enlightenment (Agnarsdóttir 2013).

Contextualization of Iceland within the world of colonialism draws attention to the way the Nordic nations in general were shaped within complex European dynamics and relations with the wider world. However, these connections have often been ignored or dismissed (Tuori 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2014). Through its relation to Denmark, Iceland became part of a wider, transnational space. Denmark had colonies and trading posts in various parts of the world, exporting spices, cotton and textiles made from silk, as well as sugar. In addition to its colonies in the North Atlantic, The Danish East India Company, for example, had trading posts on the eastern coast of India and in the Bay of Bengal. Denmark had sugar plantations in the Caribbean Islands (Naum and Nordin 2013, 6). The workforce on the Danish plantations consisted of slaves, often coming from Danish trading posts in West Africa, which also sent gold and Ivory to Denmark (Naum and Nordin 2013, 6–8).

While most Icelandic people were informally part of this transnational space, others, such as Jón Ólafsson, visited South Africa and India, for example, while working for the Danish East India Company in the early 1600s. His travels have to be seen as a part of Europe's increasing expansion at the time, as well as European states' attempts to gain control of resources in distant lands (Óskarsson 1908). Jón Ólafsson brought his experiences in distant lands back home through texts that were widely read in Iceland (Durrenberger and Pálsson 1989, xiii). Other Icelanders participated in settler-colonialism in North America (Brydon 2001) and South America (Eyþórsdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016). Texts moving across continents, and people on the move, brought racist ideas about human diversity to Iceland. Periodicals, news, letters and travel narratives all included descriptions of people living in various parts of the world, and this diversity was often understood through the lens of emerging racialized theories in Europe.

France's interest in Iceland in the mid-19th century further underlines Iceland's interconnectedness with the world of colonialism and racism. An expedition to explore Iceland was sponsored by the government of France in 1856, and it was motivated by both economic and scientific interests (Sigurjónsdóttir 1999). The scientific exploration involved collecting plaster casts of busts Icelandic men and women, which became a part of a collection in the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris illustrating the different races of mankind (Sigurjónsdóttir 1999). In this collection, images of Icelandic people were set alongside and compared to other racialized groups from different corners of the world, such as West Africa, North America and China.

Turning back to texts written within the framework of the Enlightenment, scholars in Iceland actively tried to educate the Icelandic public by producing narratives that in one way or another addressed the diversity of the world. Periodicals such as *Íslensk sagnablöð* (1817–1826) and *Skírnir* (1827– to the present) brought news that was seen as important at the time, including information about issues like the European colonization of different parts of the world, the slave trade and settler-colonialism (Sigurðsson 1986). One of these Enlightenment advocates was Magnús Stephensen, who produced and published periodicals to educate the general public. Stephensen also published various other texts, such as *Skemmtileg vina gleði í fróðlegum samræðum og ljóðmælum*, published in 1797, which could loosely be translated as *Fun Friendship Enjoyment in Informative Discussions and Poetry*. Here, he tried to explain to the Icelandic public why some people are dark-skinned, emphasising diversity as a characteristic of all life on earth. He apparently assumes that some of his readers believed dark skin colouring was due to people not washing. He explained that skin pigmentation was the result of climate, landscape, diet and traditions (Stephensen 1797, 89–90). Even though his descriptions included some quite dehumanizing and highly subjective statements – he wondered for example, whether whiteness was mankind's original colour (Stephensen 1797, 113) – Stephensen still stressed variability in all human populations. He stated, for example, that even though 'negroes' (*negrar*) had become the generic term for inhabitants of the African continent, these peoples were in reality quite diverse (Stephensen 1797, 105). This indicates that the simple equation of blackness with inferiority, which was becoming so prevalent elsewhere, was not fully implanted in Iceland at this time.

In the second half of the 19th century, race as an organizing principle gained significant scientific respectability (Wade 2015). Rudimentary classifications of human races had, of course, been put forward by several scholars prior to that time. Some of the most important originated from the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnéus in 1738. These theories were further modified by others, including Joseph Arthur de Gobineau in his works of 1853–55. In Icelandic sources published at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the strongly authoritarian voice of science is clearly heard, culture and biology being used interchangeably to explain the inherent inferiority of some races and the superiority of others. A geography book by Karl Finnbogason, for example, talks about how head-shape, hair colour, skin colour and linguistic properties can be used to assign people to different racial groups. He then used quite subjective language to describe the racial groups themselves, words such as "devious," "talkative" or "cruel" (Finnbogason 1931, 102–103, 111–112).

I want to stress that ideas of race did not simply create non-white racial subjects. As theorising on race has noted for quite some time, racialization, or the process of assigning race to individuals, who learn to recognize themselves as belonging racial groups and are recognized as members of such groups by others, also involves the creation of the social category of whiteness. The power of whiteness rests strongly on the 'white' body becoming the 'normal' body from which others deviate in some sense (Puwar 2004). Thus, in discussions and textual representations in Iceland of uncivilized others and the colonialization of their lands, references to black or brown people have to be read simultaneously as discussion of being white, and that this intersects with other notions, such as being masculine and civilized.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the stress on Iceland as a modernizing and civilized part of Europe was a part of claims for Iceland's independence (Loftsdóttir 2019a; Rastrick 2013). In some sense, discourse on race and diversity took specific forms in Iceland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with discussions of those assumed to be racially inferior not always revolving around their differentce. This discussion was rather motivated by concern to distinguish the Icelandic nation from other peoples who had been colonized by European powers. Icelandic intellectuals often described their society as a ‘civilized nation’ or a ‘culture -nation’ (*menningarþjóð* in Icelandic) in contrast to ‘a nation in a state of nature’ (Icelandic: *náttúruþjóð*). Such references could be clearly seen in connection with all kinds of discussion, such as that concerning the Parliamentary festival of 1930, when there was a strong emphasis on demonstrating to foreigners that Iceland was as civilized as other European nations (see also Rastrick 2013). A text in one journal stated that foreigners attending the festival would see that:

> we are ‘culture-nation’, poor and unpopulated to be sure, but undergoing secure development toward maturity. Foreigners will see development in all areas, and this proves the nation’s capacity for culture. This will lead to Iceland no longer being considered a savage island in the northern sea. The [Icelandic] nation will be seen as participating in all nations’ journey toward higher culture and maturity.[1] (“Alþingishátíðin 930–1930” 1930)

This indicates how mobile discourses of race and difference were also important for Iceland in understanding its own position in a world of colonialism.

Racism and Iceland in the Present

The mobility of racial theories did not decrease at the beginning of the 20th and 21st centuries although these notions have continued to mutate. As scholars have noted, outspokenly biological theories of racial differences were largely seen as discredited after World War II, culture and religion now taking the leading role in explaining human variability (Lentin 2014). But the links between biological and cultural explanations of the past should not be discounted because cultural explanations and aesthetics have always featured strongly in racist explanations of human diversity, even when they were allegedly based on biology alone.

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[1] In Icelandic: “hjer býr menningarþjóð, að vísu fátæk og fámenn, en með öryggri stefnu í þroskaátt. Erlendir men sjá nú, að hjer er að fara fram mikil nýsköpun á öllum sviðum og það sannar menningarmátt þjóðarinnar. Af þessu leiðir það, að það verður ekki lengur litið til Íslands sem villimannaeyju norður í höfum. Þjóðin verður talin með í för þjóðanna fram til hærri menningar og sígils þroska.”

The demographic composition of Iceland has changed, as discussed in the introduction to this book. One result of the new laws passed in 2004 was priority being given to other European countries in terms of access to the Icelandic labour market, making it more difficult for people outside Europe to migrate to Iceland (see Skaptadóttir 2010). This, in fact, has ensured that it is more likely that those who are socially defined as white, without a colonial past and educated (see Garner 2007) are more able to move to and work in Iceland. However, one should still be careful not to assume that whiteness is an automatic or self-evident attribution. In the years before the economic crash of 2008, discourse in Iceland often racialized Lithuanian and Polish migrants (Loftsdóttir 2017b), referring to older, wider European ideas of Eastern Europe as not fully European, which we see articulated in a different context in the present (Dzenovska 2013; Buchowski 2006; Fox et al. 2012). At the time, these nationalities became part of what was seen as a disposable labour force in Iceland (Wojtyńska and Skaptadóttir 2008), indicating the strong relationship between the position of certain ethnicities in the labour market and the ways in which they are racialized (Garner 2007).

There are three aspects that I want to emphasize regarding racism and racialization in Iceland in the present, as they are linked to mobility in different ways. First, in Iceland a similar rhetoric exists as elsewhere in Europe and in the global north, where certain populations are seen as unsuitable or too different. In the social media and in internet discussion in Iceland, Islamophobic rhetoric often depicts Muslims as a threat to Icelandic society and Islam as the antithesis of Christianity. This was especially obvious when there was a proposal to build a mosque in Iceland in the 2010s (Friðriksdóttir 2014; Sigurðsson 2014). Such discourse echoes, in striking ways, the similar ideas about Muslims as a threat and a group that is incapable of assimilating in European society which are heard elsewhere in Europe. This depiction is despite conditions being quite different in Iceland, where Muslims are an invisible minority. Not only does such discourse fail to take into account the diversity that exists within Islam (see the chapter by Kristján Þór Sigurðsson in this book), it is also based on notions of Icelandic culture and a generic Western civilization. This could, for example, be observed when there was a proposal to amend the law on religious education in elementary schools. Some members of parliament apparently assumed that the proposal had been made due to pressure from other religious groups and warned against too much tolerance of religions that are different from Christianity (see Loftsdóttir 2011).

Such discussion of unsuitable populations could also be observed in the context of the so-called migrant-crisis after 2015. After September 11th 2001, a strong association was made between the concepts 'Muslim' and 'security threat' in the media and political discourse. When refugees and asylum seekers gained more visibility in Europe in 2015, that association could easily be mobilized, creating a strong association between Muslims, asylum seekers and refugees and security risks (Lucassen 2018). Such discourse has been seen in Iceland as well, these populations being characterized as dangerous and threatening. The active deportation of asylum seekers by the Icelandic government can be understood as a reflection of such concerns, but one could also claim that the deportations promote views of asylum seekers as threats, or as inferior human beings who must be forcefully removed.

The emphasis on increased fortification against outsiders that such actions reflect are in line with the policies of other European countries and countries in the global north. Those seeking asylum in Iceland express their frustration at being unable to live a normal life as productive members of society due to policies that prevent them from working while their applications are being processed (Ingvarsson, Egilsson and Skaptadóttir 2016). Simultaneously, social media participants and some politicians often demonize asylum seekers as economic migrants who are simply seeking an easier life (Loftsdóttir 2019b). Not only do such representations downplay the horrors and dehumanization that many asylum seekers have endured, they are also based on simplistic assumptions that such distinctions can be used to describe the complex reality of economic disparity, environmental violence and racism that characterizes the lives of many people in the world (on this division, see Cannedy 2018; Goodman and Spear 2007). Furthermore, research in Iceland has shown that asylum seekers express a strong desire to work and are willing to endure considerable difficulties to make that possible. However Icelandic regulations make it quite difficult. For example, one has to pay for work permits, and there are requirements regarding housing that are extremely difficult for people to meet before they have started to work (Tryggvadóttir 2019).

The second aspect that I want to emphasize is how certain expressions of racism are more accepted in Iceland than in some other European countries, as noted by some of the people I have interviewed and in my own experience (Loftsdóttir 2016). Here I am here referring to the use of racist signs and markers that are positioned as innocent and removed from their racist indexicality. In Iceland, this is seen, for example, in racist jokes and various forms of racist labelling (Loftsdóttir 2016). Such actions and discourse carry a striking resemblance to racism elsewhere and can be seen as one part of Nordic exceptionalism, where racism is explained away as not really existing in the Nordic countries (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2014; Rastas 2014; Hubenette and Lundström 2011). In this context, I have analysed the republication of a book with the children's nursery rhyme 'Ten Little Negroes'. It was first published in Iceland in 1922 and reprinted many times. The pictures in the book show boys as having red, swollen lips and monkey-like bodies and are clearly linked to racist depictions of black people elsewhere in the global north. As such, the book reflects the globalized repertoire of racism. When it was republished in the 2000s, many people in Iceland felt it could somehow be dissociated from racism, which they justified by citing Iceland's exceptional status as existing outside history of colonialism and racism. The debate also touched on many other aspects of racism, some people denying the book was racist and expressing the view that today 'everything' was considered racism. An important part of the discussion was a focus on the intentions of the author, i.e. that he had not meant the derogatory words as racist, he was not using them to promote racism, and that these words or ideas could thus be used with a different meaning or reference (Loftsdóttir 2016). Interviews with 22 individuals from different African countries living in Iceland in the early 2000s, all of whom could be socially categorized as black, showed that their experience of living in Iceland was generally positive. However, they were often surprised at how frequently they encountered the casual use of racial slurs, even from people with whom they were acquainted in some way (Loftsdóttir 2016).

Research in the other Nordic countries shows similar disputes regarding older or more recent cultural artefacts that have a strong association with racism (Rastas 2005; Vertelyté and Hervik 2019). Research in European countries which generally are not perceived as major players in colonial exploitation in the past, such as Switzerland and Austria, also shows similar patterns of claims of innocence (Lüthi, Falk and Purtschert 2016; Hipfl and Gronold 2011). The same applies to some countries that do have a long imperial history, such as the Netherlands (Wekker 2016). These particular discursive events are characterized by strong claims of innocence, individual actors divorcing their own histories from the brutality and marginalization that colonialism and racism created, in common with the Nordic countries and others. Nordic exceptionalism expresses itself in different contexts in Iceland, and as I have discussed elsewhere, it has to be seen as an unstable construction that can "be stretched in different directions or mobilized for various projects" (Loftsdóttir 2019a, 172). Eyrún Ólöf Sigurðardóttir and James Rice (this volume) show how this sense of exceptionalism continues to frame various international engagements, as well as becoming entangled with a sense of Iceland as a small and innocent nation (see also Loftsdóttir 2019a, 172).

The third aspect, which I will only mention briefly here, relates to the self-image of many Icelandic people. Even though Iceland's past diversity has often been downplayed, both in Iceland and outside the country, it is clear that the Icelandic population did become more diversified in the early or mid-20th century. Even so, Iceland's image in the outside world seems strongly based on images of whiteness that are increasingly perpetuated by the tourism industry (Loftsdóttir 2019a). Promotional material for Iceland has emphasized the white bodies of Icelanders, as well as implying that the national character has been strongly shaped by the land itself. Such image-making stresses essentialist ideas of nationhood and the singularity of its people. What gives such presentation salience is the strong, widespread association between being Nordic and being white (Lundström 2014; MacIntosh 2015). During the economic boom period as well, there was a very prevalent discourse emphasizing Icelandic ancestry as masculine and Viking, which also implied a white ancestry (Loftsdóttir 2019a). This reified association of Icelandic-ness and whiteness in the outside world is reflected, for example, in the way young Icelanders who identify or see themselves as mixed-race constantly have to justify their Icelandic identity to tourists visiting the country (Mörtudóttir and Loftsdóttir 2017; Mörtudóttir 2018).

DISCUSSION

Looking at Iceland from the angle of racism and the racialization of different populations puts Iceland clearly into focus as part of the wider, transnational world. Ideas which described the world in racialized ways have had easy access to Iceland in both the past and the present, which means that Icelandic racialized discourse has to be contextualized in a wider, cross-cultural context. If we look at Iceland in terms of mobility of persons, it is important to stress the diversity of the Icelandic population, both in the past and now, increasingly, in the present. As this chapter has attempted to show, racism did not somehow arrive with new immigrants at the turn of the century when migration to Iceland intensified. Iceland has for a long time been part of a globally interconnected world, where inconsistent ideas of racially segregated populations bring together diverse ideas that revolve around presumed difference in regard to culture, religion and civilization. While there is nothing exceptional about racism in Iceland, in the sense that Iceland has been and is shaped by larger discourses and practices, including racial violence, stereotypes and dehumanization, racism has to be contextualized within a larger Icelandic geopolitical context, as do other social and historical phenomena.

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"When you are a Professional"
Highly Skilled Immigrants' Experiences of the Tension between Avowed and Ascribed Identity

Abstract

Research has shown that highly skilled immigrants working in Iceland experience exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination and tend to be assigned jobs that do not make full use of their education. The objective of the study was to examine workplace interactions from the perspective of highly skilled immigrants in order to gain an understanding of the challenges they experience in the workplace, and how the identities and identity work of this group of immigrants affect their sense of belonging in their organizations. Interviews were conducted with 11 highly-skilled immigrants employed in Iceland. Phenomenological methodology was used in this study, revealing four themes. Our findings show that all of the participants faced barriers and struggled against the ascribed immigrant identity which they experienced as negative and stigmatized. They resisted by enacting their avowed professional identities, which have both virtuous and valuable elements. Their professionalism was appreciated by supervisors, but it could result in tension and exclusion by peers. They struggled to address exclusion and discrimination because they felt this could hurt their already precarious standing. They found it difficult to fully belong in the organization and felt that their Icelandic skills would never be deemed good enough, barring them from top-level positions.

Keywords: ascribed and avowed identity, discrimination, exclusion, highly skilled immigrants, identity work

Introduction

Skilled immigrants often end up in low-skilled positions that lead to downward mobility and talent waste (Al Ariss 2010), because their skills and education are devalued by employers (Salmonsson and Mella 2013). Considerable research has been conducted on exclusion and the contextual barriers to skilled immigrants' occupational integration (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry 2013; Barak and Levin 2002; Syed 2008), but less is known about skilled immigrants' perceptions and experiences of the host-country professional context and their career opportunities (Aten, Nardon and Isabelle 2016). This study focuses on skilled immigrants and offers new insights into their migration experiences, privileges and disadvantages.

Immigrants in Iceland are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than are local inhabitants (Statistics Iceland 2019), indicating that barriers exist that limit their occupational integration. Highly skilled immigrants working in Iceland experience exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination and tend to be assigned jobs that do not make full use of their education (Arnardóttir and Haraldsson 2014; Christiansen and Kristjánsdóttir 2016). Up until very recently, Icelandic culture lacked diversity, but the number of immigrants in Iceland is increasing. Currently they comprise about 14% of the population, and the majority arrives from other European countries for work (Statistics Iceland 2019). The first and only Icelandic integration policy was introduced in 2007, but it made no mention of refugees (Sigurjónsdóttir 2017). Homogeneous societies tend to put more pressure on immigrants to assimilate and conform to the mainstream culture (Christmas and Barker 2014), and Icelanders expect immigrants to assimilate and learn Icelandic (Önnudóttir 2009; Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen 2017; Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017). Thus, it is important to explore how highly skilled immigrants deal with such pressures, and how they manage the tension between asserting their skilled identities and the pressure to conform.

In this study, we focus on individual identity in the workplace (Brown 2015) and how it is constructed and negotiated, highlighting the tension between belonging and unbelonging (Christensen 2009) and the effect on immigrants' identities and identity work. We view identity as dynamic rather than static (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas 2008; Lahti 2013) and adopt the definition of identity work as "the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of self that is coherent, distinct and positively valued" (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas 2008, 15).

The objective of the study is to examine the challenges that highly skilled immigrants experience in the workplace and gain an understanding of how the identities and identity work of this group of immigrants affect their sense of belonging in their organizations. To gain deeper insight, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 immigrants, all of whom held university degrees and were employed in Iceland. We used phenomenological methodology, as it aims at understanding the immigrants' lived experiences of working in Iceland and their perceptions of those experiences.

Discrimination and exclusionary tendencies

Discrimination can be based on social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, and social class. It can range from subtle, nonverbal behavior, such as lack of eye contact and failure to listen to a person to exclusion from discussions, refusal to acknowledge a person's presence, verbal insults, exclusion from jobs or other economic opportunities, and even physical violence (Martin and Nakayama 2014). Discrimination in the form of rude jokes, bad service or other types of interpersonal discrimination can have a severe effect on stigmatized individuals, and these types of behavior can have a serious effect on the physical, psychological, and relational well-being of people in minority groups (Miller and Kaiser 2001).

Fluency in the dominant language can be a denominator of social power in workplace interactions and even decrease the concern of prejudice and discrimination toward certain cultural groups (Lahti 2013), and lack of fluency can lead to disempowerment. Being competent in Icelandic is the key to integration into Icelandic society (Kristjánsdóttir, Bjarnadottir and Saphiere 2015), and intolerance towards variations in pronunciation or foreign accents presents a barrier (Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen 2017). Research shows that accents can trigger bias (Deprez-Sims and Morris 2010), affect job-related decisions (Hosoda and Stone-Romero 2010), and be the basis for discrimination and exclusion. Even when immigrants speak Icelandic, they do not automatically fit into the Icelandic language community, and they feel that proficiency in Icelandic is sometimes not enough (Ólafsson and Meckl 2013). Having good language skills and a high level of education does not generally translate into higher occupational status or social integration for Polish immigrants in Iceland. However, education acquired in the host country did counteract prejudice against them to some extent (Stangej et al. 2018). Despite anti-discrimination directives and the abolishment of citizenship requirements for state agency positions, immigrants continue to experience discriminatory practices in public sector job advertisements (Wilson and Aðalbjarnardóttir 2020). Structural constraints influence migrants' careers and experiences in the workplace, because the immigrants' proficiency in the language, their positions in the workplace, and the prestige of their cultural group affect their ability to claim their desired identities (Lahti 2013).

Keskinen, Skaptadóttir and Koivanen (2019) state that the Nordic countries' claims of exceptional homogeneity must be questioned. They maintain that the role of homogeneity in social cohesion has been overstated, and that increasing migration and cultural diversity is therefore frequently perceived as a threat. This can be illustrated through Gullestad's central value concept of 'sameness' (2002, 46), meaning there is a strong tendency in the Nordic countries to believe that people have to feel they are more or less the same in order to be of equal value. People not only need to be similar in order to be equal, they also need to fit together and share the same ideas. If people are perceived as too different in one way or another, they may avoid each other, which can lead to the exclusion of minorities. Gullestad (2002) explains that according to the egalitarian logic prevalent in the Nordic countries, people tend to avoid addressing differences and instead avoid interactions with people who are perceived as different. Lahti (2013) found that Russian immigrants experienced discrimination, in the form of difficult interactions and relationships with coworkers and supervisors, in a Finnish workplace. Moreover, the Russian employees were experiencing negative attitudes towards them from their Finnish coworkers. They said they were ignored in conversations, belittled, made fun of, and had to endure rude and racist remarks.

Power is dynamic and can be seen in mundane social practices, such as gestures, discourse, and actions (Murphy 2013). In addition, Tracy and Trethwey's (2005, 169) argument that identity or "individuals' subject positions are determined by structures of discourse, and given the growing centrality of work, people must negotiate power and often oppressive discourses emanating from organizational contexts." Icelanders continually exercise power based on their cultural knowledge and expertise when favoring those with a knowledge of Icelandic norms and language, thus excluding those who do not hold that knowledge. This power imbalance favors Icelanders over immigrants, and according to Asante (2007, 48), "power relationships will determine what is 'right,' correct, logical, and reasonable," and that the "limits are drawn by those who wield the economic, political, and cultural power." As stated above, homogenous societies like Iceland tend to put more pressure on immigrants to assimilate and conform to the mainstream culture (Christmas and Barker 2014).

Research has shown that it seems to be hard for educated immigrants to recreate their previous social status. Sociologist Nauja Kleist has discussed the immense loss of status among Somali refugees in Denmark and Britain, who were rarely able to transfer their qualifications and resources to the migration context (Pedersen 2012). Due to difficulties in having their education recognized, many immigrants work in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs that natives no longer want (Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen 2017). Using the social-identity theory approach, Dietz et al. (2015) refer to this phenomenon as a skill paradox, where employers tend to be biased and discriminate against skilled immigrants, and the more skilled the migrants are, the more likely they are to experience discrimination.

Organizational Identity

Murphy (2013) states that tensions can arise when an organization's goals and expectations come into contact with the reality of individual identities, and that these tensions can both strengthen and challenge traditional assumptions about the expression of power and power relationships in international work. When referring to these tensions, Tsing (2005) uses the term 'friction' to address the tensions at the macro and micro-levels and describe the way tensions can emerge when these two levels interact in everyday experiences. Martin and Nakayama state that identities emerge and "are negotiated, cocreated, reinforced, and challenged through communication with others" (2014, 95). Identities can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, there is *avowal*, which refers to the way individuals portray themselves. On the other, there is *ascription*, which refers to the way others attribute identities to them. Sometimes there is an inconsistency between the *avowed identity* and the *ascribed identity*, and people may resist the identity that others ascribe to them and enact a different identity (Martin and Nakayama 2014), as when someone assumes a person is Japanese because he looks Japanese, but he does not in fact hold Japanese citizenship, nor has he ever lived in Japan. This experience can put the person in an awkward position, and he might resist the position he is put into and try to ascribe other identities to himself (2014). Shrikant (2018) argues that although immigrants negotiate identities which are acceptable in their workplace in an attempt to meet the goals of their professional roles, there is often a tension between avowed and ascribed identity when immigrants view themselves as professionals, but their employers and coworkers do not.

Individuals engage in construction of identity, or what is frequently termed identity work (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002; Holck, Muhr and Villesèche 2016; Killian and Johnson 2006). They strive towards a positive identity, and identity becomes especially salient when they feel threatened. Under such conditions, claims to a particular identity serve the purpose of "anchoring the self" (Beech 2008, 71) in response to changes or uncertainty.

Individuals may identify themselves as part of a culture, organization, occupation, or profession, and that identity is constructed (Lahti 2013) and negotiated (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016; Brown 2015) through organizational communication or ascribed to them by others in the organization (Holck, Muhr and Villesèche 2016). The ascribed identity may be resisted, and part of the identity work may involve a 'not-me' identity (Killian and Johnson 2006). An ascribed identity that is a devalued or stigmatized identity can lead individuals to employ strategies of distancing themselves from the ascribed identity (Lyons, Pek and Wessel 2017; Lyons et al. 2017) and instead emphasize their professional identity (Roberts 2005).

According to Cheney and Ashcraft (2007, 153) the term *professional* "continues to evoke tangible evidence of status and identity, powerful images of actors and with attendant evaluations of bodies and behaviors, and exclusive networks of relationships." Being a professional is not limited to a specific occupation or position; one can *be* a professional by *behaving* professionally. Avowal of a professional identity thus enables individuals to contrast their identity with that related to menial work. However, the "dominant cultural, institutional codes of professional demeanor reflect gendered, raced, classed, and heterosexual visions of national identity" (Cheney and Ashcraft 2007, 165), making it a challenge for immigrants, especially women and those belonging to a visible minority, to gain acceptance as professionals. They are the embodiment of the 'other' which, by necessity, must be excluded in order for a profession to gain elite exclusivity (Ashcraft et al. 2012).

Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010) have emphasized the positive aspects of work-related identity, especially how individuals desire a positive identity that is valued by others. According to their model, work identities become more positive if they have virtuous qualities and are favorably regarded. This is especially relevant for stigmatized groups in the workplace, such as immigrants, who must negotiate with their coworkers for a destigmatized and more positive identity, such as that of a professional (Lyons, Pek and Wessel 2017).

The study poses the research question of how highly skilled immigrants experience the tension between avowed and ascribed identity and their sense of belonging in the organization. Phenomenological methodology is well suited to answering the research question, obtaining the essence of people's lived experiences and revealing the underlying structural realities (Martinez 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Eleven, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with immigrants who all held university degrees and had lived in Iceland between 3 and 20 years, or on average around 10 years. Those who had lived in the country more than ten years had all achieved a high level of proficiency in Icelandic, while the others were at various stages of learning the language. All of the interviewees held full-time jobs where they used Icelandic either primarily or exclusively. The questions addressed issues like how they felt about their interactions with their Icelandic colleagues and supervisors, when they discussed their job with their supervisor, how they would describe their experiences related to being misunderstood, and who they compared themselves with. The interviews lasted from 40–75 minutes and were conducted in English, which was the interviewees' first or second language. The interviewees were nine women and two men, aged 26 to 55. Four held master's degrees and seven held bachelor's degrees. Most of them had work experience in their home countries before moving to Iceland. Their workplaces in Iceland were in the professional services sector, education, publication, technology, and the hospitality industry. The interviewees were from the Americas, Asia and Africa. They were given pseudonyms. The interviews were analyzed and interpreted according to phenomenological methodology. The goal of phenomenology is to explore the lived experiences of particular persons as they reveal underlying structural and cultural realities. A three-step analysis was used: description, reduction, and interpretation (Lanigan 1988; Orbe 1998). Description involves the interview process and transcription. Reduction involves the researcher beginning to thematize the data and then deciding which parts of the transcripts best explain the phenomenon being researched. Finally, interpretation is the step where the initial themes are reduced again to identify the most essential features of the phenomenon and relate the themes to one another and to the research question.

Findings

The research participants all hoped for a career in Iceland commensurate with their education and experience. However, this ambition proved unattainable for many who experienced devaluation of their qualifications and experience. As a result, having to perform jobs incongruent with their professional identities, their self-identity as a professional and educated person was threatened. They had to reconceptualize their professional identities as they struggled to gain access to the upper echelons of the labor market. Four themes emerged: *a closed language community*, *exclusion by peers*, *fear of creating problems*, and *a struggle to belong as a professional*.

A closed language community

Most of the interviewees felt they would never overcome the language barrier, and fluency in Icelandic emerged as an indicator of social power in workplace interactions. Mastering the language proved a major challenge for many of the participants, a challenge that was often associated with unrealistic expectations on the part of their colleagues and employers. Lindsey, who is highly proficient in the Icelandic language, experienced discrimination due to her perceived lack of fluency in Icelandic and felt left out of workplace conversations:

> people seem to discriminate on the basis of the language … not with good grounding … It's not Icelandic enough … I do think that my weaker Icelandic doesn't give me a good position in terms of negotiation … I feel very self-conscious about my Icelandic … If it was a question between a person with very good Icelandic and me, I'll take the second seat … but I have to accept that … I wasn't born here. I'm never going to speak it that way. It's never going to sound the way people want it to sound.

Despite her efforts to learn the language and improve her accent, Lindsey claimed she was still labelled a foreigner and treated as someone whose language was substandard. She felt she was not viewed as belonging to the community or as a high-ranking professional in the organization. Similarly, Michael experienced that despite considerable job experience and being a proficient speaker of Icelandic, speaking with an accent meant he would not be considered for management positions:

> I've worked here for ten years … our manager had to quit suddenly … instead of asking me to step in … [an Icelandic] guy with four years' less seniority than me was placed in … I applied for that job and I did not even get a call back … I was feeling very, very upset about that … I've twice been replaced by [an Icelandic] woman who has considerably less experience than me

The Icelandic language requirements appear to be an insurmountable barrier for the other participants as well, who felt that speaking with an accent meant they were not deemed fully fluent. Consequently, many felt excluded from important conversations and decision making in their workplace.

Exclusion by peers

Despite many of the interviewees enjoying their supervisors' support, they sensed that this caused some tension with their peers, who seemed to feel threatened and view them as competition. Karen felt she had her supervisor's support and appreciation, but her coworkers did not like that and delegated her to menial tasks that she was not hired to do:

> She gave me this courage … 'you can do it!' … If everybody would be like her, everybody coming from another country would be so happy … you want people to be open to you because you want to learn, but not that they push you off to one side … [my coworkers] were pushing me like just do some cleaning and stuff.

Julia also experienced exclusion and lack of respect from her colleagues and felt like an outsider who does not fit in:

> I was dismissed like a small child … I don't want to create any kind of tension in the work group … but these things do happen, where I feel like I'm sent off and dismissed … It's really upsetting and disrespectful … I feel like there is a hierarchy of respect, who gets it and how … Not everyone treats me like this … My boss is very good and always treats me with the utmost respect … But you see, something is probably not right. You don't want to create problems because at the back of your head you think: "I'm the outsider."

Relationships with coworkers could get tense if the interviewees felt the locals were not as professional as they should be. Both Cindy and Julia experienced what they deemed unprofessional attitudes towards quality work. According to Cindy, "a lot of people just don't care … so long as the money is coming back in." Julia voiced a similar sentiment concerning lack of professionalism in Icelandic workplaces: "It's all about speed and money … quality work, that's something that is lacking, not done too often here." There was a sense that the interviewees reacted to this marginalization by questioning whether their unprofessional coworkers were themselves really professionals in the workplace.

Fear of creating problems

Many interviewees experienced disrespect and sometimes discrimination in their interactions with coworkers but felt they had to accept this as normal and even smile, despite feeling humiliated. A recurring statement was that they did not want to create conflict. Julia described her feelings:

> I don't know how to address this without being the one to cause any form of tension there … it's something that I find really upsetting and disrespectful … maybe I need to speak up more, but then again I always have this fear of being the one to start a drama. And no one wants to be, you know, considered a troublemaker.

Experiencing discrimination and disrespect created a dilemma. Many feared that bringing up a problem could hurt morale, and that they would be seen as unprofessional. If they wanted to belong, they felt they had to manage these situations by ignoring the offensive comments or trivializing them as being due to a coworker's bad mood or other contextual factors.

A struggle to belong as a professional

It was important for the participants' sense of belonging to be recognized as professionals, and it was demoralizing if credentials were ignored or dismissed. Karen explained: "You don't feel comfortable with yourself when you are a professional [and] you are just there in the kitchen." She emphasized that she is a professional, and how not being treated as such made her uncomfortable. She praised her current supervisor, who she felt appreciated her as a professional and consequently treated her with respect. When supervisors recognized and acknowledged the participants as professionals, they felt empowered, and this allowed them to distance themselves from the immigrant identity and enhanced their sense of belonging. Maria, on the other hand, explained how she had prepared very diligently, but her supervisor did not appreciate her work and dismissed her with: "We don't do that here." She felt defeated and her credentials disrespected: "I have my jacket from Harvard … and I just put it in the corner, because now I'm [an assistant]."

It was a struggle for the participants to integrate personal and professional identities into the Icelandic workplace. They felt they had to work especially hard to earn their place, but that also meant that they missed out on socializing with their coworkers, creating a sense of unbelonging. Julia explained:

> I always worry … it's always this constant internal battle of being aware of who you are, your position … It is a real problem … especially when you are not from here … You are put into an extraordinary situation … I'm always constantly working, working, working, and they might be drinking coffee and chatting and … I'm not there in this conversation … There is a lot of small talk … but that small talk doesn't extend to me … I feel like when I try to do the small talk people are suddenly extremely busy.

Discussion

Our interviewees are all highly skilled professionals who have uprooted themselves and found careers in a new country. This entailed varying degrees of having their credentials and experience devalued; a few have successful professional careers, while others struggle in low- paying, low-skilled, and often temporary positions.

Even those holding professional positions felt they did not stand a chance of gaining top-level positions, that those positions were reserved for those who speak perfect Icelandic. They felt they would never completely overcome the language barrier and become accent-free and fluent enough in Icelandic. So they did not experience a sense of belonging in the Icelandic language community or in workplace interactions. This finding is in line with studies which indicate that Icelandic society is intolerant towards variations in pronunciation or accents (Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen 2017), and that accents can trigger bias and discrimination (Deprez-Sims and Morris 2010; Hosoda and Stone-Romero 2010; Ólafsson and Meckl 2013).

Being a professional was central to the participants' identities. At the same time, they felt they had to swallow their pride and accept whatever was offered. The focus on professional identity and the feeling of a 'constant internal battle' crystallized the tension. In their identity work, they struggled to anchor their identities (Alvesson 2010; Beech 2008) as highly educated, competent individuals who are worthy of high positions while simultaneously feeling they should be especially thankful for being appreciated as skilled professionals. They emphasized the fact that they *are* professionals, and it is clear that this means being competent, contributing knowledge and expertise, going above and beyond what is required of them, and having a strong work ethic.

Even those who were in low-skilled positions emphasized *being* professionals and how that made them approach their work differently, even though they were not in professional positions. In some cases, participants contrasted this with the lack of professionalism they observed in their Icelandic coworkers, similar to Lahti's (2013) findings regarding Russian immigrants' views of their local Finnish coworkers. Even though the participants negotiated identities that were acceptable in their workplace in order to meet the goals of their professional roles, there was a tension between avowed and ascribed identity, because the participants' professional identity was not always ascribed to them by their employers and coworkers (Martin and Nakayama 2010; Shrikant 2018).

The participants' avowed professional identity incorporated some of the perspectives identified by Dutton et al. (2010): the qualities of a strong work ethic and expertise that were positively regarded by most of the supervisors and the professionals themselves. However, the developmental and structural perspectives did not appear fully realized, since the participants' professional identity was not fully ascribed to them by their coworkers. Most of them experienced validation of their professional identity (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016) from their supervisors, but they felt resentment from their coworkers and exclusion from the profession based on the same effort their supervisors affirmed. This is in line with what Ashcraft and associates (2012) point out as the tension between inclusivity and exclusivity in the professions and Christensen's (2009) notion of belonging and unbelonging. In their effort to belong as professionals, the participants worked hard, but their emphasis on hard work and in consequence, a lack of socializing on the job, resulted in a sense of unbelonging and exclusion from coworkers.

When the participants experienced discrimination in the workplace, they faced a dilemma. Drawing attention to the problem could further stigmatize them as outsiders and troublemakers, thus alienating them from their coworkers. Being a troublemaker does not align with the identity of a professional; it is a 'not-me' identity (Killian and Johnson 2006). Thus, addressing discrimination was not an option for them, since it would undermine the professional identity of the organization itself, because inclusivity is an integral part of the identity of professional organizations. As Ashcraft et al. put it, "'our knowledge is exclusive' while 'our community is inclusive'" (2012, 474); consequently, excluding competent employees based on ethnicity or nationality is incompatible with a professional organization.

All of the participants in this study faced barriers and struggled against the ascribed immigrant identity that they experienced as negative and stigmatized. They resisted by enacting their avowed professional identities, which have both virtuous and valuable elements (Dutton et al. 2010; Martin and Nakayama 2010). The professional identity emphasized their valuable knowledge and expertise, but if their professional identity claims were thwarted by others in the workplace, it lead to a sense of unbelonging on their part and a continuous struggle to belong as a professional.

This phenomenological study offers new insights into skilled migrants' lived experiences and perceptions and sheds light on their privileges and disadvantages in the Icelandic labor market. The objective of phenomenological research is to obtain the essence of people's lived experience. These findings are based on lived experiences of a small group of skilled immigrants from various countries outside Europe who work in the Icelandic labor market. Thus, the lived experience of this group cannot be generalized as the lived experiences of other groups of skilled immigrants.

Conclusion

The participants are under pressure to adapt to the Icelandic workplaces, but these findings show that reciprocal integration is necessary. Their enacted professional identities are a source of strength when accepted but can also hinder them from addressing discriminatory practices. These factors have affected the identity formation and self-esteem of these professionals, and the lack of positive reinforcement from coworkers and some supervisors may exacerbate feelings of uncertainty. Experiencing tension between avowed and ascribed identity can lead to an identity crisis and create feelings of being excluded and of not belonging in the organization. This highlights the need for management efforts to facilitate reciprocal integration and recognition of the necessity of openly addressing discriminatory practices. We therefore recommend continued research on skilled immigrants in the Icelandic labor market with the focus on integration and inclusion.

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Kristján Þór Sigurðsson

Travelling Faith

Transnational Context from Iceland

Abstract

The chapter is part of an ethnographic research project on the Muslim community in Iceland. It is based on participant observation and informal discussions in the field. The objective was to study the approaches of Muslims in Iceland to different religious interpretations and trajectories, which were exemplified by two transnational groups from abroad who visited local communities. The two groups were the Tablighi Jama'at, a puritanical, literalist and proselyting group, and the other was the Gülen movement, which emphasises interreligious dialogue. Both groups visited Icelandic mosques, talked to local Muslims and presented their religious and social views. The reaction from the Icelandic Muslim community was telling. The Tablighi Jama'at group was more or less rejected. They were seen as fanatics who were not welcome in Iceland. The reception for the Gülen group was different (or indifferent), most local Muslims being positive toward their message, although not demonstrating much interest in it. The conclusion was that the visitors' views did not resonate well with local Muslims, who have regularly defined themselves as 'just Muslims', who definitely reject puritanical and fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.

Keywords: transnational Islam, proselyting, religious diversity, puritanism, moderation

Introduction

Transnational processes have always been part of Islam and the Muslim world, from the beginning until today. After the emergence of Islam in the 7th century CE, this religion spread across huge distances over a short period. During that expansion, the geographical locations of its political centre changed regularly over time. Yet, Mecca has remained Islam's spiritual and spatial central point of reference. This spatial flexibility has generated historical tensions between local cultural factors and the universalist characteristics of Islam. This became evident in the complex cultural heterogeneity of the Muslim world that developed over time, and this complexity has become more evident today, not least in the West (see e.g. Bowen 2004; Mandaville 2001; Roy 2004).

One modern reaction to this cultural heterogeneity is the phenomena of Salafism[1] and other similar movements, such as the proselytising Tablighi Jama'at, which aims to purge Islam of accretions and return it to a pure, imagined past with literal interpretations of Islam's holy texts and, in some instances, the establishment of social polities built on these interpretations. Even if such undertakings are not all modern, most researchers agree that these movements are recent and engendered by modernity and the colonial context (Bangstad and Linge 2015; Olsson 2014; Roy 2004). The Tablighi Jama'at movement discussed in this chapter concentrates on proselytising – on spreading the message (*dawa*). Some other Islamic movements have taken different roads, aiming to build bridges and establish dialogue within Islam and with other religions and cultures. One such movement is the Gülen Movement (Bilici 2006; Cetin 2010), which will be discussed in this chapter as an example of the dialogical orientation, as compared to the more fundamentalist, purist direction of the Tablighi Jama'at, using examples from two separate visits to the Muslim community in Iceland.

This chapter discusses aspects of what could be termed transnational competition of religious representation. I will present ethnographic examples from my research among the Muslim community in Iceland, using two different visits to this community by Islamic groups which are both transnational in their operations; and in that context, I will present the Muslim organisations in Iceland. It became apparent, in the aftermath of these visits, that the overall religious standpoint of Icelandic Muslims is one of moderation, with an aversion to strict, literalist interpretations of Islam. In my experience, the Muslim community in Iceland is primarily concerned with peaceful cohabitation with the host society. In this way, I want to speak against common, negative stereotyping of Muslims and Islam in Iceland. This community has existed without major problems, and the occasional negative stereotype is mostly based on imported anxiety from negative reporting in foreign media. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to emphasise these moderate notions, as seen in the different responses to the two groups which visited the local community.

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[1] Salafist refers to the pious forefathers (al-salaf al-salih), who were the companions of the Prophet Muhammed, and the following two generations. Salafis most often adhere to literal religious doctrine without temporal cultural contexts. Salafism is a broad definition with diverse strands, some militant (jihadi), while others are not (see e.g. Wagemakers 2018).

The two visiting groups discussed here represent roughly opposite positions on the Islamic religious spectrum: the Tablighi Jama'at, with its literalist, puritan orientation and emphasis on proselyting (*dawa*), and a moderate variety of Islam, in this case representatives of the Gülen Movement[2]. Both of these movements are transnational and operate in international contexts, and both are of relatively recent origin. Besides their different religious emphases, one vital difference is that the Tablighi Jama'at movement openly proselytises (*dawa*), while the Gülen Movement advises against such practices and discourages direct proselytising. However, the visit to Iceland served to introduce the Gülen way to Icelandic Muslims and could thus be thought of as proselytising, or *dawa*)[3]. I will give a more detailed account of the Muslim community in Iceland after discussing some theoretical considerations. I want to point out that my participants described these two groups in these terms: as fanatical (Tablighi Jama'at), and as moderate or modern (the Gülen group), and that this chapter is not, as such, concerned with categorisations of religious groups or approaches, but rather with the reactions of participants, local Muslims, to the visitors, based on my impressions from informal discussions and participation.

