Interrogating the Icelandic Imaginary: Nation Branding and the Articulation of National Identity in Iceland's Tourism Advertisements

by

Chantel Nygaard

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Copyright © 2024 by Chantel Nygaard

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 1

List of Figures i

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL/LITERATURE REVIEW 8

2.1 Introduction 8

2.2 Critical Constructivism 10

2.3 Perspectives on Brands and Branding 12

2.3.1 Brands, Consumers, and Consumption 14

2.3.2 Branding and Performance 18

2.3.3 Spatial Perspectives on Branding 21

2.3.4 Nation Branding and the Art of Articulating National Difference in a Market-Driven Economy 23

2.3.5 Nation States, Nationalism, the Nation-Field, and National Imaginaries 24

2.4 Imagined Communities and the Lieux de Mémoire 27

2.4.1 The Lieux de Imagination 28

2.4.2 Imagination, Language, and Place-Making 29

2.4.3 Under the Canopy of the Imagination: Utopia, Heritage, Myth and Memory 31

2.4.4 Spatialization and Geographies of Difference 33

2.4.5 Place Branding: Spatializations and Imagination 34

2.5 Tourism and the Imagination: Theories on Place-Branding Representations, the Tourist Gaze, Tourism 'Destinations' and Tourism Practices 36

2.5.1 Cultural Tourism and the Rise of 'Media Tourism' 39

2.5.2 Heritage, and Authenticity: Heritage Tourism 42

2.6 Representations of Place: Nordic Place Branding in Popular Media and Culture 43

2.6.1 Constructing 'Nordicness': Value Regimes in Nordic Place Branding 45

2.7 An Overview of Icelandic History: Settlement and Saga Literature 47

2.7.1 A Brief Interlude: A Re-Evaluation of Iceland's Saga Literature in the 1970s 48

2.7.2 The Rise and Fall of the Icelandic Commonwealth 49

2.7.3 The Struggle for Independence 50

2.7.4 Creating a 'Golden Age' Icelandic Identity: Icelandic History, Reinterpreted 53

2.7.5 The Role of Language 55

2.7.6 The Myth of a Unified Nation: An Exercise in Collective-Memory Making 57
2.7.7 'We're Not Like Other Colonies!' 58
2.7.8 Old Imaginary, New World: Contemporary Iceland 61
2.7.9 Financial Boom and Bust: Iceland's 2008 Financial Crisis 62
2.7.10 Resurrection and Revival: A Post-Crisis Recovery and Comeback 66
2.7.11 Iceland's Unexpected Uptick: Tourism's 'Late-Bloomer' 68
2.7.12 Inspired by Iceland: A Brand and Tourist Destination Borne out of Crisis 69
2.7.13 Icelandic Tourism: Structure and Governance 70
2.7.14 Icelandic Tourism and the COVID-19 Pandemic 72
2.7.15 Conclusion 74
3.0 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY 76
3.1 Introduction 76
3.2 Data Sources and Data Collection 76
3.3 Visual Culture and A Critical Visual Methodology 77
3.3.1 Visual Culture and the Production/Circulation of Images in the Digital Age 78
3.3.2 Semiology 80
3.3.3 Semiology and Discourse 84
3.4 Validation of Technique and Methodological Limitations 88
3.4.1 A Moment for Reflexivity 90
4.0 CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS 94
4.1 Introduction 94
4.2 Campaign Overview and Analysis 95
4.2.1 "Let It Out!" (2020) 95
4.2.2 "Introducing the Icelandverse" (2021) 97
4.2.3 "OutHorse Your Email to Iceland's Horses" (2022) 100
4.2.4 Mission: Iceland (2022) 102
4.3 Thematic Findings: A Tale of Four Mythologies 105
4.3.1 The Mythology of 'The Sublime Landscape' (Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild') 105
4.3.2 Representations of Wilderness in Print and Visual Media 106
4.3.3 Commodifying Wilderness and the Icelandic Landscape 110
4.3.4 Northern Mythscapes: Wilderness as National Identity 113
4.4 The Mythology of Eccentricity (Iceland as 'Otherworldly' and 'Exotic') 115
4.4.1 Difference Re-evaluated: Commodification of the 'Exotic' 116
4.4.2 Appropriating and Performing 'Exoticness' in a Post-Financial-Crisis Context 117
4.4.3 'Otherworldly' Iceland 119

4.4.4 Appropriating and Performing 'Exoticness' in a Post-Financial-Crisis Context 121
4.5 The Mythology of Irreverence (Icelandic Humour and Performances of Nonchalance)................ 123
4.5.1 Comedic Relief: Comedic Performance as Self-Preservation 124
4.5.2 Parodic Expressions of Dissent 125
4.5.3 Humour as Protection, Humour as Negotiation 126
4.5.4 Laughing Through the Pain: Humour as Communion 128
4.5.5 Satire, Parody, and the Carnivalesque: Communion Through 'Carnival Laughter' 129
4.6 The Mythology of Inheritance (Iceland as Primoridial: An Authentic 'Antidote' to Modernity) ... 133
4.6.1 Escaping the Ordinary: Disconnecting from Tech in a Post-COVID Context 134
4.6.2 Parodic Expressions of Dissent: Nostalgia for an Imagined, Pastoral Past 136
4.7 Conclusion 140
5.0 CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.. 143
5.1 Introduction... 143
5.2 Avenues for Future Research... 145
5.3 Discussion: What's at Stake?... 148
5.4 Concluding Remarks: Forging Ahead Amidst Uncertainty 157
References.. 166

List of Figures

Figure 1……………………………………………………………………………………63

Abstract

The rise of nation branding points to the ubiquity and pervasiveness of brands. Under nation branding, the nation state and national identity—like the corporate brand—are transformed into commodifiable entities. Here, national identity is reconfigured to meet the demands of the global marketplace. This project explores the nation branding via tourism advertisements in the context of Iceland and aims to answer the following dual-pronged question: *How do Iceland's tourism advertisements contribute towards the country's nation-branding strategies? How do the visual and discursive representations of Iceland in tourism media (re)inforce and (re)articulate a mythologized Icelandic national imaginary and identity?* In conducting a semiological analysis of four of Iceland's tourism advertisements, released during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022, this project examines how, through visual and discursive representations, a nationalist image of Iceland—one that upholds the 'Icelandic imaginary'—is (re)constructed and (re)circulated. Using a synthesis of critical constructivist theories that examine the interconnections between geographies, national imaginaries, tourism representations, branding strategies, and consumption, I develop four key themes (presented as 'mythologies')—*The Mythology of the 'Sublime Landscape' (Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild'); The Mythology of Inheritance (Iceland as 'Primordial': An Authentic Antidote' to Modernity); The Mythology of Eccentricity (Iceland as 'Otherworldly' and 'Exotic'); The Mythology of Irreverence (Icelandic Humour and Performances of Nonchalance)*—that critically examine the effects of nation branding on the formation and articulation of Iceland's national identity.

Acknowledgements

The process of writing this thesis has been a long one—a kind of saga, if you will. And the path taken me to get me to this point—though not by my own choosing—was the one of *most* resistance. A global pandemic, a health scare, and the deaths of several loved ones are but few of the challenges my advisor, Dr. Lori Wilkinson, and I have had to overcome over the course of this project. My deepest gratitude to you, Lori, for your expertise, and your unwavering patience, compassion, support, and encouragement along the way. I truly cannot say it enough—thank you, for everything, I am so thankful Lance brought us together. I'd like to think that he's—from his café, of course—looking down on us and revelling in his handiwork. Thank you, Lance.

A special thank you to my committee members, Dr. Sonia Bookman, and Katrín Níelsdóttir, for their knowledge, feedback, and support over the course of this project. Thank you, Sonia, for opening up the world of branding, cultural consumption, and cosmopolitanism for me. Who knew research could be so fun?! Thank you, Katrín, for your enthusiasm and expertise in Everything-Iceland, and for your generosity in time, in your willingness to join my committee at a moment's notice. Thank you to the Faculty of Sociology's Graduate-Program-Assistant-and-Administrator-Extraordinaire, Margaret Currie for all the help and support she's provided to me (and countless other students) over the years. If only every department were so lucky to have a Margaret, like we do!

And finally, thank you to my community—my family, friends, colleagues, and Bluestem neighbours—for all their love and support (despite my *occasional* thesis-induced insufferability, ha). To my family—Mom, Dad, Brittney, Graham, Janet, Larry, Lauren, Auntie Lindy—thank you for your presence, love, and encouragement. This work is dedicated to you. I also dedicate this thesis, in memoriam, to my Amma, whose sense of humour, knack for story-telling and love and knowledge of Icelandic culture—always accompanied by coffee and a heaping plate of dainties (vínarterta, kleinur, date bar, galore!)—will forever be imprinted on my heart.

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This project explores the growing sociological field of nation branding in the context of Iceland. Characterized as a microstate[1] with a population of just over 380 000, Iceland's 'smallness' has always been one of its key identifiers. In the study of microstates, Simpson (2022) notes that smallness permeates all aspects of life, calling it "an omnipresent and prevalent dynamic" (p.71) that impacts states' domestic, economic, and foreign policies, as well as their self and social perception. Moreover, often viewed as 'weak' or insignificant members of the international community, microstates are routinely overlooked as objects worthy of scholarly inquiry (Simpson 2022). But, given their size relative to other nations, microstates *are* and always will be—objectively and inherently—the weaker party in the (asymmetric) relationships they maintain with other states (Simpson 2022). In addition to the country's remote location and isolation, it has always maintained a very small—and up until recently, a very homogenous—population, making it one of the most sparsely populated countries in Europe. As reported by Statistics Iceland (2023) on January 1st, 2023, the country had a population of 387,758 inhabitants. To put this into perspective, Iceland's entire population is *less than half* of what Winnipeg's is. There is tremendous value, however, in studying microstates, particularly in terms of the strategies they adopt and the negotiations they make in order to gain international visibility and credibility, while also trying to maintain a distinct national identity which, in the case of Iceland, is of crucial importance to its inhabitants.

[1] In contemporary political science, there are many ambiguities and competing definitions regarding what constitutes a 'microstate' (Simpson 2022). According to Simpson (2022), the term 'micro' in microstate signifies an "extreme smallness in size—both physical and geographical—and is a key determinant in identifying microstate status. Although there is no consensus in terms of population size, the one million threshold is often found in scholarship and therefore, Simpson argues, constitutes a legitimate definition of the microstate.

Iceland presents an interesting case as a nation. The country's history has been documented since its settlement, chronicled in their historical sagas. For most of its history, Iceland has been a colonial dependency, only gaining full autonomy from Denmark in 1944. Iceland also offers a unique case given its remote location and small population. Geographically, the small, isolated island is located on the North Atlantic Ocean—northwest of the United Kingdom and Ireland, west of Norway, and southeast of Greenland—geologically, it is located on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a sprawling underwater mountain range that runs through the Atlantic Ocean. It is also a divergent plate boundary where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates separate from one another (Sigmundsson and Sæmundsson 2008). Iceland's location on the ridge and the movement of these plates is the cause for much of what defines the country: its distinctive and otherworldly landscape sculpted by unruly geothermal forces. The nation's volcanism, too, is attributed to their location on the ridge. Frequent (but variable) volcanic activity has, and continues to decisively shape the Icelandic landscape, with—based on data throughout historical time—about 20 to 25 eruptions occurring per century (Sigmundsson and Sæmundsson 2008). As Karen Oslund (2011) writes, "[t]he striking idea of a land shaped by fire and ice grips the memories of visitors even as the tourist industry has rendered the image cliché" (p. 30). The image of Iceland as a land of fire and ice has dominated the public imaginary so much so, it has become the country's unofficial moniker. Home to a varied landscape of waterfalls, fjords, volcanoes, craggy lava fields, swathes of lichen, glaciers, geysers, geothermal hot springs, and other captivating phenomena, Iceland's natural environment—while heavily referenced to the *point* of cliché—has always had the ability to capture the imagination of outsiders. Though the country has become somewhat of a tourist hot-spot since their economic crash in 2008, what most people know about Iceland stems from representations in media and

popular culture. With the international commercialization of Icelandic cultural products, imaginations about the island as an 'exotic', mythical hinterland have congealed to the point of reification. The 'Icelandic imaginary', Tweed and Watson (2019) note, is the product of both local and global forces. In their exploration of the relationship between geography, musical aesthetics, and a globalized Icelandic imaginary, the authors argue that the nation's distinctive landscape and folkloric culture has helped distinguish Icelandic music in a crowded global music market. The nation's dramatic landscape is often invoked lyrically and sonically in the music of performers like—Iceland's most famous musical exports— Björk, Sigur Rós, and Of Monsters and Men, "creating", as Mitchell (2009) writes, "geomorphic soundscapes which transport listeners into an imaginary world" (p. 181 as cited in Tweed and Watson 2019:128). Furthermore, the band name, '*Of Monsters and Men'* is an allusion—a homage even—to Icelanders near-spiritual belief in the mythical and folkloric. Apart from the band name, itself, the imagery and lyrics of *Of Monsters and Men's* songs[2] draw inspiration from what bassist Kristján Paul Kristjánsson says are the "old national stories that have been kept for hundreds of years that we are always told as children […] [s]tories of elves and trolls and weird stuff happening" (as cited in Tweed and Watson 2019:129). Written collaboratively, the bands' lyrics often reference fairy-tale creatures such as ghosts and werewolves: as singer Ragnar Þórhallsson states, "we found that we could bond better by telling each other fairy tales [rather] than writing about real life" (as cited in Tweed and Watson 2019:129). Indeed, Icelandic culture is saturated

[2] The songs being referenced here are from *Of Monsters and Men's* (2011) debut album *My Head is an Animal* (Tweed and Watson 2019). Having listened to this album extensively when it was first released, I can attest that thematically, the album centers around Icelandic folklore and mythology. I have not listened to subsequent releases by the band, so I cannot comment on whether or not this type of imagery and lyricism has persisted.

with folk legends, attached to real people and places as well as fictional "wonder tales" (Tweed and Watson 2019:128)—both of which are passed down to subsequent generations.

Indeed, Icelanders deep and long-standing belief in the supernatural is outlined by Hafestein (2000), who notes that Icelandic elves (*álfar*), known also as the 'hidden people' (*huldufólk*)—whom, unlike their elfin contemporaries, often depicted as "the wee little creatures that the English term connotes" (Hafstein 2000:89), are, in contrast, akin in many ways (though nonetheless different) to the human population in their stature, body, costume, and even economic handlings—and their associated dwelling spaces are regarded with much veneration (Hafstein 2000). Elfin interferences—be they mechanical malfunctions or accidents, ongoing bad fortune, or unforeseen delays, as a few examples—are often cited as the reason for development and/or construction projects in elfin territory going awry. This, according to legend, is how the elves deter or retaliate against the spatial encroachment of their natural habitats—referred to as *álagablettir* (enchanted spots)—by developers (Gíslason 2015; Hafstein 2000). In Norse mythology—more specifically, in *Snorra Edda* (The Prose Edda)—elves are represented as part of the pagan godly race, appearing as either light or dark[3] and often supernatural in nature (Gíslason 2015). Although they are considered the nation's 'hidden' inhabitants, the folk beliefs of modern-day Icelanders has thoroughly captured the imagination of outsiders. As noted by Gíslason (2015), Icelanders' "pagan[4] imagination"—a broad term, carefully chosen he states, as it "moves away from specific religious affiliations" (p.6) that applies to Icelanders of varying

[3] In Icelandic folktales, elves (*huldufólk*) do not follow the 'light' or 'dark' typology and instead, resemble humans in most ways. In *Snorra Edda*, however, elves are categorized in this way, as a result of Christian influences (Gíslason 2015).
[4] As outlined by Chuvin (1990), the word 'pagan' is derived from the Latin words *pagus* (a district within any means of a country) and *paganus* ('peasant' or 'civilian') (Gíslason 2015). In its simplest form, the term 'pagan' refers to "people of the place, town or country, who preserved their local customs" (Chuvin 1990:9 as cited in Gíslason 2015:6).

religious views and beliefs and captures the mindset that developed in the pre-Christian era—has continued to persist, even after the nation converted to Christianity in 1000 AD (Gíslason 2015). Mythical or 'otherworldly' figures, like elves and the places they inhabit—rocks, hillocks, ponds, and so on—represent a powerful and prevailing strand of the Icelandic imagination (Gíslason 2015; Hafstein 2000). Although many people might be unfamiliar with the more granular details of Icelandic culture, most seem to know of, and are fascinated by, inhabitants' belief in the supernatural.

As Tweed and Watson (2017) contend, the commercial success of Icelandic artists such as Björk[5] "is intimately tied to [the Icelandic] imaginary, both in terms of how the music is perceived and interpreted by audiences… [as well as its power] as a resource for marketing" (p. 129). Björk's identity and creative outputs—characterized as experimental, superlative, avant-garde, eclectic, innovative, textured, provocative—are often attributed to her Icelandic nationality as well as her proximity to, and engagement with the nation's imposing, grandiose landscapes (Halink 2014; Tweed and Watson 2019). Such a characterization illustrates what Tweed and Watson (2019) describe as "[the] relational affinity [that] exists between the natural environment and autochthonous creativity" (p.128). The supposed relationship between "[Iceland's] very particular novel music aesthetic and unique landscape", they go on to say, "has become central to the development of a globalized 'Icelandic imaginary'" (Tweed and Watson 2019:129)—a powerful cultural and marketing resource in the crystallization and circulation of the Icelandic nation brand in today's capital-driven consumer marketplace. Likewise, the folkloric legends and traditions invoked in the music of *Of Monsters and Men* also contributes to

[5] While Iceland is a relatively new tourist destination, resulting in the recent import and/or interest in contemporary Icelandic musical performers, Björk has remained a fixture in North America's cultural and musical milieu long before Iceland became a popular tourist destination (Webb and Lynch 2010).

and strengthens the imagination and mythologization of Iceland as 'exotic', 'primitive', and 'otherworldly'. The durability of this idealized imaginary is critical in the construction and circulation of a coherent nation brand and national identity.

Iceland's nation branding strategies reveal how under capitalist globalization, space, place, history, memory, tradition, identity, and culture intersect in order to project, and (re)produce a national imaginary—an 'Icelandic imaginary''—that reifies certain legends and place myths—to the point of truth or naturalization—about Iceland and its inhabitants. Furthermore, my research suggests that visual and discursive representations of Iceland, as seen in their tourism advertisements, aid in the performance and promotion of a mythologized and exoticized Icelandic culture and identity, both domestically, and internationally. Over the course of this project, I aim to answer the following dual-pronged research question: *How do Iceland's tourism advertisements contribute towards the country's nation-branding strategies? How do the visual and discursive representations of Iceland in tourism media (re)inforce and (re)articulate a mythologized Icelandic national imaginary and identity?*

In conducting a semiological analysis of four of Iceland's tourism advertisements, released over a three-year period, from 2020 to 2022, I develop four key themes—presented as 'mythologies'—*The Mythology of the 'Sublime Landscape' (Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild'); The Mythology of Inheritance (Iceland as 'Primordial': An Authentic Antidote' to Modernity); The Mythology of Eccentricity (Iceland as 'Otherworldly' and 'Exotic'); The Mythology of Irreverence (Icelandic Humour and Performances of Nonchalance).* These four mythologies are by no means new. Developed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Iceland's place myths have been foundational in helping cultivate a strong and cohesive national identity that would, later, help the island achieve national independence from Denmark —a prolonged

struggle that would take more than one-hundred years before being coming to fruition. In critically examining four of Iceland's tourism advertisements, I aim to better understand how, as a facet of nation branding, these tourist representations visually and discursively (re)create and re(circulate) some of Iceland's most enduring mythologies.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL/LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes a constellation of critical constructivist theories that examine the interconnections between geographies, national imaginaries, tourism representations, branding strategies, and consumption. Works in critical geography highlight how historically significant, hegemonic orderings of space and societies—as immobile, territorially-bounded, and internally coherent sites of collective identification—operate similarly to nation/place branding strategies and practices (Massey 2005). Nation branding applies the same metrics and logics of corporate branding to places/nation states, as well as the "symbolic resources and resonance of nationalist discourse" (Aronczyk 2013:64) in order to transform the nation-state into a highly commodifiable and identifiable brand. Here, national identity—like the corporate brand—is reconfigured to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The transformation of the nation state into a commodifiable unit, Aronczyk (2013) writes, "alters the cultural context in which national identity is articulated and understood" (p. 64).

Tourism advertisements and campaigns are important promotional tools in the production and maintenance of the nation brand. The visual and discursive representations nation states employ in tourism ads are structured around hegemonic renderings of space as immutable, coherent, and stable (Aronczyk 2013; Massey 2005). The nation brand's success is, in fact, contingent on this. In adhering to the principles of branding—cohesion, stability, legibility, difference, marketability, etc.—nation states can present consumers with a highly distilled and idealized representation of place—a means of both constructing, and (re)producing touristic 'place-myths' and geographical imaginaries (a process known as 'spatialization') (Aronczyk 2013; Massey 2005; Shields 2013). The connections between nation states and nationalisms

(premised on the notion of the nation state as an 'imagined community), nation/place branding practices, and tourism representations are explored in relation to the imaginary and its affective qualities. Concepts such as myth, memory, history, heritage, utopia, nostalgia, and authenticity help parse these connections out. In exploring the various interconnections between geography, identity, and branding, we can begin to better understand how tourism practices—via visual and discursive representations and 'performances' of nationhood—alter and order spatial realities in very material ways.

