

Purity and Power:  
The Policy of Purism in Icelandic Nationalism  
and National Identity

By

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## Abstract

This dissertation elucidates the adoption of the notion of purity and its central role in the process of national identity making in Iceland. The purpose of such an examination is to add to anthropology's critical understanding of the joint processes of the production and reproduction symbolic power and national identity making.

By tracing these processes historically, I demonstrate how the process of Icelandic nation making cannot be understood except as a part of a broader global development as well as a response to it. The dissertation reveals that the notion of purity, while most pronounced in linguistic nationalism is not limited to language. It can rather be seen as a central part of a larger structure of secular religion, emerging at time of disintegration of old socio-economic structures and securing its position in a world witnessing an increasingly intensified global homogenization on the levels of economics, politics and social life. Icelandic language purism is only superficially linguistic but profoundly about legitimating the power of those who possess standard Icelandic. Standard "pure" Icelandic is also a powerful mechanism of social control serving as a major instrument in the formation and re-formation of mental structures. Purism, is also central to Icelandic ideas about cultural and racial "origins" as reflected in national defense policies of the Icelandic culture and nation.

I conducted fieldwork in Iceland, focusing especially on the discourse on purity as represented amongst intellectuals, politicians and the general public on the level of media and state-agencies. Through formal and informal interviews and participant observation at various state institutions (radio, parliament, colleges and university) and textual analysis I discovered increasing tension between the nationalistic notion of purity and fundamental democratic principles of the Icelandic nation-state, both of which can be seen as part of the globalization process.

After revealing increased state-action and financial input to linguistic purity, the dissertation ends by highlighting how the idea of purity has in most recent years been exploited for commercial purposes taking to international marketing of Icelandic food products and of Iceland as a tourist resort.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father Þórarinn Pétursson  
(December 7, 1926 - April 27, 1996)

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### *1. Arriving in Iceland June 1994*

The two things that make Icelanders an independent nation are; the Icelandic language, the cultural heritage and the exclusive rights over its rich fishing banks. (Morgunblaðið 6/17 1994:36)<sup>1</sup>

A nation is not only a political entity but, something which produces meaning -*a system of cultural representations*. People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the *idea* of the nation as represented in its national culture. A nation is a symbolic community and it is this which accounts for its “power to generate sense of identity and allegiance”. (Hall, 1996:612)

Upon receiving the blessing of my doctoral committee, I had left New York City in early

June 1994, just as the first heat-wave of the summer had poured itself indiscriminately and relentlessly over this overcrowded microcosm of the human race. Iceland my native country greeted me as expected with the night-less days of the arctic summer and the prevalent cool breeze from the North Pole. While only five hours away by flight, Iceland where I had decided to pursue graduate studies, seemed worlds apart from the cosmopolitan capital of the world.

In a recent tourist brochure called Iceland issued by the state sponsored Iceland Tourist Board "[t]he typical Icelander" is, said to be "something of a mixture, partly born of the ancient culture and heritage, which give him a special identity in today's global village, and partly incurably consumerist, eager to spend the money brought in by a seemingly genetic capacity for working overtime" (Iceland 1993:4). As for the country itself one is informed that Iceland, "the most sparsely populated country in Europe" is, "still largely in the pure natural state" (ibid. 3), so much so that "Iceland's pure, fresh air and spectacular environment make the perfect setting for the outdoor sports." (7) Aside from the "national trait of pursuing a sophisticated lifestyle" what makes the Icelandic cuisine a special treat for the visitor, is the fact that the food is harvested "from a pure environment at sea and on land." (ibid. p.8)

After having been estranged for many years, I was back in this place where everybody "talked the same and walked the same." Everything was familiar and yet I felt like a stranger. It felt strange to return "back to my roots" and I was both excited and nervous. I was an insider, with an outsider's view. How would people respond to my research?

I had made a point of being in Iceland, the country of "pure environment" where the people speak a "remarkably intact language," in time for the upcoming celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Icelandic republic. The national festivities were scheduled to be held with pomp and circumstance on June 17, at the sacred place Thingvellir, the ancient site of the old

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<sup>1</sup> "Það er tvennt sem gerir okkur Íslendinga að sjálfstæðri þjóð: íslensk tunga og menningararfleifð og óskert yfirráð

assembly Althing. I made it just in the nick of time. My interests in the festivities however, did not so much stem from deep-seated love for the "fatherland or the "mother-tongue" or some other nationalistic concerns. Those kinds of sentiments, which I had certainly carried with me to New York originally, had all but been washed away, for better or for worse. On the most intimate level, the motivation for my research was part of coming to terms with my own personal identity that had undergone radical transformations during my stay in New York. On a theoretical level, I was interested in studying the content of the ideology that had inspired the emergence of national identity in Iceland. In other words, at a very fundamental level I was grappling with what constituted Icelandic nationalism and, how this ideology had been reproduced over time. Of particular interest here was the question of power, i.e., who were the people who had (or had had) the power to define what counted for "authentic" Icelandicness, and how their power had been sustained over time. To paraphrase, who were the people who were the most instrumental in defining and drawing the boundaries of and around the nation and subsequently how had the nation-state endorsed and in fact institutionalized these ideas?

Moreover, for a long time I had been interested in the complex relationship between language and power, and how "language spoke" differently to different social groups. My initial aim was to analyze the historicization of nationhood in Iceland, focusing particularly on the Icelandic language – most forcefully expressed in an official policy and popular support for linguistic purism - and the role it had achieved as the primary criterion for nationhood in the country. Given the depth and scope of the influence of linguistic purism it became self-evident to focus on the dominant representations of language within modern day Iceland and the most prominent representatives within the purism discourse.

A commonly held belief holds that of the Nordic languages, Icelandic remains closest to Old Norse, the language of the Vikings, whose golden age reigned about one thousand years ago,

the time when Iceland was settled. This was also the golden age of Icelandic culture, the time when the "nation" was closest to its "origins" - i.e., in its "purest" form. The cultural achievements of this period are embedded in the old Icelandic Sagas written in the thirteenth century right before the "nation lost its independence" to brutal foreign powers, as traditional Icelandic historiography would have it. Accordingly, it is in the Sagas that the Icelandic language has been "preserved" in its most "pure" and "uncontaminated" form. In today's Iceland, Icelandic is regarded to be the most valuable cultural heritage passed on from the nation's ancestors. Hence, the first plight and loyalty of all modern day Icelanders is according to hegemonic beliefs, to stand guard and protect this treasure from being contaminated. The most dangerous contamination derives on the one hand from foreign languages and on the other from some Icelandic individuals, who because of their alleged limited intelligence are unable to master the language properly (Pálsson 1979).

In addition other things came into play and affected my decision to do research on Icelandic nationhood/ Icelandic purism. For one thing, to state an anthropological truism of first degree, one never becomes as painfully aware of the situational and particularistic characteristics of one's own cultural identity until one finds oneself confronted with different values, different norms, different references and different common denominators and in overall a different collective history. I had lived in other countries - Sweden and France - aside from Iceland before coming to New York to study, but the timing of my arrival in the United States was also crucial. Having entered the country and particularly New York City, the capital of cultural heterogeneity in the mid 1980s, mattered. This was the time when the issue of identity politics and power was emerging with unprecedented vigor, reaching the public discourse full force. Heralded by the demand for "celebration of diversity" and the ever-louder cry for recognition of multi-culture, I was forced to deconstruct my old beliefs constituting the pillars of my own cultural and national identity, where retaining unity/homogeneity, not diversity was the bedrock of the nation. Hence

my theoretical interest in the subject of language, power and identity politics in Iceland.

However, before examining the content of Icelandic nationalism *per se*, one may first ask what exactly is nationalism? Let us look just very briefly at this controversial phenomenon and its correlated concomitants, national identity and national culture. A more detailed discussion will be resumed in chapter two.

Nationalism can mean many different things: an ideology, a political doctrine, a secular religion and a theoretical discourse. Moreover, nationalism is doubtless the single most powerful political phenomena of the twentieth century. Until fairly recently the common assumption reigned, in scholarly writings and in the popular discourse, that nations possessed an immutable character and national cultures were more or less self contained entities with definite and clear cut boundaries. This notion is traced back to Herder, Fichte and other German philosophers who inspired nineteenth century nationalism. In this form of nationalism, called either essentialism or primordialism, the nation is considered to be a primordial or "natural, quasi-eternal entity created by God, language and culture embody the role each nation has to perform in history. Emphasis is on the emotional and ideational aspects of the community rather than economic, social and political dimensions." (Guibernau 1996:2)

In opposition to the essentialists approach is the so-called modernist approach, including several theories on nationalism. These theories have all appeared in this century and many in the last quarter of the century. Unlike the essentialist approach, these authors all attempt to analyze nationalism as a specific historical phenomenon. They have also shown more sensitivity to the complexity of nationalism and attempted to come up with theories in order to explain nationalism, either as an ideology, political doctrine, or political movement. While the modernists differ in their explanation about the origins of nationalism all emphasize the historical novelty of the nation and the nation state, and its concomitant phenomena, national culture and national

identity. Whether they speak of the nation as an "imagined community" like Benedict Anderson (1983), as an "invented tradition" like Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), a "narrative" like Homi Bhaba (1990), or link it to the process of modernization/industrialization like Gellner (1983), they all emphasize the specific economic, social and political aspects of the historical circumstances necessary for the development nationalism. (See also Anderson 1991; Gellner 1987; Hobsbawm 1990; Foster 1991; Fox et al. 1990 and Tilly 1991, 1990). This perspective insists that neither the nation-as-community, nor therefore, national culture, has any essential properties. Moreover, the modernists approach views national identities, and national culture - the products of nationalism or nationalist ideology - as malleable and mobile. Seen as socially constructed cultural artifacts, national cultures and national identities, as pointed out by anthropologist Richard Fox, are "the outcome of a constant process of cultural production." (1990:2) National culture is never a finished product rather "constantly, molded as individuals and groups confront their social worlds and try to (re)form them." (ibid.) National identities and national culture are always ""temporary" because whether antique or recent, its character and puissance are matters of historical practice; they are plastic constructions, not cultural givens." (ibid. 4) This notion however, does not insist that common territory, language or culture are irrelevant for shared identity or consciousness, but what is imperative for that consciousness to become nationalistic, as argued by Eley and Suny is a systematic political intervention. What is in other words necessary, they point out, is a "*creative political action*" capable of transforming "segmented and disunited population into a coherent nationality." (1996:7)

In sum, the modernist approach regards nations and national cultures as artifacts, continually imagined and invented, as well as constantly produced, contested and transformed by either individual persons (agents), collectivities (ethnic, religious or class-bound groups), the state (agencies), or by the global flow of commodities. (Anderson 1983; Eley and Suny 1996, Featherstone et al. 1995, Foster 1991; Fox 1990; Gellner 1983; Hannerz 1989; Hobsbawm 1990;

Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983 Löfgren 1989; Williams B. 1990) A more detailed theoretical discussion on the historical origins and development of the different approaches of nationalism will be resumed in chapter one.

This apparently transient aspect of the existence of nations, national cultures and national identities lead me at another level, to look at how, and then in what way, the ever increasing effects of globalization and/or intra-national organizations was affecting the discourse on national identity in Iceland. Here I refer to globalization as the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections, which have transcended the boundaries of the nation-state. Broadly speaking, globalization "defines a process through, which events, decisions, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe." (McGrew 1996:470) These include some of the trends mentioned above, such as the flow of goods, capital, people, images, ideas, knowledge, and fashion none of which respects national boundaries. Also, transnational networks, social movements of various kinds now exist across the globe. Moreover and of no less importance is "the existence of global trade, finance and production [that] binds together in very complicated ways the prosperity and fate of households, communities, and nations across the globe. Territorial boundaries are therefore arguably increasingly insignificant insofar as social activity and relation no longer stop – if they ever did – at the water's edge." (ibid.)

The most current and intriguing aspect of the globalization process for Icelanders is doubtless the ongoing discourse on Iceland's membership in the European Economic Area and non-membership in the European Union. The EEA/EU discourse is said to have been the most time consuming and the most heated debate ever to take place in the national congress Althing, in the entire history of the republic. However, in spite of the enormous impact of the increased EU integration and expansion for economic and sociopolitical development in Europe and the rest of

the world and Iceland in particular, it is only one aspect of the ongoing intensified globalization process. Therefore, while the EU question is of great importance for my research I will not focus exclusively on Iceland's relation to that particular process. I will rather look at it from a broader perspective of a range of economic, social and political changes some of which are part of the intensified globalization process of the post Cold War era. Let us look a little closer at the discussion on the process globalization and its relation to national identities.

Some theorists as well as laymen argue that the general effects of the globalization process will eventually undermine and seriously weaken national cultural identities. They maintain that there is ample evidence pointing both to the loss of strong identification with existing national cultures and that identification with other cultural ties outside the boundaries of the nation-state is increasing. While not denying that global homogenization is taking place on the level of common consumption of goods and ideas that in turn create common denominators that exceed national boundaries, I would argue in line with Stuart Hall, who has pointed out, that what is really being debated "is the tension between the "global" and the "local" in the transformation of identities." (Hall 1996:623) National identities, as we will see shortly, represent attachment to particular places, symbols events and histories. Hall points out, that national identities represent "a *particularistic* form of attachment or belonging" and moreover, that "there has always been a tension between the particular and the more *universalistic* identifications." (ibid.) The fear, expressed by some laymen and scholars who argue that globalization threatens to undermine and at worst eradicate national identities and homogenize all the worlds' cultures, is highly exaggerated and much too simplistic. Hall informs us, that one of the counter-tendencies that challenges this fear and clearly runs parallel to the tendency toward global homogenization, is the increased "fascination with *difference* and moreover the marketing of "ethnicity" and otherness." (1996:623) So instead of the global devouring the local it is more fruitful to look at these as joint and intertwined processes where intensified globalization calls for an increased

need locally to redefine "images" of the "local" / "national" for the international market. The "global" interpolates a new articulation of the "local." Hall goes on to argue however, that these new identities should "not be confused with older identities, firmly rooted in well-bounded localities." (ibid. 623-4) In line with Hall's notion of the local and global as intertwined processes, rather than polarities, Roland Robertson, has argued for the use of the term "glocalization," to avoid the contested connotation of the term globalization. (1995)

Related to this fear of recent global homogenization is an older factor, of loss of old identities in times of disintegration of old socio-economic structures that either paved the way for modernization/industrialization or crumbled as a result of it. This time witnessed the loss of identity previously provided for by religion and firmly established in the often times inflexibility of the old order. It is here that nationalism and national identity come in and provide, unlike any other form of political ideology, a sense of belonging to a supra-individuality i.e., the "nation" simultaneously as it gives a notion of cosmos and of meaning of life. In this sense nationalism can be studied as a form of secular religion. Only when one approaches nationalism as secular religion can one account for its success and the intensity of jingoism and xenophobia at the cost of democratic values that might on another level be part of the official make-up of the nation-state. This is what we encounter in the case of Iceland where linguistic nationalism or purism is only partially/superficially linguistic. The imposition of one linguistic standard that is then granted superior status vis-à-vis all other standards is, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1991) has argued, about legitimating the power of those who possess this standard. Bourdieu argues that this standard, which in the overall socio-political and economic market reigns superior, is a form of capital, i.e. linguistic capital and when possessed, facilitates access to power while simultaneously securing the power of those who possess it. This language variant, the legitimate language, also serves as a powerful mechanism of social control as it also serves as the major instrument in the formation and re-formation of mental structures.

Linguistic nationalism in the form of purism is also essentially racist as it equates "language, nation and country". Therefore, preservation of language "purity" and the fierce antagonism towards foreign words is also about preservation of national/racial "purity." This is an element originating in German Romantic nationalism and adopted by Icelandic nationalist of the nineteenth century and reproduced in the xenophobic purism of modern day Iceland.

Interestingly, the increased fascination with *difference* has in Iceland in recent years manifested itself around the idea of purity. An idea originally central to Icelandic linguistic nationalism and used to consolidate the population within has in the most recent years been adopted and applied to other aspects of Icelandic society that turn to the outside world. The idea of purity is now also to be found at the core of the image of Iceland as represented in the global market, whether in order to lure tourist to Iceland or in the marketing of Icelandic products abroad. Tourism the fastest growing industry in the country has in recent years capitalized on the notion of "purity" using it as the "buzz-word" in the international marketing of Iceland. This is reflected in notions of pure water, pure air, and pure nature. Moreover the idea of "purity" has likewise been exploited in the marketing of food products whereof fish constitutes no less than 75% of the national exportation revenues. It is no longer just fish, which is exported from Iceland but fish raised in the "pure waters" around the island. Other food products sold for export, such as lamb raised in the "pristine and pure Icelandic nature" and "naturally pure" dairy products fill the list. The latest commodities to be added to this list are "pure"/homogenous Icelandic genes. Here the idea is to make profits from a centralized database that includes all in one, decoded health information, genetic information coupled with genealogical information of all Icelanders presently living and when available, also from the past.

The central questions this research deals with are two. First, why and how did the idea of purity - most strongly manifest in linguistic purity - come central to nation making in Iceland?

The answer to this question requires a historical explanation of the origins of Icelandic nationalism and its relation to the ongoing political and socio-economic transformations occurring in Europe at the time. Secondly, this research asks whether recent intensification of globalization has called for increased emphasis in linguistic purism in Iceland. The answer to this question is yes. There is a direct link between intensified globalization and the cultural production of linguistic purity. Moreover, increased globalization has called for capitalization of "purity" of the marketing of Iceland in tourism and also of Icelandic products on the international market. On another level intensified globalization has for Iceland, meant that the country has become signatory of international agreements safeguarding human rights and issues relating to democracy. This in turn has forced authorities to slacken on their unwillingness hitherto to accept immigrants or political refugees into the country. Whether the fervent emphasis on homogeneity on all levels linguistic and cultural can be carried out without major clashes with emerging democratic demands for cultural diversity in the country, remains to be seen.

## *2. Methodology and Structure of Thesis*

The dissertation is based upon fieldwork conducted in Reykjavik Iceland, between June 1994 and August 1995 and a follow-up one month visit in January 1998. As the research is both historical and contemporary it relies on various kinds of data. The historical analysis is based upon textual analysis of journals, periodicals, newspapers, parliamentary documents, and biographies supported by official statistics when needed and when available. In addition to these, the historical section of the research relies on past and present scholarly analysis from linguists, historians, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists. When applicable, the thesis also relied on textual analysis for more recent developments within Icelandic purism.

Participant observation, as well as formal and informal interviews further supports the contemporary analysis. Formal interviews were conducted with state representatives, working

directly within the various language institutions and other that in one way or another work within the cultural industry of Icelandic language purism. These included politicians (Ministers included), linguists, university and college professors and teachers of Icelandic. Formal interviews were also conducted for the section that deals with commodification of purity, chiefly with state representatives working within the tourist industry and agricultural planning. In addition to these formal interviews that amounted to 21, the research also relies on dozens of informal interviews as well as correspondence with representatives within state bodies and individuals where needed. Needless to say, I also relied heavily on media discourse on the subjects under study. While in Iceland I followed the subjects closely, as they appeared in the press, television and radio. During my field work, I also worked as a host and producer at the National State Radio, where I was able to access audio-tapes from older broadcasts as well as gain an insiders look into this institution, which is of paramount importance for Icelandic purism.

In addition to the documents cited above, various data from the tourist industry in particular and the export industry in general were used. These included state publications from the Ministry of Agriculture as well as the Ministry of Fisheries, and videos, brochures, books and surveys from these ministries and the *Icelandic Tourist Board*.

Thanks to modern technology, I have been able to keep a close look at the public discourse in Iceland by the help of the Internet. Through the Internet I have been able to read Icelandic newspapers on daily basis as well as listen to radio broadcasts in the last year. Furthermore, the Internet allowed me to access parliamentary discussions and legal documents from the Althing (Icelandic parliament) and other state institutions. This immediate access to Iceland from afar has been invaluable. Unless noted, all Icelandic documents used in the dissertation are my translations.

The thesis consists of two main sections: the first one titled *Purism and Nationalism* and the second one *Globalization, Economic and, International Marketing of Purism*. These sections

are uneven in length, the first consisting of five chapters and thus constituting the best part of the thesis while the second one is only one chapter, albeit broad in scope.

After our introduction we turn to chapter two titled *Theoretical framework: nationalism, language, culture, state and power*. As the title indicates, what we set out to do here is to provide a theoretical framework for our study. In this chapter we will look specifically at the crucial role of national language in the process of constructing cultural "differences" between groups of people and the intimate link between language and the nation-state, which lies at the very center of the theory of nationalism. However, as will be revealed, the nationalistic ideal of a culturally and linguistically homogenous nation-state only exists in abstraction. Almost all nation-states are multi-ethnic and multi-lingual and all are definitely economically and socially heterogeneous. There is nothing natural about *national language*, it comes into existence oftentimes through intense political conflict, where state power is of crucial importance. In this chapter we will see how the process of standardization of language and the imposition of a *national language par definition* is part and parcel of nation-state building.

As Icelandic nation-state making was part of a broader political development in north-western Europe, we will open up our discussion by pointing out the close interaction between social reality and social theory and how one affects the other. Situating linguistic nationalism as a political doctrine we will trace the historical genealogy of German Romantic nationalism, the version of nationalism which Icelandic nationalists adopted almost ad verbatim. By highlighting the main features of Romantic nationalism, which became the blueprint for linguistic nationalism elsewhere and most definitely the Icelandic one, we will better understand the aspects of Icelandic purism as they manifested themselves later on. Under scrutiny here is the impact of the Enlightenment and Pietism upon the creators of Romantic nationalism. It is here that we find the ingredient that allowed for the peculiar mixture of Romantic nationalism to become not only a political program but also a form of secular religion: a unique characteristic that to a large extent counts for its

subsequent popularity. After discussing the ideas of Herder and Fichte the most influential thinkers of Romanticism, we will turn our focus to recent theories on nationalism and highlight the shift from the essentialist understanding to modernism. Here we will discuss in some detail Gellner, Hobsbawm and Anderson whose ideas have proved crucial in demystifying the legacy of Herder and Fichte. In addition to the emergence of a new understanding of *nation* as a socio-historical construction, an introduction to the new anthropological understanding of *culture* as an ongoing process, will further enable us to understand these phenomena as malleable entities continually in the making, yet never static or fixed. By the same token, we will discuss how these new understandings allow us to look at cultural and national identities as ongoing processes i.e., products in the making where power is of crucial importance. Raymond Williams' notion of *hegemony*, Michel Foucault's notion of *power* and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *symbolic violence* and language as *symbolic capital*, will further enable us to understand the intricate relationship between nation, language, culture and state. After a brief, albeit critical look at general linguistics and sociolinguistics, this chapter concludes with a critical analysis of language standardization and purism and its political implications.

In the third chapter titled, *A Pure Nation in a Growing Multi-Cultural World*, we shift our focus to Iceland. This chapter pertains a briefing on socio-political and economic development of Iceland throughout history, first regionally then globally. We introduce the national myth on purity, and trace its development from past to its present status within the ongoing process of Icelandic national identity making. The myth supposes that the national prosperity whether intellectual, economical or political stands in direct relation to the level of language "purity," i.e., the "purer" the language, the more prosperity. (Aðils 1922 [1903]) Under scrutiny here, is the manifestation of this myth in the creative political intervention of the Icelandic government at the national celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Icelandic republic held on June 17<sup>th</sup> 1994. We will analyze why the purity myth is universally accepted across political party lines by supporters as well as opponents of

Iceland's membership in the European Union, and examine why some politicians regard EU membership as a threat to the future of the Icelandic nation state.

Chapter four, *Historical Origins And Development o the Icelandic Gospel of Purism*, looks at the historical origins and development of linguistic purism and the concomitant development of nationalism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Iceland. Here we analyze the role of intellectuals as missionaries in the spread of the purist gospel and their impact upon national identity formation. We will trace the shift of linguistic purity - first advocated by *The Lærdómslistafélag* and then firmly established by the *Fjölnir* circle from a cultural to a political interest. We will look at the invention of the guiding principles of Icelandic purism, from "neologism," to the idea of "foreign" words representing "dirt" and thus assuming to threaten the order of purity. This chapter looks at the dramatic effects of the fall of the Danish Monarchy in 1848 for political development in Iceland: an event that marked a watershed for Icelandic purism, changing it from a literary interest into a political tool, hence changing the course of Iceland's history. Next we analyze the key role of intellectuals as primary missionaries in the evangelism of Icelandic nationalism/purism, their construction of a glorious past, and their invention of the idea that the old Sagas should be regarded as sacred testimonies to the alleged "purity" of the Icelandic language before any "foreign" (Danish) influence was able to contaminate it. We will look at the role of printed media in the simultaneous processes of nation-making and language standardization. Last but not least, this chapter analyzes what united the economically heterogeneous population of 19<sup>th</sup> century Iceland against Danish rule and for national sovereignty.

Chapter five, *Purism and the Icelandic Nation-State from Birth to Adulthood* deals with the institutionalization of purism. Here we will look at social movements and individuals most prominent in the process. On the level of social movements, the immeasurable impact of the Youth Movement in the first half of the twentieth century is of great interest. For the impact of individuals on what counts as linguistic capital in the market, the ideas of Guðmundur Finnbogason, one of

Iceland's staunchest purist and the author of the laws on public education, receives major attention, not least his intertwined interest in language purity and racial purity. In addition we will look at how the process of national identity making was also a deliberate effort to construct an image of a "civilized nation," and/or "cultured" people. The discussion on Finnbogason's purism highlights the close connection between genetic nationalism, xenophobia, racism and linguistic purism. From Finnbogason's input we will illustrate the continued effort of intellectuals to establish the old Sagas' as the holy scriptures of Icelandic purism in the newly founded Icelandic nation-state. The institutionalization of Icelandic linguistic purism, not only as cultural policy but more interestingly as a sort of military defense strategy will be discussed. We will analyze how Icelandic purism is carried out with militant strength by language institutions that serve as forts patrolling every soldier in the purist army. Finally, we will examine both the positive and negative form of sanctions used by these institutions in order to safeguard the hegemony of purism.

The title of chapter six is: *Purism: A Repressive Force in a Multicultural Democracy?* In that chapter we will continue our discussion on the institutionalization of linguistic purism in Icelandic society. We begin our analysis by looking at how purism has ruled in naming policy and look at recent conflicts over the law on given names and surnames. Specific focus will be aimed at the contention over apparent discrimination against foreign born Icelanders and their descendents on the one hand and conflicts over violation of human rights on the other. We will then shift our focus to the impact of public and private media, starting with the National State Radio and its legal role in protecting Icelandic culture and the purity of the Icelandic language. We examine the impact of NSR exclusive broadcasting monopoly (1930- 1985) and how its language purity programs and its policy of only broadcasting written language, fortified the notion and the dominance of language purity. Iceland's newspaper giant, the privately owned Morgunblaðið daily – a close ally of NSR in purism - will receive close attention. From there we go on to examine how the private sector has joined forces with the state in recent language

campaigns launched in printed and broadcasting media as well as on milk cartoons, campaigns aimed at fortifying language purism. Our final section in the chapter focuses on criticism on purism and lack thereof.

In the second section titled, *Globalization, Economic and, International Marketing of Purism*, includes only one chapter, namely the seventh chapter titled: *The Commodification of Purism*. In this chapter we will examine how the notion of purity has in recent years permeated into the international marketing of Iceland and Icelandic products. Here, we situate the notion of "natural purity" historically within the discourse on national identity making and follow its development to its recent adoption in tourism. We will go back one hundred years and look at the dominant popular concept of Iceland's wilderness as threatening and full of dangerous supernatural creatures to be avoided at all costs, and follow how this perception changed into a notion of "divine" and "pure," beauty" to be revered and adored. Under examination here are both the cognitive and visual aspects of this process followed by a discussion on how the fastest growing industry in the country tourism, has in recent years been able to capitalize on this idea, both domestically and internationally. We will then look at how this recently constructed image of Iceland as "naturally pure" has in most recent years come into severe conflict with governmental plans on heavy industry in the "uncontaminated" wilderness of the island. Highlighted here, is the contention between environmentalist and the tourist industry on the one hand and supporters of heavy industry on the other.

From tourism and purity we shift our focus to examine the exploitation of the purity idea within the food processing industry, looking first at the recent systematic construction of Icelandic agricultural products as organic and natural, aimed both at the domestic as well as the international market. Interestingly enough, the fishing industry - Iceland's largest industry - has also employed the idea of purity in their international marketing of fish. The recent construction and marketing of Icelandic fish products as products coming from "pure" Icelandic waters will

therefore be discussed. These waters and its contents, i.e., fish, are by Icelandic law the property of the Icelandic nation. Here the notions of "purity" on the one hand and of the "nation" on the other will be examined, in particular how they figure into the bitter conflicts caused by the accumulation of fishing rights into the hands of few

Finally, we will touch very briefly on the controversy over a centralized databank hosting genetic and medical information of the entire Icelandic population for medical purposes and ask questions whether the exploitation of this information is capitalizing on the old notion of the alleged genetic and racial superiority of Icelanders. In the very final chapter, we will draw conclusions from our research and analysis.

*Part I: Purity and Nationalism*

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical framework: Nationalism, Language, Culture, State, Purity and Power**

#### **I. Introduction**

That there is an interdependent relationship between development in the world of ideas and the greater socio-political world is axiomatic. In my opinion the importance of placing social theory within the context of social history can hardly be overstated. One of the assumptions underlying this dissertation is the belief that the influence between these two worlds is not unidirectional but rather a matter of an ongoing discourse in the Foucauldian sense.

The purpose of this chapter is, first, to highlight the linkage between socio-political reality and early 19th century social philosophy. In order to do that, we will not begin in Iceland, but rather

on the European continent. Thus we will situate ourselves in time and place and look at the socio-political environment that gave birth to German Romantic nationalism, the most influential political doctrine emerging from the social philosophy of this era. An examination of its intellectual genealogy and its main characteristics is of tremendous importance to our work as Romantic nationalism was adopted by nineteenth century Icelandic intellectuals almost ad verbatim. By charting the development of Romanticism from a cultural movement to a clear cut political ideology as it evolved in its birthplace, will give us a thorough general understanding of this type of nationalism. Moreover, it allows us to understand how some of its more specific characteristics played out in the Icelandic version, particularly the notion of purity and its relation to nation, culture and state. This includes a discussion of the most influential thinkers of German Romantic nationalism from Herder and Fichte. The tremendous impact these thinkers had upon Icelandic intellectuals at the time is literally immeasurable as it changed the course of Iceland's history. To this day the echo of their ideas lies at the core of Icelandic national identity and the national and cultural institutions whose designated role is and has been to define Icelandic culture, language and nation. After this historical discussion we will turn to contemporary theories on nationalism and introduce first the so-called essentialist school. Our main focus however, will be on more recent critical theories of nationalism and on current critique on linguistic nationalism. We will examine and trace the influence the underlying assumptions of this social philosophy had on subsequent social theory, which was uncritically adopted by linguistics in general and sociolinguistics in particular. After introducing recent critique on linguistic nationalism we will turn our attention to recent anthropological writings on culture, language, nations and state. Our last section deals with the policy of language planning in general and with language purism in particular.

## II. Historical Antecedent of Language Studies and Herder's Legacy<sup>2</sup>

In Europe, the time period from the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century was marked by tremendous turmoil in the worlds of both politics and intellectual discourse. This political and intellectual upheaval was to have unforeseeable repercussions far outside the physical boundaries of the European continent. This was the Age of Revolution, where the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution heralded change in the socio-political arena and the economic arena respectively. The French Revolution ended the European Middle Ages in terms of political geography and gave birth to the modern state. These new states were characterized by uninterrupted territorial areas with sharply defined frontiers, and governed by a single sovereign authority. Shortly thereafter, the assumption -- which became central to nationalism -- that this new state should represent a single "nation" or a linguistic group, gained ground. (Hobsbawm 1962) It is in this sense therefore that nationalism can be seen as the legitimate offspring of the dual revolution. (Hobsbawm 1962, 1990)<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, and of no less importance is the fact that the emergence of national identities, as argued by sociologist Liah Greenfeld, is the "most salient and common form of particularism in the modern world" (1992:8) also developed as a part of "essentially international process." (ibid. 1992:14) In short the emergence of "nations" and national identities are part and parcel of the process of "compression of the world as a whole," most often referred to as globalization or the

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<sup>2</sup> Here I refer both to general linguistics and sociolinguistics. Note that the term "sociolinguistics" is used here as a generic term, including all studies that deal with language and society, whether they call themselves "sociolinguistics," "ethnography of communication" or "linguistic anthropology." See for example, Cooper and Spolsky 1991; Giglioli 1982; Gumperz and Gumperz 1982; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Hickerson 1980; Milroy 1987; Saviile-Troike 1989; Wardhaugh 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Instead of treating nationalism as a normative problem, I argue in line with historian Eric Hobsbawm that the most fruitful approach to an understanding of the "national question" is historical. In other words, the best way to look at nations and nationalism is as phenomena that develop within a special historic situation and are in turn determined by it (Hobsbawm 1972, 1990).

process of globalization (Robertson 1995:35). We will resume our discussion on globalization in chapter three.

The period of Revolution did not only lay the ground for linguistic nationalism but, as we will see, also for contemporary studies on language and society (Hill 1992, 1988: Williams 1992). In other words, nationalism and sociolinguistics in the broadest sense, share the same philosophical ancestry. Before looking at linguistic nationalism, let us take a brief look at what characterized the dominant ideology of the era, in order to understand the *Weltanschauung* that gave birth to the equation between language, nation and state.

It is clear that by the end of the 17th century, the notion of rationality had firmly established itself in scientific undertakings. Moreover, humankind was seen to be in control of its own destiny and this in turn gave rise to debates on the nature of society. The issue of the nature of society and the way it was developing or, to put it differently, the issue of the nature of humankind and its relationship to authority, became one of the major themes that emerged from the dual revolution. It was in these debates that the notion of *progress* as a never-ending phenomenon played a central role (Hobsbawm 1962: Williams 1992). Glyn Williams, in a sociological critique on sociolinguistics, argues that the idea of progress was based on two assumptions: First, knowledge was thought to be cumulative, and second, knowledge was assumed to equal ability, a notion which later had profound implications for the legitimization of European rule. The notion of knowledge being cumulative and progressive can be traced back to the 17th century; whereas, the idea of linking progress with civilization -- civilization involving culture, ideas and institutions -- only came to the fore in the 19th century (R. Williams 1983). The "triumphant, rationalist humanist" champions of the 18th century Enlightenment believed that history was a matter of progressive evolution and moreover, "that human society and individual man could be perfected by the same application of reason, and were destined to be so perfected by history." (Hobsbawm 1962:278) These ideas are echoed in Kant's Idea for a Universal History and were even more clearly enunciated in Condorcet's Progress

of the Human Mind published in 1797. By tracing the evolution of social organization from clans through tribes to modern politics, Condorcet lays the ground for the idea that lies at the very foundation of 19th century social theory, namely, that progress is equal to evolving social complexity (Williams 1992).

Social breakdown was evidently one of the strongest consequences of the dual revolution, prompting the quest for social order, a preoccupation of the ensuing intellectual discourse. The assumption that social order was best represented through homogeneity led to the notion of social dichotomy between state and community. Industrialization and urbanization were assumed to generate change in the social order -- social relations went from being based upon moral imperative, i.e., Durkheim's mechanical solidarity or Toennies' *Gemeinschaft*, to being dependent upon association, i.e., Durkheim's organic solidarity or Toennies' *Gesellschaft*. This dichotomy was also evident in the works of Rousseau and Locke, as well as in the works of other philosophers such as Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Montesquieu. Within the notion of history as a unilinear evolutionary progress, *Gemeinschaft* was seen as inevitably giving way to *Gesellschaft*. Thus, Rousseau claimed that as society grew more complex, the state became necessary in the struggle to conserve the moral imperative. For the purpose of our present discussion, the more important idea is the emergence of the notion of the state as essential for progress. This idea is echoed in the works of Kant and other German philosophers of the classical period, such as Fichte, whom we will encounter again, shortly. Williams argues that this notion brought to the fore the idea that "[g]overnment was seen as the actualization in society of what was latent, desirable and inevitable in nature's provision for progress." (1992:12) It is precisely this social philosophy, with its uncritical attitude towards the ruling power and its endorsement of state actions, that lies, as we will later see, at the foundation of the social theory that historically has informed linguistic and sociolinguistic inquiry. Let us now turn to linguistic nationalism.

### **III. German Romantic Nationalism: Its Origins and the Impact of Herder and Fichte**

The essence of this ideology, i.e., of linking language with national identity and later with collective self-determination, is, in large part, a product of German Romanticism of the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, which was to spread like wildfire throughout Europe in the decades to come.

German Romanticism developed into a particular kind of nationalism, namely cultural or linguistic nationalism. The central characteristics of this type of nationalism are first the nationalizing of culture and language, and secondly, the founding of the nation on the basis of culture and language. This type of nationalism differed from the political nationalism, coming mainly from Revolutionary France, which was based on citizenship and popular sovereignty. It also differed somewhat from the concurrent liberal nationalism, in spite of the two being interwoven to some degree. In fact, whereas Romantic nationalism is an ideal type in the Weberian sense, in reality it is always found mixed with other types of nationalism.

German Romantic nationalism was imported by Icelandic intellectuals in the second quarter of the 19th century, and as we will see, many aspects of it adopted almost to the letter, albeit of course adjusted to the particular circumstances of Icelandic society of the time. It is the ideology that to this day informs and constitutes the core of Icelandic national identity. The resemblance is such that Icelandic nationalism and the German Romantic version are at times frightfully identical. The manifestation of these main characteristics within Icelandic nationalism is inextricably linked with the entire subject matter of this thesis.

The proponents of Romantic nationalism were, as we will encounter again and again in this thesis, the educated classes or the intelligentsia. This point is supported by authors such as Anderson (1983, 1991), Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1990), discussed later in this chapter and Hroch (1985, 1993) (see chapter three) as well as Berlin (1980, 1992), Greenfield (1992), and

Smith (1983). While fundamentally a response to the social crisis of the educated middle class, who in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, found themselves marginalized in the static class structure of the German principalities of the time, Romantic nationalism was also a confluence of several independent traditions, the Enlightenment coming from abroad as well as some indigenous ones. Sociologist Liah Greenfeld argues that the two most important indigenous traditions were "Pietism-itself a product of the Reformation and the structural conditions of its spread in Germany - and early Romanticism, which was among other things, an heir to both Pietism and Enlightenment." (1992:277)

The idea of the *nation* belonged to the legacy of the Enlightenment. However, the Enlightenment was cosmopolitan and preached universalism, emphasizing the faculty of reason (Berlin 1992). The German intellectuals denied the universalism of the Enlightenment and emphasized instead the particularism of each *nation* albeit holding on to the idea of the common good and happiness of their truth i.e., what they considered to be the truth for the *nation*.

The proponents of early German nationalism were also highly influenced by Pietism, an indigenous religious ideology. In its emphasis on the personal unity with God, Pietism fostered a broad tolerance for Christian worship and accepted, at least theoretically, all forms of worship as long as it was sincere. On the collective level this perspective allowed for "a new respect for the forms of worship characteristic of ethnic communities (of Christians), and a novel, mystical idea of native language, which in Protestantism, replaced Latin as the medium of worship. This idea was reinforced by the greater regard for and increased preoccupation with the education of the lower classes and the instrumental emphasis on German. "Uniqueness of the ethnic community and of the individual was seen as a peculiar expression of God's love and wisdom. It was therefore seen as a matter of Christian piety to preserve one's uniqueness. *"The mother tongue, in particular, acquired the dignity of the means through which God manifested Himself to a people, the peculiar, individualized link between the Deity and a specific community. It was thus sanctified and acquired*

*value beyond instrumental utility.*" (1992:319 italics mine) This sacred status of the mother tongue became a hallmark of Romantic nationalism.

The German Romantics appropriated core Pietist ideas, secularized them and by doing so were able to perpetuate religious characteristics in an era that was becoming increasingly indifferent to religion. By redefining religion as the experience of faith, the Romantics elevated experience to the rank of religion. For the Pietist faith was feeling. The Romantics changed this notion slightly to regard feeling as faith. Where God had for the Pietists' revealed himself in a feeling, for the Romantics "it is feeling which *is* God." (Greenfeld 1992:330) This change, however minor it may have seemed, was to have enormous impact. The Pietists' had evolved out of an old religion, but the new Romantic concept of God as feeling was nothing short of being the creation of a new religion, albeit secular. This was not a conscious effort on the behalf of the Romantics, and has as Greenfeld points out, not been fully appreciated but "proved to be the seedbed of the secular religions of the 19th and the 20th centuries, which changed our lives." (ibid.) The success of the Reformation in establishing itself outside the confines of the reign of the Papacy reflected the disintegration of century old structures of the European Christendom, held together by the Roman Catholic Church. With Latin gone as the *linga franca* of sacred matters, the Reformation called for an increased demand of religious publications in vernaculars. Facilitated by the invention of print technology, these publications in turn expedited the process of standardization of languages. Headed by language standardization, together these changes, paved the way for the emergence of national identities and nations, as Benedict Anderson in his now classic work Imagined Communities (1983/1991) has argued. In line with Greenfeld, Anderson also argues for the religious character of nationalism, setting it apart from all other political ideologies in the modern era. We will discuss Anderson's ideas in more detail below. For now it suffices to point out that, Pietism spread to the Nordic countries, and had great impact upon people's lives, Iceland included. Moreover, while an integral part of its preaching, the religious aspect embedded in Romantic

nationalism was given an added value with the subsequent disintegration of the old socio-economic structures, hence old secular identities.

### 1. *From Romanticism to Romantic Nationalism*

German Romanticism developed out of *Sturm und Drang*; a movement appearing in the 1770s consisting of young German intellectuals who embraced the Enlightenment and Pietism originally. Many of them, like its main theoretician the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), often referred to as the founding father of German Romantic nationalism, later abandoned the ideas of the Enlightenment.

In the beginning, German Romanticism was a literary phenomenon, influencing generations of poets and writers all over Europe - Iceland included - in the decades to come (Berlin 1992, Greenfeld 1992). The Romantics redefined religion as the experience of faith where emotion became God. This earned them the name of "a kind of artistic and intellectual Pietism." (Greenfeld 1992:326) The impact of Romanticism on both literature and the arts was enormous but its impact on intellectual development and not least its political implications are beyond measure. Albeit not strictly political in the beginning, the ideas of Romanticism were soon to be politicized.

The core conviction of Romantic nationalism derives from Herder. It was he who insisted that *culture*, a particular way of life, and social institutions were essentially formed by the nation. Moreover, they were in fact,

expressions of the unitary force... usually referred to as the soul or mind of (or spirit) of the people; the *Volkgeist* or the character of the nation. It is the national character of culture, which stands in the centre of intellectual activity as well as emotional attachment. Reflection on the uniqueness of a nation looks first of all at language."..."The history of language, vocabulary and grammar become the main themes of a new discipline. The reason: language is viewed as the key to the mind of a people since language is the form that expresses a particular perception of life and the world."... "The interest in language is maintained by the enthusiasm for one's own language and is combined with a practical postulate - *language should be purified and preserved*. (Nipperdey 1983:1-2)

One of the principal assumptions underlying Herder's work was the idea that the nation was a natural entity. (Koepke 1987) Herder's successors expanded this idea, developing the notion that the cultural boundaries of this "natural entity" were to correspond to political boundaries (Berlin 1976, 1980, 1992).

While the origins of linguistic nationalism can be traced beyond Herder's time, (as will be further discussed below) it was he who became the major exponent of linguistic patriotism. Herder played a vital role in establishing the link between language and national consciousness. It was Herder who "firmly established the principle that language was the most natural and hence indispensable basis of socio-political association; that language *created a Volk*." (Barnard 1965:30)

The one person who is undoubtedly most responsible for translating Herder's ideas into a broader sociopolitical language and position was the German philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) (Berlin 1992, Edwards 1985: Grillo 1989: Smith 1983). A determinist like Herder, Fichte claimed that the manner in which a nation thinks and conceptualizes the world depends upon its language. A direct outcome of his theorization of culture and language, Fichte's ideas are an extrapolation of Herder's contention that loss of language entails loss of identity. While Herder argued that for a man to speak a foreign language was to live an artificial life, i.e., to be estranged from the spontaneous, instinctive sources of his personality, Fichte maintained that the mere presence of foreign words in a language were harmful insofar as they contaminated the very springs of political morality (Kedourie 1961). Fichte's ideas are clearly more puritanical than Herder's. He argues for example, that "original, primitive languages" are superior to composite, derived languages. German was for him an original language, *eine Ursprache*, while French and English are composite, derived languages. Kedourie argues that two conclusions must be drawn from Fichte's argument. "[F]irst that people who speak an original language are nations, and second, that nations must speak an original language. To speak an original language is to be true to one's character, to maintain one's identity," and secondly,

since a nation, ipso facto, must speak an original language, its speech must be cleansed of foreign accretions and borrowings, since the purer the language, the more natural it is, and the easier it becomes for the nation to realize itself, incumbent on a nation worthy of the name, to revive, develop, and extend what is taken to be its original speech, even though it might be found only in remote villages, or had not been used for centuries, even though its resources are inadequate and its literature poor-for only such an original language will allow a nation to realize itself and attain freedom. (Kedourie 1961:67)

These ideas, not supported by any kind of linguistic or other type of empirical evidence, and as absurd as they might seem, nevertheless were in times to come to reign supreme in linguistic nationalism and moreover, in linguistic purism. These ideas, which lie at the foundation of linguistic nationalism and linguistic purism, were bought wholesale by Icelandic 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist and have ever since been the hallmark of Icelandic linguistic purism. Yet, there is more to this concern of linguistic purity than simply an interest in language. For the Romantics, language was a reflection of the unique spirit of the people, of its *Volkstum* (nationality). "With due respect to higher realities" says Greenfeld,

the champions of German nationality, "enlightened pietist [and Romantics]" as they were, refused to see this ethereal entity as the beginning of all things, and made it itself a reflection of material reality. The spirit of the nation, and therefore its language, reflected the body; *ultimately nationality was based on blood*. Again, the excellence of the German nation lay in the fact that its blood was pure, there were no foreign admixtures, the German was the *Urvolk*. (1992:368 italics mine)

Greenfeld further argues, that "German consciousness was unmistakably and distinctly racist from the moment it existed, and the national identity of the Germans was essentially an identity of race, and only superficially that of language or anything else. The language, deeply revered as it was, was but an epiphenomenon, a reflection of race, "the indisputable testimony of common decent." (1992:369) This argument should not come as any surprise, particularly when one bears in mind the subsequent development of German nationalism, culminating in the horrendous atrocities of the Holocaust. The crimes of the Holocaust were justified by this notion of the superiority of the German *Urvolk*, and the alleged "necessity" for racial purity. And as Greenfeld points out, "since

the spirit and the language reflected the race, they could retain their originality - their *Ur*-character - only if the blood was kept pure." (ibid.)<sup>4</sup> This core conflation of an allegedly "genetic race" with language, culture and nation, lying at the foundation of German Romantic nationalism was later to be adopted by Icelandic nationalists, as we will see later in our discussion. Likewise, Icelandic purism is also only linguistic on the surface so we will - and not surprisingly - find this same conflation at the core of Icelandic purism as well.

Although, the assumptions of Fichte and his supporters are highly speculative and in no way grounded on any substantive evidence, linguistic or otherwise, his ideas had an immeasurable impact on the political development of Europe and later on other parts of the world. In the same way that the French Revolution gave currency to the principle of the sovereignty of the nation, Fichte and his fellow nationalists were equally revolutionary (as Kedourie rightly argues) by claiming that a nation was defined by natural linguistic boundaries. The core of their position was that what they conceived to be "natural boundaries" of a specific language, hence "race" or "nation" automatically defined the boundaries of the state. The end result of Fichte's ideas was the "fatal equation of language state and nation, which is the cornerstone of the German version of nationalism." (Smith 1983:33)

For the Romantics, the state was seen as an impersonal entity separated from the personality of its ruler. The term, "state," was used synonymously with the term "society," and "social life," Greenfeld informs us. "Under the magical action of the Romantic logic" the term "social reality,"

was swiftly transformed into a justification for a moral and political imperative and acquired ominous connotations. To be true to one's nature, or individuality and totality, was the very purpose of human existence. Thus to be true to man's social nature became a matter of ethical conduct; a man who did not feel one with society was not an individual and was not "whole." And since "the state" or "society"

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<sup>4</sup> One of the principal arguments of the "race scientists" of the Nazi's Dr. Tirala, holds that "the voice of blood and race operates down to the last refinements of thought and exercises a decisive influence on the direction of thought. " Hence, "race science proves" that there exist irreconcilable differences in soul, mind, and blood between the numerous "races" which German, or "Aryan," "race" is the "superior" and "master" "race"" (quoted in Montagu 1974:12).

meant at the same time a particular state or society - the fatherland - nothing but complete fusion with the existence of a particular state answered the requirements of true humanity. Man's individuality was impossible without fusion with the state; his personality drowned within the state. For states too, were individuals. They were living, willing organisms. In fact, they were more individuals than people. (Greenfeld 1992:346-347)

And as the exalted purpose of the state was to preserve its individuality, there was no room for diversity, "the state, clearly, could not tolerate independence, indifference, or insufficient enthusiasm on the part of the smaller individuals who composed it." (ibid.) The Romantics generally scorned the notion of toleration, the watchword of the Enlightenment. Hence the overzealous insistence on homogeneity, whether cultural, linguistic or racial, that was to characterize German nationalism later on. This insistence on homogeneity and thus opposition to diversity is however, and one should add unfortunately, not confined to German Romantic nationalism. It is to the contrary the common denominator of extreme nationalism in general and has in other cases also led to the horrors of more recent genocides, or so-called "ethnic cleanings." As we will encounter, the similar overzealous insistence on "linguistic" purity and "cultural" preservation is a recurrent theme in Icelandic nationalism. And, as was the case in German Romantic nationalism, the line between linguistic purity and racial purity in the Icelandic version becomes dangerously thin and at times non-existing.

The proclaimed passion of the Romantic nationalists for democracy, Greenfeld asserts, "meant nothing but the total submersion of the individual within the collectivity..., [the nation], renunciation of every particular interest, and unconditional service of the collective self by each in his proper place." (ibid.) In short, this meant in practice the total submission of the individual not only to the collectivity of the nation but moreover to the material expression of its spirit i.e., the state. As the purpose of the organic state was to preserve *its* individuality, hence the individual's first and last duty was to see to the preservation of the life of this supra individual. To the notion of liberty - one of the great legacies of the French Revolution - the Romantic nationalists added a new

meaning, which was entirely in accordance with the insistence of the dissolution of the person within the collectivity and says Greenfeld, "reflected the belief in the salubrity and necessity of cultural and racial isolation. In addition to voluntary submission to recognized necessity, liberty came to mean freedom from foreign domination." (1992:370)

German linguistic nationalism, based as it was on Fichte's ideas had immense influence in shaping and defining the ideological framework and criteria employed by the practitioners of what came to be known as philological nationalism. It was during the Romantic period that the nexus of language and nation was put into a consistent ideological context and language became, for many groups of people, the most prominent symbol of nationhood.

In the 18th and the 19th centuries, interest in language and its origins was a part of a broader interest in the cultural origins of human populations. This was particularly true for the German scholars interested in cultures of past eras. It is in these early days of German social sciences that one finds the roots of the research field that was later to be called *Volkskunde*, which laid the basis for ethnological study in north Western Europe (Stocking Jr. 1982). It is within this *Volkskunde* field of inquiry that one finds a search for lost manuscripts which could serve to indicate the earlier form(s) of a particular language as well as legitimizing that language through its literacy. In Iceland, the old sagas, written before the island became part of the Norwegian kingdom in the 1200s, became one of the strongest cultural and later political tools used by the 19th century nationalists (Halldórsson 1979; Ottósson 1990; Pálsson 1979). The interest in language in Romantic nationalism is also coupled with a specific interest in history. The history of a supposedly glorious medieval period or even earlier periods "in whom the elemental features can still be seen in the purity of their budding stage without foreign accretion," is of particular interest (Nipperdey 1983:2). This glorification of the past was a reaction to the patronizing attitudes of the French towards the backward Germans. "[R]esentful of their apparent inferiority of [their] status," Berlin informs us, the German intellectuals and later the emerging nationalistic intellectuals

in other countries, humiliated by similar backwardness *vis-à-vis* the leading countries of the west, "reacted by turning to real or imaginary triumphs and glories in its past." (1992:246) We see this clearly manifest among Icelandic nationalistic intellectuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who relentlessly glorified the Golden Age of the Icelandic Commonwealth, when the Icelandic "nation," "culture," and "language" supposedly existed in a "pure" state free of foreign "contamination" of Norwegians and Danes.

In the same way as literature and arts were by Romantic nationalists viewed as products of the national mind, everywhere collections of ancient national literature emerged and the medieval epics were interpreted as *national* epics. This was definitely the case in Iceland, where Edda and the old Sagas were not only considered to be a proof a unique language but moreover they represented the glorious past of Iceland and the essence of the national character of the Icelandic nation. With the advent of nationalism the collection and interest in the old sagas became a mission aimed at proving and preserving the national character of Icelanders (we will discuss this in more detail in chapter three). Moreover, as we will see again and again in this thesis, the sagas' were amongst other things, used to justify the right to national autonomy while simultaneously serving as a criterion for "pure" and "correct" language use (Halldórsson 1979; Ottósson 1990; Pálsson 1979). Furthermore, in order to fully *nationalize* the past glory of Icelandic society and thus Icelandic national character, the early nationalist of the 19th century named the era from settlement to the time when "the nation lost its independence" in the middle of the thirteenth century, "*Þjóðveldisöld*." This period, is in English traditionally referred to as the Commonwealth era a term that does not carry the same meaning as the Icelandic term "*Þjóðveldisöld*," which actually means "the age of national power."

Another product of the Romantic nationalist ideology and the period was the establishment of national museums - in many countries - where the national past was put on display. Architecture, music and eventually nature itself became nationalized as well. This was the era that

saw the construction of national buildings signifying the architectural excellence of "the nation" oftentimes decorated by some distinct "national" features such as the hexagonal basalt pillars that decorate The National Theatre in Reykjavík, Iceland.<sup>5</sup> This time also saw an emerging passion for the collection and transcription of folk-tunes and many music composers sought their motifs to this folk music (Hobsbawm 1975/1984). Nature was praised in poetry, not in and of itself as such, but as *national nature*. The Icelandic patriotic poetry, emerging chiefly with the advent of nationalism in the second quarter of the 19th century and reigning in the field until after independence (1944), reflects this vividly. There the unmatched "Icelandic beauty" of the country is praised as God's gift to the nation and the hardship brought on by natural constraints is forgiven because the land is beautiful. Moreover, the natural constraints are seen as having fostered unique tolerance for hardship and misery which in turn has reinforced the "national" qualities of endurance, prowess and resilience.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, nature was nationalized in paintings of the era. (We will elaborate more on the nationalization of nature in chapter seven).<sup>7</sup> All these aspects of national culture were finally passed down via the emerging public school system. The "national heritage" - however defined - became a part of the main goals of education. The public schools were subsequently themselves nationalized along with all public cultural activities (Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1975/1984, 1990, Nipperdey 1983).

The implication of the above discussion is that both linguistic and sociolinguistic theory emerged from the social philosophy of the late 18th century. This same social philosophy was instrumental in shaping nationalism, the emergent political ideology of the time, and especially in shaping one of its most important branches, linguistic nationalism.

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<sup>5</sup> As will be pointed out in chapter two, the oldest remaining buildings in Iceland date only back to the eighteenth century. All building material before that time was either timber or soil or the combination of these two, neither one of which did survive the hardship of the weather for long. This absence of old architectural remains has accelerated the emphasis on other aspects of the "cultural heritage" particularly the "language" and the literary tradition.

<sup>6</sup> All the poets writing within the Romantic tradition wrote praises to the land, see chapter 7.

<sup>7</sup> For nationalism in paintings see chapter 7.

Moreover, during the period, which Hobsbawm has called The Age of Revolution, the notion of the state as essential to progress fully materializes in the writings of German philosophers such as Kant and Fichte. This point is crucial insofar as these writers were major contributors to the social philosophy of the time. It was this same notion of progress, which underlay the search for the origins of languages that preoccupied science and philosophy during the 18th century. These ideas were to develop and preoccupy the philosophy of language and the various branches of linguistics that consequently emerged. If a language could be shown to display features of the original language, it was assumed that the speakers of that language were closer to the perfect state of nature and its associated reason.

In conclusion, it was Herder who firmly established the idea that language was inextricably linked with Volk or nation. It was Fichte who gave Herder's ideas political currency by linking the nation, i.e., and the language group, with the state. It is in Fichte, that we find the ultimate conflation of "language," "nation," "race," "culture" and "state" and the insistence on their "purity." The purity of the spirit of the "nation" could only be preserved in "pure" "language," and as the language reflected the body, nationality was ultimately based on blood. Likewise, the state, the material aspect of language, had to be kept pure from any kind of foreign mixture.

Embedded in the social philosophy of the Romantics was a conception of the nature of society, which is highly questionable as argued by Williams (1992). Yet these assumptions have been so highly influential in both sociolinguistics and social theory that they have achieved the status of axiom. For the present discussion, it is important to remember that central to this conception is the idea that the emergence of the state, -- i.e., the nation-state -- inevitably led to progress.

#### IV. Nationalism and the Demystification of Herder's Legacy

The repercussions of the ideas of German linguistic nationalism were felt most immediately in Europe where the emergent nationalist movements adopted them for political purposes (Seton-Watson 1977; Smith 1983). Yet, while pivotal for political development in Europe, the idea of a national language was also to have enormous influence in the nation building processes in post-colonial societies. In order to examine the importance of national language for socio-political development in the 19th and the 20th centuries, we will now look at recent theories that have been instrumental in unraveling the origins and spread of nationalism as well as analyzing its constitutive myths. We will focus on those writers who have been most influential for the anthropological discussions of nationalism i.e., on discussions, which for the most part, concentrate on the relationship between language, nation and state.

To equate language with nation is one thing but to demand political autonomy for a linguistically defined group is quite a different matter. Yet, this equation, linked with the demand for an autonomous state, became the hallmark of many late 19th and early 20th century nationalist struggles in Europe and later elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Cross-cultural sociolinguistic studies have offered serious criticism of the nationalistic notion that language; nation and state are inherently embedded in a primordial unity. In recent years, several serious theoretical attacks have been made against this nationalistic equation, including those by Anderson (1983), Hobsbawm (1972, 1990) and Gellner (1983). Those studies in one way or another all ask the question: If the link between language, nation and state is not an inherent primordial unity as Herder and his followers maintained, what then explains the popularity and strength of this notion? In order to understand the historical

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<sup>8</sup> For Europe, France provides the best example of the reverse pattern, i.e., where the nation had to be established after the formation of the state. Of these two patterns, the latter one has proved to be more common in the process of nation-state formation outside Europe. Tilly (1991) has called these patterns state-seeking and state-led nationalism respectively.

development of how language became the object of political and governmental action we have to look at the origins and development of nationalism itself.

First one may ask what exactly, is nationalism? Nationalism can mean many different things an ideology, a political doctrine, a political movement. Unfortunately, these lines are often blurred in discussion and theoretical discourse. The obscurity and complexity of the concept *nationalism* is a reflection of the complexity of the phenomenon (Alter 1989). Even though nationalism is, without a doubt, one of the most influential political ideologies of the modern era, it is also the political ideology marked by least agreement (Breuilly 1982, 1985). This means that not only is it difficult to learn about nationalism by studying its prophets, one also has to be cautious about accepting the arguments of its most outspoken enemies. The literature reveals that there is a gulf between those who regard nationalism as a product of underlying national identity, however crude that form may be, and those who regard nationalism as the cause of nationality rather than as its product (Breuilly 1985). There is also a tension between those who see the nation as a political association and those see it as a cultural community. Breuilly (1985) has argued that the failure to agree even on basic questions concerning nationalism is attributable to two major reasons: First, the global impact of nationalism has created a vast range of cases and vested interests which make it difficult to agree upon what its basic principles are. The second reason is attributable to the peculiar dualism embedded in nationalism, i.e., that nationalism combines both a descriptive as well as a prescriptive claim. An example of this duality is the claim that "there is a nation and it should be free." (1985:65) Some analysts focus on the descriptive claim, asking whether such entities as *nations* do exist and if so, how they can be counted for. Others focus on the prescriptive claim, i.e., why do nationalists make such a claim and why do others support it? This has resulted in an ever growing literature on nationalism, although, in my opinion it has not necessarily deepened or advanced knowledge of the subject. While it is true that an immense historical and theoretical literature on nationalism exists, it is almost impossible as so many authors have noted, to make an

intelligible comparison out of its findings (Alter 1989, Anderson 1983, Breuilly 1985, Hobsbawm 1972, 1990). Recently, the debate has intensified by the end of the cold war and the rise of reactionary nationalistic movements, particularly in the former communist states of Eastern Europe.

Anthropologists are relative latecomers to the scholarly debates on nationalism, yet their contribution has helped to expand the understanding of how nations, national cultures and identities are produced and reproduced over time (Domínguez 1989, Fox 1990, Foster 1991, Herzfeld 1986, Handler 1988, Verdery 1991).<sup>9</sup> While anthropologists may be newcomers to the discourse on nationalism, they are definitely not beginners when it comes to the study of the relationship between culture and language. Before we look at the anthropological contribution to the discourse in general and more particularly, at linguistic research, it is important to examine those works on nationalism by historians, political scientists, philosophers and sociologists that have influenced anthropological understanding of the nation, national language and its relation to the nation-state. For the purposes of this thesis, there is no need to trace in detail all the various theories on nationalism that have appeared in the last decades. For that, I will point to Anthony D. Smith's book Theories of Nationalism (1983) and also to Partha Chattarje's Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World (1986). Here it will suffice to give the earlier works on nationalism a cursory look (these theories are in any event of very little importance for the present discourse).

### *1. The Essentialist Approach*

The early historical theories of C.B. Hayes (1931/1966), H. Kohn (1944), and E. Kedourie (1961) were predominantly diffusionist. Treating nationalism as an ideology with specific roots in pre-modern Europe, they regarded it as a political doctrine coincidental with the

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<sup>9</sup> This is so mainly because the units of study within anthropology were traditionally much smaller and less complex than those of the nation state. In recent years, the field has undergone great changes in this respect as will be discussed later in this chapter.

rise of state power. Underlying this conception was the assumption that nationalism possessed "an independent causal force, which is so potent that well-established structures and beliefs must crumble beneath its onslaught." (Smith 1983:27, Breuilly 1985) These theories failed to give a comprehensive understanding of how ideologies developed to influence people. Others, such as Karl Deutsch (1966), linked nationalism with "modernization." Deutsch emphasized the development of internal communications within the states as leading to the creation of a common sense of moral and political identity. The theory failed to explain why intensification of communication should necessarily lead to the consolidation of the state and further, why this consolidation should inevitably be accompanied by nationalism. In his critique of Deutsch, Smith (1983) argues that the underlying principle of "modernization," which lay behind all "communications" theories is characterized by tremendous Eurocentrism and crude determinism. In the writings of these scholars as well as in the popular discourse the common assumption reigned that nations possessed an immutable character and national cultures were more or less self contained entities with definite and clear cut boundaries. This form of nationalism, which derives straight from Herder, Fichte and other German philosophers, is called either essentialism or primordialism. Here, the nation is considered to be a primordial or "natural, quasi-eternal entity created by God, language and culture embody the role each nation has to perform in history. Emphasis is on the emotional and ideational aspects of the community rather than economic, social and political dimensions." (Guibernau 1996:2)

## *2. The Modernist Approach*

In opposition to the essentialists approach is the so-called modernist approach, including several theories on nationalism. These theories are more recent and have all appeared in the last two to three decades. Here attempts have been made to link historical analysis and theory. While

differing in their explanations of the origins of nationalism, the most prominent authors in the discourse all emphasize its modernity, pointing out that nationalism's concomitant phenomena, -- the nation, national identity and the nation-state -- are also modern constructions. The works of these authors, from Anderson 1983; Armstrong 1982; Bhabha 1990; Breuilly 1985; Chattarjee 1986; Gellner 1983; Giddens 1987; Hobsbawm 1972, 1990; Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.) 1983; Nairn 1981; to Tilly 1975, 1990, all connect nationalism with the growth of the modern state, where they differ is in regard to the aspects of the modern state that nationalism is linked to.

It is appropriate to look first at the works of Ernest Gellner, with primary focus on Nations and Nationalism (1983) (see also Gellner 1964, 1987). Gellner is one of the most prominent representatives of liberal theories of nationalism. In some respect his position is similar to those of Deutsch and Breuilly (1982). Like them, Gellner sees *nationalism as a function of modernization*. Unlike Deutsch who focuses on diffusion of communication, Gellner emphasizes that *industrialism* is the key to modernity. For Gellner, the social structure of industrialism encourages more extensive, culturally based identities which only nationalism is capable of creating. Gellner stresses that unlike what it presents itself to be, "nationalism is *not* the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, "it is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state." (1983:48) For Gellner, nations as God-given entities are a myth invented by nationalist ideology. In Gellner's view, the inescapable reality, for better or worse, is the fact that nationalism takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations. In doing so, it invents nations and obliterates pre-existing cultures. This new unit, the nation-state, is the outcome of nationalism. Furthermore, it has now become the norm for determining the legitimacy of political units in the modern world. How does language fit into Gellner's theory? To understand the role of language in industrial society Gellner argues that one must look at both the mode of production and at the mode of reproduction. The complex division of labor embedded in industrialist society is dependent upon a universal

educational system, which provides people with the basic tools for employment such as standard language and literacy. The only body strong enough to sustain an educational system of this measure is the centralized state. Universal educational systems, in turn, produce "standard cultures." For Gellner, the necessary imperative of standard education is the explanatory key for why state and culture must be linked in the modern period. In the industrial age, it is the literate idiom of high culture and the styles of communication they carry, which become universal. While nationalism claims to defend folk culture (and it usually conquers in the name of putative folk culture) it in fact imposes its own, at times invented, local high culture. In short, for Gellner, the economies of industrialized states depend upon the homogenization of culture, mass literacy and a monolithic education system. One of the key problems with Gellner's theory is that it fails to explain why nationalism emerges in societies that have not begun the process of industrialism. At another level, his insistence on classifying nationalities along cultural and linguistic lines and his inclination to treat language and culture, as more or less interchangeable for modern societies, are both tendencies, which only reiterate the theoretical propositions he is trying to critique.

In contrast to Gellner's liberal viewpoint, Benedict Anderson's now classic book Imagined Communities (1983), is Marxist in orientation. Anderson is unorthodox in both argument and presentation, in his theory of the origin and spread of nationalism. Imagined Communities has been of paramount importance for the overall discourse on nationalism and national culture across disciplines and also for the discourse of language and power. At the core of Anderson's argument, lies the notion that nationality and nationalism are cultural artifacts with specific historic origins and moreover, the development and the persistence of these phenomena must be seen in historical context in order to be properly understood. He also proposes that nationalism should be treated like the concepts of "kinship" or "religion" rather than as a political ideology, a point that is supported in this thesis. Like religion, but unlike other sets of political ideologies, i.e., Marxism or Liberalism that are completely silent regarding the existential or cosmological aspects of life, *nationalism gives*

*people a fixed place in time and space.* For Anderson, the dynamic driving economic change in the modern period lies in *capitalism* and its convergence with *print technology*. This convergence in turn makes possible the nationalist imagination, i.e., and the "imagined community." The "imagined community," a term invented by Anderson and now commonplace in the discourse on nationalism applies to the specific group called "the nation." For Anderson, the nation "is an imagined political community- imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the communion." (1983:15) Moreover, this newly imagined community has superseded all previous forms of cultural systems, dynastic or religious according to Anderson.

One may ask, what made this newly imagined community possible? Here Anderson points to the merging of print technology with capitalism, or what he has called *print-capitalism*. Within Anderson's "imagined community," people are able to think about themselves and relate to one another in ways unknown before, as culture becomes constructed through representations such as popular novels and later newspapers. Printing has been crucial for the homogenization and standardization of given vernaculars (see also Eisenstein 1983). The translations of Biblical texts into vernaculars required by the Reformation were critical for this development.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, linked with capitalism, printing helped to create a conscious, but distinct identity, of specific language communities. These language communities in turn laid the basis for the formation of national communities. Anderson argues that: "These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness in three distinct ways. First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communications below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars."..."Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so

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<sup>10</sup> The impact of print-capitalism, via Protestantism, was critical in Scandinavia. While calling for standardization of vernaculars in the Nordic speaking countries, the translation of the Bible into Finnish marked the beginning of turning Finnish into a written language in 1542 (Allardt 1985; Haugen 1972, see also Ottósson 1990).

central to the subjected idea of the nation," "Third print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects were 'closer' to each print-language and dominated their final forms." (1983:47-8)

What is Anderson's position on the relationship between language and the nation-state and intellectuals? He argues that the late 18th century saw the dawn of scientific comparative studies of languages, most of which were inspired by Herder's ideas. These studies flourished to the point that the 19th century became the "golden age of vernacularizing lexicographers, grammarians, philologist, and litterateurs. The energetic activities of these professional intellectuals were central to the shaping of 19th century nationalism." (1983:69, see also Hobsbawm 1962) Situated more often than not at university libraries, these "linguistic" professionals exercised tremendous influence upon the students they taught. Moreover, according to Anderson, the rise of the middle strata in 19th century Europe has to be understood in relation to vernacular print-capitalism. The bourgeoisie were the first classes to extensively read in vernaculars and therefore the first in world historical terms to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis.

The 19th century saw tremendous growth in literacy, commerce, industry, communications and, equally important, in state expenditure. These socio-economic changes accelerated vernacular linguistic unification by creating the need to establish formal linkages between the language of the state and the language of the population. In summarizing his argument, Anderson concludes that "the convergence of print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation." (ibid. p.49)

Like Anderson Imagined Communities, the works of historian Eric Hobsbawm on nations and nationalism (1972:1990) and of Hobsbawm's and Ranger's The Invention of Tradition (1983) have all had great influence on the discourse and understanding of nationalism and its correlated

phenomena. These works have also been crucially important for anthropology. According to recent analysis, "[o]ne of the most obvious changes in the field of anthropology in recent years is the extent to which the field has been moving in a historical direction." (Dirks, Eley, Ortner et al. 1994) Hobsbawm agrees with Breuilly (1985) and Gellner (1983) that nationalism is "primarily a political principle which holds that the political and the national should be congruent." (1983:1) For Hobsbawm, the nation as a cultural entity corresponds to the political boundaries of the state.

Hobsbawm puts forward a definition of the nation based on the socio-political aspirations of nationalists rather than on their ideological claims. He begins by pointing out that the nation "is a historically novel construct, characteristic of the period since the late eighteenth century," and that "[i]ts novelty consists in the combination of two main assumptions," which are on the one hand "the bonds of loyalty to... the "nation" [which] are not merely superior to all other, but in a sense replace them, so far as political obligation is concerned. A man is.... definable ...overwhelmingly in terms of a single one, [loyalty], his 'nationality'." The second assumption "is the belief that this single collectivity of 'the people' or 'the nation' must find its expression in an independent and sovereign 'nation-state', preferably containing a homogeneous population composed only of members of its 'nation' using a single language." (1972:388) Reiterating this point in The Invention of Tradition, Hobsbawm argues that "one of the specific interests of 'invented traditions'" is "the "nation" with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest." (1983:13) The "invention of tradition" is an imperative part of the nation-making process, entailing the selection of memories for the collectively held past. The invention of tradition is, in other words, a part of the construction and reconstruction of a national past. History is of central importance, therefore, in the ongoing process of imagining on the part of the community. To quote the famous observation by Renan, "getting its history wrong is part of being a nation." (quoted in Hobsbawm 1990:12) Hobsbawm's invention of the now celebrated term "invention of tradition" delineates the part tradition plays in constructing a collective past. Hobsbawm's term, "invention of

tradition" is highly akin to Raymond Williams' discussion of *tradition*, a phenomenon closely linked to hegemony.<sup>11</sup> As Williams puts it:

Tradition is in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits. It is always more than an inert historicized segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation. What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a *selective tradition*: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification. (Williams 1977:115)

What has Hobsbawm to say about the particular relationship between the nation-state and language? What kind of "invented tradition" does that relationship entail? "In fact," says Hobsbawm, "the mystical identification of nationality with a sort of platonic idea of the language, existing behind and above all its variant and imperfect versions, is much more characteristic of the ideological construction of nationalist intellectuals, of whom Herder is the prophet, than of the actual grassroots users of the idiom. It is a literary and not an existential concept." (1990:57) The platonic idea of a national language is thus an invented notion and by the same token the whole idea of *purity*, the key concept in Icelandic nationalism, is of course an invented tradition.

Like Anderson, Hobsbawm maintains that national languages did not evolve on a purely oral basis but rather, that they are the outcomes of a standardization of vernaculars made possible by the combination of print technology and capitalism.

Why did the modern state become so susceptible to the mythical conception of language, originally propagated by Herder and his successors? According to Hobsbawm, the modern state "ruled over a territorially defined 'people' and did so as a supreme 'national' agency of rule over its territory, its agents increasingly reaching down to the humblest inhabitants of the least of its villages." (1990:80) Hobsbawm argues that the nation-state needs to have some kind of criteria that could enforce unity amongst an otherwise heterogeneous population. These criteria simultaneously underlined the differences between "us" and "them" (i.e., "us" the nation, vs. "them" who are not the nation). Thus, state authorities had every reason to reinforce state patriotism with the sentiments

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<sup>11</sup> For further discussion on the term hegemony, see next section [Anthropology redefines national culture and language](#)46

and symbols of an "imagined community." In line with Gellner, Hobsbawm argues that the process of modernization required a homogenization and standardization of its inhabitants, acquired, not least, by means of a written national language. Literacy was necessary for both administrative purposes as well as for technological reasons. Hobsbawm points out that mass education in the modern nation-state must, for practical purposes, be conducted in a vernacular. He is quick to add however, that the choice of the "official" national language is rarely a pragmatic matter, and still less a dispassionate one (as will be shown later by examples that reveal the reluctance to recognize national languages as constructs). "[F]or the ideologist of nationalism as it evolved after 1830 and was transformed towards the end of the century,...language was the soul of a nation, and... increasingly the crucial criterion of nationality." (ibid. 95)

What made the language problem even more explosive "was that, under the circumstances, all nationalism not already identified with a state necessarily became political. For the state was the machine, which had to be manipulated if a 'nationality' was to turn into a 'nation,' or even if its existing status was to be safeguarded against historical erosion or assimilation.... linguistic nationalism was and is essentially about the language of public education and official use." (1990:96) Hobsbawm argues, that "since linguistic nationalism essentially requires control of the state or at least the winning of official recognition for the language.".... *"At all events problems of power, status, politics and ideology and not of communication or even culture, lie at the heart of nationalism of language."* (ibid.110 italics mine) "The politico-ideological element is evident in the process of language construction which can range from the mere 'correction' and standardization of existing literary and cultural languages," ....., "to the resuscitation of dead or almost extinct languages which amounts to virtual invention of new ones. For, contrary to nationalist myth, a people's language is not the basis of national consciousness but, ....., a cultural artifact," (ibid. 111 ).... "Whatever the motivation of planned language construction and manipulation, and whatever the degree of transformation envisaged, state power is essential to it." (ibid. 112)

In our above discussion, we have seen how Gellner (1983), Anderson (1983) Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Hobsbawm (1962, 1972, 1990) all emphasize the modernity of the nation and the nation state. Whether caused by "fabrication," "invention" or "imagination," they all reject Herder's legacy, i.e., the proposition that language, nation and state is an inherent primordial unity.

From the perspective of the modernists the idea of purity, whether manifested as linguistic purity or genetic purity of the nation does by the same token fall apart as the boundaries that mark one national language and one nation from one another are essentially invented. The modernists' studies emphasize that the construction and imposition of a standard language has been crucial for the construction of national identity and hence, for national culture and the nation state. They have all pointed out the importance of literacy and education for the consolidation of the nation-state and thus touched upon the central question of power and the distribution of power. Moreover, Gellner, Anderson and Hobsbawm have also all pointed out the important role played by intellectuals in the process of nation and nation-state making. Finally, both Anderson and Hobsbawm have shown us that there is an inextricable link between the rise of the middle strata, i.e., the bourgeoisie and nation-state making, where national language has served as a cementing factor in consolidating the power of the former within the latter.

## **V. Anthropology Redefines National Culture and Language**

My interest in the relationship between language and the nation-state is, as noted earlier, part of a broader and fairly recent interest in anthropological studies concerned with the production and reproduction of national culture. These new studies of national culture have been greatly

inspired by the more fundamental reformulation of the culture concept occurring in anthropology in the last twenty years. These theoretical transformations have, in turn, provided a new understanding of language and its relation to culture, nation and the state. Thus, in this section we will look at the high points of these transformations, particularly as they pertain to language and the nation-state.

One of the major motivations behind the reformulation of the culture concept was a direct result of a new understanding of power and history. The political, social and economic changes taking place in the world in the 1960s – de-colonization, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the increasing interconnectedness of the global economy - initially stimulated a fundamental revision and re-conceptualization of the culture concept and subsequently, the subject matter of anthropological analysis (Ortner 1984; Rosaldo 1989). Ethnographic research is now placing increased emphasis on history and politics/power in the context of inequality and oppression. The discipline's agenda has shifted from the search for structures to theories of practice that allow for an exploration of the interplay between both structure and agency (Dirks et al, 1994; Foster 1991; Ortner 1984; Rosaldo 1989; Roseberry 1989). Hence, instead of viewing culture as a static entity, the focus in anthropology has shifted towards "understanding [how] society and culture themselves are produced and reproduced through human intention and action." (Ortner 1984:158) This new perspective on culture has rendered a new understanding of nations and national cultures. Nations themselves are now regarded as cultural products and nationalism as cultural processes of collective identity formation. Nationalist Ideologies and the Production of National Cultures by Fox et al.,(1990), represents this new understanding. In the text national culture is understood as both malleable and mobile.

It is the outcome of a constant process of cultural production. A national culture is constantly being molded as individuals and groups confront their social worlds and try to (re)form them. Out of such confrontations emerge nationalist ideologies from which, in turn, a national culture gets produced. (1990:2)

In line with Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm, anthropologists dealing with the subject of "making nations" reiterate the notion of the novelty of the nation and emphasize that neither the nation-as-community, nor national culture, has any essential properties. No one criterion, be it language, religion, race or common history, is a necessary prerequisite for the nation and for national culture. The scholars subscribing to this notion argue that there is nothing "natural" about the existence of the nation or of national culture (see for example, Alter 1989; Giddens 1987; Foster 1991; Fox et al. 1990; Handler 1988; Herzfeld 1986; Tilly 1990, 1991; Wallerstein & Balibar 1991; Verdery 1991). The work of making culture is "taken to be problematic rather than automatic, the site of multiple contests informed by a diversity of historically specific actions and intentions." (Foster 1991:235) Within these new theoretical parameters, nations and national cultures are regarded as artifacts, continually imagined and invented, as well as constantly produced, contested and transformed by either individual persons (agents), collectivities (ethnic, religious or class-bound groups), the state (agencies), or by the global flow of commodities (Anderson 1983; Chattarjee 1986; Foster 1991; Fox 1990; Gellner 1983; Handler 1988; Hannerz 1989; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Hofer 1991; Löfgren & Frykman 1987, Löfgren 1989; Segal 1988; Williams 1990).

As encountered earlier, before the emergence of the recent studies on "the making of the nation," the prevailing historical assumptions insisted that culture and national culture, were more or less static entities and that nations were naturally defined phenomena (Dirks et al 1994; Rosaldo 1989). This understanding of culture is obviously traceable back to Herder<sup>12</sup> who preferred to speak about cultures in the plural, thereby calling attention to the particularities of different groups and cultures.<sup>13</sup> The virtual absence of history in former anthropological analysis, which rendered

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<sup>12</sup> Anthropologist Richard Handler (1988) has argued for a hidden history of associations between the anthropological concept of culture as a static entity and the nationalistic concept of nation.

<sup>13</sup> Unlike Herder, the 19th century German philosopher G. F. Klemm used culture to indicate a particular way of life of humanity in general (Williams 1983). Following Klemm's notion, E. Tylor later introduced the culture concept into the

culture (especially in so-called "traditional societies") as being timeless, has been abandoned. Culture is now seen as a locus of multiple discourses that may, at times, come together but more often involves the interaction of discourses in a field of conflict. This movement in anthropological theory has been greatly inspired by the work of the French philosopher Michael Foucault, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and British literary critic Raymond Williams. The ideas of these thinkers, which can be seen as part of a renewed interest in the role of human agency in the development of capitalism, have in turn drawn attention to the questions of consciousness, culture and language (Gal 1989).

### *1. The Impact of Williams, Foucault and Bourdieu*

We will turn first to Foucault's notions of *discourse* and *power*, which have been crucial for the recent theoretical shift in anthropology. For Foucault, the notion of *discourse* refers to "collections of statements, practices, classificatory schemas, and objects of analysis which, although seemingly disparate and contradictory, share a set of discursive rules which govern their functioning." (Miller et al. 1987:158) For Foucault, discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But discourse "is itself produced by practice: "discursive practice" - the practice of producing meaning. Since all social practices entail *meaning*, all practices have a discursive aspect. So discourse enters into and influences all social practice" (Hall, 1996:201-202).<sup>14</sup> Foucault's concept of *power* on the other hand, has allowed a new understanding to emerge regarding the relationship between discourses and their social contexts; Foucault's proposition is that the ideas that inform the dominant discourse are situated in social and material conditions. For

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English language and into anthropology in an elaborated form through his ethnographic writing (Berlin 1976, Williams 1977, 1983, Thompson 1990).

Foucault, power exists not as an essential thing but rather as a relation. As he put it, "[i]n reality power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations." (Foucault 1980:198) For Foucault, power and truth are inseparable; power is needed for the production of truth.

Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power. ....Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; of the status of those who are charged with saying what accounts as true. (Foucault 1980:131)

Foucault further notes, that "in societies like ours, 'the political economy' of truth is characterized by five important traits." (ibid.) It is worth the effort to look at these traits as they enable us grasp how power and truth operate in Western democratic societies, and more specifically the Icelandic nation-state that we will be analyzing. First of all Foucault argues that,

'[t]ruth' is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant political and economic incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles)." (ibid. 1980:131-132)

People's social and professional roles define relations in which they constantly negotiate questions of power, authority and control of the definitions of reality. Foucault's ideas have been helpful in adding to a new and more expanded notion of "the political" in social life, which, in turn, has changed the notion of power. Simultaneously, the feminist's contribution of "the personal also being political" cannot be underestimated. As a result of these theoretical contributions political

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<sup>14</sup> For a further discussion on the concept of "discourse" see also The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language by Michel Foucault (1972).

processes are now understood to reach over and above the boundaries of conventional institutional arenas and to penetrate about all areas of everyday life. In our analysis of the application of purism in the production and reproduction of Icelandic national identity, we will look more specifically at the social and political roles of certain individuals and groups particularly those of intellectuals and politicians, and also of others that have been instrumental in this process. This is a process, which from a Foucauldian standpoint evolves around producing and reproducing "truth." We will also look at the mechanisms and techniques used in order to distinguish "true" statements from "false" statements.