Theoretical background.

According to John R. Bowen (2004), transnational Islam constitutes a global public space with normative frames of references and debates that transcend migratory factors and transnational religious movements, since Islam possesses its own universalistic religious ideas, practices and norms. Therefore, transnational Islam possesses legitimacy, based on its historical, global and public space, a more or less universalised frame of reference and discourse that cannot be reduced solely to migrational factors. Bowen (2004, 880) argues that transnational Islam implies "democratic movements, transnational religious institutions, and the field of Islamic references and debate," which have recently been enhanced by electronic media and digital communications (Bunt 2002, 2009). One of the more prominent transnational, Islamic religious institutions is the Tablighi Jama'at, a puritanical movement that practices transnational proselytising (Metcalf 2003; Olsson 2014; Wong and Levitt 2014). The Tablighi Jama'at branch in Norway visited Icelandic Muslims, provoking controversial reactions, as will be discussed below. The Tablighi Jama'at movement was founded in India in 1927 (Metcalf 2003).

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[2] Here I point to Abou El Fadl (2005), who uses the terms 'extremists' and 'moderate', or 'puritans' vs 'moderates'. The term 'moderate Muslim' is contested (see e.g. Mamdani, 2005). Some of my participants talked about these two groups in these terms, especially the Tablighi Jama'at, who they saw as being extremists, as opposed to the Gülen group.

[3] Dr. Cetin, the representative of the visiting Gülen group, expressed his opposition to proselytising, saying that modern Muslims should promote Islam by their righteous conduct, not by *dawa*.

According to Vertovec (2009), transnational processes and practices affect religious factors in a multitude of ways, on both the personal and group levels. He refers to Clifford's (1992) concept of travelling cultures, which implies that movements of people transpose meanings and relationships, whereby notions of localised culture and space become displaced. Religious travel has always taken place, for example in the form of pilgrimages, missions, and proselytising, and recently by way of increased migration across the world. In his edited book, *Muslim Travellers*, Eickelman (1990) discusses the importance of travel and migrations in shaping Islam and Muslim practices, invoking symbolic nodes and spiritual centres across continents that reformed transnational notions of belonging, identity and religious practices and unified the *ummah* across ethnic lines, space, and time as adjustments were made to diverse social and cultural contexts. Non-local religious Muslim space can be categorised as a social space of connections of identities and organisations, as well as a cultural space of Muslim interactions, implicating de-cultural processes, transcending time and space, and influencing countless groups of people.

THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN ICELAND AND THE CONTEXT OF RESEARCH, METHODOLOGY AND DATA.

The Muslim community in Iceland is relatively small, estimated as numbering around 2000 persons, or approximately 0.5% of the total population of the country; and the Muslims living in Iceland have migrated from diverse parts of the world since the 1970s. There is also a small group of converts numbering between 60 and 100 people. The most numerous groups are Moroccan and Bosnian/Kosovan, with individuals from various North African and western and southern Asian countries, as well as persons from sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Most Icelandic Muslims are Sunni, but there is a small group of Shia, and a smaller group of Ahmadiyya Muslims. The migration of Muslims to Iceland began in small numbers in the

1970s, then gradually increased via, for example, people visiting relatives or finding love. In the 2000s, the number began to grow, and since the mid-2000s, it has been estimated at around 2000.[4] From 1997 to 2008, there was only one Muslim organisation in Iceland, the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI). In 2008 to 2009, a splinter organisation was founded, named the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI). The Islamic Foundation of Iceland (IFI) was established in 2010 when the Al Risala Foundation in Sweden bought the Ýmir building in Skógarhlíð to house the ICCI. In addition, there is a small Ahmadiyya group, but many Muslims see them as heretics. Nevertheless, their relationship with other Muslims in Iceland is more or less unproblematic, and they are not registered as a religious association. Since the ICCI split from the MAI in 2008, there have been periodic tensions between the different associations, but they have cooperated in specific contexts. The tension between the MAI and the ICCI has gradually subsided, but both have kept their distance from the IFI. The first two groups joined forces to celebrate the Eid-al-fitr festival following Ramadan in 2018.

The present discussion is a part of a larger ethnographic research project among the Muslim community in Iceland undertaken for a PhD, where the main methods were participant observation and unstructured or semi-structured interviews and conversations, together with research on media discourse about Islam and Muslims. The data for this chapter comes primarily from field notes taken during informal discussions with my participants and my own impressions from the field during visits. Instead of direct interviews, most of the opinions and sentiments expressed by Muslims concerning the two visits discussed in this chapter are taken from these informal discussions in the field. Therefore, there are no direct references to or quotes from interviews. In the next section, the Muslim organisations and the ways in which some of them are connected to transnational organisations and processes will be discussed in more detail.

For many years, the Muslim Association of Iceland (*Félag múslíma á* Íslandi) has received guest imams from abroad to take care of Ramadan rituals, and the Islamic Centre of Iceland (*Menningarsetur múslíma á* Íslandi) has employed an Egyptian imam for some time now. The more recently established Islamic Foundation of Iceland (*Stofnun múslíma á* Íslandi) also employs a foreign imam. These religious leaders each have their own religious emphases, based on their backgrounds and education, which may or may not influence the attitudes of the lay Muslims who attend their regular services. Many participants claim that there is little influence, emphasising instead their own backgrounds as being the main factor in their attitudes and religious practice. Two of the Muslim organisations in Iceland, the IFI and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Iceland, can, with good reason, be defined as transnational organisations. The former is run by the Al-Risala association, based in Örebro, Sweden, a transnational movement with links to the Gulf; and the latter is part of an international organisation. One association, Félag Horizon, an interfaith organisation with links to the Dialogue Forum in Denmark and indirect connections to the Gülen Movement, can also be categorised as a transnational organisation. Félag Horizon participates in annual Dialogue Forum conferences in Denmark, underlining their transnational character. The movement was founded in October 2013 and has organised regular events, often together with a Christian congregation in Reykjavík. It is not registered as a religious society, and it does not define itself as such. It aims to promote dialogue between different ethnic, religious, political, and cultural groups in Iceland.

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[4] There are no official population statistics in Iceland referencing religious affiliations.

The other, older Muslim associations, the MAI and the ICCI, are more or less run as independent organisations and are primarily financed by membership fees. In addition, there are some informal transnational links, and in 2014, the ICCI organised the first pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), supervised by their imam and in cooperation with contacts in the Saudi kingdom. These are the main transnational connections of Muslim groups in Iceland, but this chapter will now concentrate on the two transnational visits mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

The two visits

In this section, the issue of proselytising will be discussed in the context of the visits by the two groups introduced earlier. It implicates questions of religious authority and how religious ideas are transmitted to religious practitioners. It involves inviting people to God (*dawa*), and in practice denotes some sort of missionizing or proselytising of Islam. Some Muslim leaders believe Muslims should go out and spread the word, and I know an Icelandic Muslim convert who has worked for international organisations practicing *dawa* around the world, an effort that also includes charity work among the poor. Many Muslims oppose such open *dawa*. One is the Turkish-American scholar and sociologist, Dr. Muhammed Cetin, who visited Iceland in the spring of 2010, and who insisted that the practice of *dawa* was not to be encouraged, because people should not interfere with the way others conduct themselves and what they believe in. Instead, Dr. Cetin stated that one should cultivate and conduct oneself according to Islamic values and strive to be a good role model for others through deeds and correct behaviour. This apparently sat well with many of my Muslim participants. Dr. Cetin emphasised that Muslims in the West should lead the way through righteous conduct and by being 'normal,' i.e. Western, in dress and general behaviour.

The Gülen Movement can be seen as a contrast to Samuel Huntington's clash of civilisation thesis (Huntington 1993), because the main goal of the movement is to establish dialogue among religions and cultures by organising international educational projects. The Gülen Movement presents itself as religiously moderate, but socially conservative, with Islam as its underlying ideology (Bilici 2006). After the abortive coup in Turkey in 2016, the Turkish President, Tayyip Erdogan, declared his former ally, Fethullah Gülen, a terrorist and asked for his extradition from the United States (Tas 2018), which highlighted the social and political importance of the movement.

Dr. Muhammed Cetin is an example of what is sometimes – and misleadingly – termed a moderate Muslim. The leader of the Turkish association and I organised a talk for Dr. Cetin at the University of Iceland entitled *Lecture on Inter-Cultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue, Especially from a Turkish Muslim Perspective*. This took place at a time of tension between the MAI and the ICCI, as mentioned earlier, but the Turkish-American guest was unaware of that. The lecture was coincidentally a constructive contribution to the ongoing feud between the two associations, as it discussed the need for dialogue across religious, political, and social divides, and it was well-received by the relatively small group of attendees.

Dr. Cetin was not aware of the schism between the two Muslim associations at the time, and he went to the MAI mosque to pray, because the leader of the Turkish association frequented that mosque. At the lecture, he had talked with one of the ICCI leaders, who invited him to visit their mosque. When that became known, the mood among local Muslims became apprehensive, since it meant that some members of the MAI mosque would have to accompany him to the ICCI mosque and enter what they viewed as enemy territory. I had gone to the ICCI mosque, and those present there were waiting patiently, and somewhat tensely, for the guest to arrive. Some thought he would not come, or that he had been advised against it by members of the MAI, and they became anxious. The ongoing tensions between the associations were political and personal in nature, rather than having a religious basis, so the different religious sentiments of the two visitors did not resonate with these tensions. Therefore, members of both associations more or less shared their sentiments towards the two guests, despite the political conflict between them.

After the call to prayer (*adhan*), the Gülen delegation arrived, to everyone's relief. Dr. Cetin took centre stage and said he wanted to say something important. He began by saying that someone had mentioned *dawa*, and that he did not favour this practice. He repeated that one should not criticize other people's behaviour or what they believe. Instead, one should strive (*jihad*) to be a good example, conducting oneself in a proper manner and acting in accordance with real Islamic values. He emphasised the role Muslims should play in making the world a better place, referring to a few examples of this. He talked about the importance of Muslims demonstrating good leadership by example and avoiding frightening others through their appearance, dress or behaviour. After 9/11, Dr. Cetin said, it was easy to misinterpret such behaviour, because "one brainless idiot can ruin things for all Muslims." When his talk was over, he left with his companions. I had the impression that the men present were happy with his visit and his talk, and that they saw his message as a positive contribution toward alleviating the tensions in their communities at the time. As stated earlier, the Gülen Movement is, in a way, a reaction to the clash of civilization thesis (Huntington 1993), aiming to build bridges between secular and religious institutions and between religion and the state, and establishing dialogue-oriented practices. The movement has also established educational institutions in many countries and organised international trading operations, based on the concept of *hizmet* or rendering service (Bilici 2006).[5] The Horizon Society (Félagið Horizon) in Iceland is strongly influenced by the ideas of the Gülen Movement, although it is not officially a part of it.

At the opposite end of the Islamic spectrum, in various parts of the Muslim world, there are transnational, puritanical and literalist organisations like the Tablighi Jama'at, which practice *dawa*, a form of proselytising of a puritanical version of Sunni Islam. These organisations are also active in the West, in both America and Europe (Mårtensson 2012; Olsson 2012), where their members go out into the street, or into shopping malls, to introduce Muslims and non-Muslims alike to their faith and hand out pamphlets. These organisations, such as Tablighi Jama'at, also send travelling missionaries to work for the cause in distant places like Iceland.

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[5] Dr. Cetin has written a book on the Gülen Movement (Cetin 2010) which is a sociological study of the movement, using social movements theory to depict the Gülen Movement as an agent of change within Turkish society and beyond. The movement has global references while being part of the system it seeks to change (i.e. in Turkey).

Many see this strand of Islam as a reaction to an insecure world, and to what the purists perceive as the immoral society of the West (Olsson 2012). These movements have been termed post-Islamism (Roy 2004) and characterised as apolitical, pietist, and de-territorialised. These groups are very text-oriented and see the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* as the only legitimate references for their faith. According to Olsson (2012, 178), the Swedish Al-Risala Scandinavian Foundation, which owns the Ýmir house in Reykjavík, formerly used by the ICCI and which is linked to the Islamic Foundation of Iceland, is among the Salafist *dawa* societies. Similar groups operate in Norway (Bangstad and Linge 2015; Mårtensson 2012), and representatives of the Tablighi Jama'at in Norway visited the Muslim community in Iceland during the holy month of Ramadan in 2009.

According to my participants, the Tablighi Jama'at visitors simply turned up without an invitation. This, I was told, is what they usually do. The visit coming during Ramadan created some tension among Icelandic Muslims, as the visitors were considered radical or fanatics by local Muslims. One Icelandic Muslim compared them to Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons. This group of visitors was composed of Moroccans and Pakistanis who lived in Norway, and they all dressed in traditional Islamic clothes, sporting long 'Islamic' beards. Local Muslims said these visitors were obsessed with strict rules and wanted to ban everything, and that this was not good in Iceland. Thus, there was some antipathy towards these guests, and they were not very welcome. However, according to accepted Muslim custom, the hosts had to show hospitality to the guests, especially since they came during the month of Ramadan.

At the MAI's Ármúli mosque, the leader of that organization held a short speech to welcome the guests. Then, he invited the Moroccan from Norway, who seemed to be the leader and spokesman for the visiting group, to speak. The visitor sat down on a stool in front of the pulpit (*minbar*), and began his talk, first in Arabic and then in English, while the men present sat in a semi-circle in front of him on the floor. The speaker, who said he was an electrical engineer, discussed the relationship between religion and science, arguing that there were no disagreements between these two knowledge systems. Muslims, he said, had no problem uniting faith and their concept of God with scientific disciplines like physics, chemistry, genetics, evolution, and so on. This view is held by many practicing Muslims who are natural scientists, and some of them even say that scientific discoveries are the best proof of God's existence. He also claimed that it was vital to have an open heart and a sharp mind to be able to receive God's grace and wisdom. This speech did not in fact correspond to the puritanical and fanatical reputation this group has among local Muslims, but it did not change their opinions either. One could speculate that the speaker sensed negative local sentiment and wanted to minimise the expected fundamentalist side of his message. Since it was Ramadan, he emphasised the need for reviving God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and focusing on the ultimate meaning of life. No one present could refute that message, but they still maintained that these people were some sort of Islamic Jehovah's Witnesses; one saying the Icelandic community could manage very well without them. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in the mosque was quite light-hearted, which is usually the case during Ramadan sermons, as Ramadan seems to move Muslims to enhance spirituality and goodwill towards others.

The visitors from Norway went on a tour of the southeast of Iceland. When they returned, they visited the MAI mosque again. A Pakistani man in the group, who perfectly fit the Islamist stereotype due to his clothing and beard, decided it was time to preach to his hosts and talked about the importance of strictly upholding basic Islamic values, and he even indirectly questioned my presence in the mosque. This message was perceived as quite a contrast to the one delivered by the leader of the group earlier. The hosts, as before, commented afterwards that these men were too fundamentalist, and that their message had no place in Iceland. One of the leaders of the MAI left before the service ended, right before prayer was about to commence. His dislike of the visitors was clear for all to see.

The visitors from Norway were not aware of the tension between the two associations and wanted to host a collective meal for both associations to break the fast (*iftar*), an offer that was declined by everyone, demonstrating the depth of the antagonism prevailing at the time. Shortly afterwards, the Norwegian delegation left the country, to everyone's relief. While the negative reaction by many local Muslims towards the Tablighi Jama'at group was evident, my own impression – from listening to them and talking to their leader – did not completely confirm those sentiments (apart from the scene in mosque described above), so I suspected that some communication in Arabic between the locals and the visitors may have caused the animosity that was quite apparent during the visitors' stay. Many of the Icelandic Muslims stated that they had no interest in having fanatics in Iceland. Instead, Islam should be in harmony with Icelandic society and culture. One explanation was given by the imam at the ICCI, who said the problem with Tablighi Jama'at was that they were uneducated. They were not Islamic scholars, he said, which meant they were promoting wrong ideas about Islam. The danger lay primarily in their wrong ideas, not necessarily their supposed radicalism, which again brings in the question of religious authority.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have discussed how transnational actors attempted to influence the Muslim community in Iceland through visits to present their views on how best to be a Muslim. The reception was telling. The representatives of the Gülen Movement were met with muted interest and acceptance, while the Tablighi Jama'at group was viewed with scepticism and apprehension. This shows that the overall attitude of Icelandic Muslims is what has often been called moderate, which, as discussed before, some see as a contested concept (Abou El Fadl 2005; Mamdani 2005). There is no obvious consensus among Icelandic Muslims as to which branch of Islam is most genuine, demonstrating the cultural and national diversity of the Icelandic Muslim community. My experience from field work among Muslims in Iceland had showed me that in this community there are diverse religious standpoints and approaches, some more moderate than others. As this chapter demonstrates, taking into account the heterogeneous spectrum of the religious sensibilities of my participants, there was near unanimity concerning their aversion towards the Tablighi Jama'at group's visit. At the same time, most participants expressed positive sentiments towards the Gülen group, but without showing much interest in it. Differences in religious approach among Icelandic Muslims are played down by Muslims themselves, the most frequent comment being: "we are just Muslims." When these two visits took place, the impression was one of curiosity, if not acceptance, most Icelandic Muslims apparently wanting to continue being 'just Muslims'.

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An Expatriate in Iceland
Adjusting to the New Culture

Abstract

Globalization has drastically increased people's mobility. Many companies have subsidiaries in several different countries, and more and more people work in multicultural environments. The difficulties expatriates face when moving to a different country have been studied for some time within the field of international human resource management. However, limited research has examined expatriates' experiences in Iceland. Hence, the present study sheds light on how expatriates adjust to Icelandic culture. The purpose was to examine their cultural and communication adjustment, and a qualitative research was conducted in the form of 12 in-depth interviews with expatriates living in Iceland. The results show that in general, it is fairly easy for expatriates to adjust to living in Iceland, especially if they are from Europe or North America. The results also indicate that adjusting to Icelandic culture is helped by a quick establishment of trust and by low language barriers, as most locals speak English.

Keywords: Expatriate, adjustment, Icelandic culture, international human resource management

Introduction

The world is becoming one metaphorical village as globalization has drastically increased people's mobility. Researchers have proposed the term 'age of migration' to explain the increasing mobility between countries and continents (Baycan and Nijkamp 2012, 178–82; Beauclercq and Petrova-Benedict 2019, 25–29). Over one billion people, or more than one in seven, are now defined as migrants, whether voluntary or involuntary (Beauclercq, Petrovea, and Benedict 2019, 25–29). Furthermore, research done by Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2018) indicates that the number expatriates, whether sent on behalf of their organizations or self-initiated (searched and applied for a job on their own), is still growing. An expatriate has been defined as a person residing in a country other than their native country (Eade and Valkonova 2009, 1–11). In this chapter, we use the term expatriates to focus on those who move because of their employment.

In international human resource management, there is a growing interest in research on expatriates and the challenges they face when working and living abroad (Collings, Scullion, and Morley 2007, 202–4). Expatriates have to adapt both to a different culture and to new living conditions. This can be difficult, and people often return home much sooner than anticipated (Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou 1991, 291–317; Black 1988, 280–7; van Zolingen, Essers, and Vermeer 2012, 14–18). According to Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2018), difficulties in adjusting to the host-country culture represent one of the main reasons expatriates do not complete their assignments and return home early. Expatriate failure can result in a career breakdown or hindrance and/or negatively affect self-esteem and leadership abilities and is often associated with great monetary costs (Ratiu, Lvina, and Berte 2011, 276–79).

This chapter introduces a study that was conducted among expatriates living and working in Iceland. The research focused on the main challenges faced by expatriates who move to Iceland. Hopefully, the results will benefit both individuals and Icelandic and foreign multi-national companies and institutions which intend to send their expatriates to Iceland, or which currently employ expatriates. The main research question is: How do expatriates who move to Iceland experience their adjustment to Icelandic culture? The chapter first explores the theoretical background and subsequently describes the methodology. Then, the main results are introduced. The chapter ends with a discussion.

Theoretical background

In a global world, many people choose to work in a country other than their birthplace or usual place of residence (Flytzani and Nijkamp 2008, 149–52). Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2018) collects data every year on worker mobility. Their results indicate that the majority of expatriates are males between the ages of 30 and 45. Most have not lived abroad before, most have spouses, and around half bring children with them when on assignment in a foreign country. When organizations invest in foreign companies, they frequently send employees, often managers, from the head office to work in the new location.

However, another field to explore is entrepreneurs who think and act globally from the start. A growing number of entrepreneurs aim to have a presence on a global scale, grounding their business models in globalization from day-one. They and their executive teams have to interact, socialize, and build trust across borders from the very beginning (Kreftig 1991, 215–19).

In practice, the general belief has been that an expatriate who is successful in one assignment is more likely to be successful in another, regardless of the destination (Takeuchi and Chen, 2013, 248–290). The expatriate will have gained experience in intercultural communication, relocation, and cognitive skills, all of which should have a positive influence on the expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the new location (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991, 293–99; Shaffer et al. 1999, 240–48). This view is often related to believing that coping skills and management practices in one country are transferable to another (Hofstede and McCrae 2004, 52–58). However, researchers such as Hofstede (2001, 11–17) and House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta (2004, 721–27) have demonstrated that the existence of national cultures leads to one form of behavior being seen as preferable to another. When management behaviors and management practices are found to be inconsistent with these deeply held norms and values, expatriates are more likely to feel dissatisfied, uncomfortable, and uncommitted.

Despite numbers of models and theories, there is still limited consensus as to what actually constitutes individual adjustment. The concept has been described, interpreted and measured in varying ways and from numerous perspectives. Adjustment has, for example, been examined in terms of health-related variables; perceptual variables, such as perceptual maturity (Yoshikawa 1988, 140–48); relational variables, such as feelings of acceptance (Brislin 1981, 384); and the quality of the relationship with host nationals (Deshpande and Viswesvaran 1992, 299–305).

Sociocultural adjustment is theoretically based on cultural learning theory and is believed to highlight the social behavior and practical social skills underlying attitudinal factors (Black and Mendenhall 1991, 113–36; Klineberg and Hull 1979, 211–20). Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991, 291–317) proposed a model for sociocultural adjustment where distinctions were made between three dimensions of in-country adjustment. The three dimensions are: general adjustment (referring to the psychological comfort factors of the host cultural environment such as weather, living conditions and food), interaction adjustment (referring to adjustment to different communication styles in the host cultures and communication with host country nationals), and work adjustment (referring to the psychological comfort involving different work values, expectations and standards). This theoretical framework of sociocultural adjustment has been supported and validated by a number of researchers (Black and Gregersen 1991, 461–70) and was deemed a good fit for this study.

As Hofstede (2001, 11–17) has argued, countries have different national cultures that can be divided into six dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long- or short-term orientation, and indulgence/restraint (Hofstede 2006, 888–91; 1997, 540–639; Guðmundsdóttir 2015, 180–83; Aðalsteinsson et al. 2011, 360–65).

Icelandic research indicates that the national culture of Iceland can be categorized as having low power distance (PDI), high individualism (IDV), low masculinity (MAS), high uncertainty (UAI), and medium long-term orientation (LTO) (Aðalsteinsson et al. 2011, 360–65). Countries with low power distances usually have equalitarian structures with a public system grounded in the idea of social welfare and equality. Iceland also scores high on individualism. Countries that are high on this scale are positive towards competition and consider individuals to be responsible for themselves and their families. In countries where masculinity is low, gender equality is considered important, and family structures are often more diverse. Iceland scored high on uncertainty, which may have been influenced by the high economic uncertainty in the recent past. Finally, Iceland is in the middle range regarding long-term orientation. Countries that score high on this dimension have great resilience and an orientation towards the future (Aðalsteinsson et al. 2011, 360–65; Guðmundsdóttir 2015, 180–83; Minelgaite, Guðmundsdóttir, Guðmundsdóttir, and Stanjay 2018, 111–22).

Scholars such as Dincker et al. (2009, 530–33) and Ellis (2011, 99–127) have argued that the ability to manage external interactions with key stakeholders in foreign countries can be a major determinant of a firm's international success. In this vein, increased attention has been given to Earley and Ang's (2003, 127–68) construct of cultural intelligence (CQ). The concept is based on Sternberg's (1986, 3–15) triarchic theory of human intelligence and is defined as an individual's ability to effectively manage in the international arena (Earley and Ang 2003, 127–68). It is suggested that

CQ is a multidimensional construct targeted at assessing an individual's competence in dealing with cross-cultural interactions arising from differences in race, ethnicity, and nationality (Earley and Ang 2003, 99–127; Earley, Ang, and Tan 2006, 200–12).

National culture and CQ are important with regard to both adjustment and communication. According to Thompson (2011, 38–63), communication makes us human; it can be conscious or unconscious and direct or undirect. Our message can be communicated through how we dress, how we use our voice, and the people we know. Furthermore, a significant aspect of expatriates' adjustment is their CQ (Jou and Fukada 1995, 39–47; Shaffer and Harrison 2001, 245–50; Argyle 2013, 89–200). Church (1982, 562–69) has shown that when foreign employees communicate with locals, they are more positive towards the local culture.

If people do not speak the local language, it can be a hindrance to communication between different cultures (Victor 1992, 27–58). Global companies do not see language as a coveted skill for their expatriates (Andreason 2003a, 548–55; 2003b, 42–60; Mendenhall and Oddou 1985, 39–48). Yet research has shown that having good language skills in the host country helps people adapt better and can increase the likelihood of successful communication and CQ (Nicholson and Imaizumi 1993, 119–24). Yang, Noels, and Saumure (2006, 490–98) report that even when employees do not have the other personal traits that are helpful in adapting, speaking the language benefits them in adjusting to the culture.

Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of the subject, qualitative research methods were chosen (Merriam 2009, 165–237; Davíðsdóttir 2003, 219–36; Cooper and Schindler 2011, 520–78). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to draw out reflexive narratives about their experience as expatriates and the challenges they encountered (Esterberg 2002, 58–157). Interviewees were asked why they moved to Iceland and how they experienced their adjustment to daily life. In addition, participants were asked how they experienced their adjustment, for example in relation to general living and housing conditions, as well as climate, communication and food.

The twelve interviewees had moved to Iceland to work temporarily for Icelandic companies. To participate, they had to have lived in the country for at least six months. They were thus chosen by judgement sampling

(Cooper and Schindler 2011, 520–78), but snowball sampling was also used. An e-mail was sent to the human resource managers of the largest multi-national companies in Iceland. This e-mail introduced the research and asked for help in finding participants. In total, 12 interviews were conducted with respondents from four companies. The interviews took place between October 20, 2014 and November 26, 2014 and lasted an hour on average. The interviewees included three women and nine men between 25 and 40 years of age. Four of them were married, but only one had a child. All of them had been living in Iceland for more than six months, but two of them had been in the country for less than a year.

In the table below, the origin of participants and their gender can be seen.

Table 1. Participants, origin and gender

Gender	Birthplace	Gender	Birthdplace
1. Alexander	Germany	7. Julie	Kanada
2. Chloe	Ireland	8. Max	Holland
3. Eva	Guatemala	9. Richard	South Africa
4. Gabriel	Braselia	10. Simon	Denmark
5. Jack	Scotland	11. Thomas	UK
6. James	USA	12. William	Kanada

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis was used that involved the identification of themes in the data through careful reading and re-reading of the data (Rice and Ezzy 1999, 211–78). The analysis was an iterative and reflexive process, entailing circling back and forth between the data and concepts from the literature.

It is acknowledged that the findings cannot be generalized to cover the experiences of all expatriates. Nonetheless, these data offer insight into how expatriates adapt to Icelandic society in the context of their work. Although not in a traditional sense, the participants' stories are metaphorically generalizable (Stein 2004, 178–79) in that they have the capacity to sensitize readers to otherwise ignored or unknown experiences.

MAIN RESULTS

General adjustment to Icelandic culture and the lived experience of expatriates

James and William emphasized their view that Icelandic culture was somewhere in between European and North American cultures. James, from the USA, commented that "from the places that I have been now in Western Europe … I feel like Iceland is kind of like this halfway point between American culture and European culture." Another feature of Icelandic culture according to interviewees was that it was 'laid-back.' The Canadian William stated that Iceland "is a very laid-back culture. People tend to take things as they come, and they are not necessarily planning a lot … both professionally and in daily life." They also mentioned that society in Iceland was egalitarian. For instance, Gabriel from Brazil was surprised that people in Iceland referred to each other by their first names regardless of position or age.

Many of the interviewees stated that family ties and bonds between friends are strong in Iceland. They mentioned that Icelanders tend to be close to their families, and that Icelandic society is structured around families, making it a family-friendly society. James was surprised that his friend was a single mother who both worked outside the home and was a student but still had time for leisure, because her extended family was very involved in raising the children. This was different from where he came from (USA). Gabriel also discussed the difference between where he had lived before and Iceland regarding bringing up children and the freedom children seem to grow up in. He commented that he saw children playing freely everywhere, and that people could take them anywhere. This was quite different from what he had experienced before.

Furthermore, two of the participants mentioned that women's participation at work was much higher than they were used to. One of them had a female boss, and another had female engineers working with him. They thought this was unusual, but in Iceland everybody considers this normal. In their experience, female bosses were not popular in other places. Some mentioned that nepotism was the general norm in Iceland, and rules were sometimes blurry. About half the interviewees did not perceive a great contrast between their own culture and that of Iceland and did not experience difficulty adjusting in that regards. Interviewees from Germany, Denmark, the UK, Holland, Canada, and South Africa indicated that the difference was small. Simon commented that "Denmark and Iceland are very similar in many ways. It's a reasonably small culture … In terms of day-to-day life and how you deal with the government and how you are taken care of, it's all very similar."

Daily life

The darkness and the weather proved to be the most challenging aspects of the interviewees' adjustment. Gabriel, Eva, Alexander, Richard, and Chloe agreed that it was difficult to adjust to the weather. Alexander stated that it was the most difficult thing about moving from Holland. In his opinion, Iceland had only one month of nice weather during summer. It was even more difficult for Gabríel and Eva, who came from South America. Richard, who was South African, stated that "today is November 6th and it's like as cold as it would ever get in South Africa today." Chloe commented that "the winter is the worst. I think it's when they plow the roads and put all this stuff on the pavement and then don't like clear the pavement … I find that really crazy. And the wind is just unbelievable."

James, Jack, William, Julie, and Thomas were more positive. James was from Seattle, where it rains often, much like Iceland. Thomas grew up in the north of the UK, where weather conditions are similar, and Julie and William were from Canada. Julie stated: "I think it's better to be here rather than in Canada, because in Canada during the summertime … In Canada we have the extremes." Most found the darkness during winter difficult, but those who had more experience with similar conditions were not as bothered.

The interviewees were mainly positive about leisure in Iceland. Jack stated that Reykjavik is a "really creative city, I think, and there is loads of stuff going on when it comes down to the arts and music and generally theater shows and stuff … everyone I know is in a band. Everyone I know is doing some arts." James was a Lindy hop dancer and found a group in Iceland. Alexander missed large amusement parks. However, the respondents seemed to be into the music scene. The majority of the interviewees found it easy to communicate with Icelanders and considered themselves part of the group.

Some of them indicated that most Icelanders spoke English well, and that they tried to make them feel welcome. Richard stated that he did not consider Icelanders to be any different from other Europeans. Alexander mentioned that they were not as direct as Germans, while Gabriel did find them direct. Some thought it was difficult to get close to Icelandic people.

Simon stated that they could be arrogant towards foreigners they did not know. Richard thought Icelandic people communicated a great deal with their own families and did not have the time to become acquainted with others. Most of the expatriates spoke English with their co-workers. Furthermore, Simon stressed that Icelanders were willing to use English as a working language. Most of the expatriates spoke some Icelandic, but only one had started using it as a main language.

Discussion

Most of the expatriates in this study had adjusted well to Icelandic culture and were content with their daily lives. It was easier for the interviewees who came from similar cultures to adapt to the local culture. This is in line with the research on psychological comfort and might indicate that trust can be transferred between similar cultural environments (Black 1988, 289–90; Black and Mendenhall 1990, 117–21; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991, 310–11; Sappinen 1995, 3–12; Selmer 2002, 19–34). Most of the expatriates were from Western cultures, and their experiences were therefore perhaps not as novel or difficult, which is also reflected in the results. The interviewees mentioned that they experienced Iceland as an egalitarian society with low class differences in their workplaces. This accords with other studies which show Iceland having a low power distance (Aðalsteinsson et al. 2011, 360–65). They also mentioned that Iceland was highly structured around the family, and that gender equality and women's participation in the labor market were high. This confirms Iceland's low masculinity in Hofstede's terminology. Another factor is high individualism; this could be reflected in nepotism, (Hofstede 2001, 11–17; Guðmundsdóttir 2015, 180–83).

The most difficult adjustment the expatriates experienced was the weather and darkness in midwinter. Nine of the twelve struggled to adapt to the darkness and thought it affected their mood and life in general. This suggests that their motivation to stay in Iceland and the resilience they showed was based on their cultural intelligence (Earley and Ang 2003, 127–68). They seemed to enjoy their leisure time. On the whole, their adjustment process seemed to have gone well. This indicates that the factors that support expatriates' adjustment to Icelandic society are strong (Black 1988, 289–90; Black and Mendenhall 1990, 117–21; 1991, 303–10; Sappinen 1995, 3–12; Selmer 2002, 19–34). Most of the interviewees had been supported by their employers and made to feel welcome. Communication had been easy, and trust had been established between actors, facilitated by the fact that most locals speak English. However, Icelandic society is a close-knit community to which it can be difficult to gain access.

On the whole, it can be concluded that expatriates adjust quite well when they come from a similar culture; Icelandic culture can be understood as lying between the American and European cultures, as has been established before in research (Minelgaite et al. 2018, 111–22). As previously stated, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to cover the experiences of all expatriates.

Still, the data offer insight into how they adapt to Icelandic society. Awareness of issues regarding expatriates can benefit policy-makers, human resources professionals, managers, and employees alike, as well as help with further initiatives associated with their daily lives and work. This study represents a step towards creating this awareness by focusing on the perspectives and experiences of expatriates in Iceland, and between countries in general. Future research on how the first six months influence the rest of expatriates' stays would be interesting. It might also be interesting to examine different human-resources management practices. This research was not without its limitations. Most notably it would have been preferable to have participants from other regions of the world, such as Australia, Asia and the Middle East. Moreover, it would have been interesting to conduct a follow-up conversation to gain a deeper understanding of adjustment over time.

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ERNA KRISTÍN BLÖNDAL

Non-refoulement and Personal Circumstances in EU Law

– the Icelandic Context

ABSTRACT

When applying Icelandic legislation, which is in many ways constructed on the basis of EU law and European Human Rights law, it is important to keep in mind the wider context of legal developments within the EU and in the jurisprudence of European courts. This chapter presents the findings of a review of the main provisions of EU law and the judgements of the Court of Justice of the European Union concerning the principle of non-refoulement and the importance of individual circumstances and special risk factors in assessing whether the expulsion or return of an individual would violate that principle. Finally, Icelandic legislation is placed in an international context.

Keywords: Non-refoulement, asylum, EU, individual circumstances, vulnerability.

INTRODUCTION

The rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals in Europe are set out in a number of different instruments and conventions. The Council of Europe is an international organisation in Strasbourg which comprises 47 countries of Europe. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR 1950) was the first convention drafted by the Council of Europe, and its ratification is a prerequisite for joining the Council. The ECHR therefore enshrines certain rights and freedoms in all of the 47 Member States, and provides the cornerstone of human rights protection in Europe. However, many rights are also set out in treaties and the secondary legislation of the European Union (EU). The EU currently has 27 members that have delegated some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at the European level. All EU member states are also members of the Council of Europe. Nonetheless, some non-EU countries, such as Iceland, have to some extent committed to participate in certain parts of EU legislation. In the case of Iceland, which is not part of the EU, the EEA Agreement (EEA Agreement 1994), the Schengen Convention (Schengen Convention 1990), and other agreements with European partners are particularly relevant.

The prohibition of refoulement, a core principle of international refugee and human rights law that has acquired the status of jus cogens (Allain 2001), is established in Article 33 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention 1951) which prohibits States from returning individuals to a country where there is a real risk of them being subjected to persecution, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or any other human rights violation. The principle of non-refoulement is part of customary international law and is therefore binding on all states, whether or not they are parties to the Refugee Convention.

Although the Refugee Convention is not formally part of EU law, it occupies a special position in relation to EU law, as some of the rights outlined by the Refugee Convention form part of EU's fundamental rights regime, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (the Charter 2016). The prohibition of non-refoulement is found in several secondary EU legal instruments, the nature of protection depending on an examination of the facts of each individual case. The principal function of the Court of Justice of the European Union is to ensure that EU law is interpreted and applied uniformly within the EU, and to ensure that countries and EU institutions implement EU law. It consists of two courts: the Court of Justice (ECJ), which can provide clarification regarding the interpretation of EU law at the request of a court or a tribunal of a EU member state, as well as certain actions for annulment and appeals; and the General Court, which rules on actions for annulment brought by individuals, companies, and in some cases EU governments. The ECJ has recognised the absolute nature of the prohibition of non-refoulement (ECJ, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, paras. 88–90).

Furthermore, members of the Council of Europe, including Iceland, are also bound by the ECHR, which includes the principle of non-refoulement through the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment, and these states have also undertaken to comply with the judgments issued by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in cases brought against them. In addition, Iceland is bound by other ratified international obligations such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD 2006) and the UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW 1979).

In this article, I intend to review EU legislation[1] with the aim of identifying the importance of individual circumstances in different legal instruments when evaluating whether there would be a violation of the principle of non-refoulment. At the same time, I place Icelandic legislation in an international context.

THE COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM (CEAS)

Since 1999, the EU has been working to create a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and improve the legislative framework (Wagner, Baumgartner et al. 2016). The CEAS is a body of EU legislation which is intended to ensure that all EU Member States protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. The CEAS in its present form is binding for all Member States, with the exception of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK). Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, because of their membership in the European Economic Area (the EEA agreement 1992), all participate in the part of the CEAS regarding the determination of the State responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the member states, which will be further discussed later in this chapter.

The Qualification Directive

The so-called Qualification Directive (Qualification Directive 2011) is a central instrument of the CEAS. It sets out the criteria applicants must meet to qualify for international protection, the provisions on protection from *refoulement*, as well as specific provisions for children and vulnerable persons. Article 21 of the Qualification Directive addresses protection from non-refoulement, and according to Article 21(1), Member States shall respect the principle of *non-refoulement* in accordance with their international obligations.

The term 'refugee' is defined in Article 2(d) of the Qualification Directive, and it recognizes the Refugee Convention as the "cornerstone of the international legal regime for the protection of refugees" and elaborates the criteria for refugee status based on that understanding, referring to the reasons for persecution, as is done in the Refugee Convention, on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. With the Qualification Directive underpinning a policy of offering "appropriate status to any third-country national requiring international protection and ensuring compliance with the principle of non-refoulement," asylum law in the EU was expanded with what is called subsidiary protection status. According to Recital 33 of the Qualification Directive, subsidiary protection is intended as complementary to refugee protection, ensuring that those who are at risk of serious harm are given protection even though they may not be able to show that this risk is due to one of the grounds included in the Refugee Convention; subsidiary protection is thus restricted to persons who do not qualify for refugee status. The eligibility criteria for subsidiary protection are, as stated in recital 34 of the Qualification Directive, drawn from the "international obligations under human rights instruments and practices existing in Member States." The central criteria for qualification for subsidiary protection is found in Article 15 of the Qualification Directive, which defines three specific types of harm: 15(a) and (b), death penalty or execution, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the country of origin, and 15(c), serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict.

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[1] The ECHR and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights regarding personal circumstances has previously been examined, see Blöndal and Arnardóttir 2018.

The ECJ, whilst not excluding overlap, has confirmed that the harm defined in Article 15(c) covers a more general risk of harm than Article 15(a) and (b) (ECJ, *Elgafaji*, para. 33). The requirement that a person eligible for subsidiary protection be at 'real risk' of suffering serious harm was indirectly addressed by the ECJ in the case of *Elgafaji* (ECJ, *Elgafaji*, paras. 35–38) in the context of providing an interpretation of 'serious harm' under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive. Under Article 15(c), which concerns whether a person can demonstrate that he or she is subject to either a general risk or a specific risk, the ECJ articulated what has been called 'the sliding-scale' concept, (European Asylum Support Office 2015, 23), i.e. "the more the applicant is able to show that he is specifically affected by reason of factors particular to his personal circumstances, the lower the level of indiscriminate violence required by him to be eligible for subsidiary protection." (ECJ, *Elgafaji*, para. 39) The opposite also applies, and the level of violence could in exceptional instances reach such a high intensity that a civilian would, solely on account of his or her presence in the territory of the affected country or region, face a real risk of being subjected to serious harm (ECJ, *Elgafaji*, para. 43). By means of the so-called sliding scale concept, the ECJ aims to balance individual threat and indiscriminate violence and make clear how the provision is to be applied in a case-specific way (European Asylum Support Office 2015, 25).

Article 4 of the Qualification Directive states how the Member States should aassess the facts and circumstances of an application for international protection. It is clear that the assessment of an application for international protection must be carried out on an individual basis, and that it includes taking into account the individual position and personal circumstances of the applicant, including factors such as background, gender and age, in order to assess, on the basis of the applicant's personal circumstances, whether the acts to which the applicant has been or could be exposed would amount to persecution or serious harm. The ECJ has held that the assessment of the extent of the risk facing the applicant in his or her country of origin must in all cases be carried out with vigilance and care (ECJ, *Salahadin Abdulla and others*, para. 90; ECJ, *Y and Z*, para.77; ECJ, *X, Y and Z*, para. 73) and be based solely on "a specific evaluation of the facts and circumstances, in accordance with the rules laid down in particular by Article 4 [Qualification Directive]" (ECJ, *Y and Z*, para. 77; ECJ, *X, Y and Z*, para. 73).

In respect of qualification for both refugee and subsidiary protection status, Article 6 defines who can be actors in persecution or serious harm. In the view of the ECJ, since the Qualification Directive lists specific human activities as the source of persecution or serious harm, the form of 'serious harm' must be the result of 'a form of conduct on behalf of a third party' as defined in Article 6 of Qualification Directive (ECJ, *M'Bodj*, para. 35). In *Mohamed M'Bodj v État belge (M'Bodj)*, this interpretation was supported by reference to the preamble to the Directive, which in effect states that the Directive does not apply to those allowed to stay "on a discretionary basis on compassionate or humanitarian grounds." (ECJ, *M'Bodj*, para. 37) However, the case of *Centre public d'action sociale d'Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve v. Moussa Abdida (Abdida)*, decided by the ECJ on the same day as *M'Bodj*, suggests that in some cases, those who are unable to qualify for subsidiary protection or refugee status can use the so-called Return Directive (Return Directive 2008) to obtain protection against refoulement, deflecting *non-refoulement* protection in certain cases solely to return decisions (ECJ, *Abdida*, para. 48). On 24 April 2018, the ECJ found that under EU law, the fact that a person has in the past been tortured by the authorities of his country of origin, but who would no longer be at risk of such treatment if he returned to that country, would not in itself be sufficient justification for granting subsidiary protection.