Following the theoretical review, a literature review of Icelandic history is conducted. For brevity's sake, what I present here is not an exhaustive account of *every single* major event from Iceland's history but rather, a collection of some of the nation's most formative moments, from settlement until present day that have had a particularly profound effect on the emergence and development of a national consciousness and contemporary political identity. During the Independence Movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (1830-1944) Iceland's collective cultural-political identity was activated: founded on an interpretation or reconstruction of their Golden Era past—what Hálfdanarson (2000) calls a "historical imagination" (p.12)—that the nation was entitled to self-rule and total sovereignty (Bergmann 2017; Hálfdanarson 2000). Shields (2013) writes that spatializations (or place-myths) are "memorial and anticipatory" (p. 39), functioning as a form of "'montage'…an interweaving of space-time where the past and future are involved in the present formation to imply certain immediate and longer-term futures but not others" (p.39). In the case of Iceland, the re(manufacturing) and re(telling) of a particular rendering of history—of collective suffering, historical continuity, cultural distinctiveness, genealogical purity, and exceptionalism—has been crucial in maintaining the myth of an 'Imagined Icelandic Community'. As later explored in an analysis of four of Iceland's tourism

campaigns, this myth has been central in the development and articulation of Iceland's national brand.

2.2 Critical Constructivism

Critical constructivism (also referred to as critical constructionism) is an extension of social constructionism—an epistemological framework based on the assumption that knowledge is subjective, and multidimensional, constructed by individuals through their interactions with the world (Manning 2024; Quist-Adade 2019). Social constructionism is also premised on the notion that *language* is the vehicle through which social reality/knowledge is constructed (Quist-Adade 2019). Knowledge—as well as our perspectives on the world, self, and other—is understood as temporally and culturally situated, reflective of the social, cultural, historical, economic, and political circumstances that contextualize our lives (Manning 2024).

Critical constructivism merges the foundational tenets of social constructivism (knowledge/social reality as a human construct) with those from conflict theory (the struggle for power resources between groups). An important consideration in critical constructivism is the privileging of *elite* interests in the construction of knowledge/reality (Quist-Adade 2019). As Quist-Adade (2019) writes, "while human reality is collectively constructed by all members of all collectives, what becomes acceptable must first be sanctioned, sanctified, and legitimized by the power/ruling elite" (p. 162). Critical constructivism, therefore, considers the connection between power and the production of knowledge, whereby only certain groups and institutions are "can gain prominence and become sanctioned proprietors of knowledge… [thus maintaining] their knowledge construction legitimacy by continuously undermining alternative knowledges (Manning 2024).

Given that knowledge is understood as situated, provisional, and interpretative, critical constructivists emphasize the importance of reflexivity, critical thinking and constructive action (Manning 2024; Quist-Adade 2019). Considerations such as, '*Where do these ideas originate? Whose interests are being represented? Whose interests are being excluded?',* are useful in interrogating and exposing the "elitist assumptions" (Manning 2024) embedded—often to the point of naturalization—in hegemonic knowledge structures (Manning 2024; Quist-Adade 2019). Critiquing, challenging, and disrupting the power structures that "produce, embed, and render invisible knowledge in everyday practices," Quist-Adade (2019:162) says, is necessary in order to challenge and resist the reified, taken-for-granted, and invisibilized 'truths' that circumscribe the limitations of everyday life (Quist-Adade 2019).

Although critical constructivists argue that social reality is structured by the elite hegemon, that is not to suggest its immutability. Fundamental to critical constructivism is the recognition of alternative forms of discourse, knowledge, and action. In questioning and contesting dominant forms of knowledge production, critical constructivism offers an avenue for mutual exchange and transformation. This relates to critical geographer, Doreen Massey's (2005) rejection of historical (though nonetheless enduring) conceptions of space-- those that equate representation with spatialization; space as fixed and unchanging; space as a "sphere of immobility" (Massey 2005: 42), the bifurcation of space and time; the privileging of time over space—that work to tame space by reducing it to stasis. She notes, however, that space is anything but static: it is a "product of interrelations [and] coexisting heterogeneities" (Massey 2005: 9), a sphere of multiplicity and plurality, a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey 2005:9). Also important, she says, is the recognition that space is never closed. "For the future to be open, Massey (2005) writes, "space must be open too" (p. 12). In adopting a critical

constructivist approach, the myth of singularity—in the production of knowledge, the organization of space, the articulation of identity—is laid bare. It is here, within this sphere of recognition, that alternative frameworks, possibilities, and imaginations (that can sufficiently account for the plurality, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of social life) have the opportunity to emerge.

2.3 Perspectives on Brands and Branding

Branding strategies, particularly place and nation branding strategies, operate similarly to those strategies described by Massey (2005) used to 'tame space'. Hegemonic understandings of space and society influenced by the history of modernity[6] assumed an isomorphism between space/place and society/culture (Massey 2005). 'Cultures', 'societies', and 'nations' were all viewed as territorially bounded and internally coherent with their own "internally generated differences" (Massey 2005:64). Imagining space as divided and territorially fixed—what Massey (2005) calls a 'geographical imagination' (p. 64)—has remained integral to the project of organizing and naturalizing global space. Along with globalization came a new spatial imaginary—one of a 'world of flows', unfettered mobility, and free, boundless space (Massey 2005). Both modernity and globalization's stories are, what Massey (2005) calls "tales of inevitability"[7]. Looking at globalization as a single trajectory—the conversion of space into

---

[6] Under modernity, space was conceived as divided and territorially bounded, based on internally generated differences. More than that, spatial difference was also "convened into temporal sequence" (Massey 2005: 68) where different 'places' were seen as being at different stages in a single, temporal development –the turning of the world's geography into a single, unilateral history (Massey 2005:68). This, Massey (2005) argues, is deliberately employed to tame space and suppress difference and existing multiplicities (p. 68-69).

[7] Modernity's project of organizing spatial and temporal differences—where different places were determined to be at different stages in a single temporal development (linked to progress)—turned the world's geography into a single history/trajectory (Massey 2005:68). The discourses of modernity, Massey (2005) argues, 'told One Story' (p.71). Similarly, the dominant discourses of globalization (globalization '*tout court'*, though it is often conflated with economic capitalist globalization) view globalization as an inevitable process, linked to the same spatial and temporal differences as modernity (Massey 2005). Framing globalization as 'inevitable' and thus, beyond political intervention, like modernity, tells One Story (Massey 2005). Modernity's notions of space as divided-up and bounded and globalization's notions of space as free and open are both, according to Massey (2005), "imaginative geographies which *legitimatize* their own production" (p.84).

time—is a discursive manoeuvre that "obscures the possibilities of seeing alternate forms" (Massey 2005: 83).

The success of brands and branding relies on a similar approach. A brief history of brands and branding appropriately sets the stage for a better understanding of its spatial application. Brands—conventionally understood as labels, logos, and emblems or media messages linked to consumer culture—are a ubiquitous and often, taken-for-granted element of contemporary urban and social life (Bookman 2018). In her book *No Logo* (first published in 2000), Naomi Klein (2010) describes the brand as "the core meaning of the modern corporation" (p.3). While brands have a history dating back to the eighteenth century, it was during the 1980s that brands emerged as "central components of the social fabric" (Ardvisson 2006: 3). Klein (2010) attributes this shift to a singular idea developed by management theorists in the 1980s: "That successful corporations must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products" (p.3). Prior to this shift, corporations were first-and-foremost concerned with the production of goods. With the emergence of "a new kind of corporation" (Klein 2010:4), the production of goods—now being outsourced to overseas contractors—was secondary to corporations' true operation: manufacturing *images* of their brands (Klein 2010).

During the machine age, competitive, image-based branding was a necessity to distinguish otherwise identical products from one another (Klein 2010). Names and characters were ascribed to brands, infusing them with emotional appeal (Klein 2010). This idea gained traction and by the 1940s, there was a burgeoning awareness that brands had the ability to capture a feeling which could be embodied both by the corporation and the public (Klein 2010). The purchase of Kraft for $12.6 billion—six times higher than the company's valuation on paper—by Phillip Morris in 1988 was, as Klein (2010) recalls, branding's most formative

moment. She notes that although Wall Street was aware that brand visibility and marketing added overall value to a company, with the Kraft purchase, "(a) huge dollar value had been assigned to something that had previously been abstract and unquantifiable – a brand name" (Klein 2010:8). Along with this change, traditional valuation schemes—considered ill-equipped to measure brand value—were discarded in favour of alternative methodologies that could re-think the notion of value itself (Aronczyk 2013).

Under this new system, brand value was transformed into social value – value based on the perceptions of those who interact with the brand: consumers, investors, shareholders, and the general public (Aronczyk 2013). This shift in valuation brought along with it not only a new set of criteria, but also formed many new experts, effectively displacing those actors—accountants, financial auditors, and other third-party accreditors—who had, for so long, maintained an unwavering monopoly on corporate asset recognition (Aronczyk 2013). By expanding the criteria for what constitutes intangible assets, corporate leaders were able to re-define the notion of value altogether, securing brand management a more central role in the realm of corporate affairs (Aronczyk 2013). It was also during this time that corporate owners realized they needed to find ways to maintain the integrity of their 'corporate culture' and assert their corporate identity via the attitudes, actions, and behaviours of their employees, now considered 'stakeholders', 'ambassadors' and 'champions' of the firm, relating to Johansson's (2012) notion that the brand is not merely an image created for consumption purposes but is also a vehicle used to suggest appropriate ways of 'living' the brand (Aronczyk 2012; Johansson 2012).

2.3.1 Brands, Consumers, and Consumption

Unlike certain forms of media that provide ready-made experiences, brands, instead, "enable the production, or co-creation, of an experience or… more enduring forms of immaterial use-values,

like identity and community" (Ardvisson 2006:35). As a result, brands rely on "the productivity of consumers" (Ardvisson 2006: 35) for both the realization and co-production of the values they promise (2006:35). Consumption, according to Bookman (2018) is a process that is "active and productive" (p. 6) and while often considered routine and banal, it is, in fact, "bound up with complex cultural and social processes" (p. 6) including the construction and performance of identities and lifestyles, the cultivation of cultures, and forms of resistance. Contemporary sociological accounts of consumption, she notes, insist on the important role consumer culture plays in the formation of identities (Bookman 2018).

Following the work of Barker (2003), Bookman (2018) describes identity as an ongoing project or process that involves a personal element of self identity—meaning, how we think about ourselves—in addition to social and cultural elements "that emerge in relation to our positions within categories of class, gender, race, age, and so on, and are further constituted through our connections with others via shared interests, neighbourhoods, languages, and more" (p. 7). The social role of consumption—also known as cultural consumption—plays a key role in the "formation and maintenance of social and cultural collective identities and forms" (Bookman 2018: 8), largely due to the fact that consumption choices and practices can either connect or distinguish consumers from particular social groups (Bookman 2018). In this sense, consumption is not a process merely imposed from above, rather, it is a process of "*co-creation"* (Bookman 2018:15) whereby consumer practices and interactions actively assist in the co-generation of urban spaces and cultures (Bookman 2018).

As researchers like Ardvisson (2006) and Bookman (2018) suggest, the relationship between brands, consumption, and the formation of identities and lifestyles are mutually constitutive. Hearn (2008) notes that the 'brand' is much more than a simple commodity, and

instead, offers an “entire ‘virtual context’ for consumption” (p. 199). Branding practices now operate more indirectly than they did previously, in order “to install [a] definite and highly circumscribed [set] of relations between products and services and the consumers who use them” (p. 199). Branding achieves this, she says, by constructing a particular ambience to condition consumer behaviour (Hearn 2008). Brands, in this sense, operate as a “specific cultural resource” (Hearn 2008:200) that individuals and communities can use to define themselves. One of the ways consumers can achieve this is through the act of ‘self-branding’. According to Hearn (2008), self-branding involves “the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream cultural industries” (p.198). The branded self’s function, she says, is to present a “rhetorically persuasive” (p.198) version of self, since branding’s ultimate goal is to produce cultural value and potentially, material profit. Self-branding, therefore, constitutes a distinct and performed version of labour power. Following Warren Sussman’s (1984) arguments that procedures of self-promotion always reflect the dominant economic and cultural interests of time, Hearn (2008) asserts that the branded-self—and its quest to attract attention and acquire cultural and monetary value—remains “captive to and conditioned by the controlling interests of global flexible capital” (2009:213).

While John Berger and his colleagues (1972) do not use the language of branding in their seminal book *Ways of Seeing*—branded images are referred to as ‘publicity images’—their arguments capture the ‘spirit’ of branding. Despite the fact the arguments in *Ways of Seeing* were formulated long before the advent of digital technologies, social media, and the internet, they are, in many ways, still applicable to today’s condition. The authors’ sentiments that no other image confronts us as frequently as ‘publicity images’ (print and television advertisements, billboards,

and storefront displays)—if extended to encapsulate images now created and circulated digitally—remain just as relevant, or perhaps, even more so, as they did in 1972 (Berger et al. 1972). Publicity is propelled by the market-driven logics of neoliberalism and individualism, often "explained and justified as a competitive medium" (Berger et al. 1972:130) that emphasizes the possibilities of a market/consumer-based freedom (Berger et al. 1972). "Publicity", Berger et al. (1972) writes, "is not merely an assembly of competing messages: it is a language in and of itself which is always being used to make the same general proposal" (p. 131). What publicity proposes is individual transformation made possible by means of purchase and acquisition (Berger et al. 1972).

Publicity works by providing the spectator-consumer an aspirational frame-of-reference, a glimpse into the luxurious, enviable lives of those transformed by the merits of the market. It leaves the spectator-buyer dissatisfied with their present way of life, the authors note, and offers, in return, a consumption-based "improved alternative" (Berger et al. 1972:142) to their current life. This relates to the authors' argument that publicity images never speak of the present, they speak in the future tense only (Berger et al. 1972). Language of the future draws on nostalgia of the past, where connections to history and mythology can be used to manufacture credibility and authenticity (Berger et al. 1972). What lends publicity its credibility, the authors say, is that "the gap between what publicity offers and the future it promises, corresponds with the gap between what the spectator-buyer feels himself to be and what he would like to be" (Berger et al. 1972:148). It is likely that when Berger et al. (1972) wrote about publicity, the vernacular of brands and branding did not yet exist but today, their arguments fit well within its discourse.

2.3.2 Branding and Performance

Since the publication of Ardvisson (2006), Berger et al. (1974) and Hearn's (2008) works, our lives have become inextricably tethered to and governed by the dictates of technology and its twin flame: social media. In today's digital era, social media websites and apps, such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Substack are now deeply embedded in all aspects of our lives – personal, public, and productive. In her book, *Doppelganger*, Naomi Klein (2023) uses her doppelganger experience[8] as the entry point to probe into what she describes as "our doppelganger culture" (p. 11). Doppelganger culture, she says, "is a culture crowded with various forms of doubling, in which all of us who maintain a persona or avatar online create our own doppelgangers – virtual versions of ourselves that represent us to others" (Klein 2023:11). This culture, Klein (2023) notes, requires "forging a partitioned identity that is both us and not us" (p. 11). Due to the ubiquity and pervasiveness of technology and social media—now deemed indispensable tools in self-branding and self-promotion—'making it' in today's increasingly individualistic, competitive, and capital-driven culture almost always requires the making, maintaining, and performance of a personal brand (Klein 2023). Self-branding, Klein (2023) writes, "is yet another form of doubling, an internal form of doppelganging" (p.55). Divorced from the 'real' self, these "digital doubles" (Klein 2023: 56) she maintains, represent an idealized identity with defined contours of the 'self' and 'not self'; the 'me' and 'not me' (Klein 2023).

[8] Klein's (2023) book *Doppelganger* is based on the perennial confusion/conflation between herself and former-feminist-icon-turned-alt-right-COVID-19-conspiracy-theorist, Naomi Wolf. Often referring to Wolf as 'Other Naomi', Klein (2023) positions Wolf as her doppelganger, or double, Looking at the doppelganger mythology and literature, Klein (2023) outlines the various representations of the doppelganger: the doppelganger as a stand in for our highest aspirations and dreams; the doppelganger as the "evil-twin, the shadow-self, the anti-self" (p.9) that represents the most repressed and rejected parts of ourselves we cannot bear to see; the doppelganger as a warning or harbinger (Klein 2023).

In *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman (1959) argues that an individual's behaviour in a public setting—mediated by 'front-stage behaviour'[9]—is akin to an actor's performance on stage (Goffman 1959; Quist-Adade 2019). In this context, Goffman (1959) defines 'performance' as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (p. 15). Social actors like theatrical actors, he notes, are involved in the oft-invisible (or perhaps taken-for-granted) process of 'impression management', aimed at ensuring a successful and consistent performance of self. In this context, the term 'performance' refers to "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers, and which has some influence over the observers" (Goffman 1959:22). Social actors, like theatrical actors, he notes, are involved in the oft-invisible (or perhaps taken-for-granted) process of 'impression management', aimed at ensuring a successful and consistent performance of self, which influences the definition of the situation[10], allowing them to exercise some authority over the audiences' subsequent responsive actions with them (Goffman 1959; Quist-Adade 2019). In their performances and interactions with others, individuals engage in a mutual use of signs that

[9] Goffman (1959) makes the distinction between what he calls 'front-stage behaviour' and 'back-stage behaviour'. The former, he notes, is the formal, friendly, and cooperative behaviour expected of a person in a social setting, whereas the latter takes place in an often private or concealed environment, where the individual's behaviour is informal, and thus revealing of their 'true' nature (Quist-Adade 2019).

[10] In a performance, the individual or social actor projects a 'definition of the situation' to the audience. The audience—regardless of how passive their role might be—projects their own definition of the situation, by virtue of their subsequent actions with the social actor. Goffman (1959) notes that ordinarily, these different definitions of the situation are "sufficiently attuned to one another so that open contradiction will not occur" (p. 9). What maintains this consensus, he says, is the expectation that each individual will suppress their immediate emotional feelings/responses, therefore conveying a definition of the situation others will find "at least temporarily acceptable" (Goffman 1959:9). The definition of the situation can, thus, be understood as a cooperative activity aimed at establishing a 'working consensus' or tentative agreement "as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured" (Goffman 1959:10) during the interaction. Moreover, he notes that any projected definition of the situation has a "distinctly moral character" (Goffman 1959:13). In a definition of a situation wherein an individual makes (either an implicit or explicit) claim about who they are (relating to social characteristics) they automatically exert a "moral demand" (p. 13) on others, guiding their behaviour and "obliging them to value and treat [them] in the manner that persons of [their] kind have a right to expect" (Goffman 1959).

provide information and cues that help guide expected behaviours and impressions (Goffman 1959; Quist-Adade 2019). This is achieved through the use of various dramaturgical strategies[11], a particularly important one being, what Goffman (1959) refers to as a 'front'— "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by an individual during his performance" (p. 22) such as, 'setting' (the "scenic parts of expressive equipment" (p. 23) such as furniture, décor, physical layout etc.) and "personal front" (items that the audience identifies with the performer themselves related to 'appearance' and 'manner'—such as race, clothing, gender, age, posture, speech, facial expressions, bodily gestures, etc.—that are expected to follow the performer wherever they go.

Performances can also occur as a 'team', whereby "[a] set individuals…co-operate in staging a single routine" (Goffman 1959:79). In a team performance, by virtue of circumstance, the individuals are forced into a bond of "reciprocal dependence" and "reciprocal familiarity" (Goffman 1959:82-83). Here, teammates must work together cooperatively through a series of exchanges and interactions in order to maintain the stability of a given definition of the situation (achieved via the assigning of roles, practicing team-loyalty and discipline, presenting a 'united front' by means concealing or downplaying internal differences and discrepancies from the audience, and appointing a director) (Goffman 1959). Goffman (1959) writes that his theory on performance and impression management can be usefully applied to the study of social establishments. "Within the walls of a social establishment" Goffman (1959) writes, "[exists] a team of performers who co-operate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation" (p. 238). Through the careful application, communication, and expression of signs that reinforce

[11] Goffman (1959) outlines several dramaturgical tactics that can be employed within a performance: 1) front; 2) dramatic realization; 3) idealization; 4) maintenance of expressive control; 5) misrepresentation; 6) mystification; and 7) reality and contrivance.

the definition of the situation, social establishments can—similar to Klein's (2023) depiction of doppelganger culture's desire—strategically perform a highly refined and appealing personal brand. And like performance, doppelganger culture extends beyond the self; as Klein (2023) warns us, "It is not only an individual who can have a sinister double, nations and cultures have them, too" (p. 12).