Let us now look at the contribution of British literary critique Raymond Williams to a new anthropological understanding of culture. In Marxism and Literature (1977), Williams provides an expanded and in-depth analysis of Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of "hegemony." Williams tells us that "[h]egemony" goes beyond "culture" as previously defined in its insistence on relating the 'whole social process' to specific distributions of power and influence" (1977:108). According to Williams, there exists nowhere a society where human beings have total power over their own lives; this idea holds true only in abstraction. In reality, some form of inequality exists in all societies. This inequality expresses itself in class based societies as inequalities between classes. Hegemony allows one to recognize both subordination and dominance as a whole process. Williams stresses that hegemony is not a clearly defined system or structure but a process which "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered and challenged by pressures not at all its own." (1977:112) And furthermore, because this "counter-hegemony" is present at any given time, no dominant hegemony becomes total or exclusive. "At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society." (ibid.1977:113) Both Foucault's notion of discourse and Gramsci's notion of hegemony as expanded by Williams "emphasize the degree to which culture is

grounded in unequal relations and is differently related to people and groups in different social positions." (Dirks et al. 1994:3)

In The Outline of Theory of Practice (1977) Pierre Bourdieu addresses the problem of cultural reproduction.<sup>15</sup> For Bourdieu, a key question is -- to apply Marxist concepts -- how the mode of production (the material aspect of culture) is reproduced and likewise how the mode of domination (the symbolic aspect of culture) is reproduced. Bourdieu's aim is to reconcile the opposition between two different currents in social theory, Subjectivism and Objectivism respectively (Williams and Garnham 1980). This opposition is represented on the one hand in individual actors, and on the other, in social structures of culture. Bourdieu attempts to understand the effects of this opposition on the production and reproduction of culture by using the idea of *practice*. The notion of history is central to his theory of practice, i.e., in order to understand the interplay between structures and agency, both must always be located in space and time (spatially and historically).

Inspired by the above theories, anthropologists no longer see culture as an entity where human behavior can be reduced to rational calculations. Rather, culture is now seen as the changing outcome of practice. Social agents (persons) and social agencies (forces) are now of primary interest. Notions of power and hegemony are pivotal in order to understand how culture is continually produced and reproduced over time. This new understanding of culture, power and history has in turn, shed new light on anthropological studies of language.

Language and language variation is no longer seen as merely reflecting society and social inequality, but rather, as Gal has shown "talk is a practice that is one of social organization's central parts." (1989:347) Talk unites structure and agency and can either maintain, or change power relations (Irvine 1989, Parkin 1984). This understanding is clearly based on Bourdieu's theory of practice. Moreover, Bourdieu has, in his more recent works, namely Language and Symbolic

Power (1991), offered a new perspective on a variety of issues concerning language and language use, further transforming anthropological understanding of language.<sup>16</sup> Armed with his theory of practice, Bourdieu depicts, "everyday linguistic exchanges as situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies, in such a way that every linguistic interaction, however personal and insignificant it may seem, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce." (Bourdieu/Thompson 1991: 2) This conception allows Bourdieu to conclude that language and language use are embedded within the overall political economy. Thus, he describes "linguistic markets" where some products, i.e., linguistic utterances and expressions (accent, grammar and vocabulary), have more value than others do. This "linguistic capital," as he calls it, is not equally distributed throughout society, but rather, bears a specific relation to the distribution of other forms of capital -- both material and symbolic. Individuals with access to these other types of capital will have greater access to linguistic capital. Access to linguistic and other capital is decisive for where the individual is located within the social space. "Different speakers possess different quantities of linguistic capital - that is, the capacity to produce expressions *à propos* for particular market." (ibid. 1991:18) Thus, "the more linguistic capital that speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a *profit of distinction*"... "For the forms of expression which receive the greatest value and secure the greatest profit are those which are most unequally distributed." (ibid. 1991:18) While arguing that a diversity of linguistic markets exist simultaneously in a given society, i.e., different social settings call for different forms of linguistic capital, Bourdieu acknowledges that upper classes possess considerably more linguistic capital than do other classes. There is congruence between the language of the upper-classes and the language of formal markets, i.e., the language spoken in official power structures such as the media, civil service, education

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<sup>15</sup> The Outline was first published in French in 1972 under the title Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle

<sup>16</sup> Language and Symbolic Power was first published in French in 1982 under the title Ce Que Parler Veut Dire.

system etc. It is not that this "official" language as such carries power but rather, the speakers who use it endow it with power. As we will discuss in more detail shortly, it is precisely here that Bourdieu's theory differs radically from other linguistic theories. Words as such or linguistic utterances have no power, "the power of language comes from outside" i.e., the social position of the speaker, it is her/his occupation/status that gives their linguistic utterances authority. (Bourdieu 1991:109) Moreover, this power presupposes the acceptance or recognition of those who are subjected to this power. "The language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs." Language of authority resides, "in the social conditions of production and reproduction of the distribution between the classes of the knowledge and recognition of the legitimate language." (1991:113) Bourdieu invokes the concept of "symbolic power" -- i.e., power which is not obviously coercive -- in order to explain why individuals from lower class backgrounds, (whose linguistic capital is usually restricted) accept the value systems that works against their interest. Symbolic power, which Bourdieu also calls symbolic violence, refers to the aspects of power most routinely practiced in social life; Bourdieu argues that power is rarely exercised with overt physical force, but instead is rather transmuted into symbolic form, and thereby given the legitimacy it would otherwise not have. The practice of symbolic power, or more precisely, the condition for its success rests on the acceptance and the belief of its legitimacy by those who are subjected to it. In subsequent chapters we will look more closely at Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power.

## **VI. Language and Power**

Anthropologist Susan Gal (1989) has pointed out those studies of the links between language and the material world can be divided into two major branches. On the one hand, are the

studies of ethno-science, worldview and ideology, i.e., studies that rely on denotation. On the other hand, there are studies that demonstrate the correlation between the speaker's social identity -- class, gender, and ethnicity -- and their social situation and linguistic behavior. Sociolinguistics has not been concerned with studies of denotation, although they are concerned with studies of identity and social position (Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Labov 1972; Spender 1980; Kramarie et al. 1983; Tonnesen and Van Horne 1987). By studying the ways of speaking as a part of the socio-cultural context rather than focusing on linguistic competence or a homogenous language, sociolinguists have made a radical break with modern linguistics (Gal 1989; Grillo 1989). Linguistics as scholarly field has been the main source of scientific authorization for the political implementation of what Bourdieu has called "the production and reproduction of legitimate language." Yet, because of their approach to languages as autonomous structures - as we will discuss in more detail in chapter four, linguistics in general and modern linguistic theories in particular, have hitherto been unable to study the interactive relationship between language and power.

Sociolinguistics on the other hand, has highlighted the correlation between linguistic variation and social status; or, in other words, the ways in which linguistic variation reflects social stratification (Labov 1966; Trudgill 1983) (See also G. Williams 1992 and Tollefson 1991 for critique on sociolinguistics). However, as Gal (1989) has shown, the use of "speech community," as the central analytical unit has prevented sociolinguists from seeing the interdependency between linguistic variation and global economic processes. This concept is based on the assumption that anthropology "both in its politics and its poetics, isolated local populations in time and space. Comparison was typological or evolutionary." (1989:349) This model has recently come under heavy criticism "for its inability to encompass the systematic interrelations between local populations with the larger political economic structures of regions, states and global capitalism." (ibid.,) The works of anthropologists Eric Wolf (1982) and Sidney Mintz (1985) on global cultural history have been the catalyst for this change. The impact of dependency and world-system

theories as well as various Marxist approaches has also been important for the sociolinguistic change. Thus, as Gal points out, sociolinguists have in recent years begun to explore language in relation to colonialization, state-formation, class relations, capitalist expansion and political economic dependence (Wolfson and Manes 1985).

Gal (1989) has argued that the notion of cultural hegemony is useful in studies of language.

"If speech variation is seen as a cultural practice alongside others," she argues,

Then sociolinguistic evidence can be brought to bear in theoretical controversies about the workings of power and authority in the reproduction of capitalism. But authorized or hegemonic linguistic practices are not simply forms, they also carry cultural definitions of social life that serve the interest of dominant classes."...The capacity of language to denote, to represent the world, is not considered innocent, as in many anthropological accounts of worldview, but is fundamentally implicated in relations of domination. Whether the term is hegemony, symbolic domination, oppositional culture, subjugated discourse or heteroglossia, the central insight remains: Control of the representations of reality is not only a source of social power but therefore also a likely locus of conflict and struggle. (1989: 348)

Identity politics on the national level provide one of the most striking examples of attempts to control representations of reality in modern times. The construction of national identity, central to these politics, is essentially concerned with controlling these representations. This control, in turn, is directly linked to problems of state formation and state discourse. In order to legitimize their exercise of power, states need to dominate or have hegemony over these representations. One of the ways in which states control representations of reality is through the construction of national identity. National identity is produced and reproduced within special institutional frameworks and historical contexts (see also Breuilly 1985; Grillo 1980; Foster 1991; Fox 1990; Tilly 1992). As we have already indicated, the role of intellectuals and politicians has been instrumental in this process (Smith 1983). The works of Herzfeld (1986), Verdery (1990, 1991), Hofer (1991), and Sokoloewicz (1991) reveal the competing debates between groups of intellectuals over the representation of the nation during the initial formative period of nation making.

The state is one of the main sites where the nation is constructed and reconstructed; as it is one of the source producers of agencies and agents. It is within the confines of the state, that knowledge of and about the nation and national culture is classified and institutionalized. At the level of states, national identities are always defined in contrast to other nations (Löfgren 1989). Boundaries presented as having fixed roots in both space and time demarcate "us" from "them." A criterion, or marker, is necessary to separate "us" from "them." It is precisely here, in this separation that language as a criterion for national identity has become essential; not as a natural entity that makes a group of people a nation, but rather, as a criterion that functions simultaneously to erect and sustain boundaries (O'Barr 1976). In the process of national-culture production, culturally constructed identities are made to seem as if they were attributes of a natural order (LiPuma and Meltzoff 1990).

Anthropologists such as Löfgren (1989) argue that the making of a nation is a problem very much linked to integration and standardization. Standardization of language, whether in the form of standardizing related vernaculars or by the introduction of a completely new official language is, as we have discussed, a very important aspect of the overall process of standardization necessary for the production and reproduction of the nation state. Standardization of language, or the imposition of one official language, serves multiple purposes. It draws boundaries between "us" and "them," facilitates communication between the rulers and the ruled, homogenizes heterogeneity and helps to produce loyal and functioning citizens out of the unenlightened masses (Watkins 1991). Language also makes it possible to turn Peasants into Frenchmen as the historian Eugen Weber pointed out in his book on the making of the French nation (1976).

It is important to point out, that standardization of language is only one aspect of the overall standardization, classification and codification necessary to the process of nation making. In an illuminating article dealing with the ways in which nationalist ideology in capitalist societies maintains economic differences based on ethnic differences, anthropologist Brackette Williams

(1990), discusses the mechanisms state agencies use in the formation of both individual and group identities, primarily their demarcation and maintenance of classificatory boundaries. Nationalist ideologies aim at homogenizing a heterogeneous population by conflating race, class and nation. Williams argues that this unity is a myth. What happens in reality is that the hegemonic group becomes synonymous with the nation and in fact, with civil society itself, while the sub-national, sub-cultural or the "ethnic" groups become a marked category, differentiated from the "mainstream" and from the group that epitomizes *the nation* (see also Wallerstein & Balibar 1991). One can thus argue that ethnic identity as a socio-political category is distinctively a modern phenomenon rather than a mere reiteration of so-called primitive or traditional images (Ruiz 1987). In other words, ethnicity is a social construction -- to use a post-structuralist terminology --, that only emerges, in the modern nation-state. In a similar twist Tilly has pointed out, that it is only after the formation of the nation state that ethnic diversity becomes a problem (1991).

How does all of this relate to the processes involving standardization of language, one might ask? I would argue that in the same way that nationalist ideologists' claim objectivity and universalism, standardization allegedly homogenizes a heterogeneous population; in reality it acts to demarcate, stigmatize and brand sub-groups within society (B. Williams 1990). Standardization of language, is an excellent example of the process of the overall alleged cultural standardization, necessary for the production and reproduction of the nation-state. Moreover and simultaneously, this process systematically uses linguistic differences to demarcate ethnic, racial and social differences which, in turn, are used as means of sustaining the control and power of the hegemonic group.

The ascendance of national languages has historically gone hand in hand with the emergence of nation-states. Although, language standardization was historically central for state consolidation in Europe, it has arguably been less significant in other parts of the world. The literature shows that the process of standardization could either begin before the emergence of the nation-state or

after its formation (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990).<sup>17</sup> Regardless of whether this process started before the emergence of the nation state itself or after it, standardization of language has been, and continues to be, one of the primary tasks of state agencies (Fishman 1968, 1971; Grillo 1989; Handler 1988; Jacob & Beer 1985; Laitin 1992; Larmouth 1987).

The process of standardization is in many cases far from having been a silent or a non-controversial occurrence, quite the contrary. Standardization of language and language planning in the modern state are issues that have caused tremendous controversy and, at times, serious political conflicts challenging national unity. Language conflicts have polarized national communities in Belgium, where the conflict has been between French and Flemish, and in Canada, where the language conflict has been between English and French (Adams and Brink 1990; Handler 1988; Hartig 1985; Heller 1985; Esmann 1985; Magnet 1990; Sagarin and Kelly 1985).<sup>18</sup> Even in the U.S.A., there has been conflict between English and Spanish speakers.<sup>19</sup> These are just some of the most recent cases.

From our preceding discussion we learned that the construction of a national language is inextricably linked with the consolidation of modern states i.e., nation states. In the Icelandic case the national language became "pure" Icelandic *par definition*. In looking at the developmental process of national language construction it is obvious that an imposition of a common language for the purposes of efficient administration is desirable. The state is therefore usually the primary agent

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<sup>17</sup> The former pattern is characteristic of the nation-making process of the new states which emerged in the wake of linguistic nationalism in 19th century Europe. The latter pattern typifies the experience of the so-called old nations in Europe -- the French, Spanish, Portuguese, British, Dutch, Danish and Swedish. Moreover, this pattern, i.e., the imposition of a standard official or national language after the formation of the state, exemplifies the experience of the new nation-states emerging from colonial rule (Fishman et al. 1968; Fishman 1972).

<sup>18</sup> Language issues, particularly in Belgium and Canada, have posed serious threats to the stability of the state. In the latter case, the nationalist movement of the French speaking Quebecers forced the predominantly anglicized centralized government in Ottawa to make major efforts in regards to the protection and promotion of the French language. As a result Canadian francophones are assured equitable participation in the federal civil service and are guaranteed the right to use their language everywhere else (Magnet 1990).

<sup>19</sup> In the United States where language policy has historically not been a matter of great public concern, recent years have seen changes in this regard (Adams and Brink 1990). The issue of "English only" has caught public attention,

in launching the project of language standardization. This is so because the sheer scale of the project is beyond the capacity of most agencies except for the state itself. But there is another more subtle but enormously important interest at stake here, namely that the hegemonic powers that control the state apparatus have a vested interest in the process of linguistic homogenization. Bourdieu has shown that during the process of language unification in France the struggle for an official language was far from being simply a struggle concerning the facilitation of communication from the institutions of political power. "It was a struggle for symbolic power," in this case between the revolutionary intelligentsia and the dialects of *patois*, and

what was at stake, was the *formation and re-formation* of mental structures. In short, it was not only a question of communicating but of gaining recognition for a new language of authority, with its new political vocabulary, its terms of address and reference, its metaphors, its euphemism and the representation of the social world it conveys, and which, because it is linked to the new interest of new groups, is inexpressible in the local idioms and shaped by usages linked to the specific interest of the peasant groups. (1991:48)

It should not come as any surprise that, language planning is not necessarily neutral or a benevolent project from which all the state's citizens are to gain equally. On the contrary, the imposition of a standard language and the language policy accompanying it has become one of the strongest social mechanisms by which governments -- through confrontation, accommodation, or benign neglect -- have sought to mold their citizens into a stable political and socio-cultural whole. Thus relative distance from the standard language, in terms of opportunities for acquisition, plays a decisive role in marking an individual's place in the socio-economic arena as Bourdieu (1991) has argued. Bourdieu, has also rightly pointed out that "to speak of *language*, without further specification, as linguists do, is tacitly to accept the *official* definition of the *official* language of a political unit." (1991:45) Any study dealing with linguistic hierarchies, linguistic dominance and

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looming large on the political agenda, particularly in the states of California, Florida and Arizona all of which have large Spanish speaking populations (Diamond 1990; Castro, Haun and Roca 1990; Ruiz, 1990; Woodlard 1989).

linguistic inequality, is thus, as a number of recent studies make clear, inevitably a political study.<sup>20</sup> This has not always been the case as the works of anthropologist Susan Gal (1989), sociolinguist James W. Tollefson (1991) and sociologist Glyn Williams (1992) all point out. These authors have pointed out, that the diverse branches dealing with language research, whether general linguistics or the many subdivisions dealing with the social aspects of language -- anthropology included -- were all marked by an inability to deal with power in a critical way. These studies in many cases, were both insensitive to the unequal distributions of power and the linguistic aspects of power and made not attempts to put language into either the context of domination or of the global political economy. In order to appreciate the importance of this critique, we will now look at language planning -- another term for language standardization -- and at how scholars have dealt with language policy.

## **VII. Language Planning and Power - Planning Language and Power**

In spite of the importance language has played and continues to play in the process of state formation, there exists no general theory on the subject (Laitin 1989) - except if one argues that Bourdieu in his Language and Symbolic Power, has put forward a theory on the subject.

Language standardization falls under the banner of *language planning*; a term that frequently invokes confusion since it simultaneously refers to political projects as well as to an academic discipline. Of all the disciplines dealing with language and language use, language planning is the one that deals most directly with language as an object of political and governmental action. While linguists and sociolinguists have been prominent in this field, language planning has also drawn people from other disciplines, such as political science and anthropology (see for example Adams and Brink 1990; Beer and Jacob 1985; Jernudd and Rubin 1971; Lowenberg 1987). The term language planning is by far the most popular term among linguists although there are

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<sup>20</sup> See for example, Kramarie et al., 1984 (eds.) Language and Power, Wolfson and Mannes (eds.) 1985 Language

several other terms in use including language development, language management, language regulation and language policy.<sup>21</sup>

A commonly held distinction between the terms language planning and language policy is that the former pertains to all conscious efforts to affect the structure or function of language varieties, whereas the latter is restricted to governmental projects. Tollefson alerts us that this distinction "reflects an uncritical social-theory perspective that ignores the close relationship between "public" and "private" sectors. Moreover, the traditional definition of planning/policy expresses an implicit belief in essentially ahistorical, unconstrained action and choice." Furthermore, he says "this conception provides no insight into the ideological or structural basis of language planning/policy nor its connection with power, hegemony and dominance, or its role in struggle and exploitation" (1991:16).

Language planning in Iceland, as we will see, fits perfectly into Tollefson's (see also Luke's *et. al.* 1990) analysis. In Iceland, all connections between power, hegemony and dominance are subsumed under the premises of a shared "national interest," which is assumed to be something that everyone agrees upon (see chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Acknowledging that political power or hegemony goes beyond the visible confines of institutions discussed before, I will adopt Tollefson's proposition of an alternative conception of language policy that includes both governmental as well as non-governmental activities. This understanding locates language policy within general social theory. It regards language policy as one mechanism for locating language within social structures in such a way that language determines who has access to political power and economic resources. This conception assumes language policy to be one mechanism by which dominant groups establish hegemony in language

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and Inequality, and Tollefson's (1991) Planning Language, Planning Inequality.

<sup>21</sup> This popularity is demonstrated in the titles of a newsletter Language Planning Newsletter, a journal Language Problems and Language Planning and at least in five collections of articles: Can Language be Planned? Rubin and Jernudd eds., (1971), Language Planning Processes Rubin, Jernudd et al., eds., (1977), Language Planning Rubin and

use. In contrast to the notion of linguistic variation that is central to sociolinguistic research<sup>22</sup> language planning has predicated on the traditional concept of language both as a unified and as a static entity (Haugen 1987). While traceable to Herder and Fichte, this view becomes especially pronounced in language purism (Jernudd and Shapiro 1989). We will now turn to definitions of by recent scholars of this interesting phenomenon called language purism.

### VIII. Language, Purity and Danger

Before we look at language purism as such, it is imperative for our discussion to give the notion of *purity*, a notion central to our discussion, some closer look. My Random House dictionary gives the following definitions: "the condition or quality of being pure; freedom from anything that contaminates or adulterates." It also states that *purity* can mean "ceremonial or ritual cleanness" and also "freedom from guilt and sin." (1979:1073) This takes us to the closely related term *purification* a noun that refers to the act of purifying. The term "purification" is usually associated - as the concept "purity" - with the act of overcoming sin. Inasmuch as sin has been represented as "stain" or "evil," "the term "purification" has functioned partially as a moral term applied to actions aimed at overcoming evil," as political scientist Michael Shapiro has shown (1989:22). The moral or religious overtone of the concept of purity, as well as of the term purification is clear - a notion that we encountered earlier in our discussion on German Romantic nationalism and will focus on more closely in subsequent chapters. However, purity does not exist in and of itself but only in comparison or opposition to impurity as the definitions above indicates. Thus in order to grasp the meaning of *purity* one has to have some sense of impurity, dirt or contamination. Anthropologist Mary Douglas in her classic work *Purity and Danger* (1966) argues precisely that. Therefore, as

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Shuy eds. (1973), *Advances in Language Planning* ed. by Fishman (1974) and *Progress in Language Planning: international perspectives* Cobarrubias and Fishman (1983) eds.,.

Douglas points out, "there is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists only in the eye of the beholder." Better yet, "[d]irt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment." (1966:2) If we apply Douglas' notion of dirt as matter out place we must approach it as she suggests, through order. As she put it, "uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained."(ibid. 40) Moreover, this pattern is violated by disorder, therefore "disorder also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited set has been used." (ibid. 94) Disorder on the other hand has no pattern but a potential for unlimited patterns, and that is why we do not simply condemn disorder. Rather Douglas says, "we recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power." (ibid. 94) From this it follows, "that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone." (ibid. 113) Armed with Douglas' definition of purity we can now look at language purism in particular.

Language purification focuses on maintaining the linguistic consistency and standards of language. The overall targets of purism can be divided into two broad categories, external vs. internal purification. In short, *external* purification aims at protecting the language from foreign influences and if need be purging it of foreign words, whereas *internal* purification aims at keeping language usage in line with the rules of the standard (Jernudd and Shapiro 1989, Kaplan and Baladauf 1997).

It must be stressed that while targets of purification can theoretically be divided into two aspects, both aim for the same goal. The goal of purism is on the one hand to naturalize the power of the legitimate language, which is the "language" of those who have the greatest quantities of

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, Giglioli (1982), Giles and Scherer (1979), Gumperz and Gumperz (1982), Gundykust 1988, Labov

symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's concept. Secondly, the goal of purism, like that of language standardization in general, is to control the formation and the re-formation of mental structures as discussed above, to purge the minds of those who are subject to it, from "impure foreign" influences or "impure" impacts from within that upset the order. The intensity of language purism may vary from one nation-state to another. Difference in emphasis and intensity allow - at least theoretically - for taxonomy of purism ranging from what has been called "playful purism" to "xenophobic purism," with our case study of Iceland interestingly enough falling under the latter typology as we will see (Thomas 1991).

The practice of language purism, whether external or internal is as sociologist Manfred Henningsen points out, in fact, an extreme version of standardization (1989). The act of "purging" the language of foreign vocabulary and syntax has gone hand in hand with language standardization whether this process started before or after the emergence of the state (Bourdieu 1991). As we will encounter in more detail in our discussion on Icelandic language purism, rigorous attitudes and tolerance towards only one variant of the language, notably the legitimate language characterize purist ideology.<sup>23</sup> Strict language policy like purism is usually enforced and given official legitimacy by formal institutions such as the Academy Francaise and similar bodies (Edwards 1985).<sup>24</sup>

Henningsen points out that the political motivations behind language purism are a "quest for the identity and authenticity of a cultural Self that feels threatened by the hegemonic presence of another culture which may or may not be in a core position vis-à-vis the struggling Self." (1989:32-

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(1966, 1972), Milroy (1987), Saville-Troike (1989), Trudgill (1983), Wardhaugh (1986).

<sup>23</sup> See for example, Dissanayake (1989) on purism in Sri Lanka and Park (1989) on Korea.

<sup>24</sup> Bodies or institutions of similar intent as the French Academy -- and actually quite often influenced by it -- are to be found in many states. While some of them, such as the Real Academia Espanola, the Russian Academy, the Swedish Academy, and the German Berlin Academy, date back to the eighteenth century, most of them are late 19th or 20th centuries in origin (Edwards 1985). Thus the Academies founded in various Latin American states, the ones in the Middle-East, as in Syria, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Israel, as well as the one in Iceland, - which will be discussed in more detail shortly - are all 20th century constructions (Edwards 1985; Glinert 1993; Karimi-Hakkak 1989; Landau 1993; Ottósson 1990).

33) The most important criterion for national identity in Iceland has been - pure Icelandic *par definition* - where the written language of the old sagas served as an ultimate criterion. In the Icelandic case the outside language or outside culture which has been perceived to be of most threat has shifted over time from Danish language/culture to English or Anglo-Saxon cultural/linguistic hegemony.

In line with Douglas' definition on purity, sociolinguist Michael Shapiro (1989) argues that, purism as an ideology represents an extreme form of social inclusion and exclusion. Like both Brackette Williams and Pierre Bourdieu above, Shapiro argues that identity politics in every society deal with separating people into groups where their identities form a hierarchy of worthiness. In identity politics acquisition of linguistic capital to use Bourdieu's term, or one's language group membership plays an important part in determining where in hierarchy one is placed. "Clearly then," says Shapiro,

attempts to "purify" a language implicitly promotes those who can most closely identify themselves as belonging to the language base toward which the change is aimed to a position of moral superiority. And because purification implies getting rid of stain and thus evil, purification movements imply at some level that the impure language elements belong to impure persons. This impurity ascription makes it then possible to put people who cannot claim affiliation with the privileged language in a lesser moral space. (1989:22-3)

As we will see in our discussion, this practice of demarcation has exactly been the case in Iceland. In the beginning the focus was on external purification, where the impure elements were first and last considered to be words of Danish origin. Here the target was all those who used Danish words in their vocabulary, these were on the one hand civil servants of the colonial administration and secondly, the residents of emerging urban areas, where the influence of Danish was mostly felt. The propagators of language purism in Iceland in the 19th century, were as we will encounter, the emerging intelligentsia who through their production of "pure" Icelandic both formed and reformed

new mental structures, necessary for legitimating their symbolic and hence linguistic power. By their production of "pure" Icelandic they simultaneously produced a new linguistic market where the value of "pure" Icelandic had the highest accumulated capital. While still fending off all external influence i.e., Danish, the target of purism after independence was also directed internally to syntax, such as "vulgar" pronunciations (*flámæli*), "incorrect" conjugations of certain nouns and pronouns that were considered to be improper, and more recently words that have come into Icelandic from English.

For a critical understanding and analysis of language purism one has to develop a political perspective and approach on language purist movements by placing them within the larger context of political economy. If one does that, one can approach language purism as an ongoing process, a struggle over the acquisition and control of symbolic power hence linguistic capital. Thus to be aware of the political significance of the phenomenon is imperative for any critical understanding of language purism movements. Here, I refer to politics in terms of the politics of an ongoing social discourse in the Foucauldian sense (not only when elected political figures get involved). By applying this perspective one can focus on the politics of the discourse and by doing so "it can be shown that *discursive* economies, which privilege various linguistic operators are associated with the circulation of persons in connection with relations of power, authority and control" (Shapiro 1989:23).

## IX. Conclusion

From our theoretical discussion on the historical origins and development of linguistic nationalism we can conclude, that the intimate link between *language* and the nation-state - which lies at the very center of the theory of nationalism - is a social construction. Likewise, the nationalistic ideal of a culturally and linguistically homogenous nation-state is also a historical invention and only exists in abstraction as almost all nation-states are multi-ethnic and multi-lingual and all are definitely economically heterogeneous. The construction and the imposition of a national language carried out through the process of standardization of language is in fact part and parcel of nation-state building. As a key element in creating national consciousness or national identity, this process can either begin before or after the actual formation of the nation-state itself. In the Icelandic case, the process of language standardization actually facilitated the making of the Icelandic nation state, where the notion of purity played central role. It was "pure" Icelandic language that was used as the ultimate cultural marker of difference between Icelanders and others.

Our analysis of Romantic nationalism, which was adopted by Icelandic nationalists, allowed us to approach it as a form of secular religion, emerging at a time in history when old socio-economic structures were crumbling and could no longer give people a sense of security and belonging. The Romantic nationalistic program entails a recipe for new genesis of the "people/nation" a glorious past and a promise of a splendid future. The new "nation" is provided with a cultural continuity that serves as defense for national identity and ultimately as justification for political sovereignty.

We have argued for the close interaction between social reality and social theory and how one affects the other. The shift from the essentialist understanding of nationalism to the modernist approach is a direct result of that. The recent emergence of a new understanding of *nation* and of culture as socio-historical constructions allows us to look at these phenomena as malleable entities,

or processes continually in the making, never static or fixed. By the same token, cultural and national identities can also be seen as an ongoing process i.e., products in the making where power is of crucial importance. This power, i.e., the power to interpret history, to define what constitutes "our culture, our nation," what it is that makes "us" different from "them" - in sum the ideas that ultimately serve as cultural justifications for political sovereignty and political hegemony - never reach a stage of total allegiance. It is precisely here that state power is of crucial importance. Moreover, the state applies various means in order to maintain allegiance to the ideology/nationalism that justify its hegemony. The Foucauldian notion of power as a set of relations embedded in discourse allows us to understand the inextricable relation between "truth" or "truths," and how in turn power and truth are produced and reproduced in discourses. Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power and capital, further allowed us to understand how power is possessed in disproportions by those who produce and reproduce legitimate language. By the same token those who do not possess the same linguistic capital are automatically dispossessed of access to power.

The notion of purity, while most forcefully expressed in relation to linguistic purity, was also in the German prototype of nationalism which was racist from the beginning. Racism was manifested in notions of racial/genetic superiority. This racist aspect of purism was inherited by Icelandic nationalists.

The notion of linguistic purity, as we argued only superficially about "language" or "race" - both of these concepts are social-constructions themselves - but ultimately about power. The religious moralistic overtone in the "purity" concept veils it with an aura of divinity, and if divine or natural its definition is beyond the scope of any debate. By virtue of its "divine" or Godlike representation, the power of those who define "purity" is naturalized while the actual purpose and effect of the imposition of "purity" is concealed. An imposition of the construction of "purity," linguistic or otherwise is about order and the power to control that order. "Purity" is a control mechanism used by those who have power to control representations of reality. It sets boundaries of

who belongs and who does not, who has access to power and who does not. Those who possess "purity," have power by the virtue of their "expertise" on what counts as "pure" and "impure."

In order to pave the way for our discussion on the historical process of nation-state making and standardization of language purism in Iceland in chapter three, we will in our next chapter look at Iceland's history, and situate the Icelandic national myth on purity, linguistic and otherwise.

## **Chapter 3**

### **A Pure Nation in a Growing Multi-Cultural World**

#### **I. Introduction**

##### *1 .The Image of Purity*

Iceland is usually seen as one of the most isolated and ethnically homogeneous states in Europe; a place where national identity is jealously guarded and a rugged climate has forced people to pull together. The harshness of the landscape mean that solidarity and mutual aid are bred in the bone here: helping your neighbor is simply second nature. But that very ethos goes hand in hand with a rather ambivalent attitude to outsiders.

During World War II Iceland was notably reticent in accepting refugees from Nazism and even deported some Jewish families back to the mainland. More recently, the US Army, which maintains a large military base on the island, was discreetly asked not to send any black soldiers lest they upset the locals. But no country can stay isolated forever. Over the last few decades, like the rest of the continent, Iceland has had to come to terms with a more complex, multi-cultural reality. In the wake of the Yugoslavian war, as Europe tried to cope with tens of thousands of refugees, Iceland too stepped forward and said it wanted to help - in its own special way. That's led to an unusual policy of dispersing refugee families to live and work in some of the remotest corners of the country. (Crossing countries. BBC= <http://www.bbc.co.uk>).<sup>25</sup>

This quotation, comes from an introduction to a television series, called *Crossing Countries*, produced and aired on the British TV station BBC, August 8, 1998. This description of Iceland and Icelanders is of great interest to our work because it reflects an outsider's view of the country and the people. In essence this quotation also discloses an aspect of cultural policies in Iceland which today have become a source of embarrassment because of its blatant Anti-Semitic and racist overtones. However, keeping the country closed to Jews and later to African-Americans and most recently to disperse refugees/immigrants into the most remote corners of the country can be seen as part and parcel of the idea of *purity* that lies at the heart of Icelandic nationalism.

It is only in recent years that the contemptuous idea of racial purity has evoked any criticism whether amongst scholars, politicians or in the public discourse. Yet, in spite of its apparent xenophobia and superiority complexes it still resonates in publications about the country catered to foreign tourists. The idea of racial purity reverberates in *Iceland, Country and People*, a recent tourist brochure, published in English. Here, the author informs the reader about the

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<sup>25</sup> Snorri Bergsson a young historian has pointed out that " on the total, it seems that Iceland took much less part in the rescue of German Jewry than most, if not all, European countries" ..."Although the general Icelander was usually friendly and compassionate towards the Jewish refugees, the Government showed a totally different attitude. Iceland's refusal to accept the modest number of Jews that applied for immigration or transit visas" cannot be explained by any other factor than blatant Anti-Semitism (Bergsson 1998:41). Neither Anti-Communist sentiment from the right wing - in their eyes Jews were all communists , nor high unemployment explain why so few Jews were granted visas in Iceland, as German's of "pure Aryan" decent and people from the Nordic countries had no problems acquiring visas in the years preceding the WW II.

"unique pedigree" of Icelanders. He states;

Iceland was settled by Norsemen in the late ninth and tenth centuries from southwest Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia, and from the Norse settlements in the British Isles, whence a Celtic element was also introduced, although its extents is un-proven and controversial. The ruling class was Nordic, so that both the language and the culture of Iceland were *purely* Scandinavian from the outset, but there are traces of Celtic influences in some of the ancient poetry in some personal names and in the appearance of present day Icelanders, who have a higher percentage of the dark-haired type than the other Nordic nations.

Blood-group research has shown a predominance in Iceland of group O, which also prevails in Ireland, while group A is commonest in Norway and Denmark. This might suggest a closer affinity with the Celts in Ireland and Scotland than with the Scandinavians, although other explanations such as selective susceptibility to epidemic diseases have also been put forward.

The early blending of Nordic and Celtic elements may partly explain the fact that the Icelanders, alone of all the Nordic peoples, produced great literature in the Middle Ages. Immigration of foreign elements has been negligible since the first settlement, and there are no Eskimos in Iceland, contrary to common belief. (1994:11 italics mine).

This quotation reflects the nationalistic myth on the origins of Icelanders - to be discussed in more detail below - and truly resonates of notions of racial superiority. The last remark on "the Eskimos," is an attempt not only to "correct" a common misunderstanding encountered by foreigners but not least a deliberate effort to disassociate the supposedly pure *Arian* breed of Icelanders from such "lesser" "races" as "the Eskimos." Moreover, the quotation attests to the alleged remarkable preservation of Icelanders unique language Icelandic, which in turn is the key to their invaluable cultural heritage: the Sagas. While the content of the Sagas is treasured, it is the level of the "purity" of their language, which is regarded even higher. The Sagas on the other hand are seen as "Iceland's greatest literary achievement," and simultaneously the most unequivocal contribution of the Icelandic culture to the world. These literary achievements are also seen as unmistakable marks of civilization, *par definition* and past glory.

These purist ideas are a direct result of the impact of Romantic nationalism, an ideology

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The discrete agreement of not sending any African-American soldiers to the US NATO base in Iceland is not

that has shaped the course of Icelandic history. Moreover, ever since first introduced, in the second quarter of the 19th century, it has been the ideology that has informed and molded people's national identity in the country, their very sense of self. Nationalism and hence the making of national identities were essentially a part of an international or global process. Thus in spite of all its feverish accentuation on the "particular," the emergence of national identities can, be seen as Roland Robertson maintains - albeit with some qualifications - "as *an aspect* of globalization." (Robertson 1995:30) The process of globalization has brought about new definition of "home," "community" and of "locality" as sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod has pointed out (1994). By the same token the new understandings and definitions of the "nation" and the "national" can be seen as part and parcel of that process. In line with Robertson, I argue that although the level of intensity of the globalization process in the latter half of the twentieth century is unprecedented, the globalization process and the problems between the global and the local is not an altogether modern or postmodern phenomena. I would add here also that if the "global" means the world as a whole, and "globalization" essentially means the "compression of the world as whole," where the localities are linked together in various ways, "regionalization," the linking of localities within an extended geographical region was in many parts of the world the historical precedent to the globalization process.

In this chapter we will explore the Icelandic nationalistic myth on purity which lies at the core of the Icelandic national identity. In order for us to understand the various references within this myth it is necessary to give some attention to the historical developments of Iceland politically, economically and culturally. Thus in a historical section we will put these developments into a larger regional/global perspective. After this reflection on the major characteristics of Iceland and Icelandic society past and present we will explore the purist ideas of nationalist Jón Aðils, an Icelandic turn of the century historian. After discussing Aðils ideas, we

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documented in the defense contract between the countries.

will narrow our focus and look at the national celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Icelandic republic June 17<sup>th</sup> 1994 and the political agitation surrounding the celebration and then draw conclusions from these events.

In order to grasp the depth and the scope of the impact the concept of purity has had for Icelandic national consciousness, a central concept of Romantic nationalism, - it is imperative to keep in mind that the ideology, which shaped Icelanders notion of themselves, their place in the world, their collective history, sense of self as a nation and their environment - is as we encountered before, a form of secular religion. As such, it provides answers to questions concerning the meaning of life itself. Like traditional religions, but unlike all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought as Anderson points out, nationalism provides answers to fundamental questions concerning "men-in-the-cosmos, man as species" (1983:18). The rationalist secularism brought about by the Enlightenment coupled with the decline in traditional religious beliefs, left out a gap concerning answers to fundamental questions concerning human suffering and the inescapable mortality of all humans, answers that before had been provided by religion. Says Anderson, "[d]isintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning...., few things were (are) better suited to this end than the idea of the nation." (1983:19) Nationalism did however, not supersede traditional religion but it aligned itself with large cultural systems that preceded it, as we have already discussed.

For clarification purposes let me emphasize, that in this work I do not confine religion - whether secular or non-secular - to the classical Tylor understanding as belief in spiritual beings. I prefer to approach it from a broader standpoint. Hence, as a belief system that provides meaning to life, a system that explains peoples past but also gives meaning and moral guidelines for proper behavior in the present. Moreover, if guidelines are observed or fulfilled in the present, it is

believed to bring security in the future.

## **II. Iceland in a Global Context Past and Present**

### *1. Physical Conditions and Population*

A recent tourist brochure on Iceland states that the country is “still largely in the pure natural state, and .... People in Iceland relish in having a room to breathe, and have the freshest air on the planet to do it with.” (Iceland 1993:3) We are also informed that Iceland was the last country in Europe to be settled by humans. Now where is this paradise of pure air?

Situated “at the brink of the inhabitable world,” as the natives often refer to Iceland, the island lies way up in middle of the north Atlantic ocean - about 500 miles (803 Km) north west of Scotland and about 600 miles west of Norway (976 Km).<sup>26</sup> The island sits on the top of Atlantic ridge, the oceanic fault that separates the continental plates. The fault runs from south west to north east forming a belt of active volcanoes, some which lie under glaciers and some which erupt with regular forty to fifty year intervals. This geological activity has left geysers and hot springs along this belt and also produces seismological movements that at times have been quite devastating. Life in this arctic island of active volcanoes and gigantic glaciers’ has and certainly still is constrained by its unfavorable natural habitat. What makes Iceland livable physically speaking, is the North Atlantic Drift, an extension of the Gulf Stream. Yet the active growing season is only three months, cultivated hay fields amount to a scarce 1% of the country and no more than one quarter of the entire island has a continuous plant cover.<sup>27</sup>

The vegetation is mostly on the lowland coastal areas, leaving the highland interior relatively barren and practically uninhabitable. The interior has historically been used as grazing land where

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<sup>26</sup> To be more precise, Iceland lies approximately between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> longitudes west of Greenwich and roughly between the 63<sup>rd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> latitudes. The arctic circle "touches" the northern most tip of the island.

<sup>27</sup> The total area of Iceland is 39, 756 sq. miles (103,000 square km).

sheep and ponies roam without any human supervision in the short summer from late June to late September. The interior is a wilderness in the sense that it has hardly any sign of human occupation. There are no roads or bridges, hardly any constructions visible aside from an occasional mountain hut, put up for sheep herders in the past, and less than a handful of electric power stations. In recent years, service facilities to accommodate tourists have been put up in those parts of the interior which have been designated as national parks. One of the most remarkable characteristics of this "wilderness" and the nature of Iceland in whole is the absence of any forest. Hardly a tree is visible and today only 1% of the landmass is covered with trees. At the beginning of human settlement, the old *Book of Icelanders* reports that the island had been covered with birch woods and scrub from mountain to the shore. About four hundred years later the trees were all gone. Deteriorating climate - starting in the 1200s - calling for more firewood, is without doubt responsible for this deforestation but also as we will discuss in more detail shortly, increased grazing, resulting from demand for wool from the European neighbors in the south (Stoklund 1992). Interestingly this "wilderness," has in recent years been marketed to tourists as "pristine," "pure" and "unpolluted." (*Iceland* 1994, Icelandic Tourist Bureau) This image of "natural purity" has been strengthened by the absence of heavy industry.

Cultivation of barley and oats had been practiced in the beginning, but the deteriorating climate conditions of the late Middle Ages put an end to that. From that time, the country has been too cold for grain cultivation making the inhabitants dependent on grain importation ever since. Yet the island has always been self-sufficient in dairy and meat production which is the traditional form of "agriculture" practiced on the island. Iceland resides over no minerals - the island is too young geologically - and is mostly deprived of natural resources on land except for plentitude of water both hot and cold. Rivers have been harnessed for the production of electricity while the hot springs have been harnessed for hydro-thermal power stations heating over 70% of all houses on the island. Although deprived of minerals on land, Iceland is surrounded by one of the most generous fishing

banks in the world and fish and fish processing substitutes the basis of the modern economy. Historically, the economy was characterized by a combination of self-subsistence farming supplemented by fishing.

Today the population distribution is characterized by tremendous imbalance with two thirds of the Icelandic population living in the metropolitan area of the capital Reykjavík and surrounding communities in the south-west. The remaining one third lives in rural areas and tiny fishing villages around the coast. The population of Iceland is surprisingly small amounting in total to only 270.000 people making Iceland one of the smallest nation-states in the world. The population smallness acts as a constant threat to the existence of the state, a theme that is very often brought up by politicians, particularly in relation to issues that have to do with Iceland's position in the larger world as we will encounter later. The smallness is also a source of pride, such as when Icelanders achieve recognition for either artistic or athletic achievements abroad. Whether individuals or teams, these persons are treated as national heroes and every child in the nation takes pride in their recognition and accomplishments, moreover, their achievements are perceived of as *Icelandic/national* accomplishments. The smallness also gives life in Iceland a very strong sense of community, with distinctions between the community level and the national level at times non-existing. The minuscule population size is also without a doubt responsible for the exceptional cultural homogeneity found in Iceland. Cultural homogeneity has also been kept relatively static by political intervention. In comparison to most of her neighboring Nordic allies, immigration in Iceland has been minimal. It is only in the last decade or so that immigration has really become visible, with people coming from such distant places as Vietnam, Thailand, and as mentioned above from war ridden European countries such as former Yugoslavia. Significant number of East Europeans particularly Poles, have also in recent years come to Iceland in search of seasonal work. In 1997, the total number of foreign born individuals was 4.5% whereas residents but none citizens were around 2% (*Hagstofa Íslands. Statistics Iceland 1998*).

## 2. From Settlement through Commonwealth Era and Colonial Times

In looking further back in history it becomes clear, that Iceland has been a country of "immigrants" from the very beginning, albeit in a somewhat different sense. The first settlement in Iceland according to old sources, took place in the late 800s mostly by people from Norway and the British Isles and was part of the famous and infamous Viking explorations of the time. Those who came from Norway were said to have fled the ever-expanding power of Harald the Fair-Hair, who at the time was busy coercing everyone within reach under his rule. He later became the first King of Norway. In today's political terminology the first settlers of Iceland were actually fugitives or political refugees by and large. The Old Sagas recount in detail the settlement of these people - chiefly *Landnámabók*: The Book of Settlement - and are filled with mythical accounts on their divine guidance over the sea as well as on why, where, when and who settled in each area of the country.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout her entire history whether politically or economically, Iceland's fate has to a lesser or a greater degree, been subject to developments in the greater region, particularly in the

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<sup>28</sup> The most famous settler in Iceland, also the one who is granted the honorary position of being the first one, is Ingólfur Arnarson, the settler of Reykjavík now the capital. According to *Landnámabók*, Ingólfur came from a good standing family in West Norway. A mighty earl in his home region wanted Ingólfur's sister, Helga for his son, an idea that Ingólfur and his family did not approve of. This led to bloody conflicts were two of the earls' sons - including the anticipating groom - lost their lives. In compensation for his losses, Ingólfur's family was forced to give all their land to the earl. Homeless and landless Ingólfur ventures to Iceland, a country newly discovered by some sea explores. To Iceland he took along with him all his family all his stock and trade, including his thralls/slaves. The slaves had been captured in Ireland, the year before by his closest ally and fictional blood-brother Hjörleifur. Hjörleifur who now more had married Helga, Ingólfur's sister also came to Iceland with Ingólfur. They came to the shore of south east Iceland in the fall and raised some temporary homesteads for the coming winter. Their homes were within one and half day's distance from one another. Places in the area still carry their names. Ingólfur was a man of great faith and wanted to consult with the gods about where to settle down permanently. In order to get the divine guidance he threw his totem poles into the sea. In the spring Ingólfur sent his thralls to look for the totem poles. On their way they find Hjörleifur dead, his thralls had taken revenge and killed him. Ingólfur was quick to respond. The slaves had fled by sea to islands south of Iceland, there Ingólfur finds them and his sister in capture. He rescues his sister, kills some of the slaves while others threw themselves off cliffs. Ingólfur named these islands, Westman Islands after the slaves. The Norsemen at the time called the Irish West men. Shortly after these atrocities, Ingólfur's slaves, still looking for his totem poles detect them in a little creek in south west Iceland. Upon receiving these news, Ingólfur moves there with his entire family and stock. From his new homestead he spotted some fumes in the distance. These were fumes coming from hot springs. As the Norse did not recognize these kinds of fumes, he thought it was smoke and named his new place Smoke Creek or Reykjavík (From *Landnáma*, quoted in Jónsson 1915).

Nordic countries but also by developments in the greater North West Europe. The settlement of the island can be seen as the result of political agitation and changes, chiefly those occurring in Norway. For the most part of the last millennia, Iceland was a part of greater regional state power. Yet, in 930 the new settlers of Iceland established a representative congress called *Althing*. The establishment of the Althing<sup>29</sup> marks the beginning of a separate Icelandic political entity.<sup>30</sup> Until 1262 the Althing did not have to answer to any "foreign" power. Whether Iceland "lost its national independence" in 1262 as 19th and 20th century nationalists have claimed is disputable, if not for anything else but the fact that the concept of nationality, and national power as we know of it today simply did not exist at that time. However, after a bloody tribal warfare in the thirteenth century it became politically a part of the Norwegian Kingdom in year 1262. It is worthwhile keeping in mind that during the Icelandic Commonwealth era (which equals the second half of the Viking era) political territorial divisions between states in the north western most parts of Europe were far from being clear or straight forward. It took a while before royal authorities stood on firm ground and the period saw Norwegian and Danish kingdoms come and go. By 1200 Norway, Sweden and Denmark had developed into a clearly defined kingdoms, although they may not have been strictly organized (Tilly 1992; Turner and Nordquist 1982). In 1381 Norway entered into a union with Denmark and Iceland followed the motherland. In 1387, by the Treaty of Kalmar, Sweden was allied under a common king along with Denmark and Norway and until 1523 all these countries were allied under one rule.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of her unfavorable geographic location Iceland was not always remote. At the

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<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, on the web-page of the modern Althing it is stated, that the establishment of the Althing in 930, marked the beginning of a *nation- state* in Iceland ([www. Althing.is](http://www.Althing.is)).

<sup>30</sup> The settlers established a stratified society with a mixed economy of agriculture, fishing and pastoralism. This society was based on unequal social relations between; slaves, landless freemen and freeborn landholders. This society referred to here as the Commonwealth period lasted for well over three hundred years. While having legislature and a judiciary it did not have any executive power any centralized authority, which has been given as a possible explanation for its disintegration (Pálsson 1995; Durrenberger 1992; Pálsson and Durrenberger 1989).

<sup>31</sup> Unhappy with the Danish hegemony the Swedish nobility eventually seceded from the Kalmar Union, setting up a separate kingdom in Sweden in 1523 (Fullerton and Knowles 1991).

time of Iceland's settlement the surrounding region including the islands in the north Atlantic, i.e., Iceland, The Faroe Islands, The Orkneys, Shetland and Scotland along with Norway, Denmark, Sweden, formed an economic whole and was a center of trade in northwest Europe with the Orkneys as its core (Stoklund 1992). Later the region in general and Iceland in particular became marginalized due to the ascension of the powers to the south. The history of Iceland and the region is nevertheless highly intertwined with the history of the capitalist expansion, centralized and controlled mostly by her Dutch and English neighbors (Braudel 1984; Wallerstein 1974). Economic and cultural development, even in the most remote peripheries within the region i.e., Iceland and the Faroe Islands, was highly affected by developments in the center areas. In the Viking era the main export items from Iceland were fish liver oil and leather (Stoklund 1992; Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). Danish ethnologist Bjarne Stoklund has argued that in the 1400s, "the area increasingly assumed the role of *periphery* in Wallerstein's sense. The North Atlantic islands were bulldozed into the economic system as suppliers of raw materials or cheap mass-produced articles for the European market."..."From about 1350 until the end of the 1500s, dried fish was most important; but from about 1600 until 1800 knitted woolen stockings took over the role of main product from dried fish." (1992:55) This economic marginalization was to increase as time went by and the German Hanseatic League grew in strength. The period between 1350 and 1550 was in Iceland marked by cod-wars, and control over the fish trade between the English, the Hanseatic merchants and the Danish- Norwegian Crown. These, at times bloody skirmishes, figured into another bloody conflict, the Reformation.

In religious matters Iceland has also followed her neighbors. And as in so many other places, religious affiliation seems to have had much more to do with politics proper than spiritual matters. The country was declared Christian by law in year 1000 a decision that was a clear

political strategy.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, when Iceland became part of the Norwegian kingdom, the reigning king Hákon was strongly supported by foreign ecclesiastical power that desired to increase its hold in the national Icelandic church. Iceland remained Catholic until year 1550 when the last Icelandic bishop Jón Arason, was beheaded along with two of his sons. Bishop Arason fathered seven children with his concubine and is said to be the forefather of all living Icelanders today (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). The death of Bishop Jón Arason marked the end of the Catholic era and the beginning of Protestantism and also the end of indigenous church power in Iceland, a mighty institution that had existed for over 450 years, relatively free from the orders from Rome, as Arason's public fatherhood testifies. By the Reformation the church, which had hitherto been independent from state power, was subsumed under the Danish throne and with it all its properties.<sup>33</sup> As a result of these transformations the crown became by far the largest landowner in Iceland, which in turn meant a dislocation of capital that was formerly domestically controlled. In short, the rent money collected by the Catholic Church fell after the Reformation

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<sup>32</sup> Njáls-Saga gives an account on how Christianity was legalized in Iceland. While some of the settlers had been Christian, the majority worshipped the Nordic gods, Thor, Odinn, Freyja and the rest and had temples at their farmsteads as place names still bear witness to such as Hof, Hofsstadir (Temple, Temple stead). In the late 900s, Christianity was gaining ground in the neighboring countries and some people in Iceland converted at that time. Attempts by indigenous missionaries to convert the entire population had failed when King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway stepped in. He had managed to convert most of his own subjects through threats, force and bribery if necessary. King Olaf was also determined to convert the people of Iceland, The Faroe Islands and Greenland. By holding hostage four young men, all sons of great chiefs in Iceland, he manipulated some other Icelandic chiefs who were already Christian to do whatever they could in order to bend all Icelanders under the new faith. In the summer of year 1000, contentions between the Christian section and the pagan part of the population had become very intense. Althing, consulted with two old and wise chieftains, one Christian, the other pagan Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði, about how to solve the matter. After hiding under a cloak for two days and two nights, the pagan chief came to the conclusion that "we should all have one law and one faith", "if we break the law apart we break apart the peace as well." He then suggested that people should be baptized to Christianity. However, people of the old faith were still allowed to practice infanticide, worship the old Gods and eat horsemeat as long as this was done in secrecy and it could not be proved by witnesses (quoted in Jónsson 1915).

<sup>33</sup> The Catholic Church in Iceland was the largest landowner in the country. At the onset of the Reformation the bishops were not only spiritual leaders but were also personally the greatest landowners after the Church itself and thus ruled also like lords in the power of their ownership. Ever since the ascendance of the Catholic Church in the 1100's it fought a constant battle with the secular semi-nobility of rich farmers. After the Reformation, the Crown land-ownership increased from 2% to 19% in Iceland. In attacks launched by the Danish crown between 1541 and 1551, people's personal property, the money and all treasures of the two Icelandic dioceses and the monasteries of the Catholic church was all confiscated and the amount of 12. 550 cow prices in gold, silver and treasures delivered to the King in Copenhagen. The King hereafter, also received half of the dioceses' tithes, the other half remained to finance their theology seminars. The King also took over the fines previously collected by the Catholic Church (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991).

into the hands of the crown located in Copenhagen. This increased distraction of capital from the colonies, strengthened the power of the crown and simultaneously weakened the economic status of Iceland. Like the earlier conversion from paganism to Christianity, the most palatable and direct affects of the Reformation were felt in the increased integration of the secular powers in the region. "Values engendered by the Church introduced a high degree of uniformity into the development of state administration and legal systems while facilitating the exchange of social and political ideas." (Turner & Nordquist 1982:17) In other words the merging of the church with the state accelerated the consolidation of state power (Tilly 1992). Religious homogeneity was and is still to this day, one of the outstanding characteristics of Icelandic society. Today over 90% of the population belongs to the Evangelic Lutheran State Church<sup>34</sup> which has since 1550 been state controlled, although the states have changed hands from the Danish Kingdom to the Icelandic Republic.(Icelandic Bureau of Statistics 1997)

Looking back at the 1500s, the trends of consolidation became stronger within the Danish Kingdom and were further established as time went by. Conflicts between the nobility and the crown topped off by military and commercial rivalries in the Baltic and the North Sea, led to the development of trade monopoly system. These conflicts supported "the establishment of a strictly hereditary monarchy and the assumption of absolute powers between 1660 and 1665." (Wylie 1987:21) The aftermath of the Reformation, the onset of the royal trade monopoly and the establishment of the absolute state had very strong impact upon Iceland that was to last well into the 1800s. The most dramatic consequences of these for Iceland were the distraction of capital from the country. After the onset of the trade monopoly, prices of imported goods went up and of exported goods went down. Trade with any others, the Dutch or the English meant confiscation of all property and loss of office in some cases (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). The king's merchants who controlled the trade, only came to Iceland over the summer months and

went back to Denmark for the winter with their profits. This explains, partially why no real urban centers formed in the country until the late 19th century (Tilly 1992). In his Coercion, Capital and European States, sociologist Charles Tilly argues that wars played the biggest role in European state formation. Wars both called for increased capital and were capital producing for the winners. "When accumulation [of capital] and concentration of coercive means grow together, they produce states." (1992:19) Arguing against a unilinear pattern of state formation in Europe, Tilly postulates three major paths to state formation, that can be seen as contrasting conditions of life, rather than alternative "strategies," coercive-intensive, capital-intensive, and capital-coercive (1992:30). These paths reflect the means that rulers employed in their pursuit of similar goals - most often preparation for war. The rulers were operating in different environments and thus the means they used in order to establish the necessary relations to the major social classes within their environment differed. Of most concern to us is the coercive-intensive variant, where the rulers extracted the means of war from their own subjects, mostly via tribute paying or taxation. Tilly argues that, "the Nordic countries created their own variant of coercive-state formation." (1992:134) The aftermath of the Reformation and the building of the Absolute Danish Monarchy and its increased warfare, dramatically intensified the distraction of capital from Iceland and increasingly relegated the country to a mere tributary of the King.

In the early 1600s, "the dried fish trade was superseded by a new mass product which assumed an even more dominant role; knitted stockings and woolen goods." (Stoklund 1992:57) The demand for this standardized product, according to Stoklund, came from two directions. On the one hand the growing merchant companies mostly in the Low Countries, needed stockings for their seamen and the growing navies of the emerging national states. "The new North Atlantic "mono-culture" of the beginning of the 17th century can thus be related to two typical phenomena of the period: the expansion of overseas trade and the growth of the state apparatus." (1992:58)

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<sup>34</sup> In Icelandic, the State church is called *Íslenska Þjóðkirkjan* literally meaning *The Icelandic National Church*.

Stoklund maintains that the hosiery was a market economy phenomenon, although co-existing side by side with traditional subsistence economy of cattle farming, fisheries and bird hunting. One of the dramatic consequences of the wool stocking trade for Iceland was the acceleration of deforestation caused by over-pasturing of sheep (see Bjarnason 1976, quoted in Stoklund 1992:60). The decline of the hosiery in the early 1800s is most likely linked with the fast growing cotton industry of Britain and America (Wolf 1982; Hobsbawm 1969). The royal trade monopoly was installed by the king in Iceland in 1662 and lasted until 1798. However, in between 1798 and 1855 trade in Iceland was limited to the subjects of the Danish Kingdom. Fully free trade was one of the demands of the early nationalists in Iceland. The trade monopoly put an end to an age old trading with English and German merchants. The royal trade monopoly intensified the geographical isolation of the country and brought on unprecedented economic hardships (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). During the latter half of the trade monopoly - the eighteenth century - Iceland was in addition plagued by all kinds of natural disasters, small-pox and other epidemics, topped by the worst volcano eruptions in memory, all of which decimated the population, leaving it at times just above the 30.000 mark. It is thus no wonder that this era has earned the reputation of being the darkest century in Iceland's history.<sup>35</sup>

The center-periphery model proposed by Stoklund does not explain the entire economic and cultural development in the North Atlantic islands from the Viking period until the onset of the industrialization in the 19th century. Neither does it have any aspirations to do so. However, it succeeds in providing a new perspective on the history of the region and illuminates how the everyday life of the people has been intertwined with the economic development of the European powers far beyond the traditionally accepted 19th century assumption, when "traditional society" was supposedly superseded by "modernization."

In spite of being part of the Danish Kingdom, Iceland always had her own separate laws

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<sup>35</sup> In comparison it is estimated that at the end of the settlement the total population of Iceland ranged between 60.000

during the entire colonial period. The Althing functioned as a legislative body of the country. It was only after the disintegration of the Danish monarchy - finalized in 1849 - that the Danish government questioned Iceland's special position within the newly founded Danish nation-state (Hálfðanarson 1991). Icelandic nationalism and claim for political sovereignty emerged as a reaction against an integration into the Danish nation state. Interestingly, the struggle for political independence was "fought" without so much as one blood-drop being shed. In 1874, the year that officially marked a millennium of settlement in Iceland, Christian IX, visited the country and delivered a constitution granting some restricted legislative power to the Althing in domestic affairs, but the country was still an unbreakable part of the Danish Kingdom and all executive power still remained exclusively with the king. Significant changes in the political structure were not to be seen until 1904 when Iceland was granted home-rule to become sovereign December 1, 1918 (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991).

### *3. From Home Rule to a Social Democratic Republic*

The basic characteristics of the Icelandic political system emerged with the onset of home-rule, when the executive power and the civil service were established along with parliamentary democracy. With the granting of sovereignty in 1918 one of the major issues of contentions in domestic politics, the relationship with the Danes disappeared. Socio-economic changes were also rapidly transforming social relations calling for politics built on class interests. In the second decade of the 20th century all the major political parties Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkur - Farmers Party), the Social Democratic Party (Alþýðuflokkur) and the Conservative Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkur lit. Independence Party) emerged (Grímsson & Broddason 1982). With the establishment of a supreme court in 1920 all the three major institutions of the

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and 80.000 (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991)

state had become domestic; the executive power, the legislative power and the judicial power. (Harðarson 1994) Through a twenty-five year contract, Iceland was given an adjustment period – starting in 1918 - during which she shared foreign affairs and the head of state with Denmark. In 1943 when the contract expired, the Nazis occupied Denmark. The Danish authorities were unable to exercise any power for these reasons. Despite the un-normal circumstances brought on by the war, the Icelandic government at the time held a national referendum in the spring of 1944. With a Soviet style voter turnout, of 98,6% of all eligible voters 97,3% agreed on full independence (Margeirsson 1995:12). June 17<sup>th</sup>, the birthday of the 19th century national hero Jón Sigurðsson - was selected as the Day of Independence to be celebrated for the first time that same year marking the birth of the Icelandic republic. (The processes of industrialization, nation-making and democratization are all intertwined in the case of Iceland will be discussed in more detail later.)

The birth of the Icelandic republic took place in the shadow of World War II. It was not only the motherland which was occupied by foreign troops. While the Danes had the Nazi's, Iceland was occupied by British troops who arrived May 10, 1940 to be replaced by US troops a couple of years later. The occupation put an end to the Great Depression and called for a sudden need of labor. While every child in Europe was suffering from the disasters of the war, for Icelanders the war meant an unprecedented economic boom, accelerating the flight from the countryside to urban centers and the Reykjavík area. The flow of cash and new consumer goods was unprecedented, escalating the formation of the middle class (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). Moreover, and of no little weight was interaction between the troops and Icelanders, as this was their first mass scale interaction with people of other cultures on their own home turf. In the eyes of the authorities and other leading nationalists the biggest threat was the potential mixing of Icelandic blood with foreign blood. Icelandic women who formed relationships with the troops were heavily stigmatized as a result (Björnsdóttir 1989). This prejudice was maintained for

decades to come.

In the aftermath of the war Iceland became one of the founding members of NATO in 1949 in spite of being unable to sustain its own military. This "problem" was solved by The United States which has sponsored a NATO base in Iceland since 1951. During the entire Cold War era the NATO membership and the presence of the US military - i.e., the issue of foreign politics - caused the most severe cleavage in domestic politics in Iceland (Grimsson 1982). The Socialists (People Alliance) were however, the only political party which consistently protested the NATO membership and the American military base. The aftermath of the Cold War has called for a redefinition of military relations as well as the role of NATO. The former strategic importance of Iceland during the Cold War has diminished significantly in the post Cold War era.

Iceland became a member of the United Nations in 1948 and in 1952 one of the founding countries of the social alliance between the Nordic Countries called the Nordic Council. Because of Cold War politics the nation-states within the Nordic Council (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland) neither established a political nor an economic unity. Military wise Sweden was neutral while Finland had a special deal with the Soviet Union but the remaining three countries were all members of NATO. The Nordic Council has served as a consultative organization and through its work the countries share a common labor market and the citizens need no passport between the countries. Moreover, all Nordic citizens have access to health care, as well as to the social system and to education in the country they reside (Turner & Nordquist 1982; Fullerton & Knowles 1991).

Iceland became a member of EFTA (European Free Trade Association) in 1970 after heated debates over liberalizing foreign trade. Severe restrictions on foreign trade had prevailed since the inter-war period until Iceland became part of EFTA (Kristinsson 1996). Other steps into the direction of Iceland's participation in a consolidated European market were marked around ten years later when the first steps towards membership in The European Economic Area (EEA)

were taken. The process was initiated by a left wing coalition government (between the Socialists (People's Alliance) and the Social Democrats (Alþýðuflokkur) and the Progressive Party (Centre-Framsóknarflokkur)). After elections in 1991 the Social Democrats formed a new coalition with the largest party in Iceland the Independence Party (Liberal Conservatives). In the ratification process in the fall of 1992 two parties turned wholly against EEA, the People Alliance and the smallest party in the assembly, the Women's Alliance, as did the majority of the Progressive Party. (Only two political parties have been consistent in their position towards the EU issue, the Women's Alliance always against and the Social Democrats always for membership). However, after the ratification of the EEA the parliament agreed unanimously to take up bilateral discussions with the EU concerning future relations, based upon the ongoing membership negotiations of Iceland's EFTA partners. Yet it was made clear that this did not amount to a decision on a membership application - neither for nor against (Kristinsson 1996).

Like its allying neighbors, Icelandic society is characterized by the quintessential Scandinavian political system: social democracy which is mostly responsible for the relative and even distribution of sources. The concept of the welfare state and particularly its preminent association with the notion of social democracy has become somewhat of a Scandinavian hallmark. These two concepts are intertwined in the notion of the "Scandinavian Model." (Erikson et al. 1987) The "Scandinavian [M]odel" of social and economic development is characterized by a strong emphasis on security, safety, equality, rationality, foresight, and regulation." (Gullestad 1989:73) The Scandinavian Model is characterized by an institutional interdependence and a "public/private mix" rather than a "public/private" split, with the state being the dominant institution designed to administer this mix (Hernes 1988).<sup>36</sup> In Iceland, the

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<sup>36</sup> While praised by its supporters for its emphasis on equality, the Scandinavian Model has also been heavily criticized. Conservatives blame it for creating state slaves out of its citizens; others have disparaged it for being too centralized and monotonous, depriving the citizens of all initiative (Erikson et al. 1987; Selle 1991; Sundberg & Karvonen 1991). Regional and global economic recessions of the early 1990s, increased unemployment, serious cutbacks in health care, education and other areas of social benefits and provoked further criticism of the Scandinavian Model. The strength

development of social services was similar to that of the neighboring countries and evolved originally from poor relief. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, health insurance, pension funds (disability and retirement) were limited to special groups (such as fishermen, civil servants). More broad based social services were installed in 1936 with an increased participation of the state, reaching about half of the population and specifically granting members of labor unions rights to public health care and pension. Universal, or national social insurance, including pension insurance, health insurance, industrial injuries and unemployment insurance was installed in 1950 (Ólafsson 1993; Nordal & Kristinsson 1986). Iceland has no general supplementary pension scheme granting benefits in addition to basic pension, but since 1980, all wage-earners are mandated to pay to their union based pension funds, financed through contributions from employers and employees, usually around 10% of the basic salary. The state covers 86% of pension insurance, the employers the rest. Health benefits and employment injuries insurance are paid in full by the state, whereas unemployment insurance is shared between employees, and local authorities, and the state which contributes 50%. (Nordal and Kristinsson 1986). In addition to these benefits, families receive family and children benefits, paid maternity leave is six months and can be shared between parents, with basic minimum for everyone and additional benefits based upon income in the year prior to the child birth (Lög um fæðingarorlof nr. 57.1987 31.Mars).

In comparison to her allies in Scandinavia the contribution of the Icelandic state to social welfare is considerably less. In 1950 the share of welfare cost was similar to that of the Nordic countries or 6,3 of the GNP (the average was 7.2%). While government expenditure on social welfare has steadily increased in Iceland, it has lagged far behind that of the other Nordic countries, which all rank amongst the highest in the world. In 1987, Iceland spent 17.0% of its

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and the viability of the Scandinavian welfare state have also been seriously questioned in the wake of the political and economic transformations brought about by the expansion of the European Union. The social security provided by the state and the integrity of the social reality that came with it can no longer be taken for granted. This vulnerability

GNP on social welfare whereas Finland spent 25, 9%, Norway 26, 4%, Denmark 27,7% and Sweden as much as 35,7% <sup>37</sup> Likewise Iceland spends less on education than her Nordic allies, but more Icelanders seek education abroad as compared to her Nordic counterparts (Ólafsson 1993).

In recent years one has also so witnessed the cut back of government controlled industries and services as has been the case both regionally and somewhat globally. This has manifested itself in the abolishment of state controlled broadcasting media and telecommunication as well as the privatization of some of formerly state controlled industries and banks.

Global interdependency has certainly intensified for Iceland as well as for other countries in this century. However, life in Iceland has always as we have discussed, in spite of her geographic isolation been intertwined with the economic development of her Nordic neighbors as well as the European powers to the south. Like her Nordic neighbors, industrialization occurred late relative to the powers to the south. In spite of being a latecomer, and geographically remote, once the process of industrialization started it developed fast rendering a relative general socio-economic prosperity in the country. While this is of course due to the political structure, Iceland in spite of her dependency status enjoyed like the rest of the Nordic countries a favorable position within the world economy system. Iceland was thus early on able to establish its own markets that were independent of the intervention of the colonial center (G. Jónsson 1995; Nordal and Kristinsson 1987).

At the turn of the 20th century Iceland was one of the poorest and most isolated countries in Europe. The very first signs of urbanization/industrialization emerged at this time, but over

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caught many people off guard who now fear for their social security.

<sup>37</sup> If one looks further behind these figures the main difference between Iceland and her Nordic allies lies in Iceland's lesser contribution to pension (retirement and disability) and to unemployment and family benefits. It is important to point out that unemployment has for the most part been insignificant, safe for short-term unemployment during economic recessions. In healthcare the figures from Iceland are on par with the Nordic countries. Yet the Icelandic population has a lower percentage of old people and therefore the system in Iceland is relatively more costly than is the other countries as large parts of the healthcare cost go the elderly (Ólafsson 1993).

90% of the total population still lived in traditional turf-huts in rural areas along the coast. Plagued through the centuries by natural disasters followed by famines, epidemics and colonial suppression, life in Iceland was marked by hardship.<sup>38</sup>

The geographic isolation has of course long since been broken, thanks to revolutionary transformations in both transportation and communication technology. Today, Icelanders have joined the rest of the world as spectators of global current events via their television sets and satellites. Currently they also boast about having one of the world's highest Internet connections with around 50% of the population "on line" (Morgunblaðið 11/27/98). But their relation to the outside world is not all occurring in cyber space or via television satellites. The relatively high level of Internet access bespeaks not only of the uneven impact of globalization (see Hall 1996) but also to a high living standard. Iceland today ranks amongst the top four countries in the world when it comes to quality of life according to the Quality of Life Index compiled by International Living Magazine (1995 quoted in *Iceland Export Directory* 1995:17). The high living standard is amongst other things, attributed to unpolluted air, healthy diet, and an excellent national health care system which gives Iceland one of the highest longevity in the world according to OECD and WHO. In 1993 life expectancy at birth in Iceland was 78.8 years (80.7 years among females and 76.9 among males) and infant mortality was the worlds lowest at 5.5 per 1,000 births. Furthermore, the high quality of life in Iceland is also attributed to high quality of housing, high car ownership – 464 cars per 1000 inhabitants [sic!] - and high general education (*Iceland Export Directory* 1995). Yet behind this high living standard lie very long working hours. In comparison to the other Nordic countries, women in Iceland are the worst paid and have according to tax returns of 1997, almost fifty percent less income on average

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<sup>38</sup> In the first Icelandic census of 1703, the total population was 50,358. During the eighteenth century which is often referred to as the darkest one in Icelandic history, the population "which never exceeded 51,000 people, was frequently cut by thousands, mainly due to famines, epidemics or natural catastrophes..., In both the first and the last of these periods, approximately 20% of the population died" (Gunnlaugsson 1988:17). After the last disaster, an enormous volcanic eruption, the authorities in Copenhagen seriously considered evacuating all the people of Iceland to Jutland in Denmark for good (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). In the last decades of the 19th century one fifth of the people emigrated to the United States and Canada leaving the population at seventy eight thousand at the turn of the century (ibid.).

than their fellow Icelandic males (Iceland in figures 1998 Statistics Iceland). In the post war era unemployment has been insignificant most of the time except for seasonal unemployment in fish processing. The average Icelander however works two jobs in order to make ends meet.<sup>39</sup> In 1993 the labor cost in Iceland fell behind all the industrialized countries in Western Europe, the USA and Japan. The low labor cost in Iceland has occurred in spite of the fact that most of the labor force is unionized (over 90%).

How did this metamorphoses from uttermost poverty to relative affluence happened? What made this transformation possible? Gylfi Þ. Gíslason a former Minister of Education, an economist and a Social Democrat provides a typical nationalistic explanation for the economic transformation brought about by industrialization in his book *The Challenge of Being an Icelander*.<sup>40</sup> Gíslason argues that had it not been for the fact that Icelanders “in spite of their dire poverty..... possessed an ancient culture to which they remained faithful for over thousand years.” ... “They could never have become politically independent and thus they could never have transformed from being one of the poorest countries in Europe at the turn of the century to having one of the highest living standards in the world less than one hundred years later. "These people were quick to assimilate new techniques and working methods because they had retained in their poverty a love of culture and a respect for knowledge." He goes on and says that "the story of Icelandic society" .... "is a clear example of the practical value of culture for economic development" .., "the most remarkable feature of the culture of these people... was that they had preserved their national identity and their language for more than a thousand years and had been responsible for the amazingly strong continuity in the history of the smallest nation in the world." (Gíslason 1990:21-2)

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<sup>39</sup>In the aforementioned tourist brochure Iceland from 1993, one is informed that the typical Icelander is something of a mixture, partly born of the ancient culture and heritage which give him a special identity in a today's global village, and partly incurably consumeristic, eager to spend the money brought in by a *seemingly genetic capacity for working overtime* (italics mine).

Political scientist Ólafur Harðarson on the other hand does not credit "language" or "culture" for the shift from the poverty at the turn of the century to the relative high economic prosperity enjoyed in its latter half. Neither does Harðarson credit the prosperity to political sovereignty or sensible politics in independent Iceland, which he says is characterized by opportunism and high level of clientelism. The reasons are to be found elsewhere. For one thing Harðarson points out, being completely free of all military expenditure has helped Icelanders against bad economic policy. The presence of the American base has also rendered significant income.<sup>41</sup> Secondly, Icelanders simply hit the jackpot he argues. "Icelanders knew how to use the *manna* that they got from the sky or rather from the ocean; it just so happens that fish is a valuable product, even though Icelanders were pretty late to discover that." (Harðarson 1994:60) Let us look at this *manna*.

Iceland is surrounded by one of the most generous fishing banks in the world which with the help of improved technology - larger and better equipped boats amongst other things - made it possible for Icelanders to jump into the modern world in one generation's time. The arrival of the first trawler and other motorized fishing vessels, in the first decade of this century are traditionally said to have marked the beginning of industrialization/modernization in the country (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991; Magnússon 1993). Today, fish and fish processing forms the basis of the economy, generating between 70%-90% of her export revenues and 20% of the GNP, however occupying less than 15% of the work force (National Economic Institute of the University of Iceland 1994).

Throughout the centuries, British, French, German and other European fishermen have enjoyed the riches of Icelandic waters. Due to improved technology in the 20th century, the

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<sup>40</sup> The Icelandic edition of this book is called *Vegsemd þess og vandi að vera Íslendingur* (1994) which, in a more accurate translation would be: *The Honor and the Challenge of being an Icelander*.

<sup>41</sup> In 1993 the military base rendered about nine billion krónas or approximately \$630 million that amounts to 6,4% of foreign revenues for goods and services - quoted in Harðarson 1994:60.

presence of foreign fleets in the waters around the island increased considerably. As a result of intensified fishing coupled with an increased knowledge of the exhaustible nature of the natural resources of the ocean, Icelandic authorities were no longer willing to share the waters with others and extended the fishery limits twice in the 1950s (first from 2 to 4 miles and then to 12 miles). In the 1970s they were further extended to 50 miles and finally to 200 miles. On all occasions the extensions led to so-called "Cod Wars." chiefly fought with Britain. After the final Cod War was settled the 200 mile fishery jurisdiction has become recognized and accepted as a standard in international marine law.

The Icelandic fisheries are somewhat versatile both in terms of species caught and different forms of processing varying from salted, to dried and frozen products and the markets are distributed over different countries. Currently the European Union is the largest trader, buying in 1995, 70% of all exported goods from Iceland, followed by the United States and Japan each of which gets approximately 14% (Basic Statistics of Iceland 1997). The overall dependency on seafood and seafood exportation gives the Icelandic economy a mono-crop characteristic. Any major fluctuations in either market value or available quantities of the species caught are bound to be felt throughout the economy.

Because of the overall importance of fishing, any threat to the fishing sector is understood as a threat to the very basis of the economy. The EEA/EU issue has aggravated the issue of fishing rights and distribution of quotas - one of the most hotly debated issue in Icelandic fisheries. The EU/EEA issue brought about great fears over loss of the exclusive rights Icelanders have over the 200 miles jurisdiction around the island. The EU fishing policy calls for a joint share of the resources of the ocean. Handing control of the waters around the island over to the EU would spell a complete collapse for the future of the Icelandic national economy, the opponents have claimed, and for some thereby, the end of Icelandic national sovereignty.

In recent decades Icelandic authorities have made several attempts to diversify the

economy by attracting foreign investors to buy inexpensive electricity and build heavy industry in the country. Of most importance are an aluminum plant and a ferro-silicon factory. In both cases the raw material is imported. The presence and potential growth of heavy industry has caused tremendous controversy that has to a degree followed partisans' lines. The Socialists have been split while the Women's Alliance has categorically opposed further grand scale heavy industry, whereas the other political parties, the Independence Party (Conservatives) the Progressive Party (Center) and the Social Democrats have been in favor<sup>42</sup>. The issue of heavy industry has been a matter of great tensions in areas and communities that have had perennial seasonal unemployment but do also have abundant electricity. But there has also been a growing opposition towards heavy industry. The main reasons are on the one hand, disbelief in large heavy industry as a long-term employment solution and disapproval of giving foreign companies special deals for electricity. On the other hand potential increase in the heavy industry sector has by some opponents been seen as a major threat to the environment. It is precisely here that major conflicts of interest have occurred, between the potential economic growth and stable employment brought by the establishment of heavy industry and the fastest growing industry and money maker in the country, namely tourism.

Today, tourism ranks as the second largest generator of capital in the country. This industry grew by 97% in a matter of ten years from 1981-1990 (Icelandic Tourist Bureau 1992). No other industry has grown with the same intensity in recent years as tourism has. A seasonal industry and only occupying about 5% of the total work force, tourism reached an unprecedented peak in 1994, rendering over 11% of the country's total currency income (Icelandic Export Directory 1995:15).

After this brief introduction to the history of Iceland, the main characteristics of present

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<sup>42</sup> Ísland í A-flokk - Auðuga mannlíf 1991. Betra Ísland Kosningayfirlýsing Sjálfstæðisflokksins 1995.

day political and economic structure, let us now look at the myth, which lies at the core of Icelandic nationalism: the myth that explains the origins of Icelanders, and the justification for the existence of the present day Icelandic nation state. It is here that we find the source of “*purity*,” the notion that has shaped national identity within Iceland.

### III. The National Myth on the Pure Nation and Pure Language - Jón Aðils

"Mythology is something that never was, but always is" (Stephen of Byzantium a Greek philosopher, quoted in Kaplan 1993:238). We may paraphrase this and say, a myth is something that never was, but always is.

The nationalistic account in Iceland as elsewhere called for the manufacturing and manipulation of a certain view of the past and for the creation of the myth of the origins of Icelanders, as reflected in the quotation from the Icelandic tourist brochure at the beginning of this chapter. In the words of Eley and Suny the purpose of the myth was/is "to establish and legitimate the claim to cultural autonomy and eventually to political independence" (1996:8). And this is precisely what one finds in Iceland. Historian Gunnar Karlsson has argued, that the myth on the origins and the fate of the Icelandic nation is synonymous with Icelandic history teaching in the 20th century (1982). At the core of the myth lies the idea that national economic prosperity and general welfare depend upon political independence which in turn rest on the preservation of the purity of the national spirit or the national soul. The purity of the soul of the nation, as we encountered in our discussion on Herder and Fichte before, is assumed to be embedded in the purity of the national language. Hence, linguistic purity is a prerequisite for political sovereignty and economic prosperity. More importantly as we are about to encounter, the level of freedom

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Fólk í fyrirrúmi Ályktanir 23. Flokksþings Framsóknarmanna Hótel Sögu 25.-27. nóvember 1994. Kvennalistinn Framtíðarsýn Stefnuskra Kvennalistans 1995. Útflutningsleiðin Atvinna Jöfnuður Siðbót. Tillögugerð Alþýðubandalagsins Vinnuútgáfa - 3 apríl 1994.

and prosperity on practically all levels, goes hand in hand with the level of linguistic purity *par definition*. The genealogy of these ideas can obviously be traced straight back to Herder and Fichte and German Romantic nationalism.

The development of 19th century linguistic nationalism in Iceland will be discussed in more detail in chapter three. For now, let us focus at how Fichte's understanding of history, and moreover his ideas on *purity* whether, linguistic, national or racial resonate almost verbatim in the national myth of the origins, history, culture and language of Icelanders.

In Iceland, Fichte's ideas reverberated most strongly in the ideas of historian Jón Aðils (1869-1920). Mr. Aðils ideas, popularized in a series of public lectures he gave at the Icelandic Student Association at the turn of the 20th century, were to influence generations to come.<sup>43</sup> His lectures were published in three books: *Íslenskt þjóðerni (Icelandic nationality)* (1903), *Gullöld Íslendinga (The Golden Age of Icelanders)* (1906), and *Dögun (Dawn)* (1910). *Icelandic nationality* served as a school textbook in the first years of the century. Aðils' ideas were to influence every child in the nation via Jónas Jónsson's *The History of Iceland I, II and III (Íslandssaga)* (first published 1915 [1968]); a series of textbooks on the history of Iceland taught at elementary and middle school levels well into the 1980s. In the words of author Jónsson, the popularity of Mr. Aðils lectures could be explained by the fact that Mr. Aðils "spoke about the subjects that the youth of the country wanted to be informed about, precisely at these times of transformation and awakening." (Quoted in Matthíasdóttir 1995:37)<sup>44</sup> Let us also bear in mind what Bourdieu has taught us: that words do not have any power in and of themselves but their symbolic power and their value depends on the relations of power between the speaker and the

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<sup>43</sup> Mr. Aðils received a generous ten-year grant from the Althing for his lectures. He was the first professor of history at the opening of the University of Iceland in 1911, received an honorary doctorate degree from the same institution in 1919 and was elected its rector (dean) just a few weeks before his death in 1920 (Matthíasdóttir 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Jónsson, was one of Iceland's most influential and controversial politicians in the second quarter of the century, he served as a Minister of Labor and Education in the late 1920s and 1930s.

listeners. Utterances are in other words more than just signs to be understood and deciphered, they are "*signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority* intended to be believed and obeyed." (Bourdieu 1992:66) It is in this light that we must analyze the symbolic power of Aðils' "historical theory," only later to be defined as a national myth. Icelandic scholars generally agree that the popularity of Mr. Aðils ideas played a major role in molding Icelanders traditional conception of history (Matthíasdóttir 1995; Karlsson 1982). This nationalistic interpretation of history has in recent years come under attack particularly by the youngest generation of historians. However, Mr. Aðils ideas on history and nationality are still the dominant ones in the country and resonate in the discourse Icelanders have about themselves.