However, in line with the recent case-law of the ECtHR (ECtHR, *Paposhvili v Belgium*), the ECJ considered that the Charter precluded a Member State from expelling a third country national when such expulsion would, in essence, result in significant and permanent deterioration of that person's mental health disorders, particularly if such deterioration would endanger his or her life. (ECJ, *MP*, para. 43) Nevertheless, in line with previous judgments of the ECJ, and referring to the protection of the Return Directive, the prohibition of removal in such cases was not considered to mean that the person in question should be granted subsidiary protection. Substantial aggravation of a third-country national's health cannot, in itself, be regarded as inhuman or degrading treatment inflicted on him/her in the country of origin. This would, according to the ECJ, only be the case when the third country national would face a real risk of being *intentionally* deprived of health care, such as when the authorities of the country of origin are not prepared to provide rehabilitation for a victim of torture, or when that country has adopted a discriminatory policy regarding access to health care. (ECJ, *MP*, para. 51) The first of these grounds is unique to torture victims, but the second ground should arguably be relevant to any 'medical case' in order to ensure greater protection for vulnerable individuals.

Article 8(1) refers to the possibility of internal flight (often referred to as 'internal relocation alternative') where Member States may, but are not required to determine that an applicant is not in need of international protection if, in a part of the country of origin, he or she has no well-founded fear of being persecuted, or is not at real risk of suffering serious harm, or has access to protection against persecution or serious harm, and he or she can safely and legally travel to and gain admittance to that part of the country and can reasonably be expected to settle there. According to Article 8(2), Member States shall at the time of taking the decision on the application take into account the general circumstances prevailing in that part of the country and to the personal circumstances of the applicant in accordance with Article 4 of the Qualification Directive.

The Dublin Regulation

Under EU law, and as part of the CEAS, criteria and mechanisms have been established for determining which Member State is responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged on the territory of one of the Member States. The Dublin system originated in the 1990 Schengen Convention and in the 1990 Dublin Convention, outside the framework of European Community (now EU) law. The system has evolved and is now regulated under EU law by the recast Dublin Regulation (Dublin III 2013), the application of which is facilitated by comparison of fingerprint data processed in accordance with the Eurodac Regulation (Eurodac Regulation 2013) and the Regulation concerning the operation of the Visa Information System (VIS Regulation 2008). The Dublin system is also regulated under international law by a series of agreements between the EU and Denmark, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, which would not otherwise be able to participate in the system because they are not directly bound by EU asylum law (see Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Iceland and the Kingdom of Norway 2001).

Art. 3(2) of the Dublin Regulation now contains a compulsory derogation from the duty to transfer asylum seekers among Member States when "there are substantial grounds for believing that there are systemic flaws in the asylum procedure and in the reception conditions for applicants resulting in a risk of inhuman or degrading treatment within the meaning of Art. 4 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights."[2]

In the ruling *CK and Others*, the ECJ assessed whether the risk faced by an asylum seeker of becoming a victim of inhuman and degrading treatment because of his/her individual situation, should prevent his/her transfer to another Member State to consider his/her asylum claim on the basis of the Dublin system. The ruling established that evidence of systemic deficiencies in an EU Member State was not the sole criterion for preventing a Dublin transfer. Instead, the ECJ aligned itself with previous case law from the ECtHR and found that Member States must assess the risks to the individual in light of his or her specific profile, and consider whether the individual could suffer treatment incompatible with Article 4 of the Charter because of the transfer (ECJ, *C.K and others*, para. 96.) If the receiving Member State cannot provide for the individual's specific needs, then the transfer must be prevented. The ECJ finally concluded that this decision fully respected the principle of mutual trust and the presumption of respect of fundamental rights by Member States while ensuring that Member States would duly take exceptional situations into account (ECJ, *C.K and others*, para. 95). Instead of putting these two imperatives in competition, the ECJ seems to acknowledge their necessary interdependence and the way the principle of mutual trust can be enhanced by an effective application of Article 4 of the Charter.[3]

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[2] This derogation draws from the ruling of the ECJ in Case C-411/10 *N. S. v. Secretary of State for the Home Department and M. E. and Others v. Refugee Applications Commissioner and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform* (*N.S.*) [2011] ECR I-13905, para. 86, according to which the possibility for a Member State to deal with an asylum application itself, based on the early version of the so-called 'discretionary clause,' has now become an obligation when there are systemic flaws such as those described in Art. 3(2).

The Temporary Protection Directive

The 2001 Directive on Temporary Protection (Temporary Protection Directive 2001) was the EU's concrete response to the necessity of dealing with mass influxes of displaced persons. It establishes minimum standards for granting temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons. For the Directive to be activated, the existence of a mass-influx situation needs to be established by a Council Decision after a proposal from the Commission, which should also examine any requests from Member States. However, the provisions of this Directive, based on solidarity between EU States, have not yet been triggered.

According to Article 3(2) of the Directive, Member States shall apply temporary protection with due respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and their obligations regarding non-refoulement. In cases of enforced return, Member States shall, according to Article 22(2), consider any compelling humanitarian reasons that might make return impossible or unreasonable for an individual. Article 23 states that such persons shall not be expelled as long as the situation in question continues.

THE RETURN DIRECTIVE

The Return Directive (Return Directive 2008) establishes common standards and procedures for EU countries, whereby illegally staying non-EU nationals may be removed from EU territories. It lays down provisions for terminating illegal stays, detaining non-EU nationals with the aim of removing them, and procedural safeguards that apparently include protection from refoulement. The Return Directive has been transposed into national law by all the States bound by it, and by the four Schengen-associated countries including Iceland.

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[3] It should however be noted that the ruling in the case at hand was handed down by a Chamber of five judges whose authority could be considered as weaker than that of the Grand Chamber in previous cases. Nevertheless, the ruling follows the general evolution of the case law of the ECJ.

According to Article 5 of the Directive, when implementing the Return Directive, Member States shall take due account of the best interests of the child, family life and state of health of the persons concerned and respect the principle of non-refoulement. The Directive provides no definition of non-refoulement and makes no reference to the source of the principle. These are the only substantive grounds for objecting to an expulsion set out in the Directive.

The ECJ has apparently suggested that in some cases, persons who are unable to qualify for subsidiary protection or refugee status can use the EU's Return Directive to obtain a different type of protection. In the case of *Abdida*, the ECJ found that Article 19(2) of the Charter, which bans return when the applicant would face inhuman treatment, coupled with Article 5 of the Return Directive, which requires Member States to take account of the applicant's state of health, prevented a Member State from returning a seriously ill individual to a country where there was a serious risk of grave and irreversible deterioration of his state of health (ECJ, *Abdida*, para. 53). In the MP case, where the applicant had in the past been tortured in his country of origin, the ECJ enlarged the scope of interpretation and application of the concept of subsidiary protection by including former victims of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment who, upon return, are intentionally deprived of necessary medical treatment by the authorities in their country of origin (ECJ, *MP*, para. 51.) However, it also referred to its previous case law and ruled that substantial aggravation of the applicant's state of health upon return to the country of origin could not in and of itself be considered as inhuman and degrading treatment in the wording of the Qualification Directive (ECJ, *MP*, para 49).

According to this, the requirement in Article 5 of the Directive to respect the principle of non-refoulement means that irregular migrants who fall outside the scope of EU asylum law, but who nevertheless face an Article 3 ECHR risk, as defined in the case law of the ECtHR, cannot be removed (ECJ, *Abdida*, para. 47.)

With regard to expulsions, the Return Directive applies in any event to instances where there is medical need, and perhaps also to other cases that fall outside the scope of refugee and subsidiary-protection status, but which fall within the scope of Article 3 ECHR. Article 5 of the Return Directive also refers to the best interests of the child, the state of health of the person concerned, and family life, so logically these could also potentially be grounds for protection.

The Visa Code

No legal instrument in the CEAS regulates the entry of people seeking international protection. There is no legal way to access Europe and formally apply for protection (X *and* X *v. Belgium (*X *and* X*))*, and that, some say, is a corollary of the principle of non-refoulement and the obligation to take preventive measures to refrain from violating human rights through an act of omission (Moreno-Lax 2018). The EU instruments of the CEAS refer repeatedly to 'applicants' for international protection, their rights and proper procedures, emphasizing the principle of non-refoulement, but it does so without regulating access to the CEAS. This has led to applicants who arrive at the external borders of the Member States and formally apply for protection being assigned to the category 'irregular migrants.' Although the Schengen Borders Code (SBC) aims to establish rules for the control of 'persons' (without qualification) who cross, or show an intention to cross the EU's external borders, the situation of asylum seekers has not been fully taken into account despite references to non-refoulement and obligations relating to access to international protection in Articles 3 and 4 SBC (Aguilar 2018)

The basic legal framework for the issuing of Schengen (short-stay) visas is the 2009 Regulation establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code 2009). The regulation establishes the procedures and conditions for issuing visas for short stays in and transit through the territories of EU countries. In the case of X *and* X *v. Belgium (*X *and* X*)*, where the issue of access to international protection was specifically addressed. There a married couple and three minor children of Syrian nationality submitted applications for visas at the Belgian Embassy in Lebanon on the basis of Article 25(1) on Visa Codes ('humanitarian visa'). They stated that obtaining visas would enable them to leave the besieged city of Aleppo and apply for asylum in Belgium. They claimed that the Charter imposed a positive obligation on Member States to guarantee the right to asylum, and that granting international protection was the only way to avoid any risk that Article 3 of the ECHR and Article 4 of the Charter would be infringed. The referring court asked whether the implementation of the visa policy could be regarded as the exercise of jurisdiction in that sense, and whether a right of entry could follow as a corollary to the obligation to take preventative measures and to the principle of non-refoulement as also enshrined in Article 3 of the ECHR and Article 33 of the Refugee Convention. The questions addressed to the ECJ thus concerned a significant paradox in EU and international asylum law, as international protection only benefits those who reach another country.

According to the opinion of the Advocate General Paolo Mengozzi, the authorities of a Member State, when adopting a decision in accordance with Article 25 on the Visa Code, were applying Union law within the meaning of Article 51(1) of the Charter and were therefore obliged to respect the rights guaranteed by this article and could not conclude that their state was exempted from fulfilling its obligations under Article 4 of the Charter (ECJ, X *and* X, Opinion of AG Mengozzi, para. 176.). Rejecting visa applications based on humanitarian grounds left the visa applicants with a choice between exposing themselves to dangers and inhuman treatment – which might even lead to death – and attempting to illegally enter the territory of a Member State in order to request international protection (ECJ, X *and* X, para. 150).

However, the opinion of the Advocate General is not binding for the ECJ, and although the Advocate General's opinion influences most of the Court's decisions, in this case, it did not. The ECJ decided that Member States were not obliged under Article 25(1) to issue a short-term visa for humanitarian purposes, as the applicants planned to stay for more than 90 days. A request did not appear to fall within the scope of EU law, as no measure had been adopted by the EU regarding the issuing of long-term visas to third-country nationals on humanitarian grounds. Applying for a visa with the intent to seek asylum was considered to fall outside the scope of EU law. The situation in question was thus not considered governed by EU law, and the provisions of the Charter therefore did not apply (ECJ, X *and* X, para. 45).

CONCLUSIONS – AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR ICELAND

This chapter has reviewed the main provisions of EU law concerning the principle of non-refoulement. This review has revealed that individual circumstances play an important role when assessing whether transfer or an expulsion would violate the principle.

EU law contains various provisions requiring individual assessment and points out special risk factors inherent in certain personal circumstances. The most striking example is perhaps found in Article 4 of the Qualification Directive where it is stated that the assessment of an application for international protection is to be carried out on an individual basis and must include taking into account the individual position and personal circumstances of the applicant. Regarding the Qualification Directive's subsidiary protection, the ECJ has also held that the more the applicant is able to show that he is specifically affected by factors particular to his personal circumstances, the lower the level of indiscriminate violence required for him to be eligible for subsidiary protection (ECJ, *Elgafaji*, para. 39).

As the Qualification Directive requires that there be actors of persecution or serious harm in Article 6 of the Directive, the ECJ has confirmed that cases where an applicant is suffering from a serious illness cannot fall under the Qualification Directive unless the applicant has been intentionally deprived of health care in his country of origin. However, if the person in question faces an expulsion order, then the Return Directive can apply. Article 5 of the Directive includes a prohibition of refoulement as well as an obligation for Member States to take due account of the best interests of the child, family life, and the state of health of the persons concerned, and coupled with Article 19(2) of the Charter, as interpreted in light of Article 3 ECHR, it can in exceptional circumstances apply to and prevent the removal of a seriously ill person. It thus seems that in certain cases, the concept of non-refoulement in the Return Directive and the Charter is wider than the concept of international protection in the Qualification Directive. One could argue that this might lead to the uncertain legal position where an applicant would have no legal status if non-refoulement applied, for example in the case of countries that are not part of the Return Directive.

The development of the Dublin Regulation and the jurisprudence of the ECJ regarding transfers on the grounds of that regulation also show similar trends towards individual assessments even though they were exempted from this for some time due to the principle of mutual trust. The ECJ has now established that specific and individual considerations regarding asylum seekers must be taken into account in assessing whether the person in question might suffer treatment incompatible with Article 4 of the Charter, the principle of non-refoulment, because of his or her transfer. If the receiving State cannot provide for the individual's specific needs, then the transfer must be prevented.

Further examples of a requirement of individual assessment can be found, for example, in the Temporary Protection Directive, a part of the CEAS which has so far never been triggered. The assessment of personal circumstances and their relevance in light of the situation in the receiving country is very context-dependent. It is therefore a difficult task for the States and the ECJ to balance equality and predictability against the necessity of an individualised approach, as prescribed by the by EU legislation and the jurisprudence of the ECJ.

Iceland observes fundamental rights, including the rights based on the Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, namely the principle of non-refoulement. The principle of non-refoulement is found in Article 42 of the Icelandic Foreign National Act of 2016.

Icelandic law is based on a dualistic system regarding the relationship between international and domestic law; consequently, the principles of international law, including the provisions of international conventions, do not form part of domestic law, unless they have been specifically incorporated into it (Snævarr 1989, 262–63; Björgvinsson 2014, 26).

Iceland is a member of the Council of Europe; it has ratified the ECHR and most of its protocols and has therefore undertaken, under international law, to comply with the judgments issued by the European Court of Human Rights in cases brought against the Icelandic state. (Björgvinsson 2017, 35) The ECHR has a distinctive position among Iceland's international obligations, as it has been incorporated, in its entirety, into Icelandic law by Act No. 62/1994, and its provisions can be directly invoked in court as domestic legislation (Arnardóttir 2018, 15). However, consistent with the dualistic system, Article 2 of Act No. 62/1994 stipulates that the resolutions of the European Commission on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe are not binding in Icelandic national law (Guðmundsdóttir 1994, 156–57). After 1995, the distinctive position of the ECHR became even more clearly defined in Icelandic national law, as the objectives of the review of the human rights chapter of the Icelandic Constitution no. 33/1944 were defined in part as taking into account the international human rights treaties by which Iceland was bound, with the ECHR repeatedly referred to for clarification of certain articles of the bill. It has therefore been considered that the human rights provisions of the Constitution should be interpreted in light of the ECHR and other relevant international treaties. (Thorarensen 2008, 107). In view of this and the position of the ECHR in Iceland, it must be considered that the judgments of the ECtHR are de facto in some way binding in Icelandic national law (Arnardóttir 2018, 22; Björgvinsson 2017, 60–64).

However, Iceland is not a part of the EU. Iceland's formal relations with the EU are governed primarily by the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, incorporated, in its entirety, into Icelandic law by Act 2/1993.

As a member of the EEA, Iceland has access to the European single market and is consequently subject to a number of European laws. Enforcement of these laws is carried out by the EFTA Court (Björgvinsson 2006, 50). Articles 3 and 6 of the EEA Agreement stipulate that EEA States undertake to implement all appropriate measures, whether general or particular in nature, to ensure fulfilment of the obligations arising out of the agreement and to clarify and apply the provisions of the Agreement in so far as they are identical in substance to corresponding rules, in accordance with the ECJ's rulings and judgments. The main objective of these provisions is to ensure consistency in the implementation, application and interpretation of common rules of law throughout the EEA. It has been stated that the scope of Icelandic courts to deviate from these precedents is in fact narrow, because it could result in the Icelandic state not fulfilling its obligations under the EEA Agreement and thereby violating international law (Magnússon and Líndal 2011, 136).

In fulfilling EEA obligations on free movement, Iceland also participates in Schengen co-operation and therefore participates in certain parts of European cooperation. Schengen participation comes with a legal obligation to implement 'Schengen-relevant' elements of European law, such as the Return Directive, which stipulates common standards and procedures in Member States for returning irregular migrants who are non-EU nationals. Another effect of participation in Schengen is Iceland also agreeing to apply the Dublin and Eurodac Regulations. Therefore, although the Icelandic Government is not obliged to implement the directives of the CEAS, as stated in comments appended to legislation amending the law on immigration in effect in 2010, Icelandic and European rules are interconnected, as some of Iceland's most important provisions are based directly on their EU counterparts. As stated in the comments accompanying the bill that became the new, current Icelandic legislation on immigration, No. 80/2016, account was taken of developments in other European countries, in particular the main directives in force in the EU regarding issues concerning applicants for international protection.

When applying Icelandic legislation, which is in many ways constructed on the basis of EU law and European Human Rights legislation, it is important that we bear in mind the wider context of legal developments within the EU and in the jurisprudence of European courts.

It is clear that personal circumstances are an increasingly important factor when assessing whether the return or expulsion of an individual could violate the principle of non-refoulement, and there should thus be further study of whether this is sufficiently reflected in the Icelandic context.

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Migrant Families with Disabled Children

"I came here to make my family situation better"

ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to explore the social positions of migrant families with disabled children and their experiences of settlement, employment, family care and services, drawing on findings from a qualitative study of the everyday life experiences of twelve families in Iceland. Applying Bourdieu's analytical framework, we explore these families' experiences of how their social position might be determined by the social, cultural and economic capital they have lost and remade in the migration process. We present three aspects of our findings: the reasons for parents' decisions to migrate to Iceland and settle there, their experiences of combining employment with caring for their children, and their experiences of the welfare services. These findings show that these families face various barriers in their daily lives when it comes to juggling and balancing work and family care, due to limited possibilities to build cultural, social and economic capital in Iceland. The findings highlight the strategies the parents use in their efforts to build social and economic capital. The study depicts the importance of considering the diverse situations of migrant families with disabled children, including their knowledge of Icelandic, their employment positions, and the services and access to informal support which affect their abilities to generate and make capital.

Keywords: migration, disability, care, welfare services, Bourdieu

INTRODUCTION

Studies exploring social experiences of disability amongst migrant families have been increasing in number and highlight the multiple nature of formal support barriers, such as linguistic and information barriers, inappropriate approaches taken by social services, and limited migrant rights (Ottósdóttir and Evans 2016; Soldatic, Meekosha and Somers 2012; Trotter 2012). Compared to non-migrant families, they share many of the same tasks and challenges, striving to maintain a sense of control and normality in a complex service system involving collaboration with a diverse number of professionals. Migrant families face additional barriers, such as those linked to their often poorer social and economic conditions, and their limited access to support networks compared to those available to non-migrant families (Berg 2015; Lindsay, King, Klassen, Esses, and Fellin 2012; Stevens 2010). Icelandic studies report similar findings, noting that parents lack information and experience poor coordination between services (Bjarnason 2010; Stefánsdóttir and Egilson 2016; Egilson and Stefánsdóttir 2014), and migrant families are often confronted with additional barriers, including language and limited informal support networks (Egilson, Ottósdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2020; Egilson, Skaptadóttir and Ottósdóttir 2019).

Since 1998, the migrant population in Iceland has increased from 2% to more than 14.1% as of January of 2019, with migrants from Eastern Europe being the largest group (Statistics Iceland 2019). Employment has been an important motive for migration, but other reasons, such as reunification with relatives and acquiring higher education are important as well. There has been an increase in family migration, and whilst the number of first-generation migrant children is still low, there has been a steady increase in the number of second-generation children (Hagstofa Íslands 2019).

Migrants have had relatively easy access to the employment market in Iceland, but migrants are largely employed in low-skilled and low-income jobs and are more likely than non-migrants to be overqualified for their jobs (Hagstofa Íslands 2019). Studies show that migrants experience discrimination in hiring and promotion processes and are often not aware of their rights (Loftsdóttir, Sigurðardóttir and Kristinsson 2016). Finally, migrant women face a gendered trend in the employment market, with women being streamlined into specific jobs and experiencing difficulty accessing managerial positions (Júlíusdóttir, Skaptadóttir and Karlsdóttir 2013; Napierala and Wojtyńska 2016). These findings correspond with other studies that highlight barriers on the employment market for migrants (Reyneri and Fullin 2011).

The proportion of migrant children enrolled in secondary education and entering higher education is relatively lower than the figure for non-migrant children (Hagstofa 2019). Overall, migrant families experience lower socio-economic conditions than families of Icelandic origin, and children and adolescents have less access to social support and report lower well-being than those with a non-migrant background (Rúnarsdóttir and Vilhjálmsson 2015). Migrant parents commonly experience access to interaction and collaboration with school staff as difficult (Gunnþórsdóttir, Barillé and Meckl 2019). Finally, studies indicate that language is a barrier for many migrants, who say they find access to the Icelandic language community difficult even if they understand and speak Icelandic. Migrants have similarly noted that information about rights and services in languages other than Icelandic is quite limited (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017).

The aim of this chapter is to explore families' social positions and everyday life experiences with regard to settlement, employment, family care and services. We draw on findings from a qualitative study of twelve migrant families with disabled children (Egilson, Skaptadóttir and Ottósdóttir 2019). We approach our analysis and discussion using Bourdieu's (1991) concepts of social, cultural and economic capital in order to highlight families' social positioning and their different abilities to access services, obtain employment and mobilize resources to provide family care. Migrants' social relations elucidate their economic and cultural capital, as well as their engagement in constructing social capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1991). Erel (2010) has moreover pointed out that migrants do not simply lose their prior capital, such as cultural capital, in the migration and settlement processes. Nor do they take their culture with them in a rucksack to a new country. Instead they often create new forms of capital in new places of residence using both the resources they bring with them and others available to them in their new environments.

Thus, in our analysis we focus on how a family's social position may be determined by the social, cultural and economic capital they currently possess, have lost or rebuilt. Loss of cultural and social capital through migration includes not being able to apply knowledge and skills in a new social context due to this kind of capital not being recognised by the host community, or not having sufficient knowledge of the dominant language to access information. A loss of capital can also occur due to limited availability of support from relatives in their communities of origin and in the new communities. The social position of migrants is thus shaped by capital possession and abilities to mobilise and remake capital. Built into

Bourdieu's ideas is a recognition of people's agency in utilizing resources in their efforts to increase their capital. Migrants may for example learn the language, find ways to use their education and skills and construct social ties and support networks, both in their local and transnational social fields of families and friends in order to maximise their capital (Bourdieu 1991; Erel 2010). Thus, a Bourdieusian approach is useful in our analysis of how migrant families with disabled children experience, remake, build, and activate their economic, social and cultural capital in their daily lives.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study which included eighteen semi-structured interviews and six observations involving 12 families with a total of 16 disabled children aged 2–17 years. Seven children were in preschool, eight in elementary or middle school and one in secondary school. Five households were headed by single parents, and seven by two parents. The families came from diverse countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, Central America, Asia and Africa. Families from Eastern Europe were in the majority, reflecting the composition of the migrant population. Thirteen of the children were born in Iceland. Most of them had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, followed by intellectual and physical impairments. Many of the children had more than one type of impairment. Most of the families lived in Reykjavik and nearby municipalities. The families had lived in Iceland between one and a half and twenty years. Interviews with four families were conducted in Icelandic, in English with four families, and an interpreter was used in interviews with the remaining four families. The interviews and observations took place in the families' homes or at places chosen by the parents. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed thematically. We used an inductive coding technique, the coding text describing activity, views, experiences, interactions and processes representing economic, social and cultural capital. Codes were then compared, reorganised and themes identified (Silverman 2018).

Reasons for migration and settlement in Iceland

There were a range of reasons underlying the parents' decisions to migrate and settle in Iceland, but the most commonly cited were employment, the support needs of the children, and a perception of more opportunities for the children than were available in their countries of origin. Most of the parents explained that they had initially decided to migrate to Iceland for employment reasons and to better provide for their families, as seen in a father's account:

> I arrived here last year. … I came to make the financial situation of my family better because it was not good in my home country and not in [another country] where we lived [prior to coming to Iceland].

Others had come to Iceland because they wanted to experience a new and different place in which to work and live. The majority had planned to work temporarily in Iceland but had then extended their stay. The decision to remain in Iceland was apparently influenced by the parents' positive experiences of their opportunities to provide for their families. They weighed the needs of their children against their prospects for employment when making decisions about remaining in Iceland. They claimed living in Iceland would better enable them to combine work and family care than would be the case in their countries of origin.

Another economic aspect influencing the parents' decisions to remain in Iceland was being able to send remittances to relatives in their places of origin. Hence, their family caring roles were not confined to their family in Iceland but extended to close relatives in the country of origin, highlighting how working in Iceland enabled transnational family care responsibilities, mostly towards their parents, and in one case also toward a child left with grandparents. Most of the parents worked full time in low-income jobs in the service and industrial sectors. Some worked shifts, and others even had more than one job. They described how low salaries required them to work many hours in order to provide for their families in Iceland and in the country of origin, as explained by one father: "I work a lot because the money [salary] is not enough." He explained that he sent monthly remittances to his elderly parents to help them with their living costs. "My parents have no income; they have zero income." Despite these low wages most reported that their economic position had improved since moving to Iceland. It was, however, evident in some of the accounts that the parents had not been able to make use of cultural capital, such as getting jobs that matched their education qualifications. Thus, as much as employment helped them gain economic capital, it could also mean a loss of cultural capital for many of the participants. There were, however, notable exceptions to this, a few families had lived in Iceland for a long time and spoke

Icelandic. These families had formed support networks, were fluent in Icelandic, and had a good knowledge of the social services system after having lived in Iceland for a long period. Nevertheless, there were also families who had lived for a long time in Iceland and had still not built strong social and economic capital.

Another important factor influencing the parents' decision to settle in Iceland was having access to welfare services for their disabled child(ren). They believed their children would have better opportunities in the future for education and employment in Iceland than in their countries of origin. This could for example be seen in one mother's explanation. "Because, let's say like this, with all the stress related to his problem [impairment] and his disease, I think we are lucky to be here." Her husband added:

> We don't feel stressed about money. I'm earning because I have to pay for everything, and my hours help me pay for everything. We are happy with that, you know. The only issue is the stress we have concerning our child, but this is not so great. I think he will live a normal life here. I think this is a very good country.

Other parents, including those who came from small, rural communities in their countries of origin where resources were minimal, expressed similar views. One father explained that his family had lived in a small village before coming to Iceland, and if they returned, they would have to drive 300 km to the nearest area with health and social services. Because of the services available for the child and the prospect of a brighter future for their son, he and his wife had decided to remain in Iceland.

However, a sense of ambivalence was also evident in some parents' accounts. One couple stated that although they had a good life in Iceland, they had mixed feelings about living there in the future. Initially, one mother had found living in Iceland difficult, but after her children were born, her perspective changed, because she learned to value many aspects of living in Iceland, especially the formal support the family received and the way services met the needs of her children:

> For many years, I was just heading back to [country of origin]. I just found everything way too small, because previously I had lived in a large city … and the weather was difficult … But after the birth of [names of children], I am very happy, exteremely happy, to live here.

However, not all parents perceived their extended stay in Iceland as a choice. One mother described how she had "got stuck in Iceland" after she gave birth to her disabled child, and that she had to stay in Iceland in order to accommodate her child's needs, even though she would not otherwise choose to do so. In contrast, another mother decided to move back to her country of origin, as she believed her child's health care needs would be better met there. This was a lone example.

Migration decisions and decisions concerning settlement in Iceland tended to be intertwined with conditions in the countries of origin, employment opportunities in Iceland, and their children's needs for support. These situations shaped families' opportunities to mobilise resources in their efforts to build economic and social capital.

COMBINING EMPLOYMENT WITH CARE OF CHILDREN

Most parents struggled to combine their employment and caretaking roles, in part because of their low salaries and long working hours. They described having to regularly attend service sessions, such as therapy for their children, which conflicted with their working hours. This was further complicated by the limited availability of support from relatives and friends, as very few of them lived in Iceland. For the participants, migration had resulted in a loss of social capital as far as informal support networks were concerned.

Parents described how they negotiated the conflict between employment and care by adjusting their jobs to suit their children's needs, such as changing jobs, having one parent work part-time, or having one parent work day shifts and the other evening and night shifts. As stated by one mother from Eastern Europe:

> I wake up at five and start working and come home around two o'clock. We needed to change our working hours to fit the times when our children arrive home from school, and my husband now works night shifts. But we also need to pay more for things now and need the extra money … There is no one else to be with our children.

Working shifts was not an option for the single parents, who in some cases depended greatly on the help of other family members.

Some parents described their employers as being understanding of their situations. These parents were able to leave work when their children were ill, or when they needed to attend therapy sessions with their children or pick them up from school. One father, who works in construction, said he felt "lucky" to have an employer who showed understanding of his situation. In many instances, the parents felt unable to negotiate with their employers when they needed to leave work because of their children. One mother talked about her and her husband's employer as "not happy to have people like them," employees that needed flexibility because of their roles as parents. She said:

> Because of this [her children's care needs], one of us needs to leave work sooner than expected, or go home and come back, and they [the employers] are not happy to have people like this working for them.

She also stated that if one of them needed to stay home with the child, they would not be paid, revealing her limited awareness of her rights as a parent on the labour market. Other parents described similar feelings of insecurity when it came to negotiating their employment rights, given their employer's demands, as seen from a father's account:

> To begin with, there were problems that my employers had with me for leaving work, but then my boss came with me once to the doctor, and then he seemed to understand my situation. But I think I have heard that because I have a disabled child, I have the right to take my child for services if I need to during working hours. But I have also heard that they are thinking of firing me, because I am always leaving work. But the big boss, the boss of my boss – I have heard he does not agree with that, and so therefore they have not fired me. … I really don't know my rights, neither my rights as a parent nor as an employee.

In some cases, limited knowledge of their rights resulted in parents negotiating regarding their own needs and fitting them to the expectations of their employers, as described by one parent.

> I am working, but I need to leave work so often to take my son to physical therapy and doctor's appointments. So I try to avoid going other places, like to my social worker, on top of all the other time off.

The limited support available from relatives and friends greatly impacted some families' abilities to combine work with care. Some parents had one or two relatives who lived in Iceland. Most described having some friends in Iceland, but they were rarely able to draw on these friendships to get help with childcare. One couple received support from the child's grandmother, who lived in Iceland, and another couple had support from the wife's sister who lived nearby and would pick their child up from school when needed. A single mother of two children depended greatly on the support of a friend from the country of origin living nearby. Overall, parents' experiences in negotiating working roles with roles of care were influenced by their often rather limited social and economic capital, which in turn affected their position in the social field of employment.

EXPERIENCES WITH WELFARE SERVICES

The parents were generally pleased with welfare services, particularly those available during the preschool years. The transition to elementary school was challenging, because, for younger children, therapy services were often organised so that they either took place in the preschool, or a person from the preschool accompanied the child to meet these professionals. This setup fit well with the children's daily routines and made it easier for the parents to combine their children's needs with their own roles and obligations at work.

When their children started elementary school, the parents typically attended these therapy sessions and appointments with professionals together with their children, which required more time and effort than before. A single mother said:

> I cannot work on weekdays. During the preschool years, his assistant took him to therapy sessions two afternoons a week. These sessions are so important for him. But in elementary school, nobody can do this. So, I have stopped working weekdays.

The parents also experienced a range of barriers related to accessing information about their rights to support and services. Often they did not know where to look for information, whom to ask, or what to ask, being unfamiliar with the system and also experiencing a language barrier. Parents spoke about not knowing what services were available, information not being easily found through the internet, and difficulties contacting service providers on the phone. Furthermore, some had difficulty reading the letters they received, as they were in Icelandic. One couple reported that their accent in Icelandic made it difficult for professionals to understand them, and that they experienced constant fear that professionals would not comprehend their concerns and needs. Some parents negotiated barriers by drawing support from individuals they trusted or felt confident about asking for help, such as professionals involved in their children's daily lives or people who also had disabled children. Occasionally, parents formed strong and lasting relationships with support workers. One couple described how they developed a trusting relationship with their child's preschool teacher and felt they could ask her for support with a range of issues, including parenting and how to support their child at home.

Many parents found themselves in insecure housing situations, both because access to services in schools sometimes required parents to live in the same area in which their children attended school, but also due to their low incomes, high rental costs, and the unstable housing market in Iceland. They viewed their ability to secure permanent housing as a key to their children's wellbeing and ongoing support, because moving to a new neighbourhood or municipality might require them to adjust to new services and professionals. They feared the emotional and social impact that relocating to another area would have on their children, given that their lives already involved so much engagement with services and different professionals. Limited economic and social capital shaped many families' experiences on the housing market, which again highlighted their vulnerability when it came to service provision.

A single mother described how her daughter could not get a place in the local school due to the school's limited resources for supporting children with certain impairments, so she had to relocate to a new neighbourhood. This mother, after losing her housing, worried about finding a new place to live in the new school district, and also about the fact that they would be living too far from her sister, who had helped her with her daughter, looking after the child after school until the mother arrived home from work.

Discussion and conclusion

Parents' migration and settlement decisions reflected their efforts to mobilise resources in order to maximise their economic and social capital. Most of them had come to Iceland to improve the economic position of their families, but the availability of better services for their children compared to their country of origin also played a role in their decisions and highlights the way families also thought in the long-term perspective. This finding sheds light on the temporal nature of capital-making (Bourdieu 1986, 1991; Erel 2010).

Parents lost social capital when migrating to Iceland, as most of their relatives lived elsewhere. They had few friends and relatives available locally to draw on for support but found it easier to combine work with care than in the country of origin. This was due to the availability of formal services and rights for parents, thus demonstrating how formal resources became an important source of social capital for parents. Nevertheless, most parents experienced limited opportunities to build informal social capital, both in the local community, where local language skills and traditions tend to be valued over those of migrants, but also in the field of employment, where they were largely employed in low-skilled jobs, experienced job insecurity, and were often unaware of their rights. Their experiences are in line with other studies which indicate that migrants experience barriers in employment (Reyneri and Fullin 2011) and barriers when it comes to communication and interaction in the local community (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017). The findings are also consistent with the analysis of Erel and Ryan (2019), who note that migrant capital may be lost upon migration because of the mismatch between how it is valued within different social contexts (place migrated from and place migrated to).

Parents' challenges in balancing family-care responsibilities with employment obligations were shaped, on the one hand, by their limited informal social capital, but also by the limited opportunities they had to build new supportive social networks. Parents did however mobilize what was available in their environments, such as a few relatives, other parents with disabled children, or key professionals, in their efforts to generate more support and build social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Erel 2010). While a few families had built relatively strong social and cultural capital over a long period of residence in Iceland, during which they had also become fluent in Icelandic and knowledgeable about the service system (Egilson, Ottósdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2020; Egilson, Skaptadóttir and Ottósdóttir 2019), the majority of families had not. Accordingly, the process of generating capital is not a linear process in terms of time spent in a host country (Erel and Ryan 2018).

Families appreciated the support they received from formal services, drawing comparisons with services in their countries of origin. However, they found it difficult to navigate services and access information about their rights due to language barriers and complex service systems. The transition to elementary school was demanding, which matches other research showing that this is a common experience amongst Icelandic parents of disabled children (Egilson 2015).

Overall, the findings highlight the processes that migrant families with disabled children had undergone in migration and settlement: losing but also making and remaking capital, and the way in which capital was sometimes transferable and sometimes not, depending on the social position they had as migrants and the value of their cultural capital. Parents negotiated hindrances in a new social context using strategies that enabled them to mobilise the few resources available to them in order to build capital. Their social positioning as migrants and as parents with disabled children were important factors influencing their abilities to generate capital in their new country, and this highlights the importance of recognising the impact of social structures on migrants' social position, including migrant status and disability (Erel 2010; Bourdieu 1986).

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LENKA FORMÁNKOVÁ, ÁSDÍS AÐALBJÖRG
ARNALDS AND GUÐNÝ BJÖRK EYDAL

Care in the Migration Context

A Comparative Study of Czech and Icelandic Parents' Childcare Arrangements

ABSTRACT

International and transnational labour migration poses questions about the family life of migrant families and the strategies migrants use when making decisions on participating in the labour market and caring for their young children. The early childcare choices of European Union (EU) migrants are analysed in this qualitative study of families in which at least one parent immigrated to Iceland, comparing their child-care strategies to those of Icelandic families. Our findings show that pre-migrant ideals of care play an important role when deciding on care arrangements for under-school age children. Even though the choices of families in both groups have strong links to public discourses on 'good parenting,' their choices being supported, reinforced, and eventually changed through specific policy designs, these discourses are not always fully accepted by migrant parents. In our sample, the care arrangements made by native Icelandic families were often more in line with public policy, whereas parents with a migration background tended to look for alternative 'out-of-system' solutions. The transnational families can therefore be seen not only as limited by a pre-migration framework, but also as enriched by their values and experiences in two policy systems, which allow them to seek alternative solutions that match their parental needs.

Keywords: transnational migration, mixed migrant couples, childcare arrangements, gender division of work, Icelandic family policy

Introduction

Since the 1990s, migration to Iceland has undergone a shift in terms of numbers and composition, with over 50 percent of immigrants coming from EU countries that were part of the former Eastern bloc, mainly the V4 countries. While an extensive body of literature addresses the impact of Icelandic family policy on the gendered division of labour between parents, little is known about how migrant families receive the Icelandic "gender-equality oriented model" (Lister 2009, 254). To enhance our understanding of the early childcare choices of European Union (EU) migrants, we compare the strategies used in families having at least one parent who immigrated to Iceland from a Visegrad Country (V4), the Czech Republic, to the strategies used by Icelandic families. Although fewer than 700 Czechs are officially living in Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2019), Czech parents represent an interesting case, as they choose care arrangements in the context of opposing family policies and values regarding gender roles in Iceland and the Czech Republic. While Iceland has come far in adopting the so-called 'dual-earner/dual-caregiver' model (Eydal and Rostgaard 2018), the Czech Republic has strongly supported full-time motherhood and a gendered division of care for preschool children, while the dual-earner model prevails after children start compulsory schooling (Blum, Formánková, and Dobrotić 2014).

The aim of the chapter is to a) discuss how different models of family-policy design and gender attitudes and related childcare arrangements influence everyday childcare practices and b) analyse similarities in childcare arrangements in mixed and Icelandic families. The findings provide insights into the reasoning behind parental choices of care. We divide the families interviewed into three types, where each type outlines similarities in reasoning about individual care arrangements based on the policy designs of the two countries, normative assumptions on appropriate care, and the individual family context. The first is what we call the Icelandic care arrangement, supported by the Icelandic family and gender-equality policies. The second is the 'Almost Czech' arrangement supported by the Czech family and gender-equality policies; and the third is the 'In-between negotiated' arrangement, where the parents chose a way characterized by compromise between the two family policy arrangements.

The focus of the chapter is on highly qualified parents, and the Czech parents in the study had children in mixed partnerships. This mirrors the nature of migration from the Czech Republic to Iceland, which is motivated by social rather than economic drivers (see Casteli 2018). The nature of migration is mirrored in the predominance of mixed couples in our sample. Thereby, the chapter also contributes to a broader understanding of families from post-Soviet EU countries, while past research has focused mainly on the most numerous group – Polish migrants.

THEORETICAL FRAMING: THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN FAMILY POLICIES AND VALUES

Care provision in transnational families is a widely discussed phenomenon (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002), and a growing body of literature focuses on parenting in migration (e.g. Crespi et al. 2018), including recent special issues devoted to motherhood in migration (e.g. Reynolds and Erel 2018). However, most of the work overlooks mixed families and focuses on gender dynamics in the family without discussing the broader context of gender relations and state policies. When researching how parents combine work and care, we draw on literature locating this combination at an intersection of welfare regimes, the labour market and gender (Lewis 1992) and transpose this knowledge to the study of migrants' care arrangements (Williams 2012). In the context of migration, the interrelation between the legislative framing of care policies, dominant gendered values of appropriate care, the labour market, migration policy, and family relations in both the sending and receiving countries play an important role in parents' choices (e.g., Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012; Bartova and Karpinska 2019). Therefore, we move beyond discussion of the individual decision-making process and gender dynamics in families and focus on the reasoning behind a particular choice in the context of what Isaken and Czapka (2018) conceptualize as gender regimes in their analysis of mixed migrant couples living in Norway.

In our chapter, we apply the holistic analytical concept of 'care arrangements' by Pfau-Effinger. She defines them as "an interrelation between the cultural values about care, the relevant sense-constructions in a given society surrounding informal and formal care, and the way institutions like the welfare state, the family, the labour market and the non-profit sector, as well as social structures, frame informal and formal care" (Pfau-Effinger 2005, 326). Thus, according to Pfau-Effinger (2005), a culture impacts welfare-state policies, but also the way in which individuals react to policy measures. The way people receive particular policies reflects the complex interrelations between the welfare state, cultural values and individual social practices. In the transnational context of migrant families, care giving arrangements emerge both from the institutional setting of care and the spaces through which care arrangements are configured in relation to both the sending and receiving societies (Kilkey and Merla 2014). Migrant families also transfer values and expectations regarding institutions and their functioning, which influences everyday work-life arrangements as well (Bartova and Karpinska 2019). However, it is important to acknowledge that migrant families may adopt a variety of care arrangements over time (Kilkey and Merla 2014), and factors, such as family composition and the socio-economic position of the family, may influence parents' care decisions as well (Wall and José 2004).

Policies and normative assumptions on childcare

Policy design

Until 2019, Icelandic parental-leave legislation gave each parent a three-month, individual non-transferrable right (quota), and an additional three months to divide by choice[1]. The benefit was 80-percent replacement of the previous salary, but a ceiling was later introduced which was significantly lowered during the economic and monetary crisis that hit Iceland in the fall of 2008, and this negatively affected fathers' use of leave (Arnalds et al. 2019; Sigurðardóttir and Garðarsdóttir 2018). The Icelandic legislation allows for flexibility in use, and it is common, especially for mothers, to extend the leave period by taking part-time leave (Arnalds et al. 2019).

The Czech leave system consists of maternity, paternity (both insurance-based), and parental leave (flat-rate benefit). Altogether, leave lasts until the child's third birthday, which makes the Czech Republic a country with one of the longest leave policies in Europe (OECD 2017). Since 2001, fathers are entitled to parental leave, but the replacement rate is very low, so less than 2 percent of fathers take parental leave (Table 1). Since the parental benefit is designed as a lump sum, the same for all parents, the monthly allowance can differ according to the length of leave (the higher the monthly allowance, the shorter the period). However, the majority of Czech women, regardless of their income and education, opt for three years of leave (Höhne 2017).