2.3.3 Spatial Perspectives on Branding

As an emerging paradigm of brands and branding, geographies of brands and branding—an approach explored by Pike (2013)—examines the links between brands, branding practices, and the economic geographic. Brands and branding, according to Pike (2013), are economic geographic in three related ways: First, branded commodities and their branding processes are—in varying degrees and forms—enmeshed in and informed by their geographic/spatio-temporal locations, over time accumulating "histories that are economic, social, and spatial" that have a bearing on their evolution (p. 322). Brands and branding, in this sense, are "inherently spatial" (Pike 2013:322). Secondly, brands and branding have the ability to traverse space, time, and boundaries, communicating different meanings and values across space with varying degrees of commercial, social, and political, and cultural resonance, thereby (re)producing geographical differentiation (Pike 2013:322). Lastly, compelled by the dynamics of accumulation and differentiation, brands and branding are dependent on the spatially differentiated economy and society they help to create and maintain, "[generating] profit from unequal spatial differentiation" (Pike 2013:322). Under this system, brand owners invest considerable time, money, and resources, into determining how geographic difference can be harnessed to "create and realize meaning and value in spatial circuits" (Pike 2013:322).

Aronczyk (2013) examines nation branding as both a transnational business practice and means of articulating national identity and citizenship. While some theorists argue that the erosion of borders and the amorphous qualities associated with the nation state signal its insignificance, Aronczyk (2013), in contrast, insists on the pre-eminence of the national, particularly in its relationship with branding (p. 11)[12]. The nation, she says, remains a dominant form of political, economic, and cultural organization (Aronczyk 2013). The tools, techniques, and expertise of corporate brand management, she says, helps the project of nation branding create and articulate a more coherent and cohesive national identity (Aronczyk 2013). The goal of nation branding is ultimately, "to make the nation *matter* in a world where borders and boundaries appear increasingly obsolete" (Aronczyk 2013:3). In order for cities, regions, and nations to secure the financial investments required for their growth, similar to the corporate brand, they too, need to differentiate themselves from the masses. To succeed globally and acquire national advantage, nation states need to emphasize—and therefore capitalize on—their distinct national culture and characteristics (Aronczyk 2013).

In 1990, Porter applied the principles of free-market competitiveness to the nation state, arguing that the key to national advantage is in the ongoing creation of national difference[13] (Aronczyk 2013:45). His analysis, Aronczyk (2013) notes, signalled a fundamental shift in how the nation state was conceptualized. Namely, that in order to succeed in the global marketplace, nations need be both marketable and competitive. National culture and consciousness—the

[12] Aronczyk is quick to note, however, that this does not mean the nation state is a better or more enlightened space. Rather, it points to the fact that the nation acts as a "container for rights and claims that are not yet possible at other levels of organization" (2013:10). Despite claims that argue the nation state is losing its significance, Aronczyk contends that the nation state still functions as a site where distinctions can be made, and conditions of citizenship can be passed out (2013:10-11).

[13] Porter's formulation of national difference was primarily focused on markets and industries – capitalizing on the production of goods and services not offered anywhere else, niche markets, "demand conditions" (Aronczyk 2013:45).

sentiments, beliefs, values, and attitudes that made up the collective spirit of the nation—have to convey "the essentialist dimensions and internal equilibrium of a homogenized national space" (Aronczyk 2013:47). Reimagining the nation state as a globally-competitive-economic-entity is a strategic management technique used by marketing experts to transform national culture into an economic problem with economic solutions (Aronczyk 2013).

2.3.4 Nation Branding and the Art of Articulating National Difference in a Market-Driven Economy

Aronczyk's (2013) arguments relate to Pike's (2013) assertion that the process of shaping and constricting the brand and its branding is a "highly selective" (p. 321) process based on particular market-based interpretations and opinions that amplify certain attributes, while at the same time, masking others. One of the ways nation states convey difference is through the use of, what Pike (2013) terms 'geographical associations' – those identifiable and characteristic elements of a brand that connote and connect it to particular 'geographical imaginaries'. Desirable and valuable traits associated with a particular place are emphasized, while other traits considered less meaningful or valuable, are obscured (Pike 2013). IKEA, Volkswagen, and Rolex are examples of brands that use geographical associations—from Sweden, Germany, and Switzerland, respectively—to 'cohere and stabilize' (Pike 2013) their meaning and value in spatial circuits. The duty of a 'good brand' is its unwavering commitment to the carefully honed and immutable identity it has cultivated. Klein (2023) writes, "As any marketing expert will tell you, a brand is a *promise* – of consistency and dependability (p. 47 emphasis added) … "an exercise in discipline and repetition… to keep embodying your brand identity—your 'promise'—no matter what the world throws at you" (p. 51).

These geographical associations operate, according to Pike (2013), at different spatial levels. This is due to the fact that the brand interface is not singularly located but rather, diffused

and distributed across a variety of interfaces, screens, and sites (Pike 2013). Though a place's geographical associations may suggest unity and coherence, geographical associations are, in fact, "multiple, fluid, and unstable; manifest in their different kinds, extents and nature" (Pike 2013:335). Brand meaning and value, therefore, is always conditional. For this reason, Pike (2013) reminds us that place, with all its complexities and contingencies, is not simply reducible to a brand.

2.3.5 Nation States, Nationalism, the Nation-Field, and National Imaginaries

The nation and by extension, nationalism, and nationality, are—notoriously—a conceptually challenging trio. A singular, agreed-upon definition for each term does not exist. As a result, nationalism's conceptual umbrella is broad, espousing a myriad of contested and ambiguous claims, classifications, and definitions (Cox 2020). Rather than trying to parse out the semantics, Aronczyk (2015) considers it far more useful to view nationalism as a *strategy* for nation building. While language of the nation existed previously (as evidenced in the sixteenth century works of Shakespeare and Machiavelli) and philosophical discussions of sovereignty, citizenship, and presentiments about the nation and nationality characterized the works of many eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers, it was not until the nineteenth century that the nation, nationalism, and nationality, became the object of systematic sociological enquiry (Cox 2020). Ideas expressed by nineteenth and twentieth century classical thinkers (such as Mill, Renan, Durkheim, and Smith) are connected to the most prevailing form of nationalism, still present today.

According to Renan (1882), a nation is "a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future" (p. 19). in other words, the nation works to unite its members through a feeling of shared

fate. Durkheim too, would later write about the nation state, describing it as "a moral community with its *conscience collective*" (as cited in Cox 2020:21). He argued that all societies—regardless of their economic and social differences—needed to reproduce themselves "through the periodic reaffirmation of collective beliefs, sentiments and values, as expressed through public rituals and rites held at regular intervals" (as cited in Cox 2020:21). The merit of Durkheim and Renan's (1882) work, Cox (2020) says, lies in their emphasis on the roles that myth, collective memory, and ritual play in the formation of national memory.

In summary, thinkers of this era characterized the nation state as a large "solidarity group" (Cox 2020:23) bound together by a shared language, collective history and memories, and a sentiment of belonging that links the past, present, and future. Ideas advanced by nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers have coalesced over time, representing one of the most prevailing strands of nationalist thought. And while nations *are* constituted by several important (and essential) social relations—economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, temporal etc.—these criteria are not objective and *cannot*, alone, define a nation (Cox 2020).

Cox (2020) identifies five distinct—though not mutually exclusive—approaches to nationalism. In an effort to crystallize some of their guiding principles, he proposes the definition of the nation as "an imagined community of self-identified people, sharing a common stock of cultural practices, myths and memories that has as the object of its demands and aspirations an existing or envisaged state, in a territory identified as a homeland" (p. 33). He defines nationalism as, "the sum of those beliefs, idioms, and practices, oriented towards a territorially delineated nation and embodied in the political demands of a self-identified people, which may or may not be realized in a nationalist movement and state 'of their own'" (Cox 2007:3143 as cited in Cox 2020:33). Both terms are a part of what he calls, 'the nation-field'. The nation-field

is characterized by the following beliefs: 1) nation states are real, observable entities that deserve the loyalty of their national subjects; 2) people with distinguishable characteristics and a shared past, present, and history constitute a nation that can be distinguished from other nations; 3) the nation is a community that shares a 'deep horizontal comradeship' regardless of the actual inequalities and exploitation that exists; 4) political and civic obligation is derived from the nation, thereby necessitating its existence (Cox 2020:23). These beliefs are created, re-created, practiced, and diffused on a daily basis through a myriad of symbolic and discursive means—national anthems, literature, art, music, maps etc.-- and *practices*—national holidays, commemorations, and periodic rituals—all of which work to instill feelings of national belonging (Cox 2020:44).

Cox's (2020) definitions build on Benedict Anderson's (1983) seminal concept of 'Imagined Communities'. Anderson's (1983) writings offer a comprehensive account of the history, origins, and spread of nationalism and the imagined community[14]. According to Anderson ([1983] 2016), the nation state is an "*imagined* political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (p.6). Nations are *imagined* because of their individual members who, despite not knowing one another, envisage a common bond "linking their lives and destinies in crucial ways" (Cox 2020:28; Anderson [1983] 2016). It is precisely this perception of 'we-feeling' and connectedness that imbues nationalism with its incredible emotional appeal. The weakness in Anderson's ([1983] 2016) writing, Cox (2020) says, lies in

[14] Anderson ([1983] 2016) attributes the *interplay* between fatality, technology, and capitalism as being foundational to the emergence of national consciousness – "a new form of imagined community" ([1983] 2016:43-46). Print languages fostered a sense of (limited/exclusive) belonging; a 'connection-through-print' between people of the same language-field, forming the basis of the "embryo of the nationally imagined community" (Anderson [1983] 2016:43-45). Print capitalism, Anderson (1983] 2016) says, "made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (p. 36). He, thus, places a large emphasis on the role of language in the formation of nation states and nationalisms.

his inability to acknowledge the political and ideological power of nationalism and its ability to be “strategically deployed by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic groups” (p.29). Anderson’s ([1983] 2016) emphasis on the affective qualities of imagined communities is, nonetheless, a valuable insight, and has since been expanded upon by scholars in geography, sociology, architecture, planning, and branding.

2.4 Imagined Communities and the Lieux de Mémoire

Nora’s (1984) concept of the ‘*lieux de mémoire*’ builds on the notion of collective identity and memory with an added spatial element (Reijnders 2011). The *lieux de mémoire*, he writes, “is where memory crystallizes and secretes itself… [it is the] embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (Nora 1989:7). Nora (1989) speaks further to the mutability of *lieux de mémoire*, describing them as “simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial…concrete sensual experience[s] and… abstract elaboration[s]” (p. 18). The *lieux*, he says, is at once “material, symbolic, and functional” (Nora 1989:19) and can inhabit “ad infinitum” (p. 23) forms and/or sites (such as physical places, monuments, commemorations, statues, archives, particular objects, rituals, anniversaries etc.). “Even an apparently purely material site, like an archive”, Nora (1989) states, “becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if the imagination invests with it a symbolic aura” (p. 19). It is the interplay between history and memory—the act of memorialization and a will to remember—that animates the *lieux*, bestowing them with symbolic meaning. Unlike historical objects[15] *lieux de mémoire* have no basis in reality, managing to “escape from history” (Nora 1989:23). Instead, they are, as Nora (1989) says, “pure, exclusively self-referential signs…forever open to the full range of its possible significations” (p. 23-24). This kind of open interpretation— “the constructed nature of

[15] According to Nora (1989), historical objects are inextricably bound to their historical realities (*realia)*: “concerned…with things in themselves and in their immediate realities” (p. 23).

memory", as Rejinders (2011:13) puts it—is precisely what makes the concept of the *lieux de mémoire* so appealing: it offers tangibility and form (via sites of memory) to the collective memories of a society—memories both variable and adaptable. "Memory is life borne by living societies founded in its name" Nora (1989) writes, "It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting…vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived" (p. 8). He also notes that, "Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic; global or detached; particular or responsive" (Nora 1989:8). Within this realm, memories resurface and are recast—reimagined—in a bid to cohere, remember a shared past, and revive a historical memory (Nora 1989; Rejinders 2011).

2.4.1 The Lieux de Imagination

Rejinders (2011) takes Nora's (1989) concept of the *lieux de mémoire* and introduces what he refers to as the *lieux de imagination* (places of the imagination): "material reference points like objects or places, which for certain groups within societies, serve as material-symbolic references to a common imaginary world" (p. 14). Though the imagination can refer to events from the past, Rejinders (2011) points out that this is not always the case. According to Caughey (1984), the world is divided into two distinct spheres: the 'real' world—that is, an empirically measurable reality with temporal and spatial limits—and the world of the imagination— "an interconnected complex of fantasies, daydreams and stories" (Rejinder 2011:15)—that, despite being separate from one another, have moments of temporary convergence. These moments of convergence or collision are meaningful in that they bridge these two worlds together, reminding us that the imagination is connected to concrete, sensory experiences of place, and vice versa (Rejinders 2011). The problem with Caughey's (1984) real/imagined dichotomy, Rejiners (2011)

argues, is that it assumes just that: that the 'real' and 'imagined' are discrete, binary categories in a coherent and unilinear realty. A more useful of understanding the world, he notes, is to acknowledge how the 'real' and 'imagined' are interwoven, "*emic* concepts" (Rejinders 2011:15) that people use in an effort to "categorize their own everyday lives" (p. 15). "Because imaginations and realities are interwoven", he writes, "people feel the need to unravel them" (Rejinders 2011:15). As such, Rejinders (2011) says the *lieux de imagination* "should not be interpreted as physical points of reference to an existing, factual opposition between 'imagination' and 'reality', but as locations where the symbolic difference between these two concepts is being (re-)constructed by those involved, based on what is considered 'factual' evidence" (p. 16). Important to Rejinder's (2011) theory is the notion that 'reality' and 'imagination' are cultural constructs involved in an ongoing dialogue, whereby the imagination takes an assemblage of tangible, sensory experiences/stimulants and creatively adapts them based on 'what is known' in order to construct "a coherent experience of 'the' reality" (p. 19). Reality, in this sense, is constructed both by the 'real' and the 'fictitious'.

2.4.2 Imagination, Language, and Place-Making

In *The Poetics of Space,* Bachelard ([1958] 2014) uses the metaphor of the 'poetic image[16]' to discuss the imaginary dimensions of what he calls "*felicitous space"* (p. 19)—the space we love, the space we inhabit, the space that "concentrates being within the limits it protects" (p.19).

---

[16] Bachelard's (1964) theory of poetics stems from his dialectical understanding of the ancient Greek word *poiesis,* "to make" (Kearney 2014). He viewed the process of 'making' as a dialectical process: "we are made by the material images we remake in our mind" (Kearney 2014). It is, as Kearney (2014) states, "the double play of re-creation" (p. xix). Bachelard (1964) describes the "resonances and repercussions" (p. 7) of the poetic image. These resonances, he says, are "dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own experience. In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it. It is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet's being were our being" (p. 7). What Bachelard (1964) is describing here is this process of transference, or translation, where the image offered in the poem becomes the readers, becoming a "new being" in the reader's language – an interpretation of the origin image (Bachelard 1964).

Bachelard (1958) saw the poetic image not as "an echo of the past" (p. 2) but its own "entity with a dynamism of its own" (p. 2). The poetic image, he says, "is an emergence from language" (Bachelard 1958:11)—a phenomenological experience that, through the act of speaking, awakens the imagination. Tuan (1991) examines the links between the imagination, language and place-making, arguing that language—both written and spoken—is integral to construction of place. Language, he says, is central feature of daily life, operating as an imaginative force that can "build, sustain, and destroy" (Tuan 1991:694), render visible or invisible, as well as impart certain imaginative, mythical, and emotional qualities on a place.

In his analysis of "the poetics of the house" (Bachelard 1958:20), Bachelard describes the qualities—intimacy, comfort, simplicity, protection—that the image of our inhabited space (home) conjures up. Within the house, memory and imagination interact, constituting a "community of memory and image" (Bachelard 1958:27). Even as we move houses, Bachelard (1958) writes, it is "through dreams [that] the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days…when memories of other places we have lived come back to us…[w]e comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection" (p. 27-28). The house, particularly the 'house we were born in'—in its cellars, nooks, corridors, attics etc.—he notes, is where our memories reside and can be accessed as 'daydreams' (Bachelard 1958). The house we were born in, too, exists as what Bachelard (1958) calls "an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory" (p. 37), a house in which "we maintain the poetry of the past" (p.37-38). This relates to Ricoeur's (1994) argument that the language of the imagination and its future projections[17] must

[17] The imaginary, Ricoeur (1994) notes, is characterized by *projection,* which he defines as the "active production of realities" (Johansson 2012:3613).

operate within the predetermined, historically narrated parameters of the past. The past acts as both a point-of-reference and boundary the future (and its possibilities) must operate within.

The house of dream-memory (or the poetic house)—despite its obvious difference in scale—functions as a kind of domestic *lieux de mémoire.* Like sites of memory that become endowed with a symbolic aura in the interplay between history and (augmented memory), the poetic house, Bachelard (1958) writes, is created "in co-operation between the real and unreal" (p. 79), becoming an avatar for an individual's dream values and imaginations. And while the house of dream memory is not always accessible to us directly, or physically, it can be experienced, as Bachelard (1958) notes, "in its reality and virtuality, by means of thoughts and dreams" (p. 27). And through language and conversation with others, it is spoken into existence (Bachelard 1958). In applying Bachelard's (1958) *Poetics of Space* to the nation state, the ways in which the house represents a microcosm of the nation state begin to coalesce.

2.4.3 Under the Canopy of the Imagination: Utopia, Heritage, Myth and Memory

According to Ricoeur (1994, 2016), imagination can be applied spatially when it takes the form of utopia, which he describes as a 'nowhere' or 'non-place' where we can "radically rethink" (p. 132) and interrogate our reality and taken-for-granted truths[18], offering alternative possibilities and modes of living (Ricoeur [1994] 2016; Johansson 2012). Another form of utopia, he says, has the "tendency to hold reality in the throes of a dream" (Ricoeur [1994] 2016:132) expressing "a nostalgia for lost paradise under the guise of futurism" (p. 133). Invoking a nostalgic past is often linked to notions of 'heritage' (Johansson 2012). Additionally, this form of utopia offers a

[18] Ricoeur (1994) argues that utopia as a 'nowhere' or 'non-place' allows us the opportunity to look at reality and it's take-for-granted or given qualities, opening up the possibilities for 'other' ways of living. Describing ideology as "the instrument for legitimizing a given system of authority" (Ricoeur 1994:132), utopia, he says, functions as a form of "social subversion" (p. 132) that works to reveal the "excess of the demand for legitimacy" (p. 132) required in all systems of authority and legitimation (Ricoeur [1994] 2016).

perfected and idealized version of place, which, Johansson (2012) notes, “can only be achieved through the omission of disturbances” (p. 3615). Nostalgia for a mythologized past—a kind of *lieux de mémoire*—or ‘paradise lost’ can be projected towards the future (Johansson 2012; Nora 1989). This, Johansson (2012) notes, has consequences for “how the imaginary becomes translated into the built environment” (Johansson 2012:3615).

Essebo (2019) argues that due to widespread misconceptions and misuse[19], myth’s conceptual value—namely, its relationship with geography—has remained under-explored and under-theorized. Essebo (2019) calls myth a “mutual experience” (p. 521) conveyed through shared fantasies, ideologies, and anxieties. Moreover, she notes that myth functions implicitly, as a taken-for-granted belief “that alleviates fear, naturalizes ideology, and guides everyday behaviour” (Essebo 2019:515). Vital to the myth is the process of naturalization[20] -- allowing it the ability to go unquestioned and unchallenged, becoming a matter-a-fact, or common sense (Essebo 2019). In his book *Myth Today,* Barthes (1972) describes myth as “de-politicized speech” (as cited in Hall [2003] 2021) that presents History as Nature – a process Hall ([2003] 2021) refers to as the “translating real time into mythic time” (p. 379). The principal function of myth, therefore, is not to describe reality, but instead, *imagine* it (Essebo 2019; Hall [2003] 2021). In order to create and foster a sense of ‘belonging-ness’ among their members, it is not enough for nations and supranational communities to exist simply as political, economic, or

[19] Essebo (2019) outlines the three ‘geographical treatments’ that have resulted in myths’ conceptual pitfalls/limitations. 1) the historicization of myth: myth is relegated to the past and viewed as fable-like, archaic, and primitive; 2) the formalization of myth: myths are removed from the realm of everyday practice and are instead, reified; 3) the definitional presumption of myth: myths are subject to individual interpretation and contestation. Vital aspects/arguments may become ‘lost in translation’ (Essebo 2019).

[20] Naturalization, Essebo (2019) says, follows the same pattern as that of emplotment. Firstly, a chronological order of events must be established (A happened before B, which, in turn, happened before C). Secondly, these events are given an internal, or causal connection (A led to B, which then led to C). The repetition of corresponding plots Essebo (2019) notes, creates a pattern of recognition, thereby creating the impression/illusion that these events are *naturally* interconnected.

geographical entities; their existence depends on how they are represented and imagined. As Stuart Hall (2003; 2021) states: "Stores, symbols, images, rituals, monuments, historic events, typical landscapes, and above all *myths*, told and retold, lend significance to our humdrum existence by connecting our banal, everyday, lives with a much larger, more poetic, destiny which predates and will outlive us" (p.378). Myths are not fictions or grandiose fantasies, rather, they are reflections of ideological, political, cultural, social beliefs, anxieties, and imaginations mutually held by a group. The interplay between myth and geography is a key consideration in understanding how perceptions of place *materially* shape and order spatial realities (Essebo 2019; Hall [2003] 2021; Shields 2013).