At the core of Mr. Aðils ideas like Fichte's, was the idea of purity. Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, a young Icelandic historian provides a comparative analysis on Fichte's and Aðils' nationalistic ideas in her article "Réttlæting Þjóðernis" ("The Justification of Icelandic Nationality"). Aðils, like Fichte she argues, emphasized first of all the organic nature of the Icelandic nation which was intertwined with the Icelandic language. (1995). Secondly, he argued for the superiority of the Icelandic nation and of the pure Icelandic language. Thirdly he insisted on the evil of foreign influence and the importance of placing the preservation of the nation over and above all other interests." (Matthíasdóttir 1995:38)

If one looks first at Aðils interpretation of history one sees the clear impact of German Romantic Nationalism. Out of the Old Sagas he molded a Genesis for Icelanders. According to Aðils, this new nation consisted of the *crème de la crème* of Norwegian heroes/chieftains who refused to be subjected under King Harald the Hair-fair and also of some Norse people who had settled in the British Isles and mixed blood with Irish royalties and other Celts of great standing. Here, Aðils departs from Fichte who insisted the purity of the "race" or *Geslechte*. Aðils acknowledges the mysteries of genetics. Nevertheless he argued, like many of his contemporaries (see discussion on Finnbogason in chapter four) that in the case of Icelanders this racial mix

generated an exceptionally strong and talented stock. This mix in turn also verified not only the specific uniqueness of the nation but also its superiority. Or as he put it:

The Celts and the Norwegians were of two different sub-branches of the great Arian race. The Norwegians were of the Germanic branch and the Irish of the Celtic branch. The nations were also by nature entirely different. The Irish were idealists with strong emotions, a nation of extremists who knew little about how to control their passions. Their life was the one of ideals and daydreaming more than just life of action and great achievements. The Norwegians on the other hand were first and last a nation of great achievements. They were introverted and did not let their emotions and passions seize control over themselves, but when they let them loose in order to accomplish something nothing could hold them back. Yet they were also practical and had a keen eye for the importance of legalized social order. (1903/1922:49-50)

This is for Aðils the genetic substance of the new great nation called Icelanders. He then sums it up and says:

In Iceland settled finally the cream of Norwegian families from the West Islands (British Isles) and precisely those men who were sensitive to cultural influence. But that is not all. Here in Iceland these two races mixed blood. Here, merged in one, the spiritual vitality, intelligence and genius of the Celts and the profundity, the steadfastness and the willpower of the Norwegians that gave birth to a national life that hardly has had an equal in history (reads: human history). The genetic capacities of these two nations are most clearly manifested in two particular aspects of the national life, that can be said to correspond exactly to the characteristics of these two races: these two are: *the old Icelandic literature* and *the old Icelandic political structure*. (ibid. 51)

Aðils then speculates about the Celtic influence on the Old Sagas and attributes the Icelandic genius for poetry and prose to them. On the other hand the literary achievements of the Norwegians were very poor, i.e., nothing to boast about. Yet, he maintains that it was only after these two races were thoroughly mixed i.e., when this "unique breed" of Icelanders had emerged that the great literature emerged in the thirteenth century (1922:56). The two aspects of Icelandic national life which he argued had made Iceland's name around the world, the Old literature and the Old political structure, reflected the genius of these two races. Althing, the hallmark of the Old political structure - according to Aðils, the genetic inheritance of the Norwegian genius - was established in 930, only two generations after the first settlers are said to have come to the island.

By that time all ties with Norway had been severed, Aðils argues, very strange remark indeed. Other sources such as great part of Old literature show that connections between the countries continued throughout the Commonwealth era. Of more importance for the purposes of this thesis however, is Aðils' argument about the influence the new Althing had for the people. After Althing was established, he argues,

Icelanders reckon themselves as a separate and independent nation. Each and every individual reckons him as a link in the national whole with specific duties and specific rights. It is as if life takes on a whole new appearance or more correctly: this is the beginning of a whole new existence. New strength, new hopes and new emotions wake up amongst them, some of the most beautiful and noble emotions to be found amongst humans, *patriotism* and *nationalism*. When these emotions come to life amongst the nations, it always symbolizes a beginning of a new era for them. (1922:67)

In line with the German Romantic nationalist, Aðils views the nation as an organic entity: "The nation is a somewhat an independent and continuous whole, where all life movements can be traced to shared life conditions, shared genetic characteristics, shared memories, shared hopes and sorrows, shared desires and ideals. And one of the principal conditions for the life of the nation is to preserve this inner connection unbroken." (Aðils 1922:250) As postulated by his mentors, Aðils argued for an inner nature or character of the nation, reflected most clearly in its social institutions and of course in its language. The life in ancient Althing for him "corresponded to the inner most character/nature (eðli) of the Icelandic nation when it was at its most beautiful stage." (1922:64) Echoing both Herder and Fichte, Aðils maintains that languages represent the primary characteristics of every nation. He argues that, the Icelandic language represents, "a living image of the nation's inner most characteristics. It is the external symbol of the nation's deepest life movements. Therefore, the nation has to be loyal to the language as well as itself." (1922:259) For Aðils like Herder and Fichte, the language plays a central role in the preservation of the inner most characteristic of the nation. And he argues that this preservation can best be maintained "if the nation holds firmly to its Old literature and tends to it, then the

language is in no danger The fate of these two - the language and the Old literature - are intertwined and cannot be separated." (ibid.) For Aðils the Old literature did not only meet all the highest standards of artistic excellence. Moreover, embedded in it was,

an invaluable *life value* or *cultural value*. It entails a whole world of beautiful and magnificent ideals, deep life experience, rich and strong emotions, good and noble instincts. The life's philosophy that lies at the core of some of the Edda poems is so pure and deep and beautiful that one can hardly reach any higher. All which counts as the most noble in the world, love for the fatherland, patriotism, valor and gentlemanliness, strength and perseverance, friendship and loyalty are represented in some of our Saga's hero's. Better role models one can hardly ask for. No nation can be deceived, which rests its life and culture on these premises. (1922:257)

For Aðils, the Icelandic language was the embodiment of the superior characteristics of the Icelandic nation. Hence the Icelandic language, inseparable from the Old literature, was also superior. The Old literature, the Sagas were for him a living proof of "a national life that hardly has had an equal in history." (1922:51) The Icelandic language was for Aðils, like German was for Fichte an original language, *Ursprache* and part of the original national character.

### *1. Impurity Equals Degeneration*

Herder had argued as discussed before, that for a nation to lose its language equaled losing its sense of self. Moreover, even if political institutions remained, a nation without its own language was an absurdity. Fichte had taken this idea a step further and insisted that the presence of foreign elements in a language posed a major threat to the very soul of the nation, as the purity of the national soul was to be manifested in the purity of the language. Hence, the issue of linguistic purity became an issue of the life or the death of the nation, a barometer of its moral character. If purity was threatened, it would lead to the degeneration of the nation. The nation would loose touch with its original and pure consciousness and thus ultimately the very grounds of political morality would be jeopardized.

These ideas are clearly echoed in Aðils' writings who argued that, "if the national spirit/soul is contaminated and poisoned, no government, no political structure no matter how good these are can prevent the nation from collapsing. Even if all its demands for freedom and independence would be met it is of no help, because if the nation's life core is rotten and jaded, it is ruthlessly defeated by hopelessness." (1922:253) And he goes on and elaborates that the nation "has to have an unbreakable [continuous] loyalty to itself, its core character, [its soul/spirit]. The nation's future existence is dependent upon that... *Icelanders must build their future life and culture on national grounds - on the history, literature and the language of the nation.* Those are the cornerstones which our national society is built upon." (ibid. 1922:255 italics mine)

For Aðils, like Fichte, the purity of the language is of uttermost importance for the preservation of the national spirit and thus for the nation's existence. Intertwined in his mind is the notion of the purity of the Icelandic language and history of the Icelandic people. He divides the nation's history into to separate eras where language purity and the prosperity of the Icelandic nation, whether on the political, economic or spiritual/intellectual level go hand in hand. The first era, lasting about 300 years from 930-1262, he calls "*the era of autonomy or the era of [spiritual] development.*" During this time the prosperity of the nation was at its peak. "Wherever one looked there was national prosperity so beautiful, so rich and so full of splendor that nowhere else but amongst the ancient Greeks could one find its counterpart"... "Out of this national life, springs the Old Icelandic literature, the most beautiful and splendid manifestation of Icelandic intellectual achievements and the most precious heritage of our forefathers. This heritage the nation has managed to preserve intact to this day." (ibid. 241-242)

The next period also spanning 300 years, from 1262 to 1550 he calls *the era of degeneration.* The thirteenth century saw the disappearance of the old autonomy. "The moral corruption penetrates and poisons the national life. Conflicts and contentions, incited partly by foreign chiefs, weaken the resistance. And finally, when the nation has for a whole generation or

more wallowed in disloyalty, barbarity and fission, it (the nation) fills its cup of sins by relinquishing itself and its freedom to a foreign political power." (ibid. 243) He argues that despite some trails of autonomy (Iceland had separate laws during colonial times), which kept the life in the nation for the next three hundred years as he put it, "*everything degenerated and regressed.*" Even, "the literary life, the most beautiful flower of Icelandic intellectual achievement, gradually dies and *even the language becomes corrupted.* New power, the church power emerges next to the royal power and makes every attempt to attack the nation's spiritual freedom by imprisoning people's thoughts and emotions in the bondage of foreign church law." (ibid.)

The third period, extending from 1550 to 1750 is however the worst of them all. "During this notorious era which I have called *the era humiliation,*" he says,

it is as if all the evil spirits are sworn in one union to attack the nation. The royal power, the monopoly trade, the peasant suppression, volcano eruptions, weather hardships, and deadly plagues attack from all directions and make the nations existence almost unbearable, uprooting its freedom. And for a while it seemed as if the nation was to be defeated. The royal power defeats its political freedom, the trade monopoly and the peasant suppression the economic freedom, and the miseries and the hardships its spiritual freedom. *The literature degenerates, language is contaminated by Danish stains and foreign influence emerges*".... "It is as if the nation is covered with a dark night. It almost succumbs and forgets itself - its natural character and origin. Yet in spite of the miseries, the despair, the hardships, the oppression, the nation manages to hold on to its sparkle of freedom which prevents it from selling out completely to foreign influence. *The nation holds firmly to its old language, even if it is corrupted and mixed, it [the nation] preserves remarkably well its old literature and its old national character.* (1922:244-245 italics mine)

The spirit of the nation survives, Aðils insists, only because Icelanders clutched on to their language and nationality with the force of the dying fighting for their life. And, thus Icelanders managed to preserve both of these until the waking call came and the time of salvation arrived, marking the dawn of a new era; *the era of resurrection.* This is the fourth and last historical epoch in Aðils' scheme, beginning in 1750, and extending to his time. This is the time when the nation wakes up from its age-old slumber and inertia, fully materializing in the 19th

century. The nation remembers its past glory and splendor.

*The language, the nation discovers, is corrupted and mutilated by age-old lack of care and indifference, yet so rich, musical and rhythmic that it [the nation] still has not found any thought or emotion that this language cannot describe. The nation finds literature in its own tongue that does not compare in terms of beauty and genus with the literature of other nations. All this combined, generates a new sense of freedom and calls for resurrection and progress. (ibid. 245 italics mine)*

Clearly for Aðils, the prosperity of the Icelandic nation stands in equal proportion to the level of the purity of the language, hence the purity of the national spirit. The cause of all evil in Iceland's history, the biggest obstacle for prosperity on all levels - the most lethal poison for the spirit of nation does however and surprisingly so not come from the outside. Of all the misfortunes plaguing Icelanders in the past, the evils of foreign royal power, the church power, the trade monopoly, the peasant suppression, the volcano eruptions, all combined did less harm to Icelanders, than the *internal disunity* amongst them. "It is vital for the future of the nation to crush this evil once and for all." (ibid.251). While acknowledging the necessity for different opinions on one level, disunity he argues, is

a deliberate murder attempt towards all true national welfare and prosperity"..... Everyone can see that [lack of unity] will head the nation straight into peril and hopelessness. If such a thing exists as sacred civil duty, it would be to enhance peace, brotherhood and harmony within; the future prosperity of the nation depends upon it. *The individuals must bend their heads under the yoke of the national welfare and that should be done with pleasure and ease. All our misfortune and curse stems from disunity. Unity is the bedrock of our future, our hope, our trust, and our life. Unity is the magic wand that opens up everything - the key to the fulfillment of all our hopes for the future. (ibid. 251-252 italics mine)*

For Aðils, the evils of foreign power are rendered powerless if "the nation" stands united. This unity begins in national efforts to preserve true spirit/language, national efforts that safeguard the purity of the language. As he put it "by bolstering alliances and solidarity within the country, we simultaneously bolster the independence of the nation."<sup>45</sup> Independence is the most precious

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<sup>45</sup> Note, that in Icelandic the term "independence" is used alternately with the English terms "national freedom" and "sovereignty."

valuable existing in the world. The nation's past irrefutably shows and proves that." (ibid.,) In short, language purity is only preserved by absolute national unity. Unity amongst the nation safeguards the nation's independence, which in turn is the prerequisite for prosperity on all levels. All the misfortunes of foreign powers are due to lack of unity, according to Aðils. In reality Aðils gives no more space for diversity than did his mentors and protagonists of German Romantic nationalism earlier. As pointed out before, for Aðils no political system however good was of any value if the spirit of the nation was contaminated. The preservation of the true spirit, i.e., the preservation of the purity of the language thus lies ultimately at the heart of the nation's economic and spiritual prosperity.

Aðils' take on Icelandic history and his emphasis on the importance on linguistic purity for national freedom and prosperity, lie at the core of Icelandic nationalism. Aðils' writings are like the once of his German mentors, filled with inferiority complexes and desires for worldly acknowledged achievements in the name of the nation. The Danes were for Aðils and other Icelandic nationalists before him and after, what the French (or the West) had been for the German nationalists. In comparison with all the social, technical, economic and cultural achievements of the great nations of the time Iceland's present situation fared terribly. In line with their German prophets, Icelandic nationalists looked back at the past, glorified the old literature, created and simultaneously sanctified the "spirit of the nation," hence the language. It is within these ideas that we find the sources of xenophobic purism, the incessant demand for conformity/homogeneity backed by superiority complexes of the Icelandic "nation" which spoke the *Ur-Sprache* of the *Ur-Volk*.

In recent years this traditional historical understanding has been criticized particularly by young historians, such as Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1991,1993), the aforementioned Sigríður Matthíasdóttir (1995) and others Arnar Guðmundsson (1995) to name a few. However, while scholars are beginning to crack the fortress of nationalism and its concomitant myths on the

origin of Icelanders and their history, it is not to say that it has lost its power. Nor has its impact on the perceived necessity of preserving the "purity" of the Icelandic language subsided in the least.

## *2. Purity and the Language of Power in the 1990s*

In his recent book *Menning og Sjálfstæði* (1994) (*Culture and Independence*)<sup>46</sup> Páll Skúlason a philosopher and the rector of the University of Iceland and a supporter of purism, speaks on the behalf of modern day Icelandic nationalists. The recognition of Skúlason's words, is granted in the manner of something taken for granted - as Bourdieu would put it - because these words are uttered by a person whose position grants his words authority. Skúlason is not only a representative of language of authority but more broadly of legitimate language. The authority of legitimate language Bourdieu informs us, does not lie in the "intrinsic properties of discourse itself," (distinguished pronunciation, complexity of syntax, richness in vocabulary etc.), "but rather in the social conditions of production and reproduction of the distribution between the classes of the knowledge and recognition of the legitimate language." (Bourdieu 1992:113) Let us look at Skúlason's argument.

"The life of the nation rests on its knowledge of the country, its language and history and the will to care for these." (1994:42) "These [three] are the primary conditions for the life of the nation and the culture. Either we cultivate those conditions with full force and by doing so we fortify our independence or we disrespect them and thereby we sacrifice our independence simultaneously as we endorse a strange/foreign culture." (ibid. 36) This strange culture for Skúlason is what he calls "international technological culture" or simply "international culture" (alþjóðamening). While acknowledging some of its benefits, such as scientific and literary

achievements, he nevertheless warns his readers of the perils of this international force. "Unfortunately, one of the sad concomitants of modern internationalism is to rob men from their history at the same time as it uproots patriotism. The history of mankind hitherto has been the history of nations and nationalities which have died or merged within countries and states and are still merging or fighting in different parts of the world." (ibid. 58)<sup>47</sup> Skúlason then argues for the necessity of Icelanders to incorporate what he calls "the scientific, technical and legal" aspects of internationalism which for him is first and last acquired through books. It is in books, he claims that the knowledge and the experience of the forefathers is preserved, and passed on from generation to generation and from past to present and future. Praising the old literary tradition in Iceland, Skúlason insists that the future of "Icelandic national culture depends upon us buying, reading and writing books in Icelandic, that aim at fortifying our consciousness as Icelanders." (1994:57 translation mine)

The resemblance of Skúlason's and Aðils nationalistic ideas is hard to overlook. The nationalistic myth on purity resonates in Skúlason's writings. Moreover, the popularity of this myth is far from waning as we will see below in our encounter with the myth as it appeared at the national celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Icelandic republic June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1994. But we are also in for surprises, i.e., elements that Aðils did not at all include in his nationalistic theory on Icelandic nationality. As we will see it is not only language that now makes Icelanders a nation worthy of its name, but something more.

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<sup>46</sup> *Culture and Independence* is based on a series of lectures by Skúlason, specifically produced for and broadcasted by the National State Radio of Iceland in 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Skúlason further elaborates on his point by saying that, "horrific conflicts in the Balkan peninsula remind us of that. News of the independence struggle of the Catalonians and the Basks in Spain, the contentions between the Flemish and the Walloons in Belgium and the struggle between the southern and northern Italians also attest to that. And the English

#### IV. Anniversary Fever: The EU, International Conflict over Fish and Other Concerns

On June 17, the day that marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Icelandic republic, the *Morgunblaðið* daily, by far the largest newspaper in the country said in its editorial; The [two] things that make *Icelanders* an independent nation are: the Icelandic language, the cultural heritage and the exclusive rights over its rich fishing banks."<sup>48</sup> (Note this is not a mistake. The editorial counts as one the language and the cultural heritage, "íslensk tunga og menningararfleifð og óskert yfirráð yfir auðugum fiskimiðunum." It is also interesting to note the non-specified understanding of the term "cultural heritage").

The air was filled with excitement for the national celebration. The preparation for the festivities was at its final stages and things seemed to be falling into place. However, the very same day I arrived in Iceland on June 14<sup>th</sup>, an unexpected event occurred that seemed to take not only me, but everyone in Iceland by surprise, the authorities, individual fishing outfits and the public at large. It was an event that overshadowed the excitement for the upcoming festivities, making headlines and taking up great space in the public discourse. This event, soon to be termed the "Svalbard conflict" happened far up in the Barents Sea above Norway.<sup>49</sup> Nothing short of a new cod-war fever erupted. This time it was not with the British but with "our close relatives and friends, the Norwegians," as Icelanders often call their neighbors. As headlines in *News from Iceland* put it, Norwegian coast guard fires at trawlers fishing off of Svalbard and cuts the trawls from the vessels: COD WAR IN THE BARENTS SEA -Trawlers halt fishing -Icelandic authorities loudly protest to Norwegian counterparts but seek peaceful compromise - Deadlock

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and the Irish have for a long time been at odds to name just a few examples" (1994:58). So much for Skúlason's understanding of nationalism and the globalization process.

<sup>48</sup> The circulation of *Morgunblaðið* is close to 70.000 copies and the second largest newspaper in the country  *DV* follows with approximately 13.000 copies. The dominance of *Morgunblaðið* becomes more pronounced when it is kept in mind that entire population of the country is only 270.000.

<sup>49</sup> Svalbard or Spitzbergen, is a cluster of islands high in the Arctic waters north of Norway between the 10° and 35° longitudes east of Greenwich and between the 74° and 81° northern latitudes.

will see case tried before International Court of Justice in the Hague." (June 1994)

The Icelandic media reported the events in such a way that it seemed as if the Norwegians had lost all their senses. "How dared they," "how tactless," "and they who are so rich with all their oil," and similar comments reflecting shock and offence were heard all over the media on talk shows and in general by the public. Many thought the Norwegian action was especially rude given the upcoming celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. These were international waters, and the Norwegians had no more right to the fish there than did Icelanders or anybody else for that matter. The "Svalbard conflict" certainly also made headlines in Norway and feelings ran high there too. In both countries there were talks about whether King Harald of Norway would turn down his invitation to the festivities in Iceland.

The Icelandic media was full of accounts of "the ruthless Norwegians, who wrongly claimed that they had exclusive rights to fish there." "How could the Norwegian authorities have the audacity to send their Coast Guard to shoot at Icelandic trawlers that were legally fishing in international waters"! "These banks were way outside of the jurisdiction of Norwegian waters, so their claims were totally unfounded," many exclaimed. A number of people felt that the Icelandic authorities should not accept such an attack, and send their coast guard vessels to the Barents Sea to defend their men. However, Icelandic authorities had earlier made it clear to fishermen that their vessels would not enjoy the protection of the home coast guard while fishing off of Svalbard as these fishing grounds were looked upon as international waters. Therefore the vessel operators were apprised that any fishing activity on their part was at their own risk.

The Norwegian media was also full of accounts of the ruthless Icelanders who were allegedly scooping up Norwegian fish. This fish was definitely part of the Norwegian cod stock they said and moreover, the Norwegians had historical rights in these waters, Icelanders had none. The "Svalbard conflict" was widely viewed as the gravest conflict ever to have risen between the two countries in their 1100 year old relations. Why were Icelandic trawlers fishing

outside the Icelandic 200 mile jurisdiction?

Icelandic authorities were under great pressures at home, particularly from the Federation of Icelandic Fishing Vessel Owners (FIFVO - a.k.a. LÍÚ ) to take action. The authorities were however hesitant as they were not absolutely clear as to whether the fishing of Icelandic trawlers in the contested fishing banks stood on firm legal ground. Were Icelanders acting as pirates scooping up the resources that legally belonged to a coastal nation? Or, was the demand to fish there a matter of guarding interests of the Icelandic nation, not only in the present but also the future? Did the Norwegians have exclusive rights to the fish there, as they claimed?

Compounding the tension surrounding the conflict was the fact that since March earlier that year all the countries within the Nordic Council, of which Iceland is a member, had applied for membership in the EU except for Iceland. In Norway the EU issue was hotly debated. In Iceland there were also speculations over the extent to which the harsh reaction of the Norwegian authorities toward the Icelandic trawlers and its refusal to negotiate with Iceland could be seen as part of the government's effort to appease the staunch EU opponents in Northern Norway, people's whose lives depends on fishing? What were the possible repercussions of the conflict for Icelandic fisheries in the Barents Sea and in general, if Norway was to enter the EU?

Moreover, what could it possibly mean for the future of Iceland if all the other Nordic counterparts became EU members? How would that effect the socio-cultural contract of the Nordic Council? Naturally there were mixed views in Iceland on the issue. Some saw the future in bleak colors where Iceland, by staying out of the EU and thus "isolating herself," was consciously digging her own grave whether economically or politically. Others saw EU membership equal economic suicide as membership meant having to give up Icelandic control of the fishing banks within the 200 mile Icelandic jurisdiction - according, to the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union, control of fishing resources is to large extent an EU prerogative (Kristinsson 1996:2). For those people, to hand control of the fisheries over to some anonymous

bureaucrats in Brussels, who in turn would allow whomever to scoop up the most valuable resource of the country, would be tantamount to ruining the country's economy *ergo* putting an end to the independent nation-state.

Looking back at the editorial of *Morgunblaðið* daily, one might ask whether it was a coincidence that the paper cited the most crucial criteria in this order. Moreover, was it not a bit ironic that the paper had specifically mentioned the "exclusive rights over the rich fishing banks," precisely now at the same time as the Norwegians were expelling Icelandic trawlers out of the "rich fishing banks," of what they claimed to be exclusively Norwegian waters. One might ask how universal these criteria are as a definition of nationhood. Obviously not all nations have access to rich fishing banks and neither do all nations have their own language. What makes a nation a nation? Fish made Icelanders a nation but not the separate Norwegians, or so one could conclude from the way the argument was presented in Iceland. In order to contextualize these criteria for Icelandic nationhood, let us move to the national celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Icelandic republic. It is not my intention to seek an answer to that question, which would have universal application. On the contrary I hope to show by exemplifying the Icelandic case, that the criteria for nationhood are arbitrary and a matter of social construction as is the collectivity, historically called a nation.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Icelandic republic was celebrated in the shadow of a newly started cod-war with "our close brethren and allies the Norwegians," hundred of miles away outside of the 200 mile Icelandic jurisdiction. More importantly the possible impact of this war for the political and economic future of Iceland was somewhat contingent upon whether Norway was to enter the EU or not.

My fascination with the national festivities at Thingvellir was a part a broader theoretical interest in the subject matter of nation-states and the correlated phenomenon that are imperative for their existence; namely the collectivity called the nation and its indispensable concomitants,

national identity and national culture. A national celebration like the 50th anniversary of the Icelandic republic is essentially a celebration of the "nation." Hence, reflections of dominant ideas about what makes the nation a nation, *par definition* were bound to be at the fore at the 50th anniversary. What about the notion of purity, did it come through and if so, how did it manifest? Where there other things of surprise? Did the ongoing tension brought about by the EU issue, surface at all? Let us now look at the festival.

#### **V. The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Icelandic Republic: The Purity Myth Alive and Well**

A nation is not only a political entity but, something which produces meaning -*a system of cultural representations*. People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the *idea* of the nation as represented in its national culture. A nation is a symbolic community and it is this which accounts for its "power to generate sense of identity and allegiance. (Hall, 1996:612)

As one commentator put it, "the celebration reflected all the major characteristics of Icelandic nationalism in a symbolic fashion. A nation with a magnificent history and culture celebrates its freedom, its course towards progress and better life in the presence of terrific albeit generous nature." He further notes that the celebration was also symbolic "because the nation united in a shadow of political contentions over Iceland's future in the global community of nations." (Guðmundsson 1995:95)

At the end of the 20th century the affects of the diverse/multifarious and highly discussed process called globalization, infiltrates every level in the public and the personal arena in almost every corner of the world. While one can argue that the many different aspects of globalization, whether in the form of interaction and exchange of ideas, flow of goods, human migration or political power have been in the making for centuries, its present intensity and scope as we now know it, is unprecedented.

In the new information era, people's conscious knowledge of the globe and its inhabitants continues to expand, while the world is simultaneously shrinking. Increased international trade and revolutionary innovations in communication technology are immune to political and cultural boundaries. The ever expanding power of international and intra-national organizations calls for radical changes of the role and the power of the nation-state as hitherto known. Moreover, the intensified impact of globalization on peoples everyday life, calls for an accentuation of the criteria that sets "us" apart from "them." In the midst of these changes Icelanders celebrated their own and socially constructed unique "Icelandicness."

Twelve years prior to 1994, I lived in France and had the opportunity to watch the national celebration of the Bastille Day July 14<sup>th</sup> in the capital Paris. I remember being stunned by what the French (or the French authorities) took most pride in. In Iceland, Independence Day was usually celebrated by patriotic speeches that sounded like a list of achievements or records of how much progress "the nation" had made, whether socially (education, health care, etc.) or economically (employment, improved standard of living, bigger catches in fishing), in fact an echo of the national myth of the interconnection of progress, prosperity and purity. If any Icelander or Icelanders had earned recognition abroad it became a matter of national pride that went on the national list of "progress" or "achievements." Speeches given on Independence Day were not uncommonly a litany of accomplishments, individual, local and national. On Independence Day everyone dressed up in their Sunday best, children sported the Icelandic flag and the adults partook in public singing of patriotic songs at the sites of local celebrations. Everyone did their best to be the best Icelander *par definition*, as possible.

In France things were done differently. This was a military power that took great pride in displaying its military might. On Bastille Day in 1982, at the Place de Concord in Paris, the President stood in honorary position, along with the highest ranking state officials of the French armed forces, saluting a long procession coming down the Champs Élysées displaying military

equipment large and small, of all kinds. At the time I remember not quite understanding what or how military air-crafts, missiles, tanks and lethal weapons could be part of a national pride. The emphasis on displaying their military might and thereby highlighting some of their national defense system, thus surprised me

Little did I know that my own country had their own kind of national defense backed by the nation state and supported by a "military" of sorts. Not actual armed forces but rather the diverse forces, whether institutions or individuals, whose first and last duty it was *to defend the purity* of the national language. We will return again to this military metaphor regarding the defense of the Icelandic language. For now let us look at the celebration at Thingvellir.

The celebration was held at Thingvellir, which lies about 50 kilometers from the capital Reykjavík. To select Thingvellir rather than Reykjavík was not at all pragmatic but symbolic. "Thingvellir is the sacred place of the nation, the place where it met its destiny and also had its greatest moments of joy," as Prime Minister Oddsson put it (Margeirsson 1994:7). Thingvellir was the founding site of the Althing and the place of its annual assembly for over nine hundred years from 930 to 1798.<sup>50</sup> Official conversion to Christianity was also confirmed at Thingvellir by law in year 1000. In the words of Ms. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir the President of Iceland at the time, it was "at Thingvellir that Icelanders celebrated one thousand years of Icelandic settlement in 1874 and where the same year the nation received its first sign of freedom: the constitution. At Thingvellir, the nation reminded the outside world in 1930 that it now ranked amongst sovereign nations, when it hosted its first national celebration to commemorate Althing's one-thousandth anniversary. Since the great day of national consciousness, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1944, the cradle of our life source, the Republic, rests at Thingvellir." (ibid. p.6)

Thingvellir is situated at the banks of the biggest lake in Iceland that takes its name, and actually sits on the top of the active Atlantic ridge - the continental divide - that lies under the

whole island. Aside from a little stretch of grace land along the banks of the lake, most of the area is uninhabitable, surrounded by endless wastes of lava, hills, barren mountains and volcanoes. Thingvellir was made a national park after the republic was founded. Despite Thingvellir being the assembly for the Althing for over nine hundred years, all that is there is a tiny little church built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a residence of the minister and the director of the national park and a small hotel.<sup>51</sup> Contemporary Icelanders commonly agree that the beauty at Thingvellir is unparalleled.

Amidst dignitaries, heads of states from the other Nordic countries, and all the most important figures of the Icelandic state, about a quarter of the population eventually showed up at Thingvellir to commemorate the great anniversary. As there are only two routes that lead from Reykjavik to Thingvellir both of them only two lanes, one of the roads had been preserved for dignitaries only. This in turn caused an unprecedented traffic jam to occur, where I amongst thousands and thousand of other people was stuck for hours. I spent about four and half-hours to get there, a trip that under normal circumstances takes about an hour. Needless to say many people complained about this, while others didn't mind the delay so much (see Morgunblaðið 6/19, 1994). Whether this "one-way" option for the public to get to the Thingvellir celebration was symbolic for other aspects of Icelandic culture remains an open question. In spite of the traffic delay I was, thanks to technology, able to watch video recordings of the parts of the official program I missed.

The national celebration opened at 8:30 AM when in a symbolic fashion "the nation" showed its' allegiance to the National Church as church bells rang for half an hour all over the country, followed by hoisting of the national flag. By 9:30 AM a special commemoration was

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<sup>50</sup> Thingvellir - the literal meaning of the name is the fields' of the assembly - is the old and sacred site of the ancient parliament Althing - originally established in 930.

<sup>51</sup> During the centuries the assembly at Thingvellir convened only for six weeks in summer the oldest remaining structures/buildings in Iceland date no further back than the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Because of deforestation, most houses in the country after the 16th century were built of soil, a material that did not last.

held at the site of the so-called Drowning Pool to honor the memory of female victims who lost their lives there.<sup>52</sup> The ceremony was conducted by the female minister of the Thingvellir church and accompanied by a women's' choir - with all members dressed in the Icelandic national costume - singing songs of lamentation.<sup>53</sup>

The festivities at Thingvellir honored the nation's history particularly its struggle for independence, and the key elements that constitute Icelandic national identity or "Icelandicness." The identification with "Icelandicness" was amongst other things reflected in thousands of women, dressed in the national costume, among them many of the female Members of Parliament. However, neither the President of Iceland Ms. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, nor the House Spokesperson Ms. Salome Þorkelsdóttir wore the national costume.<sup>54</sup> Many, especially children, wore the more recent "national" Icelandic wool sweater.<sup>55</sup>

Aside from the formal ceremonies a "multi-performance," called "The Play of the Nation at Thingvellir" took place at various sites all over the park. Amongst musical performances, dances and old Icelandic wrestling, one could get a glimpse of or a flash-back of the nations'

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<sup>52</sup>In the past if women were suspected of fornication, they were drowned in this pool. Those who pleaded innocent sank, those who pleaded guilty floated, which indicated their pregnancy thus guilt, all equally dead. Men were beheaded for the same crimes. These punishments were installed by Stóridómur (Grand Judge), a moral law code dealing with fornication and sexual misdemeanour established in 1564. Those who did not lose their lives were subject to other kinds of physical punishments and of course confiscation of all property plus fines, which all went straight to the king after the Reformation. The punishments of Stóridómur were much harder than previously known in Iceland. Stóridómur was practiced until the end of the eighteenth century (Þorsteinsson og Jónsson 1991).

<sup>53</sup> As in other places where history has traditionally been the exclusive territory of males, women were until very recently hardly visible in Icelandic historiography. This commemoration of women's suffering is not only noteworthy because it signifies that women's history is now acknowledged, but also because it exemplifies the mutable character of national identity.

<sup>54</sup> In the late 1900s several national costumes were designed for women and became very popular as Sunday dress from that time up until the 1960s. Interestingly the costume designed for men never gained any popularity. Prior to the anniversary in 1994 The Icelandic Heritage Society (Þjóðræknifélagið) amongst others sponsored a competition for the best design of men's national costume. Sixty designers participated in the competition. (Morgunblaðið 6/16/94; News From Iceland July 1994; Íslenskir þjóðbúningar (Icelandic National Costumes) 1972 Elsa B. Guðjónsdóttir.

<sup>55</sup> The "national" Icelandic wool sweater "lopapeysa" was invented in the 1950s and has since become very popular amongst Icelanders of all ages. Moreover, the Icelandic sweater has in the last 25 years become one of the most characteristic "Icelandic" souvenirs catering to the ever-growing tourist industry. The different patterns of the sweaters that have now become "so characteristic" for the sweaters, are actually patterned after the "national" costumes of the Inuits in Greenland.

history: Men and women dressed as "traditional" peasants performing "traditional" tasks of the old peasant society. Women dressed in various "national-costumes" posed like fashion models in the lava fields. These figures also symbolized the role of female elves and fairies, who according to Icelandic fairy tales reside in every other hill and rock.<sup>56</sup> Reminders of a more recent past in the country's history were herring plants erected for the occasion, where women stood in long lines gutting herring in piecework, while the foremen - all males - hurried them on. The afternoon program also entailed music performances where both soloists and choirs along with the public sang popular patriotic songs such as "The Land of My Father, My Land" (Land míns föður, landið mitt), "Rise Iceland's Flag" (Rís þú Íslands fáni) and "Iceland" (Ísland ögrum skorið).<sup>57</sup>

There was not a trace or sign in these festivities commemorating the new immigrants that had settled in the country. Their presence in the country was rendered invisible. In this crowd of over fifty thousand people it was hardly possible to spot anyone that did not look white and ash blond, or with the "typical" Icelandic looks. Coming from heterogeneous New York this level of phenotype homogeneity was a shock to me.

Before these entertaining performances, *the nation* was honored in a very different way. The current Icelandic parliament Althing had decided to convene for a solemnized meeting where on the occasion two separate resolutions were put under consideration. Both of them were passed

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<sup>56</sup> According to traditional beliefs, which are still well alive, these invisible creatures when left undisturbed live in harmony with humans and are seen as protectors from evil forces. At times of trouble they can appear to humans and ask for help. Their helper is rewarded with good fortune. If however, fairies are shown disrespect - such as if somebody decides to build a house or a road where they live - they cast a spell or a curse on the intruders resulting in all kinds of misfortune and at worst death. As a little girl I spent every summer at a farm in the countryside. At this farmstead, as all over the country there were sacred places - hills and rocks mostly - where we the children were forbidden to play. We were told that it spelled bad fortune to disturb the fairies, the cows could lose their milk or something worse could happen. This was told to us with such reverence for the fairies that we needed not to be told this more than once. In some valleys in Iceland there are crooks in the roads, that make no technical or engineering sense, but the local beliefs claim that the road must not trespass a sacred spot or a hill. The beauty of this belief system is the respect for one's natural environment.

unanimously. One dealt with changes of the human rights part of the constitution aimed at bringing it into line with international agreements on human rights, to which Iceland is a signatory. The other one concerned an establishment of a fund to commemorate the anniversary. The fund was to be given an annual budget of 100 million Icelandic kronas' (1.3 million US dollars) for five years to come. (The total budget is 500 million kronas' or around 7.1 million US dollars). Accordingly, half of the amount was nominated to strengthen or enhance *the position* of the Icelandic language: a notion that is a current theme in the discourse on the importance of preserving the purity of the language. The other half of the fund was dedicated to research on marine ecology. Interest in the ecology of the ocean is of course directly related to the economic interest in fishing, the main stay of the Icelandic economy. In short, research aimed at strengthening the position of the Icelandic language and research on marine biology would receive roughly 3.5 million US dollars each over the next five years.<sup>58</sup> The proposal stipulated the Althing to select a three-member board of trustees who determined the fund's allocation regulations.

Before the proposal was voted, leaders of all the five congressional parties addressed the Althing and the guests at the convention. The contents of their speeches reflect the dominant ideas about "what makes Icelanders an independent nation." Interestingly these ideas cut across political party lines. Moreover, and of no less interest was the curious absence of any reference by the speakers to the emerging cultural plurality in the country - in other words none of the speakers mentioned the changing composition of the Icelandic nation.

It is noteworthy that only two out of five speakers mentioned the first proposal on human rights. These were Mr. Geir Haarde the leader of the congressional party of the conservatives

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<sup>57</sup> All adult Icelanders know these patriotic songs and a number of others as they have been part of the school curricula for the best part of this century. These songs praise the glory of the country and the culture, the hardship and the strength of the nation and the beauty and the purity of the language.

<sup>58</sup> Note this funding only supports research that aims at strengthening the Icelandic language. It does not apply to research on the Icelandic language in general.

(Sjálfstæðisflokkur) and Ms. Rannveig Guðmundsdóttir leader of the congressional party of the Social Democrats, the two parties forming the coalition government present at the time.<sup>59</sup> All the speakers devoted their time on speaking about the second proposal (i.e., the five year fund to strengthen the condition of the Icelandic language and research on marine biology). Following are excerpts from these speeches. Mr. Haarde was first in line and said amongst other things:

On the one hand we have a campaign that directly concerns the foundation of Icelandic livelihood and therefore its future economy. On the other hand the Althing has decided to enforce the cultural foundation that more than anything else makes Icelanders a nation and relates the past to the present and the future; the mother-tongue itself. By strengthening language cultivation and language education we can, in a positive way, respond to the impact of the ever-growing international media and foreign cultural impacts on the national language. Few things are as important for the future of the youth of this nation as exactly that.

The editorial of *Morgunblaðið* daily quoted above echoes the same sentiments; "We cannot state that the Icelandic language - our most precious treasure - has been guarded as should. The young people of today are poorer in terms of language, than was the case half a century ago. Impact of the English language languishes at almost every corner, eating at the heritage that makes us Icelandic. Today, we should therefore ask if we still are men enough to reproduce the inheritance that past generations have passed on to us" (p. 36).

Praising the importance of ecological research of the Icelandic waters Mr. Ragnar Arnalds, leader of the congressional party of the Peoples' Alliance (Socialist Party) noted that:

Icelandic resources [were] of many kinds. They do not only reside in the earth or in the depths that surrounds our country. The most precious resource is the life force embedded in the nation's independence - and the Icelandic language."....., "It was the luck of Icelanders at the dawn of writing in Northern Europe - when learned men wrote almost exclusively in Latin - that our forefathers put together an alphabet founded on Icelandic phonology that later paved the way for the great literary tradition that existed here and did not have a parallel anywhere else. The result was such that the literature became a public property and not the privilege of a few and selected cultural connoisseurs like happened elsewhere. The literature connected the past with the present and the Icelandic language therefore automatically became the unifying symbol that played a greater part than almost anything else in enabling Icelanders to acquire their independence

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<sup>59</sup> All the speeches given at Thingvellir 6/17/94, are from *Morgunblaðið* Daily ( 6/19/94). All translations and italics' are mine.

again.

Next in line was Mr. Páll Pétursson the leader of the congressional party of The Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkur: the old Farmers Party).

Mrs. President, dear Icelanders, what is it that makes Icelanders a nation? It is over and above other things the language. It connects us and makes us a particular group in the community of the nations. It gives us an opportunity to keep alive literature and a cultural life, which is different from the cultures of other nations. It protects the cultural heritage of past centuries and gives us our own history that is of our concern and connects us with the country which we inhabit.

A staunch opponent of the European Union Mr. Pétursson did not let this opportunity go unused to target it. "I warn against the surrender and the lack of faith in our country that is embedded in the notion that suggests that we would be much better off if we would connect with foreign state organizations and submit to their rule."

After Mr. Pétursson's speech Ms. Rannveig Guðmundsdóttir, leader of the congressional party of the Alþýðuflokkur (Social Democrats), rose to the podium. Like some of the congress female members, and many women in the audience, she was dressed in a national costume.

Althing's agreement is about a five-year campaign, where fifty million kronas' will be spent annually on ecological research on the biological habitat of the ocean in addition to the traditional research. The same amount will be spent on strengthening the Icelandic language. Some might ask whether that is an important project"... "Languages die without the world making any fuss over it. With any lost language a specific culture and world-view dies, that never will be retrieved. The Icelandic language is the firmest cornerstone of our culture and independence. That is a fact which we may never forget.

Last in line was Ms. Jóna Valgerður Kristjánsdóttir who spoke on the behalf of The Association of the Women's Alliance (Samtök um Kvinnalista), the smallest party in the Althing. She was also dressed in a national costume. Here are excerpts from her speech..."The biological habitat of the waters is inescapably interwoven with our ability to continue to live in this country."..."Simultaneously, it is the strength of every nation that wants to be independent to have their own language and culture. Protect therefore the national heritage that we have in our mother

tongue. Be proud of its protection."

After the congressional leaders spoke, the resolution was voted for by hand count and passed unanimously. President Finnbogadóttir concluded the solemnized meeting by addressing the assembly, where she amongst other things emphasized the importance of standing guard around the life source of the nation; its freedom and independence.

The ceremonial part of the program continued in the afternoon led by choral music. A children's choir consisting of several hundred children who all were dressed in "traditional" Icelandic sweaters (lopapeysa) holding the national flag, was one of many choirs contributing to this part of the ceremony. Now the convention was addressed by all the heads of states of the Nordic countries, including the Icelandic Prime Minister, the president and the bishop of the Icelandic National Church. Prime Minister Oddsson, the leader of The Independence party - i.e., the conservatives - opened the meeting and said that "the nation had waited for June 17<sup>th</sup> 1944, for almost seven hundred years" [sic!]. "That long awaited event could never have taken place in anywhere else but here, at the nation's most sacred place" (ibid.)

The heads of the other Nordic states addressed the convention. After congratulating the Icelandic nation on its anniversary, all of them mentioned in one way or another, the "rich history and culture" of Iceland, its "unique connection to the past" and its deep-seated tradition of democracy. The editorial of Morgunblaðið daily, said that Margaret the Queen of Denmark had touched the hearts of Icelanders when she in her speech mentioned that the nations could now discuss openly all their past relations without any animosity or resentments. In spite of the unusual circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Icelandic republic, Danes today rejoice over the fact that these events did not throw a shadow over the relationship between the nations. This said the Danish Queen, was due to the fact that the relations between the two countries did not rest solely on age-old formal grounds. Their relations rested instead on the unity that characterizes the relations between all the Nordic Countries, "a common democratic tradition

and our deep-seated respect for the rights of individuals and nations to self-determination."  
(ibid.,)

The speech that had been awaited with the most excitement was from King Harald V of Norway. Emphasizing the close family ties and the close co-operation between the countries through the last fifty years, the King diverted from his original speech and made a point in stressing that, "differences in opinion will not be allowed to overshadow the friendship between siblings [i.e., the Norwegians and the Icelanders]. I am convinced that the events of the last days will not change that. Together we can find solutions that serve the interest of both states. We have stood together in most affairs and our old family ties are our foundation and so it will be onwards." (ibid.,)

After the Nordic dignitaries had spoken, Ms. Finnbogadóttir, the President of Iceland, encouraged the nation again to stand guard around its "*liberty and independence.*" After some inspiring remarks about how the nation should have faith in its' own potential and not let temporary pessimism be the source of discouragement and disunity, she concluded her address by reminding the convention that "on this day of the brave we must however, think of what throughout the centuries gave the Icelandic nation over and above one justification, one rationale, enabling it to be heard in the national congresses world-wide: *It had an independent language; and in this language it had preserved its collective memories, its sagas, its poems, different from the memories, sagas and poems of other nations. It was this heritage that gave it justification.*" (Italics mine.)

The formal ceremonies were concluded by an address by the bishop of the National Church who emphasized the role of Thingvellir in bringing the blessing of Christianity to the history of the nation. After the ceremonies were over, guests could watch the various entertaining performances around the park and celebrate their "Icelandicness" past and present.

## VI. "National Interests" and Fear of Globalization

What conclusions can we draw from Icelandic nationalism from the anniversary at Thingvellir? First, it is clear that the anniversary in a symbolic fashion reflected all the main characteristics of Icelandic nationalist ideology and the myth about the nation. A nation with ancient historical roots, whose rich literary tradition unique and pure language and culture form the cornerstones of the young independent state which "the nation had waited for seven hundred years," as Prime Minister Oddsson remarked. At the anniversary the Icelandic nation celebrated its freedom and, as the President remarked, "its remarkable progress for better life." The staging of the celebration at Thingvellir according to the speeches, symbolized "the nation's deep-seated roots of an independent nation-state," as President Finnbogadóttir remarked. The proposal passed by the Althing on the occasion, epitomized the current belief in the importance of language purity. All the speeches given by the Icelanders resonated that notion and other ideas on Iceland its history and culture, we encountered in historian Jón Aðils' ideas before. And as already mentioned, none of the speakers so much as acknowledged the emerging cultural plurality in the country and thereby the concomitant decrease in the hegemony of cultural homogeneity. One might ask whether this absence was due to the lack of voice immigrants have as a group in Iceland or whether the speakers simply did not think they counted as Icelanders. Or yet on another level, whether they chose not to mention immigrants because acknowledging them would have challenged the image of purity - here racial - so dear to them. For now I will refrain from attempting to provide answers to these questions, but we will resume this issue in subsequent chapters.

In looking back at the proposal it also reflected a new element now considered necessary for the future of the Icelandic state, namely fish. When Aðils wrote his *Icelandic Nationality* in 1903, fish as a primary source of the economy of the country had not entered the picture.

Interestingly, none of the Icelandic speakers mentioned the delicate Svalbard conflict. The emphasis was on the *united* cultural and economic interest of the Icelandic people. The pressing issue of the European integration was mentioned albeit in euphemistic terms and only by the staunchest opponents, who warned against affiliations with foreign organizations and the possible political cleavage it might have for the nation. In overall the tenor of the speeches across party lines was that "the nation" had a unified interest and must therefore stand united against any threats that could possibly disrupt this unity. This is another resonance from Mr. Aðils. The speeches delivered by the Icelandic officials all reflect one way or another, the success of the traditional historical assumption - also at the core of national ideologies - which holds that "national identification" is "somehow so natural, primary and permanent as to precede history." (Hobsbawm 1990:14) This very notion of the nation with a given "fixed" cultural identity is a definite sign of success of whole array of practices in naturalizing that identity." (Foster 1991:238)

At the same time as Icelanders celebrated their supposedly non-contested "Icelandicness," the world is witnessing an ever increasing flow of cultural currents and commodities, business and trading organizations that respect no national boundaries. With the growing power of international organizations, the future of sovereign nation-states as hitherto known is predicted to have come to an end (Cable 1995: Brubaker 1995). For a nation whose livelihood is dependent upon on international trade while it simultaneously seems to put major emphasis upon protecting the "purity" of its culture, language and national identity, is faced with pressing questions, as pointed out by Guðmundsson (1995). Interestingly, the pending issue on EU membership was avoided almost like a taboo, except by Congressman Pétursson its hardest opponent.

The celebration at Thingvellir clearly exemplifies how in their homogenization of heterogeneity, national ideologies conflate any kind of social and/or economic differences and

also how the hegemonic group had become synonymous with the nation. This unity is however, a social myth as argued by B. Williams's (1990). And here lies one of the interesting aspects of nationalism in general: the suspicious absence of the notion of *power*, from the nationalistic discourse. This never becomes as blatantly missing as in the discourse dealing with the "common interests" and the necessity for "the unity of the nation" as we encountered above. However, if we keep in mind that the notion of unity rests upon the notion of the nation as an organic entity, those who insist on unity and thus the purity of the national spirit are it seems, simply safeguarding the welfare of the whole. According to this notion, disunity in one part would spill over to other parts of the entity and contaminate it. Who are these people who have the power to define what is "in the best interest of the nation?" How do they get their power and how is it sustained over time? Finding out who these people are and how their power is sustained over time is the part of subject matter of this thesis.

In Foucault's sense *national unity* is the underlying theme in linguistic purism and the construction of "national unity" is the work of "the régime of truth.". In Iceland, *purity* is central in the discourse on truth. The notion of purity, albeit originating in linguistic purity has infiltrated other aspects of the political economy. The safekeeping of the purity of the Icelandic natural environment and the safekeeping of the supposedly common property of the nation, the fish in the waters from being exploited by foreign powers (i.e., impurity), is also according to the nationalistic discourse a matter of national unity. In the case of linguistic purity, grammarians have been granted a semi-divine role in defining the level of language purity, supposedly necessary for national prosperity. In the latter cases however, the power to define "national interest" is not as clear-cut. It is indeed a much contested territory but we will see how the notion of purity has been exploited in both of these cases by capitalists who claim to have national interests in mind.

The conflicts over Iceland's foreign and/or economic policy (whether fish or tourism),

and the position towards the European integration, call to the fore ideas, questions and definitions over the Icelandic "nation," "national identity," "national culture," "national interests" and "national sovereignty," concepts that loom large in the discourse. As we have seen, the terms "nation" and "national interests" seem to change meaning depending on the context. The debate is therefore a contested territory over the myth about the nation, a territory this project seeks to explore.

## **VII. Conclusion**

What have we learned about the myth of purity and its role in Icelandic nationalism and Icelandic national identity? First of all, we learned that it was tailored after the German prototype and adopted the Romantic notions of linguists and racial purity wholesale. Secondly, we learned that it is still very much alive in the official presentation of the country to the outside world as well as amongst Icelanders themselves. We argued that while nationalism brought about totally unprecedented changes for the history of Iceland, that life in the country had always, to lesser or greater degree, been subject to political, economic and social developments in the outside world. For the longest time of Iceland's history these impacts came from the surrounding region. However, none of these regional developments brought about any attempts for a formation of a separate "national identity" for Icelanders until the idea of nationalism hit the shore of Iceland in the midst of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nationalism in general and Icelandic nationalism in particular along with the concomitant construction of a separate Icelandic national identity, must be understood as a part of an international process that emerged as a result of the dual revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We argued that while the level of globalization has intensified in recent decades in Iceland as elsewhere, it can be seen as a continuum of an older process.

The national myth on Icelandic purity came into being as a response to international political

and economic developments. The Icelandic myth on purity presented in this chapter reveals a primary example of a reconstruction of collective history for political purposes. The whole recipe for national identity making was imported from abroad so even the criteria for "purity," the primary marker of Icelandicness according to the myth, are all ideas imported from Germany and adjusted to Icelandic circumstances. In line with the German prototype, the myth supposes that the nation cannot be true to its "natural spirit" or "character" unless the language is kept "pure". Language "purity" is seen as the foundation for national prosperity. Moreover, *unity* concerning the preservation of this "purity" is regarded as the prerequisite for national independence, for economic prosperity and intellectual achievements and progress on all levels. The myth subscribes all misfortunes of Icelanders to be subject to foreign impact/rule. Hence anything which is defined as "foreign," is conceived of as "impure" and evil as it is understood as a "contamination" to the alleged "purity" of the Icelandic "nation. " Like its German counterpart this "contamination" does not only threaten the "purity" of the "language" or "spirit" but pertains to "foreign" blood as well, and is therefore essentially racist.

Yet in spite of the obvious racist elements, the myth is still well alive as we encountered at the celebration at Thingvellir where political representatives across the board unanimously subscribed to the myth, at least its emphasis on linguistic purity. Whether Icelandic politicians are unconscious of or simply oblivious to the racist and discriminatory elements in the purity myth cannot be stated with any accuracy. Due to extreme cultural homogeneity, Icelanders in general and politicians in particular have never been under any pressure from the inside to confront the racist aspect of the purity myth.

The generous financial donation by the government to the "nation" aimed at preserving the "purity" of the Icelandic language can be seen as a fear based response regarding the affects of the globalization process for the future of the Icelandic nation-state.

One of the reasons for the success of the national myth on purity in Iceland can be explained

by the intertwined processes of industrialization, nation making and democratization. The notion of purity became, as we will see in next chapters a form of secular religion that both facilitated the birth of the modern Icelandic nation state and provided the people with a new cosmos, a new meaning of life.

In order to historicize the nationalistic ideas in Iceland we will in our next chapter look at the historical origins and the development of language purism and the emergence of the Icelandic state resulting from that process. We will look at when and how the idea of language as a primary criterion for nationhood earned the semi-divine position as a prerequisite for political independence in Iceland. We will also examine where the primary missionaries in the evangelism of Icelandic nationalism/purism came from and by what means they were able to grant their ideas widespread popularity.

## Chapter 4

### Historical Origins and Development of the Icelandic Gospel of Language Purism

#### I. Introduction

If we loose our language, we will loose our national culture and national independence. Then society will collapse."...., "Nobody knows how the war over our language and cultural heritage will end. As dangerous as it may seem this is taking place right now and I think as every year passes our force of resistance diminishes. (Matthías Johannessen *Alþýðublaðið* 2/1 1996)

The words of Mr. Johannessen above, shared by most Icelandic nationalist and patriots, come from a speech delivered at the 84th anniversary of the University of Iceland December 1, 1995. The speaker, a national figure in Iceland, is a poet and more importantly one of two editors in

chief of the largest newspaper in the country, Morgunblaðið daily. Embedded in Johannessen's concept of the Icelandic language is the idea of purity. All Icelanders (or all those who speak Icelandic) know that Johannessen is not just referring to any given version or dialect of Icelandic, quite the contrary. He is most specifically referring to standard Icelandic, commonly called "pure Icelandic."

As we have already encountered in this thesis, *pure language* was made synonymous with Icelandic language and culture. These indistinguishable elements are seen as the distinctive "natural" markers of Icelandic nationhood which in turn have formed the ideological basis that legitimates the existence of the Icelandic nation-state. This idea is reflected in the notion that claims a "natural" unity between language, culture, nation, and ultimately the nation-state. This notion, now part of the nationalistic myth about Iceland and Icelanders, is embedded in an aura of naturalness, reflected in the frequently quoted lines from poet Snorri Hjartarson "country, nation, language a trinity true and one" (written in the 1960s).<sup>60</sup> Thus it goes without saying that the historical process of nation making in Iceland is inextricably linked with the idea of language purity. It was pure Icelandic *par definition* that became the ultimate criterion for nationhood. Still to this day it is a matter of loyalty to the *nation* to speak and write according to the rigorous confines of pure Icelandic.

In Iceland, the process of nation making, and the processes of industrialization and democratization are intertwined. As we will encounter in this chapter, it would however be too much of a simplification to argue that nationalism was the driving force for the two latter processes. One of the fundamental perspectives of this dissertation resides on the notion that linguistic purism whether as an ideology or as a state programme, is essentially political. As such it begs the question of who has the power to define what is authentically pure and moreover where this power comes from and how it has been sustained over time. In order to answer these grand questions, one must

keep in mind Hobsbawm's idea that "national languages are almost always semi-artificial constructs," they are therefore, "the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind. They are usually attempts to devise a standardized idiom out of a multiplicity of actually spoken idioms." (Hobsbawm 1990:54) This chapter deals with the historical origins and development of linguistic purism in Iceland.

As we encountered before, a new emerging social group; intellectuals, a group that had no secure position or identity within the old order embraced the new ideology that took Europe by a storm in the first half of the 19th century, namely German Romantic nationalism. Anthropologists, such as Herzfeld (1986) in his research in Greece and Verdery in her study in Romania, (1990, 1991) have both shown how instrumental the role and impact of intellectuals has been in the nation-making process. In these European studies, the influence of intellectuals has been crucial in the selection of collective memories and in the definition of some characteristics or criteria necessary to demarcate the boundaries of national culture. Iceland was no exception here, there intellectuals became the harbingers or missionaries of this newly discovered secular religion. We will thus look specifically at the role of Icelandic intellectuals in this process. Likewise, we will look at the means they used in order to establish purism its position within Icelandic national consciousness and national ideology. As stated before, nationalism became a form of secular religion Iceland where the notion of purity *par definition* has reigned supreme in defining the order of who/what belongs and who/what does not belong. The notion of purity is in fact one of the outstanding characteristics of the supra-individuality of the nation. It is important to keep in mind how nationalism provided, first the Icelandic intellectuals and then later the entire population, with a sense of sacralized identity (Nipperdey 1983).

The Icelandic case was however, by no means occurring in a vacuum It is therefore

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<sup>60</sup> "Land, þjóð, tunga, þrenning sönn og ein." Amongst those quoting this poem was Ms. Vigdis Finnbogadóttir

necessary to put the specific development of Icelandic nationalism/linguistic purism in a broader historical and theoretical perspective. Our first step therefore involves a brief reference to Miroslav Hroch's three-phase scheme of the historical development of national movements in Europe. In the second section we narrow our focus on Iceland starting with a short socio-historical genealogy of the Icelandic language. Then we will look at how and when first traces of linguistic purism emerged in Iceland and Icelandic writing, this section is titled: Origins of Purism: From the first prophets to a literary movement. The fourth section, deals with how purism developed from a literary movement to political force, the increased political overtone in writings on purism and how the Sagas acquired a status of "holy scriptures" of purism. In section four we give a brief description of the characteristics of the socio-economic structure of Icelandic society of the time. In section five, we look at how these ideas developed from being mere linguistic interests of intellectuals into the strongest political tools used by 19th century nationalists in constructing Icelandic national identity. Here we will also look at how the idea of *pure language* secured itself throughout the 19th century and the simultaneous socio-economic crisis of the old structure. We will look at the role newspapers and other publications and also give a close look at the role of the educated elite of the time in preaching purism. Finally, we will examine the systematic eradication of the use of Danish within the administration and subsequently the eradication of all Danish words from the Icelandic vocabulary; a symbolic and actual challenge towards the colonial power.

## II. Hroch's Three Phases'

There is no modern nation without national consciousness, i.e., an awareness of membership in the nation, coupled with a view that this membership is an inherently valuable quality. (Miroslav Hroch 1985:12)

In his book Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe (1985) the Czech historian

Miroslav Hroch puts forward a typological scheme explaining the historical development of national movements among small nations in Europe.<sup>61</sup> I will adopt Hroch's scheme because it seems to fit the development of Icelandic nationalism well and thus the development of linguistic purism. This scheme allows us to deal with the time period from the origins of the modern nation to the completion of national formation in terms of three different phases. These phases are each characterized by economic and political upheaval. Hroch's periodization scheme divides this development into three phases, which he simply calls A, B and C.

In this type of development, Phase A is the time of passionate scholarly interest in the language, the culture and the history of the oppressed nationality and is marked by the struggle against feudalism and absolutism. This is roughly the period of the revolutions of 1789 and 1830. Phase B, the period of national agitation, is "an epoch which was decisive for the actual formation of the small nation, an epoch characterized by active patriotic agitation: the fermentation-process of national consciousness." (Hroch 1985:23) This period extends from the 1830s up to World War I. While both phases A and B coincided with the rise of capitalism, it is in the latter one that one sees an increased antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and subsequently the emergence of the working-class movement. The transition to the last phase of the establishment of the nationalist programme or Phase C (mass movement) - in the integrated type of development, see below - goes hand in with the era that saw capitalism as a stable force in modern society (Hroch 1985). This was the moment in history when the 19th century "principle of nationality" had finally triumphed, which by the end of World War I was institutionalized at Weimar by the international agreement of the Wilsonian principle in 1919. We will deal with Phase C in chapter four. Here we shall look at the time period that entails both Phases A and B. It is at the end of Phase A, which one sees the emergence of the intelligentsia and their interests in patriotism appear, which was to evolve and become stronger as time passed. For Hroch the patriots are "the people who were the

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<sup>61</sup> "We can only designate as small nations those which were in subjection to a ruling nation for such a long period that

most accessible to national consciousness and ready earlier than others to become national activists." (ibid.13) This group was of course the intelligentsia, a group that had no place within the old order and only took shape as a clear-cut social group with the transition from feudalism into capitalism. It is precisely here that nationalism appears i.e., at the juncture in history when the mode of production is transforming from feudalism to capitalist industrialism. The intelligentsia played a crucial role in shaping Icelandic nationalism as it did in so many other places.

Phase B extends over the decades from 1830 and all the way until World War I. It is during this period that one sees the "principle of nationality" emerge (i.e., the notion that language and ethnicity make people a nation). Needless to say, this period sees enormous changes on all levels, economic, political and social and includes what Hobsbawm (1990), has called the period of popular proto-nationalism i.e.,, from the 1830s -1870s, and the transformation of nationalism from the 1870s to 1914. Several critical changes occurred between these developmental stages, two of which are crucial for our discussion. The first change in the latter stage (1870-1914) occurred when the "threshold principle," argued for by Herder, was abandoned. (Hence, in order for a group to insist on nationhood, a requirement for minimal size of the group was abandoned). With that gone, practically all groups of people – regardless of size - who saw themselves fit the definition of the "nation" could fight for self-determination. Hence, we see demands for national sovereignty emerge in a population as small as the one of Iceland, which at the end of this time period had not yet reached the one hundred thousand mark. The fact that this rather incredulous idea could be carried through in Iceland is in and of itself remarkable. To this day the small population size of Iceland is an issue which is of constant interest, awe and aggravation in the public discourse in the country. The second change occurring between these stages, concerns the centrality of the notions language and ethnicity assume for potential nationhood (Hobsbawm 1990).

According to Hroch's scheme, Iceland seems to falls into a category he calls "integrated

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the relations of subjection took on a structural character for both parties." (Hroch, 1985:9)

type of development" like Norway, Finland and the Czech national movement in Bohemia, (1985:25-27). There are two variants within this type where the national programme was accordingly democratic in character. Iceland falls into the type where the outbreak of the bourgeois revolution took place before the industrial revolution. The sequence of development is thus accordingly in the following order; transition from stage A to stage B followed by the bourgeois revolution, then the transition from stage B to C occurs, followed by the industrial revolution. It is here that the completion of the formation of the modern nation took place. Finally, the working class movement comes into being at the point when the modern nation is formed.

### **III. The Socio-Historical Origin of the Icelandic Language**

Iceland provides an interesting example of a nation state that came into being after national identity was constructed. In Iceland, the "nation" was defined on the grounds of linguistic boundaries with the help of 19th century nationalists. The emergence and the systematic growth of linguistic purism were a direct response to Danish colonial domination. However, contemporary purists never get tired of pointing out, that interest in the Icelandic language as well as the scholarly origins of purism dates further back. Because of the importance for the purist argument I find it necessary to include some general information on the origins of the Icelandic language.

We can ask first, where did Icelandic come from? When did it emerge as a separate language albeit not a standardized national language but structurally different, linguistically speaking? Lastly, when did the people of Iceland start to refer to their language as Icelandic? Let us look at the possible answers to these questions.

Structurally, Icelandic is part of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages. More precisely Icelandic belongs to the North-Germanic class along with other Nordic languages: Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Faroese. Historically, the North German languages were further

divided into Old East Norse on the one hand, which later developed into Swedish and Danish and on the other into Old West Norse which developed into Norwegian, Faroese and Icelandic. Before giving a fuller account of the grammatical structure of Icelandic it is important to look at its socio-historical origin. What later became to be defined as Icelandic, was originally a language of the people who settled in Iceland, estimated to have taken place in the latter half of the ninth and in the first decades of the tenth century. As we encountered before, according to old historical sources, chiefly *Landnámabók* The Book of Settlement (written in the late eleventh century) vast majority of the early settlers are said to have come from the western parts of Norway, thus presumingly speaking the same dialect of Old Norse. The rest of the settlers either came from other parts of Norway or Sweden, Denmark or the British Isles. Some of this last group from the British Isles, were Gaelic speaking Celts others were descendants of Norse immigrants and spoke one or other version of Old Norse. It has been a matter of dispute amongst historians whether any people were living in Iceland before the Vikings came there. Some of the old Sagas tell of some Celtic monks that were there already at the time of the settlement of the Norse people. Whatever may be argued about these people it will not be of concern here as very little influence from Gaelic can be traced in the Icelandic language. It can thus be concluded that what was to become Icelandic was first and foremost the language of Norse immigrants. (H. Benediktsson 1964; J. Benediktsson 1964; Á.B.Magnússon 1964 and Sveinsson 1991).

Now let us look at the second question i.e., at what point in history is it possible to begin to talk about Icelandic as a specific language separated from Norwegian? It is very hard to give any definite answer to this question. The reason lies in the ambiguity of the term language. Even if one only tries to answer the question in terms of "a specific language" (not what is language) it still remains ambiguous. For one thing it is possible to approach language as a grammatical whole with specific grammatical/structural characteristics. Moreover - as already discussed - when one approaches language as a national language of a given political entity, one is dealing with an

instrument of expressions for a given state/society. In this regard it is a social-political phenomenon which is both affected by a given social reality and in turn affects how the speakers conceptualize their given social reality.<sup>62</sup> Here, I am partially referring to the systematic interrelationship between language and culture or rather between language and "world view," the vague version of the Sapir-Worf hypothesis (Trudgill 1983). Moreover, and not least I am referring here to the construction and definition of a legitimate language, i.e., the language of authority. Keeping this in mind, it is theoretically possible to talk of Icelandic as a specific language when Icelandic society had become socially and politically established, with marked distinctions from the home society of the settlers. If we take the establishment of the Althing to mark that distinction then it gives us the year 930 as the birth year of Icelandic. In actuality distinct semantic and structural differences are bound to have appeared gradually and over a longer period of time than this distinction allows for.

In the beginning of the Commonwealth era the inhabitants of Iceland referred to themselves as "Norse" or Nordic (*Norrænir*). Only later did they set themselves apart from other Nordic people by using the term "Icelandic" (*íslenskir*). In the first half of the Commonwealth period the language spoken in Iceland is not believed to have differed significantly from some Norse dialects of the time. After the legalization of Christianity in year 1000 and the establishment of a school at the bishopric in Skálholt in the latter half of the eleventh century, the language begins to develop somewhat separately. In this period Icelanders of the time start writing in the Latin alphabet. It has been argued that somewhat in response to the inadequacy of using Latin for writing, the author of the *First Grammatical Treatise* (*Fyrsta málfræðiritgerðin*) provided solutions to these difficulties. (Benediktsson 1964, Sveinsson 1991). This first indigenous linguistic treatise was written in the twelfth century by an unknown author and is preserved in one of the manuscripts of Snorra-Edda from the fourteenth century (Benediktsson 1964). The *First Grammatical Treatise* was followed by at least three other similar works preserved in other manuscripts of Snorra-Edda (Böðvarsson 1964).

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<sup>62</sup> See the discussion on Ortner's ideas in chapter two.

It is in the second half of the Commonwealth period i.e., in the twelfth and the thirteenth century that most of the famous Old Icelandic literature was written. This was the time when the classical Saga writing flourished "culminating in the works of Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241), which have by succeeding generations always been looked upon as a model for beauty of style and purity of language," as Icelandic linguist Hermannsson put it. (1918:3/1966)

At the beginning of the settlement the language was referred to as *dönsk tunga* (Danish tongue) a term that was used at the time to refer to Scandinavian in general. This term we are told may have originated from the custom of Western European nations to compromise all the Nordic peoples under one name *Danes*. In the thirteenth century the word *Norræna* (Nordic) appears for the first time, a name which Icelanders used for their language until the 16th or 17th century when the term *íslenska* (Icelandic) became prevalent (Hermannsson 1918/1966).

As part of the Danish Kingdom, the vernacular of the administrators in Iceland was Danish not Icelandic, and remained so until the late 19th century. However, the spoken vernacular remained Icelandic. When looking at linguistic changes in Icelandic, representatives within the purist movement have long claimed that one of the main features of the Icelandic language is how little it has changed from its earliest times (Benediktsson 1964, Halldórsson 1964,1979, Jónsson 1978). From a structural point of view Icelandic has changed relatively little through its history and still preserves its grammatical structure, which is much more complex than in many other German languages. To give some examples, all nouns and adjectives are classified according to gender, which are three in Icelandic: masculine, feminine and neuter. The first four numbers are also gender based. Furthermore, all nouns and adjectives fall into four cases (nominative, accusative, genitive and dative) with its own set of endings to show number and case. All adjectives and pronouns also fall into this four-case system of inflection. The definite article does not stand separately as it does in other Germanic and Roman languages but is added to the end of nouns and follows the declension

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system. For example, the word woman, *kona* with the definite article becomes *konan* (nominative) *konuna* (accusative), *konunni* (dative) and *konunnar* (genitive).

Although, recognizing phonetic changes that must have taken place in the history of Icelandic, these linguists or grammarians have nonetheless repeatedly stressed that one of the main features of Icelandic throughout history (along with the relatively little changes) is its integrity and uniformity. This notion, of the alleged "integrity and the uniformity" of the Icelandic language, lies actually at the center of the purist argument. Acknowledging vocabulary changes, brought about by trade with foreigners, linguist Halldór Halldórsson, nevertheless claims "that the entire public can without difficulty read to their use [understanding] the books that were written in the twelfth and the thirteenth century." (1971:16. See also H. Benediktsson 1964 and Baldur Jónsson 1976). Moreover, almost no difference is said to exist between speakers from different parts of the country and not least, hardly any difference is said to exist between people of different classes (Halldórsson 1964a). We will discuss this point in more details later. For the time being it can be stated that in comparison to the other Nordic languages, Icelandic had undergone fewer changes both in terms of structure and lexicon (Guðmundsson 1977, Ottósson 1990). This inspired the belief that Icelandic was a living example of Old Norse, the language spoken during the Viking era, a notion that is still very much alive in the other Nordic countries, chiefly Norway, Sweden and Denmark. One of many testimonies to this notion was a generous financial gift from the Swedish Academy to the Icelandic Language Council in 1989 (see discussion on the Icelandic Language Council in chapter four). We will now look at the origins of this idea and how it developed.

#### **IV. Origins of Purism: From the First Prophets to a Literary Movement**

In order to make the purist argument more authentic, i.e., to have deeper roots in history and thus to be more legitimate, the protagonists of purism traditionally trace the origins of

linguistic purism in Iceland back to the 16th century. Arngrímur Jónsson (1568-1648) nicknamed the "lærði" or the learned, is praised by 20th century linguistic purist to have been the first person in Iceland to preach linguistic purism (Benediktsson 1953; Halldórsson eds. 1964). He wrote a number of books that had great circulation in Europe. In his book *Crymogea* (Iceland) written in 1609 Jónsson discusses how languages around the world have changed.<sup>63</sup> The Icelandic language he argues was in most regards the same as the language spoken all around the Nordic countries during the Viking era. He argued that the reasons for this were twofold; on the one hand the purity and the elegant style of the language were preserved in the old Sagas and on the other hand Icelanders had had relative little interaction with foreigners. While Jónsson's ideas were of very little political consequence in his era this view was to have profound and long-term dramatic consequences for times to come. (Benediktsson 1953, 1964). In addition, Jónsson argues for the necessity of Icelanders not to emulate writing styles from the Danes or the Germans but rather to seek inspiration and examples from the riches of their own mother-tongue. If successful in this attempt there would be less danger for linguistic changes in the future. If wit and knowledge was not to be used in order to reach this goal, the language would get contaminated in spite of no presence of foreigners (Benediktsson 1953:118). Print-capitalism was beginning to have its impact in Iceland at this time, most strongly felt in translations of Protestant literature. Jónsson worked on several of these translations and according to philologist Benediktsson, he made a point of making these translations as close to "daily speech" as possible (ibid.). In his attitude towards the Icelandic

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<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, in the introduction to Jónsson's *Crymogea* he claims to have written it in Latin in order to "correct" some "mistakes" about Iceland and Icelanders abroad and to "defend his fatherland against ignorance and deceit, to prove to the larger world that even if Iceland is "neither Italy or Greece" it belongs to the society of Christians and not that of "pagan barbarism" (Pálsson,1995:13). *Crymogea* was translated into Icelandic for the first time in 1985 and published that same year. Public authorities in Iceland have in recent years made other attempts to honor the memory of Arngrímur Jónsson or to make him more pronounced in the constructed collective memory of Icelanders. A portrait of Arngrímur lærði decorated a 10 krónur note, issued in a new series of notes in 1981. Due to high inflation however, this note was replaced by a coin in 1984 (Jón K. Helgason 1995). A more recent attempt was made when a little street in Reykjavík was named after him. A modest move one might say, but there is only one building at this street and no more will be added. This building is the National Library - that opened with much fanfare on December 1, 1994 - and in the words of one of the former Ministers of Education, Sverrir Hermannsson: houses the "brain in of our society" (Morgunblaðið 12/1/1994). This is by far the largest library in the country containing both the former Library of the University of Iceland and the former National Library (Háskólabókasafn and Landsbókasafn).

language Jónsson is apparently under the influence of Humanism (Halldórsson 1979; Ottósson 1990).

In the late 16th century Humanism inspired a new interest in the past in the Nordic countries and the Danes and others started to reach out for Old Icelandic manuscripts containing the histories of their kings. The Humanist of the 17th century, who did not understand Icelandic often times needed assistance in order to understand these works. Jónsson the Learned, became one the first ones to translate some of these Kings' Sagas' into Latin. Interest in the old literature was regained after a period of disinterest following the Reformation and continued to build up, particularly with publications aimed at Icelandic readership in the late 17th century (Hermannsson 1919; Ottósson 1990). Arngrímur Jónsson is honored by 20th century linguistic purists and other nationalists as the first Icelandic purist. His ideas are however not considered to have had much impact at his time.

The result of this increased interest in the past was the collection of old manuscripts of the Sagas (written on parchment). Other kind of literature and all kinds of archives also was also collected. Starting in the first half of the 1600s and stretching over decades, most of this invaluable treasure was gradually shipped to Copenhagen. Two figures stand out as protagonists in this act: One of them was Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605-1674) and the other was the manuscript scholar and collector Árni Magnússon (1663-1730), who collected more manuscripts than any other Icelander ever.<sup>64</sup> The shipping of the manuscripts to Copenhagen, was perhaps the most valuable freight to ever have left Iceland, historian's Þorsteinsson and Jónsson pointed out (1991). Unfortunately, Copenhagen was caught by fire in 1728 where lot of these manuscripts burnt. The remaining manuscripts, left in The Royal Library in Copenhagen became a source of bitter fights

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<sup>64</sup> The reason for moving the manuscripts to Copenhagen was well intended. For one thing bishop Sveinsson sent some of the most valuable manuscripts to King Frederick III, who was an ardent book collector. Another reason, which prompted Magnússon to send them to Copenhagen, was the bad condition many of these old manuscripts were kept in. In the 1600s and 1700s, the manuscripts were scattered all over the country in mud huts and cottages, many of which did not hold wind or water. There were no buildings in Iceland built well enough to host these old books.

between Danish and Icelandic authorities in the 20th century. After years of contention the last major manuscript Flateyjarbók<sup>65</sup> was shipped back to Iceland in 1971 by the Danish Royal Navy, and received with pomp and circumstance were thousands of people flocked to welcome the "homecoming" of Flateyjarbók (Pálsson 1995). Many of the old manuscripts have been retrieved from Denmark and elsewhere and are now at the Arne Magnusson Institute in Reykjavík, which is both a museum and a research institute.

The person who was to have more impact on the development of linguistic purism in Iceland was natural scientists, writer and poet Eggert Ólafsson (1726-1768). His ideas propagated through both poetry and prose reached many more people than the ideas of Arngrímur Jónsson. Ólafsson is today considered to be a true "patriot and the pioneer of awakening Icelandic national consciousness, the predecessor of the struggle of national liberation." (Kristjánsdóttir 1996:132) In other words, he is considered a sort of a prophet of the secular religion of purism. His pioneering concern for "the nation" mirrored in his poetry coupled with his sudden and dramatic death at age 42, undoubtedly helped to elevate him to the honorable status of being the first national poet (þjóðskáld). However, the praise of 19th century nationalists did as much to give him that reputation. A contemporary of Herder, Ólafsson was greatly inspired by Rousseau's ideas about man's need to return back to mother nature in order to regain his virtue and authenticity. While a student in Copenhagen, he was also greatly influenced by the message of the Enlightenment. In spite of the absence of emphasis on the national the "internationally" inclined Enlightenment program nevertheless, inspired Ólafsson's growth of national consciousness. Ólafsson, who is said to have been extremely well versed in the Old Icelandic literature, was like many of his colleges and contemporaries in Copenhagen greatly influenced by the purist ideas coming to Copenhagen from

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<sup>65</sup> "Flateyjarbók is the largest of all Icelandic vellum manuscripts and one of the most splendid ones. The main subject matter of Flateyjarbók is sagas of kings in Norway, . But there are a number of interpolated episodes from other sagas, ..." "Most of the sagas, copied in Flateyjarbók were written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the classical age of Icelandic saga writing." (The Arne Magnusson Institute in Iceland 1973)

Germany. Yet, unlike other educated men of his time he was much more inspired by patriotism than any of his Icelandic contemporaries.

Ólafsson's views were quite extremist – he suggested that Icelanders should go back to the language of the Saga era – even the most ardent spokesmen of linguistic purism in today's Iceland admit that Ólafsson's views are too extreme (Ottósson 1990). Eggert Ólafsson a son of a farmer was one of the first Icelandic students to study natural sciences (geology, geography). With support from the Royal Danish Academy he along with Bjarni Pálsson - a medical candidate later to become the first surgeon general of Iceland – went on a scientific expedition in Iceland in the years 1752-1757. (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). In their famous travel account<sup>66</sup> one finds a "fairly detailed description of the condition of the Icelandic language," as Ottósson put it (1990:27). There Ólafsson claims that the Icelandic language is found in its most pure form in the east and the north, and thanks relative isolation for that. In the south, i.e., closer to the administrative and trade centers of the time, he concludes the language to be most impure and contaminated (Böðvarsson 1964). Ólafsson put the importance of the language in relation to the future of the "nation" or the people.<sup>67</sup> His view on language is reflected in one of his poems called, "*Sótt og dauði íslenskunnar*" ("*The Plague and the Death of the Icelandic Language*"). The poem is narrated by a mother whose name is *Iceland*. She tells her life's story spanning over 800 years (as long as the history of the country was at the time). During her life she gave birth to three sets of sons, each generation lasting almost three hundred years. Interestingly the birth of each new generation goes hand in hand with the beginning of new periods in Icelandic history. The first one is the period of glory and achievement (the Commonwealth period), the second one is marked by decline and corruption (first centuries of "foreign" rule), and the third period is marked by disarray and total moral degeneration. When the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ferðabók Eggerts Ólafssonar og Bjarna Pálssonar um ferðir þeirra á Íslandi árin 1752-1757*. Samin af Eggert Ólafssyni. Íslenskað hefur Steindór Steindórsson frá Hlöðum. 2 vols. Reykjavík: Haraldur Sigurðsson og Helgi Hálfðanarson, 1943.

mother tells her story she has become sick because of too many foreign words. She sends her children all over the country in order to look for good unspoiled Icelandic that could cure her, but this is in vain because good language is nowhere to be found anymore, so it/she<sup>68</sup> is doomed to die. In the end the poet encourages his countrymen to avoid mixing foreign words with Icelandic. Ólafsson also reminds them of the respect Icelandic enjoys abroad and how the ancestors had protected their language (Björnsdóttir 1992).<sup>69</sup> To this day Ólafsson is revered as one of the nation's greatest poets and the person who over and above others helped to "awaken" the nation from its century long slumber and inertia.<sup>70</sup> We encountered this very same understanding of the history of Iceland in the works of Jón Aðils who was under great influence of Ólafsson's work, like many of his contemporaries. Jón Aðils in his aforementioned book *Íslenskt þjóðerni (Icelandic nationality)* (1903/1922) calls Ólafsson a prophet and a true apostle of patriotism (*þjóðræknispostuli*). One of the best known patriotic songs – to this day learned by every child in elementary school - is taken from Ólafsson's poem *Ísland Ögrum Skorið*.<sup>71</sup> Ólafsson's patriotism was however, never political, in the sense of taking any action to alter the status quo. Ólafsson never made any attempts to challenge the Danish Royal Powers of his time but remained a staunch supporter of the monarchy throughout his life (Björnsdóttir 1992; Kristjánsdóttir 1996)<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> While Eggert Ólafsson was not the only one of his contemporaries to be interested in cultivating the Icelandic language he is the very first person Kristjánsdóttir argues, to have presented concerns about the importance of the language for the future of the nation (1996).

<sup>68</sup> Note in Icelandic, the gender of the noun Icelandic language i.e., *íslenska* is feminine. Thus in prose the language is referred to as *she*.

<sup>69</sup> Anthropologist Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, argues that in this poem "the notion of the symbiotic relationship between the mother and the her sons that became a predominant theme in Icelandic nationalist discourse," was first introduced (1992) .

<sup>70</sup> In one his most famous poems called *Búnaðarbálkur* - an ode to farmers – “one of the most influential national encouragement to have been written in the Icelandic language” according to historian Aðils, Ólafsson praises and romanticizes the country life. And says Aðils “it is not a coincidence that he turns his attention to the country life because as everyone who has given it any thought should admit, that it is within the countryside that the heart of the nationhood lies.” (1922:196)

<sup>71</sup> This was actually one of the songs, sung by the entire gathering at the fiftieth anniversary of the Icelandic republic at Thingvellir June 17th, 1994 - see chapter two.

The shift from attempts of single person's interest to a movement is marked in 1780 by the establishment of *Hið íslenska lærdómslistafélag* -The Icelandic Society for the Learned Arts - a society of Icelandic intellectuals in Copenhagen. One can state that the establishment of The Learned Society establishes the beginning of Phase A, the Phase of scholarly interest, in Hroch scheme. From 1781 to 1796 The Society published periodicals on various practical issues, mostly farming, fishing and industry and to some degree on natural science such as medicine and botany. In the statutes of this new society one finds a program or a plan calling for the formation of new words and other concerns of purist nature. In his essay "Icelandic Purism and its History" grammarian Halldór Halldórsson has translated the statutes of the Lærdómslistafélag:

5. In the same way the Society is to protect and preserve the Nordic language as a beautiful principal language which for a long time has been spoken in the Nordic countries, and try to purify it from foreign words and idioms, which now have begun to corrupt it. Hence one ought not, in the publications of the Society, to use foreign words pertaining to sports, tools, and other things for which one can find old or medieval Nordic names.

6. Hence one is allowed, instead of such foreign words, to form new words, compounded from Nordic stems. These new words should explain the nature of the things the names of which are to be translated: in this connection one should pay attention to the principles of this language which have been used with regard to the formation of good old words: a clear explanation and translation of such words should be given in order to make them easily understandable for ordinary people.