Mothers' labour-market participation after childbirth depends on the age at which children can enter early education and care (ECEC). In Iceland, children are usually offered a place in preschool around the age of two (see Table 1), but while waiting for admission to preschool, parents often make use of family day-care situated in a childminder's home. Despite a subsidy from municipalities, family day-care is more expensive than preschool, and although subject to municipal regulation, childminders decide which children they accept into care.

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[1] In 2019 the quota for each parent was extended to four months, and the months parents can decide upon was reduced to two.

The lack of ECEC for children up to three years of age represents a crucial factor preventing women's participation in paid work in the Czech Republic (Formánková et al. 2016). Only children three years and older have the legal right of admission to public kindergarten, because younger children can be accepted only if places are available. As a result, only 8.2 percent of children aged 0–2 years attend public ECEC in the Czech Republic, while enrolment is 88 percent for 3–5 year old children (OECD 2019).

Table 1. Parental leave and ECEC in Iceland and the Czech Republic (OECD 2019)

	Iceland	**Czech Republic**
Paid leave (in weeks)		
Reserved for mothers in 2019	13	28/37
Reserved for fathers in 2019	13	1
To be used by either parent in 2019	13	Up to 128
% of previous salary while on leave	80%	70% for the first 28 weeks, after that a fixed amount
Take-up rate of parental leave for fathers in 2019	81%	2%
Early childhood education and care		
Percentage of 0–2-year-olds enrolled in public ECEC	60%	8.2%
Percentage of 3–5-year-olds enrolled in public ECEC	96%	88%

Policy impact on employment

The policies described above have an impact on the employment of men and women in the two countries. Both countries have a long tradition of relatively high participation by women in the formal labour market (over 73% in the Czech Republic and 84% in Iceland) (Eurostat 2018). When we look at the population of 25–49 year olds with tertiary education, the age group where people usually have under-school-age children, we encounter a large gender employment gap in the Czech republic (30.2 percentage points) compared to Iceland (5 percentage points), which can be attributed to motherhood. Moreover, the employment rate for Czech men in this age and educational group is 8 percent higher than among Icelandic men. This can be connected to the gender division of labour in the Czech Republic, where men take the breadwinner role while women remain at home looking after the children. Thus, we can see that the gender division of labour remains in force for highly educated parents as well.

Gendered care cultures

As already noted, when discussing care arrangements, it is not only important to take into account the family policies in a given country but also to acknowledge the dominant gendered values of appropriate care. According to an international survey on the family and changing gender roles (ISSP 2012), there are different views towards the appropriate form of care for children in Iceland and the Czech Republic. We have compared the attitudes of highly educated persons due to the composition of our sample. University-educated Czechs felt mothers should use their entire paid leave, while the majority of respondents in Iceland felt fathers should use at least some part of the leave. The responses to questions on whether mothers of under-school-age children should work, and who should bear the main responsibility for care, also reflect different values in the two countries. The majority of Czech respondents believes mothers should work part-time (45%) or stay at home (37%), and that the family should provide care for preschool children (56%). The Icelandic respondents, to the contrary, believe the care should be mostly provided by governmental agencies (82%), and that mothers should work either full (48%) or part-time (48%). For more detail, see the tables in Appendix I.

DATA AND METHODS

Qualitative interviews were conducted with two samples of parents. The Icelandic sample consists of eight interviews.[2] Joint couple interviews were carried out with the seven married or cohabiting sets of parents, and one single mother was interviewed. Czech parents were interviewed individually, as seven out of nine have children from mixed partnerships (for details see Table 2 below).

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[2] The authors thank Snjólaug Aðalgeirsdóttir, who conducted interviews with Icelandic parents.

Table 2: Sample composition

Country of origin	Iceland	Czech Republic
No.	8	9
Age (in years)	31–40	29–45
Education	University	University (up to Ph.D.)
Employment	professional position; one non-professional	Professional; one unemployed
No. of children	1–2	1–3
Year of data collection	2015	2018
Nationality/country of origin	Icelandic	Mixed Czech Icelandic, one couple Czech

Despite our attempt to create a matching sample of parents in terms of age, educational level and employment status, due to the limited number of parents of Czech origin living in Iceland, we could not achieve similarity in all aspects. This poses some methodological challenges. The small population of Czech parents living in Iceland also raises ethical concerns about anonymity. Therefore, names were not recorded, and pseudonyms were used. Furthermore, all the Icelandic parents had a child in the year that the ceiling on parental leave benefits was significantly lowered due to the financial crisis. While some of the Czech parents had children during the crisis, others were born earlier or after the country's economy had recovered.

Both groups of parents discussed how they divided parental leave, when children started ECEC, and what their understanding of appropriate care was. The family's social and financial situations were also discussed, along with gendered normative assumptions about the role of mothers, fathers, and institutions involved in children's upbringing. All interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of participants. The transcribed interviews were analysed according to the topics of the interview guide, using initial and focus coding (Glaser 1978). Parents' narratives were then classified into three groups, based on the values framing the care arrangements in the family.

CARE PRACTICES: CZECH AND ICELANDIC PARENTS

In the following chapter, we discuss findings on the care practices and the use of childcare policy measures in the Icelandic families and the families with parents of Czech descent.

The Icelandic care arrangement

The parents in the Icelandic sample followed a similar strategy of balancing paid work and care for their under-school-age children. We refer to this type of strategy as the *Icelandic care arrangement*. Some parents of Czech origin also opted for his arrangement. What characterizes this arrangement is an emphasis on care in the home for the first year, followed by family day-care until the children were old enough to enter preschool, which was usually around the age of two. Nevertheless, there were some important variations between the families, especially regarding the length of leave taken by fathers, and whether parents used their leave simultaneously, or the father alone was on leave after the mother returned to work.

Four Icelandic fathers made full use of the three-month fathers' quota, at least with their firstborn. When deciding how to balance work and care, the Icelandic parents reflected on how fathers' leave-use mattered for gender equality and the father-child relationship. According to Kristján (M, two children), the leave "*allows us [men] an opportunity to be with children, and for women, it is important for getting hired, because [employers might think a] woman isn't worth the risk, as she can go on maternity leave*." The parents also described how fathers in Iceland were expected to use leave, which demonstrates how they conformed to the idea of the importance of children receiving care from both parents (Arnalds et al. 2013).

The fathers who did not make full use of the quota stressed the importance of pursuing a work career and retaining their status as wage earners, demonstrating how parents use work-related arguments when making decisions on how to divide the leave. While they found it important to take parental leave, the reduction in income and the financial situation of the household were considered as limiting their choices. However, work-related reasoning was used only when discussing fathers' leave-use, not that of mothers.

The gender normativity of parents' choices was also evident in discussions on how the mothers used leave. Four Icelandic mothers stretched their leave for up to a year by using it part-time. When discussing reasons for extending leave, mothers mentioned their reluctance to place children in the hands of someone outside the family during the first year. As Birta said:

> I want to be [on leave] for more than six months, even though this means a loss of income. […] I want to use this time and have this opportunity to be with them while they are small, as this is the period when they need you the most. (Birta, F, 2 children)

So even though parents stressed the importance of fathers taking leave, they seldom discussed the possibility of the father using the three sharable months or extending his leave. While some said breastfeeding prevented an equal division of care during the first few months, others had not even considered the possibility of the father using more than his quota-months.

Three families in our Czech sample opted for care arrangements similar to those of the Icelandic parents. As with the Icelandic mothers, the mothers of Czech origin stretched their leave by taking it part-time. Both fathers of Czech origin opted for at least a part, if not the full share of the fathers' quota. The involvement by fathers was natural for them, as Martin, who has three children with his Icelandic wife, describes:

> I took the three months' leave and left the six for my wife so she can stay longer. I believe she is a better caregiver as she is from a big family and is used to small children. I would, however, be stupid not to use my entitlement and lose it. (Martin, M, 3 children)

In the families where the Czech parent had more than one child, the amount of leave taken varied with each child. As was the case with the Icelandic parents, the reasons were often economic (the higher the income, the shorter the leave) or career-related (the need to maintain a certain position). Petra, a mother of three, mentions the crucial impact of the financial crisis that hit Iceland in 2008, which caused her husband to lose his job when the couple was expecting their second child. Petra has a rather well-paid position, so she became the main earner and combined care and part-time work, while her partner became the primary caregiver during the first year. This, Petra found, had made them more equal:

> I am happy my husband took his share […] when a man is left alone with a child, they establish a bond – so the child, even when he is older, when he is having problems, turns to me in the same way as he does to my husband for comfort. As parents we are equal. (Petra, F, 3 children)

Besides the economic factors, the fathers' use of leave and their participation in childcare helps mitigate the potentially negative consequences that intensive mothering has on the well-being of mothers, and it strengthens the relationship between the father and the child. Petra challenges the narrative of intensive mothering as the best thing for both the mother and child, citing her experience:

> For me, the time on leave was very stressful. I felt totally isolated and started to get depressed, which influenced my ability to forge a close relationship with the child. (Petra, F, 3 children)

For the Icelandic parents, the choice of putting the children in ECEC at the age of one was based on their view that it was in the children's best interest to interact with other children. The first ECEC option was, however, often family day-care, which the Icelandic parents viewed with distrust: *"One doesn't really know what happens after the door has been shut"* (Olga, F, two children). On the other hand, they believed preschools offered children a well-organized program and proper supervision, so the parents felt it should be available from the end of the parental-leave period.

Czech parents who opted for the *Icelandic care arrangement* chose out-of-home care when the child was about 12 months old. Jana, who has one child with an Icelandic partner, stressed the need to adapt to the local norm: *"I did not have the 'Czech need' to stay home for three years. I felt it natural to adapt to local norms. So we found a nanny. She was kind of a grandma for us"* (Jana, F, one child). Here, comparing the care provider to family members (grandmother) can be a strategy to justify the quality of care provided (as good as a family member). However, lacking the help of 'real' grandparents from the Czech Republic was often mentioned as an obstacle when trying to balance work and family life.

On the whole, the parents of Czech origin who opted for the *Icelandic care arrangement* took a positive view of Icelandic policies as serving both the needs of children – by providing a high standard of childcare in preschools – and of parents by making it possible to combine family and working life for both the mother and father. However, there were considerable variations with each child, as the decision on care depended on the family's changing economic situation and the needs of the children.

The Almost Czech arrangement

The *Almost Czech arrangement* was adopted by mothers of Czech origin who wanted to provide childcare similar to that in the Czech Republic. A distinguishing feature of this strategy is fulfilment of the ideal of full-time mother care, at least until the child reaches the age of two, regardless of the impact on the mothers' employment status.

Eva, a divorced mother of three, commented on the leave system she encountered after coming to Iceland with her Icelandic husband and their first child:

> When I came here, I felt society was expecting me to put my child in childcare and start working but I was used to the 'Czech' system, so I think [using out-of-home care at the age of] nine months is terribly early. So I agreed with my husband that I would stay at home, so my first child went to kindergarten at [the] age of two.' (Eva, F, 3 children)

Her choices were deeply normative, based on pre-migration gendered assumptions on appropriate childcare arrangements. However, Eva also mentioned economic motives, because her husband encouraged her to avoid paid employment in order to benefit from joint taxation.

When discussing the leave system in Iceland, not only the length, but also the involvement of fathers came into focus. Some fathers, all Icelandic, neither used their leave entitlement (or only used a very small part of it), nor did they take an active role in caregiving, assuming the breadwinner role instead. Maternal gatekeeping might be one explanation for that, as maternal behaviour and attitudes might limit the fathers' involvement in care (see Cannon et al. 2008). This is, for example, evident in Eva's account of how her second husband took leave:

> My second husband originally wanted to use the six months, but I told him he had to be nuts to ask me for that when I am breastfeeding. And in the end, although he really was on leave, he did not take care of the child at all, everything was on my shoulders … so I sent him back to work. (Eva, F, 3 children)

Kulik and Tsoref (2010) reported that traditional gender-role ideology was a stronger predictor of gatekeeping attitudes than socioeconomic status and mothers' satisfaction with fathers' involvement. Zdena, a mother of two living in a mixed marriage, mentions the benefit level as the reasons for low participation in parental leave by fathers, as was often the case in Icelandic families as well. However she also sees this arrangement in the context of a norm of intensive motherhood, a choice every mother desires:

> I was one of the few women in Iceland to stay at home … and everybody envied me. They said: Oh, you are so lucky! It was the best time of my life. (Zdena, F, 3 children)

Hana was a full-time mother until her child reached the age of two in order to avoid family day-care, as she stresses the importance of intensive mother-care:

> Family day-care is not necessarily a bad arrangement, but it would betray my maternal instinct […] to give my child to another woman (Hana, F, 1 child).

Her account may also reflect the general distrust of the quality of family day-care, as there are no similar childcare provisions in the Czech Republic. Those who choose the *Almost Czech arrangement* aimed to provide care arrangements as similar as possible to those in their country of origin, reflecting the conflicting values associated with the appropriate form of care in the two countries. The mothers who were interviewed justified their decision by saying a mother's care is best for the well-being of the child. This accords with survey findings from the Czech Republic showing that until the age of two, exclusive mother-care at home is preferred. After that, combining parenting with kindergarten or a nanny is associated with an idea of a mother's (gradual) return to work (Kuchařová and Peychlová 2016). Furthermore, the Czech mothers did not believe involving fathers in an active childcare role would be as beneficial to the family as their role of breadwinner. However, the reasons given were not only financial; the generation gap was also cited (two fathers were well over fifty and thus not accustomed to the leave system from the time they had children who were now adults) and a belief that the fathers lacked caregiving abilities or interest (not as reliable and devoted a caregiver as the mother).

The 'In-between' arrangement

Two of the interviewed families with a Czech parent were looking for a care strategy 'in-between' the Czech and Icelandic models. In this type of strategy, the parents stretched the leave in order to stay with the child during the first one and half years or longer. The fathers in this group took a good or majority-share of the leave available to the parents. The fathers' decision to take a bigger share of the leave was motivated by the position of the mothers, who were trying to combine work and doctoral studies. However, what distinguishes this group from the one that opted for the *Icelandic arrangement* is that before the children entered preschool, they were cared for in the family by one of the parents. Both parents slightly reduced their working hours or started to work part-time to avoid family day-care.

Petr reflects on the dilemma of having someone outside the family take care of the child. He took on the main caregiving role and looked after his child at home while working part-time and taking night shifts: "*We waited* *until she was at least a year and a half to send her to preschool. Most of the people from Bohemia and our parents thought it was terribly early, and it was considered too late for Icelandic conditions*" (Petr, 29, one child, three years in Iceland). He describes the dilemma faced by migrant parents who find themselves caught between two normative ideals of appropriate care – one from their country of origin and one from their destination country (Kinkley and Merla 2014). However, his wife Alena pointed out that the Icelandic childcare-policy model makes it possible to combine an academic career with caring for small children in a much better way than the Czech model does: "*We chose Iceland because it would be possible here to have a family and study for a doctorate. It is tough in the Czech Republic, as there are no nurseries*" (Alena, 30, one child). Due to the lack of childcare institutions in the Czech Republic, between 30 and 60 percent of mothers lose their jobs after parental leave (Bičáková and Kalíšková 2015).

The '*in-between*' *arrangement* was justified by the need to provide a secure environment and parental care for children under the age of two. The importance of involving fathers in care was also well-recognized. In line with stressing the importance of parental care, family day care was viewed with distrust. On the other hand, all the parents commented very positively on the preschools and regarded them as much better than the Czech equivalents in terms of quality of service (number of members of staff, activities) and flexibility – the option of part-time attendance or shorter hours.

Conclusion

This chapter took Pfau-Effinger's (2005) concept of care arrangements as its point of departure for understanding how parents construct their choices within frameworks of cultural values, government policies, their labour market status, and social structures. Our results outline a typology of care arrangements for Czech and Icelandic families as negotiated positions between policy designs, normative assumptions on appropriate care, and individual family contexts. However, we do so solely in the context of individual families, as we cannot generalize from our limited qualitative sample.

The interviews revealed the transnational aspect of the family situation of couples where one parent was of Czech origin. Icelandic care policies were always compared to the Czech system and evaluated according to the normative assumptions of appropriate care in the Czech Republic. However, the migrant parents had a tendency to adjust to the local (Icelandic) model of childcare, at least in some respects, the longer they lived in Iceland. This reflects an adaptation to local values, but also individuals becoming more accustomed to and trusting local policy measures.

When comparing the attitudes and decisions of highly-educated Czech and Icelandic parents, we see that Icelandic policies, the family budget, and parents' labour-market status shaped parents' decisions in both groups. These factors also contributed to the fluidity of childcare choices over time. For those families who had their children after the economic and monetary crisis, the decisive factors in parental leave-use for both Icelandic and Czech parents were (a) the parents' employment status and (b) the discrepancy between parents' incomes and the maximum monthly parental-leave benefit. Thus, work-related reasoning was used in most cases by the fathers, as such factors rarely influenced the mothers' use of leave, highlighting that a gender division in roles still prevails to some extent in Iceland, despite discourse on the importance of children receiving care from both parents.

We can conclude that for the migrant parents we interviewed, pre-migrant ideals of care played an important role when deciding on care arrangements for under-school-age. This is the case even though families' choices have strong links to public discourses on 'good parenting' that are supported, reinforced, and eventually changed through specific policy designs, but which are not always accepted by migrant parents. When comparing Icelandic and Czech parents, attitudes towards these policies were often more aligned than the care arrangements. However, whereas Czech parents looked for alternative 'out-of-system' solutions, Icelandic parents adjusted to the policies that were in place in Iceland. As such, the transnational families can be seen not only as limited by a pre-migration framework, but also as enriched by their values and experiences with two policy systems allowing them to seek alternative solutions which match their parental needs. [3]

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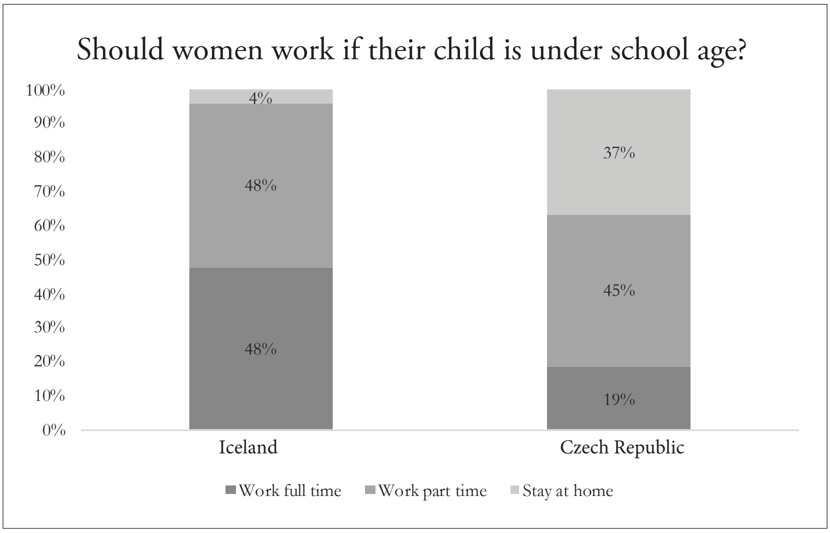
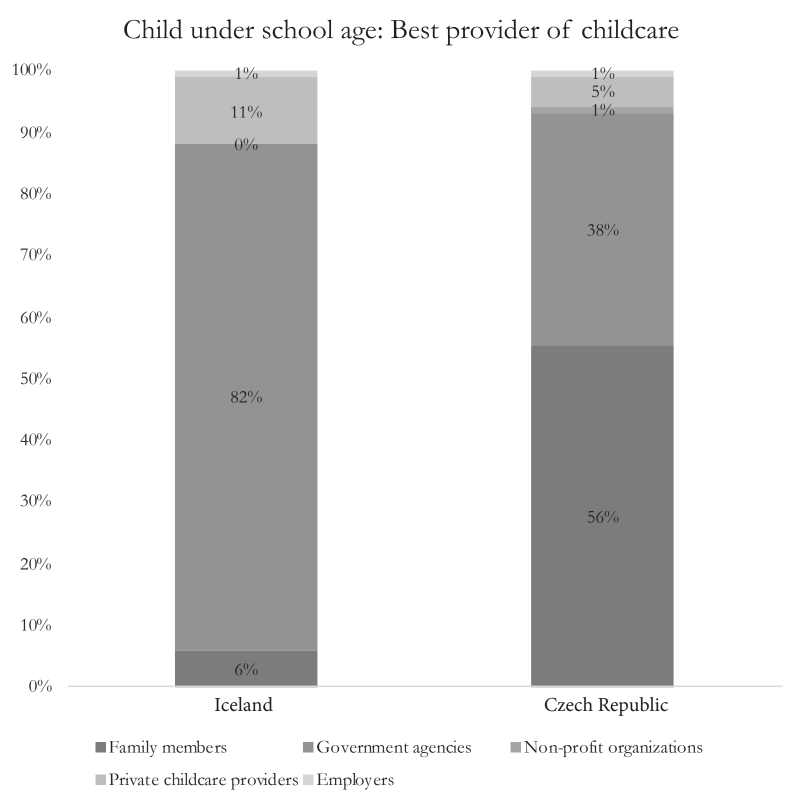
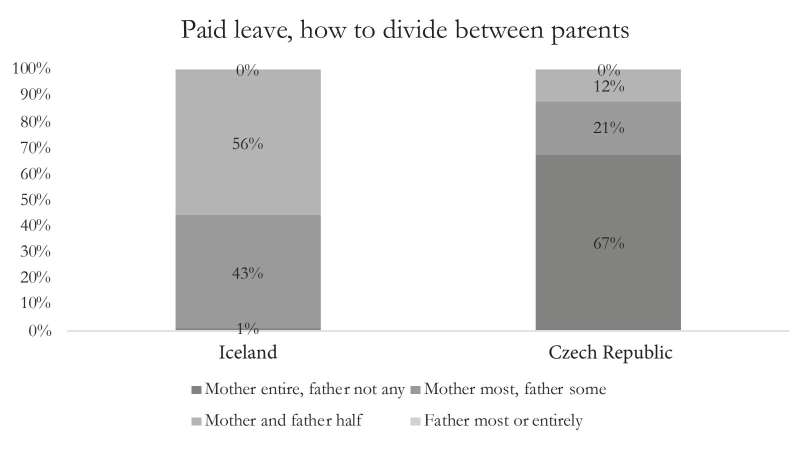
APPENDIX I

Attitudes towards the family and gender roles of Icelandic and Czech residents with a university degree (ISSP, 2012)




Child under school age: Best provider of childcare
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
1%
11%
0%
82%
6%
1%
5%
1%
38%
56%
Iceland
Czech Republic
Family members
Government agencies
Non-profit organizations
Private childcare providers
Employers


Paid leave, how to divide between parents
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
0%
56%
43%
1%
0%
12%
21%
67%
Iceland
Czech Republic
Mother entire, father not any
Mother most, father some
Mother and father half
Father most or entirely

KJARTAN PÁLL SVEINSSON

The Impact of Globalisation, Mobility and Austerity on Icelandic Medical Migration

ABSTRACT

Iceland owes its world-class healthcare system largely to medical migration. The vast majority of Icelandic doctors go abroad for their specialisation or postgraduate training. Typically, one-third of Icelandic doctors are practicing abroad at any point in time. Historically, 80% of Icelandic doctors have returned home, bringing with them a valuable set of skills and knowledge which they would not have acquired in Iceland. However, the dependence of such a small nation on circular migration also makes it very vulnerable to changes in staffing levels.

One of the primary concerns of Icelanders in the wake of the banking crisis is how to maintain a world-class healthcare service during times of austerity. Those working in the Icelandic healthcare sector have been intensely worried that doctors taking specialist training abroad will not return home, and that the circular nature of medical migration to and from Iceland will therefore turn into a permanent brain drain. Although the scale of this problem is clear, little is known about how social, political and economic factors influence the decision-making processes of Icelandic doctors.

This paper explores the narratives of 30 Icelandic doctors who have migrated abroad for specialisation and traces their migratory journeys and career trajectories. I argue that contrary to perceived wisdom in Iceland, economic factors typified by the economic crash cannot adequately explain the changing migratory patterns of Icelandic doctors. Rather, two global factors and one domestic factor play important, but hitherto unexplored, roles. Firstly, the global demand for doctors is intensifying competition for this limited resource. Secondly, increased mobility and ease of travel are making migration less problematic. Thirdly, the specifics of the Icelandic healthcare system – in particular, the idiosyncratic relationship between the public and private sectors in healthcare delivery – are unattractive to highly skilled doctors. In order to construct effective policies to retain the medical workforce, policymakers in the field must take these global trends and domestic issues into account.

Keywords: medical migration, brain circulation, mobilities, globalisation, policy

INTRODUCTION

Iceland owes its world-class healthcare system largely to medical migration. The vast majority of Icelandic doctors go abroad for their specialisation or postgraduate training. Typically, one-third of Icelandic doctors are practicing abroad at any point in time. Historically, 80% of Icelandic doctors have returned home (Læknafélag Íslands 2009), bringing with them a valuable set of skills and knowledge which they would not have acquired in Iceland. However, the dependence of Iceland on circular migration also makes such a small country very vulnerable to changes in staffing levels. Even a numerically small variation in staffing can lead to severe shortages. Should one of the five practicing neurosurgeons retire or migrate, for instance, Iceland's stock of neurosurgeons would face a 20% reduction. Landspítali (The National University Hospital of Iceland), by far the largest healthcare provider in Iceland, is greatly concerned about the challenges posed by medical migration and recently commissioned a comprehensive audit to take stock of its staffing needs and shortages. Thus, we have sufficient information on the scale and composition of the problem. What is not sufficiently understood is the complex morass of social, economic and political factors that induce or hinder circular migration, the transfer of skills and resources, and how these impact service delivery.

According to Steven Vertovec, "circular migration appears to be the rage in international policy circles" (Vertovec 2007, 2) because it promises a win-win-win situation for the host countries, the migrants' countries of origin, and the migrants themselves. Key Icelandic stakeholders, including the Government and the National University Hospital, are acutely aware of this and have set numerous initiatives in place to stimulate brain circulation. However, a number of scholars have pointed out that the ability of return and circular migration to achieve a triple-win situation is by no means a given, and it needs to be extensively researched and theorised (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 2004). In relation to medical migration specifically, the literature addressing the brain drain of healthcare workers is growing (Hardill and Macdonald 2000; Clemens and Petterson 2008; Olwig 2015; Sveinsson 2015). However, these studies focus primarily on medical migration from the global South to the global North, whereas the topic remains virtually unexplored in Iceland. Thus, at a time of rapid socio-economic change and integration into the global economy, it is vital to understand the new and innovative migratory patterns and processes developing between the Icelandic healthcare sector and other countries.

For the Icelandic healthcare system, the need to research and theorise medical migration, including the prospect of return and circular migration, is becoming increasingly important. The urgency of this task was highlighted following the 2008 banking crisis, when the number of doctors working in Iceland, both per capita and in raw numbers, went down for the first time in Iceland's history. In public discourse, this decrease was largely explained by referencing the crisis itself, which was seen as the primus motor for the exodus of doctors in its wake. In this article, I argue that the banking crisis, in and of itself, carries insufficient explanatory power to adequately account for the decrease in practicing doctors. Other factors, both national and transnational, need to be considered to fully understand the dynamics of doctors' migratory trajectories. It is important to take a holistic approach in analysing medical migration to and from Iceland, not least because of the pressing need for the Icelandic government to construct public policies aimed at attracting and retaining returnees.

The timing of this study is important. A long-standing and dramatic dispute between doctors and the Icelandic government over pay, involving the first ever instance of industrial action by Icelandic doctors, came to an end in January 2015, resulting in a minimum 20% increase in doctors' salaries. This went some way toward alleviating their primary grievance of low pay relative to comparable nations. Whereas unresolved circumstances concerning pay could have potentially muddied the waters, conducting the study shortly after the resolution of the dispute enabled me to bring to the fore other social, economic, and political issues that could otherwise have been obscured.

METHODOLOGY

My methodological approach builds on the insight from transnationalism that migration is not an individual process but is influenced by a myriad of social relations (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992; Faist 2000;

Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). In order to draw as conclusive a picture as possible, the subject was approached from a variety of angles. Qualitative interviews were conducted with various types of social actors, supplemented with quantitative data and analysis of policy documents.

The core data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Firstly, I interviewed 20 doctors who had lived and worked abroad but had returned to Iceland. Secondly, I interviewed ten doctors who had recently moved abroad for work and had no plans to come back. Finally, I interviewed 15 key players, including various directors at The National University Hospital of Iceland (*Landspítali*), the Director of Health (*Landlæknir*), the chair of the doctors' union (*Læknafélag Íslands*), professors in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Iceland, and the Minister of Health.

Interviews typically lasted 45–90 minutes. For the interviews with the doctors, I chose a biographical approach as developed by Halfacree and Boyle (1993). We explored their migratory trajectories, which usually start long before the actual event of migration. The guiding principle was that migrants' decision-making processes are complex and multifaceted and should be analysed holistically. Thus, applying Halfacree and Boyle's (1993, 334) conceptualisation of migration "which emphasizes its situatedness within everyday life" allowed me to map key stages in their migration journeys and link these to wider social structures, and to tease out the significance of 'taken-for-granted' decision-making by enquiring around specific subjects, and in that way "building a picture of the migration decision from a variety of angles" (ibid., 338). The interviews with the key stakeholders, on the other hand, were more formalised, where I set out to obtain key facts and insights into the policy landscape of the Icelandic healthcare system.

In order to provide a deeper socio-structural context, I supplemented my qualitative data by drawing on a number of secondary quantitative datasets and analyses. These include the register of medical practitioners (*læknaskrár*), statistics on staffing levels, and pressure points in service delivery. Additionally, I analysed policy documents and public debate in order to locate my data in a broader political and social context. Although the in-depth interviews with 30 doctors constitute the core data of the research project (see Sveinsson 2019) for a deeper analysis of the doctors' narratives), in this chapter I draw heavily on the expert interviews, as well as secondary statistical data and policy documents in order to contextualise the migratory trajectories of the doctors.

CIRCULAR MIGRATION OF ICELANDIC DOCTORS

The migration patterns of Icelandic doctors are best described as brain circulation. For decades, Icelandic doctors have flocked abroad for specialisation, often at the most prestigious medical centres in the world. The proportion of Icelandic doctors specialising abroad is high in international comparison, at about 80–85%. As a consequence, one out of three Icelandic doctors is practicing abroad at any given time. Again, this proportion is very high. In comparison, the figure is 5.4 % for Sweden, 5% for Denmark, 4.9% for Finland, and 2.9% for Norway (Bhargava, Docquier and Moullan 2010). However, the proportion of doctors who return to practice medicine in Iceland is equally high, at about 80–90%. The length of time spent abroad varies, but typically doctors will spend between 25–50% of their careers working outside Iceland.

A running theme throughout the interviews – with the doctors as well as the experts and policy makers – was how this type of circular migration has advanced the Icelandic healthcare system. These benefits can be classified into four categories. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, Icelandic doctors bring with them state-of-the-art knowledge of the latest developments in medical science. For a micro-state like Iceland, it is crucial to import knowledge relating to the treatment of complex illnesses, and that the healthcare system receives a steady stream of this knowledge in the form of returnees. Secondly, and of equal importance, are the networks that Icelandic doctors build up with colleagues abroad. These networks are useful for doctors in keeping themselves at the cutting edge of medical practice, and many will sojourn regularly at their alma maters in order to stay up to date in their chosen area of specialisation. A further benefit of these networks is that junior doctors are able to draw on senior colleagues' contacts when choosing a post-graduate programme. Indeed, the majority of my interviewees reported that their seniors in Iceland were instrumental in deciding the place, nature, and logistics of their post-graduate training. In this way, networks serve to maintain sustainable brain circulation between generations. Thirdly, doctors are exposed to different types of healthcare systems. This is important because doctors often take up administrative and policy-making roles. Finally, many sections of healthcare in Iceland have bilateral agreements with hospitals elsewhere in the world to whom they refer difficult cases that require resources beyond the capacity of the Icelandic health system. These agreements are often set up and maintained via links that a particular doctor has fostered with colleagues he has trained and worked with. These links, in turn, strengthen trust, decrease miscommunication, and increase the chances of things running smoothly.

Although the circular migration of physicians has certainly been a highly effective strategy in Iceland, it is not without risk. Numerically small migrations can have a disproportionate impact on the workforce, leaving Iceland vulnerable in the event of even the smallest changes in staffing levels. This is likely to become an increasingly difficult problem, as global competition for doctors is set to intensify in the coming years. The aging population in newly advanced economies, such as China, India, and Brazil, may not have a direct impact on Iceland, as Icelandic doctors are unlikely to move to these countries in great numbers, but Iceland may find itself caught in a chain reaction. If countries like the US or the UK, which have historically attracted large numbers of south Asian and African doctors, find it harder to compete for doctors from the global south, they may feel forced to make their labour markets more attractive. Indeed, Britain has responded to a looming staffing crisis in the National Health Service by rolling out the red carpet to doctors from overseas.

The financial crisis and its aftermath

In spite of the persistent emigration of doctors, Iceland has managed to increase its stock of physicians since the start of record-keeping on the subject. However, the risk inherent in the brain circulation strategy became evident in 2009 when the number of doctors decreased for the first time. Figure 1 shows how the number of doctors practicing in Iceland increased steadily from 1981 to 2009 when the graph takes a sharp dip. Indeed, be-

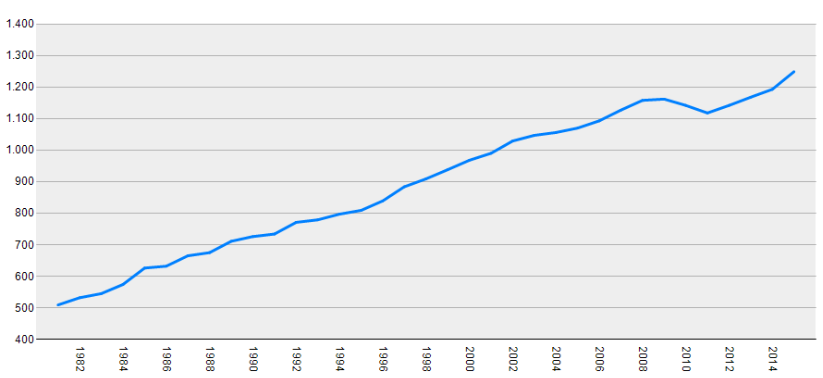


Figure 1: Total number of practicing doctors, 1981–2014. Source: Hagstofa Íslands (2017)

tween 2009–2014, 330 doctors emigrated from Iceland, whereas only 140 returned (Jónsson 2014, 575).

The decreasing number of doctors in this period demonstrated how vulnerable the Icelandic healthcare system is to changes in staffing levels, and how brain circulation can be a double-edged sword. The exodus of doctors, as the media dubbed it, induced a crisis in healthcare delivery. Although Iceland has, since 2014, returned to its previous trajectory, it took five years to regain pre-crash staffing levels. Furthermore, some specialisations, most notably general practice and oncology, are still lagging behind, and there is real concern that Iceland's medical brain circulation is turning into brain drain. As the Minister of Health said in a statement given to the Icelandic Parliament: "I have reaffirmed my worries about this in public discourse, particularly because we are told by doctors themselves that their foremost anxiety concerns the lack of renewal of medical knowledge … This is serious, because demand and competition for this labour force is extremely high, not least from our neighbouring countries" (Kristján Þór Júlíusson 2014).

The drop in numbers presented the healthcare system with severe logistical and organisational problems, but it also reflected the broader social, political, and economic anxieties of Icelanders. Indeed, the medical exodus became a major preoccupation in Icelandic discourse at the time. It was such an important issue that the brain drain of doctors became an emblem of the problems Iceland faced in the aftermath of the crisis, economic recovery being measured in our success in attracting doctors to return home. This points to the fact that medical migration is not only important to Icelanders in practical terms – in building up a successful health service – but also symbolically, because it is a significant barometer for wider political and economic issues.

What did not feature in public discourse, but which was, nonetheless, most worrying about these trends was the unprecedented nature of the decline in staffing levels. The most obvious explanation lies in the financial crisis. Doctors felt the financial impact and social disruption of the crash, just like the general population. However, the financial crisis was not the first serious recession in Iceland, and previous recessions did not generate an exodus of doctors. Furthermore, after the crash, net migration of all Icelandic citizens to and from Iceland was similar to that in previous recessions. If we consider the number of inhabitants per doctor (Figure 2), we see that there are historical precedents for this figure going up, but only during times of a significant increase in the general population, when net

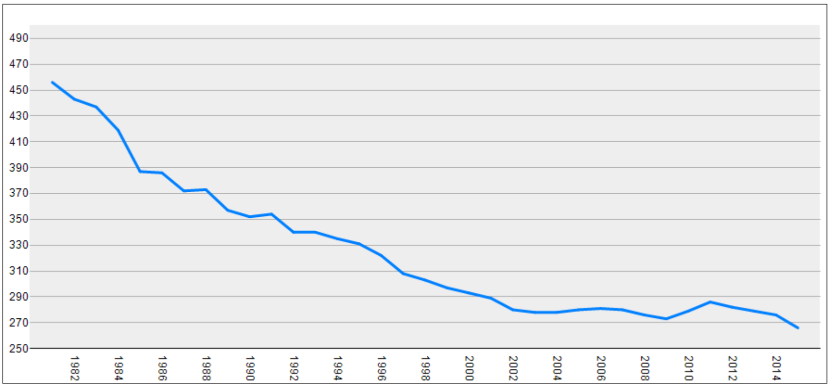


Figure 2: Inhabitants per doctor, 1981–2014. Source: Hagstofa Íslands (2017)

immigration has been high. During the period 2009–2014, however, net emigration was at its highest level ever (Stefán Ólafsson, Arnaldur Sölvi Kristjánsson and Kolbeinn Stefánsson 2012, 81). It is significant, therefore, that Iceland also witnessed an increase in inhabitants per doctor during this period, when historical precedent would have predicted the opposite.

Thus, the financial crisis cannot, in and of itself, conclusively account for the exodus of doctors. This outmigration was also emblematic of broader global processes, namely a global shortage of doctors and increased ease of mobility.

GLOBAL DIMENSIONS TO THE EXODUS OF DOCTORS

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated in 2006 that the global deficit of doctors was 2.6 million (WHO 2006), with the total number being around 10 million. A decade later, Liu et al. (2017) found that this shortfall remained unchanged, and that it was unlikely to diminish by 2030. What has been changing and will change even further in the coming years is that the economies of the so-called emerging markets have been growing and their populations aging. As these populations become both older and more prosperous, their demands for healthcare services will increase. This has led to even stiffer global competition for doctors, who are very much in global demand. This may not have a direct impact on the Icelandic healthcare system, as few Icelandic doctors emigrate to BRIC countries, but Iceland is part of the same transnational social space, where transfers on one end of the commodity chain can greatly affect supply and demand at the other end. Importantly, doctors are not only in great demand, they are also notably mobile. As a rule of thumb, the emigration rate of doctors within any given country is higher than that of the population as a whole, and Iceland is no exception. Indeed, the 30% of Icelandic doctors living and working abroad can be juxtaposed onto the 10% of all Icelandic citizens living abroad. Thus, doctors are more frequently on the move; they are significantly more mobile than the average Icelander.

This high rate of mobility is significant and impacts Icelandic doctors in a number of ways. The primary destination for Icelandic doctors is Scandinavia, particularly Sweden, followed by the US and the UK. All of these countries have healthcare systems which rely to a great extent on migrant doctors. In Sweden, 18% of doctors were educated abroad (Boström and Öhlander 2012, 4). In the US, the proportion of overseas educated doctors is 25% (Mullan 2005, 1811). In the UK, the figure is 28% (ibid). The primary destination countries for Icelandic doctors all have explicit policies in place designed to attract overseas doctors. The UK, for instance, is currently suffering a severe shortage of doctors, particularly general practitioners, partly as a result of an exodus of skilled European workers in anticipation of Brexit. Britain’s response has been to initiate a major campaign to attract doctors from overseas, one report stating: “NHS to spend £100m bringing in up to 3,000 GPs from abroad” (Campbell 2017). These are, then, the global conditions under which the Icelandic healthcare system must operate: intense competition for a limited and highly valued labour force for which demand far outstrips supply.

MOBILITY OF ICELANDIC DOCTORS

The factors which influence the migratory trajectories and decision-making of Icelandic doctors are multiple and interlock in multifaceted ways. They mirror the complex reasons underlying medical migration which the literature tends to simplify into push and pull factors. Among the most often cited push factors are low wages (Vujicic et al. 2004), insufficient post-graduate training opportunities (Hagopian et al. 2005), insufficient career development (Kangasniemi et al. 2004), unsatisfactory working conditions, and outdated equipment. Pull factors tend to mirror push factors and include higher income and more buying power, better post-graduate training facilities and prospects for career development, and access to enhanced technology, equipment and health facilities for medical practice (Astor et al. 2005).

The problem with this narrow focus on push-pull factors such as the ones listed above is that it often fails to connect the motivations and opportunities of individuals to wider structures which allow medical migration to happen on a massive scale. Indeed, de Haas (2008, 9) points out that push-pull lists are "ad-hoc explanations forming a rather ambiguous depository of migration determinants," and that ultimately, "the push-pull model is a *static* model focusing on external factors that cause migration that is unable to analytically situate migration as an integral part of broader transformation *processes*, and therefore seems of limited analytical use" (ibid., 11; emphasis in original). Thus, push and pull factors influencing migration are meaningless unless they are analysed in the social, political, and economic contexts of both sending and receiving countries, as well as in the dynamic relationship between the two. In other words, understanding the social significance of medical migrants' motivations, to draw on Castles' and Delgado Wise's (2008, 9) observation, means that "migration cannot be understood adequately in isolation, but only as one integral aspect of the complex problems and challenges of contemporary global capitalism." In my analysis of the chief determinants influencing Icelandic doctors' migratory decisions, I seek to incorporate these caveats into my evaluation.

At first glance, the push-pull factors influencing the decision-making of Icelandic doctors seem straightforward. Career development is the primary push factor away from Iceland; family and identity are the primary pull factors back to Iceland. However, a closer examination shows that the relationship between these factors is dynamic and fluid, and that at the centre of this relationship stands mobility. As mentioned above, Icelandic doctors often attend post-graduate training programmes in the world's leading universities and institutions and are generally regarded positively by employers. Thus, there are few professional obstacles to migrating. As one interviewee who moved to the US shortly after the financial crisis phrased it, "[t]hat is one advantage of being a doctor. You can work anywhere. You're not tied to one place, or one language. You're qualified all over the world. So it was really very easy, when the situation arose, to go move abroad." This generally open and easily navigated transnational space means that dilemmas and conflicts are of a more personal and emotional nature, rather than being dictated by policy landscapes (in terms, for example, of immigration status), and these personal and emotional dilemmas were marked by a tension between homesickness and professional ambition.

The reasons given for returning to Iceland were in themselves fairly straightforward. The doctors missed their families and friends, were worried about their aging parents, and most importantly, wanted their children to become Icelandic, rather than adopting the identity of their host societies. For most of my interviewees, these social and emotional needs outweighed financial sacrifices. However, they were much less willing to make professional compromises, which constitutes the main reason for either not wanting to return home or to re-emigrate. Asked why he decided to move back to the US, one interviewee answered as follows:

> I never felt I was working well enough. I didn't feel like I had the conditions to do my work properly. Not that I didn't know what I was doing, but because the system around me was such that it was impossible to do my work properly. And, I mean, the crash had nothing to do with it. Financially, things were very similar to here. So these were professional reasons, not financial.