2.4.4 Spatialization and Geographies of Difference

Similarly, in his writings on cultural topology[21], Shields (2013) notes that visual representations, literature, and folk tales help inform the *spatialization* of a region. The process of spatialization—also known as the 'production of space' (Shields 2013:33)—highlights the importance of looking beyond the purely natural and material aspects of a given landscape. It is here, in the realm contrast and distinction, that a "*geography of difference"* (Shields 2013:31) emerges. Socially constructed, performed, and reproduced over time, this 'geography of difference' informs the spatialization of places and regions, working to classify, categorize, articulate, and reify divisions— 'local' vs. 'tourist' spots, 'safe' vs 'unsafe' parts of town, 'desirable' vs. 'undesirable' neighbourhoods etc.—which, he says, are often reflected in the uneven and unequal distribution of resources (Shields 2013). This relates to Harvey's (1973) argument that every person possesses a geographic imagination – what Rejinders (2011) describes as "an imaginary map of the world…in our head, which we use to position ourselves

[21] A critical theory and method for social sciences and geography developed by Shields (2013) that examines the quality

with regard to other regions, countries, continents" (p. 28). And while this type of geographical, or spatial imagination varies from person to person, its strength lies in its ability to unify (Rejinders 2011). Geographical imaginaries offer simplified versions of place through coherent, recognizable stereotypes (or, as Pike (2013) calls them, 'geographical associations') that are often repeated and recirculated through various forms of media, thus informing a person's particular place imaginations (Pike 2013; Rejinders 2011).

Shields (2013) also notes that even if a place is already remarkable, its topology is still over-written with 'place-images' (p. 31) to create a general 'place-myth' (p.31). Like Essebo (2019), Shields (2013) describes 'myth' not as a "fictional origin story" (p.31) but rather, as "*mythic* in the original sense of *mythos* as a qualitative understanding of the 'nature' or capacity of a place" (p. 31), which often implicitly informs our ideas and conceptions of a place, even if we have never encountered it ourselves. In contrast with the 'natural' features of a place, a place's *particularity*, Shields (2013) argues, is not solely the result of individual interpretation and its distinguishing features: it is the result of the ongoing (re)production and performance of a place's collective and imagined identity. "The battle for spatialisation is not just a question of perpetuating memories," Shields (2013) states, "but of framing the future" (p.32). Place-myths and imaginations, therefore, have the capacity to *tangibly* contour geographical space and material realities. At the core of spatialization is a "process of simplifying for cognitive purposes, and of strategy for everyday life" (p.33).

2.4.5 Place Branding: Spatializations and Imagination

As noted in the theories above, the imagination and its related concepts of myth, memory, heritage, and utopia play an important role in the spatialization of place. Inhabitants, nation-state officials, stakeholders, and visitors alike rely on, and perpetuate place-myths (albeit for different

reasons) in order to 'make sense' of place. Place branding theories argue that places are sites for symbolic consumption, highlighting the acts of selection, mediation, and omission that occur during the branding process (Johansson 2012). Following the work of Ricouer (1994), Johansson (2012) notes that place branding's resonance comes from its connection to the imaginary. Through the careful construction, narration, and performance of place, place branding offers an idealized image of place. Moreover, place branding offers consumers a social, psychological, discursive, and material framework that ultimately shapes and conditions consumers' 'interpretations' of place (Johansson 2012). As such, Johansson (2012) describes place branding as "a narrative program" (p. 3613) aimed at "redescribing place by means of sanitizing, obscuring, or alternatively emphasizing chosen aspects of reality" (p. 3613). The imagination, then, is not merely representational, it has tangible – indeed spatial – effects.

Spatializations of place, or place-myths, are, as Shields (2013) notes, part of a "relational network of differences" (p. 31) that inform the basis and rationale for the movement between places and regions. He refers to this process, what as '*social spatialisation*'[22] (Shields 2013:31)-—wherein raw, topological places/sites are imbued and integrated into a meaningful human geography—is predicated on the geographical notion "of the world as a space of difference and distance" (Shields 2013:31). These spatialized distinctions, therefore, play a central role in tourist destination choices (Shields 2013). Difference, or 'differentiation,' as Johansson (2012) calls it, is an essential aspect in the consumption and branding process, particularly in its ability to "claim superiority, novelty, or relevance for the consumer" (p. 3611). Achieved primarily through the manipulation of symbols and narrative discourse, differentiation, she says, "is about the

[22] Shields (2013) uses the British spelling 'spatialisation' rather than 'spatialization'. Anywhere where Shields' is quoted directly, I use his spelling in order to accurately reflect his work. Everywhere else, 'spatialization' is spelled using the latter's spelling. The variation in spelling, however, does not change the concept's meaning.

management of meaning" (Johansson 2012: 3611 emphasis added), since the claim to be different is a discursively constructed position (Johansson 2012). In this sense, spatializations—similar to how place branding and nation branding function—are crude distillations of place.

Massey (2005) characterizes space as inherently multiplicitious, comprised of co-existing heterogeneities and pluralities. In order for place branding to be successful, the complex multiplicity that characterizes urban social life must, however, be "simplified and packaged for the sake of symbolic economic consumption" (Johansson 2012:3612). In this way, place branding functions as, what Johansson (2012) calls, a "unifying device" (p. 3613) that serves the interests of a particular group, or groups. Place branding and its ability to shape and reorient consumers' perceptions and behaviours through strategic narration can be understood as a political project (Johansson 2012). While branding efforts are often positioned as 'neutral' or purely economic, Johansson (2012) instead, argues that critically examining place branding efforts—in their compelling narrations and re-imaginings of space—can reveal the political motivations and power dynamics that are truly at play.

2.5 Tourism and the Imagination: Theories on Place-Branding Representations, the Tourist Gaze, Tourism 'Destinations' and Tourism Practices

As the authors above posit, representations, or spatializations of place play an important role in shaping consumer and/or tourists' geographical imaginations which can, subsequently, determine whether or not they choose to visit a particular place as a tourist. Scholars in tourism note that in recent decades, the tourism industry has experienced exponential growth, both domestically and internationally. Demographics (population growth, migrant flows), culture and economics (better lifestyles, increase in leisure time and disposable income, lower costs of travel), and globalization and technology (the development of high-speed transport systems, increased

connectivity and cross-cultural exchanges) are all factors that have contributed to the growth of tourism (Scarpocchi 2020).

Scarpocchi (2020) describes tourism as "not a clear-cut sector but an all-embracing and pervasive domain of service and industrial activities" (p. 13). The making of tourist destinations—destination, described by Saarinen (2004) as a "problematic concept [that] refers to a varying range of spatial scales (i.e. levels of representation) in tourism: continents, states, provinces, municipalities, and other administrative units, tourist resorts or even tourist products" (as cited in Huijbens 2011:555)—has a flattening effect, where the tourist destination becomes commodified as a "complex and integrated portfolio of services offered… [to supply] a holiday experience which meets the needs of the tourist" (Cracolici and Nijkamp 2008:336 as cited in Huijnens 2011:556). A tourist destination's projected image and representation is, therefore, essential in captivating the tourist's imagination and cultivating a particular 'tourist gaze' (Rejinders 2011). Central to the practice of tourism, Urry (2002) notes, is the 'gaze' through which the tourist "objectifies and interprets the place he or she visits" (Jansson 2002:431). Moreover, Urry (2002) argues that tourists are constantly seeking to reaffirm those images that exist in their geographical imagination (Rejinders 2011). These images are diffused and consumed via 'mediascapes'—a 'scacpe' comprised of the multitude of mediated texts (television shows, movies, advertisements, magazines, and so on) that people encounter in their everyday lives—, presenting consumers with visions of space that are both realistic and phantasmagoric[23] (Jansson 2002). A person's touristic practices, as Jansson (2002) notes, often correspond with the "overarching logic of spatial appropriation" (p. 432) that is, "a subjective

[23] As defined by Merriam-Webster (2024), the term phantasmagoria (phantasmagoric) refers to "an exhibition of optical effects and illusions; a constantly shifting complex succession of things seen or imagined; a bizarre or fantastic combination, collection, or assemblage".

orientation inherent to the lifestyle…[that] governs what kind of landscapes, socioscapes, and mediascapes the individual or the group (friends, family, etc.), wants to experience" (p. 432-433). Through "calculated design" (Jansson 2002:433) however, certain scapes tend to foster particular kinds of spatial appropriation. The touristic experience is, therefore, generated in the interplay between the tourists' desired experiences and the practical latitudes/limitations enabled by the conditions of the space (Jansson 2002).

Far from being "a purely instrumental practice" (Jansson 2002:436) all tourism, as Jansson (2002) argues, involves "a hedonistic aspect – a longing to experience different kinds of bodily and/or spiritual pleasure" (p. 436). "Like the carnivalesque and other festivities", he writes, "the hedonistic force of tourism implies a negation of everydayness and material austerity" (Jansson 2002:436). With the mediazation of tourism, there has been a gradual, but palpable shift from realistic hedonism to *imaginative* hedonism in which pleasure and new bodily experiences are sought via the "symbolic dimension of commodities" (Jansson 2002:436). It is here, as Jansson (2002) puts it, that "past experiences are of little concern; the driving force is the media-generated fantasies of truly new experiences" (p. 436). The imaginative hedonist engages in "phantasmagoria and daydreams" (Jansson 2022:436), albeit it, in a realistic way, wherein fantasies about experiencing certain bodily pleasures and experiences are often rooted in reality. In order to enhance "the interests, dreams, and desires of consumers" (Jansson 2002:437) and remain competitive, the tourism industry must, according to Jansson (2002), "*intensify* consumption… [by creating] *image* and *novelty*" (p.437). As consumers are inundated with an increasing number of options, the tourism industry—much like the nation brand—must find ways to distinguish themselves from their competitors by crafting a highly-mediated and alluring image of place, thereby activating consumers' hedonistic imaginations (Aronczyk 2010; Jansson

2002). These mediated images of place are thus becoming the 'originals', Jansson (2002) writes, "against which experiences of simulated landscapes and socioscapes are measured" (p.439). For the consumer, the representational is an important cultural resources, a kind of barometer in which they can gauge the 'authenticity' of their experience based on how well a particular destination adheres to and corresponds with their subjective, pre-conceived, media-generated vision of that place (Jansson 2022). Referred to as 'symbolic authenticity'—an authenticity that is, to some extent, "shaped within the representational realm" (Jansson 2002:439). An extreme expression of this behaviour is described by Jansson (2002) as 'hyper-tourism'. In their ongoing effort to surpass dominant schemes of classification, certain types of travel and tourism practices, as well as destinations, as the 'hyper-tourist' explores the world, they are, Jansson (2002) says, "simultaneously, or even foremost, exploring the realm of representations" (p. 439) Through the appropriation and accumulation of place, 'experiences', and cultural assets, the hyper-tourist engages in a new form of 'gazing', thereby highlighting the significance of symbolic authenticity and its ties to the representational in the changing landscape of tourism (Jansson 2002).

2.5.1 Cultural Tourism and the Rise of 'Media Tourism'

Jansson's (2002) discussion of the mediazation of tourism and spatial phantasmagoria reveals the interplay between media consumption and touristic consumption. His arguments solidify the notion that representations of place in popular culture (including television series and films, as well as literature, comic books, and video games) play an important role in the formation of viewers' spatial imaginaries, as well as their expectations and experiences of place, based on their mediated, phantasmagoric imaginings of place. The burgeoning economy of 'media tourism'—defined by Garrison and Wallace (2021) as a "niche sub-set of cultural tourism which involves travels inspired by media texts" (p. 1)—exemplifies this overlap (Garrison and Wallac

2021; Jansson 2002). In 2017, an updated, more comprehensive definition[24] of cultural tourism was adopted by the UN Tourism General Assembly that better reflected the convergence between contemporary culture and tourism (Garrison and Wallace 2021; UN Tourism 2024). The recognition of various forms of media— "literature, music, [and] creative industries" (UN Tourism 2024)—in their definition is illustrative of not only the constantly-evolving nature of tourism, but of popular media's growing influence on tourism practices (Garrison and Wallace 2021). While media tourism branches into a variety of sub-categories (screen/film tourism and literary tourism, for example), Garrison and Wallace (2021) note that these hyper-niche categories "fail to account for the multi-media nature of popular modern popular culture consumption" (p. 2). The concept of 'media tourism' was developed by Reijnders (2011) in an effort to adequately capture "the multimedia character" (p. 5) of a growing number of contemporary media-inspired tourism practices (examples include tours based on the multi-genre worlds of *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings*)

Media tourism pays homage to its origins in 'literary tourism'—a form of cultural tourism from the early eighteenth century, where readers would participate in pilgrimages to the locations connected to famed literary works and authors—and, at the same time, recognizes how pronounced shifts in media culture have impacted the tourism industry and touristic practices (Garrison and Wallace 2021; Rejinders 2011). "The world of the imagination", Rejinders (2011) notes, "is primarily a media world, where television and cinema have developed into the main storytellers of the age" (p. 16). The growing demand for media-inspired tours highlights how

[24] Cultural tourism is defined as "[a] type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries, and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs, and traditions" (UN Tourism 2024).

along with technological advancements and shifts in the ‘mediascape’—including increased internet access and the development/proliferation of social media platforms and content, the ubiquity of streaming services and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) backed technologies—the tourist ‘gaze’ and tourism practices and services have become “more and more intertwined with the consumption of media images” (Jansson 2022:431). As Pritchard and Morgan (2001) argue, tourism experiences and representations are “inexorably intertwined in a circuit of culture, whereby representations utilize and reflect identity and in which images are continuously produced and consumed” (p. 168).

Likewise, Nora (1989) writes that, “[r]epresentation proceeds by strategic highlighting, selecting samples, and multiplying examples” (p.17). As such, tourism experiences and processes, Pritchard and Morgan (2001) argue, “are part of a much wider discursive framework grounded in complex, multi-dimensional, socio-cultural, and historical systems” (p. 168). This relates back to Dela Santo and Anril Tiatco’s (2019) discussion on heritage tourism as a “critical and political concept” (p. 302) that can be used by government and tourism industry players “to perpetuate colonial epistemological frameworks and Eurocentric logic through their uncritical and dominant interpretations of heritage” (p. 302). As highly-coordinated, multi-stakeholder sector that is, ultimately, concerned with the marketability and legibility of a place brand, it is useful to critically examine how tourism images, representations, and performances emerge and how they contribute to nation branding and nation building strategies.

2.5.2 Heritage, and Authenticity: Heritage Tourism

Aronsson and Gradén (2013) explore the notion of heritage and its use-value in the performance and promotion of *Norden*[25]. They describe heritage as not merely remnants of the past, but as "a particular cultural practice that uses the past to produce heritage in the present" (Aronsson and Gradén 2013:12). Heritage-making can be understood as an ideological project engaged in acts of remembering and forgetting, where certain moments of the past are selectively and strategically re-imagined as needing protection and preservation, thus transforming them in into 'heritage' (Aronsson and Gradén 2013; Dela Santo and Anril Tiatco 2019). In their discussion of heritage tourism in the Philippines, Dela Santo and Anril Tiatco (2019) note that 'heritage' is conflated with 'inheritance'—endowed wisdom, knowledge, and property passed from generation to generation--: a concept known in heritage studies as 'patrimony'.

Heritage-as-a-connection-to-the-past has become a popular driver in the tourism industry. The demand for heritage-based tourism can, according to Park, Choi, and Lee (2019), be attributed to a number of factors, including: an increasing awareness of heritage; an ability to express individuality through an awareness of historical environments; greater affluence, increased leisure time and mobility; "the need to surpass contemporary experiences to compensate for insufficiencies and demands; and/or to meet psychological needs for continuousness through an appreciation of personal family history" (p.100). Moreover, they note that most tourists who engage in heritage tourism seek authenticity. In the case of cultural

[25] Aronsson and Gradén (2013) describe *'Norden'* (that includes the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) as a "contested cultural, ideological, and political resource" (p. 2) that has changed over time. In the English-speaking world, this region is often referred to as 'Scandinavia', whereas inhabitants of the region call it '*Norden'* (Aronsson and Gradén 2013). *Norden* has become both a cultural and supranational identity that centers around the region as territorially, culturally, and politically coherent. This, the authors say, is the result of repeated, collective performances (Aronsson and Gradén 2013). They also describe *Norden* as "a physical phenomenon and intangible concept" illustrating how *Norden* can be accessed physically, but also emotionally, through words and images (Aronsson and Gradén 2013:301)

heritage tourism, authenticity generally means, "an unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched real and traditional experience" (Park et al. 2019:100). Here, experiences of 'authenticity'—as 'local,' 'traditional,' 'historic,' 'connected to the past'—can serve to remedy the yearnings wrought on by temporal and/or geographic nostalgia: desires to return to a simpler time, a simpler place, a paradise lost. All of this in contrast with the seemingly 'unnatural' and 'artificial' characteristics of life today (Park et al. 2019).

Similarly, authenticity can be experienced as an escape from the banality of daily life, where visitors' ability to freely express themselves and engage with cultural difference activates processes of self-discovery and/or self-reflection (Park et al. 2019). Heritage tourism, therefore, relies less on objective authenticity and more on visitors' *perceptions/constructions* of authenticity: their 'symbolic authenticity' as described by Jansson (2002). A critical constructivist approach to authenticity recognizes it not as a tangible quality or asset, but rather, an individually constructed, contextually-specific, and always-fluctuating judgment or value imposed on a place, setting, or product by its observer (Park et al 2019). For this reason, heritage tourism can be understood as a "process and performance…constantly negotiated and recreated to fit the specific demands of the tourist market" (Dela Santo and Anril Tiatco 2019:303).

2.6 Representations of Place: Nordic Place Branding in Popular Media and Culture

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the Nordic region, as *Norden's* place-branding and image-building efforts have garnered international attention. The notion of 'Nordic Exceptionalism[26]', Danbolt (2016) notes, has been central in the branding of Nordicity.

[26] 'Nordic Exceptionalism' is a concept that, since the 1960s, has been central in the construction and promotion of Norden as a brand. It is based on perceptions of the Nordic region as *different*—more peaceful, socially and culturally coherent, egalitarian, environmentally-conscious, traditional etc.—than the rest of the world, by virtue of their 'Third Way' Social Democratic welfare policies. Nordic Exceptionalism is thus dependent on a "bipolar world order where perpetual conflicts *elsewhere* enabled the Nordic countries to appear different with their alleged security policies, generous international solidarity work, and egalitarian socio-economic welfare system" (Danbolt 2016:5).

Out of the New Nordic Food (NNF) movement of the early 2000s[27] emerged a 'New Nordic' discourse and brand, centered around Nordic art, architecture, culture, design, lifestyle, landscapes, and aesthetics (Danbolt 2016; Hansen and Waade 2017). The interest and commodification of Nordic culture has also resulted in a fascination with 'Nordic Noir'. In its broadest terms, Nordic Noir can be described as a rebranding of Scandinavian crime dramas and fictions. As Toft Hansen and Marit Waade (2017) note, Nordic Noir has immense brand value and is as an essential marketing tool in the production and promotion of a Nordic place brand. They attribute this to the fact that locations "are far more than pure backdrops or settings for a story, but rather contribute in essential ways to the narrative itself, the imageries, the sounds and plots of the drama series" (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:29). Moreover, they ground their analysis in discussions of 'local colour'[28] in film and television, in order to understand representations of place, language, cultural practices, as well as their implications (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). In their work on local colour, Eichner and Waade's (2015) argue that local colour "has more to do with how places are represented on screen, but also how the places inform and influence the way in which the producers of television drama series perform, practice, and (re)produce places in their production, both as tacit knowledge and as aesthetics and shared sensation" (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:35). As such, Toft Hansen and Marit Waade (2017) argue that local colour is "based on the interplay of [its] three aspects…the

---

[27] The New Nordic Food (NNF) movement was spearheaded by Danish chef and entrepreneur Claus Meyer and chef René Redzepi—owners of Copenhagen's world-renowned restaurant, Noma—in 2004 (Danbolt 2016). Along with twelve other male chef signatories from other Nordic countries, they signed the "New Nordic Food Manifesto" which outlined the ideologies behind the burgeoning terroir-focused movement that emphasized 'Nordic qualities' such as purity, health, quality, and sustainability (Danbolt 2016).

[28] Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2017) as "the customs, manners of speech, dress, or other typical features of a place or period that contributes to its particular character" (as cited in Hansen and Waade 2017:30). It is a concept widely used in art history and philosophy—developed in the seventeenth century in relation to the precise technical requirements of French pictorial art—that has, over time, been furnished with different meanings and come to reflect more cultural, social, and political ideas (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017).

physical place (object), the *mediation* of place (setting, cinematic landscapes, literary space etc.) (representation), and the *imagination* of the place (the producer's/viewer's expectations and imaginations) (interpretant)" (p. 41). To understand local colour is to understand how representations of Nordic space and place in televisual/cinematic culture are mediated, imagined, (re)manufactured, both by producers and audiences.