7. Nevertheless, one is allowed to continue to use such words as have been used in the thirteenth centuries and the fourteenth centuries, even if they are not Nordic by origin, but borrowed from foreign nations: this exception however, only applies in the event that no other common or better and more beautiful words in other respects are found." (1979:78-79)

The founders of The Society were obviously influenced by the increasing nationalistic ideas

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<sup>72</sup> Another important spokesmen for purism from the same era was Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík (year of birth and death), an assistant to the great manuscript collector Árni Magnússon. Ólafsson was under great influence from German purists at the time and was one of the first Icelanders to propagate so-called neologism or *nýyrðastefna*. (Neologism to be discussed in more detail in chapter four is the formation of new words rather than incorporating words from other languages). Within this view attempts are made to construct new words on Icelandic roots linguistically speaking (Halldórsson 1979). Jón Ólafsson was also the author of one of the biggest Icelandic dictionaries of the eighteenth century. While significant efforts to present purist ideas appear in this massive work, it has however never been published (Benediktsson 1964, Magnússon 1964).

of the time. In short, the goals of The Lærdómslistafélag were on the one hand to preserve and protect the Icelandic language and to "cleanse" it from foreign words and expressions that "spoiled" its "purity." On the other hand the Learned Society emphasized the importance of writing in such a fashion so that the common people could understand. In the aforementioned article author Halldórsson attributes the first point to the founders' understanding of the beauty and harmonious structure of the Icelandic language. The latter point he claims to reflect a "feeling for the social function of the language," and finds it quite "remarkable" that this fact had been realized as early as 1780 (1979:79).<sup>73</sup> The ideas of The Lærdómslistafélag were however, not of any political significance at the time – they were still only a scholarly interest, some kind of an apolitical philosophy. Nonetheless, as time went by these propositions were to mature and blossom into becoming the future hallmark of the movement.

The late eighteenth century saw a great rise in the interest of Icelandic language purism among Icelandic intellectuals who were inspired -as Ottósson has so interestingly put it - by "the admiration foreign nations had for Icelandic as well as being inspired by German and Danish linguistic purism." (1990:49) This time period was very important, as it laid the ground for what Ottósson calls the "Golden Age of Linguistic Purism" in Iceland, which emerged, in the first half of the 19th century.

## **V. From Literary Movement to Political Force: Missionary of the Intelligentsia**

The early Icelandic nationalism as it emerged amongst young intellectuals in Copenhagen in the 1830s, sought its inspiration from the July revolution in France of 1830 and in literary Romanticism (Greenfeld 1992; Hobsbawm 1990). Both these currents were brought to Denmark via Germany (Hálfðanarson 1993; Kristjánsdóttir 1996; Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991).

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<sup>73</sup> We will get back to Halldórsson's ideas on social function of language in chapter four.

Inspired by the political turmoil sweeping Europe and by the Icelandic purists mentioned above, the traditional Icelandic historiography claims that this intelligentsia "awakened the nation from age old inertia and slumber." This in turn made it possible for them to throw off the yoke of colonialism and backwardness in all affairs, rise up, roll up their sleeves and get busy with modernization and democracy. This is the same old myth we encountered in Aðils' writings before, and has its roots in the writings of the protagonists themselves. While in this thesis I attribute the production of national consciousness, - which facilitated political independence - to the group of intellectuals, the social and economic transformations brought about by modernization need other explanations. This is so because the relationship between the construction of national consciousness, industrialization and democracy in Iceland is not as clear cut as the old myth assumes. In this thesis we will depart from traditional historical explanations and adopt recent and radical historical theory on Icelandic nationalism by historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson. He argues that Icelandic nationalists of the 19th century were a mixed group of people that had different interests in mind in their pursuit for political independence. In spite of their differences they were united in their pursuit for political independence. Yet the writings of the young intellectuals, the missionaries of Icelandic nationalism, carried the fuel necessary to mold into one whole - as a group with common political interests - the population of Iceland. This production was however, decades in the making and industrialization/modernization did not really take off in Iceland until the turn of the 20th century.

The fuel that the writings of the early nationalists provided was a new language, "pure Icelandic," which simultaneously became the language of legitimization in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (1992). By so doing they carved out a new place for themselves within the social space: produced a new linguistic market. This new market had appeal for groups, which for different reasons wanted to sever ties with Denmark. By virtue of adopting the language of the "people of the countryside," they legitimated their rule to govern in the name of the people for the people. The production of a new legitimate language also facilitated a naturalization of the new social order

created by the challenge of the old order. Production of a legitimate language, is as Bourdieu has argued, also a struggle for the production and reproduction of mental structures and in that sense provides recognition for new language of authority (1992:48).

### *1. Socio-Economic Structure*

When one looks at the economic and social structure of Iceland in the middle of the 19th century, rigidity and stagnation are the terms that come first to one's mind. What characterized the economy of the time were age old and primitive production methods in agriculture, which according to archaeologist Kristján Eldjárn, (later a president of the country) had hardly changed since the country was settled. The fisheries were not only marked by stagnation, if anything things had worsened (Hálfðanarson 1993; Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). What about the social structure? According to contemporary analysis made by one of the leading officials in the country, Magnús Stephensen the head of the *Country Court (Landsyfirrétur)*, there were three "classes" in Iceland. In Stephensen's description one finds a social system somewhat like the old European feudal system, the social structure in Icelandic consisted of three main strata's, with the administrators of the state topping the hierarchy, the clergy second in rank, followed by the large strata of peasants and farmers (Hálfðanarson 1993).<sup>74</sup> The Icelandic state officials did not form a class with hereditary rights like the European nobility. The two classes of state officials, the administrators and the clergy, consisting of no more than three hundred persons all in all did however, form a fairly strong entity according to Hálfðanarson (1993). At this time there were

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<sup>74</sup> In Icelandic, the term "bóndi" or "farmer" is a generic term for all those who live off the land, whether peasants or great landowners, as long as they run a farm of some sort. This generic term obscures social differences. However, a social distinction is made by adding a prefix such as "stór" (big) or "smá" (small), "kot" (cottage) so several terms exist such as "stórbóndi," "smábóndi" and "kotbóndi," indicating where in the hierarchy of the "class" of farmers one stood. Together, however they were all classified as one "class" "bændur" (plural of bóndi).

around 4000 assessed farms (lögbýli)<sup>75</sup> in the country, a number that had changed little over the previous centuries and remained stable throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the century, only 10% of the assessed farms were occupied by owners, rising to 17% in the mid century. The greatest landowners at the time were the king, the church and big landowners, also called farmers.

A century before - according to the census of 1703, over half of the privately owned land was in the hands of about 80 farmers (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991:231). This pattern did not change until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then private ownership increased when both king and church started selling its property and had reached 37.5 % in 1910 (Gunnlaugsson 1988). The assessed farms were often divided into several production units, with separate households, the biggest being the *independent farm (heimajörð)* and the smaller ones *dependent* or *outlying farms (hjáleigur)*. The assessed farms ranged in size and quality. Aside from the few *landowning farmers (sjálfseignabændur)*, the farmers' class in 19<sup>th</sup> century Iceland consisted mostly of tenants (Þorleifsson 1973). These were on the one hand *tenant farmers (leiguliðar)* who varied in terms of economic means, size of land etc. On the other hand there were so-called *sub-tenants (hjáleigumenn)* and *cottars (búsetumenn)*, who's social and economic position was weak in most cases but they were in charge of a household that was their own. In addition to those who could legally be called farmers, there were *lodgers (húsmenn)* and *boarders (lausamenn)* whose status varied greatly, but they were free to sell their labor, as day laborers in towns and villages and as seasonal laborers in the farming districts (Gunnlaugsson 1988). At the bottom of the social ladder were two groups of people, *servants (vinnuhjú)* who did not enjoy household status, and *paupers (þurfamenn)* who lacked most personal, political and economic rights enjoyed by others, whether or not they lived with poor relief (Grjetarson 1993; Gunnlaugsson 1988; Magnússon S.G. 1993). Hálfðanarson points out, that nevertheless,

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<sup>75</sup> According to law there had to be at least 20 assessed farms in the commune, the smallest political unit (Gunnlaugsson 1988).

in spite of the obvious conflicts, between those who owned their own land and tenants, or between the rich landowners and cottars' there was a lot that united most if not all Icelandic farmers. As independent masters nearly all of them ruled over servants at some point in their lives, most of them paid taxes in some form. All bought and sold goods in town, the production was similar from one farmstead to the next, and the economic status of all farmers was subject to the capriciousness of the weather. In addition to their economic ties all farmers were connected internally through strong cultural ties that were formed by similar life pattern and socialization. (1993:15 translation mine)

Stagnation was the main characteristic of Icelandic society for the best part of the 19th century. In many aspects the Icelandic society of the 19th century was an "ideal conservative society" says historian Hálfðanarson. One of the strongest elements contributing to this conservatism was the fact that the Icelandic farm was an entity more akin to a family business, rather than being divided into employers and employees. In the farms, says Hálfðanarson, "the servants were not regarded as a separate class, but they were always ranked with the children of the master." Servitude was in this regard not an occupation but rather a life in direct continuation of youth." (ibid. 43) This important factor made the preservation of the old traditional society extremely important for the farmers, for whom with the advent of nationalism, the terms "nation" and "farmer" became almost synonymous as we will shortly see. The life of Icelandic servants at the time was one of hardship and tremendous control. They were obliged by law to obey to the *house discipline* (*húsaga*) of their masters.<sup>76</sup>

In the spirit of German Pietism, the *house discipline* order, stipulated in detail the relationship between the masters and other members of the household amongst them the servants. The patriarchal order of the traditional Icelandic farming society was thus, as argued by historian Pétursson, "legitimated by the ideological framework of the official religion." (1983:52, quoted in Magnússon 1993:276). The masters were free to use almost whatever means to ensure that the

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<sup>76</sup> The *house discipline* order dated back to 1746 (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). Inspired by Martin Luther, the "spiritual father of the Danes" as author Halldór Laxness argued, "the Danes got all their wisdom from the Germans, and likewise the brain of Icelanders, hopefully by mistake, had ended up in the head of the Danish king." (Laxness *Paradísarheimt* 1961: 200, 292, translations mine)

*house discipline* was honored. The servants were subject to work long hours or as long as the master insisted, often time under extremely harsh conditions. Any visits between servants at different farmsteads were illegal without the permission of their masters. Icelandic servants did not have many alternatives at the time. By the *servant law* (*vinnuhjúalög*) all persons not living in their own household or with their parents were obliged to become servants at the age of sixteen; sign a yearlong contract with their master that could be changed or renewed only one day a year, May 14 (Gunnlaugsson 1988).<sup>77</sup> The servants' rights did improve somewhat in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it was only in 1894 that the laws on servants were lifted. As long as they were in effect, the only alternative out of this system was for these people to establish their own home, which meant in reality to set up a farm/cottage. In order to strengthen the system of obligatory servitude even further, any form of residence at the shore - without a farm - was made illegal. This element played a significant part in preventing urbanization from taking place. It was not really until the law was changed at the dawn of industrialization, that urbanization seriously begun (Grjetarson 1993).

Within this hard-locked structure there was hardly any space for any kind of social mobility and although all offices demanded a secondary education there were hardly any public schools in the country. Yet the only positions available in Iceland were very few and almost exclusively within law or theology. For those who did not fit into these strictly defined class categories there was no space. It is precisely here - in this social vacuum that we find the emerging Icelandic intelligentsia, a group that was to increase in size as the century progressed. More importantly, as time went by the system could not absorb the growing population, causing major crisis to occur, which in turn united the farmers against the King and with the nationalist cause. We will discuss these crises shortly but for now let us look at beginning of the political fermentation of Icelandic nationalism.

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<sup>77</sup> May 14, according to the old Icelandic calendar was called "vinnuhjúaskildagur" in Icelandic, meaning the day when the serfs could change their masters.

As discussed before, Iceland had always during the entire colonial period had its separate laws within the broader Kingdom. It was thus never a colony in the strict sense of the term but a dependency. Nobody was concerned about the status of Iceland within the state as long as all the citizens were equal in the eyes of the monarch. In the wake of the revolutions on the European continent, ideas spread northward to Denmark calling for congresses and elections. Separate congresses were established in Holstein and Slesvig (a German speaking duchies in southern Jutland in Denmark) thereby denting the exclusive power of the Danish monarch. This turmoil put Iceland's position within the Kingdom into question and inspired Icelandic intellectuals to call for a separate national congress at Thingvellir.

## *2. The Sagas Acquire a Status of the Holy Scriptures of Purism*

Ideas from the German Romantic nationalism inspired students and other intellectuals in Denmark at the time. As we discussed in chapter one, German Romanticism, originally a literary movement, became increasingly nationalistic after the Napoleonic wars (Greenfeld 1992, Hobsbawm 1962, 1990). In Denmark, Romanticism spurred an increased interest in Nordic mythology and the medieval Old Icelandic literature. According to Ottósson, it "opened the eyes of Icelanders for their national cultural treasures and increased their esteem" (1990:52). One does not have to subscribe to Ottósson's nationalistic sentiment here but it is clear as we have already stated, that the impact of Romanticism on Icelandic nationalism was immense on many different levels. It became the source of inspiration of poetry and prose, simultaneously as it debased traditional styles and structures of riming as old fashioned and shallow in content. More importantly than its literary impact, was its application of the past for direct political purposes. In line with their German mentors, Icelandic nationalists looked to the past in order to fuel their cause. And there was plenty to be found, chiefly in the Sagas and other literary works dating from the same time period. This

rekindled interest in the long gone past and its "glorious" literary achievements its "independent" political institutions - chiefly the old Althing - fuelled ideas about a natural birthright to political sovereignty that ultimately were to be transformed into political currency. Here the *language of the Sagas* not only acquired a symbolic meaning but moreover became one of the strongest "living proof" of this political demand. As argued by Hálfðanarson, these intellectuals also looked to the past in terms of an example of an ideal society. Thus in spite of some encouragement made by them regarding improvements in agriculture, they were not necessarily preaching for industrialization or a complete transformation of the status quo (Hálfðanarson 1993). It was the glorified past they idealized and longed for its reconstruction. To them the present stagnation that characterized Icelandic society on all levels was due to the contamination (coming from Danish and Danish rule) of the national spirit. It was in the Sagas that the purity of the spirit was preserved. Given the impact of these Romantic ideas, it is no wonder that the Sagas acquired a status of holy scriptures for Icelandic linguistic purism as time went by. Let us now look at the early decades of the 19th century and the milestones laid in the development of Icelandic language purism.

The first landmark on the road to success for purism was the establishment of the aforementioned Icelandic Literary Society (Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag) in 1816. Danish philologist Rasmus K. Rask encouraged the founding of The Society.<sup>78</sup> This development in Iceland is quite in line with what was happening all over Europe. There "more often than not the discovery of popular tradition and its transformation into the national tradition of some peasant people forgotten by history, was the work of enthusiasts from the (foreign) ruling class or elite." (Hobsbawm 1990:104) Rask was a language genius who "learned Icelandic in his youth by himself and loved it more than any other language." (Ottósson 1990:52) He traveled in Iceland from 1815-

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<sup>78</sup> Rasmus K. Rask is (1787-1832) and the famous German Jakob Grimm (1785-1863) are considered to be the founders of the comparative and historical study of the Indo-European language family. And these two along with another contemporary German F. Bopp (1791-1867) are all considered to be the founders of scientific historical linguistic study of the 19th century. Rask wrote the very first systematic grammars of Old Norse and Old English (Robins 1979).

1817 and was reportedly appalled to find how "damaged" the Icelandic spoken in Reykjavík was at the time (Reykjavík's population counted less than 500 at the time). The language was allegedly teaming with contamination from Danish. He predicted that within one hundred years Icelandic would be gone if the language was to continue to develop in this manner. In his book on Icelandic grammar, published in 1811 (before he came to Iceland) Rask did not make clear the distinction between Old Icelandic and Modern Icelandic. This oversight, Ottósson contends, has likely strengthened the idea that unequivocally holds that "the older the better or purer." This assumption has ever since reigned supreme in linguistic purism in Iceland. It was purportedly Rask's concern that Icelanders would not lose their connection with the old literature that inspired the founding of the Literary Society whose goal it was to maintain the Icelandic language and writing and thereby the education and the honor of the nation." (Quoted in Ottósson 1990:53) Rask in line with other philologist of the time inspired by Romantic nationalism, insisted that the "purest" and least uncontaminated form of the Icelandic language was to be found in the countryside. This romantic notion of the language of the country people or the peasants/farmers (*tungumál sveitafólks, bænda*) being preserved in its purest form and thus closest to the national spirit in its least uncontaminated form, has been the guiding torch of Icelandic linguistic purism ever since.

In *Skírnir* and its publications, The Literary Society was in the forefront of propagating the notion of linguistic purity. The Literary Society also made a point of coining new Icelandic terms in its writings and to follow the purist ideas of the *Lærdómslistafélag* which by this time had ceased to exist.

The next stepping stone in the development and dispersion of purist ideas in Iceland was the publication of the Old Icelandic literature. Several Sagas had been published in the eighteenth century but the most significant contribution came with the publications by the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries (*Hið konunglega norræna fornritafélag*). This society was also encouraged by Rask and published so-called *Fornmannasögur (Sagas of Ancient Men)* (1829-1830) in 12 volumes.

This publication of the Sagas became very popular in Iceland and had as many as 774 subscribers from all classes, civil servants, ministers, merchants, farmers, servants and fishermen (Hermannsson 1919, Ottósson 1990). The printing and publishing of the old Sagas and other material in Icelandic directly contributed to the rise of national consciousness in Iceland as book publishing in vernaculars after the Reformation had done in other parts of Europe (Anderson 1983, 1992). Interestingly enough, the importance of the two extraneous factors, insisted by Benedict Anderson to have had particular influence upon the creation of national consciousness, cannot be argued to be valid for the same reasons in Iceland. The first factor, "was the impact of the Reformation, which, at the same time, owed much of its success to print-capitalism." (1983:43) One of the contributions of the Reformation in Iceland was the printing and publishing of books in Icelandic. However most of the books published for the first two centuries after the Reformation, were various versions of theology-literature, translated from Latin, German and Danish, into an Icelandic, which according to philologists of the 20th century, incomprehensible for the masses, (Benediktsson 1964). This assertion is based on the allegedly bad quality of these translations, the syntax oftentimes bore more resemblance to German syntax, and moreover, these translations were filled with Icelandization of new words that were of German/Danish origin, and never became part of popular use (ibid.).

The second factor of importance that Anderson mentions was "the slow, geographically uneven, spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization by certain well-positioned would-be absolutist monarchs." (1983:44) As Iceland was a part of the Danish Kingdom the vernacular of the administrators in Iceland was first and foremost Danish not Icelandic, and remained so until the third quarter of the 19th century. Nonetheless, it can be argued that these two factors mentioned by Anderson did indeed affect the rise of nationalism in Iceland but for different reasons. These factors became one of the first targets that the first leaders of Icelandic purism attacked. The ideas about "pure," "clean" and "unspoiled" Icelandic, to use the terms the purists used, contributed a great deal to the reasoning the nationalists needed in the

struggle against foreign rule.

The Latin school at Bessastaðir (1805-1846)<sup>79</sup> - which was at this time the only formal institution of higher education in the country - was a fermenting ground for the purist ideas, notwithstanding that all of the text books were in Danish. Yet the college's greatest reputation has been preserved in its relentless attempts to instill their students with great respect for the Icelandic language (Á.B Magnússon 1964, Þorleifsson 1973). While the study of the Icelandic language was not part of the curriculum almost all the teachers had great interest in the Icelandic language. Translations of foreign material were of significant importance such as the translations by teacher Sveinbjörn Egilsson of the epics of Homer and other ancient Greek works. These translations, read by all his students, have traditionally been regarded as landmarks in the history of the Icelandic language (Ottósson 1990, Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1960). Egilsson was also extremely knowledgeable of the Old Icelandic literature, published some of it in Icelandic and translated many Sagas into Latin as well.

Many of the Latin school students at Bessastaðir went to Copenhagen for further studies where they became inspired by the revolutionary spirit that swept the European continent at the time. One of them was the young law candidate Baldvin Einarsson a son of a poor farmer. He was one of the first to call for a separate national congress at Thingvellir. From 1829-1832, he published a periodical called *Ármann á Althingi*.<sup>80</sup> The journal "was supposed to bring informative and encouraging articles about various subjects relevant for Iceland" and in that sense is very much in line with the current ideas of the Enlightenment (Guðfinnsson 1941:66, J. Jónasson 1915). Einarsson used the periodical as a platform to present his ideas on political, economic and other

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<sup>79</sup> The Latin school was moved to Reykjavík in 1846.

<sup>80</sup> According to The Icelandic Dictionary from Menningarsjóður (1985), the name *Ármann* means a protector, or a chiefs' deputy. Einarsson's sudden and tragic death – from burn injuries – early in 1833 marked the end of his publication *Ármann*.

issues such as language purism. Einarsson was influenced by Danish nationalists Engelstoft<sup>81</sup> and also by both Eggert Ólafsson and Rasmus Rask and is said to have continued their work, according to one of his biographers (Ólafsdóttir 1961). A staunch opponent of Danish words in Icelandic, Einarsson wrote on the issue in *Ármann á Althingi*.

In an article written in 1941 on Einarsson's work on language, the author Björn Guðfinnsson, one of the most influential figures of the purist movement in the second and third quarters of the 20th century, laments the little attention of Einarsson's purists ideas had had in the 20th century. Guðfinnsson expresses hopes that his article will reveal "how deep understanding Einarsson had on the contamination of the language, the need for language reformation, for methodologies on language purism and the influence of language – not least its value for the nation and the national identity" (1941:67).<sup>82</sup> Baldvin Einarsson, like Eggert Ólafsson before him, Guðfinnsson says, argued that Icelandic had been ""perfect," "beautiful" and "pure" before the contaminated impact of Danish. Now Danish has had its influence on it, so it has become distorted and ugly. That must not continue. Its metal must be polished, its rusty stains removed so it will regain its former beauty and purity. Anything else is disrespectful for this language which is "the mother of other languages such as Danish, Swedish, German and English..., but herself does not know of any ancestry." (*Ármann á Althingi* Vol. 2 quoted in Guðfinnsson 1941:70-71). In line with Fichte, Einarsson also argued that the purest versions of the language were to be found in the countryside. He encouraged people to read the Sagas to get to know the language in its best and purest form. Eggert Ólafsson had argued that nations', which emulated custom and language from other "nations", would be doomed to loose their sense of self. Einarsson further argued that: "It would be a great shame if we lost our mother-tongue, this jewel that our ancestors have kept in the

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<sup>81</sup> In his book Tanker om Nationsopdragelsen the author L.Engelstoft was under great influence from Herder and other German Romanists (Ólafsdóttir 1961).

<sup>82</sup> Guðfinnsson was one of the giants of the movement in the middle of the century. More detailed discussion on him will be resumed in chapter four.

country for more than 900 years and given it to its descendants in an eternal memory of the origins of the ancient honor of the nation. Regression in language goes hand in hand with the regression of the mental state and the well being of the nations that speak them [languages]." (*Ármann á Althingi* Vol. 1 pp. 10-11). Guðfinnsson argues, that the essence of Einarsson ideas on language reformation is echoed in these words.

The reverberation of Fichte is clear in Einarsson's. As we saw in our discussion in chapter two these ideas became the backbone of the historical understanding of Jón Aðils and lie at the center of the myth about the Icelandic nation and are at the core of Icelandic purism. In a typical patriotic fashion of Icelandic purists past and present, Guðfinnsson praises Einarsson and says: "[o]ne of the most remarkable characteristics of Baldvin Einarsson's reformatory work is – something worth while looking at closely – is his pure, sincere love for Icelandic culture and the Icelandic language. He worked for his nation with burning passion, sincere will and undivided mind and he understood completely that: all intelligence and knowledge dwindles like an illusion if the heart that beats underneath, is missing." (1941:78) Baldvin Einarsson's nationalism was however, hardly political in the strict sense, as he showed no interest in challenging the power of the monarchy. His interest in the resurrection of the Althing - in the form of a consulting congress - was first and last in order to "protect the culture and the language of the nation." (Kristjánsdóttir 1996:148)

## **VI. The Fjölnir Circle: Political Agitation, the Embryo of the Icelandic Nation State Appears**

In a recent article "*Revering the Icelandic language*" which appeared in the on-line publication [Daily News from Iceland](http://www.icerev.is) (www.icerev.is) one could read the following:

The Icelandic language remains this nation's most prized possession, whether stored in the old Sagas, or the more modern version spoken on the streets today. The day of the Icelandic language is celebrated on November 16, the birthday of

the beloved poet Jónas Hallgrímsson. This year former teacher Gísli Jónsson<sup>83</sup> was the recipient of the Jónas Hallgrímsson Prize, for his contributions to the Icelandic language. The Icelandic Literary Society, founded in 1816, also received recognition. The society publishes the journal *Skírnir*<sup>84</sup>, the oldest magazine in the Nordic countries dating back to 1827. .. On the same occasion a new homepage on Jónas Hallgrímsson translated into English by Professor Richard N. Ringler at the University of Wisconsin was formally opened by the Minister of Education Björn Bjarnason. (11/18/97)<sup>85</sup>

This was the second time the Day of the Icelandic Language was celebrated. On November 16, 1995, the Icelandic government approved a proposition from the minister of education (the very same Björn Bjarnason) - to make November 16, - the birthday of national poet Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845) - the Day of the Icelandic Language (Dagur íslenskrar tungu). The details of this proposition will be discussed in chapter five. Here we will examine the impact of Jónas Hallgrímsson and his colleges on language purism in the 19th century.

The most influential publication for the original development of Icelandic purism in the 19th century is without a doubt the periodical *Fjölfnir* issued first from 1835-1839 and then after a few years break again from 1843-1847.<sup>86</sup> *Fjölfnir* was the creation of four young Icelandic students in Copenhagen; Brynjólfur Pétursson, Konráð Gíslason, Tómas Sæmundsson and Jónas Hallgrímsson.

In the *Fjölfnir* circle we see the first signs of a strong Icelandic intelligentsia that, who like in so many other European countries at the time did not find any place for themselves within the old socio-political structure. This as we encountered in our discussion on Romantic nationalism -in chapter one- left them searching for a new identity, which they found in the doctrines of German

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<sup>83</sup> Gísli Jónsson writes a weekly column on proper/correct language use in *Morgunblaðið* daily, see chapter five for further discussion.

<sup>84</sup>*Skírnir*, is a name of a figure from the old Nordic mythology. *Skírnir* was the messenger of Freyr, the fertility god.

<sup>85</sup> The website of this homepage for Hallgrímsson works is:[www.library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas](http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas)

<sup>86</sup> *Fjölfnir* According to the Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson, *Fjölfnir* was one of the names of the god Óðinn. The word implies manyness, multitudinousness, a special letter magic and *Fjölfnis fræði* the study of *Fjölfnir* implies the art of writing prose and poetry i.e., skáldskapur. "Explaining the name to a correspondent in Iceland .... Konráð [Gíslason]

Romantic nationalism sweeping Europe at the time. This lack of firm placement within the old social structure also gave them more freedom to attack the representatives of the power. Adding to this freedom was that fact that none of the Fjölnir team came from families that had great stakes in the old order, but were sons of pastors and small farmers.

The Fjölnir circle more or less adopted Baldvin Einarsson's ideas and like him, argues Björn Guðfinnsson, they knew "that language protection equals national protection"(1941:78). To this day all the members of the team are regarded as national heroes. None however, has the semi-divine status as Jónas Hallgrímsson does (Kristjánsdóttir 1996, Gíslason 1980, Þorleifsson 1973, Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). While following in the footsteps of their predecessors, Eggert Ólafsson and Baldvin Einarsson, The Fjölnir circle did nevertheless mark the beginning of new times. They teamed together and used their periodical as a platform to preach the new evangelism. Sæmundsson in his *Travel Account* gives a description of the development of German science and literature and there one finds such names as Schiller, Goethe, Tieck, Heine, Kant, Fichte, Herder, Schelling, and Hegel (Sæmundsson 1947: 110-135 quoted in Kristjánsdóttir 1996:156).

*Fjölnir* the periodical was first and foremost a literary review but it also published articles on contemporary Icelandic issues ranging from cultural affairs to aspects on natural sciences as well as translations on travel accounts from different parts of the world. While less was written on politics in the strict sense of the term, the journal was charged with the nationalistic writings of natural scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson, who "is the best loved and most admired poet of modern Iceland: *ástmögur þjóðarinnar* ("the darling of the nation")"(www./library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas). Steeped in the ideas of the late Romanticism, the first issue of *Fjölnir* was committed --- according to a preface written by Tómas Sæmundsson --- to *usefulness, beauty, and truth (nytsemd, fegurð, sannleikur)* --- the italics are those of the original. On beauty, he says;

If a publication is to be beautiful, then the language has to be as *pure and unspoiled*

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wrote that the periodical "intends to attract to itself all the forces that wish to work together in the nation's interest, and we wanted its name to suggest this." (www./library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas)

as possible both what concerns words and syntax and where new ideas appear and the need for new words arises it is important that they are easily understood and natural to the language. ... No nation does exist until it speaks its own language, and if the languages die then the nations die or become parts of other nations; but that never happens unless misery and pain have come before. The prouder Icelanders can be of speaking one of the oldest languages in the entire western part of the Northern continent, which along with their ancient literature and history provides the base of their national pride, and the more the experience can witness how it can be protected from damage, the better it is equipped to grow and expand from its own wealth. The more reason there should be for everyone to resolutely stand guard and augment this precious treasure, the common property of all those who can be called Icelanders. (*Fjölnir* 1835: Vol. 1 translation and italics mine)

This preface echoes Fichte's ideas, almost in verbatim.

In his book *Jónas Hallgrímsson and Fjölnir*, the author points out that for a long time the preface of *Fjölnir* served as "some sort of a manifesto and programme for Icelandic cultural affairs. The trumpets sound that encouraged people to either support or oppose [the national cause]." (Gíslason 1980:92) Of the important issues propagated in the preface the issue of beauty became the most influential and was followed upon by considerable rigor (*ibid.*).

The author of the famous preface, Tómas Sæmundsson was however not the one of the *Fjölnir*-team to be of greatest influence in linguistic matters.<sup>87</sup> The impact of philologist and encyclopaedist Konráð Gíslason and not least poet Jónas Hallgrímsson were far more consequential. Of the team, Konráð Gíslason was perhaps the one with the most extreme attitudes. Gíslason had no qualms about attacking anyone whom he thought did not write Icelandic in the proper fashion according to his uncompromising purist standards. Highly respected Icelandic statesmen who were representatives of the monarchy got no mercy from Gíslason who in *Fjölnir* attacked them and others for their writing style that according to his view was teeming with Danish contamination. Gíslason was an expert on Old Icelandic and wanted to revive that language form,

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<sup>87</sup> Ottósson (1990) blames Sæmundsson of being too rash and not concerned about preparing his language carefully enough. That his writings were full of "stains", like it was amongst so many Icelandic students in Copenhagen at the time and that he had his fellow team-mates 'correct' his writings before publication. Many contemporary purist share this comment on Sæmundsson.

particularly some old grammatical forms of declination. Gíslason was the author of an Icelandic-Danish dictionary. With it Ottósson informs us, Gíslason wanted to "clean Icelandic from Danish stains," (1990:101) as he partly intended to aid Icelandic intellectuals to translate their knowledge into pure and non-Danized Icelandic. As mentioned before all textbooks at the Latin College were in Danish and all professionals had to go to Copenhagen for their degrees and were thus likely to think in Danish. According to one of the deans/rectors of the Latin School in Reykjavík, Björn M. Olsen (dean from 1895-1904), no other book was as influential in eradicating Danish words from the Icelandic vocabulary as Gíslason's dictionary (Ottósson 1990, Þorleifsson 1973).

What about Jónas Hallgrímsson "the darling of the nation"? In his speech at the first celebration of the Day of the Icelandic Language – commemorating Hallgrímsson - in 1996, Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs Björn Bjarnason, quoted 20th century poet Tómas Guðmundsson, who once said about Hallgrímsson:

The short life of this sweet-tempered genius is so deeply intertwined with the existence of every man that speaks Icelandic, that he who is not to some degree acquainted with him can hardly be regarded as a good Icelander. In the poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson the nation has found the fatherland (ættjörð lit., land of family/kin/clan) it most dearly loves. Because of his life and his writings it is more honorable and more difficult to be an Icelander. (quoted and translated from Bjarnason's speech: [www:bb/radherra.centrum.is](http://www.bb/radherra.centrum.is))

Jónas Hallgrímsson "is the only Icelandic poet," Þorsteinn Gíslason observed in 1903, "who has become the founder of a whole school of poets: pioneer of a new movement in poetry and literature." <sup>88</sup> Of all his Icelandic predecessors, Eggert Ólafsson was the one with whom Jónas Hallgrímsson would come to feel the closest kinship, on the basis of their similar scientific labor and their similar hopes for the country. Indisputably a literary giant Hallgrímsson by his work "transformed the poetic sensibility of his countrymen, reshaped their literary language, and opened their eyes to the beauty of their land and its natural features."([www:bb/radherra.centrum.is](http://www.bb/radherra.centrum.is)) This remark is of no trivial value when one keeps in mind the almost divine status poets and writers or

*skáld* have had and still have in the country. Likewise interest in literature and poetry is also considered a barometer of intelligence.

In the spirit of Baldvin Einarsson, Hallgrímsson in his famous ode to the nation *Ísland* – *Iceland*....reiterated “many of the themes of the preface and stating in poetic form the political agenda of Jónas [Hallgrímsson] and his colleagues: cultural and economic revival for Iceland based on a greater measure of political independence and restoration of the Althing at Thingvellir.” (www:bb/radherra.centrum.is) Interestingly, poet and politician Hannes Hafstein (1861-1922) said that with "*Iceland*" Jónas became "the poet of our *born again* language." (www./library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas italics mine)

In spite of the immense popularity Hallgrímsson's poetry later achieved it was not an immediate success any more than the journal. In the beginning *Fjölnir* was very unpopular in Iceland not least because of Hallgrímsson's fierce attack on *Rímur* (lit., Rimes) an age-old poetic style very popular amongst the common people.<sup>89</sup> The third issue of *Fjölnir* (1837) contained his essay "On the *Rímur* of Tistran and Indiana." This is accordingly the first substantial piece of literary criticism in Icelandic, and by all odds the most famous: a savage attack on a *rímur*-poem by Sigurður Breiðfjörð (1798-1846) and on the deficiencies of the "rímur" tradition in general. It has been said that with this essay "Jónas consigned to damnation five hundred years of the history of Icelandic literature." (Gíslason 1980:99) The works of Breiðfjörð were held in high esteem by many Icelanders, not least the common people, and Hallgrímsson's devastating critique did nothing

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<sup>88</sup> Þorsteinn Gíslason *Jónas Hallgrímsson*. Seyðisfjörður: Prensmiðja Seyðisfjarðar 1903.

<sup>89</sup> "During the whole central period (16th-19th centuries) of modern Icelandic verse, one of the most popular poetic forms was the *rímur* ("rhymes"). These were "ballads of a type peculiar to Iceland," long narrative poems based on the sagas and eddic poems, and on translations of chivalric romance (Nordal and Kristinsson 1976:76). They exhibit an enormously wide range of stanza forms and revel in a highly artificial diction inherited from skaldic verse. ...Jónas despised the *rímur*, with their tenuous (often-vacuous) narratives and empty highfalutin language, and did what he could to kill them off. But he made frequent use of some of their characteristic stanza forms, which by the end of the 16th century had almost completely displaced the earlier skaldic forms, becoming --- and remaining until fairly recently --- enormously popular.....Jónas wrote stanzaic poetry, based on different schemes of end-rhyme, in both Icelandic and Danish." (www./library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas) However, his stanzaic poems in Icelandic always follow the modern Icelandic convention of correlating --- with these stanza forms --- the patterns of structural alliteration inherited from medieval verse.

to increase his own popularity. The *Rímur* of Tistran and Indiana had appeared in *Sunnanpósturinn*, a very popular periodical published by some Icelandic statesmen in Iceland.<sup>90</sup> These attacks of *Fjöltnir* on poet Breiðfjörð in particular and on *Rímur* in general, followed by a considerable amount of assault on the language style of *Sunnanpósturinn*, earned *Fjöltnir* a reputation of being extremely arrogant and added to its unpopularity. Nevertheless, in spite of its assault on the most popular poetic form amongst the common people, *Fjöltnir* in the spirit of Romanticism made an effort to elevate both the vernacular and the culture of the countryside where the nation was believed to exist in its least contaminated form. Ironically, the *style* of *Fjöltnir* was also too complex for common people to understand (Gíslason 1980). However, the impact of Jónas Hallgrímsson's writings was immense in times to come.<sup>91</sup>

In spite of *Fjöltnir* being unpopular at the beginning, the periodical had immense impact upon installing the linguistic ideas of purism and thus upon the formation of Icelandic national identity. The discontent with *Fjöltnir* soon gave way for an appraisal that to this day is seen as part of the national legacy.<sup>92</sup> The following comment dating from 1939 appeared in *Skírnir* is typical for the praise given to *Fjöltnir* and its impact on the Icelandic language. This short article called "*The development of the Icelandic language*" written by journalist and playwright Kristján Albertsson, a prominent figure in the purist movement in from the late 1920s to the 1970s - albeit a fairly liberal purist - has the following to say about *Fjöltnir*:

The love for the Icelandic language, which the *Fjöltnir* team inherited from Rasmus K. Rask and Sveinbjörn Egilsson, has turned out to be the catalyst that

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<sup>90</sup> *Sunnanpósturinn* lit. The South Post, unlike the nationalistic papers was rather conservative. The owners Ári Helgason and Þórður Sveinbjörnsson were dedicated servants of the Danish Monarchy. Helgason was an archdeacon and the other Sveinbjörnsson was the chief of justice.

<sup>91</sup> Although, he is indisputably a "national poet" there is nothing parochial about his work. His best poems rise far above local concerns and limitations. To this day Icelandic school children learn Jónas Hallgrímsson's poems. Many of Hallgrímsson's most famous poems such as *Iceland* are still to this day part of the curricula in elementary schools. Inspired by the old poetry of the Eddas and the Sagas Hallgrímsson as some of his teammates translated such Romantics as Goethe, Heine and Tieck .

<sup>92</sup> In 1997, a new quarterly paper appeared, with the name *Fjöltnir*. This new *Fjöltnir* like the old one focuses on arts and literature and moreover has had numbers of articles dealing with Icelandic national identity.

has influenced the written language to date, the most. With their purism they banned the Danish influenced language, which many intellectuals of the time used in their writings and insisted that only words of Nordic origin should be used. Behind this demand was the belief in the spiritual and moral power of the language woven with the Romantic love for ancient Nordic culture. (Albertsson 1939, quoted in Albertsson 1953:7)

It is easy for the outsider to miss the enormous impact the linguistic purism of *Fjölnir* had. Only when one bears in mind that the Icelandic language and more importantly the written form of language where the Old Sagas were elevated to a divine status as indisputable criteria for what was "correct" and "pure" and "good" and so forth, does the political implication of the *Fjölnir* circle and their purism on the formation of Icelandic national identity become clear. And Albertsson further elaborates on the impact of both Rask and *Fjölnir*

It was only natural that this kind of faith in *the superiority of the language*, should be followed by the will *to rescue it from mixing blood with inferior languages*. Icelandic authors, all of them, for a whole century bent under *Fjölnir's* demand on pure, undiluted language. If someone thought he could not escape using a foreign word he would apologize his ignorance by putting the stain (i.e., the foreign word) in parenthesis. Thereby the stain was put in an inferior class, it was an unwelcome guest, and it was expected that it would not stay in the homeland of the Nordic language/Norse. (ibid.1953:8 italics mine.)

Here we have it all; the racist belief in the superiority of the Icelandic language, the fear of contamination if this "superior" and "pure blood" was to mix with "inferior" and less "pure" blood and the fear that purism installed. In this "superior" language of peasants there were supposedly words for everything, hence no need to use foreign and "inferior" words. This notion is reflected in the lines from national poet Einar Benediktsson (1864-1934), "I learned that in Iceland exist words over everything conceivable on this earth" ("Eg lærði að orð er á Íslandi til yfir allt sem er hugsað á jörðu"). We will discuss these superiority complexes and also the fear in more detail in chapter four. Suffice to say here is that this fear is still in the late 1990s very much alive. It was/is not only found among writers but infiltrated the minds of everyone who speaks Icelandic. This fear manifests itself in constant self-censorship, hypercorrection in best cases and muteness in the worst. Embedded in

this fear is the essence of symbolic violence, the indispensable concomitant of language purism.

By the publication of *Fjölnir*, the virtual production of legitimate language begins, marking the establishment of the "pure" language of the *Volk* or the "nation" as the only legitimate language. This is the language of authority and simultaneously one of the strongest tools by those who produce it and reproduce it to form and reform mental structures, the control of symbolic power, symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991).

The enormous emphasis on the protection of national culture as appeared in *Fjölnir* was unprecedented. "The national awakening and the strengthening of the national spirit," was according to the *Fjölnir* circle the most important project and a necessary prerequisite for progress, if not an object in and of itself.<sup>93</sup> This approach is perhaps best reflected in their motto. "Icelanders we all want to be and we want to protect our language and nationality and have the Althing at Thingvellir." (*Fjölnir* Vol. 1. 1835. Kristjánsdóttir 1996:156) However, in spite of the strong nationalistic sentiment of the *Fjölnir* circle their nationalism was not politically clear. The core demand of congruence between cultural and political boundaries is not to be found in their writings, perhaps because that demand was not yet on the agenda during the period between 1835 and 1840 when *Fjölnir* was at its peak.

Ever since the establishment of separate counseling congresses<sup>94</sup> in the Danish Monarchy in the 1830s the *Fjölnir* circle and other Icelanders had called for a separate counseling congress in Iceland. This demand did not at the time entail any clear-cut demand for a national autonomy or sovereignty. The King of the Monarchy responded to the demand for a separate counseling congress, which led to the resurrection of the Althing in 1845.<sup>95</sup> However with the fall of the

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<sup>93</sup> Progress, for the *Fjölnir* team did not mean, industrialization or modernization, rather a return to the lifestyles of the "golden" past.

<sup>94</sup> The term counseling congress stands for semi-autonomous regional congresses that the Danish Monarchy established in response to political demands in Holstein and Slesvig.

<sup>95</sup> When resurrected in 1846, The Althing had not met for 48 years. The old Althing, although a very different institution than it had been during the Commonwealth era, had ceased to convene in 1798.

Monarchy in 1848 - finalized in 1849 - the Danish nation-state emerged and Iceland's position was bound to change dramatically. National hero Jón Sigurðsson in his famous *Hugvekja til Íslendinga* in 1848 (Address to Icelanders) argued that Iceland had three choices in response to these changes: to become just like the other colonies of Denmark, which he did not think possible. Secondly, it could be treated just like another province within the nation-state, a possibility he did not favor. Thirdly, it could seek an almost exclusive sovereignty, with a domestic legislature and executive power but remain only in a formal royal connection with Denmark, a course he was in favor of and which subsequently became the major demand in the long political struggle which ensued (Kristjánsson 1993, Kristjánsdóttir 1996).

At the fall of the Monarchy in 1848, the King had summoned a national meeting in Iceland and during the preparation for this meeting in 1850 it was unanimously agreed upon to seek these demands. (Hálfðanarson 1991, 1993) Having had the King respond in a very favorable manner to their demands for a separate counseling congress before, the Icelanders calling for the meeting were quite optimistic that this new demand would be met in the same manner. They could however not have been more wrong. At the national meeting to be held finally in 1851, the King offered a constitution where Iceland was practically to be incorporated into the Danish nation-state. "Althing could continue to function, but only as a counseling district congress all real legislation should be in the hands of the King and the congress in Copenhagen. Like all other subjects of the state, Icelanders were to elect their representatives to the Riksdag (Congress) in Copenhagen and thereby the country would formally have merged into the Danish nation-state." (Hálfðanarson 1993:31) This proposition was roundly rejected by the meeting as has been known to every child in the nation ever since ("Vér mótmælum allir," "We all protest"). The national meeting of 1851 marks a turning point in the history of Icelandic nationalism and thus also for the establishment of the purist ideas. From now on they take on a definite political expression. We will now turn to this period.

## VII. The Call for Political Sovereignty

In this section we will look at the period between the national convention of 1851 and 1904 when Iceland became an autonomous state. This period would equal Phase B in Hroch scheme, or time of national agitation. It is during this era that the national consciousness is firmly established or to put it differently this time saw the birth of the Icelandic nation both as a political entity as well as a cultural unit as known to this day. The fall of the Danish Monarchy in 1848 and the emergence of the Danish nation-state propelled the transformation of Icelandic nationalism from being mostly cultural into becoming a major political force for decades to come, eventually culminating in autonomy in 1904 and full national sovereignty in 1918. It is important to keep in mind that Icelandic national identity comes into being in opposition to the Danish one i.e.,, it is constructed simultaneously in contrast and comparison to the Danes.

For developments on the socio-economic level this was the period when the mode of production underwent radical transformations from being predominantly based on self-subsistence economy to a capitalist market economy. Let us look a little closer at these changes.

### *1. Structural Crisis*

Hálfðanarson (1993) argues that the mixed group that constituted the leadership in Icelandic nationalism, in the second half of the 19th century, sought political sovereignty for very different reasons. These groups were on the one hand liberal nationalists who spoke for political democracy, increased public education and increased freedom in business and trade, which they argued would bring about both social and economic transformations necessary for progress. The main spokesperson for these ideas was Jón Sigurðsson, who became the leader for the political struggle for national sovereignty. The subsequent popularity of Sigurðsson amongst all who

favored sovereignty, was not due to his progressive ideas, but rather appropriated to his sincere support for national sovereignty. On the other hand, there was the conservative mixed group of farmers (bændur) who feared the incorporation into the newly founded Danish nation state, because it posed a serious threat to the status quo of the Icelandic social structure, the very foundation of their livelihood. For the best part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of the representatives in the Althing came from the class of well to do farmers, as the franchise was restricted to property owners, i.e., to those owning a farmstead above the average in size - and those who had permanent residence on larger king or church farms. In 1903 only 10% of the entire population had voting rights and no women, apart from widows of well to do farmers could vote. This changed in the years to come, granting women gradual rights to vote with full franchise in 1915 (Broddason & Grímsson 1982; Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991).

The farmers feared that this potential incorporation could possibly bring about freedom of the servants, whose lives were entirely controlled by the farmers. As mentioned before, the farmers regarded the servants as their children and as such they were by law (the *house discipline orders* or "*húsagi*") to obey in all matters to their "parents" or masters. While for the most part, Icelandic servants were free from making any demands in order to increase their freedom and improve their lives, (i.e., they did not revolt), other socio-economic changes stirred up the rigid structures of the Icelandic society.

Foreign trade was very favorable, price for imported goods - due to increased production and expansion of the international market of the time - remained relatively steady, whereas price for fish products continued to increase. Fish production for export, which traditionally had been in the form of dried fish (*skreið*), was changing to salted fish as new markets were opening up in Europe. Favorable prices for fish products, called for more labor at the shore, in the tiny emerging fishing villages (Grjetarson 1993, Magnússon S.G 1993). Traditionally, seasonal fishing labor was restricted to the winter months. Eventually, the growing population of laborers now working in

fishing and fish processing (fishermen and female workers on shore) insisted on permanent labor around the year. The law claiming it illegal to reside at the seashore thus became harder and harder to uphold.

The population increased, which was at least partially due to improved diet and lesser tolls by natural disasters which were far fewer in the 19th century than had been in the case in the century before (Gunnlaugsson 1988). Moreover, a recurring "problem" discussed in the Althing in the latter half of the century was the "increase in the marriages of paupers." The law did not prevent servants or indentured laborers to get married and thus have children. These couples could however, not establish a home unless they had access to land and accessibility to inhabitable land was extremely scarce, and worsened considerably in the 19th century as the population grew.<sup>96</sup> The consequences of these laws coupled with land scarcity, severely restricted the number of servants who could establish families. In spite of the farmers fear, "the servants' class in Iceland," as argued by historian Gísli Á. Gunnlaugsson, became proportionally the largest in any West-European society. In the middle of the 19th century 35-40% of all those over age 15 were servants." (1988:35) In the words of another Icelandic historian "servants were made socially infertile." (Jónsson 1981:11-12) To further inhibit servants from procreating, marriage was prohibited for people in debt for poor relief to marry.(ibid.)

The farmers, claimed that the home communes (*hreppar*)<sup>97</sup> of the paupers -by law responsible to support them with public assistance if all other means ran out - would soon go bankrupt due to overpopulation.<sup>98</sup> The law called for individual farmers to take on the destitute

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<sup>96</sup> As this condition developed, people attempted to raise farmsteads in the inhospitable inland areas (heath lands), which because of natural restrictions and smallness could not, in spite of tremendous work, be made to support enough livestock, hence humans. The miserable conditions of these servants turned peasants, is vividly and passionately described in Independent People, (1936) a novel, by Nobel Price Laureate Halldór Kiljan Laxness.

<sup>97</sup> The commune (hreppur singular) was the smallest administrative unit in the country.

<sup>98</sup> In the years from 1873 - 1904 around fifteen thousand people - approximately on fifth of the overall population - left for the New World, mostly Canada. Emigration was a direct result of this overpopulation and the inability of the

paupers whose families were usually split up and relocated at the disposal of farmers in the commune (Gunnlaugsson 1988).

The farmers insisted on increased control over the reproduction of the paupers, and complained loudly over the increased lack of morals amongst the servants. In order to solve this "unfortunate problem" they passed bill after bill in the Althing in order to make it illegal for paupers to get married. Their efforts were all in vain. Much to the farmers' aggravation, the king in line with the political development in the emerging democracies, favored increased freedom for the masses, and used his veto power time and again to halt the farmers from getting their will (Hálfðanarson 1993).

Liberalism and individualism were totally incompatible with Icelandic social traditions, argues Hálfðanarson, "and the conflict between these two oppositions, i.e., between liberal modernization and conservative preservation was to mark the entire debate about labor and social affairs all the way into the 20th century." (1993:39) The ability of Sigurðsson to elevate himself over these two conflicting forces, speak of his political talents. As long as these two opposing teams had one enemy in common i.e., the Danish government, their other disagreements did not matter so much (ibid.). They could unite in their animosity towards the impact of the Danish language and work together in their establishment of national power by subscribing to purism. By doing so they together eliminated all Danish power from Iceland and established themselves as legitimate rulers in the new structure.

By 1880, Icelandic society stood at crossroads, the old socio-economic structure had worn itself out without really providing any visible solutions. Ideas about personal freedom further added to the disintegration of the old structure. These ideas were part and parcel of the nationalist ideology that swept the country from 1851 onwards. "Many people considered personal freedom to be the same as "autonomy," in spite of countless attempts of leaders to correct such "misunderstandings,

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economy to sustain it, came conspicuously manifest after Iceland was hit by several years of exceptional cold in the

and thought it was quite all right to start living together or get married without having secured any land to live on." (Hálfðanarson 1993:56) Interestingly, the Icelandic term for autonomy (*sjálfræði*) was the same term used for personal liberation (*sjálfræði einstaklinganna*) (Hálfðanarson 1993, Magnússon S.G 1993). For the leaders i.e., the conservative arm in the national movement, political freedom/autonomy and personal freedom for the masses (servants and paupers) were two separate issues. According to these leaders the welfare of these people was best regarded if they were kept under the supervision of their masters. In their patronizing attitude, the masters regarded themselves not only as employers but also as moral guards of "these children" who really didn't know what was in their best interest. Interestingly this element of paternalism a legacy from the past is still at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a very prominent element in Icelandic politics. Let us now turn to the impact of periodicals and newspapers in the construction of national consciousness and why these sentiments appealed to people of different classes whose interest were so different.

## *2. Periodical Literature*

The latter of half of the 19th century was the period that established the ideas about what makes an Icelander an Icelander, i.e., the myth on the language purity. These ideas are in the mind of most contemporary Icelanders also highly intertwined with the socio-economic as well as the political changes that transformed the entire social structure of the Icelandic society. In establishing language as one of the central criteria for nationhood the purist ideas propagated by the *Fjölnir* circle were of immense importance and gained such popularity as to become the norm, at least in written language. Their romantic notion of the language of the country people/farmers (*tungumál sveitafólks/bænda*) being least contaminated by foreign influence and thus closest to the old Sagas and the national spirit, was an idea that was to have mass appeal, as practically everyone lived in

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1880s, aggravating the constant threat of the eternal Icelandic hunger ghost (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991).

rural areas and could thus identify with the concept of "people of the country." This romantic idea fell into an exceptionally good ground amongst the political leaders of this class, who by and large were the most well to do farmers. Yet they spoke for the entire class of all country people and as by law and tradition they were also regarded as the guardians of good orderly direction and morals for their servants, this idea further strengthened their hold. If it could not safeguard the status quo, at least the notion of the language of the country people, gave the illusion that the subjected masses and their masters were equals and they shared the same interests.

By their establishment of "pure Icelandic" *Fjölur* also laid the ground for the production of a legitimate language and by so doing created a new linguistic market where this very same language, reigned superior to all other language variants. The production of this new legitimate language simultaneously legitimated the power of those who spoke it or in Bourdieu's terms those who possessed the linguistic capital that had the highest value in this new market.

In Iceland as in so many other countries the role of periodical literature on the formation of national consciousness was immense (Anderson 1991, 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). The age-old tradition of story telling at night so-called "*kvöldvaka*" (an evening waking) added to this impact. The "*kvöldvaka*" was an important "channel for both religious and cultural upbringing" and practiced during the dark winter nights, a session where people sat gathered together indoors doing different kinds of handcraft work. "It is believed that in every household there was at least one person who could read aloud fluently while others listened, worked, and discussed the characters of the stories. Originally this was an oral tradition, but written word became more and more important and the text book took over the role of the narrated story in the oral tradition" (Jóhannesson 1992:8). Books and other publications, (such as periodicals, poetry) circulated between farms. On many farmsteads, it was also a tradition to have one person, often children, read while the adults tended their indoor work (food production and wool work) (Magnússon 1993). Let us now look at how the purist ideas and the national political demands converged in forming national consciousness.

One of the most significant milestones for linguistic purism - and thus also for the making of national consciousness during this period - was the enormous increase in all kinds of publications. A general agreement to adhere to the purist standards set by the *Fjölnir* group was followed in almost all writings from the 1840s onwards. However, standardization of spelling or orthography was still in the making, causing some conflicts (Hermannsson 1918). Occasionally there would emerge voices – intellectuals and laymen alike - arguing for an even more radical restoration of Old Icelandic (see Ottósson 1990).

In line with the current development in the Western world at the time, publication saw an enormous increase in Iceland (Anderson 1983, 1991; Hobsbawm 1990). The biggest growth of printed material was in newspapers and various types of magazines. Increased public participation in social and political affairs also encouraged people to send letters and articles to the papers (Hermannsson 1918; Þorleifsson 1973). The periodicals published in the 1840s were the aforementioned *Skírnir* and *Fjölnir*, which ceased to be published in 1847. In 1841 a new publication *Ný Félagssrit*<sup>99</sup> emerged, published and largely written by the lawyer and emergent politician and subsequent national hero, Jón Sigurðsson. He parted from the *Fjölnir* group on several issues, one of them being about the placement of *Althing* if it was to be resurrected.<sup>100</sup> *Fjölnir* spoke for Thingvellir but Jón Sigurðsson for Reykjavík. *Ný Félagssrit* published until 1873 became much more popular than *Fjölnir* ever was. The publication became a platform for various issues of political nature that were of great interest to Jón Sigurðsson. In addition to ongoing debates about Iceland's position within the Monarchy and later within the Danish nation-state, other issues discussed in *Ný Félagssrit* included; the lifting of the trade monopoly (that stipulated that only citizens of the Danish Monarchy could trade in Iceland) education; and practical issues

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<sup>99</sup> *Ný Félagssrit* literary means *New Writings on Society*.

<sup>100</sup> Jón Sigurðsson made an attempt to revive *Fjölnir* which had been suspended for two years. The negotiations with the *Fjölnir* group was however unsuccessful as the team refused to change some principal points such as the change of the title and the content of the periodical (Hermannsson 1918).

related to fishing and farming. The periodical, which was issued annually and varied in size from 150 to 200 pages, was in spite of its tremendous popularity never successful in terms of sales.<sup>101</sup> In the 1848 volume of *Ný Félagsrit* - the year Danish absolutism was abolished - the aforementioned famous *Address to Icelanders* (Hugvekja til Íslendinga) appeared where Jón Sigurðsson stated briefly and clearly the principles of political autonomy for Icelanders. This address has been called "the most important and most famous political essay ever to have been written in the Icelandic language and for decades the political manifesto of the Icelandic national struggle." (Sverrir Kristjánsson 1981:84, quoted in A. Kristjánsson 1993:134) In the same volume of *Ný Félagsrit* Jón Sigurðsson called for the participation of Icelanders in the then ongoing construction of a new constitution for the state i.e., Danish state. The political impact of *Ný Félagsrit* was such that it was said to be an essential guide for Althing, as all issues of any weight and importance were discussed in the periodical before the congress got them for discussion and review (a comment in *Þjóðólfur* 1862 quoted in Hermannsson 1919).

Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879) was educated in philology and history and aside from his busy political career he also wrote extensively on Icelandic history and the Old Icelandic literature, some of these works appeared in *Skírnir*. Not surprisingly Jón Sigurðsson followed the linguistic standards set by *Fjölnir* but he never attempted to emulate Old Icelandic as some of them did (Benediktsson 1964; Böðvarsson 1964; Þorleifsson 1973)

1850 marks a watershed in Icelandic newspaper publication when *Þjóðólfur*<sup>102</sup> started, the first journal to gain a significant distribution in the country. In the years between 1852 and 1874 the number of subscribers almost doubled from 700-1300 (Þorleifsson 1973). Unlike the other publications (*Skrínir*, *Fjölnir*, *Ný Félagsrit*) *Þjóðólfur* was the first real newspaper and published

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<sup>101</sup> It is estimated that the number of copies printed never exceeded more than 800 and thereof less than half went to subscribers. The periodical as a result was constantly in a financial limbo. Marketing in a country completely lacking any kind of reliable infrastructure added to the tradition of bartering instead of trading in money must have made sales so much harder (see also Hermannsson 1918).

not only news but also columns on political issues as well as advertisements. In the editorial of the very first issue, the people of the country are encouraged to wake up from their slumber. They are told that they are a nation in their own right and must therefore not let their nationality wither away or merge with some other nations. The editor then "openly declared in favor of a national government for Iceland and full freedom of trade." (Hermannsson 1918:69) The paper was openly critical towards the government and individual acts of government officials. Thus in the second year of its existence the authorities tried to prevent its publication by excluding it from the only printing office in the country at the time, a public property under government control. The owners managed to get it printed in Denmark.

Jón Guðmundsson the editor of *Þjóðólfur* from 1852 onwards is perhaps the first person in Icelandic history to live up to the term "media-mogul." This was so not only because he was both the editor and the owner of *Þjóðólfur*, that was very common at the time, but rather because of the unchallenged dominance of his paper (Hermannsson 1918, Þorleifsson 1973).<sup>103</sup> Guðmundsson, a staunch nationalist and ardent supporter of linguistic purism was a representative in the new Althing from the very beginning (1845) until 1869. It was his desire that the paper would be the "paper of the people and the national party – an opposition paper." (Quoted in Thorleifsson 1973:37). Members of the administration really felt this opposition and made several attempts to challenge it by starting their own publications. These attempts were all in vain and *Þjóðólfur* dominated the Icelandic "news media-market" almost entirely until 1874 with the publication of *Ísafold*.<sup>104</sup>

During the latter half of this period many newspaper editors were devoted supporters of

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<sup>102</sup> *Þjóðólfur* is a man's name and literally means a man and wolf. More importantly "þjóð"/thjod is the Icelandic noun for "nation."

<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, Halldór Hermannsson in his *Periodical Literature*, makes this comment on Guðmundsson style: "[h]e had a poor pen; his style was clumsy and lacked clearness; the sentences were long and foreign in construction; his opponents often properly made fun of certain expressions and phrases in the *Þjóðólfur*" (1918:73).

<sup>104</sup> *Ísafold* is another word for Iceland.

linguistic purism. Two of the most prominent editors in the period from the 1870s to the 1910s also wrote books on grammar and spelling for public use. One of them was Björn Jónsson who owned and edited *Ísafold* that was the most popular paper in the country in the decades before and after 1900. Jónsson wrote a book on spelling with an appendix on proper speech (Ottósson 1990). He sat in Althing and was later the second person to serve as the *Minister of Iceland* (1909-1911).<sup>105</sup> Guðmundur Finnbogason, who became one of Iceland's most influential purists in the first half of the 20th century - see more on Finnbogason in chapter five – wrote an epilogue on Jónsson. "Björn Jónsson," he said "was more convinced than anybody that the Icelandic language did not need to beg for anything from other languages in order to fulfill any task the spirit was set out to do. And he showed his conviction through his own work and followed it adamantly, because he knew best from own experience how generous the Icelandic language is to all those who love it and know how to treat it." (Finnbogason 1912, quoted in Guðmundsson 1960:120)<sup>106</sup>

Jónsson's paper, *Ísafold* merged with the newly established *Morgunblaðið* daily in 1913, a paper originally owned by industrialists and businessmen and to this day a proponent of the right wing. Moreover, as we will discuss in chapter six, *Morgunblaðið* daily is the giant on the Icelandic newspaper market and moreover a self appointed guardian of orthodox purism.

In addition to the growth of newspapers and periodicals, book publishing also rose exponentially during the 50-year period from the 1840s to the 1890s. This is the time that sees the first modern Icelandic novels emerge starting with *Piltur og stúlka* by Jón Thoroddsen in 1850. Like many other prominent figures writing in Icelandic at the time, Thoroddsen in his works used

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<sup>105</sup> The establishment of this office in 1904 marks the beginning of Iceland's autonomy. The office was closed when the country received full sovereignty in 1918.

<sup>106</sup> Björn Jónsson also translated several foreign writers of the time, such as the Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf the Nobel laureate of 1909. About those translations Finnbogason says: "No one can mark that these works are not originally thought in Icelandic. The language is simultaneously ravishing, succinct and folk-like yet as soft in movements as a bride's veiling in the breeze." [sic!] (ibid. :122) Another prominent figure in the Icelandic press at the time and ardent supporter of linguistic purism was Jón Ólafsson. He edited various papers during the period from 1878-1916 and wrote two books on language and language use (Pálsson, 1943).

ridicule and disdain in order to target persons who used Danish words in their daily speech (Magnússon 1964, Thoroddsen 1850). The birth of the first modern novels in Icelandic certainly was of great importance, but translations of foreign novels which had begun at this time were also of very important for the development of purism as the translators went to great lengths to write in a "pure" style (Hermannsson 1919, Magnússon 1977).

About the same time that the first Icelandic novel appeared, the very first publication of Icelandic folktales, collected under the supervision of Jón Árnason, emerged. *Íslensk ævintýri* (collected with Magnús Grímsson) appeared in 1852 and then the greater work *Íslenskar Þjóðsögur og Ævintýri* published 1862-1864 both of these publications became extremely popular and made Jón Árnason immortal in Icelandic history. Árnason did not record all the folktales himself as was the case in many other countries, but had many people of different ages and social backgrounds assist him in this endeavor. Interestingly, Jón Árnason was so "truthful" to the gospel of purism of the time that he corrected the drafts of the folktales in order to adjust the language style to the highest level of purist standards. Árnason erased foreign words and adjusted declination styles and certain words according to the new standards (J. Kristjánsson 1986, Ottósson 1990). Contemporary purists and linguists differ in their opinion on this action. Árni Böðvarsson for example, maintains that Árnason did go too far in his pursuit of purism (1964). Other purists try to brush over this by claiming that the original scripts/drafts reveal that the "vocabulary of the common people [who told the tales] had been preserved incredibly free from foreign influence." (Benediktsson 1964:107)

Another landmark in publications for the development of purism was a new edition of the Sagas from 1891-1902. This edition was fairly inexpensive and became very popular and thus instrumental in making the old Sagas more accessible to the public (Ottósson 1990). The publication of the Icelandic Sagas had an enormous effect upon strengthening the emerging national identity in the country. This period also saw a great increase in Romantic poetry, inspired

by *Hallgrímsson* and *Fjölfnir*. The national poets from this period, all praised the country, the people and the Icelandic language. Some of these poets were active in politics, such as Hannes Hafstein (1861-1922) who became the first minister of Iceland in 1904. Others became aspiring entrepreneurs like Einar Benediktsson (1864 -1934), who was the first one to start a daily newspaper in 1896 a short lived enterprise, like most of his businesses.<sup>107</sup> These poets and a host of others became household property and national heroes. Young people in particular, learned their poems learned by heart. This "national poetry" (*attjarðarljóð*) became part of the curricula in the public school system in 1907 and remains there to this day.

In a recent college textbook on the history of Icelandic, one is informed that in Iceland as in other places Romantic scholars looked to the common people and searched for folk knowledge of various kinds. Folktales, poetry, riddles and plays were written down. It was their belief that the spirit of the nation lived in these tales. They elevated the old history of the nation, glorified it and used it in order to encourage their countrymen. "Language protection became an extremely important part of the struggle for independence. The language became a tool of political propaganda, not only an instrument for expressing opinions but also the key to the Old Literature/Sagas that showed free-born men in an independent state, a proof that Icelanders had historical and legal rights to govern their own affairs." (Sveinsson 1991:95)

### **VIII. The Cleansing of Impurity: The Heresy Eradicated, Danish Wiped Out**

Another extremely important factor for the development of Icelandic purism in the 19th century was the abolition of Danish as an official language of the administration. This campaign,

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<sup>107</sup> Benediktsson, earned himself a reputation for having ideas that were too big for the mud-hut short-mindedness dominant among the majority of many of his contemporaries. He had big dreams about modernizing Iceland, turning every waterfall and river into electricity. The story goes, that he even managed to sell the northern lights to a British entrepreneur, in the hope of making big profits from harnessing electricity from them.

against eradicating or uprooting all usage of Danish within the administration as well as all traces of Danish from the vocabulary, was both a symbolic and an actual challenge against the colonial power. Simultaneously, with this campaign a new language, i.e., "pure" Icelandic, was produced and became the only legitimate language in the country.

In 1831 it became mandatory to print all laws in both Danish and Icelandic as soon as they were published (Hermannsson 1919). Ever since the establishment of the law court Landsyfirréttur in 1800, Icelandic was to be the official language the exception being if both parties spoke only Danish or Norwegian. However, at times it caused some difficulty that the Supreme Court of the country was in Copenhagen with Danish judges only, none of whom understood Icelandic (Ottósson 1990). In an article published in *Ný Félagsrit* in 1844. Jón Sigurðsson marked the direction in the struggle to use Icelandic entirely in the administration and all official transactions pertaining to public affairs in Iceland. He encouraged the public to write petitions to the Danish King insisting that no Danish person could hold an office in Iceland unless they spoke Icelandic fluently, to call for the presence of Icelanders in the cabinet in Copenhagen, an Icelandic professor of law, and another one teaching the Icelandic language, to have all administrators in Iceland write in Icelandic, and finally to ban Danish representatives in the Althing.<sup>108</sup> Most of the demands put forward in this article were met during Sigurðsson's lifetime (Ottósson 1990). During these first decades of national agitation, a whole range of new political concepts came into being that had no equivalents in the Icelandic language. Here Jón Sigurðsson, Jón Guðmundsson and others writing about politics at the time had an enormous impact upon shaping both the political and the legal vocabulary of Icelandic, in short producing a new language of authority.

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<sup>108</sup> Before the establishment of the University of Iceland in 1911, all Icelandic lawyers got their education in the University of Copenhagen, where all the teaching was conducted in Danish. Because of this and also because most Icelandic law was made after Danish law, the language of Icelandic law was very influenced by Danish.

The resurrection of the Althing congress, not surprisingly, became an immensely important platform for the advance of linguistic purism. The representatives showed allegiance to the national cause not least by speaking in a manner that fulfilled the purist standards. By doing so they set examples for the public to follow. In the new Althing a curious situation came up on the occasions when the king passed the petitions submitted by the new congress. He did not understand Icelandic so he signed the Danish version and by doing so the Icelandic one lost all its legal value. After some bitter exchanges with the Althing, the king agreed to sign both versions, thus making the Icelandic on par with the Danish one. With the constitution of 1874, Althing received legislative power but the king had to sign all law passed by the congress. In the coming decades several bills went before the Althing insisting that the king should only sign the Icelandic version of the laws which he refused to do. Until 1912 all laws were printed in both languages in *Stjórnartíðindum fyrir Ísland* (Political News for Iceland). After 1912 the Danish version was only published for the Danish government and the supreme court in Copenhagen and remained so until the establishment of the Icelandic Supreme Court in 1920 (H. Hermannsson 1919; Ottósson 1990; Þorleifsson 1973).

In the early 19th century most of the public administrators in Iceland were Icelanders (in the preceding centuries Danes had been more numerous). Non-Icelandic speaking Danes did however still get offices in Iceland and this remained the case up until the middle of the century. While the governor of Iceland was Danish most of the other high ranking officials' were Icelandic. Nevertheless, county attorneys and medical doctors were often Danish. As a result of suggestions from the Icelandic representatives, the king stipulated that all Danish administrators in Iceland had to be able to understand and make themselves' understood in Icelandic. Yet the stipulation was manipulated and grossly dismissed. With the new constitution in 1874 a stronger demand for thorough knowledge of Icelandic became a requirement for all those seeking administrative posts in the country. Since then very few Danes have sought work as civil

servants in Iceland. During the first half of the 19th century most administrators including the Icelandic ones used Danish as a language of communication and in most of their public writings. After the resurrection of the Althing the strength of this tradition weakened significantly. The influence of representatives Jón Sigurðsson and his namesake Guðmundsson played decisive parts here. Other Icelandic public servants/administrators also called for the use of Icelandic and more interestingly at least two Danish governors did the same thing (Ottósson 1990). From the middle of the century almost all writings between public offices and administrators in Iceland were conducted in Icelandic. All written transactions between Icelandic and Danish officials on the other hand, had to be conducted in Danish and this remained the case until 1918.

The Latin School - which had moved from Bessastaðir to Reykjavík in 1847 – was as already mentioned, extremely influential in propagating the gospel of linguistic purism throughout its entire existence. After the move teachings in the Icelandic language increased greatly until the establishment of the Theological/Pastoral Seminary (Prestaskóli) in 1847 the college provided the highest level of education available in the country.<sup>109</sup> According to the school regulations from 1846, The Latin school emphasized “teaching its students to write their mother-tongue according to correct rules, undiluted [by Danish/foreign words] and in good taste.” (Quoted in Ottósson 1990:95)<sup>110</sup> In the literature program of Icelandic teaching the school put disproportionate emphasis on the Old Icelandic literature. Interestingly more recent works were read at the beginning such as *Fjölnir* and the aforementioned translations of Homer by Professor Sveinbjörn Egilsson. However, as time went by the Old Literature dominated entirely within the literature section of the Icelandic teaching and remained unchanged beyond the turn of the

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<sup>109</sup> A medical school was established in 1876 and a Law School only in 1908 these educational institutions became part of The University of Iceland when it was established in 1911.

<sup>110</sup> Many of the professors were staunch purists such as Halldór Kr. Friðriksson who taught Icelandic at the institution for almost half a century. He had participated in the publication of *Fjölnir* in its last years and is said to have been greatly influenced by the Konráð Gíslason the fanatic purist and *Fjölnir* member. Friðriksson was so relentless in his indoctrination of purism that it has been argued that grammatical mistakes were hard to find in the writings of his students (Ottósson 1990:95).

century. Ottósson points out that even in the teachings of grammar the Old literature was dominant as an indisputable criterion and as a matter of fact the only grammar taught in the Icelandic program (see *Saga Reykjavíkurskóla Historia Scholæ Reykjavicensis* by Kristinn Ármannsson 1975). The same attitude applied to the teachings of literature where the greatest emphasis was put on the Old Sagas. This trend has remained the case to this day, save for some minor input of less than a handful of contemporary writers. This overemphasis on the Sagas for both the teachings of grammar as well as literature is even more remarkable when one keeps in mind that the Latin School - later *Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík* or Reykjavík's Gymnasium<sup>111</sup> - was until 1930 the only gymnasium in the country. In spite of radical changes in the education system in the 20th century, most of which have made secondary and university education less elitist and more accessible to the public regardless of class, *Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík* to this day remains the school of the power elite.

Finally, increased Icelandic translations of textbooks used in the Latin School contributed a great deal to the spread of purism. In the first decades of the 19th century all textbooks were in Danish. After the middle of the century, however, translations of various subjects started appearing, some for the first time in Icelandic such as a book on physics (Kristinn Ármannsson 1975). These translations never reached even half of the textbooks used in the school. However, these books were important because in all of them the translators went to great lengths to coin new Icelandic terms instead of borrowing the concepts used in the languages they were translating from, whether that was Danish or German. The last decades of the 19th century saw the birth of several schools; four agricultural schools, several separate women's schools, housekeeper schools, a sea-captain school and a couple of high schools. In all these institutions all textbooks were in Danish (Ottósson 1990; Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991).

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<sup>111</sup> The Icelandic education system is different from the American one. A gymnasium is the equivalent of a senior high school and junior college. A gymnasium degree "stúdentspróf" is a passport into a university.

In spite of the systematic eradication of Danish and stigma attached to usage of Danish words it ironically became the first mandatory second language to be learnt within the public school system. In many other former colonies, particularly in multi-lingual settings such as in many African countries and in India the language of the colonizer remained the official language of the state often however on a par with one indigenous language (O'Barr & O'Barr 1976; Wolfson & Manes 1985). But languages were also the *linga franca* of the international community i.e., chiefly French and English. Danish on the other hand is a very small language (spoken today by approximately five million people) and has therefore no international value or currency. Yet, for Icelanders at the time, chiefly the educated elite, Danish was a linguistic capital in Bourdieu's sense, for it opened up access to both education and subsequently to high offices in Iceland. Ties to Denmark were close and for the first half of the 20th century most Icelanders seeking education, not available in Iceland, went to Denmark. In recent years while Icelanders have sought higher education in other Nordic countries and other non English speaking European countries, more and more have gone to English speaking countries, such as the United States or Great Britain. However, knowledge of Danish is still an asset or capital. Any Icelander who wishes to partake in any one of the many co-operations between the Nordic countries has to have some knowledge of Danish, and if not then either Swedish or Norwegian, which are the official languages of the Nordic Council and in general of any Nordic co-operation.

Interestingly, Danish is still the first foreign language studied within the Icelandic school system. English comes in as second foreign language followed by German and French in the third seat for those who seek secondary education. However in recent years a bill has been rolling around in the Althing calling for a shift of Danish from being the first foreign language to being in the second. The bill, which has not yet been passed, has caused great upheaval and fierce debates in the Althing as well as amongst the public. Those who opposed the shift have

argued against a break of historical tradition and expressed fear of ever increasing dominance of the English language. Views in favor of the shift were much more common amongst the younger generation who spoke of the uselessness of Danish but saw increased knowledge of English as a necessary asset in the today's global community where English is the key to that world.<sup>112</sup>

As is clear from the preceding discussion, language purism in Iceland gained strength as the 19th century proceeded. But "linguistic nationalism was and is" says Hobsbawm, "essentially about the language of public education and official use." (1990:96) The first laws on public education were passed in 1907, three years after Iceland had gained autonomy from Denmark. By this time the national programme had received mass support (i.e., Hroch's last phase). We will discuss the relationship between public education and purism in the next chapter.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The argument of this chapter is that the idea of language, which has been central in defining Icelandic nationhood, is essentially the idea of "pure" Icelandic *par definition*. Not only was language made synonymous with Icelandic culture, it was the "pure" language of the country people *par definition* that became the absolute and indisputable criterion and justification for political autonomy and later sovereignty.

As other anthropological studies on nation-making, (Herzfeld 1986; Verdery 1991) show, our study also reveals the crucial role played by intellectuals in the process of national identity making in Iceland. Beginning as a literary interest in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, purism had acquired all its main characteristics by the 1840: the emphasis on older equaling "purer" with the Sagas as the

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<sup>112</sup> This debate can be found in various articles from Morgunblaðið daily such as "Changed and Improved Education Policy" 7/21/94, "Improve Our Relations with the Nordic Countries, Improve our Knowledge of the Other Nordic Languages" 7/28/94, "Should English Come Before Danish?" 7/28/94, "Nordic Language Knowledge the Key to Nordic Cooperation" 9/18/94, "Important Cultural Relations" 10/11/94, "Most Want Danish to Continue" 10/19/94,

ultimate criteria for purity, the contempt for and banning of foreign words, and the practice of neologism.

It was only after the fall of the Danish Monarchy in 1848 that Icelandic purism became a political tool, used to prove and live up to the Fichtean idea of unity between, language, nation and state. The long literary heritage of Icelanders, epitomized in the old Sagas further fuelled beliefs in the "purity" of the language and thus in the unequivocal rights to national sovereignty. For the 19th century nationalists the Sagas not only provided a symbol of national pride and unity but, moreover, they "exemplified Icelandic in its "purest" form" (Pálsson 1989:122). It was allegedly in the Sagas where the spirit of the nation was preserved in its most "pure," and least "uncontaminated" form. Hence the Sagas had to be treated with utmost respect and acquired the status of a holy scripture. Through their relentless glorification of the Commonwealth era and the deification of the Saga heroes', the intellectuals constructed an image of Icelanders as "cultured" and "civilized" people whose brilliance was undisputed yet could not thrive in the presence of "foreign" influence.

The politicization of purism and the growing printing media were intertwined processes that, played a key role in constructing the idea of "purity" as primary cause and reason for Iceland's rights to sovereignty. In Iceland intellectuals used different platforms to spread the gospel of purism from direct political writings to literary criticism and poetry. Whereas in other neighboring countries the new concepts and words emerging in the wake of the dual Revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were usually shared, albeit adjusted to grammar and pronunciation, the Icelandic purists by virtue of their hegemony coined an entirely new vocabulary based on alleged "pure" Icelandic roots.

Icelandic nationalism appealed to the socio-economically heterogeneous population of 19th century Iceland, for entirely different reasons. The leaders, whether liberal or conservative, the landowners or farmers in overall and the landless servants could all subscribe to the notion of "freedom" promised in the purist agenda. "Freedom" meant different things to different groups of

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"Nordic Language a Key Issue" 10/19/94, "Which One do we Want Danish or perhaps French (with Belgian accent)?"

people and so did the term "nation." "Freedom" from foreign rule and "freedom" from the yokes of servitude is not the same thing, yet it is "freedom" in both cases. And all could rally under the banner of speaking the "pure uncontaminated" Icelandic of the countryside, as there were hardly any urban centers to speak of.

Icelandic nationalism, with its zealous emphasis on *purity* provided, first the Icelandic intellectuals and then later the entire population, with a sense of sacralized supra-individuality of the nation. The popularity of this new identity, which everyone could eventually identify with, can only be explained by reference to the religious or cosmological elements within nationalism, emerging at a time when old ideologies and old socio-economic structures no longer provided security and a sense of belonging, essential for their continuation.

Our discussion highlighted how language purism is highly intertwined with state formation, and how language determines who has access to political power and economic resources. In the next chapter we will examine the institutionalization of purism within the Icelandic nation state.

## Chapter 5

### Purism and the Icelandic Nation State: From Birth to Adulthood

#### I. Introduction

##### *1. The Production of the Truth of Purity*

In this chapter we will look at the development of the discourse on purity in Iceland and the concomitant development of the Icelandic nation state. Here, I refer to *discourse* - on purity - in the Foucauldian sense. We will particularly look at how this discourse is related to Foucault's notion of "truth," "understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution circulation and operation of statements." ( Foucault 1980:133) And moreover, how

this "truth," "is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'régime' of truth" (ibid.). As for the political problem of intellectuals, within this system of power that produces truth, Foucault argues, their role is not to change people's consciousness or what is in their heads. Rather he says, it is to change "the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth,"..., "of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time." (ibid.) As for our discussion on the discourse on purity in Iceland, the intellectuals that we will encounter are very much a part of the régime of truth and actually contribute a great deal to its existence, and are indeed representatives of what Foucault has called "universal" intellectuals (see 1980:126-130). In Iceland, these intellectuals played a decisive role in the production and reproduction of power. To this day Icelandic intellectuals that work within the "cultural industry"<sup>113</sup> of purism do not challenge the régime of truth; rather they fight to sustain its hegemony. We on the other hand might hope to take on Foucault's challenge, .i.e.,, to detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony.

We begin our analysis on purity at the turn of the century around the time when Iceland became autonomous (1904) and follow the development through the period of sovereignty in 1918 and into the republic era after 1944. During this period Iceland experienced greater socio-economic changes than ever before. This was the period that saw the beginning and rapid growth of industrialization (starting with mechanization in the fisheries), the founding of labor unions, the change of politics from being exclusively focused on the severance with Denmark, to full fledged party politics. The political parties established in the second decade of the century form the mainstay of Icelandic party politics still to this day, notwithstanding some splinters on both

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<sup>113</sup> By "cultural industry," I refer to the economy of the institutions of production of cultural goods, such as any kind of institutions, services or organizations, that in one way or another earn their living from defending the legitimacy of purity, linguistic or otherwise, see Bourdieu 1991:260 #24.

wings, some of which have come and gone, others chiefly on the left wing, which have stayed.<sup>114</sup> This period witnessed for the first time, a mass migration from the rural areas to the emerging townships on the shore and simultaneously witnessed the disproportional growth of Reykjavík. The capital, which had counted 300 inhabitants at the turn of the nineteenth century, had grown to 6600 in 1901 with the second largest township Akureyri around 1300. With all townships counted, around 20% of the total population lived in "urban" areas in 1901 (Þorleifsson 1973). This pattern was to grow steadily with the simultaneous population growth. By 1930 the rural population had shrunk to 40% of the total, by 1960 it was approximately 15% and by 1990 the rural population had fallen under 10% with two thirds of the urban population living in Reykjavík and the south-west area (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991).

In our analysis we will keep our primary focus on the discourse on language purism but also point to its close relation to racism. We will look at linguistic purism as a political act and look at the central role it has played in the ongoing process of national identity formation. As we discussed before, the construction of "pure" Icelandic *par definition* as a national language is inextricably linked with the consolidation of the Icelandic nation state. The state as we have argued, is usually the primary agent in launching the project of language standardization, not least, because the hegemonic powers that control the state apparatus have a vested interest in the process of linguistic homogenization. We will therefore look at what means the state has used in order to secure its régime of truth, and also when needed, look at non-governmental organizations and agencies that may come into play, which further have strengthened the process of homogenization.

As argued before, language standardization or imposition of legitimate language is in fact

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<sup>114</sup> This is the era that saw the birth of The Conservative Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkur), representing the new industrialists (fishing industry and manufacturers), businessmen and workers. This party has always been the largest party in Iceland (support ranging from 25%-40%). Other parties dating back to this time are The Progressive Party (Center Framsóknarflokkur) representing farmers, historically ranked second or third in terms of seats in the Althing. Third party, is The People's Party (Social Democrats or Alþýðuflokkur). A Communist Party was formed in 1930 and then

legitimization of authority and plays a decisive role in marking an individual's place in the socio-economic arena. As the standard ranks highest in terms of value, the further away from the standard one's linguistic capital is, the lesser value it has, and concomitantly the lesser opportunities for acquisition within the social economy.

After this introduction, we will begin our discussion by looking more closely at Bourdieu's theory of language and symbolic power, and discuss his notions on linguistic capital and censorship. Then we will direct our attention to Iceland and look first at the role of social movements - chiefly The Youth Movement - in the production of the symbolic domination of "pure" Icelandic. Then we look at the public education system and how purism was established there from the beginning. The purist ideas of Dr. Guðmundur Finnbogason, the author of the first law on public education, had immeasurable impact on the development of purism, not only in his lifetime but way beyond that. We will devote one section to discuss his ideas. Our focus is then directed towards main characteristics of purism in the republic era. From there we will focus on the main institutions within the cultural industry of purism, examine their role, their goals and main targets.