The problem is that, in a shrinking world, it is becoming much easier to manage homesickness. Telecommunications have become more personal and more or less free, people are well connected to their loved ones through social media, and flights are cheap, frequent and simple. One doctor who had planned to return to Iceland due to homesickness decided against it based on professional concerns.

> We just decided then that we'll come home more often for visits. We've always gone home twice a year, but we can just do more of it. Like now, this weekend, we're going home to Iceland for a wedding. We're just going to do that, no problem. It's not such a big deal to fly home from here. One of the advantages for us, being here, is how easy it is to travel to and from Iceland.

When asked about the main obstacles to their professional standards being met, the participants' answers mostly revolved around the work environment and particularly around the structure of the healthcare system itself. Interviewees complained about inconsistencies between different parts of the system and singled out the different nature of the public and private parts of the healthcare system. For many of them, splitting their time between the National University Hospital and private practice diminished the continuity of care that their specialisations demand. This narrative was particularly strong amongst highly specialised doctors at an advanced stage in their careers. They argued that for an accomplished doctor with high professional standards, this arrangement was unacceptable. One surgeon, who has reached the pinnacle of his profession in the US, explained why.

> It's just not possible in my field. I'm a [specialist] surgeon. You don't have a private practice then. My field is purely hospital work. So the Icelandic system is a bit peculiar in that way. People are maybe one day a week in their private practice, and they probably make more money there than they do the rest of their time in the hospital. Because then there are other fields, like mine, where you can't do that. But over here, it's not like that. It's not structured like that.

Another interviewee said this was the main reason for re-emigrating to Sweden.

> Yes, I think a lot of people were in the same situation as me. Setting up a private practice, not getting a proper hospital job, doing bits and bobs, waiting for an opening. That's how it was for me. I was in a private clinic 50%. I was in the A&E. I was on the helicopter. I was really stretching myself trying to work. And I mean, I was in a good position in Sweden, I was quite comfortable there, and they were just happy to have me back.

It should be noted that my interviewees were not necessarily arguing for or against a particular model of healthcare management; they were generally not making a case for either private or public healthcare systems. Their point was that for many doctors, particularly those who deal with challenging, complicated, and difficult cases, an integrated healthcare system, where different parts work seamlessly together, is essential.

Conclusion

The Icelandic healthcare system relies to a great extent on circular medical migration, but disruption to the circular flow in 2009–2014 demonstrated the risks inherent in this strategy. A relatively small number of doctors diverging from the normal migration patterns was enough to place an enormous strain on the provision of healthcare, as well as induce panic amongst Icelanders. I have argued that contrary to perceived wisdom, which placed the blame squarely on the financial crisis, global developments were instrumental in the drop in the number of doctors during this period, particularly when they dovetailed with problematic aspects of the local labour market. My worry is that the events of 2009–2014 will become a future trend. That is to say, there is a danger that doctors may respond similarly when the next economic downturn hits Iceland, and that the relatively stable and unbroken growth in the number of doctors which Iceland has hitherto enjoyed will then be marked by fluctuations.

These concerns are compounded by the fact that Iceland has not developed a clear policy on medical migration or on how to create a labour market landscape which increases the likelihood of the best doctors returning to practice medicine in Iceland. Until now, the powers that be have relied almost entirely on some vague notion of nostalgic nationalism or homesickness. The dip in numbers of practicing doctors following the financial crisis showed that this is a foolish strategy. Iceland has the social capital to withstand the pressures of global competition for doctors, and it would be disconcerting to see this competitive edge squandered through inaction. In order to avoid that scenario, two policy issues need to be carefully considered. Firstly, the Icelandic government should look further at avenues for Icelandic doctors to split their time between working abroad and in Iceland, thus turning the problem of mobility to Iceland's advantage. A number of interviewees commented on how this type of arrangement would suit them well, because it would allow them to keep up to speed on their medical knowledge whilst simultaneously reducing their homesickness. Secondly, the relationship between the public and private parts of the Icelandic healthcare system needs to be addressed and reformed. Many interviewees complained that the current arrangement was deterring potential returnees, particularly very accomplished doctors whose field of specialism demanded hospital work. Solving these two policy conundrums would go a long way towards creating a welcoming labour market for Icelandic doctors to come back to.

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EYRÚN ÓLÖF SIGURÐARDÓTTIR
AND JAMES RICE

"Our Way of Working is Very Different from That of the Big Nations Down There"

The Icelandic Coast Guard, Exceptionalism and Fortress Europe

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines some manifestations of Icelandic exceptionalism, nationalism and origin myths in regard to the Icelandic state's participation in European border security. Underlying the analysis is the participation of the Icelandic Coast Guard in border control at the external border of the European Union under the direction of Frontex, the European Union's border and coast guard agency. The aim of this contribution is to critically examine the role of the Icelandic Coast Guard in securing Europe's borders in the context of the so-called European migration crisis, while simultaneously projecting an image of a non-violent nation committed to peace, equality and democracy. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews with Coast Guard staff who worked with and for Frontex, as well as an analysis of how these activities were presented and discussed in the media and in public debate in Iceland.

Keywords: Iceland, anthropology, border security, migration crisis, Frontex

INTRODUCTION

This contribution will explore some of the key ambiguities and problematics concerning the relationship between the Icelandic Coast Guard (ICG) and Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which emerged from an ethnographic research project.[1] The collaboration between these two agencies emerged out of, and has been sustained by, a number of crises. Iceland was hit particularly hard by the global financial crisis in 2008, which affected the nation in numerous ways (see e.g. Durrenberger and Pálsson 2015). The crisis left the ICG and several other state agencies with a considerably reduced budget and a feeling, bordering on desperation, that urgent action was needed to resolve this issue. The senior managers of the ICG took it upon themselves to raise money for the agency through various paid projects. Amongst them was providing assistance with border control to Frontex, then a relatively newly established, little-known European agency (2004). In later years the ICG sent vessels and their crews, as well as the ICG's only airplane, for up to several months a year to patrol the coast of West Africa, and later for patrol duty in the Mediterranean. The second crisis that has continued and sustained this collaboration is the so-called European 'migration crisis,' which arose in 2015 when an increasing number of refugees sought asylum in the EU as a result of conflict and political and economic instability in various parts of the Global South. When the ICG was called upon by Frontex to contribute a vessel for the effort in the Mediterranean, the agency (and by extension the government and nation of Iceland) was placed directly in search and rescue (SAR) operations in the area. At the time of writing, the ICG continues to collaborate with Frontex through air patrols, and the possibility of resuming marine patrols remains open.

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[1] The data that informs this contribution is drawn from material produced by an ethnographic research project on the work of the Icelandic Coast Guard and Frontex. The research

The analysis that follows draws upon interview material with ICG staff, as well as the analysis of media discourse in Iceland surrounding the work of the Coast Guard. The collaboration between the ICG and Frontex is embedded within and reflective of the numerous problematics and debates that have preoccupied Europe in recent years, such as the increasing mobility of populations, the questions of Europe and reinvigorated national identities, and a development in which border control has become characterized by a mutually constructive relationship between humanitarianism and securitization (see Aas and Gundhus 2015; Moreno-Lax 2018; Little and Vaughan-Williams 2017; Pallister-Wilkins 2017; Williams 2016; Walters 2011). Neoliberal reforms from within the European Union since the 1990s have arguably laid the groundwork for popular support of border security, particularly in nations in Europe's southern and eastern . These

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was conducted by Eyrún Ólöf Sigurðardóttir in 2016–2017 as part of her MA project in anthropology at the University of Iceland. The research also benefitted from the support and feedback from its inclusion in the project *Mobilities and Transnational Iceland*, funded by Rannís and the Icelandic Centre for Research and located at the Faculty of Sociology, Anthropology and Folkloristics at the University of Iceland.

regions which have struggled with precarious economic conditions and sit on some of the key European migration routes. Tyler (2018) argues, using the example of the Visegrád group of former communist European states, that these neoliberal reforms have generated a measure of hostility toward the EU and contributed to the rise of populist parties and governments in the region in recent years, a process that was further exacerbated by the 2008 economic crisis and the 'migration crisis' of 2015. Tyler continues: "Politicians harnessed the animosities generated by growing economic inequalities in the region to nationalist fantasies of 'ethnic security' through 'border security.'" (Tyler 2018, 1787)

Into this context is inserted Iceland – a small island nation on the periphery of Europe and long associated with peace and the promotion of human rights, to the extent that not having a military is a source of national pride (Loftsdóttir & Björnsdóttir 2010, 28). Iceland experienced significant political and economic turmoil during the 2008 financial crisis and has also undergone neo-liberally inspired transformations since the 1990s (Durrenberger & Pálsson, 2015), all of which represent another point of continuity between Iceland, Europe, and the issue of border security. Despite not being a member of the European Union, Iceland, through its coast guard, has placed itself in an environment where force is exercised against often vulnerable populations. Yet the work of the ICG is generally described by its personnel as consisting of rescuing and saving people, placing it in a framework of selfless heroism. These ambiguities and contradictions are apparent in the words of the ICG personnel interviewed for this research. Meanwhile, this collaboration continues and expands upon some longstanding notions of exceptionalism' within Icelandic national and cultural politics, as well as involving Iceland in what Fassin (2012) by extension refers to as 'humanitarian government'.

Icelandic exceptionalism and the ICG

On the evening of April 20th, 2010, the Icelandic Coast Guard vessel Ægir, named after the lord of the sea in Norse mythology, departed from Reykjavík harbour. Ægir was headed for the first of many border control missions the ICG would undertake for Frontex, the European Union's Border and Coast Guard Agency. The final destination was Dakar, Senegal, from where the ship and its crew would operate for the following six months, patrolling waters located far south of the European continent and even further away from Iceland. Ægir's shipload included a container of miscellaneous items, ranging from pens and notebooks to bicycles, which crew members had gathered in Iceland and would donate to a local charity upon arrival in Senegal. According to the ICG, these actions were much appreciated by the local population (Landhelgisgæsla Íslands 2010). The donations were, in a sense, quite emblematic of how the ICG and its staff represented their work, emphasizing its humanitarian aspect rather than security and political implications. This is not intended to trivialize or dismiss the ICG's humanitarian intentions, but rather to draw attention to the ambiguities and problematics inherent in these endeavors and highlight the multifaceted role that the Icelandic Coast Guard has always performed. Five years later, at the height of what has been called the European 'migration crisis' of 2015, the ICG vessel Týr, named after the Norse god who sacrificed his hand for the protection of gods and mankind alike, embarked on what would be the Coast Guard's final sea patrol mission in the Mediterranean. Much like in earlier deployments for Frontex, Týr's shipload included a collection of teddy bears and stuffed toys, this time intended as presents from crew members to migrating children who might be rescued during the undertaking. When asked about the role of the ICG in these missions, a crew member sought to draw a distinction between the Icelandic approach with that of other European agencies: "Our way of working is very different from that of the big nations down there," a Coast Guard member explained in an early interview, drawing attention to the ICG's humanitarian approach to migrants and refugees while expressing an ambiguous kind of criticism of the project the agency has used as a major source of income for several years.

This statement by a member of the ICG highlights the role that Icelandic exceptionalism has long played in the cultural politics of the nation. One significant dynamic of this exceptionalism identifies Iceland as part of Europe, but at the same time, as essentially blameless when it comes to the history of politics and power relations in Europe that might conflict with Iceland's identity as a progressive, peaceful and egalitarian society. One example of this dynamic has been cogently explored by anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir, who has argued that Icelanders have long desired to situate themselves as part of a developed and 'civilized' Europe, but that they, at the same time, seek to absolve themselves of any association with European colonialism and its racist underpinnings (see e.g. Loftsdóttir 2014, 2012, 2008). It is clear from Loftsdóttir's analysis of 19th and 20th century Icelandic media discourses and educational materials, showing that Icelanders participated in the reproduction of the racist discourses that legitimated the European colonial project, even though Iceland did not actively participate in colonialism. However, any critical analysis of racial imagery in contemporary Icelandic texts tends to provoke harsh disavowal of any such racism and insistence that it has nothing to do with Iceland historically or in the present day (Loftsdóttir 2013). A form of this Icelandic exceptionalism also manifests itself concerning the work of the ICG with Frontex.

Furthermore, while not a key focus of this contribution, the intersection of nationalism, heroism and masculinity needs to be recognized. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2017) contends that while scholars have long drawn attention to the relationship of nationalism to issues of race and ethnicity, the gendered dynamics of nationalism have not been given adequate attention by anthropology. Of particular relevance here is the observation made by Eriksen "that a peculiar form of masculinity grows out of nationalism, one which celebrates violence and sacrifice, heterosexual conquest and the protection of women and children by external force." (Eriksen 2017, 1439) The apparent contradictions between humanitarianism and border security in the work of the ICG and Frontex appear less contradictory in light of Eriksen's point that the 'protection' of women and children also involves forms of paternalistic domination. While the emphasis on viewing their mission through a humanitarian lens is laudable, it nevertheless does not absolve the ICG of participation in the myriad power relations inherent in the work of Frontex in securing the integrity of Europe and its borders. The ICG has also played a significant role in Icelandic national and cultural politics for much of its history and has thus always performed multifarious roles, Frontex collaboration being no exception.

The Icelandic Coast Guard is indeed viewed rather positively by the Icelandic public. While its mission focuses largely on search and rescue, its work does at times also have political and nationalist overtones that should not be overlooked. The ICG's legacy is deeply rooted in the so-called Cod Wars, a series of largely diplomatic, but occasionally physically confrontational, disputes between a relatively newly independent Iceland and foreign stakeholders regarding the expansion of Iceland's territorial waters in the 20th century. The Coast Guard naturally played a major role in the Cod Wars, which are known to have had a lasting impact on Icelandic identity and nationalism to this day (Jóhannesson 2006, 11). The Cod Wars are frequently perceived as a continuation of Iceland's struggle for independence, the dominant narrative being one of heroism. The historian Guðni Th. Jóhannesson describes this heroic narrative as taking on almost mythical qualities at times (Jóhannesson 2008, 456), presenting an image that portrays the history of the Icelandic nation and its struggle for independence in an unambiguously positive light.

HUMANITARIANISM IN A MILITARIZED ENVIRONMENT

Participation by the Icelandic Coast Guard in search and rescue operations and in maintaining European border integrity in the Mediterranean might at first glance appear contradictory, or at least ambiguous, given that Iceland is not a member of the European Union and recently withdrew its application for membership. The so-called 'migration crisis' in the Mediterranean would not appear to be a primary political or logistical concern of a small, sub-Arctic island nation on the fringe of Europe. However, in a broader context, these kinds of ambiguities are not really exceptional in contemporary Icelandic history. Iceland has never had a military, yet it was a founding member of a military alliance, NATO, and hosted a US naval air station during the Cold War due to its strategic location in the North Atlantic. The ICG's collaboration with Frontex reflects, if anything, a continuation of the Icelandic state's commitment to participation in international collaboration on military or paramilitary objectives. Another example of this is Iceland's participation in the International Crisis Response Unit (ICRU) as part of the NATO mission in Afghanistan in the early part of the previous decade (see Baldvinsson 2008; Loftsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2012, 2010; Björnsdóttir 2014). In this instance, a team of Icelandic civilians were given a very brief period of military training in Norway and deployed as Iceland's contribution to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, at one point even taking command of a base of operations. It has been argued that this was an awkward attempt on the part of the Icelandic government at the time to win a seat on the UN Security Council, Iceland using this opportunity to demonstrate the nation's participation in the international arena. It is also worth noting that this occurred before the financial collapse in Iceland, at a time when Icelandic confidence was growing, and this perhaps merged with an increasing desire to raise Iceland's international profile. When two members of the ICRU were injured in a targeted bomb attack in Kabul in 2004, which killed one Afghan child and an American woman, the Icelandic public became aware of the nature of the ICRU mission and the government faced severe criticism, leading to a change in the ICRU mission and de-militarizing of Iceland's role (Loftsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2008, 195). It is perhaps not surprising that when the ICG decided to take part in a collaboration with Frontex, the humanitarian aspects of the mission were given prominence, and the paramilitary and security implications were downplayed in the process.

The ICG personnel, who were interviewed repeatedly, associated the work of the ICG with Icelandic exceptionalism, humanitarianism, and nationalism. For example, there were frequent references to the Icelandic nation throughout these interviews. In the first interview, a research participant stated that the Coast Guard's equipment was, of course, the property of the Icelandic nation, and the country's citizens were therefore entitled to know how it was being used abroad. A will to transparency and references to Iceland's status in the international arena as an open and democratic society were therefore communicated. Yet almost immediately contradictions were noted; the kind of secrecy Frontex has been criticized for (Moreno-Lax 2017, 168; Ghezelbash et al. 2018, 38–40) became apparent when research participants repeatedly claimed they could not disclose in detail what their work for Frontex involved. Due to the regulations for conduct imposed by Frontex, ICG personnel were able to absolve themselves of accusations of a lack of transparency in their work through reference to an external authority.

Another approach taken by the ICG was emphasizing the humanitarian aspects of the Frontex project, and in the process drawing a distinction between the actions and involvement of the ICG – and by extension the Icelandic nation – and that of the other European nations involved in Frontex missions. Another research participant expressed pride in being deployed on an Icelandic ship that was involved in 'saving thousands' in the Mediterranean. That statement echoed the frequent references to the value of SAR operations coordinated by Frontex, and Iceland's role in them. Several research participants explicitly located the ICG's Frontex undertaking largely within a humanitarian framework, placing primary emphasis on the humanitarian implications of SAR. This is not to suggest that their work had no humanitarian dynamics. It is important to note that search and rescue operations are a focal point of the ICG in general, and it is understandable that its personnel would choose to emphasise this aspect of their work. But this was also done in a manner that arguably draws attention to supposedly all-Icelandic values, such as commitment to non-violence, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and it also deflects attention away from the more problematic aspects of the overall Frontex project. This was also done through allusions to Iceland's unique history, small size, and status as a peace-loving nation. Several research participants maintained that Iceland's status as a small society leads to people there assigning much greater value to an individual human life than is the case in the value systems of societies with larger populations. Many took great pride in Icelandic crews never having resorted to force or physical violence toward persons being rescued during SAR operations. While it is questionable whether the value and worth placed on a human life has any direct correlation to population size, Iceland is officially committed to its status as a nation that does not possess military forces, and its status as a non-violent society remains an important component of the national identity. However, the humanitarian intent and approach to their work taken by ICG personnel should not rule out critical analyses of their role in the larger Frontex project and its furtherance of the goal of strengthening Fortress Europe in the wake of the 2015 'migration crisis.' If ICG personnel are sincere in their commitment to peace, non-violence and justice, a critical look at their contribution to Frontex should not call these values into question.

The Icelandic Coast Guard and Frontex

The ICG's relationship with Frontex is an area deserving of critical analysis and one that does not necessarily detract from the humanitarian intentions of the ICG personnel. But it must be kept in mind that it was primarily the budgetary concerns of the Icelandic Coast Guard in the wake of the financial crisis that led to this collaboration being established. That being the case, it is inaccurate to suggest that this collaboration was a direct response to the 2015 'migration crisis' or intended as some sort of rescue mission. The humanitarian framework invoked to characterize the agency's work arguably arose after the fact. Recurrent remarks made by research participants on the morally superior work ethic of Icelanders, compared to their European counterparts, juxtaposed with references to the way the undertaking should be viewed as Iceland's contribution to the international community, expose Iceland's deeply ambiguous position as a small state aligning itself with larger powers. The embeddedness of the ICG within Frontex during these operations needs to be considered.

This collaboration does not absolve Iceland and the ICG of all responsibility for the moral and ethical issues pertaining to the methods of operation of Frontex and other European powers. The actions of Frontex have been the focus of criticism from migrants, activists and critical scholars alike (Léonard 2010). The legality of Frontex's operations has also been questioned, including pushbacks and interception at sea, and some have argued that Frontex's methods are in some instances "politically motivated, rather than empirically justified" (Moreno-Lax 2018, 134). Scholars and activists have demonstrated how these methods rarely succeed in achieving the stated objective of protecting both individuals and borders. Frontex has responded to this criticism by strategically emphasising fundamental rights, a position that could be described as a human rights slant in the agency's official policy, even though critics claim that the agency's relationship with fundamental rights is still ambiguous. In fact, Moreno-Lax asserts that Frontex's "channels of democratic oversight are weak," as there are currently no "formal means to render Frontex accountable" (Moreno-Lax 2017, 163). In this highly problematic context, the ICG's emphasis on the humanitarian aspects of their work – rescuing people – has become interwoven with the security aspects of the agency's activities: protecting Europe and its values from the intrusion of external 'others.' Indeed, Pallister-Wilkins has argued that what she calls 'humanitarian borderwork' is both "focused on the enactment of humanitarian principles [...] while at the same time working to reproduce exclusive categories of life and exclusive territorial spaces" (Pallister-Wilkins 2015, 89). Likewise, Walter maintains that what he calls 'the humanitarian border' serves the dual purpose of governing a "novel and disturbing situation," while simultaneously "compensating for the social violence embodied in the regime of migration control" (Walters 2011, 138–139).

SEARCH AND RESCUE IN HUMANITARIAN BORDERLANDS

In one of its forms, Icelandic exceptionalism refers to the blamelessness and innocence of Iceland. In one version, this concerns Icelanders' desire to be perceived as developed and 'civilized' Europeans and a rejection of the historic association of Iceland with poverty and marginality. However, in making these associations with Europe, there is also an unwillingness to be associated with the racism, colonialism and oppression that are intrinsic parts of European history, and this also applies today (Loftsdóttir 2012, 2013). There is a parallel dynamic at work in the ICG's collaboration with Frontex when ICG highlights the humanitarian features of its work, for which accolades are bestowed. There is arguably less willingness to critically consider the security dimension and what it entails. In the context of the mass migration of people attempting to escape poverty and conflict in the Global South, it has been argued that we are witnessing the rise of harsh securitization of migration that has been described as “the extreme politicisation of migration and its presentation as a security threat” (Léonard 2010, 231–232), and it is generally recognised as having had severe negative impact on the status and human rights of refugees and migrants. Under the dominant paradigm of securitization, there has been a tendency for state interests to carry more weight than human rights concerns, or the welfare of individuals. The discourses and practices of securitization and those of humanitarianism have emerged in tandem, strengthening one another through a mutually constructive relationship (Moreno-Lax 2018; Little and Vaughan-Williams 2017; Pallister-Wilkins 2017; Williams 2016; Aas and Gundhus 2015; Walters 2011).

Frontex’s platform of ‘freedom, security and justice,’ described as their vision on their website (Frontex 2018), is an example of the ‘humanitarian’ border problematic. This is characterized by complex power dynamics in which humanitarian policies interact with various institutions and structures, forming an ambiguous relationship that concerns itself with the seemingly contradictory objectives of the free movement of people and goods and the protection of human rights, but also the security of borders and the exclusion of certain populations which leads to human rights violations. Moreno-Lax claims that the ‘humanitarianization’ of borders “(strategically) interweaves border security with human security vocabulary that helps enhance the legitimacy and reputation of securitizing forces” (Moreno-Lax 2017, 122). In a similar way, the teddy bears collected in Iceland by the coast guard and the emphasis on rescuing people have become interwoven with the larger security apparatus Frontex has implemented. The earlier emphasis on ‘pure’ securitization has largely been replaced by a new kind of humanitarian securitization which portrays the security of migrants and that of borders as “mutually attainable goals” and presents stricter border control as a means of preventing migrant deaths rather than being the cause of them (Williams 2016, 31). Iceland is not new to this particular game. Iceland’s participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan was similarly portrayed as a humanitarian endeavour, yet armed Icelandic civilians were placed directly in a conflict zone and took on patrol duties even though they had little training for them and no clear mission objectives (Loftsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2010). The Mediterranean project could be seen in a similar light, putting practical budgetary concerns aside. Albahari claims that in the context of Mediterranean border control, “a salvational and humanitarian discourse seeks to make military and surveillance projects more palatable to public opinion and politicians” (Albahari 2015, 175). In this atmosphere the role of human rights in the EU border regime has undergone a substantial transformation, as the ground has been laid for human rights to be invoked in a manner that paradoxically serves to curtail them (Moreno-Lax 2017).

When asked about the objective of the Frontex-undertaking, ICG research participants mentioned security concerns and professional networking, underpinned by access to technological novelties in the surveillance industry. But there was a distinct hierarchy in which border security trumped human security: "It's border control. Clearly we were not sent down there to search for refugees," said one research participant. Another described the project as being first and foremost about border control, which "automatically goes into SAR as well," thus framing search and rescue as possibly a consequence, or at best a complement to surveillance, but not as its primary function. In much the same way, in their research on Frontex officials and border guards, Aas and Gundhus (2015) found that the Norwegian agents who were interviewed saw their role for Frontex as being that of improving conditions for migrants, in contrast to border police from other European contexts, but the authors nevertheless contend that humanitarian practices were in aid of achieving the objectives of the overall policing mission (Aas and Gundhus 2015).

From an analysis of the ICG's website, it is obvious that the emphasis on SAR is a considerable part of the institution's self-presentation as regards the Frontex mission, thereby deemphasizing the other goals of this deployment and the problematic issues they raise (Landhelgisgæsla Íslands 2012, nd-a, nd-b). The crew members who were interviewed also downplayed any association with the more controversial aspects of border security. Responding to a question regarding the ICG's involvement in some of Frontex's disputed activities, such as forced returns and pushbacks, one research participant exclaimed: "We're lucky enough to only do the fun part. We only do rescues!" However, these sentiments did not represent the complete picture. Police violence and excessive force were mentioned as an unfortunate but sometimes necessary aspect of migration control. Icelandic exceptionalism was invoked in these descriptions of violence, highlighting the virtue of the Icelandic crews in contrast to their European counterparts. The research participants expressed great pride in never having resorted to physical violence themselves when working for and with Frontex. Instead, crew members claimed they relied on respectful communication with rescuees, keeping them well informed and giving them frequent updates via English-speaking individuals whom crew members relied on as interpreters. However, crew members did admit to resorting to intimidation and verbal threats when this was deemed necessary, but, for the most part, they directed their criticism at coworkers outside the ICG. At least one research participant reported witnessing brutal police violenc, on part of the respective host nation, when an individual that the ICG had taken aboard during a SAR operation (and suspected of being involved in organizing the voyage) was arrested and beaten by riot police upon embarkation. While the ICG crew members may not have been directly involved in inflicting the violence, violence has been part of the context in which their mission with Frontex has taken place. In fact, the extensive border enforcement efforts of the EU and European states in 2015, in which the Icelandic state took part through the ICG's patrolling with Frontex, both in the air and at sea, were described by one research participant as "pure violence," while another apparently considered SAR at sea insufficient. Referring to their descriptions of the poor conditions they had witnessed in reception camps, one research participant concluded that "People are alive, and for that they are thankful, but what awaits them upon arrival in Europe is not … It's not pleasant."

Concluding remarks

As we have argued, the Icelandic Coast Guard's mission and its collaboration with Frontex is fraught with ambiguities and problematic aspects. This collaboration came about due to a financial crisis and was prolonged due to another crisis involving a mass movement of people into Europe while fleeing violence and poverty. In describing their work, the ICG personnel interviewed were honest about the ambiguities, but they often slipped into the discourse of Icelandic exceptionalism when explaining or rationalizing their work, aided by the interweaving of humanitarianism with border security that makes the entire Frontex project (and their involvement in it) more politically palatable. The ICG's role in SAR in the Mediterranean was occasionally reported in the local Icelandic news media, but usually in a manner that underscored the heroism of the crews, while ignoring the larger context in which their operations were embedded. Reporter Gísli Einarsson, who accompanied the ICG on a mission in 2015, was one the few Icelandic journalists to acknowledge that for rescuees, the journey to safety was not yet complete upon disembarkation from SAR vessels (Einarsson 2015). For the most part, media emphasis was on the crew members, their heroism, and the generalized national pride that their mission evoked back home. Without detailed knowledge of ICG's mission and the broader implications of this collaboration, it is difficult for the Icelandic public to develop informed opinions on whether or not the ICG should participate in these efforts, particularly when the information the public receives is refracted through the lens of Icelandic exceptionalism.

Frontex collaboration apparently strengthens the status of the Icelandic state as a legitimate international player, but in so doing, it provides little impetus for the general public and the Icelandic state to reconsider their own exclusive immigration policy or challenge the Iceland's self-image as a progressive, peace-loving and non-violent nation in light of the country's complicity in the securitization of Europe's borders. A critical examination of the interplay of securitization and humanitarianization in border control reveals how humanitarian discourses may be mobilised to justify violent and exclusionary state policies, thereby contributing to an environment where SAR becomes detached from further ethical and political responsibilities. The securitization and militarization of border control has not only been unsuccessful in halting the large-scale mobility of vulnerable populations, it has also consistently failed to ensure the safety of migrating people, despite claims to the contrary. The broader implications of this border security regime should not be obscured by claims regarding the exceptional nature of specific participants, or a focus on the heroic actions of the crews involved.

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GUÐBJÖRG LINDA RAFNSDÓTTIR,
JÓNÍNA EINARSDÓTTIR AND
ÁSTRÓS ANNA KLEMENSDÓTTIR

"Not like Every Other Tourist with a Selfie Stick"

Voluntourism in Iceland

ABSTRACT

A growing number of foreign young people work as volunteers in Iceland. The Icelandic Federation of Trade and the Icelandic Confederation of Labour have agreed that those who run economic activities for profit are not allowed to recruit individuals for unpaid labour. In addition, mass media have reported severe violations of collective labour agreements and even bad treatment and abuse of volunteers. The aim of this chapter is to shed light on why young people come to Iceland for work as volunteers, who they are, and how they experience their stay. Interviews were conducted with fourteen individuals who had volunteered in Iceland during the period 2015–2019. They were between 21 and 34 years old and came from Europe and North, Central and South America. The results show that the interviewees should be defined as voluntourists instead of volunteers. Most of them were, or had recently been, university students who wanted to experience a free and flexible life while still young. They were mainly interested in cheap travel without being identified as a typical tourist, aiming to empower themselves, have new experiences and enhance their CV. Their experiences of volunteering were mainly positive, even though some of them confirmed the labour unions' concerns about bad treatment. However, they viewed negative experiences as part of the adventure, quickly dropped the host concerned and moved on to another. Thus, they were neither looking for a perfect life nor doing good deeds. Instead, they were pursuing freedom of adventure.

Key words: Young people, traveling, volunteers, voluntourists.

Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, the number of migrants has been relatively low in Iceland. However, there was slow growth in the late 1990s and a rapid rise before the economic crisis in 2008 (Einarsdóttir, Heijstra, and Rafnsdóttir 2018). Economic growth and the rapid increase in tourism in the wake of the crisis have contributed to the rise in the number of foreign workers in Iceland, particularly those working in the tourist industry (Gil-Alana and Huijbens 2018; Rancew-Sikora and Skaptadóttir 2016). This also applies to the number of migrant volunteers, even though there is good access to paid work in Iceland, and the unemployment rate among young people is low (Rafnsdóttir, Einarsdóttir, and Guðmundsdóttir 2019).

There may be various reasons behind the increase in volunteerism, such as unemployment among young people in Europe (Powell 2018; Rancew-Sikora and Skaptadóttir 2016) and employers' demand for a flexible workforce, including those in the tourist industry (Deery and Jago 2002). In addition, voluntourism is increasingly popular as a lifestyle among young people, as it apparently combines volunteering and tourism (Dlaske 2016; Lyons et al. 2012; McGloin and Georgeou 2016; Wearing and McGehee 2013).

Based on interviews with volunteers, this chapter aims to shed light on the group of young people who come to Iceland to work as volunteers. The main focus is on who they are, their motivation for volunteering in Iceland, and their experience of working for free in the country. Due to strong labour unions arguing that volunteer jobs are illegal, the high availability of paid work, and an increase in volunteering, Iceland is an interesting place to study the phenomenon.

Volunteering and voluntourism

When studying volunteering and voluntourism, the first question is how the concepts should be defined. Definitions of volunteering vary, and Bussel and Forbes (2002) argue, for instance, that volunteers are an extremely diverse group and active in a wide variety of contexts, and that the term is thus challenging to define. In addition, Hustinx, Cnaan and Handy (2010) show that no unified theory has emerged on volunteerism because of the strong empirical focus of such studies, and also because of the complexity of a phenomenon that spans a wide variety of activities, organizations and sectors. They also mention that different academic disciplines have different focuses on volunteering, with sociology emphasizing the intentions of the volunteers, and economics tending to classify volunteering as unpaid work. Nevertheless, most of the definitions of volunteers are close to ILO's definition, which is: "Unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household or related family members" (ILO n.d.). According to this definition, volunteering is not necessarily mediated through an organization. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), an umbrella association for the voluntary sector across England, defines a volunteer as "someone spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone who they're not closely related to. Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual" (NCVO n.d.).

Definitions of voluntourism are similar to those of volunteering, though travel has been added. Wearing (2001, 1) defines voluntourists as people who "volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment." However, definitions of voluntourism, commonly presented as alternative tourism with an emphasis on environmental issues, moral intent, and justice, vary in their focus on volunteering with respect to tourism (Wearing and McGehee 2013). The webpage VolunTourism defines voluntourism as "the integrated combination of voluntary service to a destination with the traditional elements of travel and tourism – arts, culture, geography, history, and recreation – while in the destination" (VolunTourism, n.d). At the same time, vouluntourism has been criticized for neo-colonial power relations and exploitation of local communities for the volunteers' self-realization (McGloin and Georgeou 2016; Wearing and McGehee 2013).

Debate on volunteering

The Icelandic mass media have reported severe violations of collective labour agreements and bad treatment of volunteers (Rafnsdóttir, Einarsdóttir, and Guðmundsdóttir 2019). Also, the labour unions have received an increasing number of complaints from volunteers, mainly due to long working hours and a heavy workload, but also because of inadequate facilities and living conditions. The Icelandic Federation of Trade and the Icelandic Confederation of Labour have agreed that those who run for-profit organizations are not allowed to recruit individuals for unpaid work (ASÍ and SA n.d.). Nevertheless, through analysis of the web pages Workaway and HelpX, Rafnsdóttir, Einarsdóttir and Guðmundsdóttir (2019) show that almost all the ads for volunteers to Iceland in 2017 and 2018 required the provision of work that is subject to collective labour agreements to for-profit organizations.

Wright (2013) points out that only a few studies focus on the experiences of volunteers in high-income countries and their motives for working for free. However, Prince and Ioannides (2017) and Prince (2017) have explored host and volunteer interactions at the eco-village Sólheimar, a home for individuals with intellectual disabilities in Iceland. Their research shows that some volunteers, who were idealists with their own expectations, disagreed with the management on organizational issues, claiming volunteers were treated only as cheap labour (Prince and Ioannides 2017, 352). Dlaske (2016), who has studied the recruitment of volunteers in the tourist industry in Finland, is also concerned about cheap labour. She concludes that market-based rationalization characterizes the daily life of the volunteers who by choice work long days, often with no days off. The volunteers, who are mostly Western and young, stay for a few weeks or months "in a chain of stays at different Workaway hosts – a chain which provides them with a way to travel across the world" (2016, 420). However, there is little cultural exchange, and English is the language of communication.

METHODS

To shed light on volunteering in Iceland, we conducted fourteen interviews with foreign individuals who had volunteered in the country between 2015 and 2019 for periods of 1–18 months. We mainly used snowball sampling to contact the volunteers (see Creswell 2013). The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. Despite promises that all interviewees would be kept anonymous, and that their nationality, workplace and occupation would not be disclosed, the volunteers were hesitant to participate. Often they agreed to be interviewed and promised to arrange a time and place for the interview via e-mail or messenger, but then did not show up. We decided to repeat our requests no more than three times. This experience was different from the hundreds of interviews the authors have organized for other research projects. We interpret this reluctance to participate as insecurity on the part of the volunteers, some of whom are aware of the controversies surrounding their position on the labour market (Rafnsdóttir, Einarsdóttir and Guðmundsdóttir 2019). One of the companies that hosted volunteers referred to volunteers as 'elves' – the 'hidden people' of Icelandic folklore – which is symbolic of their position and the difficulties we had recruiting participants for the research.

The analysis of the interviews was performed with manual coding (Crang and Cook 2007, 134–46). All names used are fictitious.

The voices of the volunteers

Background

The fourteen volunteers who were willing to be interviewed originated from Europe and North, Central and South America; ten women and four men between 21 and 34 years of age. Before arrival, they had been studying, had dropped out, or had interrupted their studies to travel. Most had chosen Iceland as their destination, while some had come because of a particular kind of work.

All except two of the fourteen volunteers had applied at some point in time for a volunteer job in Iceland through organizations such as Workaway, HelpX, Seeds, or the European Voluntary Service Program. Three had visited the country for the first time as tourists and returned later as volunteers. Those who had a volunteer arrangement prior to arrival knew where they would stay and which tasks they were expected to perform. They appreciated the flexibility of the recruitment procedure and the lack of bureaucracy involved. Two arrived without having a voluntary position. Iris had met her Icelandic ex-boyfriend while traveling and followed him to Iceland. Then she decided to volunteer to improve her CV. John dropped by at a bar or hostel and offered to work in exchange for accommodation. He is a typical backpacker who referred to himself as a traveller, not a tourist, and he loved the freedom of not having regular paid work or an employment contract. He even saw organizations like Workaway as too administrative:

> To me, going to Workaway and signing up for 40 euros is almost the same as booking a tour or something. It takes the fun out of it. It's better when you kind of don't know, and you're a bit desperate, and you walk in somewhere, and you try to charm them into giving you a job. That's like the really crazy, fun part, right?

Amanda's situation is unique within the group. She had arranged for paid work in Iceland before arrival, but due to a breach of the contract, she volunteered through HelpX while finding another paid job.

The motivation

What brings young people to Iceland for volunteering? Almost all the volunteers had reasons for their arrival in Iceland that aimed at empowering themselves as individuals, rather than helping the local society in one way or another. At least eleven of them intended to enrich their experiences through traveling, which became economically possible through volunteering. Thus, they may be categorized as voluntourists for at least some of the time they stayed in the country. Only one of the volunteers indicated that he wanted the environment to benefit from his work. Seven of the eleven volunteers had either volunteered before their arrival to Iceland or headed for a new voluntary position elsewhere, or both. They pointed out that the boundaries between voluntary work and tourism often became blurred, and they liked that blurriness.

Almost all of the group interviewed came to the country to combine volunteering and tourism. Some of the volunteers appreciated being able to enhance their CVs at the same time. A few of them were already somewhat familiar with the work they performed. For instance, Marie and Emma worked with horses. Marie had visited Iceland earlier as a tourist, and she decided to return at a time she "really had to take a break." She stayed on a horse farm and did work she already knew. Afterwards, she studied at the University of Iceland before heading for another stay on a horse farm in another country. Monika was happy to find an opportunity to work as a photographer in Iceland. Daniel, who wanted to get to know Iceland and live with a family, also took advantage of his skills in photography. He moved between countries, always staying with families he selected carefully by looking at the photographs presented in the ads.

Isabella had done some short-term volunteering before she came to Iceland. "Honestly, for me, it was most like, ehm. I didn't do it for, like, being a volunteer. It was mostly a way to travel and not to spend a lot of money." Nonetheless, she did not select Iceland as a destination. "Iceland, wasn't like my favorite place in the world, but I liked this project, it sounded good and the location also sounded very nice, so I chose that project." For Lea, volunteering was "just a way to spend some time in Iceland and discover more about the country and the culture." She had been in Iceland once before as a tourist and knew that the country was too expensive for her to travel on her own. Thus, she saw volunteering as an opportunity to "spend a lot of time in Iceland without getting touristy." John, whose father had travelled a lot in the seventies and lived "like a hippie," wanted to do the same. He liked volunteering: "You are working with people that live in the country, and you get to know the staff, and you make some good friends, and you get free accommodation and sometimes free beer."

The volunteers did not know before arrival that it was easy to get a job in Iceland, for instance at restaurants and bars. When asked, some said that they would have chosen paid employment over volunteering if they had known this. "If I had the job, I could easily pay for the pool and the movies and just drink coffee in the city. … Since the price is so high in Iceland, it's not that easy," Monika explained. Alexander found a proper job. "Why would I continue in Workaway when I can find work and get a proper salary for it." In contrast, John preferred working as a volunteer over having paid work:

> Well, I mean it is kind of nice that you're not you know, getting hired right? So you're not really committed to anything. When you get like officially employed at a company, there is always going to be like paperwork and visas that are involved, and if you're just traveling. It's just better to pop in. You're not going to be there for months – yeah – like a week or two. You don't have to be, like, "I promise to be here for six months," so to be trained and hired, that's not really what you know a lot of people are looking for if you're just traveling.

When volunteering, for instance at a bar, John argued, "I am not like every other tourist with a selfie stick." In line with many other interviewees he never did "the touristy stuff." He preferred to work at the bar rather than being "a random tourist guy. I'm the guy serving you a beer, so it puts you in a different spot and a different space, and you can kind of, ehm, build relationships with people in sort of a different way." John also pointed out that he did not come from Europe, thus it was difficult for him to get paid work in Iceland due to bureaucracy. "Everything needs to be online and registered, and you need to have like some frigging, like app signed up to do all this kind of stuff."

When Isabella was asked whether she would have chosen a paid job over volunteering, she answered:

> Yes, I mean, yeah, of course, I would prefer to like have a paid job like. But I mean, maybe in the beginning not. In the beginning, I really liked the volunteer life because it's so much more relaxed. It's not like a paid job. Like the pressure that you have in the office, and this and it's much more relaxed.

Julia argued "for me I think being in paid job is not the most important for me." Emma would have considered taking a paid job, "if it would be that easy as Workaway, why shouldn't I be interested? If it's the same job but just with a bit of salary, I think so." After her stay at a horse farm in Iceland, she volunteered in Germany, also at a horse farm. There, the work was much heavier and without the freedom and flexibility she had experienced in Iceland. When asked about her preference for paid work when she came to Iceland, Marie responded: "Probably not … I can't say actually at that time. Because of the timing, the volunteering was actually pretty perfect." Daniel's response to the same question was: "I don't know. It's a very broad question because it would depend on what type of job and for how long and where." Working for payment might change the experience and the relationship with the host family, he speculated:

> For example, these people took me to visit the highlands, as a way to give me something in return. There are these other types of gestures that we both do for each other. That maybe if the money was in between, I might just stick to my job, and they might just stick to paying me, and it wouldn't be. No, maybe it would be less human or less interesting or something.

The experience of volunteering

The volunteers we interviewed had diverse experiences of volunteering. Some of them stayed in rural areas and were the only volunteers with their hosts and had not met any other volunteers after they arrived in the country. Others lived with a group of other volunteers and had met many other volunteers during their stay in Iceland, but not as many natives.

Most of the volunteers got free accommodation and some food in return for their work, sometimes only breakfast, but often full board, especially those who stayed in the countryside. Some hosts covered public transport and paid some pocket money, most often between 40 and 75 Euros. Most of the volunteers found Iceland to be a costly country. Monika pointed out that, before arrival, she thought the pocket money amount was fair, but when she realized how expensive it was to live in Iceland, finances became a struggle. Monika explained: "We get 75 euros. But we have to buy soap and toothpaste and … I mean we don't have rent, and we have all the food for free, but 75 euros go away really quickly just for necessities." Some of the volunteers felt that Iceland was so expensive that they could not afford to go to pubs or to other places where they might meet local people of their age. Others did not get to know Icelandic peers, either because they were stuck on a farm, or they were with a group of foreign volunteers.