2.6.1 Constructing 'Nordicness': Value Regimes in Nordic Place Branding

Just as Toft Hansen and Marit Waade (2017) describe the influence of the producers' gaze on the production and performance of space in Nordic Noir, Andersen, Lindberg, and Ostberg (2021) examine the heterogenous and often conflictual value regimes[29] that are invoked by brand managers and other central stakeholders during the Nordic branding process. Place brands differ from product brands, the authors note, "in terms of the diversity of stakeholders' claims to legitimacy and ownership of stories… where values are created in a dynamic and ongoing interpretation between stakeholders situated in culture and the environment" (Andersen et al. 2021:364). This relates to Gunn's (1994) assertion that due to the multiple, co-existing, and conflictual trajectories that make up space, "tourism, in contrast to a manufacturing plant, cannot be managed by a single director" (as cited in Huijbens 2022: 568). Of particular interest to Toft Hanen and Marit Waade (2017), is how Nordic branding actors construct value by appropriating 'Nordicness' in their brand-building efforts and performances, as well as how they justify their Nordicness through the emphasis of certain value regimes and contestation of others (Andersen et al. 2021). "Nordic value regimes", the authors state, "should not be considered a 'Nordic

[29] The authors use the concept 'value regime' "as the assembly of adjacent and conflicting values behind branding practices" (Andersen et al. 2021: 363). Their conceptualization of 'value regimes' builds on Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) 'orders of worth' perspective, which examines the justifications and compromises actors make during moments of inter-regime conflict (Andersen et al. 2021). Unpacking the 'value regimes' present in Nordic brands involves understanding how inter-regime conflicts between stakeholders are negotiated Andersen et al. 2021).

essence'… but rather, a specific set of culturally-constructed valuations…[that] constitute Nordicness as a set of meaningful differences of what it means to be 'Nordic'" (Andersen et al. 2021:366). Though *Norden* is often viewed as culturally and politically homogenous, many differences (of varying degrees between states) do, in fact, exist between the Nordic states, particularly when it comes to foreign relations (Bergmann 2017). There are, however, many similarities between the Nordics, including geographical location, a shared history and cultural heritage influenced by pagan mythology and later, Christianity, Lutheranism, a social democratic welfare state structure, and so on (Bergmann 2017). Cultural Nordism, Bergmann (2017) notes, was "actually developed in conjunction with nation-states and was, in fact seen to compliment their respective nation-hood creations" (p. 10). Relationships between the Nordic states are, therefore, based on an ongoing negotiation that illuminates what Bergmann (2017) calls the "dual-sides" (p.5) of Nordic nationalism: one side emphasizing national separatism while the other "nourish[es] ideas of common cultural roots and indeed unified common purpose" (p. 5).

The construction (and subsequent performance) of 'Nordicness' by Nordic brands rely on the continuous (and often conflictual) process of value-negotiation by branding actors and stakeholders (Andersen et al. 2021). The value regimes associated with Nordicness are thus, "made meaningful as tensions, as propositions of 'value as difference'" (Andersen et al. 2021:374). As evidenced in the work of Nordic branding scholars, an increasing interest in Nordic culture, aesthetics, and lifestyles has infused 'Nordic' with incredible brand value. It performs an imaginative function, too, providing each of the nations within the region a platform, or 'stage' (in Goffman's terms) to construct and present their own compelling nation brand. In the case of Iceland, a brief historical overview of the country is requisite in order to

understand the narrative framework of their nation branding strategies, as used in their tourism advertisements.

2.7 An Overview of Icelandic History: Settlement and Saga Literature

The history of Iceland has been documented from the time of its first human settlement, in written manuscripts. Ari Þorgilsson—Icelandic writer, historian, and chieftain—is regarded as Iceland's most prominent medieval chronicler (Karlsson 2000). The nation's oldest text—written by Þorgilsson some time around 1130 AD—*The Book of Icelanders (Íslendingabók),* chronicles the island's settlement by Norse people during the Viking Age, approximately 870-930 AD (Faingold 2023; Karlsson 2000). While there has been some debate over who Iceland's first settlers were[30], Iceland's other foundational text, *The Book of Settlements (Landnámabók)*—also authored, in part, by Þorgilsson, is of twelfth century origin, but known only in later versions, as Faingold (2023) notes—is the nation's earliest genealogical record documenting the first 400 settlers who, along with their families, slaves, and servants, sailed to Iceland, a majority of whom came from Norway[31] in an attempt to flee the king of Norway, Haraldr Fairhair's, aggression and tyranny (Faingold 2023; Karlsson 2000). These two works form the *historical sagas* category, as they chronicle the events and developments considered important in Iceland's history. According to Karlsson (2000), when Icelanders speak of saga literature or 'sagas' (*fornsögur),* what they are referring to is "a corpus of prose narratives…written in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries"

[30] Some historians have asserted that before Iceland was inhabited and colonized by Norse settlers, Irish monks fleeing from persecution in Ireland, were the first to come to Iceland. Ari Þorgilsson the Learned—Iceland's first historian—confirmed this in *Book of Icelanders*. The Irish monks, however, did not stay and therefore, are not considered Iceland's first settlers. There has also been some debate about who was the first official person to discover Iceland. According to one version of the *Book of Settlements*, the country was discovered by a Norwegian Viking named Naddoddr. Another version of the *Book of Settlements* claims the island was first discovered by a Swede named Garðarr Svavarsson (Karlsson, 2000).
[31] As noted by Faingold (2023), though a majority of Iceland's first settlers came from Norway, some came from other Nordic countries as well as from Viking settlements in the British Isles. He also acknowledges that some of the settlers were said to be of Irish or Celtic origin, including a "sizeable number of slaves, servants, and wives" (p. 169).

(2000:66) that can be divided into a variety of subclasses—*historical, kings', contemporary/family* etc.—based on subject and style. Karlsson (2000) does claim, however, that comparing Iceland's *historical sagas* with the later *contemporary/family sagas* is akin to comparing academic history and fiction to one another. Therefore, while other sagas can be interpreted as dramatizations of historical events and may be met with some skepticism, the *historical sagas*, in contrast, are regarded as factual texts[32].

2.7.1 A Brief Interlude: A Re-Evaluation of Iceland's Saga Literature in the 1970s

Jónsson Aðlis' book of public lectures, released in 1906 titled, 'The Golden Age of Iceland' *(Gullöld Íslenndinga),* is, as Karlsson (1993) argues, "thoroughly outdated" (p. 15). However, Karlsson (1993) asserts that, "if [he] were to write an essay on the social history of early Iceland, on daily life and social relations, one of the very first books [he] would consult would be Aðlis' *Gullöld Íslenndinga*" (p. 15)—not necessarily for Aðlis' interpretations of events, but rather, for his narrative, survey of written sources (reliable or not) and conclusions—given that, as he says, his work offers "the best starting-point so far available for such a study" (p. 15). This, due to the fact that subsequent works that have attempted to crystallize Iceland's cultural history into a coherent and comprehensive written account were, as a result of the book-prose theory, which forbade historians from sources—such as Jón Jóhannesson's (1956) *Íslendingasögu*—that were, in contrast with the historical sagas, regarded as unreliable historical sources (Karlsson 1993).

It is not surprising, then, that Karlsson (1993) partially attributes historians' "narrow definition of [Icelandic] history" (p. 18) a consequence of the book-prose theory. Though he

[32] One of the pitfalls of such a classification, Karlsson (1993) notes, however, is that the political events during the Age of Sturlungar were regarded with great prominence and the book-prose theorists, therefore, did not view the *Sturlungur saga* as a work of fiction. In contrast, written accounts of Icelandic history, based on Jón Jóhannesson's book—published in 1956— *Íslendingasögur,* were dismissed and considered unreliable, based on the book-prose theory in saga studies which forbade historians from using *Íslendingasögu* as a source of evidence (Karlsson 1993). This, Karlsson (1993) argues, "deprived [historians] of their richest and most inspiring kinds of evidence" (p. 17).

considers *Íslendingasögu* a rich histographical data source, particularly into the social relations of early Icelandic society, it was not until the 1970s that it—as well as other saga literature previously conceived as fictional—was meaningfully integrated into research practices (Karlsson 1993). This new attitude towards saga literature, resulting in its "rehabilitation within the domain of literary studies" (Karlsson 1993:20), Karlsson (1993) says, originated in part, from the "so-called new free-prose theory, whose proponents were more willing to see traditional material in the sagas than the typical book-prose scholar had done" (p. 20) as well as in scholarly developments in the United States and Denmark examining the linkages between anthropology, traditional history, and saga literature (Karlsson 1993). Karlsson (1993) refers to this "new development" (p. 21) of the 1970s as an anthropological "structuralist approach, because it lies in discovering structures rather than explaining events, and the proof of the existence of these structures lies partly in seeing them as instances of still larger structures" (p. 21). Though this approach—like any other—is not without its limitations, Karlsson (1993) maintains that Iceland's saga literature—relegated for so long to the realm of fiction, and thus, disregarded as reliable source material and excluded from 'official' accounts of Icelandic history—and law books are rife with potential, offering a glimpse into "the history of the daily life of ordinary people" (p. 24). One in which, he says, "has not yet been exploited to the full" (Karlsson 1993:24).

2.7.2 The Rise and Fall of the Icelandic Commonwealth

According to *The Book of Icelanders,* in 930, near the end of the settlement period, the Icelandic *Alþingi*[33](Althing)—an open-air parliamentary court held on the plains of Þingvellir—was formed (Bergmann 2017; Hálfdanarson 2000). Unlike other Christian societies governed by a

[33] *Alþingi or Al-þing* (Althing) refers to the regular assembly of all free (Norse) males.

centralized executive power, Icelandic society, in contrast, was characterized by the *absence* of a single authority figure (Karlsson 2000). Under this constitutional arrangement—referred to as 'the free state' or Iceland Commonwealth—legislative power lay with local chieftains (*goðar)* who sat on the Law Council and were responsible for nominating the Althing's judicial body (Karlsson 2000). During the Age of Sturlungar (*Sturlungaöld)*—the last period/end of the Icelandic Commonwealth—major disputes arose among Iceland's most influential chieftain families (Karlsson 2000). It was also during this time that the Norwegian Crown began in its attempts to annex Iceland as part of King Hákon Hákonarson's larger attempt at consolidating all lands inhabited primarily by Norse Viking Age settlers, under the Norwegian throne (Karlsson 2000). After years of bitter and violent warfare between the families, in 1262, the Norwegian Crown annexed Iceland. In 1271, with the passing of the first part of the Ironbound, the Icelandic Commonwealth was officially abolished by law (Karlsson 2000). Later, in 1280, following a second round of legal revision by Magnús the Law-Reformer, the Norwegian Crown sent a new code of law, titled, Jon's Book (*Jónsbók)* to Iceland, which would come to form the core of Icelandic legislation for more than four centuries (Karlsson 2000). "From a constitutional point of view, the enactment of *Jónsbók,"* Karlsson (2000) notes, "is an extremely important event in Icelandic history, since it placed Iceland firmly outside the united law district of Norway" (p. 91). Although the parameters of *Jónsbók* were hazy at best, 19th century nationalists would later refer to it as evidence of Iceland as a separate law district, maintaining their call for sovereignty and independence (Karlsson 2000).

2.7.3 The Struggle for Independence

With the creation of the Kalmar Union (1397-1523), Norway, Denmark, and Sweden and their respective dependencies united under a single crown, ruled by Queen Margaret's then fifteen-

year-old adopted son, Eric of Pomerania (Salonen and Jensen 2023). It is noted, however, that despite being named the official ruler of the region, Eric did not, in fact, wield any power—it was Margaret who, up until her death in 1412, was the one who continued to exercise control over the Union's affairs (Salonen and Jensen 2023). By the 1430s, the Union was beginning to fracture. Following the peasant uprisings and rebellions against King Eric, in 1439-1441, the councils of the three kingdoms, as Salonen and Jensen (2023) write, "renounced their loyalty to him and thereby deposed him as king" (p. 236). Following the Union's dissolution in 1523, in 1536, Norway and Denmark entered into a personal union which would later, in 1660, develop into the integrated state historians call 'Denmark—Norway' (Salonen and Jensen 2023). The year 1660 also marked the beginning of Absolutism and the 'rule of law'[34] (1660-1750) in Denmark (Johansen 2006). In 1848, absolutism in Denmark was abolished, and Denmark's absolute rule was consolidated, creating a centralized state (Javette Koefed and Frisk Jensen 2020). As a Danish colonial dependency, Iceland was required to accept the absolute rule of the Danish king (Bergmann 2017). From 1830—the year the journal *Ármann á Alþingi*, edited by Baldvin Einarsson, was published in Copenhagen[35]—to 1944, Iceland would engage in more than a century-long struggle for independence (Bergmann 2017; Karlsson 2000; 2006). In the nineteenth century, streams of nationalist thought began to course through Europe, eventually making their way to Iceland (Bergmann 2016). "On the canopy of European romanticism and liberalism", Bergmann (2016) writes, "independence movements were rapidly gaining

[34] As described by Johansen (2006), the 'rule of law' is established when a society establishes certain rules to solve conflicts, and these rules become known and respected by members. These rules are often written into law codes (in a way that considers the interests of all parties) and are inserted into institutional frameworks in a way that allows them to respond to a wide array of issues/differing opinions (Johansen 2006).
[35] According to Bergmann (2017) the publication of this journal is considered the starting point of Iceland's independence struggle.

momentum in Finland, Norway, and Iceland [and] [t]he Danish supra-national monarch empire was rapidly evaporating" (p. 4).

Subsequent journals and texts promoting Icelandic independence would follow Einarsson's. Of all of them, the journal *Ný félagsrit* (1841-1873), published by Jón Sigurðsson and his supporters, was considered the most influential (Bergmann 2017). An Icelandic scholar and politician living in Copenhagen amidst the Romantic Revival[36], Sigurðsson would emerge as the leader—and later regarded as national hero—of Iceland's independence struggle, claiming that every nation had a right to rule itself (Bergmann 2017:97). Sigurðsson's awareness of 'national identity'—a new concept rooted in the belief that every nation had the natural right to self-determination—was foundational in the fight for Icelandic independence (Hálfdanarson 2006). He argued that as a separate nation with their own unique language and Viking past, Iceland should have the right to self-govern (Bergmann 2017). The ideas and sentiments used to bolster their claims for independence—connected to what Bergmann (2017) refers to as 'the national myth' (p.98) propelled the movement. Indeed, the formation of an independent Icelandic state, as Speaker of the Althing, Gísli Sveinsson, declared to the audience at the parliamentary celebration of the Icelandic republic on June 17th, 1944, was the fulfillment of a long-awaited dream (Hálfdanarson 2006). "At last the nation has returned home", Sveinsson exalts. "The political severance from a foreign country is completed. Icelandic republic has been established. Ancient liberty has been reclaimed" (Hálfdanarson 2006:237).

[36] Described as a "liberating movement" (Friðriksson and Yates 2011:8) that occurred in literature and the arts—linguistics, history, politics, philosophy etc.—that emphasized Enlightenment principles and sensibilities such as, feeling, imagination, history, and mythology, calling for the return of the romantic spirit in literary writing and expression (Friðriksson and Yates 2011:8; Sneha 2022).

Iceland's trajectory to nationhood is as follows. In 1844, Iceland's *Alþing* was, as Bergmann (2017) writes, "'resurrected' as an advisory parliamentary body in Reykjavik" (p. 95) and in 1849, a new democratic constitution was implemented in Denmark (Bergmann 2017). Following a series of constitutional decisions[37] that would span another 70-some-odd-years, Iceland would win formal sovereignty in 1918, which according to Bergmann (2017) "included full internal independence and for the most part external control within a personal union with the Danish monarch as head of state" (p. 95). Full independence would follow in 1944.

2.7.4 Creating a 'Golden Age' Icelandic Identity: Icelandic History, Reinterpreted

During their independence struggle, the creation of the 'Golden Age' (also referred to as the 'Golden Era')—an era spanning settlement in 840, its 'peak' in 930 with the state-like formation of the Althing, to its dissolution in 1262, when Iceland fell under Norwegian foreign-rule—was a vital force in Iceland's call for sovereignty (Bergmann 2017). During this time, Icelanders drew upon the imagery of their 'Golden Era' Viking history to craft a narrative that fit their bid for independence. Depictions of Vikings were frequent in Icelandic myths, legends, and saga, with Vikings representing masculinity, discovery, and domination – traits considered emblematic of the 'Viking spirit' that collectively characterized the nation (Bergmann 2017). Hálfdanarson (2000) writes, "[f]ew national communities have preserved the myths of the primordial nature of their nationality as well as the Icelanders" (p.21). Jón Jónsson Aðlis—who, in 1911, became Iceland's first history professor—describes the 'Golden Age' society as superior to all others, writing, "In these centuries, the well-being of the nation was at its peak" (as cited in

[37] These decisions include forcefully ending Iceland's domestically elected Constitutional Assembly (*Þjóðfundurinn*) in 1951, the unilateral decision to keep control over the country via the 1871 'Position Law' (*Stöðulögin*), the king of Denmark handing Iceland a separate Icelandic constitution—modeled after the Danish one and without input from Icelanders—in 1874, and the granting of Icelandic Home Rule status—with limited executive powers—in 1904 (Bergman 2017).

Hálfdanarson 2000:15). For Aðlis, 'Golden Age Iceland', politically autonomous, with its rich cultural traditions and pure and unique national language was representative of Icelandic life before its deterioration under foreign rule (Bergmann 2017; Hálfdanarson 2000). In line with the nationalist discourses sweeping Europe during this time, there was a political shift occurring among the Icelandic student community in Copenhagen in the 1830s and 1840s, premised on the (selective) notion that, as Hálfdanarson (2006) puts it, "the rule of one nation over another was, in principle, entirely unnatural, and had, for that reason, to be averted" (p. 241), with Denmark's colonial rule over Iceland acting as the perfect case-and-point. In the nineteenth century, Iceland's nationalist discourse would change course once again, this time, through "a reinterpretation of the country's history" (Hálfdanarson 2006:241).

Eighteenth century Icelandic patriots claimed that the "palpable poverty and underdevelopment of the country" (Hálfdanarson 2006:242) was the doing of its own inhabitants, whereas nineteenth century nationalists asserted that it was under the dictates of an "alien government" (p. 242) and foreign rule that weakened the Icelandic state and spirit. This narrative quickly gained momentum, despite the fact that in the eighteenth century, the relations between Iceland and Denmark were, for the most part, amicable (Hálfdanarson 2006). Iceland's re-evaluation of its relationship with Denmark and re-interpretation of the Danish-Icelandic union and subsequent divorce, Halfdanarson (2006) argues, "was driven by a fundamental shift in the political imagination of both parties to the marriage" (p. 247). The "nationalist paradigm shift" (Hálfdanarson 2006:248) that occurred between Iceland and Denmark—with Iceland re-framing and re-imagining the struggle for independence as ongoing, pre-ordained, and teleological—served, according to Hálfdanarson (2006) "a very particular political purpose at the

time of the establishment of the Icelandic republic…and legitimated the foundation of the new regime" (p. 238).

2.7.5 The Role of Language

Independence leader, Sigurðsson also made claims about the importance of language, describing it as an essential marker of nationhood. He sought to maintain what he considered to be an "unbroken link" (Albury 2016:361) between the Icelandic language and its ties to Old Norse[38] (Albury 2016; Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006; Kristnsson 2018). Moreover, emphasizing the distinctness of the Icelandic language allowed Icelanders to demarcate the boundaries of their distinct ethnic group, particularly in opposition of the Danes, thereby further justifying their demand for national liberty (Hálfdanarson 2000). Efforts to promote Icelandic as the proto-Scandinavian language and preserve its link to the 'Golden Era' played a significant role in advancing the overarching goal of national independence (Albury 2016).

In her ceremonial address at Iceland's fiftieth anniversary celebration in Þingvellir National Park on June 17th, 1994, President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir reminded the audience,

> …The Icelandic nation had primarily one justification, one argument to support its demand to be heard in international assemblies: It has a separate language and in this language preserved its memories, its stories, its poems, all of which differed from the memories, stories, and poems of other nations. That legacy provided its legitimacy… We should not forget that there is one duty superior to all others: to preserve the memories of the people and the country (as cited in Hálfdanarson 2000:14).

[38] As a member of the North Germanic (Nordic) language group, the structure and basic vocabulary of modern Icelandic still bears a similar resemblance to Old Norse, —the common ancestor of the North Germanic language group—spoken during the early medieval times in Scandinavia, the Faroes, and Iceland, as well as in some parts of the British Isles and Greenland by people of Nordic origin (Kristinsson 2018). Medieval texts such as historical manuscripts, saga, and prose literature, were all written in the original Old Norse (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006). Many of these works were written during Iceland's thirteenth and fourteenth century 'Golden Era' and are considered the peak of Icelandic literature (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006). Iceland's strong linguistic heritage has thus, played an important role in Icelandic language ideologies and subsequent policy planning (Kristinsson 2018).