## **II. The Production of Symbolic Power and Linguistic Capital**

Imposition of a standard language or legitimate language is, as already noted, an imposition of a semi-artificial language. As Bourdieu has argued, it is not that legitimate language contains in itself the power to ensure its existence whether in time or space. The only way to secure the permanence of the legitimate language is through a process of continuous creation. This process occurs "through the unceasing struggles between the different authorities who compete within the field of specialized production for the monopolistic power to impose the

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merged with a newly formed Socialist Party in 1938, which later was to change into The People Alliance (Broddason &

legitimate mode of expression." (1991:58) The struggle for linguistic authority is a continuous game for recognition of authority, says Bourdieu,

It is not a question of the symbolic power which writers, grammarians or teachers may exert over the language in their personal capacity, and which is no doubt much less than the power that they can exert over culture., ..Rather, it is a question of the contribution they make, independently of any intentional pursuit of distinction, to the production, consecration and imposition of a distinct and distinctive language. In their collective labor which is pursued through the struggles....., writers - more or less authorized authors - have to reckon with the grammarians, who hold monopoly of the consecration and canonization of legitimate writers and writing. They play their part in constructing the legitimate language by selecting, from among the products on offer, those which seem to them worthy of being consecrated and incorporated into the legitimate competence through educational inculcation, subjecting them, for this purpose, to a process of normalization and codification intended to render them consciously assimilable and therefore easily reproducible. *The grammarians, who,.. take upon themselves the power to set up and impose norms, tend to consecrate and codify a particular use of language by rationalizing it and 'giving reason' to it. In so doing they help to determine the value which the linguistic products of the different users of the language will receive in the different markets - particularly those who are most subject to their control, such as the educational market - by delimiting the universe of acceptable pronunciation, words and expressions, and fixing a language censored and purged of all popular usages, particularly the most recent ones.* (1991: 58-59 italics mine)

In the following sections we will analyze the role of Icelandic grammarians and other important actors who by the virtue of their "expertise" of the "language" were granted the power to create and ever since recreate legitimate Icelandic, i.e., "pure" Icelandic. One of the by-products of the symbolic dominance of the legitimate language is the devaluation of the linguistic capital of the dominated classes or of those who do not possess the mastering of the legitimate language. This devaluation is based upon two notions that *par definition* characterizes linguistic excellence. These are the notions of distinction and correctness, which are running themes in Icelandic language purism. The construction of the notion of an "original" language, is actually achieved, "by resorting to derivations whose common principle is that of a deviation from the most frequent, i.e., 'common,' 'ordinary,' 'vulgar' usages." Value for what is assumed correct and

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Grimsson 1982).

distinct, "always arises from deviation, *deliberate or not*, with respect to the most widespread usage, 'commonplaces', 'ordinary sentiments', 'trivial phrases', 'vulgar' expressions." etc.,. (1991:60) The notions of distinction and correctness, whether this language is called "refined," "sophisticated," "eloquent," "articulate," contains a negative reference to "common," "everyday," "popular" language and also to "sloppy," "loose," "inarticulate," "ugly," "bad," "contaminated," and "gibberish," to select a few of the favorite adjectives used by Icelandic grammarians. The connotations of distinction and correctness, the hallmarks of legitimate language, form an opposition against what is considered "vulgar," "gibberish," "ugly," which can also be seen as an opposition between rare and common. Moreover they can be seen as an opposition between what is "tense" or sustained and on the other hand "relaxed" or loose. "It is as if the principle behind the ranking of class languages" says Bourdieu, "were nothing other than the degree of *control* they manifested and the intensity of the *correctness* they presupposed." (ibid.) The perpetuation of the symbolic dominance of the legitimate language, can only be sustained by permanent effort to correction. This task falls to specific institutions designed for this purpose, the Icelandic Language Council, The Language Cultivation Fund, The Icelandic Language Institution, to name a few of those institutions we will be looking at. In addition to these institutions specific individuals, grammarians, teachers and other "experts" play an important role in the permanent effort of correction. The education system produces its own need for services and own products, (labor and instruments of correction) and by doing so forms a part of the culture industry. We will look more closely at this industry shortly.

We discussed, the notion of linguistic capital before and argued that the market fixed the price for linguistic product, i.e., linguistic production is inevitably affected by the anticipation of the market sanctions. Bourdieu argues that, in the case of symbolic production, the market exercises constraints, through the anticipation of profit. Profit in turn, "naturally takes on the form of an anticipated *censorship*, of a self-censorship, which determines not only the manner of

saying, that is, the choice of language - 'code switching' in situations of bilingualism - or the 'level' of language *but also what will be possible or not possible to say.*" (1991:77 italics mine) This notion of  *censorship*, of a self-censorship, is of uttermost importance for our discussion as it enables us identify one of the strongest aspects of the social control mechanisms embedded in the permanent process of correctness, or in other words the permanent production and reproduction of legitimate language, i.e., of power. We will now turn to back to Iceland, beginning at the turn of the century.

### **III. The Impact of Social Movements: The Youth Movement of Iceland**

The process of Icelandic nation making, hence the discourse on purity, took place on many different levels and involves the input of individuals/agents and social organizations or movements. Aside from the political parties of the time, various kinds of social movements of one kind or another had emerged such as, farmers associations, trade associations - particularly farmers co-ops - women's association, the temperance movement and the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) to name a few. No social movement however, had as great of an impact in molding people's minds and perspective on life as did the so-called Youth Movement of Iceland, (YMI) a co-ed organization. No other national social organization helped spread the Gospel of purism with the same vigor as did the YMI.

The first and most important objective of the YMI was patriotism. The movement became very popular and grew very fast in both size and numbers and local chapters were found in every commune (hreppur) in the country just few years after the first one emerged. Its motto, All for Iceland reflects their nationalistic orientation. In the words of historians Þorsteinsson and Jónsson:

More than any other type of social movement in the first quarter of the century,

The Youth Movement was the most influential in shaping the minds and perspectives of the young generation particularly in the country side. With meetings, speeches, lectures, temperance, sports activities, and a passionate worshipping of both country and nation, the people were egged on: the flag issue, the contract case [between Denmark and Iceland] and proper language use, forestation, and just about whatever was necessary in order to encourage the nation and the country. (1991:343)

The Youth Movement had enormous effect in carrying out and implementing the national program. Originating in the Folk School Movement in Denmark, the idea was brought to Iceland via Norway shortly after 1900 and spread over the entire country in a very short time. The incentive for the establishment, according to the pioneers, was to improve people's lives, invigorate patriotism and increase their social consciousness.<sup>115</sup>

The Icelandic National Association of The Youth Movement was established in 1907 a year after the first local society appeared. While very active in the rural areas, the Youth Movement was also important in the new emerging towns on the shore, thus playing an important part in the massive social transformation of the time. The number of societies grew very fast and in two years 60 societies had already been established, soon to be found in almost every commune in the country. The YMI, as the name indicates recruited young people, aged 14-35, after age 35 membership could be maintained, albeit without duties.

One of the most efficient ways to reach out to as many people as possible was through lecturing and became one of the most popular methods of spreading the spirit of the Youth Movement. Pioneer Guðmundur Hjaltason toured the country for nine years, receiving as many as 100-150 guests in little coastal villages counting no more than 250 people at the time. His most

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<sup>115</sup> These ideas were borrowed on the one hand from the popular high-schools (lýðháskólar) established by the Danish minister Johann Grundtvig and on the other from the growth in youth movements, which had been under way in the other Nordic countries. Some of the Icelandic pioneers had attended the popular high schools and participated for years in youth movements in Denmark and Norway. In the spirit of the Danish popular high schools the youth societies emphasized the Christian values of faith, hope and love and preached religious tolerance. They also emphasized the importance of education, where the teachings should be in the folk vernacular as opposed to Latin, thus appealing to a much broader group than just the civil servants to be. In his emphasis on the importance of increasing peoples knowledge of the cultural legacy of Denmark and the other Nordic countries, Grundtvig became very fond of the old Icelandic literature and made attempts to compare Christian ideology and Nordic mythology (Magnúsdóttir, 1997).

popular lecture was titled "Patriotic loyalty and ideals." In the patriotic spirit, the pioneers of the movement anticipated the resurrection of the grandeur of the Commonwealth era and intended that societies would foster the leaders of the nation who were expected "to be highly educated in the most practical subjects and thoroughly trained in sports. The Youth Movement should also be the growing field for the purity of the Icelandic language." (From Jóhannes á Borg by Stefán Jónsson 1964:92-93, quoted in Magnúsdóttir 1997:12) One of the ways to instill patriotism was to ignite people's interest in the old Sagas, history and literature. By doing so each Icelander would become more aware of his/her origins and also more proud. In her writings on the Youth Movement, young historian Sesselja G. Magnúsdóttir points out, that under the impact of the Romanticism, knowledge of history as interpreted by the movement only meant knowledge of the Commonwealth era. Colonial times and other less grand epochs from the country's history were systematically avoided. Many of the leading politicians in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s came directly from the Youth Movement, one of them Jónas Jónsson from Hrifla, the author of the History of Iceland Vol. 1, 2 and 3 (Íslandssaga). Jónsson was a leading politician of the Progressive Party (center/farmers party) and later became a minister of Education. The YMI later had very strong affiliations with the Progressive Party (Grímsson 1978, quoted in Sigurðsson 1990).

The Youth Movement emerged at the time when the issue of national independence was at its peak. One of its fundamental assumptions called for a specific attention of the young as the welfare of the nation was assumed to depend on a healthy and well-educated youth. Thus the movement stressed that each individual should try the best they could to seek spiritual and emotional maturity and perfect themselves in every way. Individuals were encouraged to start on themselves even if they were alone. "Start yourself, even if you are alone. To learn, *speak and write correct and beautiful Icelandic and read and learn the poems of our great poets*. Put down

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The Youth Movement in Iceland followed all these ideas and added their own flavor to them.

cabbage at the corner of your garden...., practice sports, hygienic, be kind to the animals." (quoted in Magnúsdóttir 1997:13, italics mine) Individual independence was highly praised and self-respect assumed necessary in order to gain respect for others. It was also assumed that increased self-confidence each individual had for him- or herself, would render itself in more confidence of the nation as a whole. "The goals of The YMI were built on high ideals. With the vigor of an enthusiastic youth, YMI was supposed to transform society and awaken the nation from its century old trance so that it could from now on grow and prosper as an educated and a mature nation, full of energy which would work towards All for Iceland." (ibid.)

The spirit of the YMI is reflected in its laws and manifesto. These laws and the manifesto were standardized for the entire country, containing humanistic/moral concerns, as well as concerns on linguistic purism. The third clause reads: To try as best we can to support, maintain and strengthen everything patriotic and purely Icelandic, as long as it is useful and the nation can be proud of it. Specific attention is paid to beautifying and purifying the mother-tongue." (Magnúsdóttir 1997:14) At the time, many assumed that Icelandic was spoiled by foreign influence particularly the language of the towns (Geir Jónsson, 1939).

Respect for the language was considered to be the most patriotic and the most important task of them all. People were encouraged to speak proper and also to correct those who did not. In order to carry out the task of beautification and purification, the YMI used mainly two kinds of methods, stipulated in the manifesto. One of them was - in the words of Ottósson - to point to the "language blemishes and show [by example] something better." (1990:106) Its' members established committees on language blemishes in some of the member societies, which task it was to record all mistakes - grammatical or phonological - as well as foreign words uttered. On occasions, some chapters fashioned a system where comments were made on the speeches of those whose utterances were considered not to be proper. These mistakes were then to be taken up for discussion at the following meeting. The idea was to publish a book containing language

blemishes so that people could see what to avoid in their usage of the Icelandic language, this book however, never saw the light of the day (Magnúsdóttir 1997). What we see at work here, is an implementation of censorship of first degree. The constraints imposed (by the market) upon individual speakers whose linguistic capital fell short of distinctness and correctness, can only be imagined. The impositions of these constraints make a mockery out of the alleged "purity" of the language of the country people, (a notion we encountered in our discussion in chapter 4), as this people were all more or less people of the countryside. At the same time these constraints highlight the semi-artificial quality of "pure" Icelandic. The YMI also encouraged people to participate in collecting words from the common people's vocabulary and even to collect folk tales as an effort to cultivate the language (Ottósson 1990).

The other method used to carry out the cleansing and beautifying of the Icelandic language and the one which became the most popular was to encourage people to read the literature of the Golden Age of the Icelandic language, first and foremost the Icelandic Sagas but also 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist poetry and writings.<sup>116</sup> The YMI interest in modern poetry and language protection was part and parcel of their patriotic agenda. In Iceland as was the case in Norway and other places, poets and writers played a significant role in the independence struggle. Concerns for the Icelandic language and patriotism were already at this time one and the same thing. Lack of concern for language purism was regarded by YMI to reflect lack of concern for the welfare of the nation and the country and their future.

One of the things that the YMI fought for was to strengthen the existing libraries and build new ones. Many libraries were established by the individual member societies. For the members it was not enough that what Icelanders read was written in Icelandic, but the members dared both journalist and writers "to take care in order to protect the mother-tongue in their

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<sup>116</sup> The glorification of the Saga period - Commonwealth period -, is reflected in the names of many of the member chapters that were given names of the old heroes from either the settlement or the Saga period – i.e., the Golden Age of the Icelandic language and history - such as the chapter of The Youth Movement in Svarfaðardalur valley, called after

newspapers, books and publications." (quoted in Magnúsdóttir 1997:37) Readings of novels were discouraged, while readings of the Sagas along with scholarly writings and of course the Scriptures were encouraged. The leaders of YMI took a vigilant interest in language purism and were unafraid to utter their moral opinions. For them all that was foreign posed a threat to the struggle for political independence, foreign words of all kinds and foreign textbooks included. As for most Icelandic nationalists at the time, anything that would disturb the "unity of the nation" was looked at with contempt. In the eyes of the YMI these were linguistic elements assumed to delineate class difference or linguistic elements assumed to be of foreign origin. At the time this contempt for foreign influences - whether in the Icelandic language or society - was by and large aimed at anything Danish. It is however worth pointing out, that the xenophobic contempt was not limited to Danes and Danish influence but can be seen as a part of a much wider xenophobia, present in Icelandic nationalism from the beginning. "The Youth Movement" says Magnúsdóttir, "considered all foreign influence to be a challenge to the struggle for independence, not least foreign influence in the Icelandic language," as for them "the language was intertwined with the concept of the nation." (1997:31) This idea was not confined to the YMI: In fact, this idea became a hallmark of the purist movement in general. Included in the YMI list of bad influence were some personal names which regarded "unpatriotic" (óþjóðleg) and family names that were considered to fuel arrogance and increase class difference. We will look more closely at the issue of names in chapter five.

In order for individual chapters to become members in the national association of YMI (UMFÍ) they were obliged to sign a contract, where they swore to work in the spirit of Christianity, not to drink alcoholic beverages and work unconditionally for the YMI. These conditions caused quite a conflict, so much so that many individual chapters did not join the national association until years later. Major clashes rose over the stipulation on Christian morals,

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the first settler of the valley Þorsteinn Svörfuður.

the ban of alcohol and the unconditional work obligations.<sup>117</sup> These requirements for membership Magnúsdóttir argues, reflect the paternalism of the old social-structure, where as we encountered in our discussion before, the servants were obliged to be subservient and obey their masters (whether better off farmers or peasants). Many members felt that this paternalism was too akin to the old structure and in conflict with new ideas stressing individual autonomy. Yet, as the old structure crumbled, many moralists felt that without the paternal care, the new emerging free laborers would succumb to loose morals and disorder. As our discussion on purity continues to unfold, this element of paternalism is to this day very visible in Icelandic politics and is also very much a part of the politics of linguistic purism.

The immediate impact of the YMI was enormous all over Iceland and the influence of their teaching, whether on language purism or ideas on work ethics and patriotism in general, shaped every generation for decades to come. The presence of an YMI chapter in almost every commune of the country appeared at a critical time in Iceland's history when the old social structure had worn itself out. The religious fervor of the YMI spirit (Ungmennafélagsandinn) was in perfect accordance with the religious character of the rest of Icelandic nationalism and provided people with a new sense of identity and purpose. The patriotism of the YMI further established nationalism as secular religion in the country. Their impact is better understood when it is kept in mind that availability of other forms of social activities in Iceland was very limited during their flourishing time. From the middle of the eighteenth century the King, inspired by German Pietism had banned all dancing, condemned the singing of ballads or so-called "rímur" and storytelling at night as part of un-Christian behavior. The banning of dances was very effective, leading to their almost total disappearance from public life for generations to come. It was however harder to keep track on activities which were conducted before closed doors, which in turn saved the tradition of

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storytelling. In the Pietist spirit, "all life was supposed to be useful to the glory of God." (Laxness 1961:20) During this era the idea reigned, that anything simply done for pleasure was sinful, thus churchgoing on Sundays was for a long time been about the only "entertainment" for the masses.

When the YMI first emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, there were no theaters, except one in Reykjavík, radio broadcast started only in the 1930s and television in the mid 1960s (see chapter six). This absence of other forms of social activities undoubtedly gave the YMI movement more room to mold the minds of Iceland's youth for decades. The YMI continued to be very active well into the 1960s but their patriotic message had by that time dwindled considerably. The national association is still active (in the late 1990s), but is almost exclusively focused on sports activities. Individual chapters still active in rural areas are in the lead of sports, amateur theaters and other kinds of social activities.

#### **IV. Public Education and Purism**

Language is the orchard of every nation. It is from language that each nation gets its nourishment that enables it to grow and develop. In Iceland it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of a vegetable garden as tropical fruits, like so many other foreign things, have never really thrived here. (Alþýðublaðið 2/29, 1996)

These words, written by two students of the Teachers College of Iceland, in defense of "language cultivation" which is another term for language purism, are followed by lengthy talk for the necessity of "weeding," particularly any "foreign herbs," that could choke the plants in the garden. This quotation was not written in 1906 but in 1996 and exemplifies the dominance of purism within the one and only institution that educates teachers for mandatory education in Iceland. The religious overtone in the "garden" metaphor is interesting.

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<sup>117</sup> Ideas concerning unconditional work obligations (þegnskylduvinnu) intended to impose self-control, self-denial and obedience in order to make good leaders never materialized, as bills ordered to install this by law never passed in the Althing. The YMI work was all voluntary.

Many authors writing on nationalism, such as Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990) have argued for the enormous importance of public education on the formation of national identity. Education in a vernacular further pushes for standardization of the language in use, regarding spelling, grammar and pronunciation. (Education institutions/ universities are likely to be in the forefront of using a standard) Notwithstanding some long lasting arguments over specific issues on spelling, Iceland is here no exception at all (Magnúss 1939). In Iceland, the process of language standardization was institutionalized by the first legislation on public schooling. This in turn actually made purism a mandatory part of the curricula for every child in the nation.

Traditionally education in Iceland has been organized within the public sector and to this day there are very few private education institutions within the school system. Moreover, almost all private schools receive some form of public funding.

Althing passed the first law on public education in Iceland in 1907, stipulating all children from the age of ten to fourteen to mandatory schooling. The homes were responsible for all education to the age of ten. Since 1907, the law on public education has changed three times, first in 1946, then in 1974 and finally in 1995. Each new law has called for increase of compulsory education both in terms of years and hours per school year. The current legislation calls for ten years of mandatory education from six to sixteen years (Magnúss 1939, Þorsteinsson og Jónsson 1991, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 1998).

The major change brought on by the law of 1995 was in the form of decentralization both in regard to responsibilities and decision-making. As of 1995 local municipalities are responsible for the construction and operation of pre-schools, primary and lower secondary schools. Parents pay fee for their children attending pre-schools. Compulsory education (primary and lower secondary) including textbooks and material is completely free of charge and is entirely funded by the state. Secondary schools and other schools at higher education levels are funded by the

state but at these levels only tuition is free, students have to pay for textbooks.

In we looking back, the law of 1907 was the result of developments, which had been in the making for decades. At the turn of the century no real legislation on children's education existed but legal decrees on the issue mirrored the emphasis of the homes/households in basic instruction. Ever since the early sixteenth century individual households were made responsible for teaching children, not the essentials of Icelandic purism but those of Christianity. The oldest statutes on public instruction mandated ministers to keep track of this knowledge in every household in the country (at this time the church had been subsumed under the king/state). A decree from the king in 1790 stipulated all ministers to make sure that no child could be confirmed if she/he was not literate. Ministers violating the law were subject to monetary fines. Confirmation became mandatory for all children, thus, all children had to learn how to read well enough to be able to read parts of the Scriptures necessary for the confirmation.<sup>118 119</sup> For the best part of the nineteenth century the only statute concerning children's instruction was the reading instruction given in their homes preparing them for their confirmation. This remained the case until Althing in 1879 passed a legislation calling for mandatory instruction in writing and mathematics. The home instruction was the legitimate and accepted order of children's education until the legislation on public education in 1907 (Jóhannesson 1984; Magnúss 1939; Þorleifsson 1973). Until the 1870s "the number of elementary schools could be counted on one's fingers" and those were all funded by private contributions (Þorleifsson 1973:107). At the end of the nineteenth century nearly fifty schools had risen around the country all of which received some financial support from the country's budget.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> In the cases of mental disabilities individuals could be exempted by the bishop of The National Church.

<sup>119</sup> The legalization of mandatory confirmation, first stipulated in 1736, was without a doubt of extreme importance in improving the public literacy in the country (Magnúss 1939).

<sup>120</sup> In the late nineteenth century several attempts were made by individual congressmen to modernize education and transfer its supervision from the church and its ministers over to the state and schools. These attempts did not bring any

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is interesting to note that two of the most influential non-partisan figures to shape both the public opinion on the matter as well as the legislation itself, were both instrumental agents of purism. These were Einar H. Kvaran (1859-1938) editor and author and Guðmundur Finnbogason Ph.D. (1873-1944) who was the sole author of the law of public education of 1907. While it is perhaps hard to measure with any accuracy the impact of specific individuals on Icelandic purism, Finnbogason without a doubt ranks as one of the most important figures in the twentieth century (B. Jónsson 1976).

In 1901, the 28 year old Finnbogason sent a petition to Althing asking for a grant to examine the level of public education in the other Nordic countries, Germany, France and elsewhere. Finnbogason's letter to Althing "clearly reflect his beliefs that a nation's education is its key to progress and liberty and for that he was willing to work extensively," states Professor Ólafur H. Jóhannsson at the Teachers College of Iceland, in a recent article (1997:18). The Althing responded favorably to his request and Finnbogason was able to conduct his comparative study on education abroad and then to examine the level of educational affairs in Iceland as well. The first law on public education in the country is thus based upon his research. Jóhannsson claims that Finnbogason had himself intended to have more impact in forming the educational affairs of the Icelandic nation than he actually did. Although he did not get the formal office heading educational affairs, his influence was great nevertheless. The report on his Icelandic research *Skýrsla um fræðslu barna og unglunga veturinn 1903-1904* (Report on the

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results. The issue on public education stirred great controversy in the Althing. A split between supporters of changes and those who would hold on to the home teaching reflected a growing mismatch between the increasing urban clusters around the coast and the rural areas. The interests of those groups were at odds. There were two main reasons standing in the way for public education in the country at the turn of the century says Gunnar M. Magnúss the author of *The History of Public Education (Saga Alþýðufræðslunnar)*. One of them was the disbelief that the nation could finance the expanded cost of increased education. "The other reason" he says, "was nationalistic. Men argued that public culture stood on an old foundation, that it would not be improved by new schools because the Icelandic nation was better educated than the other Nordic nations. Some thought that Icelanders could be very proud of their public education." (1939:107) The issue was tossed around in the Althing for years but growing numbers of congressmen supported by various organizations such as the newly founded National Teachers Society argued for the importance of mandatory public education.

education/instruction of children and teenagers -winter 1903-1904) was published in 1905. Based on his comparative research abroad, Finnbogason's *Lýðmenntun* (*Public Education*) (1903) is the work that has had the greatest direct impact on public education in the country.<sup>121</sup> In the words of professor Jóhannsson, *Lýðmenntun*, "became the banner of public education in Iceland." In this work argues Jóhannsson, Finnbogason "puts forward a comprehensive and profound education plans, which includes the objects and the content of education and the methods of public schooling. Propositions on the general structure of the school system are directed towards bolstering the education of Icelanders and thus lay the foundation for the cultural and the economic independence of this minuscule nation" (1994:18).

What kind of ideas on *language* and language purism does, Finnbogason present in his influential work? In the opening of a chapter he calls *Móðurmál*, (*Mother tongue*) he argues that the language is the life source of the nation – (lífæð þjóðernis).

Under one of the roots of Yggdrasil<sup>122</sup> was a well containing sagacity and human wisdom. The one who drank of the well became full of wisdom. Under the roots of the heart of each nation is such a well; that is the *language*, the life source of the nation. In it one can hear the heartbeat of the nation.... In the language is embedded all the experience of the nation: its wisdom, knowledge and all passions. ...It is the major source of education and the central medium for our thoughts. (Finnbogason 1903/1994:68)

He argues that knowledge of the language entails the ability to understand it and be able to speak it and write it. This is necessary for every person. He then talks at great length on reading and the object of reading instructions which is the key to the spiritual and intellectual treasure of the nation. On grammar he argues for the necessity of proper syntax, warns against language change and then speaks of the importance of standardized spelling. Finally he suggests that the mother tongue should,

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<sup>121</sup> *Lýðmenntun* was republished for the first time by The Research Institute of the Icelandic Teachers' College in 1994.

Be the apple of the eye of all schools from the first grade through the Latin School. Language is the road to knowledge and the emotional life of the nation. ....We Icelanders own such a beautiful language, we must not neglect it or tarnish it with foreign awkwardness, or let laziness or ignorance prevent us from using our own powerful and beautiful words. Let us teach our youth to love our "good, soft and rich mother tongue" let us teach them to use it in the service of high ideals. Then it will be proven that in its strings reside the sounds that can awaken the dead and those who sleep. (Finnbogason 1903/1994:77)

*Lýðmenntun* received a lot of praise and the chapter "mother-tongue" - about 10 pages – appeared in a wide spread newspaper *Norðurland* couple of months before the book was actually published. The editor of *Norðurland* was no one else but the essayist and the politician Einar H. Kvaran.<sup>123</sup>

In his report on the status of public instruction in the country Finnbogason deplors the status of Icelandic teaching and says that "foreign nations generally put great emphasis on the cultivation of the mother-tongue in the children's schools. These nations know that language is the firmest cornerstone of patriotism. To neglect the language as we have done is a sin that will seek revenge." (1905:53-53) In comments following the bill that Finnbogason wrote for the Althing, he argues strongly for an increased instruction in Icelandic and says amongst other things: "the mother-tongue is put at the top [of education] because it should be the main subject of all children schools." In regards to writers and poets he has this to say: "I insist amongst other things that the children who read *Gunnarshólmi*<sup>124</sup> will be informed about who Jónas

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<sup>122</sup> In Nordic mythology Yggdrasill is the tree at the center of the world, the most sacred place of the gods. The well underneath Yggdrasill is Urðarbrunnur. This idea that sacred trees control the welfare and fortune of countries and nations, is a common theme in many mythologies see for example Hávamál og Völuspá (Svart á Hvítu 1987).

<sup>123</sup> Kvaran had great interest in the education issue and wrote extensively on the importance of mandatory public education for children if the nation was to stand a chance in to progress (Magnúss 1939:109-110). Mr. Kvaran and Dr. Finnbogason were to work together in the first advisory committee on peoples' names, see chapter five. Shortly after the book was out, one of the most beloved ministers and poets – the author of the national anthem - Matthías Jochumsson, wrote a literary critique on Finnbogason's *Lýðmenntun*, while mostly praising the work he disagreed wholly with the author on the issue on foreign language teaching. Finnbogason did not think that any other language than Icelandic should be taught in the Public Schools whereas Jochumsson, argued that foreign language teaching was absolutely necessary for a small state like Iceland. Jochumsson also argued that by learning other languages there was a chance of holding back the emerging national conceitedness. Foreign languages and literature would be the best tools to dissolve that kind of home-grown prejudice (quoted in Baldur Jónsson 1976).

Hallgrímsson was"....., "that the children learn poetry by heart, ignites their esthetical sense and cognition for the language. Our patriotic poems and our poems about men from our history should kindle love for the country..."(*Althingistiðindi* 1905 A: 275-276.<sup>125</sup>

The first article of the law on public education from 1907 echoes these sentiments and states that, each child of the age of 14 should know how:

to read the mother tongue in a clear and articulate manner, to be able to recite what it just read; to be able to write on issues, which are familiar to them mostly without spelling mistakes or incorrect grammar. The child shall know something about our most important men, particularly those of the most recent centuries; to know by heart some Icelandic poetry particularly the patriotic poetry (*ættjarðarljóð*), historical poems; to be able to recite their content in prose. (Magnúss, 1939:129)

Guðmundur Finnbogason, was the author of the first reading book for children and youth, called *Lesbók handa börnum og unglíngum* (Reading Book for Children and Teenagers), published after the new law came into effect. This book was taught for years within the public education system, to be replaced in the 1930s by the reading books of Sigurður Nordal another important intellectual, and "The Authority of the Sagas" for the best part of the twentieth century. Other staunch purists contributed greatly in the publication of other textbooks used in the first years of legal public education and by doing so set the course for the decades to come (Ottósson 1990).

The major changes in Icelandic public education came first in 1946, when compulsory education was extended from four to seven years and then again in 1974, when it was extended from seven to ten years. The current law calls for mandatory education, starting at age six and finishing at age sixteen. A recent report from the Ministry of Education states, "a fundamental principle of Icelandic education is that everyone should have equal opportunity to acquire an

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<sup>124</sup> The poem Gunnarshólmi by Hallgrímsson, is a praise of the past glory of Iceland and simultaneously a cry to his contemporary Icelanders to live up the deeds and the glory of their forefathers.

education, irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, religion, possible handicap, cultural or social background." (1998:2. This report was issued both in Icelandic as well as English) Yet a few paragraphs later it states: "[t]he main purpose of the compulsory schooling (ages six to sixteen years) is to prepare pupils for life and work in a continuously developing, democratic society. The organization of the school as well as its work shall, therefore, be guided by tolerance, Christian values and democratic co-operation." (ibid.)

The Ministry of Education issues the National Curriculum Guidelines for both compulsory and secondary education. These national guidelines are intended to "provide the detailed objectives necessary to implement the law and offer direction as to how they should be carried out in practice." (ibid. 1998:5) In looking specifically at what *Aðalnámskrá Grunnskóla* (*The National Curriculum Guidelines*) says about the teaching of Icelandic, the impact of Finnbogason's ideas is very clear. The first goal of Icelandic teaching it says, "should be for students: to attain a mastering of the primary parts of the language, i.e.,, spoken language, listening, reading and writing as their maturity allows *and to cultivate respect for the language* (1989:61 italics mine). In the same chapter in a section titled *Skýringar* (*Explanations*) one is informed that the,

The role of the school is on the one hand to continue to foster language learning in co-operation with the homes and on the other to mold ongoing mother-tongue learning. In the school work emphasis must be put on enabling pupils to acquire basic mastering of the language in all kinds of situations, cultivate the language as a social tool of communication and cultivate positive attitude towards language and cultural heritage.

The Icelandic language is the common property of the nation. Icelanders have made it a goal to ensure unbroken continuity of the language from generation to generation, particularly by ensuring that the relationship between living language and literature from the beginning of age of writing (12<sup>th</sup> century) remains unbroken. Thus cultivation, fortification and preservation ought to be observed along with avoidance of too much changes of the language structure. Here the notion of fortifying the language pertains particularly to enriching vocabulary so

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<sup>125</sup> Guðmundur Finnbogason: *Lesbók handa börnum og unglíngum* (3 bindi. Útg. 1907-1910).

it will be possible to speak and write about whatever matter in Icelandic and moreover, to improve knowledge in the treatment of the language and the understanding of its value. The schools ought to encourage: correct, articulate and rich language. (ibid. 1989:62)

The National Guideline further explains that "correct" language is that language which is in accordance with language tradition. Teachers are specifically reminded that language traditions are not individually based, and that they are subject to change over time. However, they are reminded that dialectical differences are minor in Icelandic and that language changes have been relatively minor. "It is an asset that the Icelandic vocabulary is of similar root, dialectical differences minor and language changes inconsiderable. It is preferable, that the language will hold on to these characteristics, and vigilant efforts taken against new language forms." (ibid.) We will resume our discussion of the public school system when we look at specific targets of purism, and how they have been carried out within the education system.

## **V. Finnbogason's Purism: Pure Language, Pure Nation Pure Genes**

Guðmundur Finnbogason was one of the giants of linguistic purism of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At his death one of his colleagues and contemporaries said that "his job was twofold: he wanted to pull out of the field of the Icelandic language the entire weed by its roots and then put down new plants." (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1944 *Skirnir*, quoted in B. Jónsson 1976:8) Interestingly we encounter the garden metaphor again here.

According to, Hugur ræður hálfri sjón (Mind Governs Most Seeing), a publication from 1997 on the scientific works of Dr. Finnbogason, he is honored by being "perhaps the very last Icelandic encyclopedist. Literature, politics, philosophy, social sciences, culture, material culture, history, ethics, urban development, esthetics, pedagogy, education, language purism, neologism, scientific management, music, poetry and writing; all these subjects and more were

of interest to Finnbogason.” (Hauksson 1997:11)

Finnbogason was one of the most learned men of Iceland in his time and also one of the most prolific writers in the country in the first half of the century. He was however, by no means the only linguistic purist of his time. When he was growing up in the last decades of the nineteenth century "language purism had become like any other patriotic issue of progress" and all Icelandic intellectuals joined the school of purism, says Baldur Jónsson (1976:6) the author of Mályrkja Guðmundar Finnbogasonar (The Language Cultivation of Guðmundur Finnbogason).<sup>126</sup> There was no opposition against purism, only a difference in terms of intensity of the preaching of the gospel. Finnbogason was most definitely one of the most orthodox purists both in the sense that his ideas of purism went further than most others'. Moreover, and of no less interest for our discussion on purism, he was one of the leading voices in Iceland at the time, preaching the "importance" of racial purity for the well being of the nation and the future of the Icelandic culture. Given the immense impact of his ideas on the school system and on Icelandic purism in general it is relevant to look briefly at his biography, situate him intellectually and then look at some of his works.

Born in 1873, Guðmundur Finnbogason was of poor origin but was through help given an opportunity to educate him. After graduating from the Latin school in Reykjavík he went to Copenhagen where he received a Master's degree in philosophy and psychology in 1901. He later studied philosophy in France, Germany and in Copenhagen where he received his Doctoral degree in 1911. Finnbogason had several different occupations through his life. For some years he was a professor of psychology at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík and for a while the Rector (dean) of that same institution. He was also an archivist at The National Archives (Landsbókasafn) and later headed that institution for almost twenty years.<sup>127</sup> In addition to his

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<sup>126</sup> Jónsson is the current director of the Icelandic Language Institute.

formal offices he was a board member on several advisory committees on education and also on several important literary boards. Finnbogason was an extremely industrious writer, wrote numbers of books and hundreds of articles along with translations of both fiction and scholarly work.<sup>128</sup> He frequently wrote in newspapers and moreover many of his "scholarly" works appeared in *Skírnir*, which he edited for almost twenty years in total (Jónsson 1976, 1997; Hauksson 1997).

In Hugur ræður hálfri sjón (Mind Governs Most Seeing), he is hailed as the first Icelandic sociologist, his contribution to philosophy praised and last but not least his enormous contribution and impact on the development of the "purity" of the Icelandic language is given great acclaim. The intellectual impact of Finnbogason in Iceland is beyond measure. He was a pioneer in introducing various scientific ideas to his fellow countrymen. Interestingly the scientific value of some of these ideas, later became the source of great shame in the international scientific community and has since been completely discredited. Here I am referring specifically to his writings on eugenics and other variations of social Darwinism - see more details below. It is only in recent years that Icelandic scholars have criticized the racist element in Finnbogason's purism. A critical analysis of the xenophobic aspect of Finnbogason's purism and Icelandic purism in general are discussed in the work of historian Unnur B. Karlsdóttir (1998) and to a lesser degree, anthropologist Gísli Pálsson (1995) has pointed out the racist element in Finnbogason's writings. Yet, no deliberate actions have been taken on the behalf of the Icelandic scientific community to discard this part of Finnbogason's scholarship. In light of Finnbogason's racist beliefs and their reflections in his works it is hard not to read with ambivalence the praise he and his work receive from contemporary critics. The editor Hugur ræður hálfri sjón (Mind Governs Most), Jóhann Hauksson is blunt in the introduction when he says, "[i]t is my rock-solid conviction that

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<sup>127</sup> This institution hosted the all the old manuscripts of the Sagas in Iceland at the time. In short, he guarded the "treasure of the nation."

Guðmundur Finnbogason is still grossly underestimated not only by his contemporaries but also by later scholars." (1997:5)

As a sociologist Finnbogason is intellectually situated at the center of the Chicago school says sociologist Þórólfur Þórlindsson (1997). His ideas on the social origin of self-consciousness introduced in his Hugur og Heimur (Mind and World) 1912 resemble closely the ideas of George H. Mead, although it cannot be deduced from his work that he knew of Mead's ideas. In this work Finnbogason argues; that compassionate understanding lies at the heart of social interaction and for him represents ascribed human quality acquired through human evolution. However, unlike Mead and strangely so given his relentless obsession with language on the level of national purity, he does not in this work elaborate on the importance of language in social interaction. "He simply assumes," says sociologist Þórlindsson, "that language lies at the foundation of human interaction" (1997:116).<sup>129</sup>

Finnbogason was also the very first to introduce anthropology in Iceland when he in 1924 translated Anthropology by R.R. Marett, a staunch evolutionist, who is now remembered as "one of the last of the armchair anthropologists." (Kuper 1983:8)<sup>130</sup> Works on racial classification and other issues on social Darwinism were also part of Finnbogason's translations.<sup>131</sup> Obviously Finnbogason's wide interests and writings were bound to touch various groups of people well beyond the minuscule community of Icelandic intellectuals at the time.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Mark Twain, Leo Tolstoy, Selma Lagerlöf and P.G Woodhouse were amongst those literary figures he translated.

<sup>129</sup> Both Finnbogason as well as Mead were under the influence of evolutionism and the pragmatism of William James. Moreover, both Finnbogason and Mead were affected by French philosopher Henri Bergson and were also both under strong influence of George Simmel. Finnbogason translated some of Simmel's work into Icelandic. Sociologist Þórólfur Þórlindsson, argues that Finnbogason actually influenced Jean Piaget's ideas on the importance of practical training and they "both built their ideas on a common pragmatism, the ideas of [philosopher] Bergson. Both argue for a specific type of evolutionism in the spirit of Darwin." 1997:116)<sup>129</sup>

<sup>130</sup> One of his Finnbogason's translations was also in anthropology this time On Social Anthropology by J. Rumney in 1941.

<sup>131</sup> These translations are: "Darwinskenningin og framþróunarkenningin" or "Darwin's theory and the evolution theory," by British anthropologist Sir Arthur Keith (Skirnir 1907), and "Greining mannkyns í kynkvíslir" or "The division of the human race into sub-races," by the French scholar Rerné Berthelot (Eimreiðin 1924).

Of specific interest to this dissertation is Finnbogason's interest and writings on the "science" of eugenics and the close relation between his interest in literally cultivating or breeding a "pure" nation and his interest in linguistic purism. This should not come as a surprise as the intellectual genealogy of linguistic purism and the ultimate racism expressed in eugenics is originally of one and the same root (see the previous discussion on romantic nationalism). Whether he is talking about language or about people the approach is the same. There is great emphasis on purity, i.e., keeping the language pure and keeping the nation pure - as shown by examples below.

It is extremely peculiar that in Hugur ræður hálfri sjón, (Mind Governs Most Seeing), a book published as recently as the fall of 1997, Finnbogason's interest in eugenics is only mentioned in passing. Contrary to this recent book I find it necessary, to give his interest in eugenics a closer look, as it bears so closely upon his ideas on Icelandic language purism. In an article called "Mannkynbætur" ("Eugenics"), (published in *Andvari*, the periodical of the Icelandic Patriotic Society 1922), Finnbogason introduces the eugenicist ideas to Icelanders. His discussion is based upon an American publication called *Applied Eugenics* (by Paul Popenoe and Roswell Hill Johnson). In his article Finnbogason goes to great length to convince the reader that all the information is based upon scientific research and supports his argument with endless counts and figures, i.e., "objective data."

In short, the content of "Mannkynbætur" ("Eugenics") is on the one hand to show by "scientific" examples the correlation between genetically inherited intelligence and socio-economic success and on the other to provide social solution that will prevent the poor and

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<sup>132</sup> In line with his interest in the utilitarian and practical aspects of life, it is no wonder that the ideas of scientific management and Taylorism interested Finnbogason. He was the very first to introduce scientific management in Iceland both through his teachings at the newly founded University of Iceland in Reykjavik as well as through his public lectures held on the issue between 1916 and 1924. However, in spite of his enthusiasm he inspired very few employers at the time. In the aforementioned Hugur, Þórir Einarsson says in reference to the dull response Finnbogason attempts received that "by his introduction on the methods of scientific management to improve management and increase productivity Guðmundur Finnbogason showed that he was far ahead his time. His was the voice of the caller from the desert, the prophet in his own country." (Einarsson 1997:60)

morally inferior, as he calls it, from increasing in numbers. He is concerned that the most intelligent people do not increase in as great numbers as the less intelligent people do. This “will lead into the wrong direction” says Finnbogason and

The race will be harmed. In the past, nature itself performed eugenics. The least able ones died, only the strongest lived and for the longest time men did little to prevent this natural selection or used the same harsh method themselves, practiced infanticide, killed criminals, castrated vagrants, neglected madmen and idiots so that these underlings of society could not increase their number. Now [in contrast] humanism, medicine and all kinds of pedagogic institutions do their part to maintain this development. Criminals, madmen, idiots and all kinds of troublemakers do now "increase like rabbits" and become an ever increasing burden on societies. (1922:198)

He then goes to show how costly in financial terms it is for the society to sustain these undesirable individuals and presents some figures from Britain and the US to support his argument. In order to prevent this undesirable development from continuing, Finnbogason proposed two solutions. First of all he maintains that those of the "worst families," as he calls it, will be prevented from increasing in numbers and those of the best families will be supported so that they can have as many children as possible. For the former group he suggests, that in the worst cases they'll be sterilized and on other occasions he suggests that "proper measures" be taken so that they will not be able to increase. This is all to prevent the unfavorable genetic characteristic to be reproduced. For the latter group he says many things can be done. First and last it is important to change the way people think.

Legislation and the governing of society can also do a lot for eugenics directly and indirectly and it [actually] does much to harm the race by its ignorance. It for example, harms the race if the earnings of those who do intellectual work are so bad that they are forced to marry late and thus restrict the number of their children because of poverty. It will harm the race if all the slothful would get the same salaries as the most accomplished and would thus be given the same opportunity to support their families. It harms the race if all kinds of trash less intelligent than the ones that are here now will immigrate into the country. This is a problem that faces the United States for example" (ibid. 201). ... "In short it is important that those who have the greatest power when it comes to legislation and the organizing of the society learn to value the importance of estimating each

legislature and organization depending on whether it supports eugenics or damages the race. If the nature of the lineage (family) is poisoned, the very source of the qualities that all progress streams from will be poisoned. (ibid. p. 201-202)

In addition to this, Finnbogason is worried that if the most intelligent people (particularly scientists and artists) do not get the opportunity to blossom in the country, they will be doomed to either live in celibacy or move to other countries. "A nation that cannot afford to have famous sons, cannot afford to live." (ibid. 203)

Let us not forget that the man speaking is one of the most influential thinkers behind Icelandic twentieth century purism. He goes on to ask, "what has this to do with us Icelanders?" And now he echoes a sentiment very popular to this day: "We are perhaps better off than many other nations. It can hardly be denied that the original race was exceptionally good. It has since then hardly been mixed with any foreign blood." (ibid. 202) Finnbogason then refers to another book of his Country and People/Nation where he showed,

how the hardship of thousand years did in fact improve the breed/nation rather than leave it too inbred. If that will - also - be the conclusion after a more thorough research then it gives us the responsibility to stand a vigilant guard over the assets that the nation might reside over so that they will not be damaged. *Here the first and last duty is to prevent any kind of foreign riffraff from moving in here and mix blood with the nation.* In this matter we must not be fooled by the glitter of Mammon preachers that only look at the temporary gains and forsake the future. (1922:202 italics mine)

In his book Land og þjóð (Country and People/Nation) (first published in 1921), Finnbogason supports his argument that the hardship endured through the thousand years of settlement in Iceland had "improved the nation," (i.e., the "stock"/"race"). Rightly arguing that of all the misfortunes that plagued Icelanders in the past, famines were the costliest in terms of lives. He then says that in famines,

the largest number of those who died were those who lacked dynamism, thriftiness and self-respect. And even if poverty can stem from other things than lack of these attributes, its lack is more often than not the cause. There is hardly any doubt either, that those who survived the famines and other catastrophes

were stronger than the others that died from it were. The famines have thus killed disproportionately those who were of little strength and at the same time their share in the genetic make-up of the nation diminished. One can thus say about the Icelandic nation, that it has been improved by thousand [years of] hardships. (1921/1969:153-154)

The main content of Country and People/Nation is about the influence of climate and nature on the "character of the nation". The book was republished at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Icelandic republic in 1969. In an epilogue to the book praising Finnbogason, geologist Sigurður Þórarinnsson<sup>133</sup> a leading national figure at the time, points out that some of the material presented in the book "will still cause a lot of controversy among scientists, as it is very hard to support some of the books statements with valid scientific proof. It would for example be very difficult to prove what the author argues about the quality of the race that settled here, and the idea of famines improving the pedigree carries mixed messages/" (1969:167) Yet in spite of these dubious statements, Mr. Þórarinnsson is full of praise for this "intelligent, widely read and energetic cultural protagonist" whom he thinks the youth of the nation should know better. And he admires Finnbogason's patriotism and his relentless attempts to encourage people to live in such a way that "the nation will get stronger from living with the country and the country from the people and the culture from both."(ibid. 168)

In his monumental work Íslendingar nokkur drög að þjóðarlýsingu (Icelanders, sketches of a national character description) (1933), Finnbogason elaborates further his ideas about the Icelandic nation, its genetic/racial "qualities," and its determining effects for the culture. "This book," argues aforementioned sociologist Þórólfur Þórlindsson, is "like a textbook in sociology, where the author attempts to extract the characteristics of Icelanders, our culture, the importance of the Icelandic language, religion etc. "(Þórlindsson 1997:117) The adoration in Þórlindsson's words and his uncritical view of Finnbogason's ideas on the "naturalness" of the Icelandic "national character" are quite curious in the year 1997.

In Íslendingar (Icelanders) Finnbogason, in line with the national myth - discussed in chapter three - supports the idea of the "superior racial quality" of the first settlers of Iceland. Their physical fitness, unequaled intelligence, remarkable courage, thirst for knowledge, gifts for poetry and writing along with healthy doses of pride, according to Finnbogason count for an almost unmatched superiority. He goes at length to show that the settlers were almost 80% of Norwegian stock but that the remaining 20% came from the British Isles. Surprisingly given his obsession with "racial purity" -which in his case is at times identical with "national purity" - he does not think that a "racial mix" between the "original Norwegian stock" and the "Celtic stock" rendered "lesser breed" and/or diminished qualities.<sup>134</sup> Quite the contrary, but in line with his contemporary Jón Aðils, this "racial mix" is actually the "scientific" (read genetic) explanation behind the supreme intelligence of the Icelanders.<sup>135</sup> The argument of the "mixed" origins of Icelanders is supported by reference to Landnámabók (Book of Settlement) and to blood research on Icelanders, Norwegians, Scots and Englishmen. In addition, the unprecedented and detailed physical measures and analysis of Icelanders, conducted by his namesake and a leading physician Hannesson in the early 1920s, validate his argument, Finnbogason asserts.<sup>136</sup> These kind physical

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<sup>133</sup> Sigurður Þórarinnsson was a well known leftist and a staunch nationalist (check references).

<sup>134</sup> The stock-in-trade of racist ideology is the idea that 'interbreeding' and crossing between "races" will lead to degeneration of the stock (Montagu 1974).

<sup>135</sup> Finnbogason quotes a British scholar William MacDougal who had argued that mixing of different races i.e., any mixing between the four races of the world rendered a lesser breed. A mixing of sub-races that belong to the same principal race on the other hand most often generated a mixed breed, which generally is better than the two breeds it comes from[sic!] (1933:369). Finnbogason renders his ideas more authenticity by using a distinguished foreign scholar to support his argument.

<sup>136</sup> Finnbogason's namesake physician Guðmundur Hannesson also wrote on issues related to eugenics. Hannesson conducted a fairly detailed research on the physical form of Icelanders all aiming at proving the "purity" of their racial origins. In his article, "The Nordic Race" he makes an extraordinary effort to argue for the superior qualities of the "Nordic race" of which Icelanders represent in almost a "pure" state. Not only was the "Nordic race" the most intelligent, creative and courageous, born to rule, physically graceful etc. etc., *ad nauseum*, but as ludicrous as it may sound, according to Hannesson. He also makes an effort showing that all the great achievements, and in fact all the great 'civilizations' of the West were indeed ruled by people who were descendent of the "Nordic race." From the ancient Sumers, to the Troys, the Macedonians, the ancient Greeks, the rulers of the Roman Empire and finally the great masterpieces of the Renaissance were all works of individuals who supposedly were part of the "Nordic race." He also makes a point in arguing for the resemblance of the old sagas and the epics of Homer and other ancient Greek poetry. At another place in the article he like Finnbogason, warns against the danger of mixing blood with some "foreign riff raff" as he calls it. The resemblance of Hannesson's ideas, like the ones of Finnbogason to the racial

measures were popular in physical anthropology at the time. Later adopted by the German Nazis and conducted on the Jews, these measures served as "scientific" justification for the Jewish genocide.

As mentioned at the beginning of chapter three, Iceland received the lowest number of Jewish refugees of all European countries before and during the WW II. This reluctance cannot be subscribed to any other reason than racism plain and simple. In spite of serious attempts, mostly by Icelandic leftists and also by a leading physician a woman named Katrín Thoroddsen, to receive Jewish refugees of all ages and Jewish orphaned children, the authorities repeatedly refused to accept them. Moreover, the authorities with Prime Minister Hermann Jónasson (Progressive Party) in charge took action as to deport Jewish refugees who already were in Iceland in 1938 (Bergsson [1995]. 1998).<sup>137</sup> During these critical times it is noteworthy to point

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theories of the Germans Nazis is fearfully close. Hannesson's ideas would perhaps not be worthy of mentioning in the context of this dissertation except for the fact that not only is his namesake Finnbogason in awe of this ideas, but still to this day Hannesson's ideas resonate in a slightly milder form in the national upbringing of Icelanders, see chapter two. (Hannesson 1924:140-163)

<sup>137</sup> Bergsson argues that Iceland had had no specific Jewish policy until the 1930s. Until then Jews were welcome to the country, and some immigrated albeit on a very low scale. These people most of whom were middle class business people coming from Denmark or Norway, experienced no Anti-Semitism in the country and a number of Jewish men married Icelandic women and assimilated. Others came and went mostly because there were no religious services available in the country. Several Jews were influential in establishing businesses in Iceland in the first decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, the industrialization of Icelandic fisheries was partially financed by loans from Jewish owned banks in Denmark and Norway. Furthermore when the Great Depression hit Iceland it was the Jewish owned Hambro Bank in London that secured loans to the Icelandic government at the time and probably saved Iceland from bankruptcy as a result, says Bergsson. In his thesis Bergsson argues that, the most blatant Anti-Semitism came from the right wing and their political organs the *Vísir* daily (later *Dagblaðið-Vísir* or *DV*) the second largest paper in Reykjavík at the time and *Morgunblaðið* daily. *Morgunblaðið* daily took a stand against the Jews, mostly on the basis of anti-Communism, as it was commonplace at the time to blame Jews for the Russian Revolution. Yet their Anti-Semitism was also based upon genetic nationalism as was the blatant racism of the daily *Vísir* who stated, shortly after Kristallnacht in November 1938, that no nation as small as the Icelanders could afford immigration of foreigners and intermixture with other races. "A renown Icelandic scientist has argued that only 50 Jews if embodied into the race could deprive the [Icelandic] nation of its characteristics in 2-3 generations." (*Vísir* November 10, 11, 1938 quoted in Bergsson 1998:23) At this time several Jewish refugees had already been helped to Iceland, mostly by Icelandic Communists but also by the *Para Pacem* a left wing humanitarian organization. The *Vísir* daily condemned the persecutions of the Jews mainly because it feared that it would cause a deluge in Jewish refugees coming to Iceland, to propagate communism. The government the paper argued, "had to take stance against this immigration because of "the sacred duty to protect the Icelandic race, the Aryan and Celtic blood." (ibid.) The *Vísir* daily followed a strict policy concerning the immigration of personas non gratas into Iceland. In May 1939 it stated: "The surveillance of foreigners seems not to be strict enough. The national authorities must diligently preserve this country from allowing the vermin's of foreign wandering scoundrels to settle here." (*Vísir* May 31, 1939 quoted in Bergsson ibid.) The paper did not specify who these "vermin's of wandering scoundrels" were. At the same time as the authorities resisted to accept landless Jews, they had no problems accepting "Aryan" Germans and Nazi collaborators into the country, who were not subject to any visa restrictions from 1933-1939. At that time (April 4, 1939) a new coalition was formed still headed

out that Dr. Finnbogason, published two articles in Berlin one called "Isländische Kunst," the other "Isländische Musik" and another in Lübeck same year called "Zusammenarbeit auf nordischwissenschaftlichem Gebiet." (Cooperation in the Nordic scientific area)<sup>138</sup>

Surprisingly, Guðmundur Finnbogason, not much involved with direct party politics did however, twice run for a seat in the Althing. His first try was before the emergence party politics – before 1918 - and in 1937 he ran again, this time for the Conservatives. He lost both times. In the aforementioned Hugur ræður hálfri sjón (Mind Governs Most Seeing), editor Hauksson situates him at the right wing in politics. Finnbogason's staunch nationalism was however quite in line with the best part of the community of Icelandic intellectuals of the 1920s and the 1930s. The nationalism that reigned in the "Icelandic intellectual community at the time, says literary critique Árni Sigurjónsson, was most pronounced in its excessive love for the culture of the Icelandic Commonwealth era. It did not only appear in its approach to cultural affairs but also in its conservative political approach as well as its support of eugenics." (1986: 35)

We cannot leave Finnbogason without mentioning his vision of the future. In his aforementioned article "Eugenics" he concludes his discussion on the subject by appealing to one of the favorite past-times of Icelanders past and present, namely genealogy. Genealogy records have been kept for hundreds of years.

Let us explain this interest. In this minuscule population, the story goes that everybody is related to everybody else in the fifth or six generation. Anonymity is hard to practice and who is who concerns everybody. In the words of Finnbogason, "genealogy is the oldest living scholarly subject in Iceland and no other nation knows more about their genealogy, than Icelanders do." (1922:203) In Iceland, strangers whether in Finnbogason's day or today never remain total

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by Hermann Jónasson but now with a cabinet that outvoted Jónasson's Anti-Semitic attitudes. While this new cabinet managed to rescue some Jews from being detained, it came too late for all the other Jews (from Germany , Austria and other places) who had tried in vain to seek political refugee in Iceland (Bergsson 1998).

strangers for more than minutes as they've usually either found a friend in common or discovered that they are related by blood. Historically blood ties have been of tremendous importance - there as elsewhere - in securing political and social power. To this day blood ties or family lineage, matters for one's social position and access to power. People are said to be "*ættstór*," i. e., of grand families in terms of high standing and power, or to be "*ættsmár*," i.e., of trivial families in terms of political or social significance. Blood ties are not only socially important, as in terms of nepotism and other forms of networking, but characteristics, good or bad, are widely believed to run in families. Popular belief holds that "*skáldgáfa*" (the gift for writing) for example, runs genetically in families but so do other less glamorous characteristics, such as excessive drinking. These characteristics are not believed to be class based. Some families are believed to be haunted by bad "*ættarfylgjur*" (family followers/stalkers) such as alcoholic drinking or blessed with good ones, such as the "*skáldgáfa*" or other manifestations of "intelligence." It is also important to point out that along with this interest in genealogy, it is a public secret, as the Icelandic saying goes, that a significant number of these genealogies are incorrect, due to the age old practice of "*rangfeðrun*" i.e., "incorrect fathering."<sup>139</sup>

Finnbogason had grand ideas of how to use this interest in genealogy in the service of science. He wanted to use it as the basis for *genetic studies*. So instead of the old tradition of simply tracing names and numbers through generations' back, he argued for the importance of applying other information along with it that would indicate personal aspects such as, "the intellectual or physical nature of each individual. An important project is waiting here for Icelanders. They should be and could be the nation that could lay the broadest and securest basis for the future studies of genetics." (ibid.) Finnbogason then goes on to describe in quite detail

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<sup>138</sup> The first two articles were published by Nordland Fibel, in Berlin 1938 and the third one by Tag seds Nodens also in 1938, quoted in Hauksson 1997.

<sup>139</sup> "Incorrect fathering" is a common theme in Halldór Laxness, novels such as *Independent People* (1935) and *Salka Valka* (1932), *Paradise Reclaimed* (1961) to name a few.

how this could come about. He envisioned a genealogy research institution that had mainly two functions. The first one was to accumulate in one place all information known to day about the genealogy of Icelanders. This information would all be documented, where every individual, past and present would have a card file and all information that might shed any light on his/her personal attributes, mental/intellectual as well as physical would be registered. Secondly, for every individual born after the foundation of this national institution, says Finnbogason, there would be a file containing information on his/her mental and physical attributes and these files would be updated according to rules on regular systematic observations done at appointed times. This information would indicate good and bad personal characteristics and if possible the files would also contain photos and audio samples of the person's voice. This institution would host "genetic scientists that could trace the genetic hereditary of certain qualities and seek information on the nature of certain families. There [in the institution] one could keep track on whether the race was changing for the better or for the worse. The institution would be the mirror reflecting the life of the nation." (ibid.) After his enthusiastic description of his "scientific baby" he expresses serious doubt that his baby will ever see the light of a day, due to the parsimonious attitudes of the Althing of the time. Finnbogason's vision of a genetic research laboratory came into being, albeit much later.

Surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, a scientific institute dedicated to genetic research, not of intellectual attributes but genetically hereditary disease was founded in Iceland in 1996. This research institute called *Íslensk Erfðagreining* (its English counterpart is called *deCode Genetics*), focuses on using the genetically similar gene pool of Icelanders to detect, genetically hereditary diseases by comparing DNA of sick people with the ones of their healthy relatives. Because of the relative isolation and good record keeping of diseases in this century, Iceland provides a unique laboratory for this kind of research. As a private organization deCode

*Genetics* was originally funded by external grants. The research institute has caused one of the greatest controversies in Iceland, amongst politicians, the scientific community but interestingly the public to a lesser degree. Next to the EU debate, fewer issues have caught more attention and controversy in the history of the Icelandic republic. The controversy has not been over the external funding but over a financial governmental support and a bill that was passed by the Althing in December 1998. The new law grants *deCode Genetics* exclusive rights to accumulate in centralized databank information on all patients - as long as they do not object to submitting the information - from all physicians in the country. In short, by the law *deCode Genetics* is granted access to all medical records of all the state hospitals. This universal access of medical records infuriated not only the Icelandic Medical Association but many outstanding figures within the scientific community as well. In spite of the controversy within the scientific community, the public has however, been in favor of the bill and as have the political parties in power. The conflict has risen over granting a private company access to personal information which many assume is very delicate and fear that this could easily be misused. *deCode Genetics* has not only caused major attention at home but has caught international attention and controversy amongst scientists across the globe, while international pharmaceutical companies have expressed eager interest in the possible outcome of the institutes findings and are willing to pay high prices.

Back to Finnbogason and his purism. Finnbogason's language purism, did not really meet any substantial or significant opposition or criticism as such, except from some writers who criticized his orthodoxy (Ottósson 1990). He was nevertheless, a man of some controversy. His political ideas were thought by many to be naïve and while his original writings were mostly well received, his translations became a matter of great criticism and at times scorned at. Later Nobel prize winner, Halldór Laxness was one of those who disdained Finnbogason. Laxness said, that "while he had an ear for individual words he could never put two words together that made any

sense"... he was acclaimed for having "passionately translated books from comprehensive languages into incomprehensible languages, not least books that he hardly understood himself, such as writings on mathematics and music." (*Vettvangur Dagsins* [1942]1979:104) Laxness, a very controversial but popular writer always defied fanatic purism and took a lot of heat for that. Laxness, who as a young man had failed the strict grammar test of Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík (formerly Latin school) which put an end to his formal studies, defied standard orthography. He used all kinds of foreign "stains," Danish and others in his writings, as well as other language characteristics blacklisted by the leaders of the purist discourse, such as Finnbogason. For this audacity, many blamed him for using "sloppy" language, and "bastard" words, for mutilating and abusing the language and finally for not knowing Icelandic.<sup>140</sup> Laxness audacity bespoke of course of more than defiance towards the fanaticism of linguist purity, it was an outspoken provocation of the oppressive rigidity of the establishment. Interestingly, those who attacked Laxness most fiercely were teachers, particularly a district organization from Finnbogason's home region, who blamed Laxness for filling his books with "language damages" (*málskemmdir*) (Höskuldsson 1973). The animosity of the teachers can be seen as a defense towards the mockery Laxness was making of the heart and soul of their learning - which they preached with religious fervor in the class room - the teaching of their prophet, Guðmundur Finnbogason.

## **VI. Language Purism in the Republic Era**

One might ask that if, language purism was the prerequisite for political independence, as the purist argument holds whether its impact has dwindled after political independence was gained? The answer to this question is definitely negative, but the emphasis or the targets have

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<sup>140</sup> Today, Laxness is "the darling of the nation," his works greatly admired and he has earned a place as the best Icelandic writer of the twentieth century. His books are a real treasure, not least because he is such a master of prose.

shifted somewhat. The most outstanding characteristic of Icelandic language purism has been and still is its rigor, aimed at all aspects of the language: the lexicon, - semantics, words, and word formation, syntax and morphology - and the non-lexicon, including orthography, phraseology and phonology or pronunciation. While purism in some form or another is found in many places, the level of intensity and rigor manifested in the Icelandic version, has few parallels. Language purism can be classified into several categories depending on its intensity and major targets. At this point it should not come as any surprise that Icelandic language purism has been categorized as xenophobic purism (see Thomas 1991, on typologies of purism). Linguist Thomas (1991) has pointed out that targeting of purism involves being open to some sources but closed to others. In the Icelandic case, we find that foreign influences - whether words or phonology - have been and still are fought tooth and nail. Yet, not only foreign words can upset the alleged purity of Icelandic, any other changes - in other words variations from "pure Icelandic" - whether syntactic or phonological are seen as a threat to the order. The purist claim that the linguistic structure of Icelandic must be preserved at all cost. We will show how insistence on the preservation of linguistic structures is an insistence on the preservation of the social order/hierarchy.

Let us take a closer look at how Icelandic purism has been defined by its propagators and what rationalizations are used for its continued existence. A linguist of the younger generation Kjartan Ottósson, an orthodox purist to the bone, sums up both the content and the objective of language purism. "In a narrow sense language purism involves the uprooting of those things that are regarded as some sort of weed in the language, first and last foreign language matters but it also extends to so-called mistakes." (1990:9) Ottósson then informs us that, "Icelandic language purism goes further than is the case in most places. It does not only direct itself towards foreign influence and undesirable tendencies in the language but it has also at times showed attempts towards going back to the language of the Golden Age and retrieve some linguistic matters that

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With his rich and vivid style, Laxness, manages, unlike few others, to create through his mastering of language, unique

have become extinct. It can be said that the language is looked at as some sort of a precious metal that has become dingy and needs to be polished." (ibid.)<sup>141</sup> Admitting in line with most of his colleagues, that language changes are unavoidable Ottósson insists nevertheless that these changes can be controlled and should be controlled.

Why this rigor one might ask? "Everything depends on our ability to render our heritage - the Icelandic language - to the next generations," says Professor Baldur Jónsson the president of The Icelandic Language Council. "If we cannot do that we're doomed as a nation. Then we forsake the national rights that we have. Everyone agrees that we need to encourage Icelandic language cultivation, the jobs are endless." (Morgunblaðið May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1994) In this quotation from an article entitled "All at stake," Professor Jónsson is referring to the importance of rendering *pure Icelandic* to next generations'. This sentiment echoed in the rationalization for purism by all the leading figures within the movement that I spoke to.

In the discourse on language policy in Iceland several concepts have been used, such as "language purism," "language cultivation," "language protection" and "language admonition."<sup>142</sup> "Language cultivation," is the most recent one and came about as an attempt on the behalf of educational authorities to make language policy sound more positive. The several *language cultivation campaigns* launched in the late 1980s and 1990s testify to this change (see chapter five for the discussion of these phenomena).<sup>143</sup> The term "language policy" is believed to have been used first in 1945.<sup>144</sup> This shift does however, not reflect any fundamental changes from the principles of purism. In an article called "Icelandic Language Policy" linguist Baldur Jónsson

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characters that have become family members in every household in the country as somebody so neatly put it.

<sup>141</sup> The use of metaphors in relation to language purism is well known (Thomas 1991). In Icelandic purism, one finds language to be likened to a "metal," a "musical instrument" a "living organism" and a "garden" all of which are based on the notion of language as a fixed entity, that can be treated separately from its speakers.

<sup>142</sup> "Language purism" is "málhreinsun" or "hreitungustefna" in Icelandic, "language cultivation" is "málrækt," "language protection" is "málvernd" and language admonition, is my translation of the term "málvöndun."

<sup>143</sup> Linguist Árni Böðvarsson in his book *Icelandic Speech* (1992) prefers the term language cultivation.

expresses his surprise over why all of sudden there is a need to ask about the Icelandic language policy, as if it had not been crystal clear to everyone. To him the answer is simple. The main goals of Icelandic language policy are twofold. On the one hand it should protect the language and on the other it should strengthen it (Jónsson 1985).

In line with Jónsson, linguist Ottósson (1990) informs us, that to strengthen the language involves; "enlarging the vocabulary, increasing diversity in speech and also supporting the speech community by encouraging the language users to master the language in the best possible manner and moreover to install faith in the value of the language. *Language protection includes keeping its structure intact and not to upset the meaning of words and phrases.*" Last but not least says Ottósson, "the objective of language protection nowadays is to preserve the continuity of the Icelandic language of all ages, so that Icelanders can read Icelandic from all times." (1990:9 italics mine) The enlargement of the vocabulary refers to so-called *neologism*, the act of constructing new concepts or words that are of Icelandic "roots" as opposed to incorporate words from other languages, a continuation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century purist propaganda. We will discuss neologism in more detail below.

### *1. More of the Sagas, Continuity and Purity*

The notion on continuity is an extremely important point and evokes two interrelated points. First of all, the notion of continuity relates to the status given to the Old Sagas as irrefutable criterion for "pure" and "original" Icelandic. The myth holds that Icelanders can read without any difficulty the Old Sagas (Benediktsson H. 1964; Jónsson B., 1978; Pálsson 1989). Secondly, the notion of continuity evokes the idea of an almost complete literacy, not only in modern times but more importantly in the past as well. As discussed before, literacy has

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<sup>144</sup> The first use is attributed to Professor Jón Helgason in 1945 (Sveinsson 1991).

historically constituted a very important factor in the production of Icelandic national identity. The idea holds that literacy in the country is virtually 100% (Sizemore & Walker 1996).<sup>145</sup> The myth that holds that every Icelanders can read the Sagas without difficulty plays an extremely important role in both the purist ideology and thus in peoples notions of national identity. It is for example, one of the first things to be mentioned in tourist books and brochures on Iceland.

Anthropologist Gísli Pálsson has stated that "[d]uring the twentieth century, the Sagas have been one of the most important foundations, if not the most important, on which Icelanders have built their public image." (Pálsson 1995:16) In the latter half of this century the Sagas displayed in "leather-bound volumes.... bought by the meter" have become a pride and hallmark of every educated household in the country and displayed as a center piece in peoples' living rooms' (Pálsson 1995:20). Owning the Sagas in matter of meters, as Pálsson put it, does not necessarily indicate equivalent interest in reading them. To own the Sagas is a sign of being "cultured," patriotic and a member of "the great literary nation who lives on the Saga island" as Icelandic teacher Þuríður Jóhannsdóttir has argued (1995:24). Actual readings of the Sagas is another matter altogether. Like they were in the past, the Sagas are more likely to be consumed publicly, in staged plays or via readings in the National State Radio (Pálsson 1995).

In spite of modern publications of the Sagas with modern spelling - an issue causing great controversy in the 1940s (Pálsson 1947) - the language and the style of the Sagas is foreign to the untrained reader. Readings of entire Sagas does not occur in the school system until in the last two grades (15 and 16 year olds) when students are required to read one Saga, usually a short one (Kristmundsson 1995). Purists often express their worries that general interest in the reading of the Sagas is not enough (Halldórsson 1971; Kristmundsson 1995). This fear tells its own story.

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<sup>145</sup> For further discussion on definitions of literacy see Sizemore and Walker 1996. In their study on literacy identity in Iceland, Sizemore and Walker argue that "Icelanders actively participate in socially structured events and distill, reconstruct, and internalize the cultural models pertaining to literacy in everyday social interactions. Both the historical and current contexts of these models continue to constitute a significant factor in the concept of the Icelandic national

Surveys of actual readings of the Sagas amongst adults, interestingly as it is, do not exist. If lack of interest amongst teenagers is any indication it points to less than 1% of overall readings (Kristmundsson 1995). While interest in the content matter of the Sagas is of less importance than owning them, their near to divine status within the national myth is beyond dispute. The Sagas are as we saw at the anniversary at Thingvellir before, a constant source of pride and "indisputable proof" of "authentic" nationhood. Moreover, some businessmen have argued for the importance of the Sagas in international marketing of Icelandic goods (Reykjavíkurbéf Morgunblaðið 9/17/94). Politicians and others have argued that if not for the Sagas and the ownership of a distinct language, victories in cod wars would hardly have been achieved (Johannessen 1996; Johnsen, 1984).

The myth of universal literacy as well as the myth on the universal interest among Icelanders in the reading of the Sagas is, like all other myths, something that always is, but never was. But the weight of the Sagas in Icelandic language policy is nevertheless enormous. This is perhaps best reflected in the widespread belief, which we have encountered again and again, that Icelandic was preserved in its purity in books/Sagas. This has led to the implicit and explicit insistence on using written language as a criterion for authentic language, "good language" (*gott mál*) and "sophisticated language" (*vandað mál*) and ultimately, all spoken language. In other words the closer one comes to speak in the same sophisticated manner as an edited written script would sound, the better (Pálsson 1995).

It is worth while looking closer at the importance unbroken continuity of the Icelandic language has had for the language policy. In an interview with the Morgunblaðið daily, linguist Baldur Jónsson the director of the Icelandic Language Council, argued that if the continuity would be severed:

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identity. We found this literary identity to be a symbolically conserving force for Icelandic culture and nationality." (Seizemore and Walker 1996:194)

It would be like cutting the umbilical cord of our nationality. We have been trusted with this treasure. Nobody can preserve it but us. If we forsake it - one flower variety would be missing in the world's flora of languages. This issue is of enormously big scale for us, I do not think that everyone is aware of that. I think it is incredible, that we alone can rule this country and the waters around it. We would not be allowed to do it if we spoke English. Japanese and Chinese people come to make business in Iceland, people from nations of hundreds of million and over a billion individuals and they speak to us like equals. That they would not do if we spoke English. Then Iceland would be a seasonal fishing post or a fort. If we want to be a nation among nations, participants on an international level amongst much bigger nations, we have to preserve the language. (May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1994)

In short Mr. Jónsson is of the opinion that the preservation of the Icelandic language, i.e., "pure" Icelandic, is the prerequisite for political independence, hence economic prosperity. Jónsson's view echoes, the ideas of Herder, Fichte, Aðils and the rest of Icelandic nationalists past and present as we have seen in our previous discussion. I spoke to Jónsson a few months after the newspaper interview, where he reiterated this view and expressed his concern over international respect Icelanders had gained, precisely because of the firm language policy.

I know this for a fact because here in my job we get many foreign visitors. We have admirers all over the world, precisely because of this, which is our pride. If we lose this (the pure language) what kind of respect do you think we would have in the civilized world around us, a nation that behaves like that. The only thing we have to offer to the worlds' civilizations is this language and the literature related to it, almost the only thing. This is our contribution in the assembly of the nations. We could just drop it all. But who do you think would respect people who behave like that? (10/14/94)<sup>146</sup>

Jónsson's view is in line with purism we encountered at Thingvellir, and shared by very many Icelanders laymen and learned alike across the board. This widespread recognition of the

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<sup>146</sup> I politely reminded him of a neighboring nation, further south in the Atlantic, the Irish, who no longer spoke or wrote in Gaelic, but was nonetheless a nation. "Do you think that the Irish do not have any respect amongst other nations, I asked him. "No they do not have much respect for their language policy, poor ones," he replied. "But they've precisely contributed generously to the world literature," I said. "If there is any one nation that in this century can pride itself of having a large number of play writes and authors who have gained world acclaim it is the Irish, yet they are not writing in an original language." To this Mr. Jónsson replied, a bit embarrassed, "maybe I was not right here," and then added "It could well be that we would do better if we spoke another language, perhaps English. This is perhaps a controversial matter." The issue of lack of "respect for a nation that did not speak its own language," came up in other interviews I did, such as with the director of the Place Name Institute (Örnefnastofnun), who was also caught off guard when reminded of the literary contribution of the Irish.

purity myth bespeaks of the success of its indoctrination. Kristján Árnason, the director of the Icelandic Language Council - see below - was of the same opinion as Jónsson. Árnason told a story in regard to why Icelanders should continue to advocate purism. This notion, he said came from his dentist, who had pointed out, that if not for the strong language policy, "Iceland could soon be filled up with foreigners who would compete with Icelanders for jobs. But as long as strict language requirements are kept this would not happen, as very few people would be able to learn the difficult language Icelandic is." I asked him if he was also of this opinion himself. "I don't know" he replied, this is a point that my dentist argued." (10/15/94)

## *2. Purity, National Defense and More Xenophobia*

Halldór Halldórsson, now a professor emeritus of Icelandic at the University of Iceland and one of the leaders within the purist movement, argues in the same vein. "We ought to protect this purity of the language."(Halldórsson 1971:16) "In my view," says Halldórsson, this means,

to follow the pattern of speech used by ordinary, intelligent people, not least the country people,... this is due to the fact that intellectuals are more influenced by foreign languages,... to follow the pattern of speech used in the Old Icelandic literature,.... to follow the pattern of speech our best writers which are widely read by ordinary people,... to avoid loan words and loan phrases. (1979:84)<sup>147</sup>

About the importance of linguistic purity and/or language cultivation he says:

One could say that an unsophisticated treatment of the language equals indifference. And indifference has never been considered beautiful. It is indifference towards the nation, which has raised us and protected its language and culture and passed it down to us for custody. The Icelandic language and the Icelandic culture are the things that give us the ethical right to be an independent nation. These two things are so intertwined that they cannot be parted. Thus it is a sign of a deficiency of social skills to abuse the language. (Halldórsson 1971:20)

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<sup>147</sup> (See also "I am against language changes, except when necessary" by the same author in *Morgunblaðið* 10/23/83).

What Halldórsson is referring to by "deficiency of social skills to abuse the language" is on the one hand the act of speaking "incorrect" Icelandic, also referred to in daily speech as "ugly," "bad," or "sloppy" language. And on the other hand, the act of "staining;" a highly stigmatized term used to refer to using of foreign words. For him, as it is for all those who strictly follow purism, it is the sacred duty of every Icelander to follow both, i.e., all acknowledged rules about "correctness" and to speak "pure" language. For Halldórsson, not to follow the rules of language admonition or purity, does not only speak of "lack of intelligence and ignorance but of ethical carelessness,"....."People, are disgusted by those who needlessly destroy the properties of municipalities and the state. That is similar to the crime committed by those who delude or spoil the language needlessly. Such men are vermin." (ibid. 1971:20) As he put it, "sophisticated language equals *pure* language. We Icelanders ought to cultivate language purity." Halldórsson does however argue, that from the standpoint of linguistics it is impossible to talk about something being,

grammatically correct," or "grammatically incorrect." "The study of grammar is a scientific study."... "The study of grammar is descriptive and historic... thus it is not its role to argue how things should be... However, by this I am not saying that language admonition should not exist or that it is the opposite of grammar. The relationship between language admonition and the study of grammar is the same as between science and ethics. Language admonition is the ethics of language. (ibid. 1971:24-25)

In my interviews, all the grammarians I spoke with were of the opinion that, what counts as correct speech ("*rétt mál*") is based upon linguistic data (reads scientific) of what is older. By referring to language as a self-contained entity, that follows its own rules regardless of the speakers, they were able simultaneously to make statements about the objectivity of Icelandic language policy and also count for linguistic wrong doings ("*málvillur*") as something that upsets the system.

Even more interestingly, for Halldórsson, "preservation and cultivation of language purity" is a matter of foreign policy, whereas the cultivation of "correctness" in both speech and writing is a matter of domestic policy. To quote, "[T]he protection of the purity of the language is a matter of the country's defense policy, where one has to fight an endless and merciless battle. Nobody would dream of giving a foreigner an Icelandic citizenship immediately. Likewise, we cannot immediately accept foreign words that have snuck up on us from other languages - words that look bizarre and have difficulty in adjusting to the Icelandic language structure." (ibid. 1971:28) Later in the same article, he states "People must not disrespect the Icelandic language by defiling it with foreign stains." (ibid. 1971:29) Halldórsson wrote this article originally in 1943 when the country was occupied by American troops. However, this fierce view towards foreign influence on the Icelandic language remains to this day one of the strongest hallmarks of the purist doctrines, and echoes the xenophobic attitudes of this ideology, most shamelessly expressed in Finnbogason's works.

The idea of citizenship also crops up in discussions over foreign words that have in spite of the purist attempts, "found their way" into the Icelandic language and questions arise over whether measures should be taken so as to eliminate them or propagate for the proper Icelandic term. What actions are taken depends on whether or not the purists consider the term to have "earned citizenship in the Icelandic language." ("Öðlast þegnrett í íslensku máli." (Halldórsson 1971)

Interestingly, the metaphor of language and defense policy surfaced as recently as early January 1998 in a response to an article in The British weekly, *The Economist* called "Little countries" featuring Iceland amongst others. Under the subtitle "The pleasures of homogeneity" one could read;

Icelanders grow up talking a language spoken by 0.005% of humanity. That has cost for education (and the second language taught at Icelandic schools is Danish, tongue of a mere 5.2m people). It has costs for publishing and entertainment too:

Iceland publishes more book-titles per head than any other country - the result of being a tiny country with a unique language. One publisher Benedikt Johannesson, puts the economic cost of Iceland's language at about 16 billion Icelandic kronur, about 3-3,5% of the GNP. (The Economist January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998)

This tiny article prompted some reaction in the country and there were discussions about the high cost of maintaining Icelandic as opposed to taking up English. The editorial of *The DV* daily, the second largest newspaper in the country said that in the Icelandic case it was simple. "Other countries have military budgets, Iceland has none, but holding on to the Icelandic language is our "military budget." (*DV* January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1998)

Let us look a little closer at these assertions about "cultivation" and "preservation" of "correct" language being a matter of domestic policy and "pure" language being a matter of foreign or defense policy. While language policy in Iceland is usually not described in this way - the terms preservation and protection are more commonly used - I find this metaphor of great interest and also of great importance for our work and want to expand on it. The military metaphor enables us to understand the fierceness and inflexibility of Icelandic purism.

As we pointed out earlier, one of the peculiar characteristics of the Icelandic nation-state is the absence of national armed forces. An indigenous military or rather a national military, that defends off possible enemy attacks and protects the nation and national treasures, is one of the most prominent characteristics of the modern nation-state (Tilly 1992). Sure, the role of the US NATO base in Iceland provides the Icelandic state with military defense but it does not, nor is it expected to, defend Icelandic national culture or language, which is the very basis for the existence of the Icelandic nation-state, according to the doctrine of Icelandic nationalism. And if we also keep in mind that Icelandic nationalism is a form of secular religion carried out by officials of the nation-state to ensure unity amongst its members against a possible foreign evil the validity of this metaphor becomes even clearer. This metaphor also allows us specifically to look at linguistic experts or grammarians who work for the state as law enforcement agents of

sorts and the institutions they work for as law enforcement agencies. Hence the forcefulness and rigidity of official language purism and the various state institutions and agencies that carry out the policy. Icelandic language policy is however, more than national defense policy against a possible outside intruder.

On the inside, or what concerns what Halldórsson called "domestic policy" falls the surveillance of every child in the nation over one another. It is here where it becomes the sacred duty of every Icelander to make sure that not only he or she herself adheres to the principles of purism but moreover, it is also their sacred duty to make sure that everyone else does that as well. This practice is manifested most clearly in people taking the liberty to "correct" a speaker whom they think is not adhering to the rules of purism. This is perhaps most strongly felt amongst people who are close to one another but it happens quite frequently amongst strangers as well. This is part of the censorship of self-censorship, discussed earlier. In worst cases this censorship leads to fear of speaking amongst those whose linguistic capital is so devalued that they are rendered muted, because their speech is "so full of stains," so "sloppy," so "inarticulate" that the subject matter of what they have to say is totally deprived of all value.

This is not to say that literally everyone corrects everyone else, but it is quite common to have strangers who in their righteousness about the "proper treatment" of Icelandic, correct somebody they hear, by saying "this is not pure Icelandic" or "this is ugly language." Or, when it comes to usage of "incorrect" grammar, such as when somebody uses "mér langar" ("I," or first person dative, "want"), instead of "mig langar" ("I", first person accusative, "want") - which is equivalent to saying in English "it's me," instead of "it's I" - speakers are reminded that they are not following the rules. Here negative informal sanctions can come in form of sarcasm such as "yes, þér langar" ("þér" is second person dative and also "incorrect" according to the "proper" rules of purism). We will discuss these "incorrect" practices in more detail below. For now it suffices to point out that this practice, which is the direct result of the indoctrination of purism, ensures

general participation. This censorship guards one member against another and thus safeguards unity to the "cause" (purism) amongst the members and prevents heresy on a grand scale. Icelandic language policy is thus not only a form of state defense strategy, against potential invasions into the "jurisdiction of Icelandic culture," but moreover it is a national policing where each speaker is dared against one another, so as to safeguard loyalty to the cause, hence, the continuous reproduction of the social hierarchy under the disguise of "national unity."

### *3. Linguistic Communism*

One of the fundamental assumptions within Icelandic purism is the notion that language can be treated as an entity existing in and of itself, a notion deriving directly from the German Romantic nationalists and, also at the foundation of modern linguistics. In Icelandic purism this notion is reflected in expressions like the ones we saw above such as "respect for the language" or respect for the "national heritage," "disrespect for the language" etc. This assumption supposes that somehow, language can exist without its speakers (Pálsson 1995). That the speakers of the language have a responsibility to follow the structures of the language, here meaning both grammar structures as well as other rules of "pure" Icelandic. Let us not forget, that what is "pure" and what is "correct" only exists as an opposition to something which is perceived of as "impure" and "incorrect" and moreover that these notions are entirely subjective. To approach language from this perspective as an autonomous entity to which the speakers have a duty to "preserve and respect," gives the illusion that the language structures to be followed are somehow of divine or natural order. By doing so, the notion conceals the fact that the order of purity is human made, and thus subject to change. Yet more importantly, to approach language as a "treasure to be preserved" to use one of the popular expressions of Icelandic purists, entirely conceals the fact that the order of purity rests upon who has the power to determine what counts

as pure or what "purity" is, in the first place. This notion gives the illusion, of linguistic communism as pointed out by Bourdieu (1992).