Those who were not satisfied with their stays argued that they had worked more hours than was indicated on the volunteer websites. "I had a feeling that the job that I was doing was definitely a full-time job for at least two people," said Alexander. Lea, who stayed at two farms, also worked more than expected.

> I had been a little bit surprised when I arrived there because what I agreed on Workaway was five hours a day and five days a week, but in the end, I worked way more than this. I worked seven days per week and between ten and … and sometimes like fifteen hours [a day]. I had the feeling that I was being exploited because I didn't have the right to move from the farm, I didn't have free time on Sundays or … I'm just thinking that the first farm [where] I stayed they weren't honest.

For Lea, this "looked like slavery. … I think this work is forbidden in Iceland, maybe the government should be interested in what's happening on Workaway." As was the case with all the other volunteers, Lea did not sign a contract. Being suddenly asked to leave the farm six weeks earlier than initially planned was problematic for her. She did not have much savings and had nowhere to go while waiting for the flight back home. Fortunately, she was able to move to another farm, where she had a much more positive experience than on the first one.

Some volunteers had far too much responsibility. This was true of Chloe, who was requested to perform tasks for which she was not trained. For instance, she was asked to drive a vehicle for which she was not licensed. Alexander said the volunteers were in weak positions when it came to improving their situations once they started volunteering in a foreign country. Marie took advantage of the informality of the volunteering arrangement. She quit after a few days on the first farm because she was disappointed, but she quickly found another farm she really liked. Emma, who volunteered in the fall and winter, was content. She loved her work, had a good relationship with the hosts and was able to travel around. The hosts provided a car, and she slept over for free at their friends' hostels.

Discussion

The main aim of this chapter was to shed light on volunteers in Iceland: who they are, why they came to the country as volunteers, and how they experienced their stays. It is based on qualitative interviews with fourteen interviewees selected with snow-ball sampling. In line with Hustinx, Cnaan and Handy (2010) and Bussel and Forbes (2002), the volunteers interviewed were diverse in terms of the tasks they performed (see also Rafnsdóttir, Einarsdóttir and Guðmundsdóttir 2019) and their experiences of being volunteers. However, they were similar in some respects. Their age range was narrow, and they originated in Europe and the American continent. In most cases, they either were or had recently been university students and were looking for a way to experience the world at little cost.

Most of the volunteers interviewed saw themselves as voluntourists, and most of them got the voluntary position through Workaway, HelpX, Seeds or the European Voluntary Service Program. Many had volunteered in other countries, and after their stay in Iceland, they headed for yet another destination. Some argued that, at this point in their life, they were not searching for paid work. However there was one exception. Amanda came to Iceland for paid work but was cheated. She is a labour migrant who took advantage of HelpX and stayed as a volunteer to bridge the gap while finding a new paid job.

The volunteers interviewed were mostly pleased with their stay in Iceland. They had the opportunity to pursue their dreams by traveling without being ‘traditional tourists’ in an easy and unbureaucratic way. Their ideas may fit the global labour market’s increased demand for a flexible and mobile workforce (Deery and Jago 2002). When discussing their motivation, they mentioned cheap travel through volunteering, rather than unemployment in their countries of origin. Almost all of the volunteers wanted to empower themselves by traveling abroad, learning something new and boosting their own CV, which corroborates research highlighting the theory that voluntourists may have selfish motives (McGloin and Georgeou 2016; Wearing and McGehee 2013; Wright 2013).

Most of the volunteers had a prior interest in Iceland; three had visited the country as tourists before coming as volunteers. However, they found the country surprisingly expensive, which limited their engagement with locals. The volunteers’ experience of their hosts and tasks was mixed, and they also had varied experiences during their stays. Unlike what Prince and Ioannides (2017) found, the interviewed volunteers did not have an outspoken ideological view on volunteering and were not aiming to contribute much to the local society in which they lived as volunteers (see, e.g. Wearing 2001; Wearing and McGehee 2013). In general, they did not experience art, culture or history during their stay, which is defined as a part of volunteerism by VolunTourism (n.d.), except for the two photographers, who underscored the importance of enhancing their CVs. They adapted to society to varying degrees, and even though some did not want to repeat the way they had lived as volunteers in Iceland, they were generally happy with their experiences and would not have wanted to miss them. One of the volunteers found a permanent job after volunteering and decided to stay in the country. Most of the others were in a chain of volunteering and traveling free around the world while still young and uncommitted (see Dlaske 2016).

A few of the volunteers were aware of the debate on volunteering in Iceland and the labour unions' assertion that, in general, the kind of volunteering they were doing was illegal, because there were collective labour agreements that applied to these jobs (Rafnsdóttir, Einarsdóttir and Guðmundsdóttir 2019). Despite volunteers' generally positive experiences with volunteering in Iceland, some of them felt exploited by having to work long hours and take on tasks for which they were not qualified.

CONCLUSION

Our interviewees should be defined as voluntourists rather than volunteers. Most of them were, or had recently been, university students who wanted to experience a free and flexible life by looking for jobs as volunteers while they were still young and unfettered. Their motivations for seeking voluntary work were mainly empowering themselves, enhancing their CVs and traveling abroad at little cost. Their experiences were mainly positive, even though some of them confirmed labour unions' concerns about bad treatment. However, in most instances, they saw this as part of the adventure, quickly dropped the host, and found themselves another and better position. Thus, they were neither looking for a perfect life, nor were they aiming to do good deeds; they were rather pursuing the freedom to have an adventure while still young.

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John Bodinger de Uriarte

Selfies, Sovereignty, and the Nation-State

Into the Modern World at the National Museum of Iceland

Abstract

This chapter uses the lens of nation-making to examine key objects in the National Museum of Iceland's *Into the Modern World* exhibition, in particular the gallery's instant photo booth, a 1930 Photomaton. Photo technologies provide an important focus for thinking about the semiotics of sovereignty, and the mechanics and poetics of image-making for national citizens. The Photomaton presents an illustrative site for the full entanglement of the social and political roles of self-representation. As an element in the Museum's overall narrative, it contributes an important component to answering the Museum's main guiding question: "What makes an Icelander?" As the Photamaton's panel text suggests: "The photograph became one of the mediums for nationalism." Images of the self are also one of the single most important ways to continue the bureaucratic registration of citizens so important to national organization and individual mobilities through its participation in the formation and verification of national and international identities.

Keywords: self-representation, museums, photography, selfies, national identity

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The National Museum of Iceland's earliest collection was begun in 1863; the repatriation of Icelandic materials from Denmark in 1930 enriched the museum‘s holdings. In 1944, following the declaration of the Icelandic Republic and full independence, the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi) dedicated funds to construct the current National Museum, which was completed in 1950. It was closed in 2000 for repairs and the designing and installation of the current permanent exhibition, *Making of a Nation: Heritage and History in Iceland*, which opened in 2004. The history of the National Museum is a complicated one, reflecting a changing, imbricated set of political autonomies and sovereignties. The *Into the Modern World* gallery provides an interpretive narrative of the twentieth-century Icelandic experience of nation-making, by mobilizing objects and stories to exemplify the modern formation of the Icelandic nation-state (and its processes of self-representation).

Self-representation is both political and culturally performative; these two distinctions are fully entangled. Much of my research has focused on cultural and political sovereignty and self-representation, especially in Native American museums and casinos. Such sites recognize that the control of national representation – to both its citizen members and others – is a key national enterprise. Nation-states frequently draw from established imaginings and discourses to form both national and international identities. Under increasing global tourism, 'the nation' is also a congealing of projected and internalized representations created for national and global audiences. While national museums seek to cohere self-representation, national identity is a dynamic and fluid process, not an essence (Edensor 2002), a nesting set of self-representations not always in full concert with one another.

The National Museum of Iceland

I conducted my main research on the National Museum during Fall 2017,[1] with my primary focus on how 'the nation' is both conceived and performed in the museum. This chapter is best understood as a focused reflection on some key elements from the museum's exhibitions, not a product of ethnography or historical research; in James Clifford's terms, a 'meditation' (Clifford 1997). In my engagement with the museum, I am intrigued by the ways in which transnational ideologies have helped to shape Iceland's national identity. Here, I pursue a number of key questions: What is the museum's story of 'Icelandicness'? Or, in the museum's words: "What makes an Icelander?" and "What makes a nation?" (*Making of a Nation* museum guidebook 2011). Museums are both "translators and translations" (Erikson 2002), both productive and necessary in national formation and representation, especially at a nexus of international and national identity formation. Museums "are uniquely powerful semiotic instruments for the creation, maintenance, and dissemination of meanings by fielding together and synthesizing objects, ideas, and beliefs." (Preziosi 2011, 82) National museums are powerful participants in the semiotics of sovereignty, validating self-rule through a sequencing of signs. In Iceland, the national museum illustrates the formation of the nation through time, and through different periods of conditional sovereignties (what might be called, in a Native American context, domestic dependent nationhood). This chapter focuses on how discourses of national belonging are embedded in systems of representation, in the mobility of things and people, how these surface in the museum, and how this surfacing is an exercise of the museum's 'epistemological technology.'

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[1] I am deeply grateful to both the Fulbright Foundation and the University of Iceland for the opportunity and support necessary to conduct this research.

Early affirmations of nationhood are sometimes expressed as a projection of blood and soil, political and cultural identities grounded in nature and the biomechanics of heredity. We are national citizens with national identities because we are born so; the obverse: those not born of the 'national blood' are not national citizens. While romantic nationalism may be supplemented by more rationalist constructions of the nation-state, it is still powerfully seductive for many, especially visitors, tourists, and other consumers, for example. National representation is often played out in a number of key sites, to a number of imagined receptors. In Iceland, especially in the face of its exploding tourism industry,[2] 'Icelandicness' becomes a site for confirmation. Visitors seek to find the nation of their imaginations confirmed, partly encapsulated by a rich 'national brand' combining nature and culture, and more than a gesture toward an (almost) timeless past populated with Vikings, elves, and ever-increasing numbers of puffins. Tourism imaginaries participate in creating the enterprises that undergird a substantial component of the contemporary Icelandic economy, while the service-oriented industry also increases the demand for non-Icelandic labor and immigration flows.

This chapter follows Sherry Turkle to offer "a detailed examination of particular objects with rich connections to daily life as well as intellectual practice. … [to use] evocative objects [to] bring philosophy down to earth" (2007, 8), to focus on *Into the Modern World* to perform a meditation on one of the stand-alone, heroic objects on display. I consider Walter Benjamin's notions of history as a storm-driven record of catastrophe, questioning the coherence and sequence of objects-as-records (1969), and I find myself guided by Donald Preziosi's cautionary statement that "museums manufacture a *twofold* belief – in what its contents or collected objects signify, and in the independent existence or agency of what is signified" (2012, 82). If "nations loom out of an immemorial past and … glide into a limitless future" (Anderson 1991, 12–13),[3] national museum narratives shape and reflect this process, stringing events and objects from the past into an inevitable present, a constructed coherence. To draw again from Preziosi: "The production of that from which a society wishes to be descended is in fact precisely what museum narrative stagings seek to demonstrate and naturalize as truth: the facticity of its fictions" (2001, 84).

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[2] Almost 500,000 tourists visited Iceland in 2006; by 2016 that number had reached almost 1.8 million (source: 2016 Icelandic Tourist Board Report). The total population of Iceland is less than 350,000.

Iceland complicates the 'immemorial past' by being able to precisely locate the beginning of settlement on an uninhabited land (AD 874), and the museum's mission "has been to communicate and create knowledge of the nation's cultural heritage from the time of its settlement to the present day" (Hallgrímsdóttir 2007). This historic precision, however, is still subject to positioned retellings, to imagined historical antecedents beyond the reach of Iceland's settled history. If history is "a social form of knowledge" (Porciani 2015, 137), "museums of history are part of the field of tension and the dialectic between knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) and state power" (120).

My reflections are also guided by Preziosi's caution to avoid 'ghost-catching,' the temptation of presupposing that 'national narratives' have an existence independent of the institutions and occasions in which we imagine them to be "staged" (2012, 86). National museums often present themselves as catching and fixing stories and narratives that are already 'out there' as exemplars of the nation, of coherent national identity and experience, of gradual and inevitable national progress. "Bounded and self-evident, a nationally rooted culture is not imagined as 'the outcome of material and symbolic processes but instead as the *cause* of those practices – a hidden essence lying behind the surface of behavior' (Crang 1998, 162)" (as cited in Edensor 2002, 2). National museums are both layered objects and machines (Ames 1995) that recontextualize artefacts and stories into redefined coherencies. As Director Margarét Hallgrímsdóttir has also stated about the Museum, "here the past meets the future and the visitor can explore how Iceland, its culture and society, has developed through the centuries" (*Making of a Nation* museum guidebook 2011). This is an exploration guided by the willed coherencies of its exhibitions.

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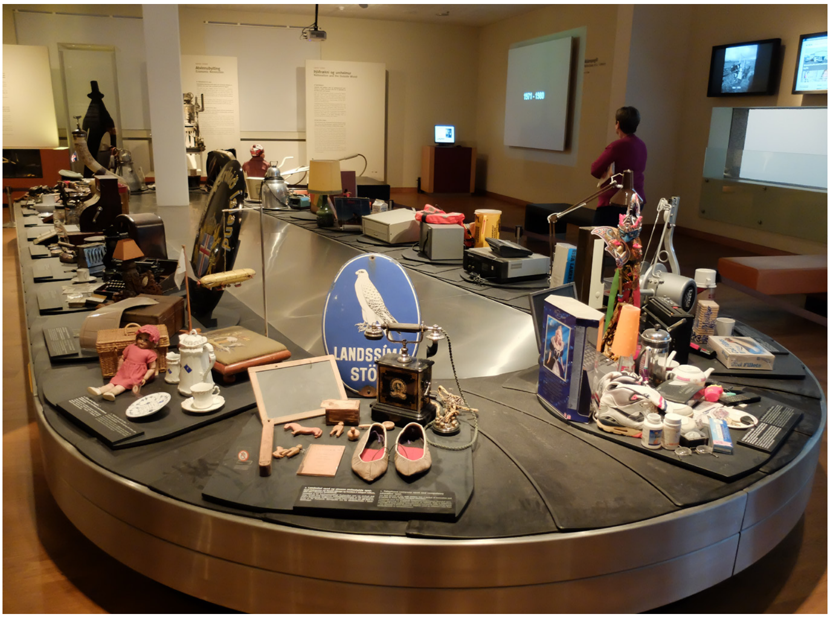
[3] Admittedly, Iceland complicates this by being able to precisely locate the beginning of settlement on an uninhabited land.

The museum's central question, "What Makes a Nation?" can be read in two directions. First, nation-making is described by the museum, at least conditionally, in the present tense. Second, the museum is the agent that manufactures the nation – as exhibition experience – for its visitors. "What Makes a Nation?" seems to be answered, and thus closed off, by the exhibition itself. The museum's exhibition design reflects late-twentieth-century museum practices focused more on themes than objects. There are four thematic paths: Arts and Crafts, Social Culture and Language, Homes and Settlement Patterns, and Work and Way of Life, framed to provide visitors alternate viewpoints and pathways for making sense of the objects and series in the galleries. As the catalogue states: "History contains other stories." There is no single master narrative; the themes allow for a number of engagements with the exhibition and its materials.

INTO THE MODERN WORLD

The national history of Iceland includes the negotiation of particular kinds of compromised sovereignties over time, from its status as a Norwegian colony, to a Danish colony under colonial rule and trade control, to what one might call a domestic dependent nation under Danish political rule but exercising domestic political control, to occupation by British and



Luggage Carousel

then US military forces, to a fully independent republic. Iceland's national identity has long been a negotiated one, and one that preceded its full political sovereignty. Icelandic national identity is formed in a crucible of competing factors and influences that don't all find their origin within 'the nation.' *Into the Modern World* shows this well, and perhaps best, in the complicated central exhibition component, the airport luggage carousel, a commanding gallery element that illustrates both movement and stasis, transnational movement and national transformation.

The gallery offers a point of entry into a narrative of modernity as an extended and ongoing national practice. As translator and translation, the gallery both focuses on modernity and exemplifies it. The contemporary is a difficult terrain for national museums as the present is always becoming the past; the realm of the most recent is often missing. As the twentieth century is a key historical period for Icelandic nation-building, including a fuller entry into the global marketplace, the final gallery in the museum's permanent exhibition became my primary focus. It establishes an open-ended set of assertions about nation-making. The traditional, authoritarian voice of an earlier museum here, if not fully multi-vocal, is at least self-aware enough to frame its exhibitions around themes as well as objects.

The museum's overall exhibition design and strategy is clearly influenced by some of the main tenets of new museology, especially a recognition of the social and political roles of representation, a reconsideration or active questioning of a single institutional authoritative voice, a recognition of multiple perspectives and contexts for making sense of museum objects and stories, and an emphasis on the practice of interpretation as a key attribute for both visitors and museum professionals (see Clifford 1997; Handler and Gable 1997; Gable 2006; Marstine 2006; Lonetree 2012, for example). *Into the Modern World* provides a multi-layered set of possible engagements with stories and objects as important for how the twentieth century was critical for the 'making' of the modern Icelandic nation. While the luggage carousel is rich with objects, this gallery also illustrates an exhibitionary focus that shifts from objects to ideas. Further, the gallery uses a mix of heroic and more vernacular objects, as can be seen in the difference between wall texts and the vignettes on the luggage carousel.

The arc of exhibition design and execution means that the museum's present has always receded before its representation is mounted in the gallery. The last twenty years have witnessed enormous challenges and transformations in Iceland, the 2008 banking crisis and the recent explosion in tourism not the least of them. With a cut-off date of 2000, *Into the Modern*

World cannot fully address these issues. The present is a moving target, but the design of this gallery and its use of objects and text powerfully tell the story of Iceland's experiences of modernity and nation making.

Walking through museum spaces often involves a surrender to objects, to their (somewhat) arrested exhibitionary lives. The concept of 'arrest' is complicated here as the main object – the carousel – gestures toward mobility itself and how it figures as a component of national and transnational movement. The carousel's objects are arranged in twenty-five vignettes spanning the century. They present entangled "paths through modernity [where] (no one escapes the market, technology, or the nation-state)" (Clifford 1997, 214). Surrounding the carousel are a series of heroic objects, stand-alone elements with dedicated wall panel texts. The relationship in the gallery between the heroic and the more thickly quotidian establishes a tension between objects as sites for contemplation and sites for distraction, an oscillation between a range of everyday things made the objects of different attentions.

The serial vignettes contaminate one another, blurring the boundaries between their individual arrangement and the arrangements of those that precede and follow. They jostle between illustrating specific moments: the establishment of the telephone company, for example, or compulsory education; decades ("Daily Life in the 1960s") or broader themes like 'Commerce and Industry' or 'Safety.' The gallery stresses the horizontalness of national identity-making, finding it in the telephone and radio networks as well as the declaration of the republic. Admittedly, the twentieth century is a long and complicated time span to cover in a relatively modest gallery. The flow of the gallery is shaped for visitor traffic, and the vignettes present both 'voiced' and 'unvoiced' objects as exhibition elements (not every object on display is referenced in the corresponding vignette's text panel).

The circular shape of the carousel offers different ways to navigate through the exhibition, assisted by a numbered sequence of vignettes. The hero objects on the surrounding wall panels help organize and identify larger historical moments to connect them clearly to their role in 'making' the Icelandic nation. A fire hydrant indicates the advent of municipal water systems, for example; a trawlwire cutter indicates the Cod Wars. Here, the text panels reflect a more extensive and nuanced engagement with the object(s) on display. The explanatory text for the trawlwire cutter, for example, connects the object to larger narratives of struggle for economic and political independence following the declaration of the republic, and to the practices of international militarized and economic conflicts. In their singularity the gallery's heroic objects gesture toward an imagined whole (out of what context was this hydrant taken) while they confirm their own authority to 'speak' for the general (once there were many hydrants like this).

Rather than moving through a set of periods traditional for the conceptualization of Icelandic history: "the 'Golden Age' of the old Commonwealth, the deprivation period of foreign rule, and the restoration period of the rising Republic" (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2008, 224), the museum organizes its narrative by a more arbitrary exercise of chronology. *Into the Modern World* represents 1900–2000, but the bridges between the nineteenth and the twentieth century do not connect discrete categories as much as they provide liminal transition spaces. For example, although the 'key element' for the gallery[4] ('The Blue and White' flag connected to increasing demands for Icelandic independence at the turn of the century) is indicated by its black wall and white text, it is the reverse of this wall that provides the establishing text for *Into the Modern World*.[5]

From 'The Blue and White,' the visitor navigates a pathway between the flag and elements from a nineteenth-century photo studio, complete with painted backdrop, developing-chemistry bottles, and examples of studio portraits. Once on this path, the luggage carousel becomes fully visible and may serve to pull the visitor into its sequence of vignettes, indicating the entangled practices and intersections of commodities and identity-making.

Luggage Carousel

The carousel is both a compelling strategy and a difficult one. While there is provenance provided for some of the objects, and quite a number of them are fairly specific, there are also a number that surface without a clear, associative history. Like commodities, they represent one among many, often story-less, providing 'context clusters' without clear grounding. It's an interesting terrain. The presentation of events within memory for many of the visitors, a bricolage of touchpoints, nostalgias, and histories that provide connective tissue without clear, developed narratives. The increasing density of the object arrays, especially as the visitor moves through time from the beginning of the century to the end, offers stories that are simultaneously open-ended and somewhat bare.

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[4] One exhibition strategy used throughout the museum is to connect shifts in galleries and time periods through the presentation of 'key elements.' These are also signified by a change in wall panel and panel text colors.

[5] By this time in the visitor's experience, the signal of the establishing text may already be well established and clear.

Airports are sites for mobility, for arrivals and departures, for the circulation of bodies and goods, and for the intersection of people, places, and things. International airports are especially interstitial places where the body moves between different circulations of control. The traveler is in a place reckoned through the interaction and entanglement of national and international (or global) selves. Airport baggage carousels offer partial glimpses of traveling others; the baggage itself appears as closed collections of different needs and desires, different organized elements of individual lives arranged for transit. It is a site for an intense traffic in things, made plain and latent, quotidian and rarified. In the museum, the carousel is repurposed to indicate the increasing porousness of the Icelandic state as a site for the exchange of global and national commodities and cultural practices, especially across the latter half of the twentieth century.

The process of political, material, and symbolic self-representation is exercised through exhibition galleries and museum elements, through the harnessing of representational technologies in the formation of the nation and the national citizen (including the representational technologies of the museum itself), calling to mind Benjamin's *Angel of History*, back turned to the future while the present-becoming-past "keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" at his feet (1969, 257). The carousel works as a closed loop; the past leads to the present and then to the past again, endlessly. As one moves along this time sequence, the sheer object density and materiality of the vignettes thicken, congeal, and contain even more objects than can be interpreted by their panel texts. In the first vignette, there is only one object that is not explained or mentioned in the panel text; by the twenty-fifth, there are more objects not mentioned in the panel text than those that are. The popular cultural circulation of commodity objects is almost overwhelming by the end of the century, and the carousel is mimetic of this growing circulation density. Those things that can be pointed to as particularly or specifically Icelandic also change as Iceland's transnational and global trade increases; this trade in transnational goods and cultural influences is emblematic of modernity. It is the role of the museum to take these things, this "pile of debris" and render it as a "chain of events" (Benjamin 1969, 257). Or, in Preziosi's terms, "a teleology – a story … with a direction and purpose. In the modern museum time is arrowed" (Preziosi 2012, 86). The sequencing of the objects on the luggage carousel 'arrow' time, directing the progression of our reading. Further, this history is "represented by objects staged to be read as if they were relics or effects of that abstract identity" (Preziosi 2012, 88).

PROTOTYPICAL SELFIES: IMAGE-MAKING AND THE COMMODITY CLASSES

In a museum that sets out to illustrate the processes of nation-making, the Photomaton, one of the heroic objects in the gallery, is particularly marvelous. I had become interested in the photo booth as an element of *Into the Modern World* and found myself returning to it often during my repeated visits to the museum. The booth‘s accompanying panel text seats the object into one of the galleries subthemes, Welfare and Consumer Society. The text first establishes the poverty endemic in Iceland in the nineteenth century, highlighting changes in housing organization (how many family members and generations might live under a single roof) and production (from the home as domestic, productive unit to the advent of industrial-capitalist production and the growth of consumerism). The Photomaton surfaces further down the text, giving a place of manufacture and its use in Iceland.[6] The Photomaton contributes to consumer society as a machine that generates commodity objects.

Photography is a modern technology. The hallmarks of modernity include rationalization, the celebration of progress, the rise of industrialization and urbanization, a focus on individualism, the rejection of tradition, the establishment of the nation-state and, to follow Foucault, the advent of increasing surveillance and surveillance technologies. The technology of image-making provides a powerful enactment of many of these aims. As Suhail Malik suggests, “the pivotal moment in the history of modern representation … is without doubt the invention and mass popularisation of photography” (1997, 55). An increasing access to photography, in studios and through technologies like the Photomaton, affirms the gallery’s main story that the twentieth century brought profound political and cultural changes to Iceland, and one of the larger measures of this change is an increasing interest in, and ability to access, popular cultural forms such as photography.

Photographs increasingly replaced other forms of representation at the end of the nineteenth century, especially those of individuals and family groups. The ‘mechanical recording’ properties of photo technologies also support claims to objective record; photographs record things as they ‘really are,’ outside the realm of interpretation. This is a powerful discourse for photography, especially in the beginning of the twentieth century. There

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[6] 1896: First automatic photo machine with a negative and positive process invented in Germany. 1925: Russian immigrant Anatol Josepho built the first curtain-enclosed photo booth in New York City. Ólafur Magnússon installs the Photomaton in 1930.

Samfélag velferðar og neyslu
Welfare and Consumer Society

The Photomaton

was a concurrent debate about photography itself: Was it an art form or a purely mechanical recording device? Some of the studio portraits reveal this consideration, as settings often include props and classical backdrops, similar to settings for a formal painted portrait. But the Photomaton is not only about an exercise of photo technology in the creation of modern commodities. It also offers one origin point to consider vernacular selfie photographic practice. Simply, the photo booth offers the individual consumer the opportunity to take photo portraits of themselves. The affordability of the selfie allows for the booth to be understood as a self-directed, performative mini-theatre. While the camera might indicate the creation of a neutral record, the booth drives home that the photo subject is formed at the intersection of different desires and imaginings: sincerity, sarcasm, irony, glee, seduction, paired couples, squirming children with staid parents, or official documents of the state, for example. And, at six images a sitting, the performed self can vary across the time of the recorded series.

The figure below shows variations on some popular cultural themes, including glamour, spontaneity, and the bonds of family. As a commodity, the product of the photo booth enters into a complicated stream of goods. While it helps to supply the images that extend both consumerism and participation in the bourgeois practice of displaying family photos, it also subverts some of these expectations and understandings.

As a site for the individual to record the self, the photo booth introduces

Images from the Photomaton

consumers to the wink and the nod of both being 'in on' the performance of self for others and the affirmation of the positioned class ability to participate in the circulation of such objects; self-image is both a commodity and a means of conspicuous consumption. The commodity stream of self-imaging established with 19th century photo studios is expanded with the advent of photo booths, a technology that builds on a practice that was increasingly normalized – the possession of self-images – to extend it outward in almost all directions. What the photo booth may lack in print size and total image fidelity, it more than makes up for in affordability and mobility. Crossing from studio to booth further confirms that self-representation and individual identities are increasingly entangled with modernity and commodity streams.

The national self is assembled through its access to, and deployment of, such commodified components of self-representation. Indeed, the growth of the European nation-state is firmly tied to the rise of capitalism and its commodities and marketplaces (Hall 1999). This is the message throughout the gallery. National identities and the self-representation of the nation are confirmed through a traffic in brands and branding strategies. From the national flag to passports and banking systems, Icelandic national identity coalesces around its verification through unique representation. This is a key function of the modern nation-state. The affirmation of national category and the establishment of discrete geopolitical boundaries further confirms this identity building as a component of an increasingly rationalized politics. But, the affirmation of nation is also rooted in its ability to participate in global flows of popular culture and commodity. The national citizen is a discerning citizen that makes rational choices as an element and extension of an imagined, national polity.

The growth of both photo studios and the availability of self-service image-making supports the 'consumer society' and extends a main element of the gallery, the notion that national identification becomes even more closely tied to the ability to participate in international and global marketplaces, and that such marketplaces are fundamentally and increasingly tied to popular cultural practices and commodities. These practices and commodities exceed the boundaries of the nation-state, with a nod toward transnational marketplaces and mobility, at the same moment as they affirm the nation-state as a consuming and consumable entity. Iceland's participation in the global market of commodities and ideas further confirms its 'making' as a nation among nations.

The photo booth and the photo studio provide a transitional practice and technology connecting the nineteenth century to the twentieth. The subtitle for the Photography panel is 'Self-Image–Image' and establishes that Icelanders adopted photography at an early stage in its development. While the panel text connects photographic technology with self-image, it also connects this to both 'growing individualism' and the circulation of appearance(s). While photo technology and practice extended the vernacular circulation of photographs, they also participated in the growing connection of individual photographic representation to the bureaucratic function of the state. Photo booths, in particular, helped supply the stream of photographs necessary for the state identification apparatus: passports, official licenses, and identity cards, for example, that were mandated with US occupation in 1941.[7] It helped to build the common-sense assertion of connecting mechanized visual records of the self to other archives of information important in rationalizing the growing functions, responsibilities, and surveillance capacities of the nation-state. Images of the self contributed to an ongoing shadow archive (Sekula 1986) of registered images of selves and extended a growing, common-sense notion that photographs faithfully represent the self; they are one of the single most important ways to continue the individual and bureaucratic registration of citizens so important to rationalized, national organization. Here as well, we can witness the ideologies of representation tied to ideological exercises of the nation-state, carried out through transnational technologies, connected to specifically proscribed or enabled mobilities. Finally, the photo booth contributes to a traffic in images and a growing sense, even insistence, that the represented self IS the self, rendered through a fully transparent technology (unlike the painted portrait, for example). Much like museums, the photograph gets tangled up in concepts of evidence and evocation; oscillating between the two territories of meaning, they are artifacts that confirm what they set out to record.

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[7] Following the US occupation, everyone age 12 and older had to have an id card with a picture – personal correspondence with Inga L. Baldvinsdóttir, Director of the Photographic Archives, National Museum of Iceland.

Contemporary selfie practice, a confirmation of self, often in places recognizable or otherwise in popular circulation, locates the subject in discourses of travel and verifications of experience, establishing a kind of 'personal brand' through circulation. The selfies of the photo booth, however, render place as an empty backdrop. The assertion of self in such a place is dependent on the self-representing subject (a significant change from the studio portraits that represent the self as other, to the photographer, and as often nested within backdrops and props). The final selfie 'object' is also significant: six different images without negatives, printed directly onto paper, completely unique as artifacts.

The panel text near the photo studio exhibit asserts: "The photograph became one of the mediums for nationalism." This was exercised at the level of registry and self-representation; but, the imaging technology also allowed for a growing archive and circulation of images of Iceland's natural beauty and distinctive landscape. Photography contributed to establishing a transnational circulation of images of Icelandic **place** as landscape. The assertion of place, as distinct, as romanticized, as evocative, also affirms national and homeland 'belonging.' Thus, photographs complicate conversations of patrimony, especially as an element of colonial and post-colonial identity configurations. Landscape and people, connected through technology, confirm and represent particular claims to 'Icelandicness' and enter these claims, these visual records, in a much larger arena of national branding and global circulation.[8]

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[8] There's a moment in the history of photo-technology, the shift from the unique images of the Daguerrotype to the infinitely reproducible images heralded by the invention of the Talbot-type paper negative process by Henry Fox Talbot (and the eventual move to glass negative plates). This connects to Walter Benjamin's concerns about the loss of the aura of the original object and a shift in the circulation/meaning of objects. Coupled to all of this is the understanding of the photograph as a trace, as evidence (Sontag). The record-keeping concerns of the state are coupled with keeping traces of its citizens.

IN CONCLUSION

'The nation' is not only a focus for a master museum narrative. It also functions as a particular kind of branding experience, one that intersects with projected tourist desires, expected outcomes, and image circulations. 'The present' is a difficult terrain for national museums, especially in the face of growing tourism. Iceland has a wealth of excellent and often idiosyncratic exhibitionary spaces that jostle for expanding international tourist audiences. Telling 'the story of the nation' in national museums reflects branding and anticipated visitor desire. To draw from Simon Knell:

> when we consider museums as providing material settings for the performance of the nation we need to understand that this performance, and the material setting which permits it, have a direct relationship to the world outside; indeed, that we need to understand that the processes of musealisation involved in the performances in both settings are essentially the same – but also connected. (Knell 2008, 26)

Museum boundaries are porous, and the museum validates both its internal narratives of place and the exterior "places" that surround it, "legitimiz[ing] what is outside the museum – its contemporary social contexts" (Preziosi 2012, 85). The exhibitions in the National Museum of Iceland both prepare and shape the non-exhibition experience for an increasingly mobile and transnational audience; the museum mutually affirms the relationship between inside and outside the representational structure as counter-indicative and counter-supporting. The formation of 'national' trajectories or coherences as elements of the museum's narratives also confirms 'the nation' outside of the museum as coherent and distinct for national and international visitors and as a response to (and framing of) increasing tourist and visitor circulations. These counter-supportive processes are worthy of further careful consideration and study.

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Mobilizing the Arctic
Polar Bears and Puffins in Transnational Interplay

ABSTRACT

The relationship between mobile humans and animals in the transnational 'north' is one steeped in long cultural history, but it is also uniquely connected to contemporary issues. In the light of folklore, imaginaries and recent developments, this chapter investigates the roles and symbolic meanings of puffins and polar bears within the transcultural context of narrative and material culture in Iceland's past and present. It investigates how these animals travel beyond the edges of their habitat and into the midst of urban landscapes in diverse forms and representations. Grounded in a thorough analysis of folk narrative and everyday life, it takes a specific look at how these somewhat anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images are propagated and countered in art, museums, and tourism in modern Iceland. The chapter discusses how they produce a sense of Arcticness or Borealism. Furthermore, it throws light on their significance in relation to emerging ecological developments that lie at the heart of human and non-human mobility today.[1]

Key words: materiality, folklore, transnational arctic, posthuman mobility, art, tourism

INTRODUCTION

Can one fit the Arctic into a suitcase? The simple answer would be no. However, tourists traveling to Iceland sometimes try the impossible when buying Arctic souvenirs that can easily be packed into their suitcase. In downtown Reykjavík, the shelves of every tourist shop are now flooded with Arctic objects and symbols of various sorts, including stuffed puffins and polar bears. Following Lund et al. (2018), we regard souvenirs as particularly interesting when investigating how an image of the Arctic is created – the way landscape is constantly narrated through objects which, as della Dora points out, often "operate as active media for the circulation of space" (2009, 334). On a similar note, Hetherington (1997) also directed attention to the importance of the *materiality* of place in terms of *mobility*, proposing that places are not just attached to space, but are also diasporic in the sense that they travel with us and are articulated through mobile objects. In this relation, we focus in particular on puffins and polar bears as key objects in relation to visual imaginaries, tourism and the materialization of Iceland within the context of contemporary Arctic discourses.

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[1] Part of the underlying research behind this chapter is conducted within the project *Visitations: Polar Bears Out of Place*, and funded by the Icelandic Research Fund.

As a tourist destination, the Arctic has become particularly valuable for various stakeholders, such as governments, commercial players, and local communities (e.g. Bailes et al. 2013; Lund et al. 2018). The growing interest in the Arctic as a tourism destination is based on a long fascination with the High North, interwoven in narratives of exploration and adventure (Oslund 2011). In this context, Iceland falls within the trope of "the northern voyage" in Western imagination, serving as an area "relatively unaffected by anthropogenic pressures" (Pálsson 2013, 314, 173).

Our analysis gives insight into how visual representations, tourism, and material culture, such as souvenirs, take part in situating Iceland within contemporary Arctic discourses, and how these elements can be seen as important players within current local/global dynamics and the mobility of Iceland. In line with post-human approaches (e.g. Barad 2003; Braidotti 2013), we highlight the role of non-humans and animals in our examination. In particular, we focus on how (stuffed) puffins and polar bears play an active part in creating diverse cross-cultural and cross-species entanglements. In our analysis, we have also been influenced by multi-species ethnographers Van Dooren and Rose (2012), their take on penguins and flying foxes in Sidney, Australia, and their attempt to disrupt the singularity of human-centrism and dualistic notions of animals as being out of place in cities. This study sheds light on recent developments in relation to the role and symbolic meaning of puffins and polar bears within the context of contemporary art and tourism in Iceland. We investigate how these animals, through their living presence in Iceland, as well as their representation through narratives and objects of display, take part in creating a certain sense of Arcticness, Arcticality, or Borealism in the midst of the Iceland's urban landscapes. We also ask how their roles may relate to emerging ecological developments that lie at the heart of human and non-human mobility today.

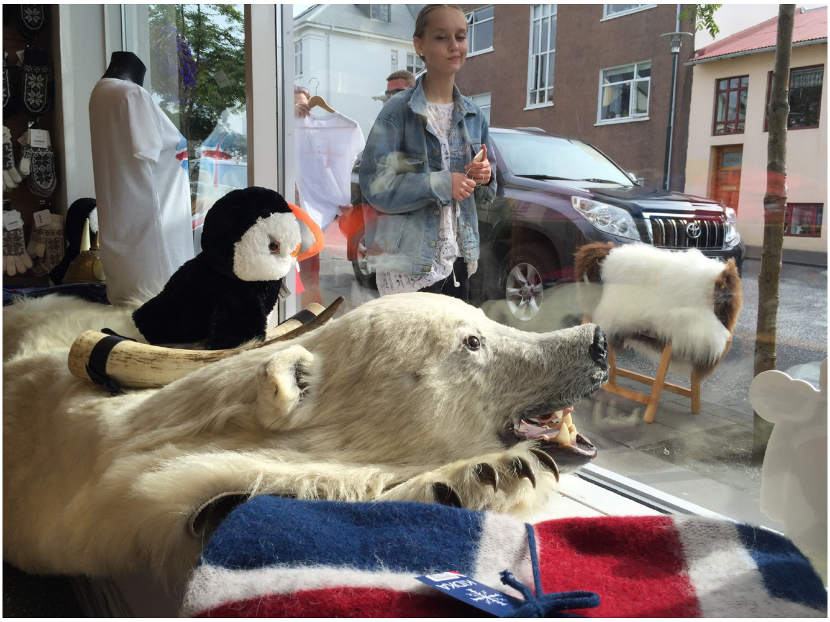


Fig. 1: Puffin and polar bear in a shop window in Reykjavík. Photo: Kristinn Schram

How to fit a polar bear into a suitcase

When scanning through Icelandic tourism destinations and stopovers, one quite often comes across themes, symbols, and images which, via repetition throughout history, have become fundamental parts of the mental map and visual archive of the North. The polar bear is certainly one of them. As a symbol of power, conservation, climate change, and Arctic cooperation, the polar bear carries various connotations in the Arctic (Ellis 2009; Engelhard 2017; Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson 2006). This includes an emerging, sub-regional folkloric image in the North Atlantic islands of Iceland and Greenland, and in the Nordic kingdoms that have ruled over them. The polar bear has particular significance in the folklore of northern peoples, particularly those who live on the edges of the bears' habitat. In various Icelandic narratives of bears' visitations and invasions on Icelandic shores – in sources ranging from medieval literature and legends to new media – the polar bear is presented as having many faces. When it enters their locality, Icelanders narrate the *bjarndýr* as benign and malicious, appeased or hunted, and as respected and feared as an outsider.

In medieval literature, polar bears are used by human characters as precious commodities. One of the best-known polar bear accounts in medieval literature is *The Tale of Auðun of the West Fjords* (Þórólfsson et al. 1943). In the Norse settlement in Greenland, Auðun, an impoverished character from the Westfjords in Iceland, invests everything he possesses in a live polar bear. Traveling with the bear to Norway, he manages to pass through the land of King Harald and give the bear to Harald's enemy King Svein as a gift. He returns to Iceland a man of means, having gained the favour of both kings. As William Ian Miller points out, in the Norse context of luck, wealth, and gift-giving, this particular animal is a hugely significant unit of value. As a white bear, it is an extravagant treasure, but also a blank cipher to be endowed with meaning by those who encounter it (Miller 2008). In the same vein, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdottir and Mark Wilson refer to the polar bear as paradoxical or "a prism with the capacity to contain and refract all manner of responses in us; fear, horror, respect, pathos, affection, humour" (2006, 98–127).

While these stories are likely rooted in oral tradition, they eventually found their way into the migratory legends of Scandinavia (designated ML 6015/AT 116), particularly in West Norway in the 19th century (Liestøl 1933). These legends are centred on the invasion of a farmstead home by supernatural beings, an incursion that is thwarted only by the arrival of a lone visitor with no name and his accompanying polar bear (or sometimes a dog, as in an Icelandic variation). Interestingly, the evil beings, often in the form of trolls, mistake the bear for a white cat and are later intimidated by the farmer who claims: "she's had three kittens, and they're all bigger and more irritable than she is herself" (Gunnell 2004, 65). It is worth noting that mistakenly identifying the bear as a domestic pet can be seen as a testament to the polar bear's rarity and exotic character in Scandinavia. This also enables the narrative function of stealth and surprise when an otherwise docile animal jumps at the unsuspecting intruders.

In Icelandic folk tales, particularly in legends, polar bears are often presented as vicious invaders that possess intelligence and a moral code that are equal, if not superior, to those of humans. Polar bear narratives, to some extent, represent how people related to nature and respected the various forces that reside within it. Here, the nature of man and animal are the same, whether expressed as nobility or cruelty. Like many other folk narratives, these legends have moral import and may bear the popular message that integrity leads to happiness (Haraldsson 2002; Þórisdóttir 2018). Many of these traits are, of course, not limited to Icelandic polar bear narratives but are shared in international legend motifs that centre on various visitors and invaders, natural or supernatural. Through their physical appearance and struggle, polar bears may also take on a more human character than many other animals.

These anthropomorphic qualities are not the only aspects of significance in Icelandic polar bear legends. Other examples stress the cruelty of the bear and the danger its presence poses. In these legends, the Icelandic population, dispersed along the countries' coastline, experiences the sudden arrival of the polar bear as an invasion. The bear, as a menacing outsider, is believed to be vicious and life-threatening, disrupting daily life and posing a risk to both humans and livestock. It is worth noting that no other wild animals represent a threat to humans in Iceland. This invasion of an external agent is, therefore, one of the key aspects of polar bear legends. In many of them, the bear invades the farmhouse itself in search of food. In some ways, the bear is more like a supernatural being than an actual animal. The unwelcome guest, a cruel beast who comes from the sea, belongs to a different world than the islanders. Stories of bears' invasions are, in many ways, comparable to those of menacing nature spirits roaming on the dusky edges of a human abode, occasionally overrunning the farmstead in the twilight of the winter solstice or the days of Yule (Schram and Jónsson 2019).