Finnsbogadóttir's (1994) speech calls attention to the essential role the Icelandic language plays in the country's nationhood, as well as the emphasis placed on residents to actively guard it. Iceland's protectionist language policies continue to reflect their nationalist desire to maintain linguistic purism[39] (Albury 2016). This form of linguistic purism, Albury (2016) notes, is based on a historical or genealogical connection to Old Norse/'pure form' Icelandic, a form of Icelandic, he says, is only *truly* accessible to those with Icelandic ancestry (Albury 2016). While it is mandated[40] that applicants must pass an Icelandic language examination in order to secure Icelandic citizenship, a person's *'Icelandic-ness'* is "contingent on [their ability to speak] the pure form of Icelandic" (Albury 2016:361). Demographic changes to the nation's population is, however, resulting in a higher number of non-native Icelandic speakers. As Kristinsson (2018) notes, "[t]he cultural and ethnic profile of Icelanders has…become more complex than it was only about two decades ago…[and] Icelandic spoken with a foreign accent is increasingly a part of the everyday language experience" (as cited in Faingold 2028:181). While Icelandic remains the country's only official language and is still, by far, the most common language used in everyday communication, Kristinsson (2018) maintains that "the Icelandic labour market today carries a multilingual profile" (as cited in Faingold 2023:182). "Language nationalism and a linguistic protectionist culture that promotes the use of Icelandic above all other languages and in all domains of language use", Faingold (2023) states, "result in laws and regulations that may hinder the opportunities of immigrants to become naturalized citizens; to access services they need, especially in the health care system; and to receive an education that includes the child's

[39] Iceland's national language policy is primarily concerned with maintaining grammatical, orthographic, and lexical purism in the Icelandic language (Kristinsson 2018).
[40] During the mid-to-late-1990s, Iceland experienced—for the first time—an influx of foreign-born migrants. Due to this newfound linguistic diversity, in 2011, Icelandic was legislated as the official language (Act on the Status of the Icelandic Language and Icelandic Language no. 61/2011, Article 1). Under this legislation, in order to be granted Icelandic citizenship, applicants must pass an Icelandic language examination (Albury 2016).

home language in the school curriculum and daily activities" (p. 209). With a growing immigrant population, Iceland's linguistic profile is, undoubtedly, changing. And though the region still does still maintain a high level of cultural and linguistic homogeneity—often attributed to a common ancestry and cultural uniformity—it should be noted that this too, is the result of a sustained nationalist cause that purports a strong connection to the past (Hálfdanarson 2000).

In his lecture in Sorbonne on nationhood, Renan (1882) warns about the dangers and inconveniences that arise from "the exclusive interest in language as a criterion of nationhood" (p. 17). Languages, he says, are historical formations that—like race, geography, community interests, and religion—are illusory, overly deterministic, and limiting as conditions for nation-building and national belonging (Renan 1882 translated by Thom 1990). Renan (1882) describes the nation as a "soul" and "spiritual family" (p. 19) around which a collective identity—united by "the profound complications of history" (p. 19)—and collective purpose forms. Although Icelandic nationalism relies on claims of 'purity' connected to race, ethnicity, geography, and language, it was from under the canopy of a shared 'heroic past' from which these claims emerged and gained political traction (Renan 1882 translated by Thom 1990).

2.7.6 The Myth of a Unified Nation: An Exercise in Collective-Memory Making

A small, isolated nation with strong Viking roots, a rich linguistic tradition, and homogenous population with unique cultural customs steeped in antiquity was the story discursively crafted by Icelandic nationalists during their fight for independence. Invoking their 'Golden Era' past of political autonomy, Icelandic nationalists were able to frame their right to independence as a manifestation of "destiny…rather than historical contingency" (Hálfdanarson 2000:13). Icelanders' independence struggle, however, focused not just on their right to self-rule but also the right to external recognition as an 'equal partner' among the other developed nation states

(Bergmann 2017). This apparent paradox of Iceland's dual insistence of wanting to be both nationally autonomous—maintaining their distinct culture and heritage linked to a glorified past—while also being recognized as a modern state and 'key player' in an economy deeply rooted in Western culture, Hálfdanarson (2000) notes, is "solved through historical imagination [where] the uniformity of modern culture is counteracted by remembering a time when Iceland was fairly isolated from foreign influences and therefore in many ways very different from other countries" (p. 12; Bergmann 2017). In order to advance their national interests, the narrative story presented by Iceland can, therefore, be understood as a carefully cultivated *interpretation* of their history centered around collective acts of remembering and forgetting. "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error," Renan (1882) famously said, "is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation" (p. 11). By strategically remembering and forgetting parts of its history, Icelandic nationalists crafted a narrative of a Unified Nation, bound together—past, present, and future—by history, heritage, circumstance, and spirit.

2.7.7 'We're Not Like Other Colonies!'

Iceland's status as a colonial dependency—first, under Norwegian rule and later, under Danish rule—played a significant role in the country's nationalist struggle and formation of its cultural-political identity (Loftsdóttir 2011; Bergmann 2017). Loftsdóttir (2011) argues that the contemporary Icelandic identity is still very much informed by "the interwoven racial, gendered, and nationalistic ideologies associated with Europe's colonial project" (p. 12). During their independence struggle, Icelanders strongly identified with and benefitted from Europe's "meta-narratives of civilization" (Loftsdóttir 2011:13) despite being colonized themselves—a position been described as "colonial complicity" (Keskinen, Skaptadóttir, and Toivanen 2019:5; Loftsdóttir 2011). Within Europe, Icelanders had an insecure identity or "ambiguous status"

(Loftsdóttir 2011:16), occupying a liminal space between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized'[41]. Considering themselves among the 'civilized,' Icelanders viewed their colonial situation as an 'unnatural one'[42] (Hálfdánsson 2000; Loftsdottir 2011; 2014), aligning themselves with Europe's project of imperialism (Bergmann 2017). They sought to separate themselves from other subjugated and colonized peoples—like those from Greenland and Africa—by articulating their superiority and thus, establishing difference (Bergmann 2017; Loftsdóttir 2011; 2014).

Longing to be on the 'right side' of the imperialist duality like other European nations, Icelanders, Nielsen Gremaud (2017) notes, distanced themselves from those associated with the Indigenous Far North[43] and characterized themselves as belonging to the Germanic North. This relates to Shield's (1991) description of spaces being mapped as "systems of centres and peripheries" (p. 3). In the race towards modernization, development and 'progress', to be peripheral is to be marginal— "on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other" (Shields 1991:3; Pritchard and Morgan 2001). Iceland's identity was, therefore, informed by the dual-subject position they occupied under colonialism. Loftsdóttir (2011) writes about the importance of analysing colonialism and its impact on

[41] Loftsdóttir (2014) notes that in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, school textbooks enforced the idea of a 'superior' European civilization embodied in 'white', 'civilized' men. There was also a long tradition in European texts that represented Icelanders as "backward, uncivilized, lazy, and ignorant" (Loftsdóttir 2014:31). Icelanders, therefore, were not fully seen as civilized, but were able to make distinctions between themselves and other colonial dependencies, like Africa, due to their connections to whiteness and masculinity (Loftsdóttir 2014). This subject-position, rooted in racist tropes and anti-Blackness, is further explored by Loftsdóttir (2014). Given the parameters of this project, I am unable to explore this further. It does, however, deserve further inquiry in future research.

[42] Icelanders viewed their colonial subjugation as 'unnatural' because they did not view themselves as 'uncivilized' or 'backwards', like they viewed other countries being colonized by Europe. In identifying with European colonialism, Icelanders celebrated the colonialization of other countries as 'natural' – the next stage of progress, civilization, and modernity (Loftsdóttir 2014).

[43] The Nordic countries' engagements with colonialism—both direct and indirect—are often erased from their national imaginaries, in favour of a narrative that positions the region as unified, culturally-homogenous (white), and peaceful. Despite repressive and assimilatory practices that sought to erase them from the narrative, Indigenous populations, such as the Sámi and Inuit (as well as ethnic minorities, like the Roma) have always existed in the region (Keskinen, Skaptadóttir, and Toivanen 2019). Given the parameters of this project, I am unable to explore this subject further. It does, however, deserve future inquiry in future research.

contemporary politics through a post-colonial lens, exploring the links between the past and present. Iceland's contemporary political-national identity is the product of its sustained entanglements with colonialism—which she describes not as an isolated historical moment, a 'thing of the past' or 'legacy'—but as an *ongoing project* regularly reconstructed and rearticulated through discourse and practice. Iceland's engagements with colonialism are also useful in highlighting the various intersections of identity.

As critical race theorist, legal scholar, and activist Crenshaw (1989) writes, "dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis" (p. 140). Developed as a critique of the single-axis frameworks that position race and gender as "mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (Crenshaw 1989:139), Crenshaw (1989) developed a concept and framework of intersectionality that would highlight the convergences, or intersections, between race and gender. The concept of intersectionality[44], she says, accounts for the overlapping and interlocking axes of subordination and privilege that exist simultaneously and are often compounding in nature (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) focus on how the experiences of Black women and women of colour (1991) are often shaped by intersecting patterns of discrimination "highlights the need", she says, "to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (p. 1245). Intersectionality, she says, should be expanded to include other realms of identity and experience (such as age, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, class etc.) as it offers an analysis of power dynamics (Crenshaw 1991). Power, Crenshaw (1991) writes, "is clustered around certain [value-laden] categories" (p. 1297). These categories

subordinate some, and privilege others, working to establish and uphold social hierarchies and ideologies (Krenshaw 1991). As an analytical framework, intersectionality reminds us that identity is a not a binary, but a prism, where oppressions and privileges often co-exist in various refractions. Iceland's identity perfectly exemplifies this dynamic.

2.7.8 Old Imaginary, New World: Contemporary Iceland

Achieving full independence from the Danish Crown in 1944 was a triumphant victory for Icelanders; after centuries of suffering, *finally* – destiny realized. In his account of what makes a nation, Renan (1882) describes "suffering in common" (p. 19) as the ultimate unifying device, stating, "Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties and require a common effort" (p. 19). Indeed, a shared history of suffering is deeply embedded in Iceland's collective conscience, preserving the myth of the 'imagined community.' In the years following their independence, the nation continued to (re)manufacture and perform an imagined, essentialized version of 'Icelandic-ness' that drew upon inhabitants' historical and genealogical connections to one another. Prior to the mid-1990s, immigrants made up a negligible portion[45] of Iceland's population—in fact, 95 percent of citizens parents' were of Icelandic origins—and inhabitants' strong sense of intimacy was reflective of the region's overall homogeneity (Eydal and Ottósdóttir 2009).

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1990s, however, there was a palpable shift in Iceland's population, as the country—for the first time—experienced the arrival of newcomers (often

[45] While prior to the 1990s, foreign-born immigrants represented a very small portion of Iceland's population, it should be noted, however, that Iceland, like other nations, has long relied on the labour of immigrant workers. in the 1970s and 1980s, foreign-born migrants—arriving from nations such as Poland and Australia—came to Iceland to work in the fishing industry (Eydal and Ottósdóttir 2009:5). Like many other nations, Iceland has long relied on the labour of immigrant workers. Viewed as a temporary workforce and nominal in population size, immigrants were, however, excluded from Iceland's official policymaking (Einarsdóttir et al. 2018:132). Therefore, the foreign-born immigrants working/residing in Iceland prior to the 1990s were, in many ways, excluded from Iceland's history.

referred to as 'foreigners' or 'foreign-born immigrants'[46] in official Icelandic documents) coming to the country in search of work. Iceland entered into the mutual European labour market in 1994, by joining the European Economic Area (EEA) and in 2001, signed the Schengen Agreement—a treaty which called for the abolishment of Europe's internal borders, thus facilitating the free movement of European citizens across member states, also known as the 'Schengen Area' (Loftsdóttir 2017; Schengen Visa Info 2022). In 2002, Iceland introduced the "Act on Foreigners No.96" outlining the conditions for immigration to Iceland. These conditions are outlined further in Chapter Four.

2.7.9 Financial Boom and Bust: Iceland's 2008 Financial Crisis

During the early-to-mid 2000s, Iceland experienced an unprecedented economic boom. The number of migrants in the country grew rapidly from less than 2 percent prior to the mid-1990s to 9 percent in 2009—a 450 percent increase—due to industrial labour needs for the country's large-scale industrial projects (Eydal and Ottósdóttir 2009; Loftsdóttir 2017). In response to the growing number of foreign-born immigrants entering Iceland, in January 2007, the government of Iceland released its first ever policy on multiculturalism and integration which—despite still maintaining strict immigration policies[47]--allowed as Eydal and Ottósdóttir (2009) state, a "certain flexibility on behalf of Icelandic officials" (p. 9) in order to address labour market

[46] According to Statistics Iceland (2022), an immigrant is an "a person born abroad with both parents foreign born and all grandparents foreign born". Within this typology, a second-generation immigrant is defined as a person "born in Iceland having immigrant parents" and a person with a "foreign background" is defined as having "one parent with foreign origin" (Statistics Iceland 2022).

[47] Iceland's Act on foreigners (no.96/2002) was introduced in 2002, replacing the older and outdated Act on the surveillance of foreigners (no.45/1964), which served to clarify matters on the legal rights and status of foreigners, or foreign-born immigrants. In 2003 and 2004, amendments were made to the act, tightening restrictions for work and residency permits, including those related to family reunification. Additionally, an Act on the employment rights of foreigners (no.97/2002) was introduced in 2002, later amended in August 2008, further changing the requirements for work and residency permits, this time, including tightened work and residency permit restrictions for citizens living outside the EU (Eydal and Ottósdóttir 2009).

demands. With the introduction of industrialization and diversification[48], in less than a century, the Icelandic economy was rapidly transformed. A meteoric rise from poor, impoverished colonial dependency to one of the world's wealthiest nations—a true 'rags to riches' story—further solidified inhabitants' belief in independence as teleology (Bergmann 2017; Huijbens 2011). Interestingly, as Iceland became more involved in the global economy, finally receiving the external recognition it had, for so long, vied for, their nationalist rhetoric intensified – an indicator, according to Bergmann (2017), that "the fragility of the nation is always present" (p. 104).

Anxieties would deepen in the fall of 2008, when the nation experienced an economic crisis—colloquially know as 'The Crash'—of cataclysmic proportions (Benediktsdóttir, Eggertsson, and Þoraarinsson 2017; Bergmann 2017). The three largest banks in Iceland (referred to admiringly at the time as the 'Viking Banks') *Landsbanki*, *Kaupthing*, and *Glitnir*—all operating under the Central Bank (*Seðlabankiin)*—accounted for ninety-five percent of the nation's banking system (Benediktsdóttir et al. 2017; Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). Following the privatization of a two of the three largest banks in Iceland, and membership into the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland's financial sector opened itself up to the unfettered flow of global capital—a phenomenon known in the economic literature as "capital inflow" (Benediktsdóttir et al. 2017:59; Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). In short, the three banks had incurred massive foreign debts and liabilities[49] that were, as Tranøy and Sigurjonsson (2022)

[48] According to Bergmann (2017), at the beginning of the twentieth century, Iceland's connection with international financial markets provided the region with an inflow of foreign cash, leading to fast industrialization and the creation of a modernized fishing economy. The fishing sector's volatile cycles of boom and bust pushed Icelanders to diversify and by the end of the twentieth century, Iceland's economic ventures included geothermal energy and aluminum production, tech and tourism, drastically transforming their economy (Bergmann 2017).
[49] In the years prior to the Crash, Iceland's financial system received funding from the European Bond Market (EMTN Market) and the US Bond Market. Later, through their membership into the European Economic Area (EEA), the banks would also collect internet deposits in Europe and increase their collateralized borrowing from the

note, “completely disproportionate to Iceland’s economic size and financial resources, and its capacity for meaningful financial regulation” (p. 388-389). Due to lack of internal oversight, dubious insider trading, and “botched privatization” at the hands of “local cronies[50]” (Gylafson 2018 as cited in Knowledge at Wharton 2018), Iceland’s banks amassed a debt of nearly 115 billion euros – close to ten times the nation’s GDP (Benediktsdóttir et al. 2017:16). In less than a week’s time, the entire Icelandic banking system collapsed—according to University of Iceland economist, Thorvaldur Gylafson (2018), “like a house of cards” (as cited in Knowledge at Wharton 2018).

On the verge of bankruptcy, Iceland turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) who, on November 20th, 2008, approved a 2.1 billon loan for debt insolvency, becoming the first Western European nation to receive an IMF loan since 1976 (Legutko 2018). Iceland would end up receiving 4.4 billion USD total – 2.1 from the IMF itself and the rest, as bilateral loans from the Nordic countries and Poland (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). The crisis was felt across the nation, with the Icelandic króna (ISK) depreciating over 50 percent in just twelve months which, according to Tranøy and Sigurjonsson (2022) had a serious repercussion on households, companies, and the public sector, who had borrowed in foreign currency under carry trade agreements (Legutko 2018; Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). Unemployment rates reached an all time high, the price of import goods doubled, foreign transfers came to a halt, and the Icelandic

---

Central Bank of Iceland (CBI) and the European Central Bank (ECB) via ‘love-letter’ exchanges, where two banks would issue their own bonds, exchange them (often without going through the financial market) and then post each others’ respective bonds as collateral for a loan at the CBI or ECB. As Benediktsdóttir et al. (2017) note, no limits were in place regarding how much banks could issue and exchange in bonds, essentially giving banks “unlimited access to funding” (p. 15) from the CBI and ECB.

[50] Benediktsdóttir et al. (2017) note that based on data provided in Special Investigation Commission’s (SIC) Report (2010), bank loans could be traced back to bank owners and individuals who had close ownership connections with one of the three banks.

stock market plummeted around ninety percent (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). Indeed, as outlined by *The Economist* and the IMF, relative to the size of its economy, Iceland's financial crash was the largest experienced by any country in economic history (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022).

In outlining the 'lessons learned' from Iceland's banking saga, Benediksdóttir et al. (2017) describe Iceland's pedestal position prior to the crash. In 2006, domestic and foreign commentators and officials (like the OECD) publicized their praise for Iceland, lauding the nation for its successful transformation into an advanced economy—*á la* privatization, liberalization, and modernization—thus integrating the world financial system (Benediksdóttir et al. 2017; Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). The nation's high economic freedom, and low government debt was celebrated in addition to other progressive qualities, such as high life-expectancy and quality of life, near-universal literary rates, gender egalitarianism, and virtually non-existent unemployment rates (Benediksdóttir et al. 2017; Invest in Reykjavik 2024). All of this, Benediksdóttir et al. (2017) note, worked to covey to the world that Iceland was "an advanced Nordic country with strong institution and well-functioning democracy that had little in common with emerging market countries" (p. 57). In emphasizing their exceptionalism, dynamism, and financial competencies, Iceland sought to differentiate itself from those emerging market economies they had long been associated with, indicating to other western democracies that they too, were Global Players (Benediksdóttir et al 2017; Bergmann 2017). As Tranøy and Sigurjonsson (2022) write, "[b]efore the edifice came crashing down…Icelandic financial entrepreneurs were viewed as heroes" (p. 392).

The mythos of Iceland's 'Viking Capitalist' economic system meant that bank owners were bestowed with enormous amounts of trust—allowing them, essentially, unfettered access to

bank funds—free from regulatory oversight (Benediksdóttir et al. 2017). At the same time, all of this occurred during a period[51] when the prevailing attitude was still that of “the banks are in the best position to regulate themselves” (Benediksdóttir et al. 2017:58). And while rules on insider trading *did* exist, the overall opacity regarding the inner-workings and ownership of banks (in not just the case of Iceland, but in general) made it increasingly difficult to get a holistic picture of what exactly was going on behind vaulted doors (Benediksdóttir et al. 2017). For this reason, Iceland’s economic crash is also “a textbook example,” according to Benediksdóttir et al. (2017:58) of the era’s numerous policy failures.

2.7.10 Resurrection and Revival: A Post-Crisis Recovery and Comeback

Despite experiencing an economic crash of cataclysmic proportions, Iceland was, in fact, able to make a miraculous recovery. In the wake of the crisis, Iceland went through a period of political upheaval—a period referred to as the ‘Pots and Pans Revolution’[52]—culminating in the formation of a new centre-left government, the appointment of a new Prime Minister, the resignation of the Central Bank of Iceland’s (CBI) head, with the enactment of a new law in the Althing mandating that the CBI’s head be an economist (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). In addition, the design and implementation of IMF’s recovery-programme—structured around four primary components: a highly restricted use of conditionality, the active use of capital controls, a

---

[51] “The rise of Icelandic banks into international franchises,” as noted by Benediksdóttir et al. (2017) “…occurred within a particular set of political ideas that became dominant in western democracies towards the end of the last century” (p. 57). These ideas being that “the best people to regulate bank lending [are] the bankers themselves” (Benediksdóttir et al. 2017:57).

[52] Following the crash, as news about bank owners’ and officials dubious financial practices emerged, protesters began assembling on the lawn of parliament on a weekly basis, banging pots and pans, chanting, “Throw the Rascals out!”. (This, in response to the fact that despite citizens’ knowledge about reasons behind the crash, no minister or official had official had resigned from their parliamentary posts). These weekly protests garnered international media attention and were a vital force behind a new centre-left government—the ‘Nordic welfare government’—taking over. Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir was appointed as the new Prime Minister, becoming Iceland’s first female and first openly LGBTQ+ Prime Minister. The demonstrations were also vital in enacting a new law mandating that the head of the Central Bank of Iceland’s (CBI) be an economist, forcing Oddson (who was head at the time of the crash) to resign from his post. This period of political mobilization is often referred to as the ‘Pots and Pans Revolution’ (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022).

tolerance of bail ins as well as (domestic) bail outs and allowing for fiscal space[53]—is cited as, perchance, the governing factor behind the revival of the Icelandic financial sector (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022).