The alleged "naturalness of purity" obscures the human power behind the order. One might thus say that to insist on "respect for the language" equals the respect for those who rule. A request for "respect for language" – whether for adherence to grammar structures or rules that make foreign words a taboo - is thus much more than a linguistic request. It is a request for adherence to the structures of the doctrine of purism, the secular religion of the Icelandic nation-state or in other words, a request for adherence to the structures of power. Official violation of these structures is by the purists regarded as blasphemy or heresy. In Icelandic language purism adherence to the structures or the form of the order is, as we will encounter, what matters the most.<sup>148</sup>

What matters is the preservation of the form, the content matter of what is being said is automatically devalued if the utterance does not follow the rigid forms of "linguistic structures," i.e., the rules and regulations of purism. Insistence on loyalty to linguistic structures safeguards that those who possess the highest value of linguistic capital have authority or have a voice. Simultaneously, the words of those whose linguistic capital is further away from the language of authority are devalued and at worst their voices are made mute. In short one can say, that demands for loyalty to so-called "linguistic structures" are in reality a demand for loyalty to the hegemony of those who produce and reproduce the language of authority, i.e., the dominant power structures.

Another very important characteristic of Icelandic purism is the near unison denial of any kind of socio-dialects or social variation in speech. It is only in recent years that some

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<sup>148</sup> Guðmundur Finnbogason said in reference to the importance of the protection of language and language purity, "[e]veryone knows that whatever it is which is the most original thing in each language can never be translated fully into other languages. It is not possible to translate one face into another face, because the soul that mirrors in it reveals its unique character precisely in this particular form. If you change one mark you will not see the same soul as before.

grammarians of the younger generation who have been trained by the older purists, but also educated abroad, are more willing to acknowledge social differences in Iceland and with it social differences in speech (Rögnvaldsson 1983).

Traditionally, the emphasis has been on the "unity of the language" and the only differences found in the country are supposedly regional "dialects" albeit so minor that misunderstandings' never occur between two speakers of different dialects. The purist argument holds however, that there are some individuals who by their laziness, lack of respect for the mother-tongue or because of some other individual psychological deficiencies do not speak properly (Halldórsson 1964, 1971).

Anthropologist Gísli Pálsson, one of few scholars who has publicly criticized Icelandic purism, has argued to the contrary and shown by thorough research a correlation between certain linguistic characteristics acting as indicators of social markers. The purist's refusal to acknowledge any kind of speech differences to be based upon occupation or economic or social position should however, not come as any surprise. To acknowledge class differences in speech would distort the image of "unity" among Icelanders and thus the foundation of the myth of purity on which the notion of the nation is founded. Flat denial of socio-dialects, serves the purpose of giving the illusion that all Icelanders are equal and thus feeds into the myth of the egalitarian society. Yet some are more equal than others as Pálsson has argued (1979) and those who speak pure Icelandic *par definition* are "purer" hence more Icelandic (Pálsson 1995).

Icelandic language policy, like language purism in other places, is prescriptive rather than descriptive and as such not characterized by democratic discussions. Quite the contrary, it is characterized by relentless orders or prescriptions on how people ought to speak. Who has the power to decide what fits the definition of what is authentically *pure* and therefore acceptable is in the hands of "linguistic" experts many of whom work within state based language institutions

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The spirit lives in the form and is inseparable from it. The culture of every nation is the expression which it has

have been granted some sort of a supreme judge status within the society. Their verdicts go beyond debate.

## VII. Language Institutions

### 1. *The Icelandic Language Council*

One of the most outstanding characteristics of the ideology of language purism is its rigorous attitudes and tolerance towards only one variant of the language. As already mentioned rigid language policy like purism has often been enforced and given official legitimacy by formal institutions whereof the Academy Francaise is perhaps the most famous. (Edwards 1985). In this section, I will discuss the major Icelandic official language institutions which are in the forefront of the cultural industry of purism, and which regard it as their first and last role to protect, support and strengthen the position of "pure" Icelandic.

Interestingly, given the fervor of language purism in Iceland a formal language academy was not founded until 1964. Ideas about an academy had however, surfaced before. First interest in establishing some kind of an Icelandic Academy was aired shortly after the turn of the century but did not gain any current. The idea resurfaced several decades later at the suggestion of literary critique and right wing conservative Kristján Albertsson in 1939 to be passed as bill in the parliament in 1951 by the acting Minister of Education Björn Ólafsson (Albertsson 1951/1953). The bill suggested that the Academy would "be in the forefront concerning everything that has to do with cultivating the Icelandic language, supporting the protection of its roots (*stofn*)<sup>149</sup> alive and uncontaminated, and to enrich it as possible in accordance with its nature and inheritance." (Albertsson 1951:24) Due to controversy over the need for a specific language institution the bill

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'chiseled into the image of the world." (1974 [1916]) All purists in essence share Finnbogason's words.

<sup>149</sup> The term "stofn" in Icelandic can also mean "race" as in "kynstofn." Literally the prefix *gen* or *kyn* plus *race/root*.

was not passed. However, in spite of the failed attempt the Minister of Education managed to have the government financing, for the first time, a systematic collection of new terms i.e., *neologism*. The minister nominated the Dictionary of the University (of Iceland) to supervise neologism. Shortly after 1960 a paid committee, consisting of three specialists on Icelandic was formed. This committee was the embryo of the formal Academy to be founded in 1964 under the name *The Icelandic Language Council (Íslensk Málnefnd)*. The council was established under the aegis of the Ministry of Education as the official body responsible for language planning and preservation.<sup>150</sup> Originally the ILC consisted of a committee of these three men i.e., Halldór Halldórsson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson and Þórhallur Vilmundarson who still to this day - 1998 – is a member of the council. In the beginning the laws on the council insisted that two of the three of the council members should be professors in Icelandic studies at the University of Iceland.

Mr. Halldórsson chaired the council until 1966, to be replaced by Jakob Benediktsson the editor of the Dictionary of the University of Iceland. The council functioned as a consulting body in all matters concerning neologism and also on "good language and bad" (Ottósson 1990:130). Early in 1978, Baldur Jónsson replaced Benediktsson as the chair of the ILC and served until 1989 when Professor Kristján Árnason the current chair took over. Late in 1980, the members of the council were increased by two. About the same time the council's budget increased significantly and was to increase more in the following years<sup>151</sup> (Jónsson, B. 1982, Lög um Ísl. Málstöð 80/1984, Ottósson 1990). This made it possible for the council to hire an assistant to work with the chair Baldur Jónsson. The first law on the Icelandic Language Council was passed

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<sup>150</sup> The Minister of Education at the time was Gylfi Th. Gíslason and the brother in law of Þórhallur Vilmundarson. In Iceland family connections between cultural institution and political bodies are quite common. Thus at the time when Gylfi Th. Gíslason was a Minister of Education his brother Vilhjálmur Th. Gíslason became the Director of the National Public Radio.

<sup>151</sup> For the longest time, ILC did not produce much work and was criticized for that. It has also been argued that in spite of "sweet talk" on sentimental moments the ILC suffered from financial deprivation for the longest (see for example, Valdimar Gunnarsson and Hanna Lára Gunnarsdóttir "Þankar um Málstefnu" Skíma 3.árg. 2 tbl. 1980). From the beginning the budget of The Icelandic Language Council was calculated in kronas and not inflation secured. As Iceland

in 1984 with changes in 1990. In 1984 the members of the council were still only five all ordered by the Minister of Education but now the University nominated three of the members' council.

The law on *The Icelandic Language Council* stipulates that the major role of the council is to work towards fortifying the Icelandic language and to strengthen its protection both its spoken as well as its written form. The ILC acts as a consulting body on the Icelandic language for the political authorities. Before any rules or laws on the Icelandic language are passed the legislature is mandated to consult with ILC. *The Icelandic Language Council* shall cooperate with institutions that make decisions on peoples' names and place names. According to law the ILC is also expected to cooperate with those who have great influence on peoples' speech such as the media and schools. ILC is also stipulated to give theoretical guidance to official institutions and the general public at large on issues concerning language. "*If the need arises the Council may initiate comments about the treatment of the Icelandic language in public places*" (Stj.tið.A.nr.2/1990 Lög um íslenska málnefnd 2.gr. nr.4. Law on ILC - italics mine).

The major change of the law in 1990 brought about an increase in the number of members sitting in *The Icelandic Language Council*, from five to fifteen. As before, three members come from the University of Iceland; the University Council (Háskólaráð), the department of philosophy (which is the oldest of all the university's departments, hosting history, literature and languages, thus including Icelandic history, literature and language) and the third from the Dictionary of the University. The Minister of Education orders nine members nominated by The Place Name Institute, The Teachers College, The National State Radio, The National Theater, The National Association of Icelandic Teachers, The Icelandic Writers Association, The Icelandic Journalist Association, The Standardization Council and Hagþenkir, an association of authors of scholarly work and textbooks. In addition to these, the Minister nominates three other members from other institutions, societies or associations that deal with language cultivation or

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experienced double and triple digits' inflation in the late 1960s and 1970s the budget of the council was rendered

influence peoples speech greatly one way or another. Of these fifteen, five are nominated to a steering committee. Currently all the five with the exception of one are grammarians, linguists or Icelandic scholars. Interestingly in the beginning all the members of the ILC were men. It was only in 1987 that a woman first appeared there, increasing the ratio of women from zero to one in five. However, when the Council was enlarged from five to fifteen the ratio of women remained the same (See *Árskýrslur Ísl. Málstöð 1989 and 1990/Annual Reports of the ILC 1989 and 1990*). In 1998 their ratio had increased somewhat as women were six of fifteen in the main Council and actually three out of five on the steering committee.

The aim of the increase in the ILC and the relative width of their representative bodies is a conscious effort on the behalf of the state authorities to get as broad cooperation as possible. Whether this should be interpreted as a sign of an increased tolerance for linguistic diversity remains to be seen.

## *2. The Icelandic Language Institute and The Language Cultivation Fund*

The increase in the number of members constituting *The Icelandic Language Council* can also without a doubt be accredited to the establishment of the *Icelandic Language Institute* - hereafter also ILI or Institute - (*Íslensk Málstöð*), stipulated in the law of 1984. The ILI is a body that operates as a secretariat of the Icelandic Language Council and is the official center of language cultivation/ language purism in the country. ILI works in cooperation with the University of Iceland. A new professorship with limited teaching requirements was established in relation to the Language Institute that was given to the aforementioned Baldur Jónsson. In an interview, Jónsson pointed out that, "for longest time, The Icelandic Language Council (*Íslensk Málnefnd*) was floating in the air lacking all executive power until ILI begun working in January

1985, then the operation gained a new life and it became possible to tackle more issues." (Morgunblaðið 5/8/1994) In 1986, the budget to the Institute was increased significantly and now it has personnel consisting of a handful of full and part time employees. Interestingly Mr. Jónsson felt obliged to point out in the same interview, "[that] the Language Institute is a consulting institute not a policing institute."(ibid.) He reiterates that one of the roles of the Institute is to give language advice to the public. "The phone here is ringing off the hook most of the time. People call to ask about language use, the meaning of words, spelling and declinations. Often times they ask for new words. They have the English words but need the Icelandic name. Sometimes new words come about in a phone conversation." (ibid.) Everything is registered and collected in a word bank. ILI is the center of neologism and is expected to follow the development of terminology banks in other countries and establish a similar bank here."(ibid.)

*The Language Cultivation Fund (Málræktarsjóður)* another language institute, was established by law in March 1991. ILC is the founder of the Language Cultivation Fund, which is funded by contributions from the Icelandic State but also by private contributions from individuals, profit and non-profit organizations. The main objective of the Fund is the same as those of ILC with specific stipulations concerning; financial support to the operations of neologism and terminologies, the operations of terminology committees, the publication of specified dictionaries, publication of handbooks and textbooks in Icelandic, publication of dictionaries. The Language Cultivation Fund does also award individuals, organizations and institutions for their work on language admonition and language cultivation. The Fund operates under the supervision of a representative council, headed by the Icelandic Language Council where all the founders of the Fund have representatives (Skipulagsskrá Málræktarsjóðs 7.mars 1991).

## Targets of Purism

### 1. Neologism and "Stains"

The importance for social theory says Bourdieu is to take account of the way in which agents represent the social world. And "more precisely, of the contribution they make to the construction of this vision of the world, and, thereby to the very constitution of this world via the *labor of representation* (in all senses of the term) that they continually perform in order to impose their own vision of the world." (1991:234) What is at stake here is the power to define the social world. "Knowledge of the social world and, more precisely," Bourdieu argues, "are the stakes *par excellence* of the political struggle, a struggle which is inseparably theoretical and practical, over the power of preserving or transforming the social world by preserving or transforming the categories of perception of that world." This capacity to explicitly bring into existence, that which has not yet attained objective and collective existence "represents a formidable social power." (ibid.:236) The agents, who are in the position to impose the legitimate vision of the world by the virtue of their authority, possess enormous symbolic capital hence symbolic power. The act of naming is the act of imposition, which has on its side, Bourdieu informs us, "all the strength of the collective, of the consensus, of common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the state, that is, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic power*." (1991:239)

One of the hallmarks of Icelandic language purism is the practice of so-called neologism, which is the construction of new terms that are based on Icelandic roots. This is in fact where the relation between Icelandic language purism and xenophobia becomes clearest. Particularly so, if one bears in mind the purists equation between "language" and "nation," the idea being that, "language" (vocabulary, syntax, etc.), parallels or corresponds to the individuals that compose the nation. Whether the goal is to protect the "pure" blood/genes of the nation or the "pure" roots

of the language, in both cases foreign influences must be avoided at all cost. Neologism is an attempt - and a very successful one - to keep the language "pure" of so-called "stains" i.e., words of "foreign" origin and by so doing imposes a vision of the world where all that which has a foreign name is inferior, evil and dirty.

Grammarians take great pride in neologism and constantly argue for the need to hold on to the transparency of the Icelandic language. If a new word of "pure" Icelandic origin is coined, instead of incorporating loan words from other languages, that derive from different roots, Latin for example, it is assumed that everyone will automatically be able to understand the meaning of it (Halldórsson 1964, 1971; Jónsson 1976). This idea further supposes that "pure" Icelandic is the "language of the people" where no class differences exist, hence any class dialects. Moreover, the purists also take great pride in the popularity of neologism. The "popularity" should not be of any surprise given the power of the purist propaganda and its equation of "staining" (the act of using "foreign" words/expressions) with treason. And as Bourdieu pointed out, the imposition of naming has on its side the strength of the collective, common sense. Moreover, those who "stain" in public have a very hard time having a voice. The subject matter of what one says, drowns in attacks on the "stains" found in one speech, at least if one wants to have a public voice. Recent examples from such public disputes rose over such terms as "gender" when the Department of Social Sciences at The University of Iceland in Reykjavík, prepared to open a "gender" studies program in 1995. Fierce debates rose over how to translate the term, as using the foreign term "gender" was out of the question (see chapter five for more examples such as "AIDS" and "Internet").

The best part of the entire modern vocabulary, whether pertaining to political, social or technological changes are words that have been coined by the nationalist intelligentsia in pre-independence times and in post-independence times by various agents of the state, mostly grammarians or experts in Norse studies (Saga experts). Here are some examples of neologism;

democracy is *lýðræði* -of the root *lýður/people* and *ræði* of *ráða/govern*; university is *háskóli* -of the root *hár/high* and *skóli/school*; philosophy is *heimspeki* - of the root *heimur/world* and *speki/wisdom*; imperialism is *heimsvaldastefna* - of *heimur/world*, plus *valda* of *veldi/power* and *stefna/direction/ism*; colonialism is *nýlendustefna* - of *ný/new*, plus *lenda* of *land/land* and *stefna/direction/ism*; anthropology is *mannfræði* - of *mann/man* and *fræði/study*; globalization is *hnattvæðing* -of *hnöttur/globe* and *væðing/impose*; television is *sjónvarp* - of *sjón/sight* plus *varpa/broadcast*; radio is *útvarp*- of *út/out* plus *varpa/broadcast*, and so forth. All these words fulfill the neologist requirement of being composed of Icelandic roots, but the transparency of their meaning - the other justification for neologism - is debatable. As in most cases, comprehension of concepts requires a more thorough knowledge than what a morphemic understanding can ever allow for. Yet all these words have firmly established themselves in the language. Occasionally, the foreign word wins or might still live officially side by side with the new term. This is the case with the term *pólitik* (politics) that exists side by side with the "proper" Icelandic term *stjórnmal*. On other occasions the "foreign" terms become widespread in spite of fierce attempts to eliminate it. Such is the case with the term "video." The "proper" term "myndband," is used almost entirely in written language and on formal occasions but hardly in spoken language. The word *videó*, is also seen in compound names such as *videóleiga* (video-rental). A host of other terms have gained popularity such as "fax" the "proper" word is "*bréfsími*," and "*bió*" for movie theatre instead of "*kvikmyndahús*," to name a few that can hardly any longer fall under the stigmatized category "stains." Yet a great number of other "foreign" words and expressions, have not yet "earned themselves citizenship within the jurisdiction of the Icelandic language," to use the purist terminology, and are thus officially branded as "stains."

Neologism is traditionally appropriated to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century *Icelandic Society for the Learned Arts* (Lærdómslistafélag) mentioned before. Relatively few of the words coined at this time have survived to this day, grammarian Halldór Halldórsson informs us (1964). "That does

not really matter" he argues, "what is important is the fact that a course had been taken which has existed ever since (1964:140). Several decades later the members of the Fjölnir circle became ardent propagators of neologism. As the nineteenth century proceeded translations of all kinds of material into Icelandic increased enormously. These were books on various subjects within the natural sciences, from physics to botany and zoology. In almost all of these books the translators followed the ideas of language purism and thus coined new words, made of Icelandic/Nordic roots. In these years and the years to follow, modern technology marched with full force into Icelandic society, first to be felt in fisheries and later in almost every aspect of society. As we have already seen, nineteenth century purism worked diligently at "cleansing" the Icelandic vocabulary of foreign "stains," some of which had existed in the language for generations.

As was the case in many European countries the postal services and telecommunications were combined under the same hat within the administration. In Iceland this was also the case, the official mail delivery started in the early decades of the nineteenth century before language purism had received the foothold it later acquired. Telephones on the other hand were used for the first time in the country at the turn of the twentieth century (Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991). Yet as we have seen, in between these years lies the watershed in Icelandic purism heralded by the purism of Fjölnismenn. Thus what is in the neighboring countries called Post & Telecommunications is called in Icelandic *Póstur og Sími*. Thanks to the purist propaganda, telephone is called *sími* in Icelandic. *Sími* was an old word meaning cord/string but had not been used for centuries when it was rejuvenated and given a new meaning. It was thought to be more authentic and a better word than the foreign word *telephone* and became popular very fast (see Halldórsson 1964).

## 2. Terminology Committees

Almost the entire modern vocabulary consists of new constructed words, but a systematic collection of new words and concepts did however not begin until 1919, when the terminology committee of the Engineering Society of Iceland (Verkfræðingafélag Íslands) was established. From the beginning two of Iceland's most influential cultural apostles, Sigurður Nordal and Guðmundur Finnbogason were both on the board and influenced the course of the work from the beginning.<sup>152</sup> The terminology committee registered and coined a host of new words in fields like, ship building, marine engineering, commerce and electric engineering. Halldórsson argues that because of this terminology committee, the entire electricity vocabulary is "almost entirely Icelandic" as he put it (1964:144). So electricity is *rafmagn* and electric engineering is in Icelandic *rafmagnsverkfræði*, to give examples.

After some very productive years the terminology committee of the Engineering Society of Iceland ceased to operate in 1927 but its work continued in the Engineering Society itself. The terminology committee was revived in 1941 as a terminology committee of the electric engineering department of the Engineering Society. This committee, called *Orðanefnd Rafmagnverkfræðinga* still operates and is the oldest one of its kind existing in the country. This particular committee has throughout the years been very productive and published numerous dictionaries (see publication list at: <http://www.ismal.is>). In the 1950s several specified dictionaries were published. These were mostly the work of grammarians working under the sponsorship of the Dictionary of the University of Iceland. No new *ad hoc* terminology committees were established until 1968 when one on computer technology was formed (Orðanefnd Skýrslutæknifélagsins). The 1970s saw a slight increase when three new terminology committees were created, one at the Teachers College of Iceland, and another on mathematics and

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<sup>152</sup> Sigurður Nordal was professor of Icelandic studies and later an ambassador in Copenhagen. He is to this day regarded as one of the giants in so called cultural affairs in Iceland. The *Sigurður Nordal Institute* established in the mid 1980s, in the honor of his name.

one in physics in 1979. Then in the 1980s after the changes made within The Icelandic Language Council, increase in terminology committees multiplied. In the 1980s twenty-three new terminology committees were founded and by 1997 there were as many as 41 terminology committees operating across the board some of who have published specified dictionaries. To give an idea: terminology committee: of theatre and dramatics, of registered nurses, of physicians, of geologists, of construction engineers, of librarians, chemists, pharmacists, biologist, printing industry etc., etc., (See also Orðanefndir *Málfregnir* 1.1 (1987) 31 and Orðanefndir *Fréttabréf íslenskrar málnefndar 1.1 11-15*. Íslensk Málstöð 1997)

The increase in the number of terminology committees is without a doubt due to an increased budget to the I.C.I coupled with a reinvigorated enthusiasm of the board. This increase can also be seen as a response to the growing number of Icelanders with graduate degrees.<sup>153</sup> The dominance of language purism, requires that all written communication in whatever field, be it molecular biology, urban sociology or immunology psychology, follow the standard of the ideology, hence all the *ad hoc* terminology committees. This increase in terminology committees is the direct result of significant increase in governmental funding to various language institution bodies and specific projects.

On another level the increase in governmental funding for the various language institutions may definitely be seen as a response to the joint increasing impact of new communication technology and Anglo-Saxon hegemony in almost every field.<sup>154</sup> The early 1980s saw an explosion in the marketing of two new technologies; the home videos where American movies control the market, and the invention of personal computers with all word processors and

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<sup>153</sup> This growth resulted from changes in the education system in the mid 1970s when the old traditional elite trend was abandoned opening gymnasium education to the masses. The establishment of a National Student Loan Fund (Lánasjóður Íslenskra Námsmanna) granting loans with less than 3% interest rate to everyone further prompted an explosion in university education.

computer games in English. The hegemony of English and American pop culture has steadily grown since then with the invention and marketing of new technologies affordable to the general public. This hegemony is manifested in rapidly growing computer technology, the Internet in various aspects of the audio-visual entertainment industry such as movies, music videos, video and computer games, and access to American and other English speaking television channels via satellites. The first and last function of these formal language institutions, is to "stand guard around the purity of the Icelandic language" as defined by the "experts"/linguists who work there. This form of language policing is highlighted in the recent multiplication of terminology committees. The function of these bodies is to preserve representations of the social world as defined by those who possess the greatest quantities of symbolic capital/power i.e., of those who hold monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence. All other representations of the social world are thus illegitimate.

Yet on another level, there is obviously a hierarchy at work when it comes to legitimate foreign words and those illegitimate, as anthropologist Pálsson has pointed out (1995, 1979). Titles for university teachers are all foreign, such as *prófessor*, *dósent*, *lektor*, but are never called stains, by the policy makers, many of whom bear these very titles themselves. However, when it comes to usage of foreign words by the working class, and the lower middle class, they are called "stains." Purist policy makers relentlessly object to the use of foreign words by these classes now called "stains." Fishermen for example, says Pálsson persistently use such words as "holl" from "haul," "troll" for "trawl,"(1995:135) and "stím" as in "full steam." The word "holl" does not exist in the Icelandic Dictionary of Menningarsjóður published in 1985 (the equivalent in terms of status as the American Webster) and edited by Árni Böðvarsson a leading figure in the purist policy. The word "stím" was there, albeit marked with a "?," which in explanations was

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<sup>154</sup> Broadly speaking, globalization "defines a process through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe" (McGrew 1996:470). For further discussion on globalization see introduction and also chapter seven.

defined as "bad language, or a meaning that should be avoided in Icelandic." (1985: XIX) No such marks were found in relation to the university titles cited above.

In an old article by Halldórsson, he points out that in spite of new terms intended for use in the fisheries and in trade, a "strange thing has happened. The new words are used in all published regulations [in these fields] but the fishermen continue to use their foreign stains" (1971:9). Pálsson has argued that the use of stigmatized language, such as "stains" can be seen as a threat to the establishment as "deficient" language is seen as a threat to the stability and hierarchies of the school system and the labor market." (1995:133) At the same time, many professionals, such as physicians, also continue to use foreign "stains" in their speech amongst themselves as opposed to the "proper" and more "Icelandic" terms use in health related publications. In this case the use of "stains" does not mark a defiance of the social order but can be seen as marker that affirms their high social status.

One of my interviewees, Baldur Hafstað a professor in Icelandic and Old Literature at the Teachers College, argued for the tremendous importance of neologism. "One can "stain" over a cup of coffee, but not in the media," he said. When asked why, he simply replied: it's the language policy, one should put on one's Sunday's best, when it's formal. We have to do our best. We have to protect the language." And about the usage of the English words "hi" and "bye," commonly used by both the working and the middle class, particularly the younger generations, he said "these are like boils/scabs on the face of Icelandic and so is "shit." I fiercely propagated against using these "stains" in my radio program" (see chapter six on radio-programs on purism).

### *3. Dative Sickness, Sloppy Pronunciation and Deflated Speech*

As we discussed before, language purists take great pride in the uniformity of the Icelandic language and have categorically denied that any class or socio-dialects exist in Icelandic society.

"Icelandic is - in the social sense - free from dialects there are only minor regional dialects." (Halldórsson 1979:85) "Socio-dialects in Icelandic that I think are a fabrication of some men who have learned about such things abroad." (ibid. 1984:45) Some authors have argued in the same vein, for example Böðvarsson (1992), while others have simply ignored the existence of socio-dialects (Pálsdóttir 1994a, 1994b). At the same time there exist and have existed several linguistic features, phonetic, morphological and syntactic, in addition to "stains," that have been heavily stigmatized. Yet, language policy makers have in general shown very little interest in trying to account for the widespread distribution of these linguistic characteristics. Their interest in the matter has predominantly been focused on targeting these characteristics as "bad language," "ugly language," "wrong language." Purist protagonists have worked at attributing sociolinguistic characteristics to some kind of psychological deficiency. These speakers are said to suffer from "laziness" manifested in their "inarticulate" pronunciation. This in turn can, according to the gospel of purism, be attributed to lack of morals, such as indicated in their emphasis on showing the language i.e., "pure" Icelandic, "respect," and "nurture" it, to "cultivate" and "preserve" it, to "protect" it, and so forth.

So-called "sloppy" pronunciation ("*linnæli*") also called "lazy" pronunciation, or indistinct pronunciation, is accordingly on the increase. This linguistic characteristic, previously only found in the south-west and in the Reykjavík area, is now found all over the country particularly amongst the younger generation. This increase is attributed to increase in English heard on television, movies and other entertainment mediums (Pálsdóttir 1994a, 1994b). As these labels "sloppy" and "lazy" indicate this distinct pronunciation is associated with negative qualities. Distinct or "clear" pronunciation on the other hand is associated with "industriousness" and "tidiness."

Two linguistic characteristics have, however, been favorite targets of the policy makers. These are on the one hand, what they have called "dative-sickness" (*þágufallssýki*) manifested in dative substitution where "pure" Icelandic calls for accusative case, such as in *mér langar* (I want)

instead of *mig langar* and (plural *þeim langar* instead of *þau langar*), *mér hlakkar* (I look forward to) as opposed to the "proper," *ég hlakka* and *mér dreymdi* (I dreamt) instead of *mig dreymdi*, to give some examples. The other one is so-called *flámæli* or deflated speech.

A joint research conducted by anthropologists Gísli Pálsson, sociologist Þórólfur Þórlindsson and linguist Ásta Svavarsdóttir (1984) showed that indeed some linguistic features were directly related to class and could not be attributed to regional differences. This particular research focused on so-called "dative-sickness," which according to some purists is particularly common amongst people who suffer from psychological deficiencies (Halldórsson 1971). Interestingly, in recent translations of novels written by African-American authors, such as *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, the translator used "dative-sickness" in her translation of non-standard or Black English (Eldjárn, 1987). "Dative-sickness" has, not surprisingly been associated with stupidity (Halldórsson 1971).

According to Halldórsson, none of the Icelandic regional dialects have been stigmatized (1971). However, the systematic eradication of so-called *flámæli*, contradicts this assertion, as the opponents have insisted on it being a regional dialect, rather than a class dialect. Halldórsson was actually one of the central figures in this early state-sponsored campaign aimed at wiping out this dialect. The term *flámæli* literally means deflated speech. In opposition, standard Icelandic, - i.e., the one that fulfills the standards of purism, is called "*réttmæli*," literally meaning correct speech. In short, *flámæli* was characterized by changed pronunciation of the phonetic /i which was pronounced like the phonetic /e and the phonetic /u which was pronounced like the phonetic /ö. For those who did not have this accent, this variation in pronunciation could in worst cases lead to misunderstandings.

In a recent article on *flámæli* Icelandic teacher Kristján J. Jónsson criticizes the attack on *flámæli* and points out that grammarians approached it as an interloper from the beginning, on the basis that its "peculiar" sounds were not part of the phonological order of Icelandic.

When news like this spread Icelandic grammarians start honing their knives and aim for an attack in order to rescue the language of the ancestors, like a maid from the claws of a dragon. Or should I rather liken the interference of grammarians to the struggle of Icelandic peasants who have been fighting the fox which for centuries has not let any opportunity to bite the cute Icelandic sheep, go unused. (Jónsson 1997:42)

The main argument behind the eradication of *flámæli* was that it was a wrong pronunciation and equaled so called "*hljóðvilla*" or "sound error" attributed to alleged lack of sensitivity to be able to distinguish between "correct" and "incorrect" sounds (Guðfinnsson, 1947; Halldórsson 1971). Interestingly, Halldór Halldórsson while denying any stigma being attached to this dialect, argues that distinction between "correct" and "incorrect" to be based on moral grounds rather than grammatical (ibid.). Others, such as grammarian Kristján Árnason (the director of The Icelandic Language Council), have justified the eradication of *flámæli* because knowledge of it was based on "public information," which in turn was "based on *theoretical research* of people like Mr. Guðfinnsson's." (Árnason 1989:14 italics mine) Whether based on moral grounds or "scientific research," most if not all of those in favor of eliminating the Icelandic language of *flámæli* have classified it as "unwanted" (óæskilegt) because it was "vulgar" and supposedly reflecting personal/family deficiency ("sound error").

The systematic eradication of *flámæli* can be traced back to the late 1940s when the Board of Educational Affairs sponsored grammarian Björn Guðfinnsson to conduct a national study on Icelandic pronunciation. The BEA had for some years been planning on rules about pronunciation, i.e., standardization of the Icelandic language.<sup>155</sup> This particular issue to eradicate *flámæli*, became a matter of both professional and personal crusade for Mr. Guðfinnsson (Halldórsson 1971). The mastermind behind the eradication, linguistic Björn Guðfinnsson was the author of grammar books taught for decades in both primary and secondary schools and is to this day praised by purist - laymen and "specialists" alike - for his achievement (Árnason 1989).

In the words of anthropologist Gísli Pálsson, "Mr. Guðfinnsson came to the conclusion that *flámæli* was very widespread in the country. As a result of his "discovery" specific action was taken in order to eradicate the "error." In particular attention was directed to those homes that were considered "sound erring." (Pálsson 1979:180) The results of Guðfinnsson's research and "shocking discoveries," were published in his book Breytingar á framburði og stafsetningu (Changes in Spelling and Pronunciation) (1947) where he called for the necessity of eliminating *flámæli* or "hljóðvilla" (sound error). Political authorities (Minister of Education), acted swiftly in response to his requested advice to have experts on the Icelandic language (i.e., philologists and experts in Norse studies) at the University of Iceland to submit their verdict on this urgent issue. They in turn concluded that *flámæli* was a form of dialectical pronunciation characteristic, that should be condemned and worked against by all means necessary ("hljóðvilla er framburðareinkenni," sem "fordæma [á] með öllu og vinna af alefli á móti." (Halldórsson 1971:89) These suggestions in turn were directed towards the entire education system, as well as the National State Radio and the National Theatre, both of which were commanded not to hire any people who might suffer from "sound error." (ibid.)

According to the purists, there are no class dialects to be found in Iceland. Thus *flámæli*, like all other dialect differences, has traditionally been defined as a regional dialect. Strangely however, no part of Iceland was completely devoid of the dangers *flámæli* according to Mr. Guðfinnsson, but its strongest influence was found in two regions, far apart from each other. These were the southwest mostly, Reykjavík and the Reykjanes peninsula, and also in villages in the East fjord. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the two former regions were both centers of trade and commerce and simultaneously the centers of the emerging urbanization and thus the emerging working class.

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<sup>155</sup> Björn Guðfinnsson received a grant from the National State Radio of Iceland, (Pálsson 1979). Mr. Guðfinnsson was the first person to host and produce a radio program on the Icelandic language see chapter six.

Moreover, and of no less importance, is the purists' refusal to acknowledge any significant class dialects in the Icelandic language (Halldórsson 1979; Pálsson 1979). Therefore, no systematic study of socio/class dialects has ever been conducted, save for the one on "*þágufallssýki*," or "dative-sickness." As our previous discussion highlighted, sociolinguistics literature in other countries reveals however, that dialects, whether regional, ethnic or class based are usually ranked in order of status. There the national standard, (the legitimate language) enjoys the highest grade and the language of those who rank at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder the lowest grade. Icelandic purists have categorically denied this hierarchization. Yet as early as 1959, one grammarian of the purist's school Hreinn Benediktsson acknowledged the social discrimination and stigma attached to "*flámæli*" was not the result of some "sound error" of certain individuals or families. He argued that "*flámæli*" was a part of "the development of the Icelandic vowel system [which] is dominated by a single tendency, by which we mean that the different changes are nothing but modalities of one and the same evolutionary process." (Benediktsson H. 1959:306) Interestingly, in his article "The Vowel System of Icelandic: A Survey of its History" Benediktsson gives an explanation on the specific status or lack of status of "*flámæli*." But first he fully subscribes to the notion of the uniformity of the Icelandic language, and further elaborates that: "not only are the dialect differences few and insignificant; for the most part the different varieties of Icelandic also enjoy the same social reputation. The different geographically distributed variants are all considered equally "good" or "correct." There is therefore no contrast between a standard language and substandard or dialect varieties, in the sense which these terms may be applied to most other European languages." (ibid.) Yet he feels compelled to point out that "[t]here is one and only one exception to this. The tendency to confuse *i* and *e* and *u* and *ö* often with the diphthongization, is considered "vulgar" and is fiercely fought on all levels of instruction and education. It will be interesting to see the outcome of this conflict between a linguistic tendency which seems to be in line with the preceding development

and the non-linguistic factor of social gradation of language differences." (ibid. 1959:306) Hreinn Benediktsson was the very first to point out that *flámæli* was in fact part of a systematic change in the Icelandic vowel system. In recent years Rögnvaldsson (1993) has argued in line with Benediktsson's conclusions (see also Blöndal 1984). This acceptance of *flámæli* as a natural phonetic development came however a little too late.

The stigma and the labeling of *flámæli* as "vulgar," indicating some individual/family "deficiencies" propagated by the purists and enacted in the entire education system without a doubt sped up the eradication of *flámæli*. The usage of the term *hljóðvilla* ("sound-error") reinforced the stigma. Today *flámæli* has very negative connotation in Icelandic and has almost entirely disappeared, save for the oldest generation. Interestingly, however, according to language research by grammarians Höskuldur Þráinsson and Kristján Árnason, a new and different form of *flámæli* has replaced the old one (1984:125). In their research the new *flámæli* is not associated with class.

The complete disappearance of so-called *flámæli* is perhaps the most classical Icelandic example of a stigmatized class dialect, which was highly associated with stupidity. Given the popular notion amongst purists, on the "superior racial qualities" of Icelanders, it should not be surprising that the blatant "stupidity" of some of its sections, (manifested in *flámæli*) is by them seen as a matter of embarrassment and understood in terms of pollution, as it upsets the order of purity, linguistic, hence intellectual and genetic.

Both "dative-sickness" (*þágufallssýki*) and "deflated speech" (*flámæli*) have been shown, to be class related. Moreover, these "pathological" conditions seem to have plagued Icelanders for hundred of years. Yet, according to the purists there are only some people, either some families or individuals who suffer from language diseases, according to their categorization of "sloppy," "incorrect" speech. In their relentless imposition of "pure" Icelandic, the ordinary "language of the country people," there just seems to be a great number of people who just "don't get it."

As we have seen in our discussion, the order of purity is further established by relating impurity to other series of oppositions as Pálsson has also pointed out (1995). The level of purity of speech has positive associations whereas "impure" speech exemplifies negative qualities. "Pure" speech is thought to exemplify "clear" thinking and "impure" speech "unclear" thinking. Linguist Árni Böðvarsson has argued that "[o]ne of the aims of language cultivation is systematic and clear phrasing. Such clearness in thinking shows what the speaker is expressing. Unclear or unsystematic phrasing points on the other hand to unclear thinking." (1992:169) Other oppositions are those made between intelligence and stupidity and between sloppiness and tidiness, as we saw above. Yet another contrast is drawn between what is considered "civilized" and "healthy" as opposed to "savage" and "unhealthy," as reflected in the terms used for non-standard Icelandic, such as *skrílmál* (mob language) and *götumál* (street-language) both of which indicate lack of "civility" and *þágufallssýki* (dative-sickness) indicates a diseased state.

Like the fundamental oppositions between purity and impurity all these oppositions, are as Douglas's has argued in relation to the notions of purity and impurity, in fact a matter of order versus disorder. On the one hand a laissez-faire attitude and on the other hand a strict language policy. "The former will inevitably lead to chronic state of language disease. Left to themselves the diseases would become plagues. Only by rigidly applying the publicly "established" rules of language is it possible to bring thought and language under control and divert the danger of pollution." (Pálsson *ibid.* 132-133) In short, impurity upsets the system of social order as known, whereas purity ensures order and the maintenance of the system.

## **IX. Conclusion**

In this chapter we have examined the institutionalization of purism in Iceland, and the concomitant state supported cultural industry of purism. We also looked at the role of social

movements and focused on high profile individuals within this process.

The Icelandic discourse on purity is in essence identical to the notion of "truth" in the Foucauldian sense. Moreover, this "truth" is linked in circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it. In our discussion we saw, how the ultimate power in defining language purity lies in the hands of a group of people who are "experts" in the Icelandic language and culture. These people are granted their power by the nation state and they serve the state in the name of the nation and national welfare. Icelandic language purism is part and parcel of what Foucault has called the régime of truth. We learned from Bourdieu that it is not language itself that contains power, but rather the authority of those who impose the standard that gives their "language" the highest value in the linguistic market. The safeguarding of this power becomes a matter of continuous game of recognition of power.

In Iceland the "régime of truth" was institutionalized within the public school system, where high profile intellectuals, such as Finnbogason had enormous impact in defining the value of what Bourdieu has called linguistic capital. Our discussion showed that Finnbogason's ideas on purity did not stop at language, but also entailed genetic nationalism and the propagation of eugenics, xenophobia and racism. The propagation of linguistic purism went hand in hand with racist ideas. With Finnbogason in the forefront other Icelandic intellectuals, particularly of the first half of the century, emphasized the superiority of the "white-ness" of the "pure-Aryan" Icelanders standing in contrast to non-Aryan, non-whiteness being impure, representing dirt, barbarism, savagery etc.

The institutionalization of purism in Iceland was further facilitated by the participation of social movements such as the Youth Movement, a national organization of tremendous impact in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Through its institutionalization of purism, the Icelandic state has granted the "experts" on the Icelandic "language" authority or power to define the "truth." By virtue of their status, the

"experts" speak the "truth," about how to speak and how not to speak, in other words how to express representations of reality. In order to ensure their power the experts - who are actually representatives of state power- employ various kinds of negative sanctions or symbolic violence that degrade non-standard speakers. Whether it is labeled "staining," "sloppy speech," "dative-sickness" or "deflated speech," all these markers in language that depart from the standard, are treated as violations to the order of purity. The stigmatization of non-standard language varieties in turn calls not only for their censorship in the public arena but also prompts the censorship of self-censorship. Our analysis revealed how speakers of Icelandic are constantly on guard about how they say things, but also about what can possibly be said. The constant threat of stigma and censorship attached to non-standard varieties further secures the order of purism.

Our analysis shows that potentially polluting effects are perceived as violations to the notion of purity and moreover, any disturbances or violations to purity pose danger to the social order and need accordingly to be kept under control. It is here that the role of language institutions, begin to resemble law enforcement agencies whose function is to fend off potential disorder within the boundaries of the nation-state, as well as potential threats coming from abroad as in the alleged impurity of foreign words. The intense fervor of institutionalized purism in Iceland can be seen as from of national defense policy, where purism takes on the form of military strategy aimed at defending the purity of the *Icelandic* "language," "culture" and "nation" from both inside and outside potential pollutants.

Our analysis showed a significant increase of these law enforcement agencies/language institutions in the last decade and half, whether in terms of so-called terminology committees, or in increased funding to existing institutions and the establishment of new ones. This increase can on one level, be seen as a response of a small language community to the ever-increasing intensification of the globalization process and the concomitantly increased impact the English language. On another level, it is also an enormously powerful tool or a social mechanism

employed in order to control the social discourse, as well as people's mentalities.

In our discussion we have seen how conformity to the social order, in the form of preservation of the notion of linguistic homogeneity, is dressed up as a matter of loyalty and respect for the; "national heritage," the necessity for the "preservation" and "protection" of the Icelandic "culture" and the "language." Violations to the order are seen as a sacrilegious act, as treason to the national cause and strict adherence to purism a matter of life and death for the Icelandic nation state and its future.

In the next section we will continue our analysis of linguistic purism and look at how the régime of truth has been thoroughly established by law. We will also look at the role of state sponsored institutions as well as private media enterprise in safeguarding the power of purism.

## Chapter 6

### **Purism: A Repressive Force in a Multi-Cultural Pluralistic Democracy?**

#### **I. Introduction**

##### *1. Purism and Democracy, Incompatible Ideas?*

In this chapter we will continue our discussion on the discourse on purity and look specifically at aspects that entail different forms of legalization of purism. The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first one focused on the Icelandic law on personal names and controversies that have arisen in regards to the law. In the second section we will look at the role of media in the production and reproduction of purism. A large part of this section focuses on the

National State Radio and Television and its sacred role as one of the temples of purism and hence the protection/defense of the Icelandic culture. We will also discuss recent changes in Icelandic broadcasting law and then direct our attention to other forms of private media, newspapers, and radio and television stations. Our third section deals with language campaigns launched by the state in recent years. In the final section we will look at criticism on purism.

## II. Eternal Peace and Other Problems in Icelandic Naming Policy

Hví er ég Arinbjarnarson  
en hvorki Kúld né Schiöth  
sem búa á númer þrettán  
í sömu götu og ég  
í sama húsi og ég.

Why am I Arinbjarnarson  
but neither Kúld nor Schiöth  
who live at number thirteen  
in the same street as I  
in the same house as I. <sup>156</sup>

In the spring of 1996, a native of Colombia caught media attention by officially stating that the Icelandic laws on people's names bordered on violating human rights (Morgunblaðið March 31, 1996). This statement came from a person whose original name was Jorge Ricardo Cabrera Hildago but had to be changed to Eilífur Friður Edgarsson when he became an Icelandic citizen.<sup>157</sup> According to Icelandic law at the time, immigrants seeking citizenship in the country were forced to bear Icelandic names. This meant that they had to change their names entirely - given names as well as surnames - and select Icelandic names for themselves. However, their new

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<sup>156</sup> From "Arinbjarnarson," a popular song from the late 1970s by *Spilverk Þjóðanna*. Published by, Steinar h.f 1977.

<sup>157</sup> In Icelandic adjectives follow the gender of the noun. In this case "Friður" (Peace) is a masculine noun and "Eilífur" (Eternal) is a masculine adjective but can be declined like any other name ending with 'ur' such as, Ólafur or Pétur.

names had to be on a list of acceptable names issued by the Justice Department. Or if they chose a name that did not appear on this list, their selection was subject to go for an *ad hoc* name committee that made the final decision on whether the name was acceptable or not. The Icelandic name of the young Colombian mentioned above caught a considerable attention because of its peculiar meaning *Eternal Peace* (Eilífur Friður). By common standards, this is not a name in Icelandic and sounds very strange to say nothing more. Strangely however, this unusual name while not on the public name list met all legal standards in terms of grammar and was accepted by the official committee on people's names. In an interview Edgarsson/ Cabrera said that he deliberately chose this strange name in order to show how absurd the current law was. Mr. Cabrera's case was one of several that came to the public eye during the spring of 1996, when a bill went before the Althing, calling for changes in the law on peoples' names that had been in effect since 1991.<sup>158</sup> To an American it may sound very strange that such personal matters, as people's names should be subject to governmental/political intervention.<sup>159</sup> For an Icelander and people in many other countries in the world this is no surprise. Governmental interference over what kind of personal names are acceptable is not uncommon. However, a fervent and inflexible

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Edgarsson follows the partinomic tradition, i.e., the first name of the father of Eilífur Friður is Edgar so he becomes Edgarsson. Most Icelandic male names take on an s in the genitive case, thus the two esses as in Pálsson, Jónsson etc.

<sup>158</sup> Other cases concerned rare names that had existed in the language for hundred of years but had fallen out of the name list in 1991.

<sup>159</sup> A notable exception to the name change requirement for foreigners seeking Icelandic citizenship was the case of Vladimir Ashkenazy; a Soviet born pianist whose wife is Icelandic. Mr. Ashkenazy, who became an Icelandic citizen in the mid 1970s, was allowed to keep his name on the basis that he had made himself a career as a world known pianist under this name. He was thus not required to become, say Valdimar Ásgeirsson, which could have been the Icelandization of his Russian name. Shortly after Ashkenazy was granted Icelandic citizenship, a Catalanian painter named Baltazar, who sought Icelandic citizenship, applied for the name Vladimir Ashkenazy on the basis that it had by now become Icelandic. His application was turned down but he reapplied and the second time selected a name that supposedly was "Icelandic" to the bone. The name was Egill Skallagrímsson, the name of one of the great heroes from the Sagas (Egilssaga). Although Grímur is still a fairly common name the name Skallagrímur (literally Grímur the bald) was never established as a proper name in Icelandic. Egill Skallagrímsson is in the minds of many Icelanders, particularly the literary circles and some of the fervent nationalist, untouchable, if not divine, at least semi-divine. He is the personification of the ancient Icelander who according to a recent writing "was an extremely complicated person accommodating all the major contradictions of the Icelandic national character (þjóðarsál lit., national soul)" (Magnússon, 1994:42). Again officials turned Mr. Baltazar down, not finding this amusing at all (The Wall Street Journal 7/20, 1990). All the members of the naming board at the time had family names not patron YMI, many people thought that a bit ironic.

naming policy such as found in Iceland, is usually found in countries that have - unlike Iceland - not earned themselves a name for being democratic. In Hitler's Germany for example, "one of the first acts of his government was to compel every male Jew to carry the name of Isaac and every Jewish woman to register the name of Sarah." (Adler, 1978:132) More recent examples of oppressive naming policy come from Indonesia, Singapore and Bulgaria to name a few (Jernudd 1994).

In Iceland people's names are yet another area where the evangelism of purism enjoys the support of the legislature. After heated debates both in the congress as well as amongst the public - in radio and newspapers - the new bill was passed as law on May 17, 1996.<sup>160</sup> The new law went into effect January 1, 1997 replacing the laws from 1991. Not surprisingly, the most significant change in the new law regards a conflict of interests between ideas central to the notion of democratic society on the one hand and nationalistic ideas concerning the importance of maintaining linguistic/cultural purity on the other. One of the statutes in the laws from 1991 - discussed above - insisted that foreigners who sought Icelandic citizenship had to take up Icelandic names. This statute along with some others had come under severe criticism as it so deliberately discriminated against foreign-born Icelanders.<sup>161</sup> It was not only Mr. Cabrera but also many others - thereof the entire preparation committee who wrote the new bill - who argued that the 1991 law was deliberately discriminatory and anti-democratic and thus unfit in a democratic society.<sup>162</sup> For others, particularly "friends of the Icelandic culture" - as the authors of the bill put it in a somewhat sarcastic way - the new changes posed serious threats to the Icelandic culture

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<sup>160</sup> See articles published in Morgunblaðið daily by Jónas Kristjánsson 4/20/1996, Árni Björnsson 4/27/1996, Erlendur Jónsson and Páll Sigurðsson 5/2/1996, Þórólfur Jóhannesson and Berglind Steinarsdóttir 4/4/1996, Editorial of Morgunblaðið 4/25/1996. Two of the staunchest opponents of the new bill in the congress were both from the Socialist Party, former Minister of Education Svavar Gestsson and Hjörleifur Guttormsson.

<sup>161</sup> See also "Personal names and human rights" by Björn Jernudd in Skutnabb and Kangas eds. 1994.

<sup>162</sup> See "Bannað er nafn þitt" ("Forbidden is your name") by Drífa Pálsdóttir, Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson and Hjálmar Jónsson in Morgunblaðið April 27<sup>th</sup> 1996.

and the Icelandic language.<sup>163</sup> Two of the staunchest opponents in the Althing, former Minister of Education Svavar Gestsson and his partisan Hjörleifur Guttormsson of the Socialist Party argued that the new bill would eradicate age old Icelandic naming traditions. This view shared by many was also interestingly enough, supported by the editorial of the right wing daily Morgunblaðið (4/25/1996). Responding to the fears expressed by Mr. Guttormsson and his request for a national poll on this controversial issue, Congressman Hjálmar Jónsson one of the authors of the bill of 1996 argued, that the new law would strengthen the patronymic tradition. To support his argument he pointed to a Gallup poll on the issue conducted in 1994. The poll asked: Laws on people's name exist in Iceland. Do you think that there should be limitations so as to what kind of names can be used, as the law now stipulates, or do you think that it should be completely free? These were the results.

1. More restrictions than now: 1%.
2. Content with the current law: 21%.
3. Expand freedom however install some restrictions: 45%.
4. Complete freedom: 34%. (Gallup poll, quoted in Hjálmar Jónsson 6. Maí 1996 120. löggjafarþing 131.fundur).

According to the authors of the new bill of 1996 the law from 1991 suffered from at least four major flaws. The first flaw concerned the obvious discrimination against foreign-born Icelanders already mentioned. The second flaw concerned the prohibition of adopted foreign names on the basis of lack of tradition within the Icelandic language. This was the case even if it could be proved that these "foreign" names were easily adjustable to Icelandic grammar and thereby meeting at least part of the requirement. This kind of prohibition was unprecedented in Icelandic history. The third flaw in the 1991 law took to a prohibition of non-gender specific middle names. (Before 1991, many people circumvented the family name ban by giving a family

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name as a middle name and by doing so omitted altogether the use of their patron YMI). The fourth flaw of the 1991 law said the authors of the 1996 bill, took to increase in foreign family names at the cost of Icelandic patronymic tradition. This increase the authors claimed was caused by a problem rising amongst descendants of foreigners who had settled in Iceland but never sought citizenship and therefore kept their family name. The children of these non-citizens on the other hand had to choose between a patronymic or a family name but could not use their family name as a middle name (the descendant are Icelandic citizens). In regards to this "problem", the authors of the new bill stated in a controversial article, which appeared in Morgunblaðið daily April 27, 1996, that:

In a society where family names are "limited resources" it is not surprising that most people who have to choose between these two will choose the family name. Resulting from this is a rapid increase in foreign family names in Icelandic society".... that eventually "will push Icelandic names away. Obviously it is necessary to take action so as to direct these foreign family names into another channel in the language community"..... "For some people this may not be an issue worth spending any energy on. The authors of this bill however, are convinced that if nothing will be done soon only few decades will pass before Icelandic surnames will mostly be foreign. Other peoples' histories show that thousand year old patronymic systems may be eradicated in a matter of decades. ("Bannað er nafn þitt" Morgunblaðið 4/27/96)

In order - for the outsider - to understand these flaws and the conflicts they caused it is necessary to look at how and in what way the legislature has dealt with peoples names in the past.

The very first law on people's names was passed by Althing in 1913 and replaced by new one in 1925 which, remained in effect until 1991. On two occasions in 1955 and 1971 attempts were made to change the law without any success (Halldórsson 1971, Sverrisdóttir 1996). The most significant stipulations in the old legislation dealt with restrictions on both given names and family names. These restrictions in turn relate directly to the notion of purity. Many people whether laymen or learned who are in favor of legal restrictions to maintain the "purity" of people's names, argue that people's names are part of the vocabulary of the national language and

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<sup>163</sup> Same article as above "Bannað er nafn þitt" in Morgunblaðið April 27<sup>th</sup> 1996.

thus rightly subject to legislation's (Kristjánsson 1996, Kvaran 1987). Linguist Halldór Halldórsson for example, is of the opinion that it is important to keep the Icelandic names supply as pure as possible and to hold on to the old naming traditions (1960/1971). He praises those who love the purity of the Icelandic language and their understanding of the importance of the name supply there within. Yet interestingly, he warns against too much restriction and calls for a middle ground in these matters (1960/1971:96).

In 1913 when the first law was passed on people's names, the main pillars of Icelandic national identity as known now in the late 1990s were already well established. This was the point in Icelandic history when the country was already autonomous but not yet sovereign. The main impetus for the law of 1913 was the increase in family names, a tradition that first appeared in Iceland in the seventeenth century (Halldórsson 1967/1971).<sup>164</sup> Until then Icelanders both men and women had used patron YMI. This system may need a little explanation. In the patronymic system the rule is to add either "son" or "dóttir" (daughter) to the father's first name, the father's name being in the genitive case (indicating ownership). So if a girl is given the name Guðrún and her father's name is Jón, she becomes Guðrún Jónsdóttir (note that the "s" in Jónsdóttir stands for the genitive case). Her brothers' on the other hand would be Jónsson. Her father could be Ólafsson or the son of Ólafur. Her mother could be Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir i.e., daughter of Guðmundur. While this naming system is apparently gender biased - favoring men - women never changed their last names, so our Guðrún would remain Jónsdóttir for as long as she lived regardless of how many husbands she might have had. Within this system, people are never addressed solely by their surname. It is an oxymoron for example, to address our Guðrún by saying Ms. Jónsdóttir. This tradition is also responsible for what all but Icelanders find peculiar, i.e., to list people by first name in telephone books as well as everywhere else. In spite of the traditional first name address forms there were other ways of keeping social distances. In the past,

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<sup>164</sup> (nr.41.Nov.10, 1913)

a T/V ("tu"/"vous") was used, albeit hardly used anymore. Full names are always used in formal introductions; nicknames would never be used in formal situations or publicly, such as the case is in American English. Other ways of indicating social distance in addressing manifest in usage of terms of politeness at the beginning such as, "excuse me," "afsakið," followed by the persons first name.

The first people to take up family names in Iceland in the seventeenth century were not surprisingly, men from the upper strata, civil servants such as county sheriffs or ministers within the church. Most often they changed their names while staying abroad (mostly Denmark). At the turn of the nineteenth century family names were on the increase albeit a tradition almost entirely found amongst the ruling elite (see Halldórsson 1967/1971). Often times these family names were simply Icelandic patronymic spelled in a Danish way. So Þórarinnsson would become Thorarensen to give an example. In the middle and the second half of the nineteenth century new constructions such as Hafstein, Blöndal and Nordal appeared all names that to this day are highly visible within the high ranking offices in the country. Finally, many foreigners who settled in Iceland - mostly Danish and Norwegian merchants, industrialists and others - kept their names, such as Knudsen, Kerulf, Keld, Scheving, Bachman, Olsen, Jensen, to name a few. In 1855, 155 family names in total were found in Iceland but in 1910 they had risen to 297.<sup>165</sup> In 1994 in contrast, there were as many as 2227 different family names registered in the country and thus outnumbering the patronymic (Sverrisdóttir 1996:32). When the controversial bill of 1996, went before the parliament, a headline in Morgunblaðið daily read: "More family names than patronymic names." This headline smacked of tabloid sensationalism intended to shock the reader. In reality however, all in all the entire section of the Icelandic population carrying family names in 1994, amounted to 13 thousand people or 5% of the total population ("Ættarnöfn fleiri en föðurnöfn" Morgunblaðið April 27, 1996).

In the first law from 1913, there was a stipulation on protecting family names and patronymic. With this legislation anyone who now wished to take up a family name had to apply for permission to the state department. However, names that were considered unfit, as it was called, in the Icelandic language could not be granted acceptance. Included here were names that were thought to be shocking in one way or another. As it was possible to interpret this article in many different ways, final decisions were left to the state department. With the passing of the first law the legislature stipulated the state department to put together a list of names that could be used as family names and another list over "good and solid" old and new Icelandic names (male and female) (Halldórsson 1971.) On the committee working on these name lists was amongst others, the aforementioned Guðmundur Finnbogason along with author and journalist Einar Hjörleifsson. Mr. Hjörleifsson was the only one on the committee to take up a family name from this list and was after that known as Einar H. Kvaran. The committee composed a list of new family names that were contributed as suggestions, the idea being that these new names would somehow be more in alliance with the grammatical structure of the language, or not be as threatening to the language. While some of these names were used, the list was scorned and met with great controversy, particularly those who wanted to ban family names all together. (Pálsson Á., 1947/1916) Interestingly Dr. Finnbogason's attitude towards family names was not at all antagonistic, as one might have expected. He was of the opinion "that good family names did not pose any threat towards the Icelandic language,"... and felt that every man should be free to take up a family name if they so chose (Jónsson 1976:38).

The work of the committee was however rendered useless with the new bill passed in 1925 as that law stipulated in article 2: "from now on nobody can take up a family name" (*Ættarnafn má enginn taka sér hérefnir*, see *Lög um mannnöfn nr. 54, 27 júní, 1925*). Moreover, all new family names that had come into use from 1913 were stipulated to disappear with the

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<sup>165</sup> In the later case are all those names are carried by people who are born in Iceland, thus not counting those with

second or the third generation. The argument for these restrictions was that if family names would be allowed to increase without governmental interference the old and unique patronymic tradition would soon disappear. There is of course a grain of truth in that, however at the same time it is also apparent that the elite - or at least some parts of it - had marked themselves off from the common folk. Around the turn of the century more and more people from other social ranks were taking up family names. It is thus tempting to conclude that the legislation was at least partially, an attempt on the behalf of the elite to legitimize one aspect of difference that set them apart from the public. In spite of this legislation many of the people who took up family names after 1913 disregarded the law so their names have been passed on to the generations.<sup>166</sup> In those cases there were no penalties imposed.

It is worth while mentioning that in Iceland, as is the case in many other places, not all family names carry the same weight. For the most part the older family names from the nineteenth century carry much more prestige - and at times also power - than the newer ones from the twentieth century. Today most middle age Icelanders would be quick to distinguish between the old family names and the newer ones. Regarding foreign-born people and their names, both the legislation from 1913 and the one from 1925 indicated that foreign born people who settled in Iceland and their descendents were fully permitted to keep their given names and their family names. However, in 1951 a bill on law on citizenship for foreigners stipulated that no one could be granted citizenship unless they had Icelandic names according to the law of 1925 (Alþingistíðindi A 1951:824 quoted in Halldórsson 1967/1971). This issue was further established in the law of 1991, which included an article on foreigners seeking Icelandic citizenship. This article, which caused a lot of controversy, stipulated foreigners who sought

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family names who were not born in the country (Halldórsson 1967/1971).

<sup>166</sup> Ironically, linguist Guðrún Kvaran, granddaughter of the above-mentioned Einar Kvaran, is one of those who are very much in favor of legal restriction of names and name giving. While she does not directly oppose the increase in family names she warns against the "particular danger" of using family names as middle names as some cases witness

naturalization to take up both an Icelandic given name and surname. It also called for their children to follow the Icelandic patronymic tradition, and thus banned them from using their "foreign" family name. On the other hand, family names taken up by "native" Icelanders were accepted, as it was considered unrealistic to ban them even if these names were illegal according to the law from 1925, hence the appalling discrimination between foreign-born, and native-born Icelanders.

In a commentary following the bill of 1991 the Minister of Education at the time Svavar Gestsson, pointed out that to ban illegal family names taken up by native born Icelanders would probably be considered a violation of human rights. This was so because these names had acquired a tradition in the language simply because of the indifference of their usage by the authorities.<sup>167</sup> All native-born Icelanders who had taken up family names in the questioned period were permitted to keep these names and pass them unto their children. Foreign-born Icelanders or naturalized citizens and their children were however, forced to give up their original names and adopt an "authentic" Icelandic name. Let us look at an example to highlight the importance of the matter.

One of the great concerns facing the Icelandic authorities when a group of Vietnamese refugees - the very first non-European group of refugees to be granted asylum in Iceland - arrived in Iceland in 1978, was to find proper Icelandic names for them. The Vietnamese who came to Iceland, were part of the so-called boat people who had fled Vietnam on open boats and been tossed about in the open sea with scant food sometimes for weeks on end. Undoubtedly suffering from massive doses of post-traumas, the most important thing Icelandic authorities could think about for these people when they arrived was to make sure they were given proper Icelandic names. This might sound absurd and even on some level even amusing. More seriously however,

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(Kvaran 1987:103). Ms. Kvaran currently works for the Dictionary of the University of Iceland and is on the board of the Icelandic Language Committee (Íslensk Málnefnd) discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>167</sup> (1990-04-06 112 Íþ.N. F.Fundur 475 mál A mannanöfn (heildarlög) frv. Menntamn. ND)

it bespeaks of complete lack of cultural sensitivity on the most fundamental level, highly unfit for a society that on other occasions wants to be regarded by the international community as an example of an ideal social democracy.

Interestingly, the acting Minister of Education Mr. Gestsson the primary advocate for the law of 1991, did not see any reason to doubt that the apparent discrimination against foreigners - embedded in the old law and carried over by the bill of 1991 - could possibly violate international contracts on human rights that Iceland was signatory to. It was precisely this glaring discrimination or double standard between "native" born Icelanders on the one hand and immigrants on the other that became a source of heated debates.

The most critical shortcomings of the law of 1991 were statutes that opposed dominant ideas about personal freedom, as Minister of Justice Þorsteinn Pálsson (Conservative Party) said in his comments following the new bill of 1996. While acknowledging the importance of protecting Icelandic names, Mr. Pálsson argued that rather than imposing laws it would be more successful to reach that goal through education and information.

A persons name is one of the most important aspects of their personal identity and concerns first and last his/her personal interest rather than a public interest. The right of parents to decide their child's name must be great and the right of the legislature to interfere with name giving proportionally limited. However, some name traditions are such that they touch on important social interests as well as on personal interests, hence, an increased right of the legislature to interfere. This applies not least to the Icelandic patronymic tradition. (Þorsteinn Pálsson October 31, 1996. 120<sup>th</sup> Congress, meeting 22)

Pálsson argued that the goal of the new law was particularly aimed at three issues; first to expand the freedom in name giving, particularly by allowing foreign names even if they had no previous tradition within the Icelandic language. The second goal of the new law was to even peoples' naming rights as much as possible by expanding the rights of foreigners who became Icelandic citizens. The third goal is to encourage the use of family names as middle names rather

than surnames. (ibid.) All these issues were subjects of heated debates, where some opponents argued that the last stipulation was indeed nothing but usage of family names in disguise. "By permitting these [middle/family] names to flow into the language unhindered is like opening for a dam that within short will dig out such a deep channel that the banks will collapse" (Jónsson and Sigurðsson 1996:29).<sup>168</sup> The passing of the 1996 law characterized a more liberal attitude towards people's names. However, as the discussion above clearly indicates name giving is still subject to law and monitored by the supervision of the Justice Department.<sup>169</sup> New family names are still not permitted.

One of the statutes in the laws on peoples names (nr. 45/1996), calls for an *ad hoc* committee on people's names appointed by the Minister of Justice. The primary purpose of the name committee is to put together a list of proper/authentic Icelandic names. The list is subject for revision no less than every third year. The second role of the committee is to assist religious ministers - traditionally name giving and christening goes hand in hand and are performed by church ministers - the Bureau of Statistics, the Minister of Justice and other child caretakers in cases of controversy. Thirdly, the committee is to solve controversies over name giving and name spelling, such as in Ester as opposed to Esther, Elísabet vs. Elizabeth etc.,. According to the law, the committee's verdicts cannot be appealed. Thus in those cases when a minister is asked to give a name which does not exist on the name list, he/she has to consult with the name committee. The Bureau of Statistics will not register a name of a child if it is not found on the name list. All children have to have registered names before the age of six months. One of the clauses (kafli IX 25.gr .) calls for financial penalties up to kr. 1000 a day (approx. \$13) in the cases of violation of the law.

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<sup>168</sup> The authors Erlendur Jónsson and Páll Sigurðsson were both acting members on the name committee at the time ("Rangur farvegur mannanafna" Mbl. May 4, 1996:29).

<sup>169</sup> Look for the original source a speech by Svavar Gestsson from the spring of 1996. The supervision of this law was moved from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Justice at the suggestion of Svavar Gestsson.

A provisional clause, (No. III) called for a surveillance committee ordered by the Minister of Justice to secure the observance of the new law. Upon a report given to the Minister of Justice by committee on September 15, 1997, the Minister saw it fit to send a warning to all religious ministers in the country, reminding them of their duties. This was not as one might expect because the new law had been massively violated. The number of violations mounted to less than 1% of the total. The number of ministers involved was around 10%, this being so in spite of the fact that the Ministry of Justice and Churchly Affairs had had specific hearings introducing the new law to religious ministers. The *ad hoc* committee suggested that the ministry would make extra efforts in order to acquaint them with the law. The Minister took the committees suggestions and sent out warnings to all religious ministers ten days later (Dóms og Kirkjumálaráðuneytið, tilvísun 96060040, September 25, 1997). When I was in Iceland in January 1998, I called the Ministry of Justice in order to get hold of these documents. As is almost always the case when one asks for documents, this was not at all a problem. I was told that I could just come there and pick up copy of the letter, which I promptly did. The spokesperson I talked to on the phone, informed me that the action on the behalf of the Minister was necessary. "You know," said the spokesperson, "how they are these sweethearts [the pastors]. Some of them are just too shy to tell parents up front that the name they're giving their baby is forbidden. This you see, just makes matters worse and complicates things unnecessarily. It is much easier to nip things in the bud, than have to tell people later after they have gotten used to the forbidden name that they cannot use it. It is less hurtful to do it right away. That's why we have to remind them to do their duty."

### III. Media Purism

It is unfavorable speech to talk about "evading a collision" or "evading a bankruptcy" etc. It is better to say for example, "to prevent" or to "avoid collision, bankruptcy." (Tungutak nr. 82 May 1995)

I cannot explain many peoples' tendencies to say "on June 17<sup>th</sup>, on May 1<sup>st</sup>" instead of simply saying "June seventeenth, May first." This *on* is excessive in this relation. On the other hand it is natural to say on the thirteenth or on the seventeenth... (Böðvarsson 1992:31)

These examples, picked at random are typical of the language instructions heard on a prime time program called "*Daily Speech*" (*Daglegt Mál*) aired for decades every other night after the evening news on the Icelandic National State Radio (NSR). This program along with another called "*Íslenskt Mál*" (*The Icelandic Language*) have played a decisive role in molding peoples ideas about the Icelandic language, what is "proper/improper," how the language should be treated, what kind of respect should be shown to the language etc., as the propagators phrase it. Other forms of media, particularly newspapers have also been influential in propagating language purism in Iceland. The impact of the National State Radio shaping Icelandic national identity is beyond measure as pointed out by grammarian Árni Böðvarsson (1992).

As discussed in chapter two, Benedict Anderson argued for the important role of print-capitalism and newspapers in the process of nation making particularly in pre-twentieth century Europe (1983/1991). Needless to say, the impact of newspapers is still to this day significant in terms of molding people's political opinions and sense of self as well as their group identity. The impact of the twentieth century media both radio and television is by most considered to be beyond measure. There is an extensive literature dealing with the impact of broadcasting media, particularly television, on violence, on gender reinforcement and in general on how television shapes peoples opinions on variety of issues (Calhoun 1994). However, less attention has been directed to the impact of these media in shaping the ongoing process of national identity making

(Hall 1996). Yet the ideas about the nation or national identity and the mirroring other are constantly enforced and reinforced either directly by conscious and deliberate identity forming or subtly and indirectly.

In this section I will discuss the role of media in propagating language purism in Iceland. Because of the gigantic impact of the Icelandic National State Radio, I will focus specifically on its role in molding national identity in Iceland.<sup>170</sup> While attention will be given to programs dealing directly with language and language use, such as the ones mentioned above, I will not confine myself to those, but look at the broader impact of the National State Radio in fortifying Icelandic language purism. Along with using written and audio taped material I will also draw from my personal experience working as a news reporter at the NSR and later during my fieldwork as a program producer and a host. In addition I will also look at privately owned broadcasting services and newspapers.

### *1. National State Radio – RÚV*

Imagine being able to listen to only one radio channel and one television channel in your own language. This is difficult if not impossible, for people who grew up being able to run up and down the dial in search of a radio channel to their liking or flip between dozen or so television channels. This was however, the case in Iceland, where until 1985 the Icelandic National State Radio and TV had exclusive rights to broadcasting.

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<sup>170</sup> The National State Radio is called *Ríkisútvarpið* acronymed RÚV in Icelandic. The term *Ríkisútvarpið* actually means the State Radio. Interestingly, in Icelandic as in many neighboring languages, such as German, the terms *state* and *nation* are used alternatively. This should however not come as any surprise, as within German Romantic nationalism the state was seen as essential to national progress.

The Icelandic National State Radio began its service in 1930 and enjoyed exclusive broadcasting rights in the country until 1985.<sup>171</sup> 1980 marked the beginning of broadcasting *Glasnost* when a second NSR channel was added on the dial, to be named Channel Two. Five more years passed however, before the laws were changed, dissolving the exclusive rights of the NSR and allowing for private ownership and management of broadcasting services. This thaw was undoubtedly part of a general development, taking place in all the neighboring countries in north Western Europe at the time. However, in Iceland this *Glasnost* can also be seen as a response to the long debated impact of the US military base, felt most directly in their 24 hour broadcasting services.

The US managed NATO base located in Keflavík - ca. 40 Km from Reykjavík - formally established in 1951, shortly opened up a radio station to serve its military personnel, following suit with the opening of a television channel in the early 1960s. Granted they had powerful enough TV antennas, it became possible for people living in the southwest area to tune in on the "The Yankee" or "Kaninn" as the military broadcasting services weather radio or TV were called in Icelandic.<sup>172</sup> For those who wished they could watch such programs as *Gun Smoke*, *Bonanza*, *Combat* and a host of other shows, movies and other American TV productions. Likewise, from the American military radio, listeners in the area could hear rock and roll twenty-four hours a day.<sup>173</sup> Listening to "The Yankee" was however not a free act, as it was seen by many people as a sign of betrayal and very unpatriotic. By the socialists and others who were resolutely against Iceland's membership in NATO and the presence of a US military base, listening to the Yankee was regarded as a complete taboo. To them it was a sign of support to US imperialism and also very unpatriotic. However, right wing cultural apostles and patriots who regarded the US base as

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<sup>171</sup> Radio broadcast had begun in 1926, but the laws granting the Icelandic State exclusive broadcasting rights were passed in 1930.

<sup>172</sup> The term "Kaninn" is a contraction of the singular Amerí*kani* plus the decisive masculine article *inn*. In Icelandic the decisive article comes at the end of nouns and follows the grammatical rules of four different declinations.

Iceland's life saver from the dreads of Russians communism would no more be caught listening to the broadcasting services from the NATO base for patriotic reasons. Who were the people who listened to the military radio? This is difficult to answer, as there is no research available. My guess is that these were non-partisan rebellious youth along with young people "who were eager to be part of the consumerism, pop culture and Americanization" sweeping the Western world at the time, to quote sociologist Gestur Guðmundsson (1994).

Tremendous controversy reigned over the issue of NATO, the base and "The Yankee" radio and TV channel in Iceland. Many leading figures in cultural politics felt that this broadcast was an "invasion into the Icelandic cultural jurisdiction"<sup>174</sup> a threat that was amongst other things seen as having "polluting effects" upon the language. Interestingly, Björn Bjarnason the now current Minister of Education and a staunch supporter of language purism, has argued that the presence of the NATO and the US base has not threatened the Icelandic language in any way (interview November 11, 1994). The controversy over the impact of the television broadcast of "Kaninn" did not really quiet until the US military officials agreed to respond to a request from Icelandic authorities on turning their TV station into a cable TV, finalized in 1975. The radio broadcast of the military continued to be a matter of controversy until NSR opened its second dial in 1980 (see discussion below).

For its entire history the best part of all the production on NSR's Channel One was pre-taped - and thus read - safe for the news broadcast, occasional political discussions and the direct broadcasts of funerals. (Broadcasting of funerals was a popular "program" aired two to three times a week until the mid 1960s - see next footnote). The direct broadcasts of the proper program consisted however, mostly of read material or written texts. In the late 1970s NSR had

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<sup>173</sup> It is no wonder that the birthplace of Icelandic rock and roll was in Keflavík, the Liverpool of Iceland in terms of pop music.

come under criticism both for its broadcasting "monopoly" as many claimed, as well as for the content matter of its program. Many people also maintained that if there was an Icelandic FM music/light talk channel fewer people would listen to the American military radio, hence the cultural "contamination" from the base would lessen.

By 1980, when Channel Two opened, the average broadcasting hours of Channel One was on average 17 hours a day.<sup>175</sup> The program had come under criticism particularly from the younger generation that considered it to be very conservative and stiff in its presentation. There were no talk shows or any other form of programs where one could hear spoken language. All texts were read. Moreover, complaints were loud over lack of popular music. Interestingly, the content of the program was somewhat a mixture of what was considered patriotic and thus automatically proper on the one hand and on the other it bore a great witness to an admiration for the high culture of the European bourgeoisie. An example of patriotic programs, were for example, the "Kvöldvaka" ("Evening wake") named after an old Icelandic tradition to tell stories in the evening. This program included narrations' from the past, reading of poetry, some solo performances of songs in the German *Lieder* tradition, choir songs, accounts from the Old Sagas or biographical accounts of some Icelandic men and their deeds.<sup>176</sup> Variations to this theme could be found at different points in the program throughout the week. Within these confines fell readings of both translations of foreign fiction and Icelandic contemporary fiction as well, afternoon and evening stories and stories for adults and a story for the children in the morning.

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<sup>174</sup> See here Þórhallur Vilmundarson, *Íslensk Menningarhelgi* Reykjavík (1964). Interestingly, Mr. Vilmundarson is the only person who has had a seat on the steering committee of the Icelandic Language Institute from its beginning until this day.

<sup>175</sup> Only in 1967 did broadcasting become continuous from 7:00 AM to ca. 11:45 PM. Until then there had been regular breaks in the broadcasting in the morning and in the afternoon. To give random examples: in September of 1944 the combined broadcasting on weekdays was just under five hours a day. In 1956 it had increased to eight and a half hours a day on weekdays. By 1965 all breaks are gone except a break in the morning between 10:00 and 12:00 AM. Until 1967, the general public could rent this time slot in order to broadcast funerals from the Reykjavík area. The popularity of the funerals is without a doubt part of the popular interest in who is who and genealogy. *Morgunblaðið daily* to this day dedicates a handful of pages on "obituaries" written by relatives and friends of the deceased, indicating their family background, i.e., genealogy as well as their deeds and sorrows. The "obituaries" are one of the most popular sections of the paper. (Dagskrá Ríkisútvarpsins/NSR Programs 24.- 30. september 1944; 19.25 ágúst 1956, 6. -12 júní 1965).

<sup>176</sup> See for example, NSR Program 4/30 1970 (Dagskrá Ríkisútvarpsins 30. apríl 1970).

Moreover, all kinds of tales and biographical accounts of various people both local heroes and foreign ones along with plays domestic and foreign figured into the program. The best part of the music - about 35 hours a week - was European classical music proper - concerts, symphonies etc., and light classic mixed with contemporary Icelandic music, this included morning, afternoon and evening concerts. At the same time there were only a half a dozen of music programs where one could hear pop music whether Icelandic or foreign. The combined airtime for all these programs was approximately nine hours a week.<sup>177</sup> In addition, there was one 45 minutes weekly jazz music program hosted and produced by one of the regular radio announcers.

In spite of some changes in recent years the program on Channel One is still true to its old traditions and for many people provides a sense of stability in a world of rapid changes. To this day there is still a prayer in the morning, said by a minister from the Icelandic National Church. Likewise, obituaries are read twice a day on prime time, i.e., around the noon news broadcast and right before the evening news at seven PM. The obituaries are preceded by read advertisements and public and private announcement of all sorts. Other traditions such as playing patriotic songs right before the news broadcast at noon and always before the station goes off air at night, are still honored. Listening surveys were not conducted until after the radio laws changed. In March of 1991, after several new channels had opened up, the NSR still had 41.0% of the listening market at noon and 31.9% at the evening news at 7:00 PM. In March of 1998 by contrast NSR still had 32.0% of the market at noon but only 19% at the 7:00 PM evening news.

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<sup>177</sup> In three of these programs people would send in greetings and ask for a specific song to be played. Thus there was one program called "The Songs of the Young People" (*Lög Unga Fólksins*) where teenagers sent in greetings to one another - i.e., girls to boys and vice versa - with a wish for a particular song to be played. Another one called "The Off Shift" (*Á frivaktinni*, óskalagapáttur sjómanna) was for the fishermen at sea where girlfriends and loved ones would send greetings to their men at sea. The third one was called "The Songs Desired by the Sick" (*Óskalög sjúklinga*), catering to patients in hospitals. It was consider the most "uncool" program of these three. In the mid 1970s a music program called "Achievements" (*Afangar*) started introducing alternative pop music, mostly from Great Britain. The program aired once a week (45 minutes). This program marked a beginning of a new and more liberal attitude within the institution which was to result in the opening of Channel Two. *Afangar* was different from the other music programs in the sense that people could not send in requests for specific songs to be played (See NSR Program February 27, 1980 - Dagskrá Ríkisútvarpsins 27. - 2. febrúar 1980).

In 1998, more television channels had appeared some of which had their evening news broadcast at 7:00 PM, thus severely challenging the dominance of the NSR (figures RÚV 1998: Samtengdar Rás 1 og Rás 2, virkir dagar. Snertiverð í útvarpi samlestri, skv. Hlustendakönnun).

When Channel Two opened up it was revolutionary for many reasons. For the first time people could listen to a twenty-four hour radio broadcasting in Icelandic. Secondly, it broke entirely off from the mother ship when it started broadcasting spoken language. This came as a major shock to many people, - me included - as one heard spoken language on the radio for the first time. Until then almost every word that ever was aired on Channel One was in the form of a written text, which had been edited and was thus void of any "incorrect" or "ugly" language and "foreign stains." As grammarian Kristján Árnason, Professor at the University of Iceland and the chairman of the Icelandic Language Council put it: "All the way from the founding of the National State Radio in 1930 until recently all spoken language on the radio was performed according to a written prepared text. It was thus possible to turn to NRS in search for examples of formal and sophisticated speech." (Málrækt 1989:43) This practice had in turn strengthened the idea of the "purity" of the language as it simultaneously reinforced the preference and status given to written language over spoken language. Thus in 1980, when people heard regular spoken word on air for the first time they were shocked and claimed that hosts and guests did not know how to speak Icelandic properly. Many claimed that this was a definite sign of language regression; of the degeneration of the mother tongue, terrible stains on the tongue, the pronunciation was terrible and on and on etc. (Ottósson 1990; Þrjú nefndarálit 1987).

The Icelandic State TV started broadcasting in the fall of 1966. Until the mid 1980s the average length of television broadcasting time was around four to four and a half hours a day, from circa 7:30 PM to circa 11:30 PM. However, until the mid 1980s all Thursdays were off as well as the entire month of July. The reason for this was predominately financial but many people claimed they were relieved to "get a break" from television.

Both *The Radio* and *The TV*,<sup>178</sup> as these all powerful media are called still to this day by most Icelanders, were for the longest time in a key position to influence peoples' concept of national identity. The radio was in particular instrumental in shaping peoples attitude towards the Icelandic language. Most of the programs shown on NSTV have been imported - complicated TV production is simply beyond the means of the Icelandic State. A large part of this material is in English either from Great Britain or from the United States. Foreign programs have always been subtitled, never dubbed except for children's programs. At times even when the original script is characterized by working class dialects or is full of slang, the Icelandic tradition has called for a translation into "Golden Age Icelandic" as linguist Ottósson, points out with pride (1990:124). The pressure from language purism has however, rendered the translation awkward at many times, stressing the usage of so-called "proper" words, which in fact sound very strange because nobody ever uses them (árbitur, lautartúr, aldinberjamauk, to give a few example/s). Safe for some programs on "correct pronunciation," broadcast in the late 1980s, NSTV has not had regular programs on "correct" language use as such.

## 2. *Purity Programs*

The National State Radio on the other hand has from its early days had specific programs on "correct" language use. Early on purists started complaining about the language use heard on NSR (see for example Pálsson 1940). In 1935 programs on language teaching began, where Icelandic was taught along with English, German and French. Regular broadcasts on "proper" language use did however not begin until 1939 (Ottósson 1990; Stefánsson, 1997). The first program called *Questions and Answers* broadcast every other week, was produced and hosted by

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<sup>178</sup> Interestingly, the NSTV is often times referred to as "the Icelandic television" (íslenska sjónvarpið) a term that came into use when the American base still aired their television. In spite of the establishment of privately owned television

grammarians (linguist) Björn Guðfinnsson, who based his book *Íslensk Málfræði (Icelandic grammar)* on these radio programs (Böðvarsson 1992.<sup>179</sup> In the early 1940s the broadcasts were increased to twice a week, the program changed hosts and name but the content remained the same. In 1953 *Daglegt Mál (Daily speech)* went on air for the first time and sent out twice a week, later programs gradually increased. The length of the program has varied from time to time, from five to fifteen minutes. By 1984, the program aired six times a week for five minutes at the time, right after the broadcast of the evening news, which practically the entire nation tuned in on. The program focuses mostly on "correcting" "wrong" usage of the language. This involves the "proper use" of prepositions and declinations of nouns to remind of the "danger" of using "foreign" words and "stains." Warning against dative-sickness, deflated speech/flámæli, sloppy speech and other "pests" that plague the "purity" of Icelandic. *Daglegt Mál* has solely been hosted and produced by grammarians (Helga Jónsdóttir NSR). Most if not all Icelandic acting grammarians have hosted *Daglegt Mál* at some point. Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson, a linguist of the younger generation is one of them. Unlike his colleges Rögnvaldsson is one of the few, who has dared to criticize the rigorous attitudes of purism. He has pointed out that one of the "strongholds" of this program, is its pedagogic role. "Unfortunately," says Rögnvaldsson, "it seems as the hosts of this program have been more concerned with judging rather than informing. I will admit, that it is much simpler and takes less preparation to judge, moreover I also know that many think the best hosts are those who use sarcasm to pinpoint people's awkward speech styles." (1985:9) Says another critic, "[t]his is of course the consequence of the policy that has reigned in the program (*Daglegt Mál*) in the previous decades a policy that in fact has many admirers. Last year the program received a letter that began like this: The program "Daglegt Mál" has sometimes

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stations in recent years with and increased access to foreign channels via satellites, the term does still solely refer to the NSTV. Likewise "the radio" is synonymous for NSR channel one.

been the whip used to beat the blunders of the Icelandic language to obedience." (Karlsson 1989:17) *Daglegt Mál* is still on and is now broadcast every other night and then rerun the following morning.