The idea that bears are actually humans under a spell appears early on in Icelandic sources. In Jón Guðmundsson's *Íslands náttúrur*, a natural history of Iceland from around 1600, one finds the folk belief that a polar bear's hibernation is actually an attempt to starve itself out of the guise of a bear (Guðmundsson n.d., 14–15). This motif can also be found in 19th century folktales, including one that claims bears give birth to human children which only become bear cubs after the she-bear touches them with her paw (Árnason 1954, 606). The objectification of the polar bear is interlinked with its personification. Its pelt was a precious treasure that could be sold at a high price and was coveted by churches and kings (Teitsson 1975, 35–44). Catching a polar bear must have been considered very good fortune. A common phrase, even in modern Icelandic, *bjarnylur*, 'a bear's warmth,' springs from a folk belief recorded in both medieval literature and mid-nineteenth century folktales. The bear's warm nature is believed to be transferable to children born on a polar bear's pelt. According to this belief, the individual in question could count on being immune from the cold, which is certainly a desirable trait in the North Atlantic climate (Hávarðasaga Ísfirðings 1943, 294; Árnason 1954, I, 605). In modern times, however, the bears that have arrived in Iceland have been taxidermized and are much sought after by museums, where they attract attention as objects of display.

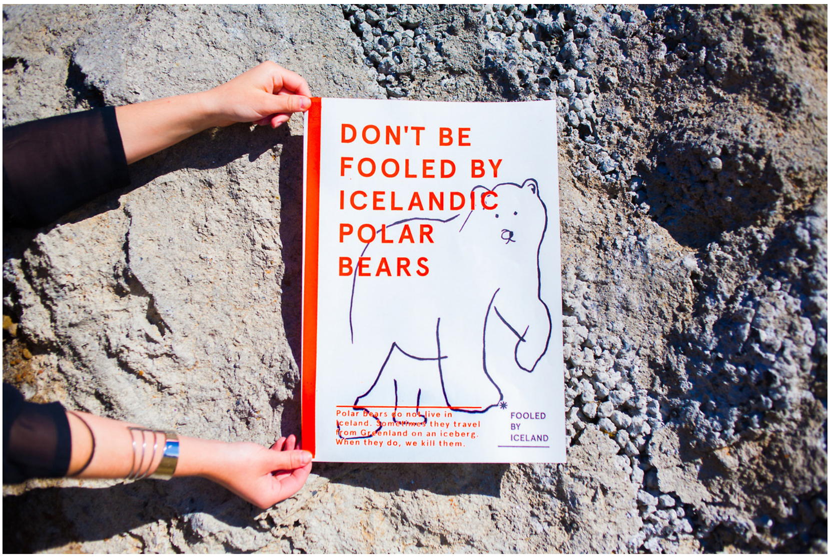
Today, the polar bears that venture onto Icelandic shores are shot on sight for the stated reasons of domestic health and safety, making them thoroughly out of place in an unsustainable environment. Nevertheless, they are presented to tourists in Iceland as an accessible and familiar animal, easily bought and taken home as a souvenir. Tourism operatives appear to be drawing on the exotic images of the North that have played a considerable part in the self-representation of Iceland in recent decades. Exotic Arctic imaginaries, Arcticality, or Borealism have many facets and have increasingly become a subject of critical socio-cultural scholarship. Only a few years after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the term Borealism was apparently first coined to describe the image of the Sámi peoples at the end of the 19th Century (Broberg 1982). It is however not until after the postmodern rediscovery of the North, at the turn of the 21st century, that the concept was used to express the complexity of cultural formations and cross-cultural exchanges in relation to the North's past and present (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013; Giles et al. 2016).

Cross-cultural exchanges can be seen as enriching and empowering marginal areas of the North but can also lead to cultural objectification and the propagation of preconceptions which are fuelled and sustained by uneven power dynamics between cultures. Recent interest in these dynamics in Iceland has a produced a wealth of publications that draws on diverse subjects, including history, imagology, anthropology and folkoristics (Ísleifsson 2010; Gremaud 2012; Lund et al. 2018; Kjartansdóttir 2019). This research places varying emphasis on external or internal images, or the self-exotification that is often based on the tension between the two. The objectified polar bear could be taken as a telling example. The appetite for the exotic bear could be said to have coloured the geographic imaginary of the Arctic and the North Atlantic from the middle ages to contemporary times. As stated earlier, the source of this exoticism has varied throughout the cultural history of the bear, but one element of it is derived from its apparent whiteness.

If, when, and how the bear's apparent whiteness applies to early modern racialisation is open to question. While this warrants reception studies among both hosts and tourists, which are not within the scope of this article, a faint connection between the representation of the white bear's colour, or lack thereof, to the whiteness of human skin could however be drawn from external historical accounts. Counter to colonial representations, which elevate whiteness, late medieval 'geographies' present negative zoomorphic images of the whiteness of people in the north. Among them are numerous exaggerations of Icelanders' size and whiteness, as if they, like the Arctic fauna, have 'adapted' to the whiteness of ice and snow (Haupt 1844, 495; Franck 1534; *Rudimentum novitiorum* 1475, in Ísleifsson 2015, 73). While whiteness, in this late medieval context, can be seen as a tool of marginalisation, one which in some cases persists in contemporary times, the participation of Icelanders in racialisation and the colonial project cannot be overlooked (Loftsdóttir 2019; Bertram 2018). Even the image of the polar bear is tainted with unequal power dynamics, having been utilized as a royal and colonial symbol of Danish rule, as evidenced by its depiction in official crests and seats of power in the kingdom.

Yet while far-right movements have appropriated Viking-age tropes and medieval literature for their racist propaganda, and fringe elements make use of Borealistic imagery, identifying with such symbols of Arcticality would not have fitted easily with the racial typologies adhered to in early Icelandic nationalism. On this geographical 'fringe' of Europe, nationalists were more likely to distance themselves from their Inuit neighbours to the west, in that way stressing their 'Europeanness' and sophisticated, deep-rooted literary culture (see e.g. Hálfdánarson 2001). In turn, many expressed abhorrence for the allegedly primitive nature-folk they saw on the other side of the culture-nature dichotomy (Jóhannsson 2003). Today, by contrast, representations of cultures in the North Atlantic have once again become increasingly infused with images of "primitive or 'natural' peoples" as opposed to "civilized nations." This frequently conjures up images of the survival of an indigenous Icelandic nation in a harsh and barren land, which also preserved an ancient culture, language and literature (Schram 2009).

The Borealizing or Arctification of the polar bear in the Icelandic context is also associated with the way Icelanders negotiate and adapt to emerging regional developments through Arctic or West Nordic identification as a response to Iceland's ambiguous Arctic status and the dynamics of globalised market forces, cultural politics and geopolitics. Narratives and images of polar bears can also be seen as part of an international narrative tradition which sometimes runs counter to official discourse. Counternarratives, as defined by Amy Shuman, build on the possibility of critique of the master narrative, and thus, to some extent, on empathy, providing whatever redemptive, emancipatory, or liberatory possibilites the narrative holds (Shuman 2005, 19). A case in point is directed at, among other things, representations of polar bears. This curious venture, called *Fooled by Iceland*, a thinly veiled spoof of the 'Inspired by Iceland' campaign aimed at tourists who are already in Iceland, debunks common myths and deconstructs associated images of authentic Arctic Iceland. The ‘campaign,’ which began as a student project in the Icelandic University of Art, consisted of a series of posters distributed around Reykjavík, which were aimed at deactivating tourist traps and correcting falsehoods. One of the posters depicts a polar bear and states: “polar bears do not live in Iceland. Sometimes they travel from Greenland on an iceberg. When they do, we kill them” (Fooled by Iceland n.d.).


DON'T BE
FOOLED BY
ICELANDIC
POLAR
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Polar bears do not live in
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When they do, we kill them.
FOOLED
BY
ICELAND

Fig. 2: Fooled by Iceland poster.

The popularity of the polar bear in Icelandic representation can be connected to its growing role in the discourse of climate change and fragile environments under threat. The polar bear’s image connotes the conditions of regional groups in the Arctic, as well as the challenges shared around the globe, often on a local scale (Bjorst 2011). In the Icelandic context, this narrative and material *play on display*, positioning Iceland directly within these Arctic discourses and, like Audun of the Westfjords, project open-ended values on the white slate of the exotic polar bear.

Objects of Arctic display

Through the circulation of material objects and their contextualization, the image of the exotic North has been continuously recreated. As noted by

Byrne (2013), artefacts collected by northern travellers were both souvenirs of their travels, evidence of their experiences, and material expressions of metropolitan perceptions of Northern cultures. According to Byrne, these objects served both as curious novelties and sources of information. After their physical dislocation from their point of origin, the artefacts retained a situatedness or specific geographic identity. Davidsson (2005) also describes how the North has always been a place of marvels, wonders, and treasures. For decades, 'the unicorn horn' was the greatest northern marvel of all. According to Davidson, the North was, in fact, mainly a series of trade routes, and among the most valuable treasures were amber, ivory, women, and animal furs. A great many items of this sort became part of royal collections of exotic objects, the so-called cabinets of curiosity, in Europe.

Ole Worm's cabinet and his part in creating and sustaining a certain image of the North as a space of natural wonders and oddity is a particular example of this. In Ole Worm's (1588–1654) Cabinet of Curiosity, several examples of taxidermied animals from the North were, for instance, categorized in a system designed to provide knowledge about nature in this area and provoke wonder (Hafstein 2003; Kjartansdóttir 2019). Through these museum items, a certain image of the North was presented, displayed, and circulated. Among the taxidermied animals in his cabinet were a small stuffed polar bear, a great auk and an Atlantic puffin. In contemporary times, these endangered or extinct species, in diverse forms, are also frequently linked with Iceland, particularly within the context of arctic tourism.

One example of this is the way puffins and polar bears are contextualized in a recently opened exhibition: *The Natural Wonders of Iceland* in Perlan, Reykjavík, where a huge 'bird cliff' with clay puffin models is currently on display, along with a large taxidermied polar bear that was killed in Iceland in 2008. The polar bear is placed in a large glass cage beside the entrance of a manmade ice cave, which is also part of the exhibition. As seen on the photograph below (fig. 3) the polar bear looks quite spectacular – although a bit out of place – in this context. Together with other wildlife items and images at the exhibition, these museum objects take part in creating a sense of the Arctic in the Reykjavík city centre. These and other material and visual representations mentioned in the article coincide with the Icelandic government's increased emphasis on positioning Iceland as an Arctic state (Bailes et al. 2014).

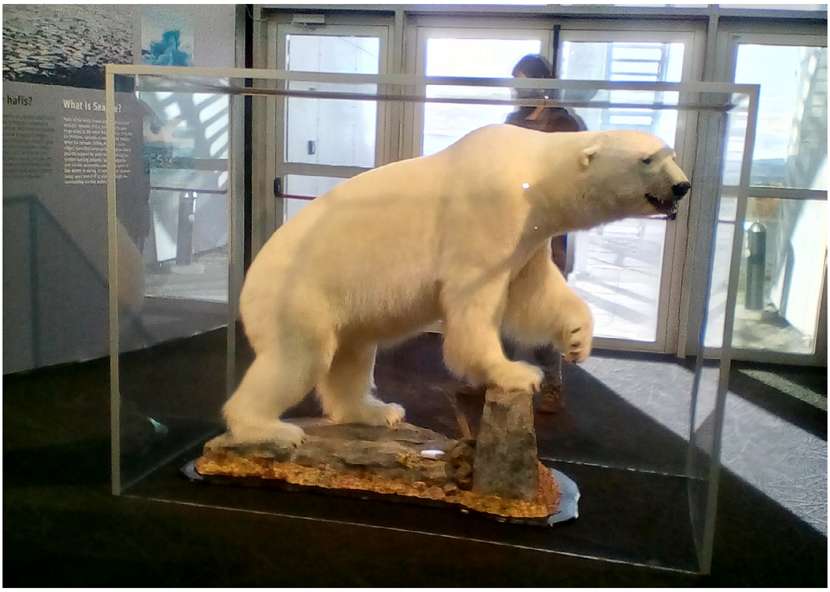

Fig. 3. A mounted polar bear in the exhibition "The Natural Wonders of Iceland". Photo: Katla Kjartansdóttir

It is also worth noting how these items actively engage with other currently circulating performances and visual narrations of Iceland that take part in situating the country within Arctic imaginaries and discourses. In this relation, we can, for instance, mention the recent Icelandic Arctic noir TV series *Trapped* and films like *Rams* and *Of Horses and Men* (Loftsdóttir et al. 2017).

Puffins through the cracks

The currently most popular artefact among tourists is apparently the Atlantic puffin (Lat. Fratercula Arctica), which comes in all shapes and sizes. The puffin is a relative newcomer as a representational image of Iceland. The 'archdeacon' (Icel. prófastur), as it was called due to its clerical appearance, features only to a limited extent in Icelandic folklore, despite being an important food source throughout the centuries. On arrival at the international airport in Keflavík, tourists are confronted with a giant puffin figure which, apparently crashing down through the ceiling, has a sign attached to it saying: "Hi, I'm Palli the puffin – you can find me and more tax- and duty-free items upstairs on your way home," thus serving as an important reminder to those tourists who might possibly have forgot to buy a puffin when souvenir shopping.

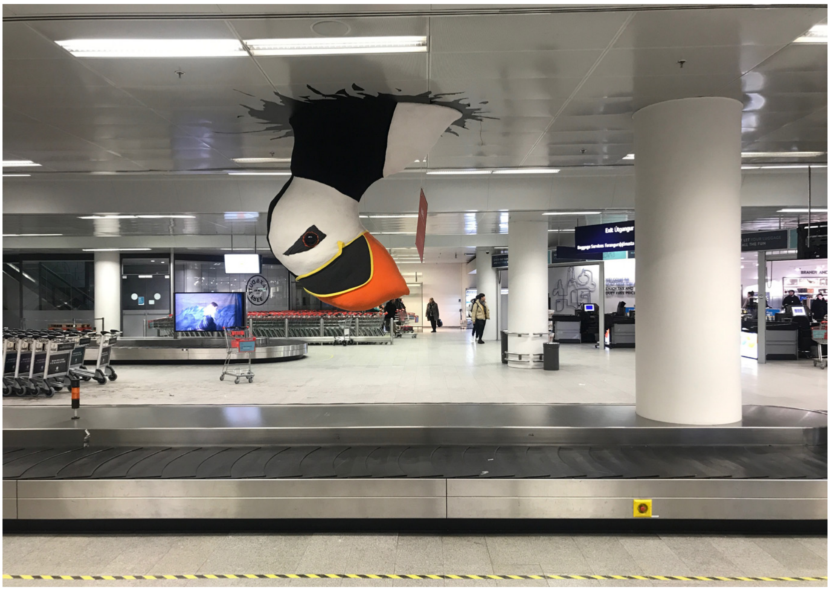

Fig. 4: Keflavík Airport. Photo: Dagur Kári Pétursson

For contemporary tourists visiting Iceland, that is almost impossible. The tourist shops in Iceland have, as mentioned above, literally been filled with stuffed puffins and diverse puffin items, including mugs, keyrings, miniatures, pyjamas, postcards, magnets, and even puffin origami. This small 'clown of the air' has, it seems, become a very active player in recent socio-economic developments and could be described as a key figure, along with the polar bear, in situating Iceland within emerging global Arctic narratives and visual imaginaries. Below, we take a closer look at this local/global interplay and contextualization of Iceland within the visual narration, materialization, and imaginings of the North, where wild as well as stuffed animals play their parts in creating an Arctic image of Iceland with an emphasis on access to exotic and untouched landscapes. An important part of this image is nature as dangerous and dynamic, and the result is a seemingly pristine construct, exempt from the Anthropocene effect, serving as a dreamscape for the growing global Arctic appetite (Lund et al. 2018).

In contemporary times, museum objects continue to remind viewers, tourists and locals alike of the fragility of the Arctic ecosystem as well as taking part in the ongoing image-making of Iceland – and the North – as a space of wonders and rare oddities. In this regard, one can mention Tóti the Puffin, who recently became a much-adored local hero in the Westman Islands. The bird was supposedly rescued and kept alive for a whopping seven years by the museum staff in the Sæheimar aquarium in the Westman Islands until he sadly passed away in 2018. The bird was then taxidermied, and as a museum object he continues to be adored and admired at the museum (Ragnarsdóttir n.d.). Through this contextualization, the puffin, a wild animal, was transformed into a respectable and quite impressive member of human society, or at least a very welcome, temporary guest. Within this context, the bird became an insider and participant in human culture and simultaneously a representative of pure Icelandic nature. Tóti was, for instance, prominent on the aquarium's Facebook page, where he gave the Vestmannaeyjar islands' handball team good advice prior to an important game and even had his own wardrobe of several football t-shirts ("Famous Puffin Bids Farewell" 2018).

As both an adorable artefact in a museum and a living museal object, the bird has been turned into a focus of tourist interest, and as such, it takes an active part in the commoditization of exotic Iceland. In this respect, one is reminded of Bryman's (2004) concept of 'Disneyization,' a term he used to describe the impact of Disney theme-park principles on a range of organizations and institutional settings. But in the narrative produced by the Sæheimar aquarium, Mickey Mouse is nowhere to be seen; Tóti the Puffin is undoubtedly the star. In addition to the puffin material exhibited in museums and on offer in souvenir shops, tourists are also invited to take puffin tours, for instance to the Westman Islands, the home of the biggest puffin breeding colony in the world.

Among tourists visiting Iceland it has also been quite popular to buy stuffed puffins as a souvenir. According to a media report published in 2015, Icelandic taxidermist Sveinbjörn Sigurðsson makes a few hundred mounted puffins each summer, which he sells to souvenir shops. The same report states that the puffin, as a taxidermy, is by far the most popular bird among the tourists (Pálsdóttir 2015). The attraction of the puffin as a hunting trophy was also discussed in the British newspaper *The Independent*, which wrote that British hunters were willing to pay up to 3000 pounds for a trip to Iceland to hunt puffins (Wyatt 2019). According to information available on the webpage of the Environment Agency of Iceland, certain regulations apply to bird hunting in Iceland (The Environment Agency of Iceland n.d.). In response to recent data showing decreasing numbers of puffin, the Icelandic Ministry for the Environment has been reviewing Icelandic laws pertaining to the hunting of individual bird species. But tourists traveling in Iceland can still taste puffin in several Icelandic restaurants.

One example of how popular the bird has become in relation to Icelandic tourism was seen in a visit by the Australian TV chef Gordon Ramsey, who travelled to Iceland in the summer of 2007. A short video: "Hunting puffins on the edge of a cliff in Iceland," presents a visual narrative of his 'encounter' with the puffin, and the video emphasises the remoteness of Iceland, its wild nature and exotic food traditions, including fermented shark, whale and puffin. At the beginning of the video, Ramsay describes Iceland as located on the "edge of the Arctic Circle," and after eating a puffin salad in a restaurant, the chef heads straight to a tiny-looking airport building, apparently in the middle of nowhere. Nobody, except the Australian chef, is waiting at the airport, which underpins the marginal and exotic atmosphere. According to several historical sources, the puffin was indeed hunted, and for centuries, it was an important food source for Icelanders (Jónasson 1934). In some areas of Iceland, such as in the Westman Islands, a limited number of puffins is still hunted per year, in accordance with Icelandic hunting legislations.

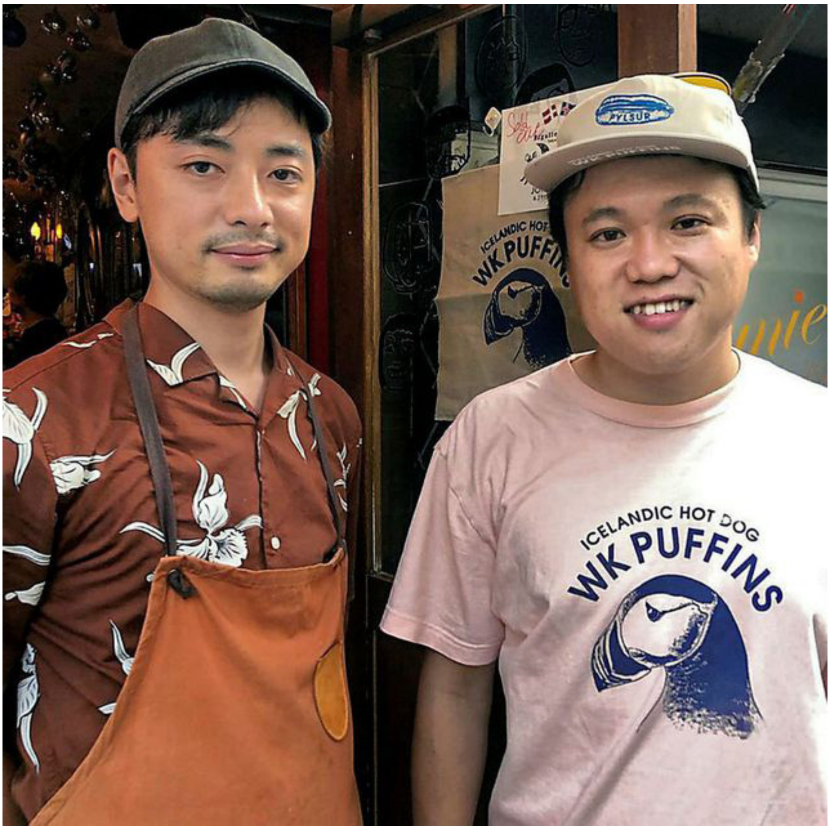

Fig. 5. Watari Takano and Koichi Hirano. Photo: Iceland Review 2019

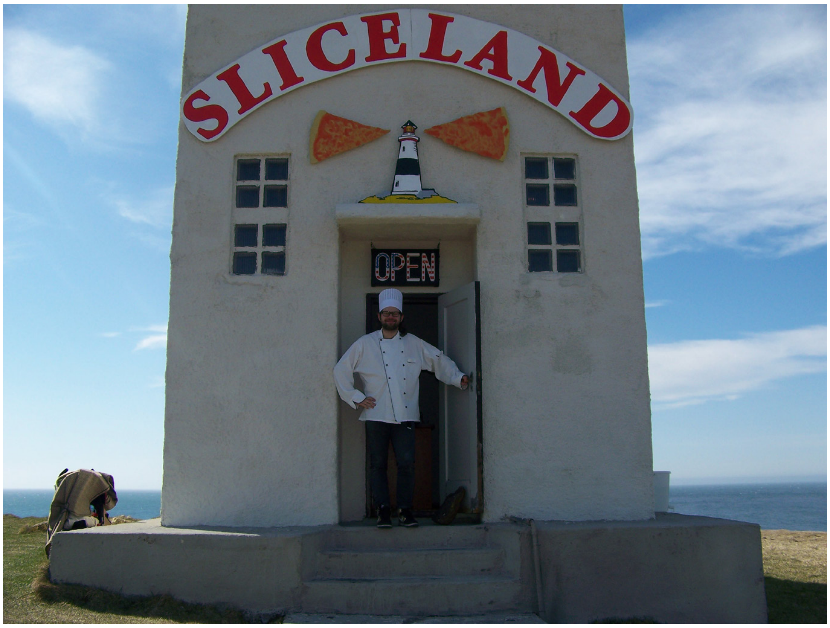

Fig. 6. Sliceland – The westernmost pizzas in Europe in Bjargtangarviti by Curver Thoroddsen. Photo: Jón Jónsson 2009

With regard to ‘exotic’ food tourism, the mobility and global circulation of the image of the puffin as food source and cultural symbol, an interesting puffin pop-up restaurant in Tokyo can also be mentioned. According to a recent interview in *Iceland Review*, two nineteen-year old Japanese tourists (fig. 4) liked Icelandic puffin so much when they tasted it while traveling in Iceland, that they decided to open a puffin hotdog stand in their hometown, Tokyo.

As young restaurant owners Watari Takano and Koichi Hirano describe in the interview: “Many people associate puffins with Iceland,” and one Icelandic customer even told them their product was just as good as the traditional Icelandic hotdog. In the interview Watari also comments on his understanding of the symbolic meaning of the bird, saying: “the bird signifies peace and happiness, and it brings along good energy” (Hafstað 2019). This example sheds light on the mobility of the bird as a cultural symbol and food source across national borders.

Another interesting case in point is a pop-up restaurant/performance by Icelandic artist Curver Thoroddsen. In his thought-provoking performance, “Sliceland– the Westernmost pizzas in Europe,” which took place in a remote lighthouse in the West Fjords of Iceland, the artist offered locals and tourists a slice of puffin pizza in the lighthouse (fig. 5). Through this cultural contextualization, the puffin becomes a central player in a continuing local/global interplay, complex cross-species interaction, and creative cross-cultural identity performances.

The Artist as a Puffin/The Puffin as an Artist

The puffin has also played a key role in several works by contemporary Icelandic visual artist Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir. In her work, *Don't Feed them after Midnight* (2006), a mixed media installation, performance, and design, Guðnadóttir deals critically with the image of the Icelandic artist as a weird, elf-like figure akin to the vulnerable puffin. As stated in the short introductory text on her website, this work is "a game of reappropriation [sic], of taking control over the creation of meaning of the symbols representing one's own identity" (Guðnadóttir 2006). The puffin is also a central figure in her work *Material Puffin* (2014) in which she plays with human/animal relations, national imagery, and gender roles.

In this work, the artist appears wearing a festive pink gown and a large puffin mask in the harbour area in Reykjavík. As can be seen on one of the stills from the work, shown below, she holds a gas pump in her hand and seems to be spraying gold and glitter into the ocean. In her multi-layered visual narration, the artist gives the masculine harbour area a feminine touch and evokes challenging questions in relation to tourism and urban development, sustainability, ecological awareness, and future visions.

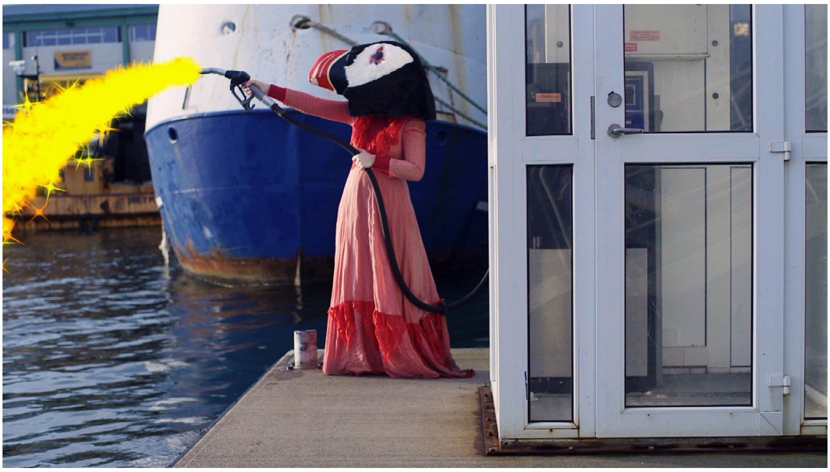

Fig. 6: Still from 'Material Puffin (2014)'. HD, 00:06:28, 16:9. Artist Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir

In yet another recent work entitled *All is Full of Love* (2019), Guðnadóttir again engages with the puffin as a mass-produced tourist souvenir and material emblem of contemporary Icelandic cultural identity. In this work, the artist critically explores questions relating to the commodification of ethnic identity (Comoroff and Comoroff 2009) that are linked to the massive growth of tourism in Iceland and the role of the artist (as a puffin) within ongoing social and cultural developments. Again, dressed in pink, she playfully positions, and literally masks herself as a puffin, with a large puffin mask on her head, inviting the viewer to participate in discussions of current socio-economic issues in the country, complex human/animal relations, and their local/global interplay.

In Guðnadóttir's works, the puffin evokes questions of how overexploitation can lead to the exhaustion or even complete extinction of natural resources. Along with the snowy owl and the European turtledove, the Atlantic puffin has recently been placed on the BirdLife International list of birds in danger of extinction (BirdLife International 2018). Although the puffin is indeed cute and cuddly, it can also be described as a non-human reminder of the fragile ecosystem of the Arctic, ecological anxieties, and the gloomy ecological prospects for our post-human/post-anthropocentric times, which include climate change, habitat-loss and/or bird extinction.

Concluding Remarks

Accessibility to a distant, exotic North plays a key role in the way polar bears and puffins occupy the shelves of the souvenir shops, placing Iceland on the map as part of the Arctic zone. Our analysis of material culture and narrative, past and present, traces how their roles have been intertwined with different identities and changing cultural contexts. Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations of polar bears and Icelanders trace back to, and express, the mental mapping (or imaginary settlement) of the West Nordic region from the late middle ages and beyond. Now in times of climate change and growing environmental awareness, polar bears and puffins are the figureheads of an increasing focus on the Arctic in visual and material representation in Icelandic tourism, museums and art. Arctic landscapes, depicted as sublime and exotic, are attractive, and Iceland offers a glimpse into the Arctic as a safe zone to visit, as a meeting point, or as a gateway destination between the wild north and the civilized south (Loftsdóttir 2015; Lund et al. 2018). Iceland has been promoted as easily accessible, but simultaneously distant and dramatic, as it offers a taste of the supposedly untamed but pure nature of the island and the Arctic. In Icelandic museums, souvenir shops, and other urban settings, the visitor can paradoxically experience a secure form of tantalizingly wild and exotic Arctic wildlife and landscape with an emphasis on comfort, convenience, and safety.

In this chapter, we have discussed how the North has long been negotiated through diverse oral, literary, and visual narrations, and what might be described as Arctic materiality, such as souvenirs and museum objects. We have highlighted their Borealization or how the Arcticality of Iceland is continuously created and circulated through these objects and narrations. In our analysis, we have approached the Arctic as a zone of liminality that is constantly in flux and on the move, geographically and as imagined space. We have thrown light on how this space has developed through the centuries and how it continues to take shape through diverse transnational interactions, global processes, flows and migration of both humans and animals. As discussed above, the North is a space filled with complex cross-cultural and cross-species entanglements where diverse encounters between humans, non-humans, and animals constitute its meaning and take part in shaping future developments.

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SIGRÚN ÓLAFSDÓTTIR

How Welcoming are Icelanders?
Attitudes toward Immigration over Time and in the European Context

ABSTRACT

Immigration has increased drastically in Iceland since 2000, largely due to more lenient regulations and job market demands. Public attitudes are important to understand the general cultural context into which migrants arrive and the possible pressures put on politicians when formulating immigration policy. The purpose of this chapter is threefold: 1) to explore the attitudes of Icelanders over time toward immigrants with a different background, 2) to ascertain whether there were group differences in support of immigration in 2016, and 3) to see how the attitudes of the public in Iceland compare to those in other European countries. The findings for Iceland show that the public holds positive attitudes toward immigrants; that attitudes have become more positive over time; and that those with a university education are more supportive, whereas those who are older or identify with the right in politics are less supportive of more immigrants coming in. In the European context, Icelanders, along with Swedes, are the most positive when it comes to welcoming more immigrants with a similar or different racial/ethnic background and immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe. This may be related to the historically low levels of unemployment in Iceland, and the fact that the immigrants who come here to work are not seen as a threat to the labour market position of Icelanders.

Keywords: Public attitudes, Immigration, Cross-national comparison

Introduction

While people have long moved across national boundaries, some have argued that the 21st century has witnessed unprecedented immigration and migration (Arango 2000). Yet, immigration scholars, such as de Haas and colleagues (2019), point out that this is not the case, and that for the last 70 years, approximately 3% of the population has been on the move. What has changed is who is migrating and where to. Specifically, Europe has become more of a destination for migrants, and the skill-level of those who migrate has increased. This development can, very broadly, be divided into two trends. Firstly, various regulations, most notably those of the European Union, have made it easier for citizens of certain countries to move across national boundaries in Europe and work legally in other countries. Secondly, political landscapes and uncertain circumstances in many countries have resulted in large movements from countries experiencing such circumstances to more stable countries (Loftsdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2019). The latter was particularly prominent, starting in the 90s, due to the war in former Yugoslavia, and after 2015, due to the Syrian wars (De Hass et al. 2019). Iceland was no exception to this development, although it was easier to strictly control who entered the country. From 1996 to 2005, 223 refuges from former Yugoslavia came to Iceland through government programs and settled in 8 different locations across the country. Since 2015, 194 refugees from Syria or Iraq have settled in 13 different communities in Iceland (Stjórnarráð Íslands nd).

This development has unsurprisingly led to the question of why people decide to migrate from one country to another. The answer has often been related to economic development and demographic shifts, and migration scholars have asked who moves away from where and how these things relate to conditions in the origin and destination countries and the position of the migrant in the two societies (de Haas et al. 2019). We might often have an image of poor persons in poor countries attempting to move to better conditions, but research has clearly shown that the largest volume of migration does not come from the poorest countries in the world, nor is it the poorest segment of the population that migrates (Czaika 2012). At the individual level, migration has been conceptualized as a mix of capabilities and aspirations, indicating that a person must have the desire to emigrate, but also the resources to do so (de Haas 2014). While the association between levels of development and migration generally takes a long-time to emerge, we do sometimes witness 'migration humps' (Martin 1993), spikes in migration resulting from trade reforms or political-economic shocks. This was observed in migration from Mexico to the United States in the first 15–20 years after the enactment of NAFTA (Mahendra 2014) and following the liberalization of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 (Kureková 2013).

While demographic factors cannot be discounted, de Haas (2010) demonstrates that they play an unclear role in migration processes, and alternative explanations must be found. Among the likely explanations are labour demand and welfare and social-protection policies. It does not come as a surprise that labour demands in destination countries may be the most important factor driving international migration, and levels of immigration are generally associated with business cycles and job opportunities in destination countries (Czaika 2015; Czaika and de Haas 2014). The image of a person who takes advantage of the welfare state has long been known, for example the notion of the 'welfare queen' in the U.S., which refers to a poor, single, black mother taking advantage of the welfare system (Hancock 2003). This notion has relevance for debates on immigration in Iceland. Borjas (1999) proposed the 'welfare magnet' hypothesis: that countries with more generous welfare arrangements were likely to attract higher numbers of immigrants, especially lower-skilled immigrants. This may resonate with many as a likely explanation, but the results of research have been mixed, and there has not been significant empirical support for the theory that strong welfare states attract a larger number of immigrants (Giuliette 2014; Kureková 2013). Taking these two factors together, it is clear that job opportunities are a direct driver of migration, and the generosity of the welfare state might play an indirect role in getting migrants to stay (de Haas et al. 2019).

Broader societal factors shape public attitudes toward immigrants, including government policy, political narratives, media coverage, the possibilities of contact between immigrants and non-immigrants, and whether or not migrants are given a voice in the media (Dempster and Hargrave 2017). Similarly, while the broader theoretical debates in the migration literature regarding who migrates and why do not directly address public attitudes, they provide the general contexts for the kinds of ideas the public might have about migrants: who they are, why they are coming to the destination country, and how one should feel about them. Along these lines, cross-national research has indicated that the public tends to have more favourable attitudes toward some immigrants than others. Specifically, the public tends to be less concerned about legal immigrants than illegal (Duffy et al. 2014; Doherty 2015), and the public tends to favour those viewed as economically beneficial (Bansak et al. 2016; Ford et al. 2012), and those who are viewed as more culturally and ethnically similar (Heath and Richards 2016). This reflects broader policymaking across countries, where modern migration policies emphasize migrant selection that focuses on the skills, wealth or family background of migrants (de Haas et al. 2019). Understanding public attitudes is critical, as favourable attitudes from members of host societies are important for successful settlement, impacting both well-being and integration (Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher 2017).

Iceland has experienced a major increase in immigration for the past two decades, as Figure 1 shows. Until 2000, less than 2.5% of the population were foreign citizens. The most drastic change happened between 2005 and 2008, which is not surprising given the unprecedented economic growth and demand for labour during those years (Loftsdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2019). The economic crisis did of course hit Iceland hard in 2008, resulting in an almost immediate decrease in foreign citizens as a percentage of the population. This aligns with the concept of migration hump (Martin 1993), showing that the easing of policies shortly after 2000 led to an increase, then a drop after the economic collapse, followed by a large increase with the growth of tourism and economic prosperity. Yet, despite these ups and downs, the percentage never fell below 6%, and it began to rise again almost immediately after the crisis, with a relatively steep increase since 2014.

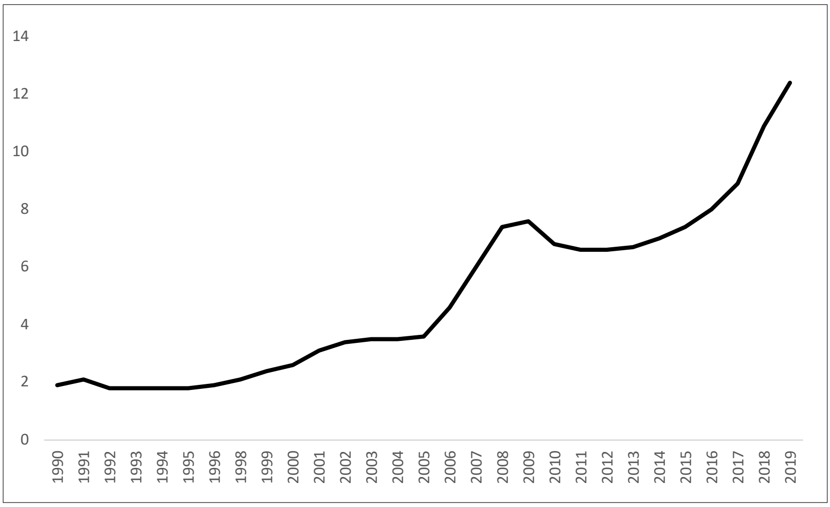

Figure 1. Percentage of foreign citizens in Iceland, 1990–2016. Source: Statistics Iceland.

Figure 1 illustrates a major societal transformation that produced a much more diverse population than ever before. What is equally important is the diversity among the immigrant population. The first large groups of immigrants and workers came from Poland and other Eastern European countries, and Poles still represent the largest immigrant group (38.1% of the total immigrant population), with Lithuanians in second place. Despite the difficulties associated with immigration from outside Europe, there has still been an increase from these countries, and immigrants from the Philippines represent the third-largest immigrant group (Loftsdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2019; Statistics Iceland n.d.). In addition, there has not only been an increase in the number of immigrants who come to Iceland to work, but also in those who come through various programs, or who arrive and seek asylum due to hazardous conditions in their home countries (Tryggvadóttir 2019).

Not surprisingly, this surge in immigration has resulted in a similar increase in academic interest in the experiences of migrants in Iceland, for example, in the educational system (Harðardóttir and Magnúsdóttir 2018) and in the labour market (Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen 2019; Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska 2019; Tryggvadóttir 2019). This work, often based on qualitative studies, has shown that immigrants are vulnerable in the labour market, and there are even signs their experiences may be getting worse (Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska 2019). Similarly, research has shown that immigrants face prejudice in the labour market and in Icelandic society, and that some immigrants might be more likely to experience such attitudes than others. For example, research has found prejudice against Muslims in the hiring process (Kristinsson and Sigurðardóttir 2019), and that all Lithuanians are potentially viewed as criminals who have just been released from prison (Loftsdóttir 2019). While these studies provide important insights into the experiences of immigrants and the kind of attitudes and prejudices they might face in Icelandic society, they are not generalizable to a broader cultural climate surrounding immigration in Iceland. Research up until 2008 indicates that Icelanders held rather positive attitudes toward immigrants While Icelanders were positive toward immigrants compared to the public in several other European countries, there were signs that attitudes were becoming more negative following the economic collapse (Önnudóttir 2009).

Consequently, it is important to continue monitoring public opinion toward immigration to Iceland, especially given the major increase in immigration generally, as well as the increase from certain countries. I therefore ask three interrelated questions: 1) Have attitudes toward immigration changed in Iceland over time, and are there differences based on where immigrants come from, 2) Are there group differences in the attitudes of Icelanders toward immigrants, and 3) How do public attitudes in Iceland compare to those in other European countries? To answer these questions, I rely on data from the European Social Survey (ESS). Iceland has participated in the ESS four times: in 2002, 2012, 2016 and 2018[1]. Although more time points would be desirable, this sporadic participation does cover the period of rapid increase in immigration, and the questions asked allow for an exploration of whether some immigrants are more accepted than others, which segments of the population are more welcoming, and how Icelanders compare to citizens in other European countries.

DATA AND METHODS

The European Social Survey is a cross-national study that was initiated and seed-funded by the European Science Foundation with the aim of comparing public attitudes, beliefs and behaviours across European countries. The ESS began in 2002, and since then, surveys have been conducted biannually, resulting in nine rounds of available data. Each round is comprised of core modules and rotating modules that focus on specific topics. The funding and execution of each national survey are organized by a national team under the guidance and co-ordination of the larger ESS organization. While different teams of researchers have been responsible for data collection in Iceland, the data has always been collected by the Social Science Institute at the University of Iceland. As required by the ESS, the survey uses face-to-face interviews. The sampling strategy includes random sampling in the capital area of Reykjavik and the use of random sampling within cluster sampling in the countryside and more remote areas. Iceland participated in the ESS in 2002, 2012, 2016 and 2018 (data not yet available).

The ESS is a combination of a core module asked in every round and rotating modules focusing on a specific topic of interest to researchers and policymakers. While immigration has been a focus of rotating modules (unfortunately not fielded in Iceland), selected questions related to immigration have been included in the core module of each round, making it possible to compare citizens' attitudes over time. A set of questions has focused on attitudes toward immigrants with different backgrounds. Specifically, the ESS has asked: 1) To what extent do you think Iceland should allow people of the same race or ethnic group[2] as most of Iceland's population to come and live here, 2) How about people of a different racial or ethnic group from most Icelandic people, and 3) How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe? These questions are informative as they cover a spectrum of potential immigrants, ranging from those who will likely be perceived as least threatening to those who will likely be seen as most threatening.

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[1] The data for 2018 was not available at the writing of this chapter.

Analysis

As the purpose of this chapter is to provide a general picture of Icelanders' attitudes over time, the analysis relies on descriptive data as well as regression analysis. The analysis is divided into three parts, reflecting each research question. First, I offer graphs of attitudes towards different types of immigrants in Iceland in 2002, 2012 and 2016. Secondly, with data from the most recent survey in 2016, I use ordered logistic regression to evaluate whether respondents' characteristics impact attitudes toward immigrants. The variables included are gender (female=1), age, education coded as two dummy variables indicating whether a respondent completed secondary school or a university degree (high school or less is the reference category); labour force status, capturing whether respondent is in the labour force or retired (all other possibilities serve as reference category); feelings about financial status; whether respondents live in the capital area or not (1=lives outside of the capital area); whether respondents belong to any group that is discriminated against; and a position on a political scale ranging from left to right. Thirdly, again using data from the most recent immigration wave in 2016, I evaluate where Icelanders stand compared to their European counterparts. The 2016 survey was conducted in the 23 European nations: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. All analyses are corrected for the appropriate sample weights.

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[2] I do, of course, acknowledge that the question of racial and ethnic background is much more complex than can be measured in a set of survey questions, as all such categories are socially constructed (Omi and Winant 1986; Saperstein, Penner and Light 2013; Winant 2000).

Results

Attitudes toward immigration over time

The first part of the analysis considers whether attitudes towards immigrants have changed over time. Figure 2 shows the results for the question of whether immigrants of the same race or ethnic group as Icelanders should be allowed to come and live in Iceland. As might be expected, these are the types of immigrants that would face the least resistance. The figure shows that an overwhelming majority of Icelanders believe these immigrants should be allowed to come and live in Iceland, and support for this also increased during the time period.