While it was Iceland's residents who forced to weather the after-effects of the crisis—both financially and socially (as the shame stemming from such an event is particularly eroding to a person's identity, both in terms of selfhood and national/collective pride)—the devaluation of the ISK was salutary in effect (Chartier 2017; Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). The country's tourism industry, which, pre-crisis, was marginal, at best, experienced tremendous growth—a fortuitous circumstance discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Despite experiencing a financial crisis of cataclysmic proportions—relative to GDP, the largest economic crisis experienced by a nation--Iceland was able to emerge relatively unscathed[54], even becoming somewhat of an exemplary case in terms of crisis-management (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022).

---

[53] Each of the four components of the IMF's programme played a fundamental role in the recovery of Iceland's economic sector. The programme's conditionality was, as Tranøy and Sigurjonsson (2022) write, "narrowly focused on dealing with acute fiscal and financial issues" (p. 398) as opposed to other IMF-supported programs at the time that focused on broader, structural reforms. The absence of such demands facilitated cooperation between the Icelandic government and the IMF (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). The use of capital controls defended Iceland's currency, the Icelandic króna (ISK) while, at the same time, keeping interest rates low (lower than what they would typically be in traditional cases of currency defence). (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). The IMF's "de-facto emphasis on…and tolerance of bail-ins" (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022:399) allowed for delayed asset recovery for foreign creditors. In addition, the capital controls in place meant that foreign creditors with 'glacier bonds' could not exchange their ISK-assets into the currency of their choice, offering the Icelandic banking system and Central Bank "breathing space through their most critical years" (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022:399). This did, however, generate strife with foreign creditors and governments. The one-year of 'breathing space' Iceland was granted—before any fiscal cuts would be implemented—allowed Iceland to prioritize its public finances (reduce its debts to a point where interest and debt repayments feasible), strengthen its social services, and make the distribution of income more egalitarian (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022).

[54] This is not to say, however, that there are not still lingering effects as a result of the 2008 crash, as much of the literature has suggested. I say this as a means of emphasizing the nation's ability to quickly rebuild their economy as well as their public image. Although Iceland's banking crisis was the largest (relative to the size of its economy) experienced by any nation in economic history, it did not—unlike other crisis-stricken countries in the eurozone, particularly in Southern Europe—as Tranøy and Sigurjonsson (2022) note, "translate into a sustained recession" (p. 388). This is, at least, the overarching narrative. Danielsson (2013) outlines "the rot underneath" Iceland's dazzling recovery figures. See: Danielsson, Jon. 2013. "Iceland's post-Crisis economy: A myth or miracle?". *CEPR.* Retrieved July 1st, 2024. https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/icelands-post-crisis-economy-myth-or-miracle for more on this.

The recovery period was brief: by 2011—following a period of decreased consumption and migration, an increase in unemployment, and a rise in debt (from 28 percent in 2009 to 130 percent of GDP in 2011)—Iceland's economy was starting to grow, reaching its pre-crisis peak in per-capita terms, by 2016 (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). And by the end of 2017, GDP was 15 percent higher than its pre-crisis peak (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022). Iceland was the recipient of resounding praise by foreign commentators—adding to the longstanding chorus on Icelandic exceptionalism—for their 'miraculous' recovery. In addition, citizens were revered for their conviction and tenacity to not only weather but emerge triumphantly from the sharp vicissitudes of economic despair. This, too, helped to both preserve and propel Iceland's idealized imaginary onwards.

2.7.11 Iceland's Unexpected Uptick: Tourism's 'Late-Bloomer'

Following the crash of their financial system—colloquially known as 'The Crash'—Iceland's economic downfall became a bona fide 'media event', coursing the international news circuit (Chartier 2011). Articles written by the foreign press—chastising Iceland for its financial irresponsibility and hubris, its arrogance and excess, were published in the thousands, tarnishing the small nation's reputation (seemingly) beyond repair (Chartier 2011). The crisis was both deeply humiliating and deeply destabilizing for Icelanders, whose national identity and image, Chartier (2011) says, "underwent a complete and sudden reversal" (p. 27). The nation's extensively-covered fall-from-grace did, however, reveal itself as rather fortuitous: the devaluation of the ISK led to an uptick in international tourism, a sector in which pre-crisis, contributed only marginally to Iceland's economy (Tranøy and Sigurjonsson 2022).

The volcanic eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010, however, thrust Iceland back into the foreign media's spotlight of scrutiny when volcanic ash from the eruption brought European air

travel to a sudden and decisive halt (Surette 2023; Visit Iceland 2023). Over the next five days, as the ash continued to migrate, blanketing much of Europe and the North Atlantic Ocean, a no-fly zone was imposed over a large portion of European airspace (Surette 2023; Visit Iceland 2023). In total, an estimated 100,000 flights were cancelled, affecting tens of millions of travellers, as well as international trade relations (Corfield 2023; Surette 2023; Visit Iceland 2023). The eruption (and subsequent airspace disruption caused by the heavy volcanic ash) prompted a flurry of negative media coverage that painted Iceland as a dangerous tourist destination, resulting in an immediate 22 percent drop in tourist arrivals—a devastating blow for Iceland, whose tourism market had just recently begun to flourish (Gaitens 2022; Gore 2010).

2.7.12 Inspired by Iceland: A Brand and Tourist Destination Borne out of Crisis

Just as quickly as it emerged, the unanticipated boon of Iceland's financial crisis—the remarkable growth of its once-dormant tourism industry—was just as quickly jeopardized following Eyjafjallajökull's eruption in 2010. In an effort to thwart the negative misconceptions about travelling to Iceland, the Government of Iceland, the City of Reykjavik, airlines Icelandair and Icelandic Express, Business Iceland, and around eighty other tourism-related companies joined forces to launch the promotional marketing-based platform, *Inspired by Iceland* (Gore 2010). Inspired by Iceland's first campaign launched in the summer of 2010, with "Iceland Hour"—a national online event that encouraged Icelanders to send messages to their friends and family (accompanied by a link directing users to Inspired by Iceland's website) to share with their social networks, via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Gore 2010; IPA Social Works 2014). Celebrities such as Yoko Ono, Eric Clapton, and Viggo Mortensen were among the five-hundred 'Friends of Iceland' who shared their stories on the website (Gore 2010). By the end of the campaign, tourist perceptions had changed dramatically, and Iceland's tourism rebounded. The

Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (2014) attributes the campaign's success to Icelanders' "model of unity" (IPA Social Works 2014) which inspired mass participation, with one third of the population contributing to the campaign.

Unbeknownst to Iceland, the extensive coverage of *Eyjafjallajökull's* eruption—despite not being overwhelmingly positive—would catalyze in the coming years, an international "tourist eruption" (Visit Iceland 2023), visitors eager to experience for themselves the "stunning landscapes shown in the global media in connection to the eruption" (Visit Iceland 2023). From 2010 onward, international tourism has been a growing force in the Icelandic economy—now one of the nation's three primary export economies[55] (International Trade Administration 2024; OECD iLibrary 2024). The sector reached peak popularity in 2018-2019, with more than 2.3 and 2 million tourists vising the nation, respectively (International Trade Administration 2024). In 2019, tourism in Iceland accounted for 35 percent of total value of exports of goods and services, with international tourism representing 8.1 percent of the nation's GDP (International Trade Administration 2024; OECD iLibrary 2024). The crises-turned-opportunities of 2008 and 2010 allowed Iceland the opportunity to develop its international tourism infrastructure, transforming the once-negligible sector into one of its top export-earners (OECD iLibrary 2024).

2.7.13 Icelandic Tourism: Structure and Governance

As one of the country's main economic pillars, Iceland's tourism framework involves a variety of stakeholders who work in close cooperation with one another. The organizational structure of Iceland's tourism sector is as follows: The Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs is the governmental body responsible for developing and coordinating tourism policy and work

[55] As outlined on the United States' International Trade Agreement (2024) website, Iceland's top performing export sectors are tourism, fishing, and aluminium smelting.

(Government of Iceland 2024). All departments, boards, funds, and stakeholder relations operate under the auspices of the Ministry (Government of Iceland 2024. As a branch of the Ministry, the Department of Culture also oversees the Department of Tourism, "responsible for developing and executing an official tourism policy, proposing legislation in the field of tourism, and coordinating the work of various governmental bodies with regards to tourist issues" (Government of Iceland 2024). Operating under the Department of Tourism is the Icelandic Tourist Board (Iceland's national tourism authority), the Tourist Site Protection Fund, the Route Development Fund, and the Tourism Task Force (Government of Iceland 2024). The Ministry also works in tandem with Business Iceland—a "public-private partnership established to improve the competitiveness of Icelandic companies in foreign markets and to stimulate economic growth through increased export [as well as] [promote] Iceland as a tourism destination [and] assisting in the promotion of Icelandic culture abroad" (Government of Iceland 2024)—to promote Icelandic tourism, via Visit Iceland. Visit Iceland is the country's "official destination marketing office aiming to attract visitors to the country" (Government of Iceland 2024) under which Inspired by Iceland— "Iceland's official destination brand"—operates (Government of Iceland 2024). Owned and operated by Business Iceland, Inspired by Iceland and Inspired by Iceland North America[56] promote Icelandic products, culture, and tourism via online-based marketing campaigns and partnerships (Visit Iceland 2024).

[56] On Inspired by Iceland's website, Inspired by Iceland is described as "a public-private communication platform to promote Icelandic products…[owned] and operated by Business Iceland" (Inspired by Iceland 2024). Underneath this, Inspired by Iceland North America described as "a cooperative marketing organization comprised of top Iceland brands that promote the tourism, services, products, and culture of Iceland to a North American audience…[t]hrough a series of robust online channels…[that] bridges the gap between Iceland and North America in engaging and meaningful ways" (Inspired by Iceland 2024). In all the other sources I use, there is no distinction between Inspired by Iceland and Inspired by Iceland North America. Though I highlight the distinction between Inspired by Iceland and Inspired by Iceland North America here, throughout the rest of this paper, I do not and instead, operate from the assumption that in the ad campaigns analyzed, Inspired by Iceland and Inspired by Iceland North America are working in conjunction with one another and thus, do not make the distinction between the two.

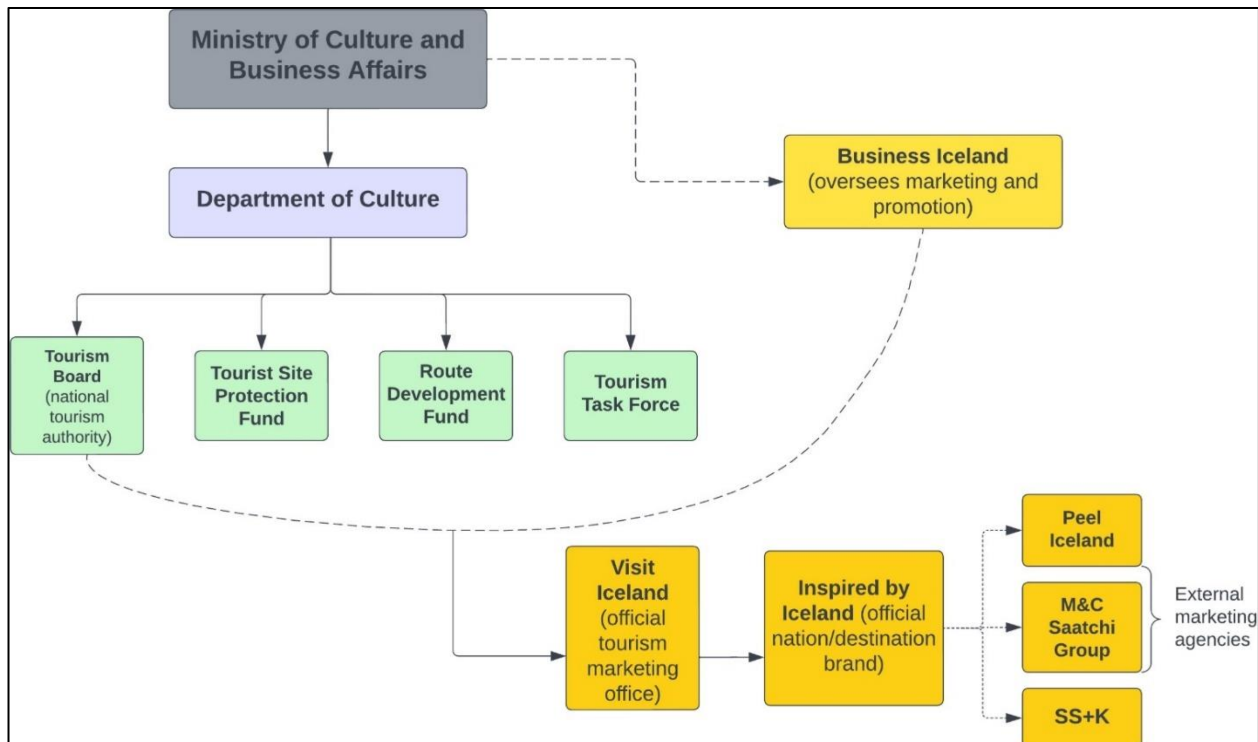

Figure 1: A flow chart of the various governmental bodies and stakeholders involved in Iceland's tourism sector (Government of Iceland 2024; Íslandsstofa 2024; OECD iLibrary 2024).

2.7.14 Icelandic Tourism and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ten years from after its inception, Inspired by Iceland's platform was reintroduced in 2020 by the Government of Iceland (in collaboration with Business Iceland[57]). Forced to weather the impacts of yet another crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic—a three-year marketing-based initiative was established to strengthen Iceland's tourism sector by advertising to foreign markets (Íslandsstofa 2024). Prior to the pandemic, international tourism to Iceland had been developing steadily—each subsequent year more promising than the last—so in 2020, when the nation experienced a

[57] Inspired by Iceland is guided by a steering committee that consists of three members: The Minister of Tourism as well as two representatives from the Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF). The steering committee is responsible for "strategic planning and establishing project goals and major decisions" (Íslandsstofa 2024). In addition, a ten-person board—three people nominated by the Minister of Tourism, Industry, and Innovation, five nominated by the Tourism Association, and two representatives from the local government level—one nominated by the City of Reykjavik and the other, nominated by regional marketing offices—also oversee and consult the implementation of the initiative (Íslandsstofa 2024).

78 percent decline in international tourists from the previous year (486,000 versus 2 million), this sudden reversal of fate was a particularly devastating blow (OECD iLibrary 2024). Although the numbers rebounded slightly in 2021, international tourism rates were still 68 percent below the 2019 pre-pandemic levels (OECD iLibrary 2024). Domestic tourism, conversely—while traditionally stable—increased substantially due to border restrictions with 1.2 million domestic tourists visiting Iceland – a 70 percent higher than the 2019 figures (OECD iLibrary 2024).

The initiative—operating over the course of three years from 2020 to 2022—was granted a total of ISK 2,050 m (14.2 million USD)58 by the Icelandic Treasury with the aim of "[increasing] awareness and demand for Icelandic tourism while strengthening Iceland's image as an extraordinary destination and supporting the competitive position of tourism among Iceland's export sectors" (Íslandsstofa 2024). In line with their previous "Iceland Hour" (2010) campaign, Inspired by Iceland's marketing strategies would eschew tradition in favour of a more modern and online-savvy approach by leveraging popular and participative media and social media platforms. Working in partnership with the marketing firms Peel Iceland, M&C Saatchi Group, and SS+K, over the course of this period, Inspired by Iceland would release four campaigns— 'Let It Out!' (2020); 'Introducing the Icelandverse' (2021); 'OutHorse Your Email' (2022); and 'Mission: Iceland' (2022)—promoting tourism to the country. The first campaign, titled 'Let It Out!', launched in the summer of 2020 when the pandemic's stifling restrictions on movement, travel, and social contact were still being enforced. This, according to the campaign's branding officials, was a strategic move, reflective of the tiny nation's unwavering commitment—even amidst a globally-sanctioned lockdown responsible for the worst travel crisis

[58] In 2020, the Icelandic Treasury granted the initiative ISK 1,500 m (10.4 million USD) for the 2020-2021 period. In 2022, the Government of Iceland and Business Iceland signed an agreement to extend the project until the end of the year, contributing an additional ISK 550 m (3.8 million USD) to the project (Íslandsstofa 2024).

in history—in sharing Iceland with the world (Nudd 2022). When others countries chose to forgo their tourism advertising efforts, Iceland ramped up its campaigning, reminding the pent-up, pandemic-fatigued, wanderlust-seeking viewer at home, 'When this is all over, Your Experience Awaits (Nudd 2022).

2.7.15 Conclusion

Critical constructivist theories argue that knowledge is multidimensional, intersubjective, and contextual, continuously created and recreated through human interaction. The interests of the elite, however, are reflected in hegemonic discourses of knowledge (Manning 2024; Quist-Adade 2019). By drawing on critical constructivist theories from a variety of disciplines, this chapter aims to show how geography, identity, and branding practices are all intimately connected. As a form of nation branding, tourism practices—in their visual and discursive representations of place—play an important role in manufacturing and circulating a distilled version of place (through the process of 'spatialization'). This narrative version of place—central to the overall nation branding process—is simplified for consumptive purposes. Here, place must be legible, highly refined, and distinctive, yet cohesive. Also important is the participation of the nation's members and their sense of allegiance not only the nation, but to the project of the nation brand. By invoking the idea of a communion centered around a shared cultural past, an imagined thread of common experience and kinship is formed. In the case of Iceland, this sense of an imagined community—borne from their prolonged struggle for independence—has been a dominating feature of Icelandic society; one that, in subsequent moments of rupture and incoherence, has offered both stability and a sense of orientation by looking to the past. Iceland's tourism advertisements are one of the ways the country is able to craft a persuasive and highly

marketable nation brand while at the same time, reinforce and recirculate a nationalist spatial imagination.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter outlines the methodological framework used in this project. I begin with an overview of my data sources and data collection strategies, followed by a discussion on visual culture and what Rose (2016) refers to as a "critical visual methodology" (p. 25). From there, I explain my methodology, semiology (also known as 'social semiotics') and its applicability to my project. The chapter concludes with a discussion on my project's methodological limitations, and researcher positionality and reflexivity.

3.2 Data Sources and Data Collection

This project examines the four tourism campaigns released by Inspired by Iceland, Peel Iceland, M&C Saatchi, and SS+K during their three-year tourism-marketing initiative. The campaigns, "*Let It Out!"* (2020); "*Introducing the Icelandverse"* (2021); "*OutHorse Your Email"* (2022); and "*Mission: Iceland"* (2022) are video-based, and available free-of-charge for viewers to access and share via Inspired by Iceland's *YouTube* channel and official website. All data collected for this project was done so using unobtrusive methods—an approach that does not require the researcher to interact with research subjects in order to obtain data (van den Hoonard 2015). Instead, the researcher analyzes content or research materials—often referred to as 'texts' or 'cultural artefacts'—that already exist, such as archival records, maps, statistical records, advertisements, television shows, films, photographs, newspapers, journal entries, and books (Rose 2016; van den Hoonard 2015). In addition to analyzing the four video campaigns, I also examine the discourse published in response to each of them. These sources—primarily web-based—include articles published by Icelandic and North American news sources, marketing firms, and tourist webpages, interviews and articles that feature quotes from the marketing experts and stakeholders involved in making the campaigns.

Because this project is both exploratory and highly interpretative, I follow a qualitative, case study methodology. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is, as van den Hoonard (2015) writes, “not in the business of seeking generalizable findings” (p. 27). What it reveals, instead, are the ‘generic social processes’ (van den Hoonard 2015: 27)—social processes and/or elements consistent across different social settings—that may shape individuals collective experiences (van den Hoonard 2015). Crowe et al. (2011) describe case study as a research approach that is “used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context” (p. 1). Conducting a case study of Iceland has helped me develop a thorough understanding of Iceland’s history, culture, politics, and social processes—knowledge that an analysis of visual culture requires (Rose 2017).

3.3 Visual Culture and A Critical Visual Methodology

The term ‘visual culture’ captures the importance of the visual—images and representations—in social life (Rose 2016). Berger et al. (1972) argue that images have always played a role in societies, defining an image as, “a sight which has been recreated or reproduced” (p. 10). “It is an appearance, or a set of appearances”, they elaborate, “which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved – for a few moments or a few centuries” (Berger et al. 1972:9-10). Every image, they argue, “embodies a way of seeing” (Berger et al. 1972: 10), that is, the perspective of its artist. How an image is interpreted and appreciated, however, is dependent on *our own* ‘way of seeing’ as the viewer (Berger et al. 1972). Examining visual images can offer valuable insights into the perspectives, assumptions, beliefs, and affinities held by their artists/creators – as well as ourselves.