Another long-term program on the Icelandic language and still on is *Íslenskt Mál* (*The Icelandic Language*), which also begun its broadcast in the early 1950s. While *Daglegt Mál* focused mostly on correcting peoples speech and language use *Íslenskt Mál* an hour long weekly program is slightly different in its emphasis as it has mostly been concerned with collecting old – and "pure" - Icelandic words and expressions for the Dictionary of the University of Iceland. Occasionally, other grammarians have hosted *Íslenskt Mál* but from the beginning the program has been produced by its creator Jón Aðalsteinn Jónsson, a grammarian and the director of the Dictionary of the University of Iceland for the longest time.

The NSTV and the NSR are one and the same institution (Ríkisútvarpið - Sjónvarp - acronym RÚV) and thus subject to the same law. From its beginning the NSR was by law granted the role of "protecting the language and the culture." <sup>180</sup> Likewise, the general laws on broadcasting passed by Althing in 1985 state that NSR and NSTV should cultivate the Icelandic language, the history of the nation and the cultural heritage (Útvarpslög. Stj.tíð. A. nr. 68/1985 p. 3).

The NSR (including NSTV) is by law an independent institution owned by the Icelandic State. The president of the country points the director of RÚV who is obliged to follow current traditions and rules regarding the execution of the programs for all of the institution's channels. The ultimate power over the institution remains in the hands of so called *Útvarpsráð* or Broadcasting Council. The Broadcasting Council consists of seven partisan persons who are

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<sup>179</sup> *Íslensk Málfræði* is perhaps the most popular Icelandic grammar book ever. It was taught for more than three decades in the school system. Mr. Guðfinnsson was also the leading figure in eradicating so-called "*flámæli*" (see chapter five).

<sup>180</sup> In the older version of the law on NSR it stated that the institution should "protect Icelandic language and culture." In the newest version of the law the term "protection" has notably been replaced by the term "cultivation."

proportionally elected by the Althing every four years, i.e., after every parliamentary elections. The Minister of Education elects a chairman and a vice-chairman from the council.<sup>i</sup> All decisions made by the council concerning programs are final. (Útvarpslög. Stj.tíð. A. nr. 68/1985 p. 4).

In the fall of 1985, shortly after the new broadcasting laws had been passed, NSR (i.e., Útvarpsráð/ NSR Council at the time) agreed on an official language policy for the first time. This policy was later to be approved by the Icelandic Language Council. The first article of this formal language policy states that "[a]ccording to law, the National State Radio shall strengthen the Icelandic language and culture. The NSR Council considers the institution to have a very important informative as well as pedagogic role in this respect. All speech on NSR should be exemplary and everything that comes from the institution should be sophisticated, performed with good pronunciation. Foreign words, whose usage cannot be avoided, shall be adjusted to *the laws of the Icelandic language*, as much as possible and good tradition offers." (quoted in Böðvarsson 1992:178, italics mine) And about specific points it says; sophisticated speech is systematic and is embedded in good selection of words, right inflection, natural syntax, clear sounds, right accent and natural rhythm of continuous speech. All employers of NSR shall make sure that speech on radio and television is flawless" (ibid. 1992:178-179).

Apparently the ground rules of the official language policy are, to say nothing more, subjective to the extreme. What is especially interesting here is the assumption of what is "good," "right," "correct" etc., is somehow seen as a given. Hence it is assumed that "laws of the Icelandic language" are something everyone is familiar with. In fact these "laws" are the rules of standard "pure Icelandic" which is used here as an ultimate criterion.

In order to make sure that NSR fulfills its purist role a special language counselor has been on NSR payroll since the early 1970s. Until 1984 this was a part time position headed by grammarian Baldur Jónsson (later director of the Icelandic Language Institute) who was replaced

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<sup>i</sup>Ríkisútvarpið skal leggja rækt við íslenska tungu, sögu þjóðarinnar og menningararfleifð." (Útvarpslög. Stj.tíð. A. nr.

by grammarian Árni Böðvarsson when it became a full time position.<sup>181</sup> In short, the role of the counselor is to ensure that the language heard on the NSR and NSTV follows the ideas of language purism. He/she is there to give Icelandic courses to the employers, to advise journalists and program hosts and when possible to read over scripts before broadcasting. He/she also listens to broadcasts and if he/she hears "mistakes" on air that employee will be approached and corrected. The language counselor also holds regular meetings with the staff at the news bureau and edits a monthly newsletter called *Tungutak* (a loose translation would be *Speech*).<sup>182</sup>

### 3. *Moral Standards and "Political Correctness"*

Given its preoccupation with morality and tireless nit-picking on what is "proper" and what is "improper" it is quite surprising that neither one of these long term language programs on NSR nor the institution itself has ever seen reason to systematically motivate the listeners to eradicate the use of derogatory terms referring to minorities. While outright racial slur or blatantly derogatory terms are not heard on the airwaves it is not to say that they do not exist. This indifference to racial slur can be explained by absence of racial contentions in Iceland due to the extreme racial/ethnic homogeneity. However, the same does not apply to other social minorities, such as women in general and gays in particular.<sup>183</sup> This lack of concern and

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<sup>181</sup> Later successors are Ari Páll Kristinsson and Margrét Pálsdóttir both of a younger generation than Mr. Böðvarsson and Mr. Jónsson.

<sup>182</sup> *Tungutak* consists of guidance on language use, which is subject to the personal taste of the language counselor. Needless to say however, all the people who have served on this post follow the preaching of language purism in all fundamental matters. Slight generational differences in terms of emphasis can however be found amongst them. Older grammarians might regard expressions unfit and improper if they can be proved to be of Danish origin - a fact which, is obscure to most users of the language, except for experts - as these expressions have been in usage for decades on end (see *Tungutak* nr. 80 - Mars 1995). Differences might also rise over weather new and thus Icelandic terms should be coined for the foreign terms, "badminton," "minigolf" and "croissants," to give a few examples (*Tungutak* nr. 76 - nóvember 1994). Nevertheless, on all basic matters the grammarians do agree.

<sup>183</sup> Given the increased numbers of immigrants especially non-Europeans to Iceland the issue of race is bound to come to be an issue if it isn't already.

insensitivity for those who are undermined only disturbs the purists when they feel that they or the "purity" of language (read also nation) is tarnished by the demand of these peoples' for equal recognition.

To give an example of this and also of how the language purism of NSR has manifested itself let us look at a famous and very controversial case.<sup>184</sup> In March of 1981 the newly established Icelandic association of gays and lesbians *Samtökin '78*, (*Association '78*) was banned from using its own terms' "hommi" and "lesbía" in reference to themselves in a public announcement on NSR.<sup>185</sup> Their announcement read as follows: "Lesbíur, hommar munið fundinn í kvöld. *Samtökin '78*" (Gays and lesbians remember the meeting tonight. *Association '78*). At the time homosexuality was still very much a taboo subject in Iceland and homophobia the standard attitude.<sup>186</sup> This attitude was reflected in the usage of highly derogatory terms such as "kynvillingur" (lit. sex heretic or sex savage) or "öfuguggi" (pervert) both commonly used in reference to homosexuals. The collision between NSR and *Samtökin '78* became a source of heated contention that lasted for years.

The establishment of *Samtökin '78* marked the official "coming out of the closet" for homosexuals in Iceland - both men and women. In line with the gay and lesbian rights fought elsewhere in the Western world at the time, *Samtökin '78* made public statements and officially demanded equal social and legal rights on par with the heterosexual members of society. Embedded in their demands was the request to be referred to by the concepts that they themselves used to refer to themselves, (i.e.,, "hommi" and "lesbía") but not the derogatory and heavily charged terms imposed upon them by the hetero-sexist bourgeois sectors of Icelandic society.

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<sup>184</sup> This section is based on sources - letters, statements, and articles - received from *Samtökin '78*.

<sup>185</sup> Unlike many of its counterparts in other countries, the Icelandic NSR is not commercial free. NSR radio channels broadcast announcements and commercials. Traditionally on Channel One these are simply read, not produced. Anyone can have an announcement on social activities, sale or promotion of goods and services read as long as they pay for it and as long as their language is in accordance with the language policy of the NSR.

<sup>186</sup> In the late 1990s homophobic attitudes are still present in Icelandic society. Homosexuals were however, granted rights to marry - albeit only civil matrimony - in 1996, which improved their legal status.

In regards to the ban Andrés Björnsson, the director of NSR at the time insisted that the terms "lesbía" and "hommi" were in conflict with the laws on advertising on radio and television as these words "provoked popular taste and decency" ("Þessi orð stríddu gegn almennum smekk og velsæmi." Bréf til Guðna Baldurssonar dagsett 6. marz 1981). Director Björnsson, was however, not opposed to the usage of the term "kynvillingur," which accordingly was a good and solid Icelandic term. *Samtökin '78* pointed out to him and others that the terms' "hommi" and "lesbía" could hardly "provoke popular taste and decency" as these words were the only words used by themselves about themselves. "Decency is not a matter in the case of this announcement - any more than it is regarding other meeting announcements. And it is hardly within the jurisdiction of the National State Radio to rule that one section of the Icelandic nation, i.e., we gays and lesbians, provoke public decency" (*Samtökin '78* January 12, 1982).

*Samtökin '78* immediately sought both information and advice from The Icelandic Language Council and The Dictionary of the University of Iceland and asked both if there existed in Icelandic other terms for homosexuals that were not charged with the same derogatory connotation as "kynvillingur." In short both of these institutions answered no, i.e., that no words free of negative charge existed. In regards to the terms "hommi" and "lesbía" ILC argued that "hommi" was alright but "lesbía" was not as good.<sup>187</sup>

The acting language consultants of NSR first Baldur Jónsson and then Árni Böðvarsson, both loyally followed the director of NSR. Later Böðvarsson argued in line with ILC that the term "hommi" was all right and acceptable and "has fully adjusted to the Icelandic language," but the term "lesbía" he argued was unacceptable because it sounded "un-Icelandic." Böðvarsson gave some lengthy grammatical "explanations" and maintained that the word "lesbía" included twofold inconveniences "un-Icelandic phonological relation" (the 'sb') and an "un-Icelandic

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<sup>187</sup> ILC was headed by Baldur Jónsson who until 1984 was the acting language counselor of NSR and the Editor of the Dictionary of the University of Iceland was Jón Aðalsteinn Jónsson, producer and host of *Íslenskt Mál*.

ending" (the Latin "ía" ending).<sup>188</sup> He suggested that the word "lespa" would be used instead. This infuriated Icelandic lesbians and Elísabet Þorgeirsdóttir the spokesperson of the lesbian association *Íslensk-Lesbíska* said that this was the very last straw the NSR was using in order to prevent homosexuals from advertising on NSR (*Þjóðviljinn* May 15, 1986). It is tempting to ask to what extent Böðvarsson's bogus argument about "un-Icelandic" phonology and ending is an attempt to rid the "impeccable" image of "pure" language/culture/nation of such embarrassing and "impure" "stains" as homosexuality? One might ask to what extent public presence of homosexuals upset the order of purity, and thus posed a potential threat to the order of purism.

Was this ban based on grammatical or political grounds? Early on *Samtökin '78* asked NSR director Ms. Björnsson whether the rejection was based on grammatical presuppositions alone, he refused to give an answer. Given this lack of a straightforward answer *Samtökin '78* argued that "it was obvious that the director's stand on the issue was based upon his political conviction that this particular social group - gays and lesbians - should not be mentioned publicly on the radio." (*Samtökin '78* January 12, 1982)

In their fight against NSR, *Samtökin '78* stood for demonstrations December 1, 1981 - the day Iceland became sovereign in 1918 - in front of all the Icelandic embassies in the other Nordic countries as well as in front of the house of Congress, Althing. The association also wrote letters to all members of the parliament: the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education (The Department handling and ruling the NSR). It repeatedly pointed out to them as well as to the director of NSR, that the ban went against all Icelandic democratic traditions whether legally confirmed or not. Moreover, it pointed out that the ban was verifiably an obvious breach of several international treaties on human rights that Iceland was signatory of. These were amongst others the United Nations Treaty on social and political rights, and later the agreement of the European Council from October 1, 1981, and the agreement of the Nordic Council from March 1, 1984 stipulating

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<sup>188</sup> This argument rest on very weak grounds as there are actually number of words in Icelandic that have the ending

for the abolition of legal, political and social discrimination against gays and lesbians. Yet in spite of this the ban held.

Not surprisingly, the contention caught the attention of the press including of course the News Bureau of NSR itself, where some reporters dared the ban and used the terms "hommi" and "lesbía" in their reports of events. As this was however not a universal act on the behalf of the News Bureau, the word "kynvillingur" was occasionally used prompting *Samtökin '78* to send the News Bureau a complaint (July 8, 1981). Surprisingly ever after, the Editor of the Bureau honored the request made by the association.

*Samtökin '78* had the support from other international gay and lesbian organizations (IGA and ILIS) as well as the Nordic Association of Homosexuals (NRH) which diligently supported them. In early 1985 the NRH participated in a post-card campaign addressed to the director of NSR where the ban was protested in thousands upon thousand of post-cards. As long as he remained in office director Andrés Björnsson had the support of the Broadcasting Council (Útvarpsráð). His successor Markús Örn Antonsson - who took office in early 1985 - decided to maintain the same policy as his predecessor.

Sadly to say, it took the issue of AIDS to change the policy of NSR in regards to accepting the terms "hommi" and "lesbía." Only when AIDS had become part of the public discourse did the NSR see fit to change their reactionary policy. In 1987 *Samtökin '78* was able to have an announcement read on NSR with the terms "hommi" and "lesbía" included without any comments from anyone within the institution whatsoever. This announcement was in reference to AIDS.

In an interesting article on AIDS in Iceland, by Böðvar Björnsson an active member of *Samtökin '78*, published in Morgunblaðið daily, the author points out that in the beginning of the discourse on the disease, after it had been painted as "a punishment to some unwanted

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"fa," such as *Biblíá* (Bible), *Belgía* (Belgium) *Arabía* (Arabia) and *olía* (oil) to name a few.

individuals”.... “the issue was soon to be classified as a taboo. The only solution was to stick the head in the sand and keep quiet as no vaccination was available.” Yet, “the only reaction was all Icelandic. In order to get a grip on the disease, people competed in finding an Icelandic word for it. “Áunnin ónæmisbæklun”/“acquired immune handicap” (considered too stiff), “ónæmistæring”/ immunity consumption (considered principally correct but too long) “alnæmi”/ “complete immunity” and “eyðni” (akin to the verb eyða meaning to raze, obliterate, or eradicate) which no one understood.” (Morgunblaðið October 1, 1986) To find the most imperative aspect of this newly discovered deadly disease rest upon whether a “proper” Icelandic word could be found for it, bespeaks of the power of the language purism in the country. Another important aspect of the controversy of AIDS as it manifested itself in the beginning of the public discourse, was as author Björnsson argues, related to the silence imposed by many powerful men in Iceland regarding homosexuality and thus the people who were worst hit by the AIDS disease (ibid.). In other words if one cannot find a “proper” Icelandic word for whatever it is that one wants to discuss publicly, one has no voice, and/ or one's topic is silenced by public shunning.

#### *4. More on Censorship*

I had the opportunity to learn about NSR's language policy from the inside when I worked at the institute at two different occasions. In the summer of 1987 I worked there as a news reporter at the News Bureau and then I was there again between 1995 and 1996 working as a free-lancer, hosting and producing programs for both Channel One and Channel Two. Interestingly NSR is almost like a little family firm, and actually with many inside family connections. The staff is expected to be loyal to the institution and its language policy. Most people are, or else they would not stay there for long. Because of the official language policy everybody - particularly those who go on air - is under a pressure to conform, i.e., to make sure to

use the "proper" terms that have been approved either by the Icelandic Language Institute or accepted by the language counselor. This also pertained to words that are hardly used anywhere else, except by the staunchest purist. Technical lingo for example, is all translated into "pure" Icelandic, ones on air. Staff members are encouraged to always use *Icelandic* words, even if the foreign ones are the ones that most people use all the time. Most people feel compelled to put on their "Sunday best," i.e., in terms of the way they speak, when on air. So, to give an example, the foreign word *studio* widely used inside as well as outside the institution, was called by its "proper" name *hljóðstofa* (literal translation: sound room) once on air. So was *mikrafónn*, which became *hljóðnemi*, ((literal translation: sound sensor) to give but few examples Similar attitude applies to a host of other words that have been used by people for decades if not longer, which are because of their foreign origin deemed unacceptable on the airwaves of the Icelandic National State Radio. Again, what we see at work here is the oppression of purism in the form of constant censorship or self-censorship, as we discussed before. If one wants to have a voice in Icelandic society, there are no ways around it, adhere to purism or nobody will listen to what you have to say.

In one of my recording sessions for a program I was doing for Channel One in 1996, on the history of ethnic and cultural diversity in New York City, I wanted to use the term "sívíliseraður." This word "sívíliseraður" is the Icelandized version of the English verb "civil" (as in, *to act in a civil manner*). I was aware that even if this was a term frequently used in many circles it was on NRS taboo list but I just wanted to see how or if I could get away with it. Not at all, the audio technician stopped me and told me that I had to use the proper Icelandic word "síðmenntaður" a word that does not at all have the same nuance as "sívíliseraður." He then gave me a lengthy speech about how adamantly he himself showed the Icelandic language its due respect by always trying to use the "correct" words and how he inculcated the necessity to his children by showing them by good example. So instead of using a "bastard" word such as

"battery" (battery) he used the "proper" word *rafhlaða*." I had no choice but to obey his order if I was to get my program on air. My experience at the NSR, proved a clear double standard at work in regards to language use, hosts and guests would simply change codes once on air, so as to live up to the request for language purity. This double standard is - not surprisingly - at work elsewhere in the Icelandic society.

Anyone who violates the rules of language purism when on air, runs the risk of becoming a subject of attacks from many directions; co-workers, the language counselor as well as listeners. The person who does that runs the risk of being either labeled as stupid, or seen as disloyal to the nation. One can be regarded stupid if one does not rigorously follow what the purists claim to be the correct rules of grammar. (This includes declinations of nouns, "proper" use of personal pronouns and more (Pálsson et al. 1984). On another level one runs the risk of being labeled "stupid" if one is thought not to be able to recognize the "foreign" words from the "pure" Icelandic words. To use foreign words or "stain" - as it is called - is a sign of disrespect for the "cultural heritage," and the alleged "purity" of the language. Thus "staining," is not least seen as disloyalty to the unity/homogeneity of the nation. Icelanders have, thanks to the politics of obsessive language purism, learned to perceive violations to the set standards of language purism as a threat to the alleged unity of the nation. However, most people would not put it in these terms but rather argue that everyone had a duty to honor the "cultural heritage" and "respect the language." Observation of these rules never becomes as imperative as in public arenas or media as on the NSR or in written text.

Early in 1995, I co-hosted and co-produced a program on Channel Two, which focused on the Internet.<sup>189</sup> In one of our sessions, aired around Independence Day of 1995, we asked three grammarians to discuss the new lingo of computer technology and the Internet.<sup>190</sup> The

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<sup>189</sup> Computer scientist Guðmundur Ragnar Guðmundsson was my co-host on the show.

Internet was and is pretty much beyond the scope of any national law and does not respect any cultural or political boundaries. In this regard it is bound to bring to the fore all sorts of new questions and hitherto unknown problems. One of the impacts of the communication revolution was obviously the one on language.

A deluge of new concepts - all coming from the English language - accompanied this new wonder; the word cyber both as a noun and a prefix, such as in *cyber-punk*, *cyber-space*, *cyber-sex*, *cyber-relations* etc. In addition there was a host of verbs such as *browse*, *surf*, *download*, and *hack*, not to mention all other technical terms popping up as fast as the market releases new products. For all too obvious reasons, Icelandic computer and Internet users were not going to wait for the approval of new words from the Icelandic Language Council, so they did as has been done so often before in Icelandic, they simply took the foreign term and adjusted it to Icelandic grammar. So to *browse* became "*að brása*," to surf "*að sörfa*," to download "*að dánlóða*," to install "*að installera*" etc., to name only a very few of the new words coming into use with the advent of the Internet.

Our guests on the show were grammarians Baldur Hafstað professor at the Teachers College of Iceland, Kristján Árnason professor at the University of Iceland and the chair of Íslensk Málnefnd (Icelandic Language Council) and Margrét Pálsdóttir the current host of *Daglegt Mál*. We asked them to come to our program and discuss the new communication revolution and its impact on the Icelandic language. We had them listen to a recording of some young computer/Internet whiz, who explained the Internet, how to use the World Wide Web, electronic mail (e-mail) and other aspects. Both professor Hafstað and professor Árnason were totally shocked and claimed that the language spoken by the whiz was not at all Icelandic but some shameful pidgin (*hræðilegt hrognamál*). It turned out that both of them hardly knew left

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<sup>190</sup> The program was simply called "Í sambandi" or "On Line" was thought as an introduction to non-professionals. The program covered all these interesting aspects of the Internet and cyber space, such as the fact that it operates independent of national or political boundaries, various technical aspects, the Internet as a new market and on and on.

from right when it came to the Internet. Ms. Pálsdóttir, on the other hand was first of all very familiar with the new technology and much more liberal in her attitude towards the new vocabulary emerging around it. All of them however, argued for the necessity of translating these new technological terms into proper Icelandic as soon as possible. For many, such as current Minister of Education, Björn Bjarnason, translation of computer terminology is a matter of "national interest" (hagsmunamál fyrir þjóðina), see discussion below on Bjarnason and the American software producer Microsoft.

#### 4. *Private Media*

The greatest change in the new law on broadcasting passed by the Althing in 1985, was the permission granted to others than the Icelandic State to own and manage radio and television stations. A fifty five-year-old chapter in the history of broadcasting had come to an end when the Icelandic State lost its exclusive rights to broadcasting. The bill calling for change of the law caused heated debates amongst the general public as well as within the Althing. Conservatives expressed fear of moral degeneration and too much foreign influence in the form of foreign pop music while others feared the power of commercialization (see for example discussions from the Althing in *Althingistiðindi* 1984, 1985).

The new law calls for a specific board called *Útvarpsréttarnefnd* (*Committee on Broadcasting Rights*) that handles all applications for broadcasting. The *Committee on Broadcasting Rights* consists of seven persons elected, like the *NRS Council* (*Útvarpsráð*) proportionally every four years by a new Althing. The majority in this committee depends therefore on what parties hold power in the parliament at any given term.

The permission to broadcast is subject to several conditions, both technical as well as cultural. These include honoring the foundations of democracy such as respecting the right to free

speech, making sure that space is given to different opinions in hotly debated issues. Hardly a surprise at this point, but there is of course a stipulation concerning the Icelandic language stating that "broadcasting stations ought to encourage general cultural development and strengthen the Icelandic language." (Útvarpslög Stj.tíð. A, nr. 68/1985:1) In 1993, some changes were made on the Icelandic broadcasting law so as to make them comply with Iceland's contract with the European Economic Area. So in 1993 it became permissible to broadcast without translating, programs from foreign channels in their entirety and unchanged. This change made foreign satellite television broadcasts lawful in the country. However, all domestic channels were yet to translate all foreign material with the exception of direct broadcasting, where translation could be added later.

One might ask whether this points to a contradiction within the broadcasting law. What I am referring to here, is the stipulation on language purity on the one hand and on the other, free speech, which is subject to stipulations on democratic governance. Is it possible that these two could be at odds with one another? As of early 1999, no case, testing this aspect of the law has come before the courts. It remains to be seen. However, the issue was a matter of debate in the fall of 1998, when the Day of the Icelandic Language was celebrated for the third time (see next section). At a conference held in relation to the celebration, the issue of "bad Icelandic" came to the fore, while some called for "actions" i.e., to eliminate the "ugliness" others claimed that such actions could possibly violate constitutional rights to free speech (*Morgunblað* 11/16/98). However, it is not unlikely that within very few years this situation could come up. Either where some people of the younger generation would insist on being able to use their lingo, slang or foreign "stains" when on air. Or, another scenario is not unlikely where some of the growing ethnic minorities in the country would want to open up their own channels, speaking their own language, whether it is Croatian, Polish, Tagalong or Thai. As the law is that would be unlawful. Hence, it remains questionable whether the law is constitutional as it is.

The Icelandic law on broadcasting also contains provisions concerning the content of the program of domestic channels, stipulating that they should make an effort to make sure that the bulk of the program is Icelandic and that programs preferably come from Europe. (Skýrsla Útvarpsréttarnefndar 1. janúar 1992 - 31. desember 1994 - *Committee on Broadcasting Rights Report: January 1992 - December 1994*). This stipulation is apparently an attempt to stem against the flow of English (British or American) productions.

Since the change of the broadcasting law passed in 1985 dozens of privately owned commercial radio stations opened up. With one exception *Bylgjan* which broadcasts all over the island the rest of the stations are regional. These are for the most part music stations with some talk shows thrown in here and there requiring hardly any production. In other words these stations air spoken language for the best part. They remain however, fairly true to the law on language purity. While no such case has yet surfaced, according to the law stations are subject to revocation of their license, if stipulations on language purity are not observed.

After NSR lost its exclusive rights, a handful of television channels have appeared, come and gone. These privately owned and managed stations are also subject to the broadcasting law and thus the observance of language purity. These stations, that are only available through cable, broadcast for about eight to ten hours a day on average. The income for these stations is based on subscription fees and the revenues collected from commercials. Even so the proportion of home produced material in Icelandic is less than that of NSTV. The privately owned stations, buy most of their material from the United States. In comparison NSTV which has much more versatile programs and significantly more domestic production the proportion of foreign material broadcast at NSTV in 1996 was 67,5% against 32,5% of domestic production. Of all the foreign material a little bit over 40% is in English, with American productions in the majority (*Ríkisútvarpið Sjónvarp útsent efni 1996. Skýrsla - NSR& TV broadcast material 1996*).

In addition to these private "Icelandic" television channels, it has become possible in recent years to subscribe to foreign television stations, such as the American CNN, the British Sky and a host of others English speaking channels as well as channels that are based on the European continent. In the fall of 1997 the grand total of broadcasting permits had risen to 30 for radio stations and 13 for television stations transmitting 40 channels (*Daily News from Iceland* November 12, 1997).

This number went up in the fall of 1998, when the state run television channels in the Nordic countries started satellite broadcasting over the entire Nordic countries. Some of these stations had been available for a while in the mainland countries for those who had satellite discs. "This decision is historical and marks the implementation of a twenty year old dream," says a news report issued by the Icelandic NSR announcing this news. Moreover, the report announces that "this solution was made at the initiative of the television stations themselves. It is not based on any political decisions nor is it financed in any way by national or Nordic political institutions" (Fréttatilkynning RÚV 3. júlí 1998 - News Report NRS July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998).

What about Icelandic newspapers and purism? As we saw before, Icelandic newspapers have ever since their beginning in the nineteenth century been in the forefront of language purism. The unrivaled giant on the market today, the daily *Morgunblaðið*, is if anything more Christian than the pope himself - as one says in Icelandic - in matters of language purism. There every word goes through the screening of language purism and the paper takes great pride in its loyalty to the cause. One of the current editors is as mentioned before, poet and purist Matthías Johannessen. The current minister of education Mr. Björn Bjarnason was also an assistant editor in chief of *Morgunblaðið* daily for seven years and before that their journalist for five years. Mr. Bjarnason is a staunch supporter of language purism and has contributed greatly to the cause. In his term as a minister he has fought diligently for the purity of the language and is amongst other things the author of the *Day of the Icelandic language (Dagur íslenskrar tungu)* discussed below.

As an assistant editor at Morgunblaðið daily Mr. Bjarnason - albeit anonymously in accordance with the rules of the newspaper - was the originator of a cooperation between the paper and the NSR in publishing a book called *Speech in the Media (Málfar í fjölmiðlum)* (Böðvarsson 1992). This book was not for sale and only used by the journalist of the two institutions. Interestingly, while the NSR has at times been criticized by some right wingers to be too liberal, this cooperation with the conservative *Morgunblaðið* is indicative of the fact that these two giants on the Icelandic media market are identical in their approach and loyalty to the politics of language purism.

Like NSR, Morgunblaðið daily has a regular weekly column on language purism, simply called "*Íslenskt Mál*" (Icelandic Language). These columns, written by Icelandic scholar Gísli Jónsson, are now close to one thousand in number. Here as on NSR, the focus is on correcting "improper" use of the language and to encourage people to show the language its "due respect." On the Day of the Icelandic Language in 1997, Mr. Jónsson received the Jónas Hallgrímsson Prize for his contributions to the Icelandic language. With due respect for this regular column on language use, it is the overall adherence and loyalty to language purism and the self appointed power the newspaper grants itself in order to execute its policy, that is extremely curious.

A specific case in point occurred recently, when Morgunblaðið daily took it up to call the *Internet* "*alnet*," stating that the prefix "Inter" was not Icelandic and thus unfit for usage in the Icelandic language. Since coining the term, in all its discussions on the Internet, the paper now employs this new term "alnet" (Kristinsson 1996). While the popularity of this new term remains to be seen, the impact of Morgunblaðið on people's ideas about correct language and respect for the mother tongue is beyond doubt. In the summer of 1998, the acting linguistic counselor at NSR suggested another term instead of the "Internet" namely "lýðnet" meaning the peoples' net. It again remains to be seen whether this term will gain any popularity.

Minister Bjarnason, recently took on the giant computer company *Microsoft*, insisting that the company translated their word processor program *Windows 98* into Icelandic. *Microsoft* - whose software products run more than 90% of the world's market personal computers - for the longest time refused to translate *Windows 98* into Icelandic. The company claimed that the tiny Icelandic market does not warrant a translation. Denmark with a population close to 5 million was so far the smallest market to have had *Microsoft* translate their word processor *Windows*. The case caught the attention of international media, namely the British television station BBC and the American newspaper The Los Angeles Times (June 29, 1998). In an interview with *Morgunblaðið* daily on the issue, Minister Bjarnason, said the international media are realizing that Icelanders' wish for an Icelandic-language *Windows 98* is a "fair and reasonable request." (quoted in *Daily News from Iceland* July 3, 1998). This coverage of the international media apparently changed Microsoft's take on the issue, and as of July 6, 1998 "Microsoft had informed the Icelandic government that it wants to cooperate in finding a solution to the Word 98 translation wrangle between Icelandic authorities and the computer software giant." (*Daily News from Iceland* July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1998) In an interview with NSR, Mr. Bjarnason said that he was convinced that the upcoming 1000 year anniversary of Leif Erikson's presence in America<sup>191</sup> had been a catalyst in convincing *Microsoft* about the importance of supporting the preservation of the Icelandic language.

On January 20, 1999, *Morgunblaðið* daily announced that Microsoft and Mr. Bjarnason on the behalf of the Icelandic state signed a contract where the company agreed to produce an Icelandic version of *Windows 98*. The article stated that the minister had described this as a

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<sup>191</sup> The Nordic countries are preparing for a major commemoration of Leif Erikson's presence in America in year 2000. Icelanders claim that Leif Erikson was Icelandic and not Norwegian as the Norwegians claim. In recent years some contentions have risen between the countries in relation to the "proper nationality" of Viking Erikson. This tension has mostly calmed down. It became clear that it was far beyond the financial means of Iceland alone to sponsor the anniversary. Thus the major festivities, scheduled to take place in the USA and Canada are financed jointly by all the Nordic nation states as well as private companies. The contribution of each country varies according to their size. The festivities are seen as a golden opportunity to boost commerce and trade between North America and the Nordic countries.

landmark in the history of computer development in Iceland. "With the contract the status of Icelandic is strengthened in the information society. In addition, a foundation is laid in the establishment of co-operation with the strongest software and computer company in the world. I welcome the great understanding the company has shown towards our [Icelanders] language defense." ("Vil ég fagna því, hve mikinn skilning fyrirtækið hefur sýnt á varðstöðu okkar Íslendinga um tungu okkar") The minister also, expressed his gratitude to the computer terminology committee as well as The Icelandic Language Council and the Icelandic Language Institute. In 1993 the Icelandic state, decided to use the DOS -Windows program in the entire school system. Following this decision, the minister thought it was a logical continuation to work towards having the system in Icelandic. Along with the contract between Microsoft and the Icelandic state, a memorandum was signed that describes common goals of all those working within the computer development in Iceland. Amongst the goals is the translation of *Office 2000* from Microsoft and to reduce the price of Microsoft software to Icelandic schools (Morgunblaðið 1/20/99).

#### **IV. Language Cultivation Campaigns**

##### *1. Day of the Icelandic Language - Dagur íslenskrar tungu*

The cultural premises of the Icelandic nation are embedded in our cultivation of and tending to the Icelandic language. (Björn Bjarnason 11/16 1997)

On November 16, 1995, the Icelandic government approved a proposition from the Minister of Education Björn Bjarnason<sup>192</sup> (Conservative Party), to make November 16, - the

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<sup>192</sup> Before becoming a congressman for the Independence Party (Conservative Party) Mr. Bjarnason, was the editor in chief of the daily Morgunblað. Mr. Bjarnason is the son of Bjarni Benediktsson, former Prime Minister and leader of the Independence Party.

birthday of national poet Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845) - *The Day of the Icelandic Language* (*Dagur íslenskrar tungu*). In the proposition it was suggested that the Ministry of Education<sup>193</sup> launched a special campaign for the mother tongue and that the day should be dedicated to language cultivation.

This will be done in co-operation with the national organization of teachers of the mother-tongue, at all levels of education and the media. Other institutions that are connected with the language, such as The Arne Magnusson Institute, (The Dictionary of the University of Iceland, The , The Icelandic Language Institute, The Institute for Place Names (Örnefnastofnun), The Icelandic Association of Writers, The National and University Library and other libraries and institutions around the country. In this way the attention of the nation would be directed at the status/position of the language, its value for our national-consciousness and the entire culture. (Newsletter from The Ministry of Education -printed from its homepage last up-dated July 1,1996)

The Day of the Icelandic Language was first celebrated in 1996. On the occasion Minister Bjarnason argued, that most people would understand the justification for selecting the birthday of Jónas Hallgrímsson for a dedication towards the mother tongue. Yet some would have difficulty understanding the need for a particular campaign. "This is my justification," Mr. Bjarnason said: "The day is to be a day to commemorate the mother tongue in a festive way.... The day is not at all the last day of a dying national language but a sign of the determined certitude Icelanders have towards their own language and cultural heritage." (Speech delivered on November 16, 1996.(<http://www.centrum.is/bb/radherra>) *The Day of the Icelandic Language* is celebrated on NSR and other media, such as *Morgunblaðið* daily.

## 2. *Purism on Milk Cartons*

During the cold and snowy winter of 1995 the largest dairy produce distributor company in the country Mjólkursamsalan launched a "language campaign" on its milk cartons. The company is the sole milk distributor in the Reykjavík metropolitan area, where two thirds of nation's

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<sup>193</sup> The Ministry of Education is also the ministry of Cultural Affairs although it is not reflected in its name.

population lives. All milk consumers in the region received illustrated instructions on how to speak Icelandic "correctly" and how not to speak it, when to use certain adjectives, when to keep silent, what forms of greetings to use and on and on *ad infinitum*. There was no way getting around it, if one wanted to buy regular milk one got a lecture on how to use the Icelandic. All milk cartons whether for regular or low fat milk contained an illustrated message on the "proper use" of grammar, pronunciation and style. As many as sixty different messages were issued and distributed evenly over the year. Another series of sixty new messages was delivered in 1997. (See appendix.) Here are several examples for the first set of messages, chosen at random:

1. **“Prolivity!**

Oftentimes meaningless words and expression are used unnecessarily. Some for example become fashionable and inundate/sweep the media.

**Normal Speech**

The freezing plant is by the harbor.

The company is new  
In the election yesterday...

Political discussions.

**Get straight to the matter!**

Icelandic is our language”

**Long- windiness**

The freezing plant is *located*  
by the harbor.

*Under discussion* is a new company.  
In the election *that took place*  
yesterday.....

Discussion in the *field of*  
politics.

Along with this message is an illustration of two persons, one with his hand under his chin and looking bored. The other one has his mouth wide open and an oversized tongue extending far out of his mouth. (See appendix 1).

2. **Góðan dag!** (Good day/ good morning)

**Blessaður! Sæll! Heill og sæll! Sæl og blessuð!**

**Vertu sæl! Komdu blessuð og sæl! Vertu sæll! Verið þið öll blessuð og sæl!** <sup>194</sup>

We Icelanders have plenty of beautiful and warm greetings. Empty “hi” and “bye” could however, easily exterminate them if we do not keep our vigilance.

<sup>194</sup> All of the above are Icelandic forms of greetings, meaning hello and goodbye.

**Show each other the respect to greet each other in Icelandic!**

Icelandic is our language”

The illustration accompanying this message is of two youngsters sitting in an American convertible car - could be a Chevy - and a man standing outside the car leaning forward to the driver shaking his hand. (See appendix 2)

3. **“Ice-English!** (ísl-enska)

The influence of English on our daily speech is more than many people suspect.

Some say:

**Have a good** weekend.  
Do you **take** milk in your coffee?  
Now you take **over**.  
**Talking** about Jón.

Icelandic is our language”

Better to say is:

**Enjoy** the weekend.  
**Do you use** milk in your coffee?  
Now it is your **turn**.  
As we are mentioning Jón.... Or:  
Yes by the way! Jón

Along with this message is a drawing of two men. One is dressed in Western cowboy gear; fringed shirt, cowboy boots and a cowboy tie. The other one is wearing a “traditional” Icelandic sweater and is trying on the others hat, i.e., cowboy hat. In bold letters under the illustration this could be read: **Beware of unnecessary impacts from other languages!** (See appendix 3).

4. **“Hvert er málið/** What’s the issue/language.

(This one needs an explanation. In Icelandic the word "**mál**" has many different meanings: language, issue, measurement, yardstick, and mug).

**Verbosity:** Now when the publication of this book has arrived at the final stage I want to thank Árni for helping me with the publication, Ásta for her contributions of the lay-out stage and Baldur for getting it to the printing stage.

**Normal speech:** At the publication of this book, I want to thank Árni for the help, Ásta for the layout and Baldur for the printing.

**Avoid long-windiness!**

Icelandic is our language”

Illustration: A man is giving a speech from a pulpit while three persons, one woman and two men stand behind. The facial expressions of the three indicate that they don't understand. (See appendix 4).

Why dedicate a day on "language cultivation" on the national language? This may look odd to the outsider specifically when one keeps in mind that there are no other separate language communities existing in the country large enough to threaten the dominance of "pure" Icelandic. And why, one may ask, launch a language cultivation campaign on milk cartons? In other countries such as in the United States, milk cartons have surely been used as a medium for public announcements or awareness. In the greater New York region for example, pictures and relevant information on missing children have been published on milk cartons in recent years. In Iceland on the other hand, milk cartons have been used in a very patriotic fashion. The messages are patriotic in the sense that they call for loyalty to the nationalistic cause - linguistic purism - or the elements that are believed to be essential for the future existence of the culture and the nation. While the milk carton campaign can be explained by reference to Bourdieu's ideas of "symbolic violence" of the "linguistic market," one might ask whether there is more to it. It is obviously an attempt to stave off linguistic/cultural influences, particularly those of Anglo-Saxon origin. Influences, that the purists conceive as a major threat to their power as they upset the order of purity/power. This fear is part of another underlying assumption of the campaign, which bespeaks of the evil of anything foreign, namely xenophobia.

The idea of launching a language campaign on milk cartons came from the milk distributing company *Mjólkursamsalan*. On June 17, 1994, the day that marked the 50th anniversary of the Icelandic Republic, a full-page ad appeared from *Mjólkursamsalan* in the two biggest newspapers in Iceland, *Morgunblaðið* daily and *Dagblaðið-Vísir* (DV) daily.<sup>195</sup> The ad sheds light on the rationale of the agents behind the campaign. The ad had no illustration, only

text. In italics and huge bold letters that ran across the page, the following headlines appeared: ***Icelandic is our language*** (Íslenska er okkar mál). At the top there was a quote from the poet Snorri Hjartarson; Country, nation and language, a trinity true and one....," a line - mentioned before - and frequently cited by the president of the Republic, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. Below is the content of the ad:

A mother-tongue is the symbol of a nation and the Icelandic tongue is our clearest declaration of independence. The history of the country and the nation is written in it. It reminds us of our duties and also gives us precious freedom. The country and the language are our common property. The nation is made of these two. In its daily work, Mjólkursamsalan has participated in utilizing the resources the country resides over. On the anniversary of the Icelandic republic and also on the occasion of Mjólkursamsalan's 60th anniversary coming up next year, the company has decided to make a special effort towards the cultivation of the Icelandic tongue - the most precious cultural heritage of the nation.

With knowledge and guidance on the milk cartons and with other forms of support towards language cultivation, Mjólkursamsalan contributes to the united effort of the people aimed at protecting and cultivating the tongue. Icelandic is the language of us all and it is the common task of the nation to stand a faithful guard around it. (Morgunblaðið, June 17, 1994, Vol. 82, 135:19)

The ad above reflects all the major nationalistic ideas about the importance of keeping the Icelandic language pure. One is reminded once more that pure Icelandic is "the most precious heritage of the nation." And moreover, that pure Icelandic *par definition* is presumably essential for the country's political independence and that "Mjólkursamsalan contributes to the united effort of the people aimed at protecting and cultivating the tongue."

An outsider might wonder why there is not a word on who decides what criteria are to be used in order to reach these goals of "protection" on the one hand and "cultivation." However, to the average Icelander this is not an enigma at all, but a taken for granted assumption; these are the grammarians and linguist's working at the various state based language institutions, whose divine role was discussed in chapter four. In the case of this particular campaign, linguist Baldur Jónsson

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<sup>195</sup> A poll conducted by the Social Science Institute October 12-18 1997, reveals that 60 percent of the nation, age 12-80, reads Morgunblaðið every day. Dagblaðið-Vísir (DV) is read by 41 percent of the people (*Daily News from Iceland*

of The Icelandic Language Institute (Íslensk Málstöð) was the main consultant for Mjólkursamsalan. An outsider might also ask what *Icelandic* "is the language of us all" and whose idea is it that, "it is the common task of the nation to stand a faithful guard around it"? In my classification I came up with 9 different categories of the language instructions on the milk cartons: i) from the old sagas: 9. ii) idioms/expressions 13. iii) diction/wording/phrasing: 58. iv) pronunciation: 5. v) conjugation of names: 5. vi) stanzas/quatrains: 18. vii) word puzzles: 4 viii) direct foreign influence: 3. ix) miscellaneous: 5. Total number of advertisements 120 (See appendix). Both of these language cultivation campaigns were aimed at protecting the purity of the Icelandic language. Both events can be seen as a response to the fiftieth anniversary of the Icelandic republic celebrated in 1994 as well as a response towards an ever increasing impact of globalization and the intensified influence of the English language in Icelandic society.

In looking at the first celebration of the Day of the Icelandic Language, November 16, 1996, Minister of Education Björn Bjarnason, talked at length about the constant flow of information coming into Icelandic society and culture through new means. He argued that nobody would want to stifle that flow but pointed out that Icelanders must not lose the "uniqueness of the language," in other words they should aim at finding "Icelandic" words for all those new ideas and technology. "By caring for the uniqueness of the language we strengthen our part in the international community." He also argued, and rightly so that the increased flow of global information had pushed both individuals as well as nations to care more for their origins and history. Then he stated:

This should not surprise any of us Icelanders, because we are of the opinion that the history, the country and the language, give us a unique status in the community of nations. If we were to lose this uniqueness, it would not take long before we would lose the will to fight. That will made it possible for us to transform Icelandic peasant society into a highly developed and rich informative, service and industrial society without us having to be defeated by foreign cultural currents. ([www.radherra.centrum.is](http://www.radherra.centrum.is))

These two language campaigns were not entirely new as such. Given the preoccupation with language purity in Iceland it is easy to argue that during the entire 20th century language campaigns, albeit informal, have been ongoing both within the school system and the media.

### 3. *From Cleansing to Cultivation*

Aside from the systematic eradication of "*flámæli*," discussed before, the first systematic language campaign entitled *Málrækt '89* (Language Cultivation '89) was launched in 1989 by the acting Minister of Education Svavar Gestsson (Socialist Party).

The initiative behind *Language Cultivation '89* was an encouragement from President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in her address to the nation on New Years Day of 1989. There she urged Icelanders to attend to their language and show it care. This inspired Mr. Svavar Gestsson, Minister of Education to call for a meeting with some specialists where he asked them to give their opinion on the status of the Icelandic language and also on what could be done in order help the improvement of the language (*Málrækt '89 Skýrsla Verkefnisstjórnar*). The Ministry of Education issued the summary of this meeting. It is interesting to look at these conclusions as they have also been the drive behind subsequent language cultivation campaigns. There it says:

"Many people are now increasingly worried over the future of the Icelandic language. Many reasons come into play here:

- a. Social structures, of which the language is so inextricably tied to have changed and young people in urban areas seem to have difficulty mastering traditional vocabulary, diction's, expressions, idioms and conventional speech (*talshætti*) and more.
- b. More and more people seek their education and appropriate work experience and essential professional vocabulary in foreign languages abroad.
- c. The media is expanding and becomes more and more international and foreign channels begin sprouting (in Icelandic soil).
- d. Very monolithic and strong currents come from the English language and [the Anglo-Saxon] culture.
- e. Teaching in the mother tongue does not render the expected results.

- f. Modus operandi and the attitudes of those who have worked the hardest towards language cultivation does not seem to have reached young people." (Málrækt '89 Skýrsla Verkefnisstjórnar 1989:7)

The Ministry of Education based *Language Cultivation '89* on these comments/suggestions. The program aimed first at strengthening existing language cultivation programs, second to launch campaigns in schools and in the media to increase the standing (auka veg) of the mother tongue and thirdly to work towards legal changes and language cultivation projects.

The planners of *Language Cultivation '89*, including Minister Svavar Gestsson himself, agreed to select the term "language cultivation" rather than "language protection", "language purism" or "language admonition" all of which they argued, were too charged or too authoritarian (interview with Svavar Gestsson 10/17/94, and *Málrækt '89* 1989). Like the meaning of the other terms the term "language cultivation" does not have a clear cut or definite meaning the authors say, and is perhaps the least clear of them all. Yet most people seem to agree on it and it is perhaps the most positive of them all. "'Language cultivation," does seem to incorporate many of the things embedded in the other terms but in addition it also entails an endeavor to improve the language in which ever way possible." (1989:10)

Minister Gestsson said, that he felt the term "language protection" had too much of a conservative and isolating tone to it." He argued that language protection could at times go too far and people would set themselves up against any foreign words whatsoever. "Language cultivation on the other hand was aimed at cultivating the nation's language understanding and the spoken word, which has in recent years been on the retreat. That is why I was clear on it from the outset not to use "language protection" but rather to use "language cultivation," which sounds a bit like human cultivation (málrækt vs. mannrækt). Not unlike the discourse around the turn of the century, when people spoke so much of cultivation, the cultivation of land and people and all of

that. Perhaps it was somehow the same thought, a bit pedagogic thought, you see." (Personal interview October 17, 1994)

When I asked, the former minister who he thought was to lead that "cultivation," Mr. Gestsson said a bit surprised "everybody preferably. That was the main thought of *Language Cultivation '89*. It was not a prescription, you see. On the contrary, what we did was more like opening for a vein that already existed with the nation; in the kindergartens, the primary and secondary schools, colleges, work places, the media all over. And it is important to point out that the Ministry of Education has to be very much alive in Iceland. I think that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs has too be very strong in Iceland because culture is such a strong factor in our foundation. We did not lead we searched. In *Language Cultivation '89* I felt as if I was a man who is drilling for hot water and searches for a vein and then comes the vein, at times hot water at times cold water, something just bursts forward. That's exactly what we experienced with the interest for the language cultivation campaign. The wide spread participation was simply incredible," said Mr. Gestsson with great emphasis on his words.

In the report Málrækt '89 the authors point out that when organizing the language campaign attempts were made to reach the ears of each Icelander so as to sensitize their responsibility as language users and language cultivators. Three things had to be kept in mind for those who cultivate their language. First of all,

it has to be clear to the speaker that the language is a cultural heritage which he is responsible to render to the coming generations. It is a matter of ambition to him that this heritage will bear fruit while in his care and will not be less than what it was when he received it. He is aware that this cultural heritage is by far of the greatest importance in making him an Icelander, brought up in Icelandic culture and Icelandic thinking. Secondly, he is aware the language is a medium and a communication tool." ..... "In such a way he will be able to influence his environment and become an active participant in a democratic society. Thirdly, he is aware that language will enable him to structure his thoughts ....The better he cultivates his language and the better he is able to use it to express his own thoughts and the better he is able to use what ever he has acquired in intellectual matters. In this way language relates man with himself, his environment and his nation. The language plays such a pivotal role in the life of the nation and the

individuals that it would spell vandalism beyond repair if we would in any way reject it, such as by forgetting its role or forgetting that the language is like vegetation, which needs constant nurture and care. (*Málrækt '89*, 1989:11)<sup>196</sup>

To give an idea of the vast scope of this first official language campaign here are some of its undertakings: Encouragement and suggestions sent to various institutions and agents around the country. These were both public and private institutions and companies. Various forms of media, TV, radio, and newspapers were used to present so-called "micro-shots" (*örskot*), where people were given very short comments on language. "This was very popular and many parents said that this had been the cause for lively discussion at home" (*ibid.* 12). Municipal boards, personnel at all schools and daycare centers, were encouraged to dedicate the week of October 23-27 to celebrate Icelandic or the mother tongue. Two companies, one a grocery plastic bag company *Plastprent hf.* and the other a producer of plastic food containers for dairy produce *Plastos hf.*, asked *Málrækt '89* if they could print encouraging words on language cultivation on their products. The report states that "the clients of the latter company had insisted on this. It now seems as if many claim that a company's image can be improved, if it attends to the language." (*ibid.* 13) Finally, the Icelandic association of book publishers and the ministry of education in cooperation with *Málrækt '89* sponsored a week of children's literature on the National State Radio in October. The children's literature week was held in connection with the mother-tongue week held in all public schools.

In addition to the informative aspect of the actions, great part of the work of *Málrækt '89* was in the form of information of all kinds. To name but a few, articles on various institutions dealing with language and any kind of service on language use, such as *Íslensk Málstöð* (Icelandic Language Institute), the *Arne Magnusson Institute* and *the Dictionary of the University of Iceland* appeared in all the major newspapers. A book on spelling issued by the National

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<sup>196</sup> The author of this report/ text/brochure is Kristján Árnason who was one of the thirteen members on the board of executives of *Málrækt '89*. Mr. Árnason is a professor of linguistics at the University of Iceland. He is also one of the board members of *Íslensk Málstöð* (Icelandic Language Institute).

Institute of School Material (Námsgagnastofnun) and Íslensk Málnefnd was given to all 11-year-old children in the nation. *Málrækt '89* and the National Public Radio sponsored a dedication to the Icelandic language on a very popular weekday radio talk show called *Þjóðarsálin* (The spirit/soul of the nation). Language cultivation became part of *Þjóðarsálin* once a week for ten weeks and was immensely popular with lots of people calling in for advice. The National Public Radio also cooperated in the production of comic shows on language and language use called *Bibba á Brávallagötunni* (Lucy on Lincoln Street). Twenty programs were produced and the idea was to reach to those people who usually do not listen to programs on the Icelandic language. Furthermore, the programs were meant to be encouraging and informative. In short these programs attacked all the most common and most stigmatized aspects of ungrammatical or "incorrect" language use amongst the working class such as cases exemplifying "dative sickness" (*þágufallssýki*) - such as in "mér" hlakkar/langar, vs. "mig," and "læknirar" vs. "læknar," "hellirar" as opposed to "hellar" - and "deflated speech" (*flámæli*).

The main character on the show *Bibba á Brávallagötunni* is Bibba, a housewife whose prose was overflowing with grammar mistakes. She was portrayed as ignorant to the point of being embarrassing. This show received great ratings but caused some controversy as many people were simply offended by the exaggeration of this portrayal. Not only was it sexist but it was also offending to the working class or uneducated people. Others thought it was great.

In addition to the weeks dedicated on "raising peoples' consciousness," about language and children's literature mentioned above, all teachers from kindergarten and up to the gymnasiums, partook in a week of language-cultivation campaign sponsored by various education institutions and teachers associations. Finally, *Málrækt '89* issued a brochure on language education/rearing for parents of children five years old and younger.

At another level the expected roles of *Málrækt '89* was to strengthen those institutions or individual researchers who were already doing research on language cultivation. These included The Dictionary of the University of Iceland, researchers working on a guidebook on language use for teachers, parents, kindergarten nurses and others.

Lastly it is worth while looking at some of the institutions and individuals who co-operated with *Málrækt '89*. These were amongst others the Ministry of Education (Menntamálaráðuneyti), The Teachers College of Iceland (Kennaraháskóli Íslands), The National Institute of School Material (Námsgagnastofnun) and Íslensk Málstöð (The Icelandic Language Institute). The National Youth Association which was already working on some programs on language cultivation and *Málrækt '89* supported the NYA in a competition they sponsored amongst children on the best slogans and images to be used in support of language cultivation. Other institutions were the Icelandic Association of Book Publishers, the NSR and NSTV in addition to privately owned media.

All these language campaigns operate under the assumption of linguistic purity. As language and nation are synonymous in the Icelandic nationalist ideology, the launching of the three official language campaigns can be seen as a response to increased linguistic influences from abroad. Hence as a response to an alleged threat to the "unity" of the language and the "unity" of the people. These influences are not least the ones coming from the English language, whether in the form of new technologies or in forms of entertainment films, music etc. These language influences are by and large seen as negative by the protagonist of linguistic purity. As pointed out above, it does not matter at all what political party is heading the Ministry of Education, whether it is the Socialist Party (Alþýðubandalag) or the Conservative Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkur) the attitude towards linguist purism is the same. To this day no Icelandic political party has ever expressed anything akin to criticism of Icelandic language policy.

## V. Critique on the Ideology of Purism

The views on purism that we have dealt with in our discussion, are by far the views of the "experts," whether linguists or other intellectuals who have dominated the discourse and shaped the official view towards linguistic purity. If this is the dominant scholarly view one might ask whether one finds the same argument to hold true for the public.

First of all it may be noted that the process of standardization - exemplified in linguistic purism - has not caused any serious conflicts to occur, notwithstanding some minor differences in terms of emphasis rather than fundamental ideological differences with a couple of exceptions, which we will look at shortly. Notwithstanding, a study conducted by Pálsson in 1987, revealed however that there was "far more opposition to the dominant discourse of linguistic homogeneity than Icelandic linguists would like to believe. Although, most Icelanders (61.3%) think there is "little or no" difference in language in terms of social class, no less than 29.9% believe that there is "considerable" difference, and an additional 8.8% believe there is "very great" variability from one socioeconomic group to another." Interestingly these responses, says Pálsson, turned out to be unrelated to social class, gender or education. On the other hand, the survey indicated a statistically significant relationship with age (1995:132-133). Pálsson's survey also indicated that the higher the socioeconomic status the less likely the speaker was to divert from the standard. The difference being as high as 30% on a tested example of the nonstandard use of the dative case (labeled "dative-sickness" by the purists). Speakers of higher socioeconomic status used the tested case of personal pronouns (ég hlakka, nominative case) according to the accepted standard 71.7% of the time as opposed to 41.6% of those of lower status. (ibid.) As Guðfinnsson's survey of the stigmatized "deflated speech" (*flámæli*) did not indicate social status of the speakers it is difficult to establish a concrete systematic qualitative survey of exact social differences of this language differentiation. Our discussion on the "deflated speech" (*flámæli*) in chapter five, nevertheless, supports that this

language variant was class based. Pálsson (1995) also supports that view.

Aside from a few individual voices that have dared to publicly challenge the rigors of purism conflicts leading to a formation of an opposition movement has never emerged. The purists have consistently argued that historically regional dialectical differences were relatively minor in Iceland compared to most neighboring countries (Benediktsson 1964; Sveinsson 1991). Reference to small population size and a relative high level of migration by servants as well as landowners, have explained the absence of sharp regional dialectical difference in Iceland. Finally, seasonal migration of fishermen from the countryside to the seaside during the fall and winter fishing seasons is said to have prevented sharp regional language differences. (Sveinsson 1991) As we have seen this statement does not quite fit the facts as the case of so-called "deflated speech" (*flámæli*) proves. That dialect was both regional, albeit found in several regions, and also a class dialect. The reason for the successful eradication of that dialect is without a doubt applicable to the political action taken by the state coupled with the heavy doses of stigma that forced the speakers to change their pronunciation.

In line with anthropologist Gísli Pálsson I argue, that the absence of an overt criticism or systematic challenge towards the doctrine of purism, cannot be explained by reference to the alleged linguistic homogeneity of all the speakers of Icelandic as the purist claim. The purists' argument emphasizes relative absence of regional dialects and complete absence of class dialects. This argument, which categorically negates the existence of socio-dialects has as however, served a political purpose of sustaining the myth on social and economic equality within Icelandic society (Pálsson 1979, 1981, 1995).

Pálsson has argued that the rigor of Icelandic purism is attributable to a fundamental lack of understanding amongst the purists of the modern Icelandic social system and its stratification (1981). He has also argued that the language cultivation practiced by the purists to be out of touch with the social reality most Icelanders live in, a point supported by linguist Rögnvaldsson (1983,

1985) and to a lesser extent and Icelandic teacher Finnur Karlsson (1989) (see also Hannesson 1981). This detachment is for example, well exemplified in the traditional attitude towards "dative-sickness" and has led to an increased gap between written and spoken language. On another level, Pálsson has argued that the rigorous policy of purism has led to inferiority complexes and fear amongst those who do not follow the scriptures of purism or self-censorship as Bourdieu has argued for a point that we have already discussed. Moreover, Pálsson has argued that the rigorous Icelandic language policy has led to hypercorrection by some speakers, a well known phenomenon in other language communities (Pálsson 1981; Labov 1972; Bourdieu 1991). The frequency of so-called hypercorrection,<sup>197</sup> is in Iceland, like in other places, most likely to be found by the petty bourgeois or those who have just recently entered the middle class. An example on hypercorrection, common in Icelandic is the obvious avoidance of the stigmatized "dative-sickness." A case in point here is the usage of the accusative case "mig," where the "correct" usage calls for the nominative case "ég" in relation to the verb "hlakka" (look forward to). So instead of making the "deplorable" mistake of using "mér" or the dative case, hypercorrection prompts people to use another case, which by all accounts is equally wrong, if one assumes like the purist that only case is "correct."

Pálsson's criticism emerged first in 1979, in the periodical *Skirnir*, in an article titled "Bad language, bad grammar." This article, argued against the rigors of purism and the almost universal lack of understanding of the social aspects of Icelandic and class differences in Icelandic society amongst the "bacteriolinguists," as Pálsson sarcastically called the purists. The article led to fierce reactions from linguists and other "friends of the Icelandic language," who attacked Pálsson and his "non-reliable rubbish" (markalaus þvættingur) as philosopher Þorsteinn Gylfason, called Pálsson's argument (1981:34). Philosopher Gylfason, the son of former Minister of Education Gylfi Þ. Gíslason (see chapter 3) interestingly, also attacked Pálsson's argument on class difference in

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<sup>197</sup> Hypercorrection refers to a speech characteristic, where speakers avoid "obvious" and stigmatized markers in speech but instead of using the "correct" or standardized form, use another form, which is by definition equally "wrong."

Iceland stating that: The class difference, Gísli [Pálsson] argues for sure does exist, but it is a class difference between scholars and teachers. Gísli [Pálsson] himself belongs to a class of scholars that enjoys little respect, and in my opinion rightly so. [A class] that now fights hard for its survival and existence. One of their objectives is to move mother-tongue teachers out of the way with their uninspiring rote so that sociologists can take over with their undisciplined rubbish." (1981:34-35) Others devoted purists, accused Pálsson of "vandalism," and labeled him as a "demolisher." (Hálfðanarson in *Morgunblaðið* 4/24/85) Similar undignified accusations were aimed at Pálsson in the largest leftist newspaper at the time *Þjóðviljinn*. Pálsson informed me that after this stormy debate it became clear to him who were his friend and who were not. Apparently, he had touched upon something that to the followers of purism was sacred and beyond criticism.

The absence of real verbalized conflict between the "experts" and the general public over language policy is also a strong indication of a very successful nation-making i.e., national propaganda. Furthermore, and of no less importance is the fact that any opposition and/or serious critique of language purism has traditionally been stigmatized and treated as treason. In our discussion on Icelandic purism we have argued that it has been propagated with religious fervor and that adherence to it is a measure of national loyalty. The "purer" one's speech is the more Icelandic one is as we have argued. To "stain" in public is seen as a matter of disloyalty and is as we have seen not tolerated neither in the broadcasting media nor in most printing. Most people are very conscious of their speech when speaking in public or in settings that call for such loyalty. However, in more relaxed the situation, say when friends are among friends, people are likely to defy the rules of purism. While I did not do any systematic survey of it, it was clear to me during my fieldwork, that there was a significant difference in terms of age. The younger the people the more likely they were to use "stains" and of course slang, which in Icelandic is oftentimes synonymous with "stains."

Recently, an Irish journalist Gary Gunning, who had lived in Iceland for five years dared to

challenge the dogma of purism in a way that few if any Icelanders ever have. In a newspaper article Gunning began his discussion stating: "consumption of hallucinogenic drugs has not played a big part in my life, so it is no wonder why I am now wondering why I am confusing milk cartons and articles in Morgunblaðið daily. The answer is simple. The combination of fanatic nationalism and ignorance has made it difficult to distinguish between a milk carton and "the highest selling newspaper in the nation."<sup>198</sup> ..., The core of the matter is that both the milk carton and "the highest selling newspaper in the nation" have taken a defensive stand around the Icelandic language, or more correctly a preservation of chastity." ("Í upphafi var orðið" *Alþýðublaðið* 1996:7) It should be clear to the reader that Gunning is referring to the language campaigns on milk cartons and the ongoing purist defense of Morgunblaðið daily. And he goes on and says: "the ongoing redundancy of the purity, the sacredness and divinity of the Icelandic language in some of the media, is not only wrong from the perspective of linguistics but it adds fuel to the zealot's fire. It is [also] a neat method to control how people think." (ibid.) Gunning then refutes the myth of the preserved originality of Icelandic and says that Icelandic is like any other language alive, and stubbornly resists fettering and restraining. It is the nature of all languages says Gunning, "to develop according to inner laws and outer pressure: that's precisely what makes them alive and beautiful. If Icelanders would diligently obey all the orders on the milk cartons and in "the highest selling newspaper in the nation" they would all be speaking the same stilted variation of Icelandic, a prescribed variety that would satisfy the authorities." And Gunning in line with the argument in this thesis, argues that "the reiterated opinion claiming that "pure" language is the only way to preserve nationality and culture is nonsense. There is no such thing as a "pure" or "unpolluted" language. And if someone has forgotten there is no such thing as a "pure" or "unpolluted" race either." (ibid.)

The article was highly noticed and a couple of weeks' later two students from The Teachers College of Iceland (Kennaraháskóli Íslands) responded to Gunning with the same old

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<sup>198</sup> "Mest selda dagblað landsmanna" or "The highest selling newspaper in the nation" is the slogan of Morgunblaðið

religious fervor that characterizes the purists. They took great offence over the challenge of the validity of language protection and argued that the Icelandic language was akin to a vegetable garden that needed constant care and attention (see quotation page 201). "In his article, Gunning urges us to stop pulling out weed and other invasive plants in our garden and urges us instead to allow it to fall into rut because that's its nature.... Gunning's argument is right out unbelievable and it is not clear what his objective is." And in regards to his comment on language purism on the milk cartons they say: should we not rather be proud to be in the lead in the Nordic countries in allowing the milk cartons to provide not only physical nourishment but a spiritual one as well? ....., In reading the article one is filled with the suspicion that it is written by a bitter man whose nation has not only lost its own language and origins but also its independence. Or what else could it be, when the leading writers of a nation compose not in the ancient mother-tongue but in the imported language of their old master nation." (*Alþýðublaðið* 2/29/96) The authors concluded their argument by referring to the old purist argument that the Icelandic language and the Sagas are the only things that kept Icelanders alive throughout centuries of colonial hardship. To these young students preservation of the purity of the Icelandic language is the prerequisite for national independence not only of Icelanders but of other nations as well.

## **VI. Conclusion**

From our continued discussion on the institutionalization of purism we can conclude that the politics of purism has infiltrated every level of public discourse in the country. Any public interpretation of social reality has to be represented in the terms of purism, or else it will not have any voice at all. The very hegemony of purism acts as a powerful tool of social control of what can be said in public discourse.

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daily.

We began our analysis by looking at how purism has ruled in naming policy. Laws on given names and surnames have in recent years caused conflicts over apparent discrimination against foreign-born Icelanders and their descendents on the one hand, and conflicts over violation of human rights on the other. Again we witnessed an intensified attempt on the behalf of the legislature to increase the impact of purism. The changes in the naming policy, stipulated in 1991 were an obvious attempt to "purify," hence restrict permissible given names and family names. This act can easily be seen as a response to the increasing number of immigrants in the country. Simultaneously it was also an attempt to restrict native born Icelanders who violated by circumvention, the ban on family names. Only after heated controversy over glaring discrimination against foreign-born Icelanders, and native-born Icelanders who had violated the ban on family names, was the law modified in 1996. The controversy evoked suspicions about Iceland's possible breaches of international contracts on human rights. Yet in spite of the recent changes made in 1996, the law is still in essence discriminatory as it still calls for governmental control over permissible given names as well as a general ban on family names, for those who carry patronymic.

On the level of media, purism reigns supreme. The National State Radio was by law granted the responsible task of "guarding" the Icelandic language (i.e., pure language) and culture from its establishment in 1930. By virtue of its exclusive broadcasting rights the impact of the edited style of NSR fortified both the notion and the dominance of language purity in the country. Decentralization of broadcasting rights did not occur until 1985. Through its purity programs NSR enforced stigmatization of non-standard language variants and kept up with the mission of purism by targeting speakers of "ugly language," and "bad grammar." This practice further added to self-censoring of speakers within the institution and within the entire Icelandic language community. We showed by highlighting a case, how the NSR in the name of language purity banned homosexuals from advertising on their airwaves, unless they would adhere to the usage

of the "politically/puristically correct" but derogatory terms permitted by the institution. The ban held in spite of the fact that it violated human rights and was only lifted when AIDS became part of the public discourse.

Our study revealed that in spite of the legal changes permitting free market broadcasting, anyone who applies for a permission to broadcast in Iceland must adhere to the law that stipulates them to stand guard around the "purity" of the Icelandic language. It remains to be seen whether this law is constitutional or whether it violates democratic rights to free speech, regardless of whether it meets the standards of purism or not. The current law, our study showed, makes it unlawful for immigrants to broadcast in their own language.

Other privately owned media have agreed to adhere to the control of purism with the media giant Morgunblaðið daily, heading the cause. The paper is a self-appointed apostle of purism, with regular columns on language purity along with articles and editorials on the importance of purism for Iceland's political and economic independence publicly in general.

Recent language campaigns, Language Cultivation '89, the Day of the Icelandic Language, and language campaigns on milk cartons are the latest invention in the struggle to ensure the power of purism. All these campaigns can be seen as a response to the increased impact of globalization on Icelandic society, characterized by increased access to foreign entertainment (films, videos) TV channels, computer technology, the Internet and in overall the increased flow of international communication.

Our final section in the chapter focused on criticism on purism and lack thereof. We showed that contrary to the purist belief, linguistic markers of speech do follow class or social lines. We also argued, that one of the main reasons for absence of public criticism of purism could be explained by reference to purism as a secular religion. Within those parameters loyalty to the cause is seen as a barometer of one's Icelandicness, i.e., the purer one speaks the more of an Icelander one is.

Icelandic purism and the insistence on adherence to it, resembles an orthodox religious loyalty to the scriptures. Disloyalty to the doctrine, or the act of polluting, is as Mary Douglas argued seen as dangerous and sacrilegious. It upsets the system of order as known, and in the case of Icelandic purism, disloyalty is seen as heresy and treason to the nationalistic cause, the very foundation on which Icelandic culture and the Icelandic nation state rest. The absence of public opposition to purism becomes clearer, when one bears in mind first of all the difficulty of expressing such a voice publicly and secondly the potential sanctions imposed on the critics in the form of stigma and overt and covert targeting.

***Part II: Globalization, Economics and International Marketing of Purity***

## Chapter 7

### The Commodification of Purism

#### I. Introduction

As we noted in our introduction, Stuart Hall has argued that parallel to the tendency toward global homogenization, is the increased fascination with "*difference* and moreover the marketing of "ethnicity" and otherness." (Hall 1996:623) This counter-tendency challenges the fear that the ever-intensifying globalization will eventually consume the local. So instead of the global devouring the local it is more fruitful to look at these as joint and intertwined processes where intensified globalization calls for an increased need locally to redefine "images" of the "local" / "national" for the international market. The "global" interpolates a new articulation of

the "local." Hall goes on to argue however, that these new identities should "not be confused with older identities, firmly rooted in well-bounded localities." (ibid. 623-4)

Not surprisingly the increased fascination with *difference* has in Iceland manifested itself around the idea of purity. This idea, as we have discussed at length, has been central to Icelandic linguistic nationalism and used to systematically consolidate the population within. In recent years the idea of purity has been incorporated in to other aspects of Icelandic society that turn to the outside world.

In this chapter we will shift our focus away from linguistic purity and explore how the notion of purity has been adopted and exploited on other levels of Icelandic society, clearly for economic purposes. What we will look at here is the recent systematic international marketing of Iceland, and Icelandic products as "pure." We will begin our discussion by tracing historically the notion of purity as applied to nationalistic perceptions of the country itself and follow the development of this idea and its marketing within the rapidly growing tourist industry in Iceland. From there we will look at how this notion has recently clashed with governmental plans for increased heavy industry. We will also look at how the notion of purity has been adopted by the Icelandic export industry particularly in regards to food products, whether from land or sea. Our final discussion is devoted to the hotly debated international marketing of "pure" Icelandic genes.

## **II. Tourism and Purism**

### *1. "Pure Land Beautiful Land" ("Hreint land fagurt land")*

Iceland is nature at its purest. The freshest air you'll ever breathe and the purest water in the world are goals worth striving for. To freshen up your corporate image, morale or motivation, Iceland is not just a change of scenery but an experience that never wears off. (1996 The Iceland Convention and Incentive Bureau)

Iceland is the place for people who want to see new things and do new things.

Discover a world that nature is still creating and the people and the culture that live and thrive in a challenging, beautiful and purely natural environment. (Iceland The Icelandic Tourist Board 1999)

One of the biggest attraction baits used to lure foreign tourists to Iceland is the country's "unspoiled and pure nature." To create an image of Iceland as "pure and unpolluted" was at the top of the agenda in a 1992 report called *Tourist Marketing and Development* issued by the state run Icelandic Tourist Board (the tourist industry was controlled by the state until few years ago, see Hafsteinsson 1994). The report further announced concerns over the possible expansion of the European Union, both in relations to the future of Nordic co-operation as well as in regards to the possible financial support EU members would get from Brussels to enhance the tourist industry in their home countries. These concerns were particularly aimed towards other Nordic countries that Iceland competes with notably Norway, Finland, Sweden, and also Ireland. All these countries had increased their expenditure on international marketing.

Tourism, is the fastest growing industry in Iceland, and as we noted before grew by 90% in the years from 1980-1990. It is only recently that Iceland has earned itself a name as place for vacation. Tourism as we know of it today began only in Iceland in the post-WW II era and remained relatively insignificant for the economy until the 1980s. In 1950 foreign visitors were 9000, in 1970 53.000, and in 1990 over 140.000. The increase has been steady in the 1990s reaching a record high in 1996 when the number of visitors reached the 200.000 mark, and jumped to over 232.000 in 1998 (figures: Hagstofa Íslands 1999, Einarsson 1993). In the last four to five years, the tourist industry generated 10-12% of the national foreign exchange earnings (Around Iceland 1997). The goal set in 1992 was to expand foreign tourism in Iceland and foreign currency income respectively, by 6% annually until year 2000, both of which have

already been achieved.<sup>199</sup>

## *2. The Tourist and the Tourist "Gaze"*

While humans have been on the move forever, tourism as we know it is a modern phenomenon, the product of the socio-economic changes of the Industrial Revolution. Travels before the Industrial Revolution were either in the form of pilgrimage or as later in the form of "exotic expeditions" for the upper classes of the colonial empires. Improved mass transportation, from railways and steamships to automobiles and airplanes, along with shorter working hours brought about the shift from the "holy" day to "holidays" paved the way for mass tourism (Graburn and Jafari 1991). Being a tourist is part of the modern experience, it is part of one's social status and even social pressure, as traveling is considered a part of the overall make-up of being well informed. I do not intend to give any detailed analysis of the social science literature dealing with tourism, and the construction of the "tourist" as a temporary "identity," and how it relates to the ongoing process of national identity making. That process is, as we have discussed, a matter of constant interaction between "us" and "them." Increased presence of foreign visitors to Iceland has certainly influenced the process of national identity making. Given the "explosion" within this industry every sector within the economy is affected by tourism in one way or another. Local communities have in recent years revived old tales, renovated old houses, and innovated new means to emphasize district specialties, all in order to increase tourist attraction to their region. At the same time, Icelanders remain "ambivalent toward tourism and tourists in relation to the natural environment. The romantic nationalist ideology represents the environment, like the language and people, as pure. Foreigners, by definition pollute. Icelanders debate whether the

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<sup>199</sup> International reports from OECD and World Tourist Organization (WTO) for the same period expected the international growth in tourism to be between 3-7% for the same time period, granted that economic growth would be according to OECD plans.

tourists grasp the "real" Iceland," and books are still being published that echo this sentiment."  
(Einarsson 1996:216)

Unlike before, Icelanders now have the opportunity to produce and stage their identity by the use of various means of modern technology. The presence and growth of tourism has brought about changes for the entire society. Anthropologist Magnús Einarsson rightly argues that "[t]ourism has to be contextualized within modern consumer culture imagery and cultural productions: the realm of aesthetic pleasures, desires, dreams, images, and style. The glossy brochures of the tourist industry create and reify such a realm of image and meaning. Nationalism has become such a sign which Icelanders create at home and to which they respond abroad." (ibid. 217) In the staging and representation of Icelandicness, the role of "unspoiled," "pristine" and "pure," Icelandic nature is playing an ever increasing role a notion which is intertwined with the national sentiment of language purity and racial purity.

The tourist industry is constructed around the key elements of the "tourist gaze," and inextricably linked with the modern social structure. Tourism is part and parcel of the modern notion of leisure activity. Some key elements of the "tourist gaze," are central to the consumption of tourist services as Urry (1990) argues. People visit places that are outside their normal residence, and places and objects are in return constructed as worthy of "gazing" at. Urry (1990) has argued that the tourist "gaze" is characterized mainly in two visual forms, the romantic and the collective. The romantic is searching for the "authentic" and prefers solitude and privacy with the object of "gaze." The collective "gaze" on the other hand is constructed around public consumption and the designation of certain places as tourist attractions. The collective, does not mind if sites are artificial or if the "authenticity" is staged, as it is seen as part of the modern experience. These notions have affected the way Icelanders present themselves. In Iceland, the tourists' search is directed towards signs that are believed to represent, the uniqueness of "Icelandic" nature, history and culture. Interestingly, the notion of authenticity or lack thereof

presents a problem for the romantic "gaze" in spite of the fact that the notion of romantic notion is fundamentally a social construction.

Icelanders are in many ways very ambivalent about their identity, and as a nation suffer from inferiority complexes *vis-à-vis* the "big world out there." This insecurity is reflected in a general concern over what the "other" might think of "us" and constant attempts to please the other, to impress the other, to be liked by the other. The question, "how do you like Iceland," a question tourists and other visitors are frequently asked, reflects this insecurity and has become a joke amongst Icelanders themselves when they reflect on this insecurity. Hence, it should not come as any surprise that being in control of what kind representation of the nation gets abroad is of great concern. Although the tourists that visit the country share some common characteristics, they are not a homogenous group and will seek their own different level of meaning of their experience of Iceland and Icelanders, depending on their own individual and national identity. We will look closer at this group shortly, but first let us look at notion of *pure nature* contextualize it historically and situate it within the recent development of the tourist economy.

### *3. The Construction of Pure and Beautiful Nature: From Poetry to Paintings and Postcards*

Comely and fair is the country,  
crested with snow-covered glaciers,  
azure and open the sky,  
ocean resplendently bright.  
(From "*Iceland*" by Hallgrímsson, 1980:41. Orig. 1835)<sup>200</sup>

Ever since Jónas Hallgrímsson, the darling of the nation wrote *Iceland*, denounced the old ballad tradition of *rímur* and introduced Romantic poetry as the style of the day, Icelandic poets have been praising not only the language and the people but also the country's landscape. This tradition was firmly established by the national poets of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>200</sup> English translation by Richard N. Ringler of the first verse of *Iceland* "Landið er fagurt og frítt /og fannhvítir

who wrote long poems where the beauty of Iceland was glorified. "How beautiful is our foster land in the fair summer day," or "I love you, you Iceland's mountains! With bright foreheads and blue heaths," give an idea of this genre.<sup>201</sup> This glorification, epitomized in the national anthem "The God of my land, the land of my God," unifies all in one the exaltation of the land and the religious aspect of Icelandic nationalism.

These patriotic poems called "*ættjarðarljóð*," were an integral part of the national sentiment, and as we already mentioned incorporated into the public school curricula from the beginning, to be updated as this tradition grew in scope. Through their poetry the national poets radically altered the previous cultural perception of the landscape. Art critique Hannes Sigurðsson has argued, that this poetry was "the single most important reason for the breakthrough in the visual arts in Iceland around the turn of the century." (1990:2) For the poets, the notion of "beauty" equaled "purity" and purity was argued, as we have seen, to be the prerequisite for "unity" i.e., "national unity." The national myth assumes "national unity" to be the foundation for independence and economic prosperity. The equation between natural beauty and purity, i.e., the notion of beautiful nature and pure/clean nature, was not as explicit in the patriotic poetry, as it was in discourse on linguistic purity. Nevertheless, while this equation as recently marketed to foreign tourists is largely a product of a latter day environmental concern, it is also very much part of the general social construction of purism in Icelandic nationalism.

In spite of the relentless glorification of the Icelandic landscape in their poetry, the poets did not really manage to alter the impression the public had of the land. The reconciliation of man

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jöklanna tindar/ himininn heiður og blár/ hafíð er skínandi bjart."

<sup>201</sup>"I love you, you Iceland's mountains! With bright foreheads and blue heaths," (Ég elska yður þér Íslands fjöll með enni björt og heiðins bláma").by Steingrímur Thorsteinsson (1831-1913). The national anthem "The God of my land, the land of my God," (Ó, guð vors lands, Ó land vors guð) written by Matthías Jochumson (1834-1922). These are some beginnings of famous Icelandic patriotic poems that give an idea of this genre of poetry. Some of these poems are still on the list of mandatory learning within the public school system: "How beautiful is our foster land in the fair summer day" (Ó, fögur er vor fósturjörð) by Jón Thoroddsen (1818-1868). "Mountain queen, my beloved mother" (Fjalla drottning móðir mín) by S. Jónsson (1878-1949). "The land of my father, my land" (Land míns föður, landið mitt) by Jóhannes úr Kötlum (1899-1974). "Who has a more beautiful fatherland" (Hver á sér fegra föðurland) by Hulda (1881-1946).

and land was left to the first painters before it would take on "the symbolic identity as the locus of national pride and freedom." (ibid. 6)

The ideas that reigned in the public's mind at the turn of the century were entirely different. "Beauty" of the land was first and last seen in terms of how much the land gave, how many it could feed in other words. Clear distinctions were made between, habitable land or *byggð* and uninhabitable land or *óbyggð* (Hastrup 1990, 1992).<sup>202</sup> The interior, commonly referred to as *óbyggðir*, the uninhabitable, was argued to be occupied by outlaws, infamous for their thefts of sheep and cattle. The extreme harshness and merciless operation of nature was cloaked in giants, demons, goblins, gnomes, and ghosts roaming in every hill and dale. Added to those were all kinds of strange creatures, such as half-breeds between fox and cat that were thought to be capable of killing with their look alone. Ponds, lakes and the sea engulfing the country were likewise assumed to be filled with all sorts of peculiar beasts, large and small, that like the other were capable of harming and killing.<sup>203</sup> Popular belief held that the uninhabited wilderness was the home of vicious forces, ghosts and reckless outlaws, while the volcanoes were assumed to be the gaping apocalyptic mouths of hell and the glaciers the factory of hailstorms and sorcery. The long dark winters and the uncompromising harshness of nature were without a doubt responsible for this myth making in national fairy-tales. One can argue, that tales like these are perhaps self-generating in an environment where these kinds of beliefs are dominant; however, it would be a gross oversight not to take their social function into account. As we have discussed, the traditional Icelandic society was locked into a strict social order, inhibiting not only social but physical movement, i.e., of children and servants. Violations of the *house discipline order* were a matter of punishment. Many of these tales tell of people who defied the order and paid with

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<sup>202</sup> See also Kirsten Hastrup on structural analysis on "inside" versus "outside" of past Iceland (1990, 1992).

<sup>203</sup> On other occasions, figures/creatures not of this world, such as so-called sea cows (*sækýr*), were in great demand as they milked more than ordinary cows. They sometimes walked on shore and if humans managed to pop a big blister on their nose, they could not live under water anymore and became part of the domestic animals. These fairy-tales, which

their lives.<sup>204</sup> In contrast to these scary tales, the Sagas detailed physical descriptions of the land are rare, except as a background for the course of the story. Explorations of the land outside the boundaries of human residence were discouraged and cartography, while first beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, disappeared until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when foreign visitors resumed it. The interior, was not really explored until the twentieth century.

Why and how did the first Icelandic painters alter the negative public image of nature and landscape in Iceland? Art critique Sigurðsson, interestingly, argues that the first painters were designated the role of reversing this negative image, by the state. Even before any artist emerged, some representatives in the Althing had expressed the need for painters in order to create a positive image of Iceland, particularly so that foreigners would get a more positive image of the country. Hitherto, most travel accounts of the country drew a picture of Iceland as extremely backward, lacking in any "culture" and other necessary signs of "civilization," such as the visual arts. Likewise the inhabitants were described as filthy, lacking in manners and "barbaric" in their behavior (Nelson 1982 [1905]; Pálsson 1996; Pálsson & Durrenberger 1989).<sup>205</sup>

The first two Icelandic painters, were both of poor origin and needed support, which they received from the Althing, granted that they would paint "positive landscape." By doing so they created not only a more positive image of the country for the outside world, but also a new image

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tell of super-natural help such as the ones on the sea-cows, can be seen as a wishful thought of the poor for unexpected luck that could make their lives more bearable.