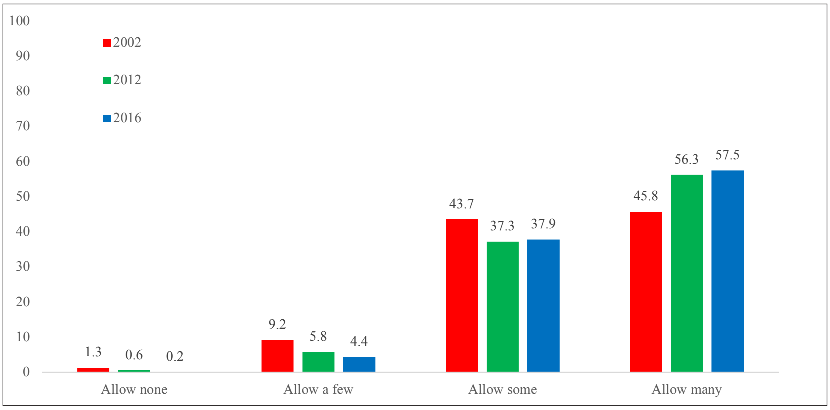

Figure 2. To what extent do you think Iceland should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most Icelanders to come and live here?

Focusing on those who oppose this type of immigration, the percentage is low in all years. Just above 1% thought no immigrants of this kind should be allowed into the country in 2002, but that percentage was virtually 0% in 2016. Similarly, less than 10% wanted only a few such immigrants in 2002, and less than 5% in 2016. Similar trends can be seen for those who want to allow in some or a large number, representing a more positive view toward immigrants. Approximately 44% wanted to allow some immigrants in this category in 2002, and that percentage decreased to about 38% in 2016. Similarly, about 46% wanted to allow many to come in 2002, but in 2012, that percentage exceeded 50%, indicating that the majority of Icelanders want a diverse, inclusive society, as long as the immigrants concerned look fairly similar to Icelanders themselves. What can be concluded based on this figure is that over time Icelanders have become more positive towards immigrants who are similar to the Icelandic population, but it is impossible to say from this data whether there is a similar attitude toward immigrant groups that are perceived as more different.

Figure 3 shows that the answer to this question is no. The majority of Icelanders are still relatively positive towards immigrants of a different race or ethnic group, but there is clearly more resistance to this category of immigrants than there is towards immigrants who are racially or ethnically similar. In 2002, close to 10% of the population wanted to ban all such immigrants, compared to about 1% for immigrants of the same race or ethnicity. That percentage had decreased to about 2% by 2016. The percentage opposed to admitting immigrants of the same race or ethnicity was small in 2002 and almost non-existent by 2016, but Figure 3 shows that a sizable percentage of the population still preferred to allow in only a few immigrants from groups that were racially or ethnically different from Icelanders. Specifically, about 25% wanted to allow in only a few such immigrants in 2002, but that percentage decreased to about 21% in 2012 and to about 18% in 2016. Along similar lines, there was an increase in the number who wanted to allow in many immigrants of a different racial or ethnic group from most Icelanders, from about 28% in 2002, to 34% in 2012 and 42% in 2016. The broad conclusion that can be reached is that while Icelanders are certainly less supportive towards allowing in immigrants of different races or ethnicities than they are towards immigrants of the same race or ethnicity, a large majority of Icelanders are supportive of a society that is racially or ethnically diverse. That view has become more popular during the only period in Icelandic history when Iceland has been on the route to such development.

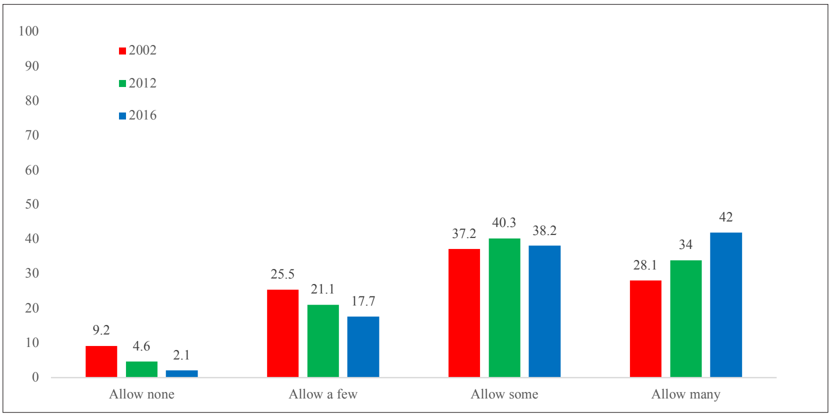

Figure 3. To what extent do you think Iceland should allow people of a different racial or ethnic group from most Icelanders to come and live here?

The last question focuses on whether Iceland should permit immigration from economically poorer countries outside Europe, capturing at least in part the views Icelanders hold on the responsibility of those living in wealthier countries to help people living in less wealthy countries. The short answer is that the picture that emerges here is relatively similar to the picture of public attitudes toward immigrants of a different racial or ethnic group. Here, the results show that about 8% wanted to ban such immigrants in 2002, but that less than 2% held that opinion in 2016. The percentage of those who wanted to allow a few to come also decreased from about 25% in 2002 to about 16% in 2016. Not much had changed for those who wanted to allow some, but there was an increase among those who would like to allow many, from slightly less than 30% in 2002 to about 34% in 2012, and to roughly 43% in 2016. Again, the picture that emerges shows a larger proportion of Icelanders stating they would like a more diverse society than those who say they would not.

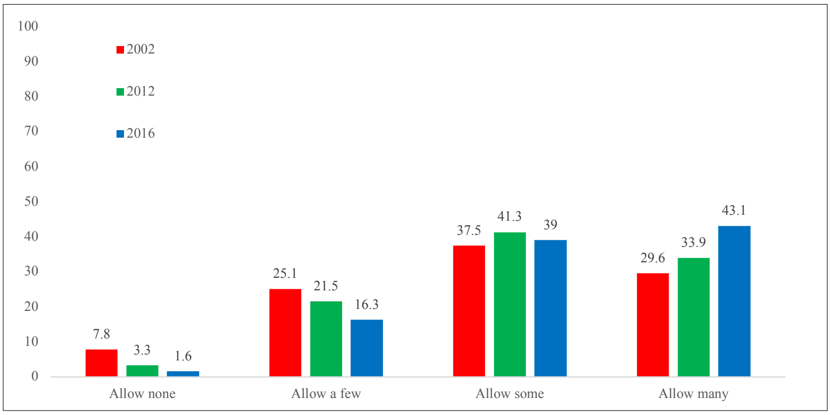

Figure 4. To what extent do you think Iceland should allow people from the poorer countries outside Europe to come and live here?

Are all Icelanders equally welcoming?

The second research question asks whether there are group differences in how welcoming Icelanders are toward immigrants. Table 1 shows the results from three ordered logistic regressions, which is the most appropriate model choice for ordinal variables like these.[3] The numbers presented are the raw coefficients that cannot be directly interpreted as in linear regression models, but since the purpose is simply to give insight into whether there are group differences, presenting them is sufficient. The findings are clear across all three dependent variables: older persons are less likely to want more immigrants of the same racial or ethnic group as most Icelanders, and they are not in favour of more immigrants of a different racial or ethnic group, or more immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe. For all three variables, those with university degree are more likely to prefer more immigration, and those who identify more to the right in politics are less likely to prefer more immigration.

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[3] To verify the consistency of the results, I also ran binary logit models (0=allow none and allow a few; 1=allow some and allow many) and the results from these models are largely consistent with the findings presented in the chapter. As some would argue that political ideology is too strongly linked to immigration attitudes, I also ran models without including the left-right placement, and the findings were also largely consistent.

Table 1. Ordered Logit Regression of Attitudes toward Immigrants on Selected Background variables

	Similar		Different		Poor	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
Female	.205	.151	.273	.141	.294*	.141
Age	-.021**	.005	-.036**	.005	-.034**	.005
Secondary school	.212	.206	.377	.193	.170	.193
University	.616**	.223	.924**	.208	.739**	.209
Working	.189	.185	-.191	.173	.036	.171
Retired	.242	.313	.317	.288	.414	.289
Well-off financially	.168	.153	.043	.143	.078	.143
Capital area	-.068	.155	-.276	.145	-.232	.145
Discriminated group	.021	.204	.292	.189	.207	.186
Left-Right scale	-.154**	.038	-.215**	.036	-.185**	.035
N	786		787		788	
Pseudo R2	.043		.074		.064	
LR-c2	55.29		129.10		109.38	
Prob	.000		.000		.000	

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Are Icelanders similar to or different from other Europeans?

The third question turns to the larger European context and explores how these generally positive attitudes in Iceland compare to attitudes in 22 other European countries. For this analysis, those who would want to allow in some or many immigrants have been combined, as have those who would want to allow in few or none. Of course, there can be debate over where to draw the line, but I argue that those who want to allow none or few can be viewed as being negative towards immigration, while those who are willing to allow some or many hold more positive attitudes and are less likely to fear immigration and immigrants than their counterparts.

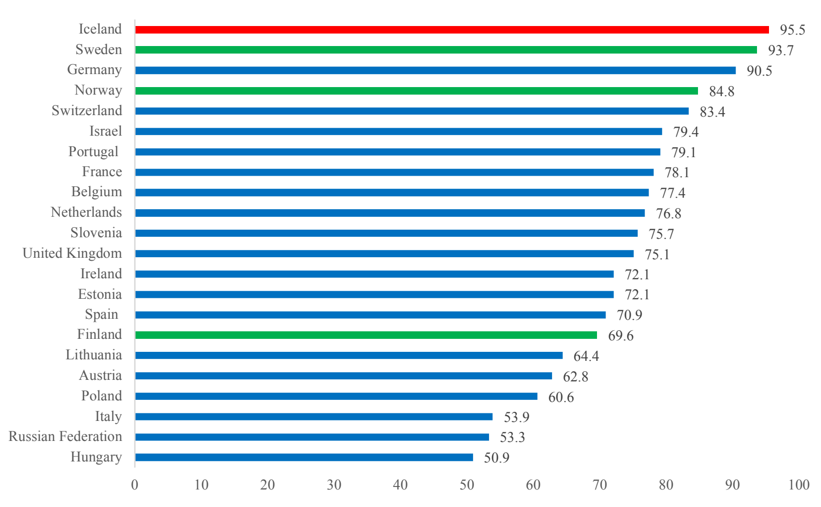

Figure 5. Percentage of respondents who want to allow some or many immigrants of a similar race or ethnicity to move to their countries

Figure 5 shows the results of surveys of attitudes toward immigrants of the same race or ethnicity as the majority population of each country. The figure shows that compared to Europeans in 22 other countries, Icelanders are the most positive. In fact, a Nordic pattern emerges with Iceland, Sweden and Norway all being among the top four nations that are most positive toward immigrants who are racially or ethnically similar. There is also a great difference in attitudes towards such immigrants when comparing the three most welcoming nations, those where more than 90% of respondents want to allow in some or many immigrants, and the four least welcoming nations: Italy, the Russian Federation, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In the latter group, less than 55% of the populations are positive toward immigration of this kind, with less than 40% being so in the Czech Republic. In fact, a clear Eastern European pattern emerges here. Interestingly, Finland follows those nations rather than its Nordic counterparts.

Being positive toward immigrants of the same race or ethnicity is only part of the story. The question remains of whether Icelanders are similarly positive toward immigrants who are more different from them. Figure 6 shows that the answer is yes. In this case, the three Nordic countries of Sweden, Iceland and Norway are at the top of the list, with between 77% and 92% of respondents wanting to allow some or many immigrants who are of a different race or ethnicity than the majority population. What is particularly interesting about this finding is the drastic increase in the variation observed for immigrants of the same race or ethnicity. While the difference between the countries that were most positive and negative towards similar immigrants was 44.6 percentage points, the difference, when it came to immigrants of a different race or ethnicity, was 78.6 percentage points. Again, Eastern European countries were less positive toward these immigrants.

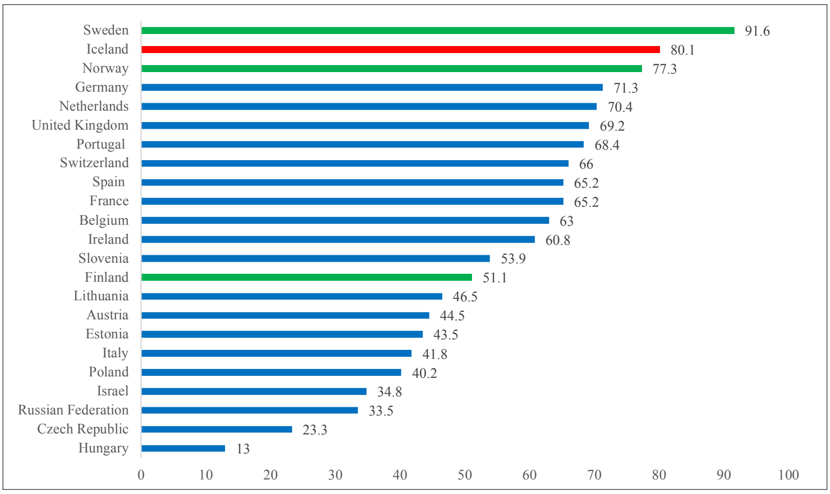

Figure 6. Percentage of respondents who want to allow some or many immigrants of a different race or ethnicity to move to their countries

Finally, Figure 7 shows the results for attitudes towards immigrants from poorer countries. The same pattern emerges. The three Nordic nations are the most positive. About 88% of Swedes want to allow some or many immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe, as do roughly 82% of Icelanders and approximately 75% of Norwegians. The participating Eastern European countries are more negative, and the variation is drastic. When comparing public attitudes in the most positive and the most negative countries, we see that about 88% of Swedes want to allow in some or many, as compared to only about 6% of Hungarians. It is clear that attitudes toward immigrants vary drastically across European countries, and Icelandic public opinion is close to that in countries that have the most inclusive attitudes toward a more diverse society.

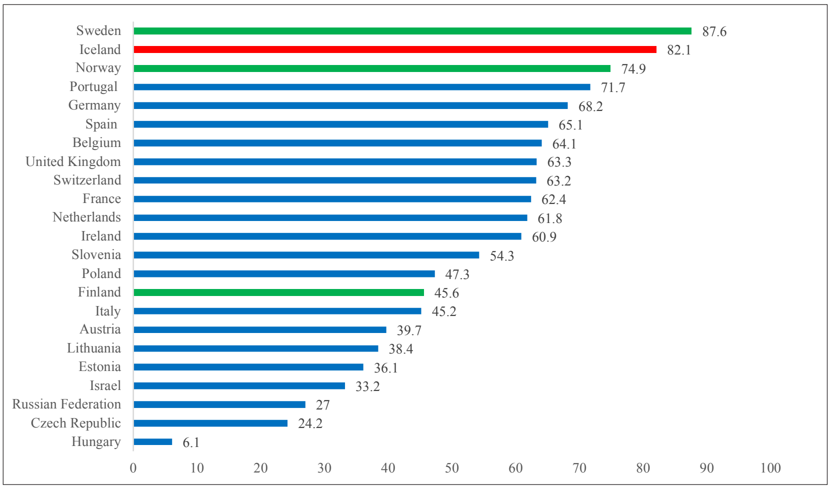

Figure 7. Percentage of respondents who want to allow some or many immigrants from poorer countries outside of Europe to move to their countries

Conclusion

The descriptive results for Iceland are very clear. First, Icelanders are generally positive toward immigrants, and they have become more so over time. What apparently happened in Iceland is that immigration increased, the population became more diverse, and Icelanders became more open to Iceland not being only a country for people with Icelandic parents who could preferably trace their ancestry back to Iceland's first settlers. All of this has, of course, taken place in the context of major changes in the Icelandic economy, with international agreements, including the EEA treaties, making such movement much easier (Loftsdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2019). Secondly, there are group differences in attitudes toward immigrants, those with a university degree being more positive, and those who are older or more towards the right in politics being more negative. The findings for education correspond to the findings by Önnudóttir (2009), but she did not observe the age-effect or include political ideology. Therefore, an age cleavage may have emerged as immigration has increased in Iceland, and those with a university degree may have been positive toward immigrants over a longer period of time. While not directly tested in this paper, it is interesting to consider the larger context of immigration in terms of availability of jobs and the welfare state. Unemployment has historically been low in Iceland, which may result in Icelanders not feeling threatened by immigrants. Immigrants are also frequently employed in jobs that Icelanders prefer not do. Conversely, Iceland has a generous welfare state, which might make some parts of the population concerned about immigrants taking advantage of the welfare system. This might explain the concerns of the elderly and those who identify more toward the right in politics. It is important to note that while anti-immigration discourse has more often emerged on the right-wing of politics, an analysis of the policies adopted cannot easily be correlated with party lines (de Haas et al. 2019).

Of equal importance is the picture that emerges when looking at the attitudes of Icelanders in a European perspective. They are among the most inclusive and open populations for all types of immigrants. It might be fair to point out that while Icelanders have certainly experienced increased immigration, they have not seen the same long-term influx of migrants as many other European states. Sweden, on the other hand, has been one of the countries described as having an immigration problem, according to right-wing politicians (Krzyżanowski 2018). Yet, the analysis shows that the Swedish population is among the top European countries, along with Iceland, when it comes to having a positive attitude towards different kinds of immigrants. This underscores the importance of considering the relationship between public discourse, public attitudes and policy-making within and across countries. To illustrate this point, de Haas and colleagues (2019) point out the danger of equating tougher ideas on immigration in public discourse with what actually happens in policymaking. Their analysis of migration policies in 45 countries since 1945 indicates that migration policies have become more liberal (54% of all policies) rather than more restrictive (36%). The data shows that development in Iceland has been similar, with 55% of policies since 1945 being more liberal, compared to 24% becoming more restrictive and 21% that are unclear or represent no change (DEMIG 2015). While politicians do of course have their own agendas, they seek their support from the public, and that makes understanding public opinion a critical part of understanding both policymaking and the kind of overarching cultural climate that immigrants encounter when they arrive in a new country.

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ANNA WOJTYŃSKA

Black Protests in Iceland

Transnational Flows and Entanglements

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the Black Protest demonstration organized by Polish migrants in Iceland in October 3, 2016 to support women striking that day in Poland against a proposed abortion ban. As an expression of migrants' continued social embeddedness in the sending society, the event provides an interesting example of diaspora politics, or what is otherwise called long-distance nationalism. Although intended to influence domestic politics in Poland, due to the universal character of women's reproductive rights, the demonstration in Iceland can be perceived as a manifestation of transnational activism and as part of the general feminist movement. Furthermore, the generous involvement of the local population shows how migrants' transnational practices enhance Iceland's transnational entanglements. Finally, Black Protest exposes a process of growing global interconnectedness and relates it to cross-border flows of meanings and ideas.

Keywords: transnational practices, diaspora politics, Black Protest, Polish migrants, social movements

On October 3, 2016, a black-clad crowd gathered on Austurvöllur square in Reykjavik in front of the Icelandic parliament. A large group of Polish migrants, other foreigners living in Iceland and many Icelanders came together to demonstrate solidarity with women in Poland who were striking the same day against a proposed abortion ban. The square was full of black flags, Polish flags, white and red balloons, and banners in Polish, Icelandic, and English. The general national walkout in Poland, and the supporting demonstrations that took place in different cities throughout Poland and abroad became known as *Czarny Poniedziałek* (Black Monday). This corresponds with a term *Czarny Protest* (Black Protest), commonly used for an ongoing resistance movement that commenced in reaction to a new bill tendered to Parliament by a pro-life citizens' initiative named *Stop Aborcji* (Stop Abortion) in March 2016. The proposed legislation aimed to tighten up already restrictive abortion laws in Poland by criminalizing any attempts to terminate pregnancy, even if the pregnancy is the result of rape, a threat to the health of the mother, or even if the foetus is seriously malformed. Not only women would be punished by up to five years' imprisonment, but also the doctors who carried out abortions. The new law would also preclude access to in-vitro fertilization and emergency contraception. Ardent objections to the proposed changes induced massive mobilization in Poland, protests taking the form of recurring street rallies, civil actions or internet campaigns that took place even before the All-Poland Women's Strike.

The demonstration in Reykjavik was one of many similar events organized around the world to support the strikers in Poland. However, since the actual idea of women in Poland abandoning work as a form of a protest was clearly inspired by the Icelandic women's strike (*Kvennafrídagurinn*) that took place in October 1975, there was additional impetus for people in Iceland to participate in the event and send their message of encouragement and solidarity to Poland. Although initiated by Polish migrants, the local population became genuinely involved. Aside from the Polish leaders, there were Icelandic feminists who spoke that day on the ad hoc stage set up on Austurvöllur. The presence of Icelandic activists and politicians was seen as making the protest more prominent, so it would receive broader international attention and hence put extra political pressure on the Polish government. Significantly, Black Monday in Iceland concluded with Icelandic parliamentarians signing a joint letter to the Polish parliament calling on them to withdraw the proposal from their agenda. The letter was handed to the Polish ambassador in Iceland the next day.

In this chapter, I consider the organization of Black Protest in Iceland as an expression of migrants' continued social embeddedness in the sending society, and as an example of diaspora politics (a form of long-distance nationalism), understood as migrants' collective attempts to influence politics in their native countries (Glick Schiller 2005). Available studies of Black Protests primarily discuss the origin, course, character and impact of the feminist mobilization in Poland (Korolczuk et al. 2019; Kubisa and Wojnicka 2018), looking, for instance, at emerging political agency among Polish women and its large-scale common nature (involving a broad spectrum of the general public) (Majewska 2018), the role of information and communication technology (Korolczuk 2016), and reproductive justice rhetoric (Król and Pustułka 2018). Less attention has been paid to Polish migrants' involvement in the protests. While Gober and Struzik (2018) analysed the different motivations of Polish migrant women to organize solidarity demonstrations abroad, I use this case to prove how transnational practices pursued by migrants can result in host-country embroilment in the politics of another state or, in other words, how the presence of Polish migrants heightens Iceland's transnational entanglements. Furthermore, I show how the cross-border mobility of people entails bi-directional movements of images, values and ideas.

I place my analysis within theories of globalization, which is defined as a process of growing interconnectedness, where geographically distant regions become increasingly entangled in complex nets of interactions and dependencies, largely resulting from advances in communication technologies (Tomlinson 1999). Accordingly, modern subjectivity, as Arjun Appadurai argued, is constituted by a 'work of imagination' influenced by different kinds of global flows in which electronic mediation and mass migration play major roles (1996). Both globalized media and people's mobility substantially contribute to the diffusion, exchange and gradual deterritorialization of ideas, terms, images and memories that are loosely used to construct the imagined worlds in which we are living. "[T]he imagination", argues Appadurai (1996, 31), "has become an organized field of social practices, … a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility."

Consequently, in the age of the Internet and 'Network society,' loyalties are increasingly assembled beyond or despite national sentiments (Castells 2000). As David Held (1997, 261) observed, "we live in the world of overlapping communities of fate, where trajectories of each and every country are more tightly entwined than ever before." New forms of spatial organization and human activity cross national borders, and boundaries challenge the sovereignty of nation-states and the nature of modern democracy. Growing flows and interconnectedness not only pave the path for transnational social activism brought together by universal values, human rights and common goals, but also encourage international interventionism, frequently presenting fusion between local and global activism (Tarrows 2005). Therefore, the capability of national governments to determine policies exclusively for themselves considerably declines, especially when they decide on issues, such as the regulation of sexuality, health and the environment (Held 2002, 400). With mass communication, domestic politics can hardly be pursued in isolation, but rather tend to be constrained by international actors and the worldwide community. Specifically, the advent of social media is perceived as forging grounds for digital or networking democracy (Loader and Mercea 2012). Cyberspace increasingly becomes the new public forum which incites and/or materializes many of the contemporary social movements (Castells 2012).

This chapter is primarily based on interviews with the Polish leaders of the protests and an analysis of the speeches given that day, supplemented by data from my longitudinal ethnographic research among Polish migrants in Iceland. I also refer to my own experience as a Polish migrant living in Iceland, including my observations as a participant in the demonstrations. Five in-depth interviews were conducted in 2019 with Polish migrant women who, at the time of the interview, had been living in Iceland for between six and eighteen years. All of them hold university degrees and work at different jobs in Iceland where they can utilize their specialized skills, although to varying degrees. Given the small size of the Icelandic population, the small size of the sample, and the public visibility of the Polish leaders I talked to, I intentionally mix together their statements without providing any personal or contextual information on participants in order to prevent them from being recognized.

Polish migrants in Iceland and their transnational practices

Poles have been coming to Iceland since the 1970s, but migration intensified with the fast economic growth in the 2000s, especially after 2006, when Iceland opened the labour market to citizens of new EU member states. This migration is mostly labour-driven and typically temporary. While some migrants have definite plans concerning their stay or return, the majority has a rather unspecified picture of their future. Drinkwater and Garapich (2015) described this fluid and indeterminate character of recent migrations from Poland as intentional unpredictability. The majority of Polish migrants remain connected with their places of origin in various ways, including formal, personal and affective linkages. Many of them travel to Poland regularly for summer or seasonal holidays, usually visiting their relatives and friends. Many watch Polish television, listen to Polish radio and follow news from Poland while living in Iceland. Some occasionally try to exercise their civil rights by participating in Polish presidential and/or parliamentary elections at the Polish Embassy in Reykjavik, and this clearly displays their continued involvement in the political affairs of their native country.

Likewise, one of the organizers of the protests in Iceland explained her involvement as a natural consequence of keeping abreast of news from Poland and being constantly concerned about affairs there. As she said, "you know, news comes from Poland. Information. And, everyone. … Well, anyone who is interested in a topic starts to get involved." Another coordinator further explained:

> We are living here, but we are Polish women. You never know when you might go back there. And then what? You end up in a place where the only thing you can do is pack and cross the next border because everything that is happening there [in Poland] is totally absurd … So, despite living abroad, I am talking about women in general, because I think all the girls who gathered at the Black Protests, no matter in which country, were fighting so that all of us, including our families and friends, if we ever go back to Poland, can have a normal life. So we won't have to live in fear.

The above interview excerpt demonstrates a maintained sense of belonging, emotional affiliation and shared responsibility for the current and future situation in Poland that motivated involvement in organizing the protest (cf. Gober and Struzik 2018). The last quote also shows continuing social and familial embeddedness, as well as the undetermined character of the migration project which incited pragmatic concerns about current developments in the native country of the woman interviewed and how these developments might actually affect her life directly if she ever chooses to return to Poland.

Following the alarming news from Poland, a meeting was organized as early as April 2016, bringing together those who later became leaders of the protests in Iceland. A Facebook group called *Dziewuchy dziewuchom – Islandia* (Gals for Gals – Iceland), was set up as an offshoot of the original Poland-wide grassroots network *Dziewuchy dziewuchom*. The Icelandic page was one of many similar local sites in Poland and other countries. *Dziewuchy dziewuchom* became a vital coordination and communication platform uniting different groups of people across the country and abroad. This site, and the one established directly for *Ogólnpolski Strajk Kobiet* (All-Poland Women's Strike) were extensively utilized to distribute information and share promotional materials like leaflets or posters. Academics have attributed the apparent success of the Black Protest and its broad-scale reverberations to its mediated character (Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017; Majewska 2018). For instance, Ewa Korolczuk (2016) emphasises the crucial role of virtual networking in mobilizing masses of people in different geographical locations by enhancing a sense of solidarity and strengthening collective identity.

As a new kind of social movement, online activism has proven more flexible, faster, and more mobile and inclusive (Loader and Mercea 2012). Clearly, employing social media as the main communication platform contributed to the viral diffusion of the initiatives carried out and the large-scale public involvement. Significantly, it also enabled a swift response and simultaneous engagement of throngs of Polish migrants around the world. From the very beginning, Polish migrants have widely shared various memos, quotes or personalized posts, as well as instantly taking on initiatives undertaken by activists in Poland. For instance, one of the first internet-based actions, #blackprotest, which invited women to post pictures of themselves wearing black on social media, met with an ardent response from Polish women living in Iceland. The black colour of the clothes was chosen as a symbol of mourning for the loss of women's reproductive rights. Poles in Iceland also joined the civil initiative launched in April 2016, called *Wyślij wieszak pani premier* ('Send the prime minister a hanger'). The leaders in Iceland, organized a collection of coat hangers in front of the Polish embassy in Reykjavik, which were then sent, along with short messages, to Beata Szydło, the Prime Minister of Poland at that time, who in her public speeches had expressed her support for antiabortion laws.

Flows of people and circulation of ideas

On the 23rd of September 2016, the Polish parliament dropped a counter bill to liberalize abortion presented by the pro-choice civil coalition *Ratujmy Kobiety* (Save the Women). At the same time, it voted to move up parliamentary debate on the Stop Abortion proposal. In response, *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*, local feminist groups and the left-wing party *Razem* (Together) organized demonstrations in major Polish towns under the common name Black Protests. During one such gathering, held in Wrocław, Marta Lempart called for *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* (All-Poland Women's Strike), recalling an event in Icelandic history when women refused to go to work in October 1975. Precisely as in Iceland, women were not only expected to leave their workplaces, but also to refuse to perform any household task or reproductive work. The idea had already been mentioned the day before by the acclaimed Polish actress Krystyna Janda in a post on her Facebook page, where she also placed a link to an article describing the

Icelandic strike published in a Polish daily newspaper one year earlier.

Evoking the Icelandic past might sound surprising given that not so long ago, Iceland was hardly present in the collective awareness of Poles. There was little news from Iceland in Polish media, and Iceland was repeatedly confused with Ireland or placed on the polar circle along with Greenland and Alaska. This lack of knowledge about Iceland was clearly revealed in my interviews with Polish migrants, many telling me that prior to their arrival, they knew nothing or virtually nothing about their destination.

It would be farfetched to assert that Krystyna Janda or Marta Lempart were directly inspired by the knowledge brought by Poles working and living in Iceland. Likewise, it would be unfounded to claim that Polish migrants are the sole reason for Iceland's greater presence in the public discourse in Poland. There are probably manifold factors contributing to this, including spectacular events like the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull or the particularly severe impact the global financial crisis had on Iceland in 2008, which put the country in the foreign media spotlight (Loftsdóttir 2019). Furthermore, the recent intense tourism campaign launched by Iceland reached Poland as well. Also not without significance, was the role of various European funds directed at enhancing cultural, educational and civic exchange between the two countries.

Yet, it might be fair to say that migrants also had a more or less direct impact on the growing interest in Iceland in Poland, particularly because it clearly coincided with Iceland opening up its labour market, and an increasing number of Poles moving there. Undoubtedly, migrants channelled and facilitated part of the information flow between the two countries, not least due to their occasional appearances in Polish public media or their enabling of cultural exchange projects, including the growing number of books authored by Poles who have lived or are still living in Iceland. Polish migrants also run various blogs about Iceland that serve as a source of information about the country, and these sites are frequently visited by people from Poland.

Significantly, the reference to Icelandic history as the inspiration for the strikes provoked a widespread response among Polish migrants in Iceland. It clearly gave additional impetus to the Polish organizers of the demonstrations in Reykjavik, as one of them explained:

> There was this talk about the article in Wyborcza [Polish daily newspaper], which mentioned Iceland and which Krystyna Janda referred to. And this for us … This gave us more enthusiasm. Suddenly, this link was established. So being here, doing the

> protest here, started to make sense. … We did not have to go to Poland. We could engage people here who became the inspiration. Because, however you look at it, Iceland is the symbol of feminism, of women struggling for their rights. Where should we organize protests if not here?

Recalling the Icelandic Women's Day Off (still a cherished and memorable event in the recent history of the country) rendered a demonstration in Iceland somehow more symbolic and meaningful in the eyes of Polish migrants. This also came out in a speech given by the Polish leaders at Austurvöllur. "Icelandic women showed us that it is worth fighting for one's rights. You are the inspiration." The influence of the past was also extended to the gender equality of the present, for which Iceland seems to be known and valued. The inspiration was not only on a discursive level, but also on a personal one, as some of the Polish organizers I interviewed indicated, they became active feminists only after moving to Iceland. Enjoying various women's rights in their daily lives in Iceland made them more aware of the need to advocate gender equality in their native country.

The established ideological link between Poland and Iceland amplified a sense of agency among the Polish leaders who felt they could become even more influential and visible by acting in Iceland than if they joined protesters in Poland. As one put it:

> It is precisely about this reaction. Do you understand? If we went to Poland, we would be one more person in black. But we managed to form a movement here, a movement of women who engaged in something that appeared on the world map.

Likewise, acting on this conceptual reference, Aleksandra Chlipała managed, in a few days, to mobilize her friends to shoot a short video clip containing a message of encouragement from women in Iceland to women in Poland. The idea was that Polish women would be empowered by listening to their newly arisen heroes and role models. The film featured Icelandic activists and feminists, including Guðrún Jónsdóttir and Kristín Ásgeirsdóttir, who took part in the strikes in 1975. The film received more than 30,000 views on YouTube, was broadly shared on the social media, and was placed on the internet site of one Polish daily newspaper. It was very well received by women in Poland, who enthusiastically expressed their sincere gratitude to Icelandic women in numerous comments on the film.

The initial reference to Iceland eventually triggered a whole chain of mutual inspiration and referencing. While Polish leaders in Poland and Polish migrant activists in Iceland acknowledged being stimulated by the past and contemporary Icelandic feminist movement, Brynhildur Heiðar- og Ómarsdóttir, the chair of the Icelandic Women's Rights Association, in her speech on Austurvöllur, expressed her admiration for the Polish women who went on strike:

> I just came from Warsaw last week. … And I was blown away by the energy of the people in Poland, the women of Poland. … And, I am looking towards the future when the energy of the women's movement in Poland supports the women's movement in Iceland.

Guðrún Jónsdóttir (the chair of Stígamót Counselling Centre for Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Violence), who also gave a talk during the Black Monday demonstrations in Reykjavik, recalled the Solidarność movement in the 1980s and the role of women then. It is worth noting that Guðrún Jónsdóttir was later invited to give a talk at one of the rallies in Poland during the next round of the All-Poland Women's Strike organized on 23–24 October 2016 on the 41st anniversary of Icelandic strikes.

The above examples clearly display already established bilateral linkages, a bidirectional flow of information, as well as the strengthening of relations between two states that can be at least partly attributed to the rising number of Polish migrants in Iceland. More and more Icelanders are visiting Poland for different purposes, which was actually made evident by all three Icelandic speakers.

FROM THE POLISH EMBASSY TO AUSTURVÖLLUR: INTERNATIONALIZATION OF DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

Right from the start, all information about the planned change to the law, the heated discussion around it and planned events were posted in the Gals for Gals – Iceland Facebook group in Polish, English and Icelandic. In this way, Polish migrants intentionally sought to bring the attention of the broader public in Iceland (and abroad) to the controversial bill in their native country.

> Some people who were engaged in organisation instantly felt that we could involve local people. That we could make some noise. Iceland is small, so if someone has a fantastic idea – and let's say it was fantastic idea. So, if someone has a good idea, energy and the

> will to do something, it is possible to do a lot here. We can make an impact, especially a social impact.

The size of Icelandic society, personal contacts, and the social networks already established by Polish migrants in Iceland were important resources on which organizers could draw in order to mobilize the local population and make the event more significant. “Every Icelander knows someone from Poland living in this country,” commented one of my interviewees. They expected Icelanders to sympathize with the defence of women’s rights, and they found it easy to involve local activists, politicians and the general public. As explained in the interview: “for them [Icelanders] women’s rights are natural and protecting them is self-evident.” Indeed, local residents sided with Polish migrants, sharing pictures with support messages on social media and attending events organized by Poles in Iceland.

Undoubtedly, the direct connection to Icelandic history as a source of inspiration for the movement in Poland proved effective in organizing Icelanders, because they may have felt virtually compelled to react. At the same time, Polish coordinators were convinced that political pressure from abroad would have great power to influence the Polish parliament and force them to abandon debate on the bill. Justana Grosel was straightforward in her speech at Austurvöllur, saying: “I think that help like public opinion in one country concerning another country might be the only solution when it comes to changing somebody’s mind, at least in our country.” This could also explain why the core of the speeches at the protest in Reykjavik were delivered by prominent Icelandic feminists.

In a similar vein, Polish leaders chose to gather at Austurvöllur square, which is a popular venue for social protests in Reykjavik. Many of the Polish migrants saw this location as better suited to their gaols, even though typically, in such cases, people would protest in front of the embassies of the states whose politics they want to influence. The earlier positive response by Icelanders boosted the motivation of the leaders. It gave Polish migrants a sense of credibility, recognition and membership in Icelandic society, enhancing their confidence to claim the representative spot in the heart of Reykjavik and in that way ensure the event had greater resonance and prominence. Again, to quote one of the organizers:

> We are talking about a symbolic place, a place where all the important protests have been happening. A place that is open for such things. A place where the Icelandic parliament is situated, in which – after all – we had support.

Moving the event to a place near the Icelandic parliament resulted in greater participation, not only by migrants, but also by the local population, including well-known individuals. The speeches given on stage were in Polish, English and Icelandic. As intended, the protest received wide media coverage, not only in Iceland, but also abroad. Significantly, Ásta Guðrún Helgadóttir, a member of the Icelandic parliament for the Pirate Party, motivated by Polish activists, wrote an official letter to the Polish parliament expressing her deep concern and urging them to withdraw the bill criminalizing all abortion in Poland (for the full text of the letter, see "Íslenskir þingmenn senda bréf til pólska þingsins vegna 'Black Monday'" 2016). The letter was signed by 30 Icelandic parliamentarians across all political parties and was handed to the Polish Ambassador in Iceland the following day.

It is doubtful Icelandic parliamentarians would undertake an official action to influence a decision by the Polish government without the direct intervention of Polish migrants. The presence of Polish residents in Iceland clearly connects the two states and brings both societies into mental proximity, which may further influence an emerging sense of relatedness, mutual concerns and responsibility that eventually contributes to Iceland's transnational entanglements. A rationale of this kind was echoed in Guðrún Jónsdóttir's speech, when she indicated that Icelanders are somehow compelled to show their support, since Poles make up such a large part of the population. "Poles are one-third of all people of foreign origin here in the country. They number more than ten thousand, and if only because of this, we shall stand with them."

SOLIDARY WITH 'POLISH SISTERS': FEMINISM BEYOND BORDERS

Black Monday was organized by Polish migrants in support of Polish strikers in Poland, but it could be associated with a global struggle to defend women's reproductive rights; one that Icelandic women could easy identify with. As Brynhildur Heiðar- og Ómarsdóttir put it, "[s]exual and reproductive rights are the fundamental demands of all of us who fight for women's rights, for equal rights, and for human rights." Ásta Guðrún Helgadóttir finished her speech by thanking people "for showing this huge solidarity with Polish women, with all women in the global context, because we can only do this together." Guðrún Jónsdóttir continued in a similar spirit:

> We shall never fall asleep on guard. It is not given that the rights we have worked so long for can be taken for granted or that they cannot be taken from us in one move. The struggle of Polish women is the struggle of us all.

Emphasising common values and goals as well as acting on universal women's solidarity not only helped mobilize the Icelandic public to intervene in Polish affairs, it also gradually changed the Black Protest in Iceland into a general act of social activism, an exemplification of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) called feminism beyond borders. Consequently, Polish migrants, other foreigners and the local population assembled as a transnational political community, linked by shared norms and principles, constituting a form of "cosmopolitan conception of democratic governance" (Held 2002, 394).

Significantly, this notion of shared values and common purpose had great unifying power. Guðrún opened her speech with "Ágætu pólsku systur mínar" (My dear Polish sisters), most likely referring both to Polish protesters in Poland and the Polish women who gathered that day in the centre of Reykjavik. While it was clearly a way of referring to global sisterhood, it had also a very symbolic and local dimension. It simultaneously conveyed a message of recognition and inclusion of the Polish community in Iceland. The acknowledgement of Iceland's growing diversity was particularly prominent in the words of Brynhildur, when she directly addressed migrants:

> We are looking for you to help us create a better society and a better future for Iceland. We need your experience, your knowledge, your stories and your passion as we continue our work to ensure women's rights and gender equality in Iceland. … Our work is incomplete without your voices!

Calling for cooperation and emphasising common goals mitigated or even temporarily suspended ethnic differences and social boundaries. It was a very powerful message; at least for me, one of the Polish migrants standing that day in the crowd with other migrants and Icelanders. It could be perceived as support for the Polish demonstrators in Poland, symbolic recognition of the Polish community in Iceland, and of the strong will to build one just society together. It displayed readiness to embrace diversity rather than simply assimilate it. Standing by her word, Brynhildur invited Justyna Grosel to speak at the protest co-organized by the Women's Rights Association on October 24, 2016. The announcement of the event included information in Polish. As already mentioned, Polish feminists were also demonstrating that day in Poland, hence Polish migrants joined the rally in Reykjavik wearing black and carrying black umbrellas (which became an emblem of the Protests due to heavy rain during strikes in early October) in order to simultaneously show solidarity with women in Poland and support local demands for equal pay regardless of gender.

Concluding remarks

The occurrence of Black Protests in Iceland is an interesting example that focalizes several interlinked issues. Clearly, demonstrations organized by Polish migrants in Iceland to influence a decision by the Polish authorities, exemplifies what is often referred to as long-distance nationalism or diaspora politics. It was familial, social and emotional embeddedness in the native country and serious concerns about its fate that motivated their genuine engagement. The digitally mediated character of the protest enabled migrants to respond instantly to various initiatives undertaken by Polish activists in Poland. They could directly join numerous internet actions by disseminating personalized information, and in that way amplify its repercussions, but they felt also compelled to organize rallies in public spaces. Drawing on their personal contacts, their social and cultural capital, Polish leaders succeeded in mobilizing the local population in order to enhance worldwide attention and media coverage, which has become a prominent tool in contemporary activism and a new way of doing democracy (Loader and Marcea 2012). Clearly, the defence of women's reproductive rights, due to its universal dimension, had the potential to unite masses of 'ordinary' women in Poland, regardless of their political views or previous involvement in activism (Kubisa and Wojnicka 2018), but it also carried the potential for bonding people across borders. Thus, an apparently conventional instance of diaspora politics was transformed into a form of international intervention or even more general transnational social activism (assembled around common goals rather than common origin), even though largely initiated by migrants. This aptly illustrates the conjunction between migrants' transnationalism and cross-national interconnection. A growing Polish community living in Iceland is forging durable cross-societal bonds that can engender a sense of shared responsibility and make Polish domestic affairs somehow more relevant to the local population, as clearly manifested in the official letter signed and sent to the Polish parliament by Icelandic parliamentarians. The growing diversity of Icelandic society is definitely affecting the density of the country's transnational entanglement.

Black Monday also provides a good example of how the mobility of people inevitably entails less tangible flows of values and meanings and contributes to a gradual liberation of ideas, myths and memories from their local context, so that they inform works of imagination (Appadurai 1996). To mobilize people in Poland, Polish activists borrowed from the Icelandic heritage, incorporating it into their own ideological repertoire and then linking it with the legacy of the Solidarność movement (Korolczuk 2016; Majewska 2018).

Significantly, while performing and acting on the basis of their own national sentiments and identities, the Polish organizers in Iceland clearly displayed a familiarity with local norms and social practiaces. At the same time as they felt responsible for the future of their native country, they often saw themselves inspired by daily experiences in Iceland and the local feminist discourse. This in turn challenges the simplistic notion that transnational practices hinder migrants' integration.

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