<sup>204</sup> The most famous giants of all times, is *Grýla* a horrifyingly ugly age old female figure who lives in the wilderness and feeds on naughty children, whom she abducts, takes to her home and cooks in a caldron. Icelandic children are still fed *Grýla* stories although her powers have been mitigated. The term *Grýla*, in Icelandic is synonymous with horror, something that is petrifying. In the tale *Grýla*, is married to *Leppalúði* a meek guy who looks like a ragamuffin. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century she was first associated with Christmas, when she became the mother of a roguish band of so-called *jólasveinar* or Yuletide Lads. In recent times the thirteen Lads and even their hideous mother have seen a gradual improvement in their image. The Lads have adopted the custom of Santa Clause, but still retain some of their wickedness. From child snatchers they have developed into thieving tricksters who descend from the mountains one by one the thirteen days before Christmas. Their custom of placing a small gift in children's shoes, left on a window sill, became common around the middle of this century. This tradition make kids behave during the hectic days leading up to Christmas.

<sup>205</sup> Annandale Nelson, a British anthropologist and a student of E.B Tylor, traveled to Iceland at the turn of the century. In the typical imperialist colonial attitude of the time, he described the natives of Iceland as a "primitive race" that "of course never produced a great, art, or even great artists." (1982 [1905]:143)

of Iceland which for Icelanders fostered national identity and collectivity.<sup>206</sup>

The first decades of this century witnessed the birth of the art of painting. From the beginning and until 1940, over 90% of Icelandic paintings were landscape. Sigurðsson points out, how all the Icelandic painters, who all were educated abroad and thus encountered the various currents on the continent from cubism to expressionism, once upon arrival back home had to adhere to the "nationalistic" perception of art. If not, they did not get any support or any recognition, even if they had the money to support themselves.<sup>207</sup>

The "nationalistic" perception of the land called for a romantic image where sunshine and tranquility reigned. Thingvellir, became a favorite landmark to paint, where the painter connected "the affective inner experience of the nation and constitutional beliefs - observation with evocation" (1990:8). On the rare occasions, when glaciers or volcanoes were painted, they were depicted as serene oftentimes with a picturesque countryside in the foreground but never as the devastating forces that they were and certainly had been through history, decimating humans and livestock. One of the striking characteristics of these early paintings is the absence of any representation of human beings. "What they must surely have been trying get across again and again" Sigurðsson interestingly argues, "was the democratic belief that the land did not hypothetically belong to a handful of landowners but the nation at large." (1990:9) The calm and the serenity depicted in these paintings is as far from the actual climate as anything could possibly

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<sup>206</sup> These painters were Þórarinn B. Þorláksson (1867-1924) and Ásgrímur Jónsson (1876-1958).

<sup>207</sup> Painter Finnur Jónsson was one of those. He had studied in Dresden in the early 1920s and was highly influenced by the German Expressionism of the time and received recognition by leading art figures in Dresden. Back in Iceland however, Morgunblaðið daily went at great length to denounce the artistic quality of his work, labeling it as sterile, cold etc. A short time after the artist's return to Iceland (1927) he had completely abandoned his Abstract-Expressionism in favor of landscape, i.e., given in to the pressure of the nationalistic interpretation of art. Likewise, his contemporary Jón Stefánsson who had studied under Matisse in Paris, had also received great acclaim in Copenhagen where critics had noted that "there was something extraordinary heavy and serious about his art." Matisse had taught him to be true to the medium. Stefánsson while painting Icelandic landscape, did not conform to the 'neat' or 'cozy spots' such as Thingvellir, but instead painted glaciers and presented them not as 'cozy', but cold and compact not with the characteristic blue sky of the romantic paintings but cloudy, gray and gloomy. Stefánsson's work was greeted with little enthusiasm in Iceland and even less so when the Danes decided to praise him. Stefánsson felt obliged to defend himself by stating "I am and will always be an Icelander." (Sigurðsson 1990:39)

be. While the sun does occasionally shine on Icelanders, for it to expose itself for more than three days in a row is considered heaven sent by most. The arctic climate of the county is much more characterized by heavy winds and rain that slap, kick and throw you around with devastating deadly snow hailstorms in the winter. As it is an arctic island, stability is not characteristic of the climate, quite the contrary; one can in an afternoon experience sunshine and calm, suddenly changing into heavy wind and rainfall, followed by hail, snow and then sleet. For the Icelandic pioneers of "landscape," "'truth to nature' was achieved not through observation and description alone, but through the intuition or intellectual fabrication of ideal forms and abstract schemata." (Sigurðsson 1990: 21) By adapting the landscape to Romantic poetry, the first landscape painters put the finishing touch on "the task of uniting the dispersed population, and gave the final lesson in what it meant to see and feel like a "true Icelander." (ibid. 25)

It was not until the 1930s that this romantic idealization of the landscape began to change. The Great Depression had hit the newly emerging working class very hard with intensified class conflicts, strikes and demonstrations. For the first time the harshness of the nature is represented in landscape paintings and a new generation of painters started to depict both workers striking and labor at the shore. These painters did not sell at all. On the other hand those who capitalized on the superiority ideas of Finnbogason and his allies did and sold everything in record time.<sup>208</sup> One such was painter Kjarval who was a legend both alive and after his death. He interestingly managed to combine *modernism* with *landscape* painting by emphasizing the mysterious qualities of the land and appeal to the old beliefs in trolls, elves, and other beings, not of this world.<sup>209</sup> At the same time, the racist intelligentsia whose power was

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<sup>208</sup> In 1935, the state sponsored an exhibition of Kjarval's works and declared him a national painter. He sold all his works within two days. In 1945 at his next exhibition he sold everything within the first half hour, or as long as it took to write peoples names down (Sigurðsson 1990).

<sup>209</sup> Interestingly, during the Great Depression when unemployment was at its peak, Spiritualism - present in the country since the turn of the century - received an extra boost. "Psychic 'research institutes' and clairvoyance agencies sprouted like mushrooms in and around the capital area to serve the needs of those who wanted to make contact with relatives on the other side for consultation." (Sigurðsson 1990:46) Kjarval, says Sigurðsson, seems to have responded to this "hysterical" situation "by offering the onlooker a visual, yet highly imaginary, encounter with his kin, and the

immeasurable, was busy emphasizing how the harshness of the land had generated exceptional surviving qualities in the Icelandic nation. The political purpose of these ideas was of course to justify the economic hardship most laborers were experiencing, "endure hardship and pain in the name of the nation," one might phrase it. Only in the early 1940s, did the romanticizing of nature and the countryside cease to reign in Icelandic paintings, allowing for other artistic styles to be acknowledged. This was the time, as we have discussed, of the invasion of British troops - later American - that turned Icelandic society upside down, decimating real and imagined notions of homogeneity on both cultural and class levels. The occupation put an end to the depression, generated an unprecedented boost to the economy calling for a major rush to towns, particularly the Reykjavík area. The economic boost spurred an increase in publication and opened up for an increased consumption and buying of art, particularly by the fast growing middle class. This was the time when the idealization of country life and the concomitant demonizing of urban life came to an end. This change happened, however, only after a major clash between the state and artist. Not only did the Minister of Education attack all writers as well as authors who did not conform to what he defined as art, but as he was solely responsible for who was to receive grants from the state, his power or rather his authoritarian actions were of immense consequence.<sup>210</sup> After this

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convenient outlet for escapism." (ibid.) Here one needs to know that the spiritual movement like the youth organizations, was an integral part of party politics - the clergy and other visible figures within the power élite, supported the movement - hence says Sigurðsson, "these symbolical paintings or dream landscapes should."....,"be interpreted as not only as personal but an 'official' reaction to the harsh economic reality of the period. Kjarval thus closed his eyes on the problems of the age and devoted himself to pleasant reveries about the past within the framework of nationalism and popular belief." (ibid.)

<sup>210</sup> This clash is perhaps the most famous one of its kind in Icelandic history. The Minister of Education at the time Jónas Jónsson, (a representative of the farmers' party a staunch nationalist and the author of aforementioned textbooks on Icelandic history taught in the public school system into the 1980s) launched a major attack on art and literature. In the newspaper *Timinn* the second largest paper in the country at the time and the organ of his party, he argued that in art and literature one could detect four branches of the same river: In architecture it is the "box-style" in sculpture it is the "cumbrous style," and in painting it is the "daub-style" and in literature it is the "erotic" or the "porno-movement." According to him, every other publication in the country was a Socialist propaganda, while the rest of literature, while pretending to be neutral served the same purpose: a suggested mobocracy and worst of all the weakening of the national spirit with alien and disperse influence. Public enemy number one in literature was Laxness, who supported by all the divisions of the Association of Icelandic Artists, launched a counter-attack on Jónasson. The Minister responded by mounting an exhibition of all "degenerate" artist in the Althing's house, where Jónasson in the spirit of Hitler's *Entratere Kunst* exhibition of 1937, crucified the "traitors." To further get his point across he published four more articles in *Timinn* smearing and insulting them even further and threatening to ban them, infuriating the already enraged

clash was settled, politicians were replaced by art critiques that now took over writing about art in the media and were also put on board of public funds allocating grants to artist.

The romantic idealization of landscape/nature, introduced first by the national poets and then established visually by Icelandic painters, was in total accordance with the ideas of Icelandic nationalism and their romanticizing of country life. With this tradition, painters and their work was established as national. Moreover, the official role of painting "further consolidated the nation in its aspirations by pinpointing visually those landmarks which the national poets had already 'recommended' as suitable for veneration." (Sigurðsson 1990:3) The romantic landscape tradition emphasized "national unity," through its idealization and accentuation on bathing the "sacred pearls" in sunshine and tranquility, and further by presenting the land, not as the private property of landholders, but rather as the common property of the people. Simultaneously, in their glorification of the land, the painters lent support to the ideas, which depicted city life as demoralized, ugly and the source of all evil, thus further sustaining the ideas of the old farmer's elite.

The victory of modernism in Icelandic paintings did, not however, kill the landscape tradition. Amongst the established painters it changed, giving space for the dynamic powers of the natural forces. Yet the romantic landscape lived on amongst amateur painters who in the 1950s and 1960s produced hundred and thousands of Thingvellir paintings in pink midnight sun, Gullfoss (The Golden Falls, a national park) bathed in golden beams, Geysir (the "original" geyser) in action and other "sacred" landmarks. These paintings were very popular amongst the working class.

The romantic landscape was further popularized through other visual media. For

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artist. This clash came to a sudden end in the fall of 1942, when Jónasson's party, the Progressive Party, which had led the government since 1927, lost due to changes in the electoral system. The electoral system had been in favor of the rural areas, which PP represented. After the change the parties representing the urban population gained considerable strength. These were on the one hand the Conservatives (Sjálfstæðisflokkur) and on the other the Socialists and the Social-Democrats. (Broddason & Grímsson 1982; Sigurðsson 1990; Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991)

example, the cover of chocolate boxes, an inextricable part of the Icelandic Christmas tradition, have since the Icelandic production started in the 1930s, been decorated by these "sacred landmarks," the traditional Icelandic country house, the gable-head mud-house (*burstabær*) and other national symbols. Likewise, Christmas cards, commonly depict landscape as well, both consolidating further the national aspect of religion and the religious aspect of nationalism. The landscape tradition has also dominated on calendars from private companies, small businesses and state owned banks. Whether large or small these calendars have for decades depicted the traditional romantic landscape scenery. In more recent years, rugged landscape and erupting volcanoes, emphasizing the merciless power of the Icelandic nature has entered the scene, fortifying the idea of the "survival of the fittest." And no surprise here, where the NSR (Channel One) ends its program every night with a patriotic song, The National State TV, for years ended its program with a still life landscape photo, accompanied at times by a patriotic song, and on Sundays with the national anthem. Names were usually not given of these sites, until a few minutes into the broadcast, giving the viewer an opportunity to guess. These moments were a lesson in Icelandic geography, and "love for the land," as television watching was for the longest time a matter of social consumption for the entire family. Typically, like the romantic landscape paintings, these still lives' were void of human beings. Morgunblaðið daily also follows this tradition. In recent years, after the paper began using color pictures, landscape usually decorates half the front page in the Sunday edition and on weekdays, the back page frequently has a landscape photo, often with a poetic title.

Likewise, the romantic tradition has been the hallmark of the Icelandic post-card industry. Before the advent of tourism, postcards also depicted the "sacred" landmarks (and/or some national symbols). Not surprisingly, these sites were marketed as tourist attractions and as tourism grew, the wilderness or the interior, became more visible and has now in the minds of Icelanders also been sacralized. Icelandic postcards were until recently, like the romantic

landscape paintings devoid of any human presence. Postcards from towns, characteristically depicted some "important" buildings or cities, such as churches or harbors, rather than people. It is only in recent years, that this tradition has been challenged, by scenes from "city-life" and images of "authentic" fishermen, or farmers at work. Landscape photography in Iceland is highly intertwined with the postcard industry and has entirely evolved around publication of tourist books aimed for the foreign consumer (see Hafsteinsson, 1994). Recent years have also witnessed an increase in the publication of landscape photography for Icelanders. These books are very popular as Christmas presents. Einarsson has argued "that by looking at the tourists looking at them, Icelanders confirm their stance." (1993:17) What we see here is a circulation of the constructed image of Iceland and Icelanders, i.e., for Icelanders themselves at Christmas, for the tourist in the summer time.

#### *4. Who Visits Iceland?*

The majority of tourists visiting Iceland come from the other Nordic countries or 30%, from Germany 17%, the USA 15%, and Great Britain 11%. Holland, France, Italy and other European countries constitute 21% of all foreign tourists and the remaining 6% come from elsewhere (*Ferðamálaráð ársskýrsla 11/1997* - Icelandic Tourist Board Annual Report 11/1/97). The vast majority of tourists - over 50% of the total - visit Iceland in the summer time, or in a three month period from June through August. This imbalance makes the industry seasonal in most parts of the country except for Reykjavík, which gains from hosting different kinds of conferences, large and small during the off season. More even distribution of tourists over the year was on the aforementioned 1992 agenda. According to most recent figures, increase has been most significant for the winter months.

The average length of stay is 10 days (nights) the French and the Germans spend the least time in Reykjavík, whereas people from the other Nordic countries, Americans and the Irish (a

new group) spend most of their time in the capital. Large part of the Nordic visitors come to Iceland for conferences or other business related activities and are thus more likely to figure large in reports from hotel occupancy in Reykjavík.

The tourists who visit Iceland are a heterogeneous group of people coming from many different countries. However, in looking at a recent survey conducted in July and August 1997, by the state sponsored *Icelandic Tourist Board*, it is clear that certain characteristics are shared by the majority of them.<sup>211</sup> The "average" tourist visiting Iceland, is a little bit over 40 years old, with an income on a par with or above the average in their home country and with a university degree. Men were 20% more numerous than women. In short, tourists that come to Iceland are almost entirely white, middle class and well educated. The majority came there for vacationing (78,8%) and almost 90% said that nature had played a role in their decision. When asked "did the purity of the country affect your decision to visit Iceland?" 65,3% replied "very much" and 22,3% somewhat and the rest little or nothing at all (Icelandic Tourist Board 1997).

##### 5. *The Glossy Picture of Pure and Beautiful Iceland*

In looking at a tourist brochure on Iceland, one finds a pattern of themes and layout. They usually start with some basic "information," emphasizing the active geological aspect of the country, the harsh survival, praise for the Sagas and the assertions that every child in the nation can read them. Then the Althing is presented as the first "democratic" assembly in the world, the "purity" of the language coupled with the "unprecedented" high level of literacy; the presence of superstition, i.e., common belief in elves residing in rocks and hills; the high level technology and finally, one typically finds notions emphasizing egalitarianism whether social or cultural. In short, all the main strands of the national myth on Iceland and Icelanders are marketed in these

brochures. Likewise they are almost without an exception, heavily illustrated with romantic landscape pictures, intended to appeal to sensations of harmony and tranquility and further fortifying the equation of "beauty" and "purity."

When did the equation of beauty and purity become major bait for attraction? Magnús Oddsson, current director of the *Icelandic Tourist Board* argues, that the idea of purity in tourist marketing in Iceland, came not from the within the country or from Icelanders, but from foreign travel agents organizing tours to Iceland. This was in the 1970s, a time that witnessed an increased interest in the environment and the concomitant consciousness of environmental pollution. Given the relative absence of heavy and real industrial manufacturing in the country, air and water pollution were not issues in Iceland, as in other industrial countries where it was becoming a hotly debated political matter at the time in those countries. Oddsson argues that these travel agents were the first to see the unspoiled nature as something that set Iceland apart and could be marketed. Icelanders then simply adopted the idea. He is also very quick to point out, that the notion of Icelanders themselves being particularly environment friendly, does not fit the facts. Nevertheless, this notion has become very popular in the country in the last decade or two (after the explosion in tourism). Recent representations of Iceland whether aimed at tourists or trade, reflect this as shown in emphasis on Icelanders living in harmony with nature (see more on this below). To argue that Icelanders are in the forefront of environment protection, is a form of delusion maintains Oddsson, "the explanation is rather that we are few living in a relatively big country." Referring to the absence of industry he said, "we simply never had the chance to spoil it, as somebody said." But this should not be taken as a sign of the nation being environmentally friendly as a whole. Icelanders lag far behind other European countries when it comes to recycling and sorting garbage. "We maintain that we are environment friendly because the country is clean. That the purity has somehow been transposed upon us, making us superior to

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<sup>211</sup> The survey, the first of its kind, was conducted in the months of July and August 1997. The sample ranged from ca.

others in environmental issues," he says in a mocking tone. "The country is clean but Icelanders are slob," says Oddsson. He further argues for the impossibility of marketing the country without also focusing on the people who live there, as was done in Iceland for the longest time. The romantic image of Iceland, he states, goes hand in hand with major focus on nature rather than culture, in tourist marketing of Iceland. Why was "nature" only marketed as opposed to "culture"? Given the obsession with the notion of "authentic" or "original" Icelandic culture in the nationalist agenda, it is surprising that this has not been the case in tourism. On one level an explanation for this might be found in the fact that hardly any human made sites/constructions from previous times exist. The oldest buildings remaining in the country date only back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and there is only so much one can do in order to market old Sagas and vellum manuscripts for the tourist "gaze". But that does not explain why for example, ordinary life in modern Iceland was not thought of as worthy of the tourist "gaze" until very recently. One explanation could be that hard labor of ordinary life in a fishing village, accompanied with its "unsophisticated" or "uncivilized" weekend drinking, simply did not fit the image of the literary intelligent Icelander. That image is anything but glamorous. It is only in the last five years or so that the tourist industry has made real attempts to direct attention to "culture" as opposed to "nature." This shift can be seen as a response to the increased competition between regions that have called for the construction of an image that is unique and/or "authentic" for the region. Thus one of the old herring towns, Siglufjörður in the north, has in recent years staged a typical herring plan in the summer in order to lure tourists to the town. Other regions have focused on so-called activity tours, where the tourist are not merely "gazing" but "actively participating," in either river rafting, horseback riding or glacier tours.

The increased interest tourists have shown in Iceland, has also called for increased interest among Icelanders in exploring the country. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a

significant increase in all kinds of organized hiking tours in the interior, aimed for the domestic market. The 1990s have witnessed several marketing campaigns (part of the 1992 plan on tourism such as "Visit Our Country" or *Sækjum landið heim* 1994-1995), catered to the native tourist. Icelanders themselves are also increasingly "doing the tourist thing" i.e., things that originally were designed for the foreign tourists.

### **III. Heavy Industry or Pure Land?**

In recent years a growing conflict has arisen over whose right it is to utilize the natural resources on land, such as the uninhabited interior. By law this part of the country is the common property of the Icelandic people, like the fish in the ocean.

As mentioned before, political parties have been divided over the issue of heavy industry. The only party entirely against it has been the Women's Alliance (Kvennalisti), the smallest party in the parliament. The People's Alliance (Alþýðubandalag) has been split on the issues, while the other three, the Social Democrats (Alþýðuflokkur), the Conservatives (Independence Party) and the Center (Progressive Party), have favored it.

The current government of Iceland, which is supported by two of the largest parties (Independent Party and Progressive Party), has in recent years worked to liberalize the financial markets, most restrictions have been lifted and the free flow of capital ensured. A recent article in *Iceland Business* titled, "Island of Opportunities," bespeaks of this attempt. There it says, that "the overall aim is to create economic conditions that attract foreign investment, whether direct or portfolio investments. In return the government offers the industries electricity at a very low rate, less than half of what the ordinary consumer pays." (1999:1:2)<sup>212</sup> Although electricity consumption per capita is one of the highest in the world in Iceland, only a fraction of the

country's power potential has been tapped. Yet Iceland has utilized no more than 15 per cent of its electricity potential. Export-oriented industries now consume over 60 per cent of the country's electricity production at very competitive prices (ibid.). In order to meet the potential electricity needs, more power needs to be harnessed from the waterfalls. Current plan to raise a hydro-power plant in the interior, calls for a flooding of great areas of land in the interior (Eyjabakkar). This plant will sustain an aluminum factory in the East Fjords, jointly owned by international and Icelandic investors.

Given the enormous growth within the tourist industry it is not surprising that tensions have grown between those who favor increased foreign investment in heavy industry on the one hand and environmentalist and the tourist industry on the other. The preservationists' claim that increased heavy industry is in dire conflict with the image of Iceland as a pure country, an image that the tourist industry has spent large amounts of money in constructing and marketing. Critics are concerned that these developments will cause irreversible damage to the already delicate and sensitive environment.<sup>213</sup> In addition to possible air and water pollution from industrial developments, critics have argued that large industrial developments would cause visual pollution in the sense that the physical presence of industrial sites in the "unspoiled" Icelandic landscape would stand out as a sore thumb. Protests have grown louder with individuals, organizations and private enterprise, expressing their disapproval in the media and regular demonstrations in front

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<sup>212</sup> *Iceland Business* is a quarterly magazine catered to foreign investors and businesses interested in doing business with Iceland. *Iceland Business* is published by *Iceland Review*.

<sup>213</sup> The Icelandic government has steadfastly refused to sign the Kyoto agreement based on the United Nations Conference on climate change and will not meet the deadline March 15, 1999. The government wants to have free hands in continuing to build up power plants and heavy industry even if it increases the release of greenhouse gas into the atmosphere. Iceland is the only OECD country that has not signed the agreement. The government wants special provisions for Iceland, "in the Kyoto agreement, granting exemptions to small economies using renewable energy sources to pollute more. Iceland also wants recognition for its effort to limit carbon dioxide exhaust through reforestation and soil reclamation. Finally, Iceland wants the flexibility to allow exhaust from its fishing fleet to rise in the future in connection with additional fishing, but is ready to lower exhaust per each catch unit instead. An exemption granting Iceland the permission to increase the release of greenhouse gas by 10 percent from 1990 levels was not enough. Forecast that take into account heavy industry build up in Iceland show that the levels would rise by as much as 25 percent by the year 2010. This makes it difficult for the government, intend on harnessing energy to attract more heavy industry, to sign the agreement. The Nature Conservation Council and the parliamentary opposition were quick to respond, saying the decision sends the wrong message to the rest of the world." (*Daily News from Iceland* 2/24/99)

of the Althing's house for several months. In the fall of 1998, large protest meetings jointly sponsored by various organizations, were held, where critics expressed their discontent against the government's exploitation of natural resources in the highland interior. A couple of young female university students even went on a limited hunger strike in order to express their disapproval (*Daily News from Iceland*: 11/30/98).

The government has responded to the discontent by stating that it will pursue its original plans, that business contracts have already been signed for a new aluminum smelting plant in the East Fjords, as well as the enlargement of two other existing heavy industries in the south-west. At the same time the government has decided to take up a proposal of the Minister of the Environment, to designate 25 April 1999 as a special "Day of the Environment." "It is hoped that the theme will encourage schools and the public generally to consider the impact of man on the natural environment, as well as leading to discussions by the government, various organizations and the media." (*Daily News from Iceland* 1/13/99) With the growing discontent over utilization of natural resources and the environment, an umbrella association addressing these issues was formed in late January of 1999. Particular concerns of the association include advocating the sustainable utilization of natural resources both on land and in the sea, as well as protecting the untouched highlands of the interior from being sacrificed to developers. In addition to the conflict over rights to utilize natural resources, the association's aims at addressing the all-important question of land reclamation, combating the serious effects of erosion and desertification in Iceland, and the monitoring and reduction of greenhouse gases. Despite boasts of the purity of the Icelandic environment, carbon dioxide emissions are as high per person here as elsewhere in Europe (*Daily News from Iceland* 1/21/99). The Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson has expressed his disagreement with those in the media who prophesy that environmental issues will become a major bone of contention in the country over the next few years. At a large meeting, held January

23, 1999, with the newly established umbrella organization *Iceland Environmental Union*, "Oddsson denied that there was a fundamental disagreement on environmental issues. He claimed that the majority of Icelanders were in favor of preserving the unspoiled nature of the interior, while at the same time wanting to utilize its clean resources to profit the entire nation." Prime Minister Oddsson announced that the government would publish a booklet called "The Highlands of Iceland - the nation's treasure," to be distributed to most households in the country over the following week. "The aim of the booklet is apparently to explain the decision-making processes affecting the highlands and to inform people of what forum they have for questions or opinions. The Prime Minister was critical of those whom he described as trying to blow up the recent environmental controversies out of all proportion." (*Daily News from Iceland* 1/25/99). At the time of this meeting a recent poll had appeared revealing that two thirds of the nation was opposed to developments in the contentious region (Eyjabakkar) of the highlands. With parliamentary elections fast approaching in May, the government's move would seem an astute one.

#### **IV. "The Eco-Island: Icelandic Food Production is Based on Purity, Wholesomeness and Sustainability"**

If pure air, pure water and pure nature constitute the image the Icelandic tourist industry has created of tourist Iceland, what about the marketing of Icelandic products abroad? "*Purely delicious*" was the title of an advertisement from the Icelandic Dairy Produce Marketing Association, in a booklet called Iceland Export Directory aimed for the foreign market.<sup>214</sup> Under a soft focused picture of a "mountain" of various cheeses, it read: "There's a perfectly natural

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<sup>214</sup> The Official Guide to Quality Products and Services 1995-1996, published by the Trade Council of Iceland, contains a list of almost all if not all, Icelandic products and services for export.

reason why Icelandic cheese is delicious. Farm animals in Iceland are reared in a pure natural environment. Products from them are products from nature. There's nothing more to it!" (1995:3-19). Similar advertisements were found in Icelandic newspapers and on television. "Icelandic nature takes on many images. Icelandic cheeses are a pure natural source which gives a lot of energy. Icelandic cheeses are purely delicious," was one of many whole page ads from the same association that ran in all newspapers in 1994 and 1995.

In the early 1990s an organized cooperation between state-based agencies and farmers' organizations began investigating the possibilities of transforming all agricultural production to organic production. Various researches were conducted made in order to find out what changes needed to be carried out in order to meet international standards along with market research, market development etc.,. The goal of this work was "to ensure a leading position for Icelandic agriculture and other food products on the domestic and the international market." (*Iceland Business* 1998:2: 5) Heading this new aspect of Icelandic "purity" is *The Icelandic Development Committee on Natural and Organic Production (Áform)* established in 1995.<sup>215</sup> The committee (*Áform*) has focused on introducing sustainable harvesting methods to farmers, where no chemicals or additives are used in order to ensure "the wholesomeness of natural products." (ibid.) The Althing has passed regulations on ecological and organic production.

The title above on *Eco-Island*, is borrowed from an opening article in a special issue of *Iceland Business* (1998:2) featuring Iceland's food industry. What we see here is a deliberate effort on the behalf of state and various business agencies, to create an image of Iceland as a country producing only ecologically sound and "pure" products. This new image is a direct result

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<sup>215</sup> Interestingly, the co-ordinator of the *Áform* project Baldur Jónsson, is the same person who in the 1980s was the key figure in reviving female beauty pageants, which became very popular in the country and played a decisive role in constructing and consolidating "pure" Icelandic female beauty, as well as being "exported" to the outside world in the form of participation in international beauty pageants. (See *The Amazing Beauty of Icelandic Women, Nationalism, Purity and the "American Gaze,"* unpublished MA thesis by Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, New School for Social Research 1998)

from the *Aform* research. The similarities between notion of "eco-island" and the purism found in the language policy and tourism are striking. The first paragraph in the article, states:

Icelandic agriculture is both traditional and thoroughly modern, based on a combination of old and new. The hardy stocks of domestic animals date back to the time of the Viking settlement over 1,100 years ago. In the course of the years, the government has taken several steps to protect the stocks; the use of steroids, hormones and feed additives has always been forbidden, as have genetic improvements and the importing of new livestock. (*Iceland Business* 1998:2: 2)

This statement is also reminiscent of the genetic nationalism of Guðmundur Finnbogason presented earlier and of similar emphasis found in the controversial deCode Genetics project, discussed in the same chapter.

This new emphasis on organic and ecologically sound production in Icelandic agriculture can be seen as a response to three changes: firstly, to Icelandic agricultural policies, secondly to the EEA agreement and thirdly to changes in food consumption and consumer awareness. These changes are part and parcel of economic trends occurring in the industrial world and as such are intertwined with economic globalization.

Agriculture in Iceland has traditionally mostly been sheep for mutton and wool, and cattle rearing for dairy and meat. As was the case elsewhere in the industrial world Icelandic agriculture underwent dramatic transformations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from manual labor to mechanization and from rationing and food shortages to overproduction. Systematic mechanization, supported by the state in order to make the country as self-sufficient in food production as possible, did not really begin until after WW II. This transformation was coupled with heavy subsidizing both for the domestic market as well as for export. As elsewhere in the industrialized world, these changes led to overproduction, - markets for export were saturated - calling for drastic changes in the 1980s, installed in quotas and the elimination of subsidizing for export. Food habits in Iceland have also changed significantly in the last fifteen years or so, with less meat and dairy consumption but increased consumption of imported food such as pasta, rice,

fruit and vegetables (*Iceland in figures 1998. Hagstofa Íslands* - Statistics Iceland). Since the EEA agreement took effect in 1995, limited import of dairy products became permissible for the first time. The market campaign for pure products in Iceland was a response to this newly found competition. Iceland, only sustains half of the country's calorie intake, which is considerably lower than the neighboring countries and is always been dependent upon imports of food, in spite of its increased domestic production (Icelandic Agricultural Information Service 1991).

In addition to being a response to the growth of the famous European "butter mountain." The new focus in food production in Iceland is an attempt to respond to the growing demand for organic and ecologically friendly products. The market for organic products, (in food and cosmetics) is rapidly growing both in the neighboring European countries as well as in the United States. This market suits the Icelandic production very well as farms are usually small and incapable of big scale production, needed for the large mainstream market. Small-scale organic products, which render higher prices per produce unit are thus a feasible alternative for agricultural products. Exports of agricultural products have traditionally been on a small scale in Iceland. Agricultural products were only 1, 6% of exported goods from Iceland -fob- in 1997 (Hagstofa Íslands. Ísland í tölum 1998:15. Statistics Iceland). Whether this new marketing image of Icelandic agricultural products as "pure" will succeed, in terms of increased sales of Icelandic agricultural products abroad, is still too early to predict as the experiment is still in its infancy. But for Icelanders themselves, this newly found aspect of purity sustains and supports the notion of purity within the ongoing process of national identity making in the country.

### *1. From Pure Cheese to Pure Fish*

The image of "pure" products and the notion of "eco-island" is not only confined to agricultural products but to the entire food industry, fish included, which to this day is the

backbone of the Icelandic economy generating close to three quarters of merchandise export exchange.

At another place in the booklet Iceland Export Directory (1995) is a picture showing a rugged snow-covered mountain with a calm sea in the foreground. Underneath this picture perfect photograph a text reads; CLEAN NATURAL BREEDING GROUNDS for the Finest Fish in the World. This advertisement is from Iceland Seafood International Ltd. the second largest exporter of Icelandic fish. In another glossy brochure on Icelandic products, the following message from the fishing industry depicted with a photo of a fishing vessel, looking almost as if it was standing on its stem in a very rough sea, one could read:

The pure, rich ocean around Iceland really makes modern life on the rugged land possible at all. Eight times the size of the land at 837,000 square kilometers, Iceland's waters are the living store of its greatest resource. Fishing is part of the centuries old Icelandic heritage of living with nature.

Surrounding an island with little heavy industry of its own and far from industrial centers of Europe and America, *Iceland's fishing grounds rank with the cleanest in the world.* And although it takes heroism to harvest, the ocean is sensitive too. The rich species in Iceland's waters obey a complex balance that is nature's own. Sustainable harvesting means taking only what nature itself can replace: an over-fished stock can take years to restore.

*Inherent quality and purity*, moreover, can never be won back if lost. Quality seafood from Iceland bears clear witness to what nature can do when left to its own resources, and their nutritious, healthy seafood diet is a major reason why Icelanders enjoy one of the world's longest life expectancies today. (Naturally Iceland 1995:6 italics mine)<sup>216</sup>

For a long time in this century fish and seafood products accounted for as much as 90% of Iceland's export. Today's economy is a little bit more versatile, fisheries are however, still responsible for over 70% of the country's revenues coming from exportation goods, and 55% of Iceland's export earnings and around 11% of her workforce.

The rich fishing banks around the island are the country's only large-scale immediate resource. The biggest markets today in terms of export value are the EU countries buying almost

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<sup>216</sup> Publisher: Export Council of Iceland 1995.

three quarters of all exported seafood from Iceland with the USA and Asia equally sharing the rest (1996: Ministry of Fisheries Iceland). Until the late 1970s the US was the biggest buyer of Icelandic sea products. However, since the mid 1970s, when Iceland gained exclusive 200 mile jurisdiction over the waters around the island, the market has increasingly swung to Europe with the United Kingdom emerging as the single largest buyer, followed by Germany and other European countries. The 200-mile exclusive fishing jurisdiction has not prevented the fishing stocks in Icelandic waters from shrinking according to research. The government installed a much debated quota system in the mid 1980s in order to control the precarious resources. It is noteworthy to point out that the biggest export markets of Icelandic fish products are countries within the European Union of which Iceland is not a member. As of early 1999, Iceland has categorically refused membership in the EU, largely because of the stipulation, which insists that control of fish catching would no longer be nationally controlled but mandated from EU headquarters in Brussels.<sup>217</sup>

Why would fish exporters want to exploit or capitalize on the notions of eco-island and purity? Why this emphasis on 'sensible utilization' of the natural resources in the waters around Iceland? Let us look at Iceland's fishing policy, which all the major political parties are responsible for. Yet, the stakes are highest for The Independent Party (*Sjálfstæðisflokkur*, the Conservatives) and The Progressive Party (*Framsóknarflokkur*, the Center and the old farmer's party). These parties are the largest and the second largest political parties respectively in the country and both of have high stakes in the fisheries. The largest exporter of fish Iceland Freezing Plants Corporation (*Sölumiðstöð Hraðfrystihúsanna*), enjoys the support of the IP, while the second largest fish

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<sup>217</sup> As we noted earlier, a national referendum on membership in the European Union has never been held in Iceland and no negotiations between Iceland and the EU are on the horizon. In a recent poll conducted for the Icelandic Trade Council, by *Pricewaterhouse Coopers*, close to 50% of respondents said they would want negotiations about membership in the EU without commitments about membership. When asked "Do you think that Iceland should seek membership in the European Union if it would be safeguarded that fishing policy would not be part of the deal" 47,2% said yes, 33% no and 19,8% were uncertain or refused to reply. The poll was conducted December, 7-16 1998 and the sample consisted of 1, 018 individuals age 18-67. Total number of respondents was 672 (*Morgunblaðið* 2/10/99).

exporter Iceland Seafood International Ltd. (Samband of Iceland) enjoys the support of the PP.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, "[t]wo clusters of interlocking companies, which crabbier Icelanders nickname "the octopus" (Kolkraðbinn) and the squid" (Smokkfiskurinn), have stitched up an awful lot of the island's business between them. They are informally tied to the two main parties in the ruling coalition." (The Economist January 23, 1999:15) These two parties have been the mainstay of political power in Iceland ever since the 1920s and have governed either together as is the case now (since 1995), or one of them has formed a coalition with the other parties to the left. Because of traditional patronage dominant in Icelandic politics, these two parties have also had great power in nominations and appointments of public servants both within the overall government administration and state based institutions (Grímsson 1982).

*2. The Highly Contested Icelandic Fishing Policy:  
Sensible Harvesting in the Interest of Whom?*<sup>219</sup>

During the cod wars in the 1970s, Iceland claimed national ownership of the highly valuable fishing stock in the 200-mile coastal waters surrounding the island. In subsequent years the domestic fleet continued to grow while catches relative to effort continued to decline. In order to prevent the cod stock from collapsing and to make fishing more economical, Icelandic authorities introduced a quota system in 1983. Implemented in 1984, the system was originally presented as a short-term experiment, granting quotas only one to two years at the time. By 1990 the system was confirmed as permanent policy by the fisheries laws of the Icelandic

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<sup>218</sup> "The Icelandic Freezing Plants Corporation (IFPC) is the largest exporter of seafood products from Iceland, contributing to over 20% of all the country's exports. The company is also one of the world's largest operations of its kind with annual sales of approximately 100,000 metric tons of frozen seafood products worth approximately US\$ 400 million. IFPC is owned by its members which are land based freezing plants and freezing trawlers." ([www.nas.is/sh](http://www.nas.is/sh))

<sup>219</sup> This section is based upon several sources including articles from Morgunblaðið daily, the DV daily, in the period from December 1998 to February 1999. In addition it is also based on parliamentary discussions on fishing policy in the Althing, before and after the ruling of the Icelandic Supreme Court in the case of Valdimar Jóhannesson against the Icelandic state, was announced December 3, 1998.

Parliament. At that time the total allowable catch of codfish, one of the most valuable species in the category of demersal fish catch, had plummeted by 150-200 thousand tons from the pre-quota era. Before the quota was installed, it went up to 450-500 thousand tons in peak years, in 1989 the total catch of cod amounted 300.000 tons, constituting 50% of the total national catch value of fish. With a foreseeable shrinking of the Icelandic cod stock, drastic reduction in quotas was installed. In the fishing year 1994-95 total allowable catch had shrunk down to 155,000 with the expected drop of total catch value of cod to fall to 25%. (National Economic Institute of Iceland 1994; Institute of Marine Biology of Iceland 1994). This drastic reduction caused an economic recession and was a matter of tough fights. Authorities were under pressure from different interest groups to increase the quota.

The quota system divided access to the resource among those who happened to be boat-owners when the system was introduced - allocation of quotas was based largely on their fishing record in the three years prior to the implementation. "With the fisheries legislation in 1990 the system was revised: some of the smallest boats (6-10 tons) previously excluded from the quota restrictions were now incorporated into the system and, secondly permanent quotas became effectively transferable" (Pálsson 1994:1). The legislation of 1990 in effect granted the quotas permanently to those who filled the requirements.

While most would argue for the necessity of some kind of sensible fishing policy in order to prevent depletion of valuable resources, enormous conflict has arisen over the result of the quota system. As elsewhere where quota systems have been implemented "the wider social and economic implications are hotly debated" and have in Iceland raised "central questions of ethics, politics and social theory" as pointed out by anthropologist Pálsson (1994:2). In Iceland, critics of the quota system have pointed out that those who originally were granted quotas did not have to pay for their fishing permission, in spite of the fact that the resource is by law the property of

the whole nation.<sup>220</sup> Those who received fishing quotas on the basis of so-called historic rights obtained their permission i.e., their quotas on a silver platter. Loud complaints have been voiced by fishermen who claim that they have been left out of the large profits the quota holders are making, profits the fishermen claim is made by their very hard labor at sea. Women working in the fishing plants have likewise argued for changes in the system as their interests are highly disregarded under the present system. Last but not least the quota system has in most recent years been met with increasing discontent amongst the general public, and loud reproach aimed at the authorities for aggrandizing the lot of the rich by giving away to them resources that lawfully belong to the people.

By the fishing legislation of 1990 the number of quotas did increase. However, the effective transferability of permanent quotas after 1990 has escalated in the concentration of quotas into the hands of the biggest fishing companies as pointed out by Pálsson, who has argued that:

The largest companies now in possession of a large proportion of the permanent quotas, are increasingly sending their vessels to exploit fishing stocks in foreign waters, while leasing their quotas to less prosperous operators.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> The first article of the Icelandic law on fishing policies states: "The usable fishing stocks in the Icelandic waters are the common property of the Icelandic nation. The aim of this law is to ensure their protection and practical utilization and thereby secure permanent employment and residence in the country. Allocation of fishing permits according to these law does not equal property ownership or irreversible control of individual parties over the fishing permits." (Laws on fishing policy (Lög um stjórn fiskveiða) 1990, nr. 38, 15. maí) In Icelandic the article is as follows: "Nytjastofnar á Íslandsmiðum eru sameign íslensku þjóðarinnar. Markmið laga þessara er að stuðla að verndun og hagkvæmri nýtingu þeirra og tryggja með því trausta atvinnu og byggð í landinu. Úthlutun veiðiheimilda samkvæmt lögum þessum myndar ekki eignarrétt eða óafturkallanlegt forræði einstakra aðila yfir veiðiheimildum. (Lög um stjórn fiskveiða 1990, nr. 38, 15. maí)

<sup>221</sup> At the same time as the Icelandic cod stock was shrinking, noticeable upturn in the Barents Sea fisheries took place. By the summer of 1993, Icelandic trawlers increasingly began fishing in a zone called "The Loophole." The "Loophole" lies next to the Svalbard protection zone. This fishing instantly became a matter of conflict between Icelandic and Norwegian authorities, - unsettled in June 1994 when the Svalbard conflict broke out - the latter claiming that the Icelandic trawlers were scooping up the same stock whose breeding habitat was within the Norwegian protection zone and therefore rightfully a Norwegian possession. The Loophole fishing in turn, called for a national interest in the Svalbard Treaty in Iceland. Not surprisingly, great contentions rose over the total catch of cod of Icelandic trawlers in the Barents Sea. In an interview with *Morgunblaðið* Daily on Independence Day, the head of the Federation of Icelandic Fishing Vessel Owners (FIFVO) Mr. Kristján Ragnarsson - by some said to be the most powerful man in Iceland - argued that the total catch of Icelandic trawlers in the Barents Sea -including both the Loophole and the Svalbard protection zone - was expected to be between 30-40,000 tons in 1994, whereas Norwegian officials said it was as much 50,000 tons (Norges Fiskarlag quoted in *Morgunblaðið* 9/21/94). Whichever figures are more accurate, it is obvious that great interests are at stake. In recent years the number of Icelandic owned trawlers sailing under foreign flags, such as Russian and Argentinean, and fishing in these same waters has increased.

This state of affairs has lead many fishermen to describe the quota system in feudal terms, with the “quota-kings” or “lords of the sea” controlling most of the quota and profiting from renting it to “tenants” companies, who actually do much of the fishing. After paying the rental price, the “tenants” are left with only 60% of the value of the catch (the quota holders’ charge 40% of the value of the total catch), while still bearing all the normal expenses of fishing. In the ”tenancy” system it is the “quota-kings” who make the rules; not only do they own most of the permanent quotas, they also control many of the plants that buy the catch. (Pálsson 1994:11)

Since the permanent quota system was installed the quota value has multiplied many times over. The constant value increase of the quota, the wheeling and dealing of it, coupled with mortgages in un-fished quotas granted by the banks, have further infuriated critics of the system. In 1997, shares in the fishing industry were for the first time available on the new Icelandic stock market (established in the early 1990s).

The critics have also pointed out that the free trading of the quota has had serious socio-economic effects on the communities whose livelihood depends on fish. These effects are manifested in increased depopulation of small villages that have lost their quota, hence their livelihood. Opponents of the system have also argued that with the concentration of the quota in few hands, the holders of fishing permissions will within few years become the real possessors of the fishing stocks in the Icelandic fishing banks. It is precisely here where the contention lies. The critics whether politicians, fishermen or the public in general has pressed for answers regarding this apparent inconsistency, i.e., that the natural resources - on land and in sea - are by law the property of the nation, yet the right to exploit these resources is in the hands of a selected few. Recent years have witnessed heated discussions on alternatives to the existing quota system between those who have called for so-called *resource-tax* (auðlindaskattur), and others calling for *fishing-fees* (veiðileyfagjald) both in the Althing and amongst the public. Yet the government did not make any attempts to change the law on fishing policy. It was thus just a matter of time until the laws would be tested before the highest court of the country.

In December 1996, journalist Valdimar Jóhannesson, applied for a permission to the Ministry of Fisheries to fish within the Icelandic water jurisdiction with the aim of selling the catch. Among the species he asked to fish were the most valuable species such as codfish and others all subject to quota. In short, the development of the case was, that Jóhannesson's application was dismissed by the Ministry of Fisheries on the basis that the quota was restricted to fishing vessels already granted quotas. Jóhannesson sued the Minister - as a representative of the state - in a District court and lost the case. Jóhannesson refused to give up and presented his case to the Supreme Court, resulting in a watershed decision, which ruled December 3 1998 that the basis for the rejection was in conflict with two amendments in Iceland's constitution. To put it differently, the current law on fishing policy was outright unconstitutional.

On the one hand the Ministry's rejection was in conflict with a stipulation calling for equal rights of the citizens. (Before the constitutional changes were passed in 1995, the notion of equal rights, had been honored, by tradition). Secondly, the Supreme Court ruled that the rejection was in conflict with freedom of labor, also granted in the Icelandic constitution. The ruling argued for the right of the legislature to limit fishing within the jurisdiction of Icelandic waters on the basis of protection of fish stocks. Yet, the verdict of the Supreme Court argued that these fishing limitations would have to be in accordance with the country's constitution. In other words, to grant only those who had received their quotas from vessels designated as having "historic" rights, exclusive and permanent access to a resource, is in conflict with the first amendment of the constitution on equal rights of the citizens of the Icelandic state. The fish in the waters is also a resource that by law belongs to the entire nation

The Supreme Court ruling was a shock to the government and the fishing industry as a whole, while the public at large and the systems critics received it with great enthusiasm. The ruling was unprecedented in the 73-year-old history of the Supreme Court. Never before had it happened that the judiciary had ruled against the legislature in such a point-blank and unexpected

fashion. Legal professionals and other specialists were all of the opinion that the ruling would have dramatic consequences.

What became clear by the ruling was not only the blatant injustice of the fishing system but on a greater level it called for a clearer division than hitherto practiced in Icelandic politics, between the three divisions of power, the executive power, the legislature and the judiciary. The ruling was praised by those who have fought for increased value of the constitution, an issue that has been highly discussed all over the world in recent years amongst scholars and legal experts. The Supreme Court ruling in the case of Valdimar Jóhannesson against the Icelandic State, reflected the development within both European and international discourse in recent years and decades on human rights, democracy and the constitutional state.

In the following days, letters and faxes snowed in on the Ministry of Fisheries, over 2000 applications for fishing permission had arrived within a weeks time, putting the government in a great predicament (by early February 1999 this figure had reached 4000). The message from the Supreme Court was clear: the fishing policy was unconstitutional. Loud cries came from the fishing industry, claiming that disaster would occur if the present laws would be changed, opening up the fishing bank to any Tom, Dick and Harry. This they said, would spell disaster for the economy, and a souring inflation 1970s style, when it was between 100-200% on annual basis. The stock market reacted with lower prices per share in the fishing industry. It was however clear from the beginning, that the government was not about to alter the interests of the quota-kings in the favor of democratic sharing of the natural resources, in spite of blustering outcries calling for equal justice and democratic allocation of a treasure that by law belonged to the entire nation and not only a handful of individuals.

The economic interest and political interests were simply too high with parliamentary elections coming up in the spring of 1999. Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson said in an interview with Morgunblaðið daily that the verdict could hardly be taken seriously as there were only five

judges that ruled in this case as opposed to a full court of seven. Oddsson also emphasized that the ruling did not indicate anything else but that permissions without time limits for quotas were illegal. (12/5/1998). Pétur H. Hafstein, the President of the Supreme Court argued that the Prime Ministers assertions regarding the number of judges to be wrong. The Supreme Court very often ruled in cases with five judges and not seven, he argued and it was no indication of how serious the Court assumed the cases to be (*Morgunblaðið* 12/8/1998). The current Foreign Minister and former Minister of the Fisheries Halldór Ásgrímsson, one of the authors of the current quota system and a quota owner himself, suggested on the other hand that the Constitution should be changed. This suggestion was supported by the youth section of his party (Progressive Party) publicly supported (*Daily News from Iceland* 12/14/1998). Over two thirds of acting professors at the University of Iceland signed a requisition to the Althing. There they called for the duty of the Althing to abide to the Supreme Court ruling and change the law in accordance with the articles on equality in the Icelandic constitution (*Morgunblaðið* 12/12/98).

Instead of revising the entire law, the government chose to interpret the ruling as narrowly as possible and came up with a bill that called for minimal changes, rephrasing only the most critical wording within the law. Opponents within the Althing and in society at large argued, that now as so often before in the history of Icelandic politics, this new bill would be pushed through the parliament with much noise but little circumspection or research. The bill was passed as law January 13, 1999. The government sought experts' opinions, but opponents claimed that these experts all had interest in maintaining the system - many of them held shares in the fishing industry - so the government simply got what it ordered, critics said. In practice, the changes will not alter the position of those who already have quotas - i.e., the so-called "quota-kings" - the law will still only grant fishing quotas to those ships that already are registered. On the other hand the new law will severely restrict the fishing permission and quota of the small boats under 10 tons. This infuriated small-boat owners along the coast and other villagers who

many have lost the quota of their trawlers and whose only income rests upon the catches of the small boats.

The new law was met with very mixed feelings and many politicians and legal experts critical of the quota system have argued that, this is not the end and the constitutionality of the new law will be tried before the court system. Critics argued that the passing of this new law presented a peculiar situation concerning the co-operation between the judiciary and other arms of the state power. The new law will press the Supreme Court to follow suit with its ruling and push the legislature to revise the allocation of fishing permissions, based on the ruling. "Because of the immense interests at stake it is possible that one could witness the greatest conflicts in recent history between the judiciary and the other branches of government. If not, the ruling of the Supreme Court is nothing but a storm in a teapot." (Þórhallsson: *Morgunblaðið* 12/11/1998:) As of early February 1999, owners of fishing vessels currently without quota but with their new applications pending in the system, have threatened to go fishing in the current winter season, even if their cases have not yet been handled by the fishing authorities. They have argued that if they will be accused of breaking the law, they are breaking a law that does not hold in the first place and have threatened to use the constitution to safeguard their rights (*Dagur* 2/11/99, *DV* 2/11/99).

Following the dramatic Supreme Court ruling, the revised edition of the fishing law now calls for a committee to work on revising the entire law on fishing policy to be completed within two years. In the meantime the quota system is likely to continue to be hotly debated in Iceland.

## *2. Exclusive Rights to Do Research on "Pure" Icelandic Fish*

On another level, yet closely related to the conflict over the quota, or rather the rights to exploit a resource that by law is the common property of the nation, concerns the issue of who

has the right to do research on marine biology in Iceland. In recent years - after the fishing quotas were permanently installed as law in 1990 - it has become almost impossible for anyone, except the scientists who work at the state based marine biology institute called *Hafrannsóknarstofnun Íslands (The Marine Biology Institute of Iceland)* to do research on marine ecology and marine biology. Several scientist (biologists and ichthyologists) working outside the institute have experienced severe obstacles in both accessing data as well as accessing research grants, and have expressed fear concerning the freedom of scientific research and the freedom of submitting competing ideas or theories in Iceland. The scientists working at *The Marine Biology Institute* are not to blame they say but the problem lies rather with the legislator and the role and the place it has granted the institute. On several occasions scientists outside the institute applying for the right to do research on fish stocks, both those subject to quota and others, have been rejected permission. Research permission has not been granted unless it was guaranteed it would be conducted under the supervision of *The Marine Biology Institute* or that the institute is granted access to the research results. The law has evolved in such a way in recent years that the scientists and others working for the *MBI* have been put into a kind of a policing role towards potential competitors on the level of science and research (See NSR "Fréttaauki á Laugardegi" 11/7/98 Jóhann Hauksson). On the board of trustees for *MBI* sit five members, all appointed by the Minister of Fisheries, one of whom is nominated by The Federation of Icelandic Fishing Vessel Owners (*Landsamband íslenskra útgerðamanna LÍÚ*) and another by the National Association of Fishermen (*Sjómannasamband Íslands*). The current chair, appointed by the Minister, is the director of one of the largest fish processing companies in Iceland *Grandi hf*. Obviously not only the executive power but also representatives of financial interest are involved in the management of *The Marine Biology Institute of Iceland*.

On other occasions scientists have been rejected research grants in spite of having fulfilled and passed all qualifications. One case involved *The Icelandic Research Council*

(*Rannsóknarráð Íslands*), where the applicant sought a grant to continue an ongoing research originally supported by the *IR Council*. The applicant, a professor of biology at the University of Iceland, met all requirements but was denied the grant by the allocation board on the basis that his research was not done under the supervision of *MBI*. The same person applied to the special fund (*Republic Fund*) established at Thingvellir in 1994, dedicated to research on marine biology (see chapter 2). Again he was turned down, this time the majority of the board of the fund were all scientist at *MBI*.

Out of three members sitting on the board, two appointed by the government came from *MBI*, the third from the University of Iceland. In 1996 the board had allotted 21 grants 5 of which went to projects the *MBI* board members were themselves involved in. The biology professor, Einar Árnason appealed his case to the independent counselor of the Althing who concluded that the presence of the *MBI* members on the board was in conflict with other law on democratic governance (*stjórnsýslulög*). That for these members to be the judges of their own applications was against the law. On another level however, the government had stipulated that by virtue of their professional knowledge scientist at the *MBI* should sit on the board of the *Republic Fund*. Thus the independent counselor argued that there were obvious conflicts within the law and the rights of the said applicant not clear at all.

It is also worth mentioning that all the fish caught for research by *MBI* is outside the law on fishing quota.<sup>222</sup> Moreover, The Federation of Icelandic Fishing Vessel Owners (*Landsamband íslenskra útgerðamanna LÍÚ*) had on another occasion offered to donate one billion kronas' (around \$14 million) to finance the purchasing of a new research vessel for *MBI*. That will definitely enhance their ability to do research, but not those who work outside the jurisdiction of the institute. The cases above indicate that *The Marine Biology Institute* has

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<sup>222</sup> In recent years the institute has caught between 500-700 hundred tons annually of cod-fish alone, the price for it goes to the institute (the market value of one hundred tons of cod-fish can range from ca. \$. 200.000 to 300.000).

become a tool in the hands of the executive power or that it works first and last in its interest and thus by law enjoys a monopoly situation.

In early November 1998, Magnús Jónsson the director of the Institute of Meteorology wrote an article in *Morgunblaðið* daily where he pointed out that in the early 1980s lively discussions and different opinions had been exchanged regarding research methods, the impact of fishing and other related things. "Ever since the quota system was first introduced" he says,

it is as if a "wall of opinion" has gradually been created around the *MBI*, a wall that has become invincible after the installation [of 1990] and the authorities and the owners of the fishing industry joined forces in their safeguarding of the fishing policy system. It is as if all of a sudden science has become so developed that all doubts, which people discussed before do no longer exist when it comes to ichthyology research. Not surprisingly, most doubtful voices have gone silent as they are by now labeled as eccentric, false prophets and even as irresponsible enemies of the nation. Many biologists and others who have criticized the basis of the fishing policy system no longer dare to express their opinions out of fear of losing their jobs or to be subjects of one or another kind of inconveniences or even loss of honor. (*Morgunblaðið* 11/1/98)

As is the case with the quota system at large, the issue of freedom to do scientific research as well as the issue of exclusive rights to commercial exploitation of natural resources, is a matter of growing conflict surfacing in other hotly debated issues in Iceland.

." Added to this marketing development of "pure" products most recently, is a recent law that grants an American based pharmaceutical company exclusive access to create a computerized database including all in one, the nation's entire medical information coupled with detailed genealogical data and DNA profiles. This is simultaneously the most controversial aspect of this commodification of "purity". The intended purpose of the database is to find cures to genetically hereditary disease.

## **V. Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen how the notion of purity has in recent years been taken into the service of international business and trade. As diverse as these businesses are, they all seem to have great economic stakes in fortifying the notion of purity. I argue, that this wide exploitation and capitalization of purity fortifies the status and importance of "purity" within Icelandic national identity in general. If there exists a general agreement over the application of the notion of "purity" for economic profit in international marketing of tourist Iceland and Icelandic products, there are obviously great conflicts over who has the rights to exploit the "pure natural resources" that are the source of these profits and by law belong to the nation. Conflicts over common property versus privatization of exploitation of the "pure natural resources," whether this concerns the "pristine wilderness" of Iceland, the "pure" fishing stocks in the waters around the island or the "pure" genes of the nation will continue to be a source of bitter debates. By the same token, debates over democratic governance and democratic allocation of resources on the one hand and authoritarian style ruling and increased accumulation of wealth on the other, will continue.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusions**

This dissertation elucidated the adoption of the myth of purity and its central role in the joint processes of national identity making and nationalization of culture in Iceland. The research set out to explore two central questions. First, it asked why and how the idea of *purity* - most strongly manifested in linguistic purity - became central to nation-making in Iceland. The second question the research dealt with, asked whether recent intensification of globalization had called for increased emphasis on linguistic purism, particularly by state agencies. Let us now attempt to answer these questions and also highlight how and in what way this research contributes to the field of anthropology.

First, let us ask what is Icelandic purism all about? What has our study revealed? In short, our study showed that *purism*, as a policy, whether manifested on the level of "language" or on the level of "race," is in effect a mechanism of social control, an instrument of *power* that claims to have roots in some authentic natural order. There is nothing "natural" about *purism* or notions of "purity," as these notions are all socially constructed. "Purity" of the Icelandic language, was the primary criteria, employed by Icelandic nationalists in order to justify political sovereignty for the country. Icelandic language purism was and is only linguistic on the surface or superficially but profoundly about legitimating the power of those who possess standard Icelandic. Standard or "pure" Icelandic, is as the thesis shows a powerful mechanism of social control serving as a major instrument in the collective formation and re-formation of mental structures, by ordering from above how things can be said and by what words. Purism in and of itself does not have any power; it receives power through the authority of its propagators. Through its monopoly of symbolic violence, the Icelandic state regulates through purism who can participate in the public discourse. It determines the rules of the game by controlling what counts as capital in that market.

In Iceland the imposition of purism went hand in hand with the process of language standardization, a process that facilitated the construction of national identity and paved the way for the founding of a separate Icelandic nation-state.

It was clear from the beginning of our discussion that there was nothing "purely Icelandic" or indigenous about the idea of purism, linguistic or otherwise. Icelandic nationalism and all the criteria used in the process of nation making, which in due time became the primary sources used in order to justify Iceland's sovereignty, were ironically enough all of German origin. In short Icelandic purism is an invented tradition, to use Hobsbawm's concept.

The Icelandic nation did not suddenly come to from an age old slumber as the nationalistic myth has it. Nation-making in Iceland can only be understood as the direct result of

political development in the broader region. This constant interaction between the local and regional (later global) further supports the modernist approach of nationalism and the recent anthropological understanding of the *nation* and of *culture* as a socio-historical constructions, malleable entities or processes continually in the making, yet never static.

Hence, instead of looking at nation-making in Iceland in a vacuum we began our exploration by looking at a larger picture of political development in Europe, analyzing in particular the historical development of early nineteenth century German Romantic nationalism, which became the blueprint for linguistic nationalism in Iceland and elsewhere. By applying a historical perspective, I demonstrated how the process of Icelandic nation-making could not be understood except as a part of a broader regional - later global - development as well as a response to it. I argued, that while Iceland had through its history been relatively isolated, people's lives have always, to a lesser or greater degree been shaped by socio-economic and political developments in the broader region, and later globally.

I argued that globalization is not a modern or a post-modern phenomenon, although its present level of intensity is of course unprecedented. Globalization is a much older process, preceded by "regionalization" i.e., the compression of regions - the linkage of localities within regions- on the levels of economics and politics. Nationalism and hence the making of national identities was essentially a part of an international or global process. Thus in spite of all its feverish accentuation on the "particular," the emergence of national identities can, be seen as Roland Robertson maintains - albeit with some qualifications - "as *an aspect* of globalization." (Robertson 1995:30) The process of globalization has brought about new definition of "home," "community" and of "locality as sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod has pointed out (1994). By the same token the new understandings and definitions of the "nation" and the "national" can be seen as part and parcel of that process. In short, one can only understand the modern phenomenon called "nation," within the context of the global.

Anthropologists, studying the process of nation and national identity making, such as Herzfeld (1986) in his study on Greek nation-making and Verdery in her study on Romanian nation-making both argued for the key role intellectuals played in this process. Likewise my study reveals that Icelandic intellectuals were instrumental in constructing and developing Icelandic national identity.

The study traced the social construction of the notion of "purity" and how it became central to the making of the Icelandic nation, and national identity. Beginning as an intellectual interest, the idea was later exploited for political purposes by Icelandic intellectuals in Copenhagen in the second and third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By adopting the notion of between nation, language and state including the myth about purity from German Romanticism, these intellectuals, the primary evangelists of Icelandic purism had come up with what seemed to be a God given justification for political sovereignty for Iceland.

The Icelandic myth on "purity" supposes that the national prosperity whether intellectual, economic, or political stands in direct relation to the level of language "purity," i.e., the "purer" the language, the more prosperity. Moreover, the myth supposes that the nation cannot be true to its "natural spirit" or "character" unless the language is kept "pure". It was allegedly in the old Sagas where the spirit of the nation was preserved in its "purest" and least "uncontaminated" form, hence the notion of older equals "purer," whether pertaining to vocabulary or grammar structure. Thus the Sagas had to be treated with utmost respect and acquired the status of a holy scripture. If a word or an expression could be found in the Sagas it was assumed "proper" and "pure," if not their place in the Icelandic language became questionable. In the cases of new words, they could only be accepted if they were constructed from "true" Icelandic roots. This included refusal to accept any "foreign" words into the Icelandic vocabulary, whether in writing or speech. In addition, this belief was coupled with the insistence of coining new and "authentically" Icelandic words. "Foreign" words were assumed to equal dirt and seen as impure and thus posing a threat to the order of purity.

These have been the guiding principles of Icelandic purism ever since. Moreover, the myth holds that national sovereignty rests upon *unity* concerning the preservation of this purity. The ideological basis of the new political entity; the Icelandic nation-state, rests therefore on the concept of purity.

My research concludes how the notion of purity - central to linguistic nationalism - can be seen as a central part of a larger structure of a belief system or secular religion

Historically, the nationalist leaders claimed that the purity of the Icelandic language was the measure for economic prosperity and "freedom." For the leaders however, whether liberal or conservative this freedom did first and last mean freedom from foreign rule, not personal freedom/autonomy for the masses to do as they pleased. For the farmers the terms' "nation" and "farmer" became synonymous, which for them in practice meant, the "freedom" of the farmers/nation to continue their social control of their servants. For the masses (chiefly landless servants) on the other hand, "nation" meant all the people of the countryside. For the masses, "freedom" had the additional meaning of individual freedom: of becoming autonomous from the rigidity of the socio-economic structure. We showed that the old Icelandic socio-economic structure did not disintegrate because of industrialization inspired by nationalism or "national awakening," it crumbled from within, as pointed out by Hálfðanarson (1993). Based upon this notion we concluded that nationalism appealed to the socio-economically heterogeneous population of 19th century Iceland, for entirely different reasons. Icelandic nationalism, with its zealous emphasis on *purity* provided, first the Icelandic intellectuals and then later the entire population, with a sense of sacralized supra-individuality of the nation. As there were no significant urban settlements in Iceland, the entire population lived in the countryside and could thus easily subscribe to the purist notion that held that the "language," of the countryside was the least "contaminated" i.e., "pure." In short, we the speakers of "pure" language are entitled to "freedom," albeit "freedom" that meant different things to different people.

The imposition of purism in Iceland is inextricably intertwined with the formation of the

Icelandic state. The study also showed how "language" *par definition* "pure" Icelandic, determines who has access to political power and economic resources. Icelandic intellectuals inherited the Romantic notion of the state as the material manifestation of the "national spirit." The nation state as represented in its institutions reflect this "spirit" and the job of those who work there is to ensure that it is kept "pure" from "evil" and any kind of "contamination" that could possibly "stain" it. This notion explains why the Icelandic state, after it came into being, took a leading role in propagating and institutionalizing purism, in short preservation of "purity" became part of the state's interests. Icelandic language policy our study shows is a form of cultural policies on a national level, which simultaneously is part of national defense policy. It is precisely here that the Icelandic nation state and Icelandic national identity depart from all other known nation/national states. The peculiar position of Iceland is not only to be found in its minuscule population and exceptionally high level of cultural homogeneity, but also in the fact that one of the main characteristics of modern national states, namely a national military force is missing in Iceland. National armed forces are, as Tilly (1992) has shown, one of the fundamental means of coercion necessary in order to safeguard the continuing existence of the modern national state power. While not dismissing the presence of the US military base in Iceland, which according to law provides the country with military defense in cases of an external enemy attack, we pointed out the obvious - as every child in the Icelandic nation knows - that the American armed forces are by law not expected to provide protection for the Icelandic culture or language. Our study proposes that one could also analyze Icelandic purism as form of military strategy without real military forces. This policy or strategy, is a sort of national defense policy that is considered to safeguard the cultural independence of the nation, which in turn is assumed to be the prerequisite for the country's political independence. The notion of "purity" central to the discourse on the nation and national identity in Iceland, can therefore be analyzed not only as a form of secular religion but also after the foundation of the Icelandic nation state as national defense policy.

The popularity of this new purist identity, which everyone could eventually identify with, can only be explained by reference to the religious or cosmological elements within nationalism. Nationalism in Iceland emerged at a time when old ideologies and old socio-economic structures no longer provided security and a sense of belonging, essential for their continuation. During these times of uncertainty, Icelandic nationalism/purism provided people with a new genesis, a new glorious past and a promise of glorious and prosperous future as long as "purity" was honored. It provided in short, a new sense of self, a new cause for living.

The success of the national myth on purity in Iceland can also be explained by the intertwined processes of industrialization, nation making and democratization. The notion of purity became a form of secular religion that both facilitated the birth of the modern Icelandic nation state and provided the people with a new cosmos, a meaning of life. The glorious past stood in direct relation to the level of purity and the glorious future of tomorrow was contingent upon getting rid of impurities in the present. Since the emergence of the Icelandic nation-state this belief has been systematically nurtured and secured through various means such as the school system, the media, legislation on peoples names along with various state based quasi-religious institutions, that in one way or another have safeguarded the power of purism.

The religious aspect of Icelandic nationalism is further strengthened in the term "purity" itself. The terms "purification" and "purity" are both associated with the act of overcoming sin and sin is understood as representing "stain" or "evil." In this way the act of "purifying" is a moral act aimed at overcoming evil. "Purity," as anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) argued, is a fiction that cannot exist except as an opposition to something that is perceived of as impure or polluted. Yet there is no such thing as absolute dirt either, it only exists in the eye of the beholder. Douglas' understanding of dirt as a matter out of place or *disorder*, allowed us to understand *purity* as a matter of *order*, hence safeguarding *purity* becomes a matter of safeguarding *order*. Within this cosmic structure impurity spells danger as it upsets the order of purity. To put it differently,

impurity spells danger because it upsets the order of *power*, impurity is conceived of as a challenge to the power structure. Any challenge to the order of purity is therefore a challenge to the order of power. In essence the alleged danger of impurity is only a danger to those who in the first place have the power to define purity. In other words impurity is dangerous as it upsets the order of the system of power.

Through its monopoly of symbolic violence, the state regulates through purism who can participate in the public discourse. It determines the rules of the game by controlling what counts as capital in that market. In the public arena, whether in the printing press, broadcasting media or any place that can be defined as "public," "pure" Icelandic is the only variety of Icelandic that has any value. Deviations from the purist protocol in public are either negatively sanctioned, by shaming, or ridicule, or speakers are simply ignored.

The hegemony of purism is further secured by its inherent religious moralistic message. Through the yearlong relentless indoctrination of purism adherence to it is commonly perceived of as a matter of loyalty to the "sacred" boundaries of the Icelandic *culture*, and *nation*. Any public challenge to it is thus seen as sacrilegious. The fervent militaristic style of purism has resulted not-only in self censorship, where speakers are constantly on guard about what they can say and how, but also in the common practice of one speaker censoring another. This practice of interrupting and "correcting" a speaker while he/she speaks, reflects a sort of grass-root policing of speech which in turn further safeguards the power of purism.

Through its application of a historical approach, the dissertation shows that the relative absence of significant or collective opposition to purism, points to a tremendous success on the behalf of its propagators to naturalize the basis of their power. A notion, totally foreign to the Icelandic public until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, has through systematic production and reproduction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, become central to the national identity of the Icelandic people. The myth-making of the purity of the old Sagas, the glory and splendor of the past, further fuelled the quasi-

religious status of purism. Likewise, violations of the rigorous rules of linguistic purism whether in the form of "staining," "dative-sickness" or other alleged blemishes are regarded as blasphemy and sanctioned through various impositions of stigma.

My study also revealed the similarities between linguistic purism and racial purism elements. Although, most forcefully expressed in the notion linguistic purity, with the old Sagas as a living proof of the "originality"/"purity" of the Icelandic language, Icelandic purism/nationalism, like its German prototype, had racist elements embedded in it from the beginning. These elements manifested themselves in notions of the alleged intellectual and physical "superiority" of the Saga heroes and their descendants. Icelandic national identity was not only constructed in comparison and opposition to Danes, but the process of national identity making was also a deliberate effort to construct an image of a "civilized nation," "cultured" people. The relentless emphasis on "the literary achievements" represented in the Sagas, propagated by the purists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century took on a racist overtone in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These ideas reflect extreme xenophobia, aimed at everyone who was not Icelandic, where foreigners were thought to represent contamination. Consequently the notion of purity became increasingly associated with race. Icelandic intellectuals, particularly of the first half of the century emphasized the racial aspect of purity, the "white-ness" of "pure-Aryan" Icelanders as opposed to non-Aryan, non-whiteness being impure, representing dirt, barbarism, savagery etc.,. Our discussion on Finnbogason's purism further established the close connection between genetic nationalism, or eugenics, xenophobia, racism and linguistic purism.

The resemblance between linguistic purism and racial purism is frightfully close. There is not a fundamental difference between the purists' definition of words as "pure" and "original" and their notion of "pure" blood/individuals. *Foreign words* represent, *impurity, dirt, contamination*, likewise *foreign blood/people* represent *impurity, dirt and contamination*. The Nazis'

construction of the "master-race" was of course a direct result of the racial purism embedded in the original version of German Romanticism.

The racist elements in Icelandic purism have only partially been put to test, and never really on a grand scale. Yet our study revealed how racist purism was the guiding light Icelandic authorities used in order not to accept Jews into the country before and during WW II and later how the same principle of "racial purity" was a determining factor, preventing black soldiers to be stationed at the US run NATO base in Iceland. I would argue that the extreme level of cultural homogeneity which has characterized Icelandic society until very recently, neither the staunchest propagators of purism nor the public as whole has ever had to confront these racists illusions embedded in the purist ideology. With the growing number of immigrants in Iceland, these elements are bound to surface in the public discourse.

Now let us turn to our second research question, has recent intensification of globalization called for increased emphasis on linguistic purism, particularly as represented by state agencies?

The research shows that the hegemony of linguistic purism remained almost entirely unchallenged until the early 1980s. This was the time that saw challenge to the superior status of written language/"pure" Icelandic on air, first emerge. The state opened up its second radio channel in 1980, thereby marking the beginning of broadcasting in vernacular. Soon thereafter in 1986, the state gave up its control of the broadcasting media, which opened up for a free-market broadcast of spoken language, further threatening the power of purism, and cracking its fortress. This was also the time that witnessed increased influx of various kinds of entertainment media and the very dawn of the new information technology. In my argument I highlighted, that this time also saw a significant increase of both financial input and political action on the behalf of the state as well as agents within the private sector. Manifested in increased institutionalized supervision or policing of purism, language campaigns in media and on milk-cartons, these actions can be seen as attempts to fight the potentially "polluting" effects of this aspect of the

globalization process. For the staunch purist, globalization spells danger as it threatens their hegemony over the mental structures of peoples' minds. They no longer have the same control they use to have. But the hegemony purism is gradually being challenged. The protest over NSR policy from the gay and lesbian community marked - in retrospect - a watershed in public disapproval of language purism. The more recent challenge to the discriminatory naming policy also bears witness to growing discontent over the rigor and the restraint embedded in purism.

The apparent authoritarianism embedded in purism, its rigor and general lack of tolerance for anything that upsets the purist order I would argue, is bound to be increasingly challenged in the years to come for several reasons. For one thing, increased immigration to Iceland coupled with increased international awareness of the necessity for tolerance for ethnic and cultural diversity is bound to have its impact on purism. On another level, more and more Icelanders are becoming bilingual, with English as an actual second language. Moreover, more and more jobs actually require a substantial knowledge of English. This requirement may not necessarily be explicitly acknowledge but is certainly assumed. Yet another reason is simply to be found in the discrepancy between "pure" Icelandic and spoken vernacular. This discrepancy has in recent years manifested itself more and more in the incorporation of English words, an impact that doubtless comes from American movies, the dominance of American TV productions and other kinds of entertainment in addition to information media such as the Internet.

If I have prophesized a lessening of linguistic hegemony in the coming years, purism is picking up its strength in other areas as our discussion on the commodification of purism indicated. My research shows how the notion of purity has in the last decade and a half, expanded into to new areas of the Icelandic economy. Purity has become a buzzword in the fastest growing industry in the country, namely tourism, where we see Iceland marketed as a country of pure air and pure water, and pure nature. Interestingly, our study revealed that this marketing devise has caused intense conflicts between the state of Iceland on the one hand, the tourist industry and

environmental purist on the other. Here, state planned heavy industry is said to potentially "contaminate" the "purity" of the land. This rhetoric echoes the terminology of the language purists.

It is not only the tourist industry which has taken purity into its service. The oldest and largest exportation industry - the fishing industry - along with exporters of agricultural produce, have also taken purity into their service, by marketing their goods as "pure." These new propagators of Iceland's "purity" are obviously tapping into the fast growing consumer group - found amongst the middle and upper middle classes in the Western world - that are concerned about environmental issues. The Icelandic marketing executives are preying on these informed consumers who are willing to pay more for products that are either labeled as "organic," "pure" or "natural," and are also likely to want to go to places that are not plagued with industrial pollution. This new international marketing policy of Iceland and Icelandic products as "pure," does not have to be a bad marketing strategy. Yet one is compelled to ask why "pure" and not something else. I have argued that this international capitalization of "purity" is both part and parcel of the globalization process as well as a response to its recent intensification. "Purity" lies at the heart of the Icelandic national identity, which was constructed as a response to the international development of nation-state making. Recent developments in the global economy, have called for increased competition for markets and products are increasingly marketed as symbolizing something, as being a part of a concept or an "image." To choose "purity" above everything else in the international or global marketing of Iceland and Icelandic products, is simply a continuation and an expansion of the "purity" conception Icelanders have constructed of themselves.

The most recent twist in the commodification of purity surfaced in 1998 when "pure"/ "unpolluted" genes were added to the list. Here the idea is to make profits from potential medical discoveries based on research from a centralized database that includes all in one, decoded health

and genetic information coupled with genealogical information of all Icelanders past and present. After fierce debates, and protests mainly from Icelandic and international scientists, the Althing passed a bill in December 1998, that granted an international pharmaceutical company DeCode Genetics exclusive rights to create and maintain a gigantic centralized database containing the country's health records. Aside from all the ethical and legal controversy over this database, the whole project, I would argue, comes fearfully close to Finnbogason's racist/eugenic ideas. He had dreamt of this kind of database back in the 1920s, Icelanders and the world can be grateful that he did not get funded. The recent DeCode database was popularized by appealing to the goodwill of the public, who was made to believe that the potential genetic information received from the database could help cure diseases such as Alzheimer's, cystic fibrosis, various types of cancer and other diseases. On another level, I would argue that this database had great public appeal precisely because its founders predicated on the racist believe about the superiority of their genes, a believe "thanks" to purist propaganda is still commonly held by Icelanders,

Finally, we may ask in what way this study contributes to the field of anthropology. First of all, I argue that the notion of purity is imperative for any kind of insight into Icelandic culture and understanding of Icelandic national identity. The dominance of purism whether linguistic, cultural or on the more muffled levels of class and race, is simply the key, the compass necessary to navigate through the cultural landscape of Iceland. It is the ideology that forms the basis of the national culture, the national identity, has inspired the political life past and present and plays an important role in the economy of the country as well. Any understanding of the history of Iceland's last hundred and fifty years would be only be superficial, if the notion purity was left out. It is, as this dissertation has shown, the keyword in Icelandic nationalism, which in turn has been the prime motor in the fundamental political and socio-economic transformations the country has undergone. There is simply no way getting around it, anyone who wishes to conduct an anthropological study in Iceland, totally misses the point if the importance of purism is

dismissed. The notion of purity permeates every level of Icelandic culture and society and lies at the heart of Icelandic nationalism, which forms the back-bone of the public/national discourse in the country.

The research, while interdisciplinary in its approach, is a contribution to anthropology's critical understanding of the joint processes of the production and reproduction symbolic power and national identity making. Likewise this study underscores the importance of history for anthropology, and further contributes to the discipline's increased interest in culture as a malleable and ongoing process, molded by events and processes inside as well as outside of its official boundaries. The study also contributes to anthropology's interest in tradition, the selection and invention of tradition. This study clearly shows, how the invention of purity gained unexpected political currency by its application to the historical construction of national identity in Iceland.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the increased and necessary awareness for anthropologists to study closely the constant interaction between the joint processes of national identity and national culture making on the one hand and the intensified process of globalization on the other. I hope that my study will contribute to the ongoing search in anthropology, for the complex interaction and intertwined processes of culture, history and power.

# Nýmjólk

## Málalengingar! 1 lítri



Oft eru merkingarlítill orð og orðasambönd notuð að óþörfu. Sumt kemst í tísku og veður uppi, t.d. í fjölmiðlum.

Eðlilegt málfar	Málalengingar
Frystihúsið er við höfnina.	Frystihúsið er <i>staðsett</i> við höfnina.
Fyrirtækið er nýtt.	<i>Um er að ræða</i> nýtt fyrirtæki.
Í kosningunum í gær...	Í kosningunum <i>sem fram fóru</i> í gær...
Stjórn mála umræður.	Umræður <i>á vettvangi</i> stjórnmála.

Komum beint að efninu!



# Nýmjólk

## 1 lítri

### Góðan dag!

Blessaður! Sæll! Heill og sæll!

Sæl og blessuð! Komdu blessuð og sæl!

Vertu sæll! Verið þið öll blessuð og sæl!

Við Íslendingar eigum nóg af fallegum  
og hlýlegum kveðjum.

Innantóm

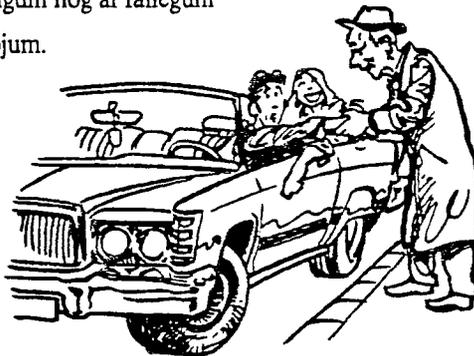
„hæ“ og „bæ“

gætu þó hæglega

útrýmt þeim ef

við höldum ekki

vöku okkar.



Sýnum hvert öðru þá virðingu  
að heilsast og kveðjast á íslensku!

Íslenska er okkar mál  
**MS**  
MJÓLKURSAMSALAN

# Nýmjólk

## Ísl-enska 1 lítri

Áhrif ensku á daglegt mál okkar eru meiri en margan grunar.

*Sumir segja:*

Hafðu góða helgi!  
Tekurðu mjólk í kaffið?  
Nú tekur þú yfir.  
Talandi um Jón ...

*Betra er:*

Njóttu helgarinnar!  
Notarðu mjólk í kaffið?  
Nú tekur þú við.  
Úr því að minnst er á Jón ...  
Eða: Vel á minnst! Jón ...



Vörumst óþörf áhrif  
annarra tungumála!

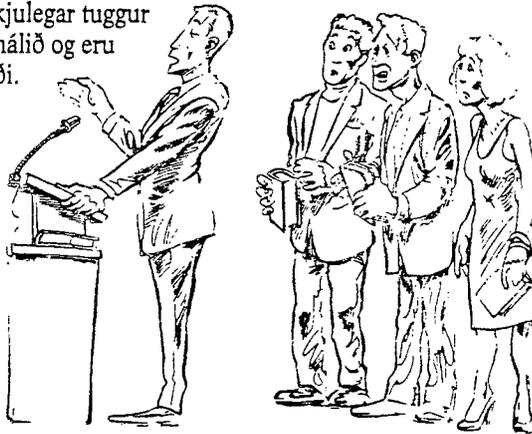
Íslenska er okkar mál  
  
MJÓLKURSAMSALAN

# Nýmjólk

## 1 lítri

### Hvert er málið?

Flatneskjulegar tuggur  
lengja málið og eru  
til óprýði.



**Langloka:** Nú þegar útgáfa þessarar bókar er komin á lokastig, vil ég þakka Árna fyrir að koma að útgáfunni með mér, Ástu fyrir að koma að málinu á umbrotsstigi og Baldri fyrir að koma að því á prentunarstigi.

**Eðlilegt mál:** Nú þegar bókin er að koma út, vil ég þakka Árna fyrir hjálpina, Ástu fyrir umbrotið og Baldri prentunina.

Teygjom ekki loþann að óþörfu!

Íslenska er okkar mál  
  
MJÓLKURSAMSALAN

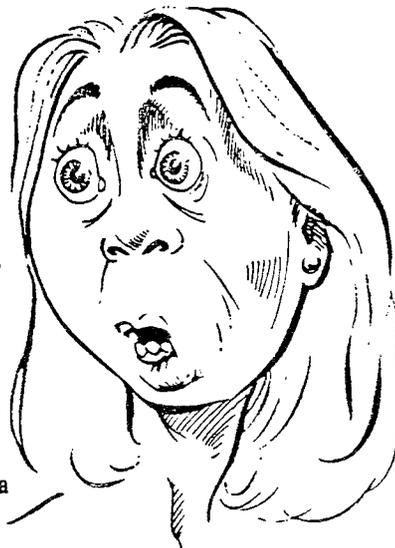
# Nýmjólk

1 lítri

## Við erum rík!

Íslensk tunga býr yfir  
ríkum orðaforða.  
Hræðslu má til  
dæmis tjá með  
margvíslegum hætti:

- að óttast
- að hafa beyg af
- að kvíða fyrir
- að bera kvíðboga fyrir
- að standa stuggur af
- að hrjósa hugur við
- að verða ekki um sel
- að vera uggandi um
- að fyllast geig
- að lítast ekki á blikuna



Hræðumst ekki fjölbreytnina  
- verum hvergi smeyk!

Íslenska er okkar mál  
  
MJÓLKURSAMSALAN

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<sup>i</sup> The current Minister of Education is the conservative Björn Bjarnason, appointed to the post in the spring of 1995. In the fifty years from the establishment of the Icelandic republic in 1944 until 1995 the Conservative Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkur) has headed a coalition government for almost 30 years of those they ruled the ministry of education for over 15 years. (Vikublaðið 31. Mars 1995 "Ráðuneytin á lýðveldistímanum"). The years between 1957 and 1971 were ruled by a coalition of the Social Democrats and the Conservatives. At that time the Ministry of Education was in the hands of Gylfi Th. Gíslason of the Social Democratic Party (see chapter two). It is a commonly held belief in Iceland that the Social Democrats were right off the center not left of it. They were staunch supporters of NATO and the presence of the US military base (Broddason & Grímsson 1982).