All four travel campaigns were examined using what Rose (2016) calls a ‘critical visual methodology’ (p. 25). Rose (2016) makes the distinction between vision—what the human eye is

capable of seeing, physiologically—and visuality—the various ways in which vison is culturally *constructed.* She describes the 'cultural turn' of the 1970s and 1980s that ushered in a new realm of inquiry: cultural studies. Culture, Rose (2016) says, offers social scientists a way to examine the ways in ways in which social life, social identities, social processes, social changes, and conflicts are constructed. Hall (1997) describes culture as "not so much a set of things" (p.2) but instead, "as a process, a set of practices" (as cited in Rose 2016: 2). Moreover, he writes that culture relies on its participants' ability to meaningfully interpret, or "make sense" of what is around them (Hall 1997 as cited in Rose 2016). These made meanings—also known as 'representations'—structure the everyday behaviours of participants (Hall 1997; Rose 2016). In advancing what she refers to as a 'critical visual methodology', Rose (2016) identifies four sites where the meanings of an image are made: 1) the site(s) of *production*; 2) the site of the *image* itself; 3) the site(s) of *circulation;* 4) the site(s) where the image is seen by various *audiences* (p. 25). Moreover, each site, she notes, have different aspects or 'modalities' (Rose 2016:25)—*technological*, *compositional*, and *social*[59] --that contribute to the critical understanding of images. Of particular importance is the social (which encapsulates the social, economic, and political) due to the fact that visualizations perform a social function as well as an aesthetic one (Rose 2016).

3.3.1 Visual Culture and the Production/Circulation of Images in the Digital Age

The rise of digital technology has drastically changed the landscape of visual culture, particularly in terms of democratic access and exploration (Obiegbu and Larsen 2024; Rose 2016). Some

[59] Rose's (2016) three modalities: 1) technological – any form of apparatus designed to be looked at or to enhance natural vision (examples include paintings, television, the internet etc.). Since all visual images are made, in one way or another, technologies are useful in understanding how an image is made, how it travels, and how it is displayed (Rose 2016); 2) compositional – refers to the specific material qualities of an image or visual object, such as colour, composition, spatial organization etc. This modality relates to genre – how images might be classed, categorized, and understood (Rose 2016); 3) social – a shorthand term, Rose (2016) says, that refers to the economic, social, and political relations that surround an image, affecting how it is interpreted and engaged with.

postmodern theorists have argued, however, that the development of digital new media has resulted in the pervasiveness of visual images in Western societies. These new technologies, they claim, enable the easy production and dissemination of images. Long before today's digital age, authors like Williamson (1978) and Goldman (1992) sought to draw attention to the ideology behind advertisements, with Goldman (1992) writing, "Ads saturate our lives, yet because ads are so pervasive and our reading of them so routine, we tend to take for granted the deep social assumptions embedded in advertisements; we do not normally recognize them as a sphere of ideology" (as cited in Rose 2016: 108). In the decades since Williamson's (1978) and Goldman's (1992) work on advertisements, nearly every aspect of the advertisement—its format, delivery, scope, etc.—has changed dramatically because of technology. Technological innovations in areas like data capture, processing, and storage, machine learning, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and algorithmic personalization have actually recalibrated the consumer experience (Obiegbu and Larsen 2024). As algorithms have become more sophisticated, brands are leveraging consumers' input and output data—their search engine history, location (spatial and temporal), social networks, online purchases etc.—to mediate their online experience (Barnet 2009; Obiegbu and Larsen 2024).

Through AI-backed algorithmic personalization, brands can, as Obiegbu and Larsen (2024) note, "think and act in response to the consumer" (p. 3) by means of content-based filtering and recommendations based on personal preferences (Obiegbu and Larsen 2024). According to Barnet (2009), the era of the singular (and indiscriminately-aimed) flow[60] of mass-

[60] The concept of 'flow' was introduced by cultural critic Raymond Williams (1974) to describe the "distinct emotional and psychological experience" (Barnet 2009:93) of watching television through the planned, sequential, and continuous broadcasting of disparate images and messages. When Williams first introduced the concept in 1974, the 'flow' of television programming/public broadcasting was transmitted to millions of households at the same time, in the form of mass media (Barnet 2009).

media advertisements has been replaced by the era of "customized media flows" (p. 94)—a phenomenon she refers to as "idiomedia" (p. 94). "There is not one but literally *millions* of media flows", she says, "assembled or 'aggregated' for each individual" (Barnet 2009:94). Moreover, Barnet (2009) emphasizes that these idiosyncratic and personalized aggregate flows of content—that often feel individualized and thoughtfully curated—are, in fact, "iterable, mass-produced, and apersonal in the sense they have been selected for you by a machine" (p. 95). For this reason, she argues that the aggregation of digital content be thought of as an "act of production" (Barnet 2009:96) enabled by processes of selection, hierarchizing, and automation (Barnet 2009). These more tailored 'flows' of content include targeted advertisements, brand recommendations, brand logos, and branded content, so seamlessly integrated into our online encounters, we often do not realize their sheer ubiquity. As such, the algorithmic mediation of consumer culture has come to play an increasingly important role in the production and consumption of culture. Additionally, this form of oversaturation can also be attributed to the fact that advertisements—in their format, delivery, for example —are increasingly omnipresent. Semiology examines mainstream images, like advertisements, because, as Rose (2016) notes, "they are core to the ideologies structuring contemporary society" (p. 100).

3.3.2 Semiology

Semiology (also known as social semiotics) is a visual research method that examines how images make meaning as well as their social effects (Rose 2016). As opposed to other visual methods that follow a more prescriptive approach, semiology, Rose (2016) says, offers an arrangement of "analytical tools" (p. 106) designed to deconstruct images and understand how they work in relation to broader systems of meaning. Moreover, as a study of signs, semiology offers "an elaborate analytical vocabulary" (Rose 2016: 107) to describe how signs make sense.

A semiological analysis, she says, “entails the deployment of a highly refined set of concepts that produce detailed accounts of the exact ways the meanings of an image are produced through that image” (Rose 2016:107). Semiology recognizes the relationship that exists between knowledge and ideology, namely, how ideology works to legitimate unequal social power relations and inequalities (Rose 2016).

Applying her framework for a critical visual methodology to semiology, Rose (2016) describes the overall importance of examining “the social modality at all sites of meaning making” (p. 109) examining each site’s modalities—*technological, compositional,* and *social*—and how they contribute to an image’s meaning and interpretation. Mainstream semiology is less concerned with its generalizability or applicability to a wide range of materials and is more interested, instead, in examining a much smaller case-study of materials that focuses on the site of the image itself (Rose 2016). The most fundamental unit of mainstream semiology, Rose (2016) says, is the ‘sign’ –a concept based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1916) work in linguistics. Arguing that the sign was the basic unit of language, de Sassure (1916) described the sign as consisting of two parts, distinguishable at the analytical level, but in practice, fundamentally integrated into one another (Rose 2016). The first part of the sign is the ‘signified’ – a concept or an object; the second part is the ‘signifier’ – a word or image that is attached to the signified (Rose 2016). The point de Sassure (1916) makes in his distinction between signifier and signified shows, as Rose (2016) articulates, “that there is no necessary relationship between a particular signified and its signified” (p. 113).

Rose (2016) uses the term ‘baby’ as an example of a signifier, noting that different languages use different words for the same signifier (for example, in Italian, ‘baby’ is ‘bimbo’ or ‘bimba’) and that the same signifier can have different meanings (‘baby’ is also a term of

endearment between adults, and ‘bimbo’ in English is not associated with babies but with an adult woman who is generally considered to be stereotypically ditzy (Rose 2016). Her example illustrates de Sassure’s (1916) point that the relationship between signifier and signified “does not depend on an inherent connection between them” (Rose 2016: 113) but instead, “depends on the difference between that particular sign and many others” (Rose 2016: 113). The distinction between signified and signifier, Rose (2016) argues, is crucial to semiology in that it “makes the relation between meanings (signifieds) and signifiers not inherent but rather conventional” (p. 114). Knowing this distinction equips researchers with the knowledge to parse out the different parts of an image, thereby identifying its signs. Once the signs are identified, their meanings can be explored (Rose 2016).

Signs are complex and polysemic and can be a variety of things at once[61] (Rose 2016). The distinction between signifier and signified can, Rose (2016) says, help us understand the structure of advertisements. According to semiologists, adverts work by transferring (or trying to transfer) “visual and textual signifieds onto their product” (Rose 2016: 124). As a result, the signs included in an advertisement’s image and writing will often signify notions of health, quality, taste, happiness etc., with adverts attempting to shift these signifiers onto their own product—a process called ‘meaning-transference’ (Rose 2016: 124). This process is vital to how adverts work and is often done so persuasively, so that certain objects become “the objective correlates of certain qualities” (Rose 2016: 124). Here, these objects become taken-for-granted as possessing certain qualities (Rose 2016). Hall (1993) writes that within a certain community, language, or culture, specific codes may be so widely distributed and learned from such an early

[61] Rose (2016) outlines various types of signs: syntagmatic, paradigmatic, denotive, and connotative—which can be divided into two kinds: metonymic and synecdochal. My project is unable to explore all these different types of signs. For a more comprehensive look at these signs, see Rose 2016: 120-121.

age that they appear not to be constructed but instead, 'naturally given'. In such cases where certain codes have been so "profoundly *naturalized*" (Hall 1993: 95) one can see the ideological effects of a code's ubiquity and habituation.

The relationship between the signs in different advertisements can also be useful when examining how certain signs are used as a way of creating and articulating difference, which is, notably, the hallmark of 'good branding' (Rose 2016, Aronczyk 2016). In mapping the parameters of what an item *is*, it is also, by association, letting consumers know what it *is not* (Rose 2016). Indeed, relationality is a key tenet of semiology, with Rose (2016) stating, "all meanings are relational not only within the image but also in relation to other images and to broader dominant codes, referent systems, and mythologies" (p. 132). This relationality can also be described as 'intertextuality' (Rose 2016: 188). Rose (2016) outlines a number of steps that can be implemented to conduct a visual semiological analysis: decide what the signs are; decide what they signify 'in themselves'; think about how they relate to other signs 'in themselves'; explore their connections to wider systems of meaning, from codes to ideology; re-examine the signs via their codes and examine how they articulate ideology and mythology (Rose 2016).

Using the example of advertisements that feature celebrities—described by Rose (2016) as humans that possess certain qualities a brand wishes to become associated with— she includes a list compiled by Dyer (1992) that outlines what signs humans in advertisements might symbolize. Each category—representations of bodies, representations of manner, representations of activity, and props and settings—has a series of characteristics and attributes (example: in representations of bodies, characteristics like age, gender, race, looks, body etc.) that can be analyzed in order to understand the meaning behind an image (Rose 2016). Images can also be examined based on compositional qualities, like those suggested by Williamson (1978) in her

analysis of how advertisements produce preferred meanings. Considerations include: the spatial organization of an image and its positioning vis-à-vis its spectators; the visuality of an image, namely, what is made visual and what is rendered absent; the use of written text and phrases; and the use of textual or visual puns or puzzles (Rose 2016).

3.3.3 Semiology and Discourse

In his work on the communicative structure of television broadcasting, Hall (1993) discusses the role of encoding and decoding[62] messages in televisual discourse. Discourses can be articulated through a myriad of visual and verbal images and texts (Rose 2016). Historical events in their 'raw' form, Hall (1993) argues, are unable to be transmitted via a television broadcast. Events, he says, "can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse" (Hall 1993: 91-92) and are thus, subject to the formal rules and conditions of language (Hall 1993). The event must necessarily be transmitted in 'message form' in order to make its way to the receiver and, in a later, differentiated moment, enter into the structure of social practices (Hall 1993). According to Hall (1993), encoding is not a singular or isolated event that takes place within a closed system: it draws upon larger, pre-existing circuits of communication and frameworks of knowledge that decisively shape the 'moment' when an event becomes *encoded* as a 'message' or 'communicative event' (Hall 1993: 91-92). The moment of encoding therefore, is critical: it is the entrance point into the discursive.

It is through the encoded 'message form' that events are passed from source to receiver (Hall 1993). However, in order to generate meaning and have an 'effect', the encoded message

[62] In his account of television broadcasting, Hall (1993) outlines the four stages in his theory of communication: production, distribution, consumption, and reproduction. Each stage, he notes, operates in relative autonomy from the others – each with its own determining and distinctive limits and possibilities. During this process, an event must go through the related but differentiated moments of 'encoding' and 'decoding' (Hall 1993).

must first be 'decoded'—made into 'meaningful discourse'—by the viewer (Hall 1993). It is at the moment of decoding, that televisual messages are 'realized' and "[their] meanings signified in the discourse [can be] transposed into practice or consciousness to acquire social use value or political effectivity" (Hall 1993: 93). The televisual sign, he says, is unique in that its visual discourse must necessarily transform a three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional plane (Hall 1993). For this reason, it cannot be the referent or concept it signifies: "The dog in the film can bark but it cannot bite!" (Hall 1993: 95). So, while Hall (1993) acknowledges that reality exists outside of language, he argues that "it is constantly mediated by and through [it]" (Hall 1999: 95) by means of discourse. Discursive 'knowledge', he states, is not "the transparent representation of the 'real' in language" but rather, "the articulation of language on real relations and conditions" (p. 95).

Using the example of advertising discourse, Hall (1993) argues, "Every visual sign in advertising connotes a quality, situation, value, or inference, which is present as an implication or implied meaning, depending on the connotational positioning" (p. 97). As such, Hall (1993) notes it is at the connotative level[63] --the sign's contextual reference/where it is situationally positioned—where signs appear to be the most malleable, where "their fluidity of meaning and association can be more fully exploited and transformed" (p. 97). Hall (1993) also maintains that it is at this level where "the active intervention of ideologies in and on discourse" (p. 97) are best

[63] Hall (1993) makes the distinction between the literary terms 'denotation' and 'connotation', outlining how the terms may be used analytically in relation to signs. The term 'denotation', he says, is widely equated with the literal meaning of a sign. In this sense, the meaning of the sign—especially when paired with visual discourse—is so universally recognized, it is often seen as 'natural', produced without the intervention of a code (Hall 1993). 'Connotation', on the other hand, refers to those signs whose meanings are less fixed and are therefore, their associative meanings are situationally dependable, requiring the intervention of codes for its meaning to be realized (Hall 1993). The distinction between the two terms, Hall (1993) maintains, is an analytic one which can help distinguish in particular contexts, "not the presence/absence of ideology in language but the different levels at which ideologies and discourses intersect" (p. 97).

observed, since it is “the point where *already coded* signs intersect with the deep semantic codes of a culture and take on additional, more active ideological dimensions” (p. 97). The signs used in advertising are intimately connected to the broader ideological codes, or “maps of meaning” (Hall 1993: 97) under which culture is organized and classified. Built into these ‘maps of meaning’ or ‘maps of social reality’, Hall (1993) says, are the “whole range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power, and interest, ‘written’ into them” (Hall 1993: 98).

More often than not, signs are designed to reinforce the ‘dominant cultural order’ of society. Different areas of social life, Hall (1993) says, are mapped out into discursive domains and hierarchically organized into what he calls ‘dominant’ or ‘preferred meanings’ (p. 98) which are then used to discursively assign and categorize new or troubling events, which run counter to taken-for-granted or ‘common-sense’ constructs (Hall 1993). This must be done, he notes, in order to ‘make sense’ of the event. Moreover, Hall (1993) refers to these meanings as ‘dominant’ or ‘preferred’ in that they represent the hegemonic social order, embodied as a set of knowledges, practices, and beliefs about everyday social structures, power, and governance (Hall 1993). It is *through* the interpretation of the codes, he writes, by the means of ‘*performative rules’* (p. 99)—rules of competence and logic-in-use—that “seek actively to ‘*enforce*’ or ‘*pre-fer’* one semantic domain over another and rule items into and out of their appropriate meaning-sets” (Hall 1993: 99). Preferred meanings, in this sense, are simply ideologies.

Enforcing dominant meanings, however, is not a one-sided process imposed from above – it requires audiences’ engagement and understanding of signs, both in relation to other signs as well as themselves (Hall 1993). This practice, though, is hardly subjective as audiences’ decoding of signs are limited by the hegemonic social order imprinted on them (Hall 1993; Rose 2016). When preferred meanings are interpreted by audiences in a way that maintains the

dominant cultural order of society, they become ‘preferred readings’ (Rose 2016: 133). Hall (1993) develops three hypothetical positions from which decodings may be made, calling the first the *‘dominant-hegemonic position’* (p. 100) and situates the viewer as “*operating inside the dominant code”* (p. 100). This position, Hall (1993) notes, is often framed by broadcasters as an “ideal-type case of perfectly transparent communication” (p. 100) since it maintains the hegemonic structures, framing them as ‘common sense’. Because Hall (1993) understands that signs and their preferred meanings are polysemic and open to transformation, viewers can also decode signs from a *negotiated code* or position which, he says, operates through ‘particular’ or ‘situated logics’ (p.101). Decoding from this position, he says, “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements” (Hall 1993: 101) where viewers—based on their “differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power” (p. 101)—decode a text in a way still accepts the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions (or preferred readings) but may partially modify it in a way that reflects their own social position and interests (Hall 1993). In Hall’s (1993) third position, the *oppositional code,* the viewer recognizes the dominant televisual codes but opposes them, and instead, chooses an oppositional reading, decoding the message “with some alternative framework of reference” (p. 103).

Hall’s (1993) encoding/decoding is a fruitful exploration into the ideological role of the media and how meaning is made and articulated, via discursive knowledge. Moreover, it highlights the fundamental role audiences/viewers play in the meaning-making process. As Hall (1993) notes, the ‘correspondence’ between moments of encoding and decoding are not given but constructed, thus giving rise to alternative articulations. Audiences and viewers are not simply passive recipients of messages – they have the capacity for disruption, to resist and change hegemonic meanings. This relates to Fiske’s (1994) notion of ‘audiencing’ – the process where

visual images' meanings are renegotiated or rejected by different audiences in different contexts/circumstances (Rose 2016). Therefore, while this project looks primarily at how, through the use of highly coded signs, Iceland's travel campaigns work to reproduce the dominant/hegemonic (nationalist) version of Iceland, a semiological analysis also recognizes audience's ability to oppose those hegemonic meanings imposed on them.

3.4 Validation of Technique and Methodological Limitations

In my exploration of four of Iceland's tourism campaigns and how, through strategic nation-branding tactics, a nationalist, mythologized version—or 'preferred reading'—of Iceland and 'Icelandic-ness' is reproduced, the qualitative approach of mainstream semiology best fits the parameters of this project. Unlike content analysis which follows a much more prescriptive, systematic, and methodologically explicit framework equipped to analyze large amounts of data (often involving coding schemes), semiology looks at a small sample of data and follows a more interpretive framework to better understand the social effects of meaning (Rose 2016). According to Rose (2016), semiological approaches "demand detailed analysis of images" (p. 142) and "[rely] on case studies and their elaborate analytical terminology" (p. 142) to offer a precise account on the social conditions and effects of images (i.e. how meanings are made, how difference is constructed and articulated through signs, how they work to enforce dominant meanings etc.)

It is worth noting that semiology requires a certain level of reflexivity. Rose (2016) suggests that researchers conducting semiological research should reflect on their own meaning-making tactics, as they are the ones tasked with interpreting the images. Pillow (2003) writes that in qualitative research, reflexivity is often framed as an ongoing project of self-awareness during the research process, which, she says, aids in "making visible the practice and construction of

knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research" (p. 178). In exercising self-reflexivity, the researcher, Pillow (2003) notes, acknowledges their role in the construction of the research question, the research setting, and research findings and remains consciously aware of these factors and their potential implications

The first ad campaign, "Let It Out!", released in July 2020, took the internet by storm, becoming viral just shortly after its release. The other three campaigns— "Introducing the Icelandverse" (2021); "Outhourse Your Email" (2022); and "Mission Iceland" (2022)—were released over the next two years as part of Inspired by Iceland's tourism/marketing strategy. All the ad campaigns—some more than others—received international attention and generated discussion. Following Crowe et al.'s (2011) selection criteria for case study research—advising the researcher to formulate their research question and select their methodology based on access and practicality—my committee and I decided that given the pandemic's restrictions on travelling and social contact, in addition to language/communication barriers as a non-Icelandic speaker, that my research question and methodological framework needed to be revised. The project I had initially proposed—one that would take me to Iceland to conduct face-to-face interviews with racialized immigrant newcomers about their experiences in Iceland—was, given the circumstances, no longer viable. My interest in the relationship between nationalisms, spatial imaginaries, representations of space/place and lived experience, however, led my committee and I to consider how Iceland's nation branding strategies might reproduce certain national/spatial imaginaries and mythologies. Opting to select data sources that were both easily accessible and presented in English, Iceland's newly-released travel/tourism campaigns aimed at international audiences allowed me the opportunity to pivot and realistically respond to and better accommodate my project's limitations.

3.4.1 A Moment for Reflexivity

My insider/outsider identity as a half-Icelandic, half-Filipino Canadian has, undoubtedly, shaped my research process. I would argue that although I am a member of the Icelandic community, thereby granting me insider or "partial insider" (Narayan 1993:676), status, I am just as equally, an outsider. I have never lived in Iceland, nor do I speak the language or know the 'local' customs. With these considerations in mind, my knowledge of Iceland—its history, traditions, language, politics, and so on—as a non-inhabitant of the country is primarily based on second-hand data sources and accounts. As a result. I cannot speak to the lived experiences of Icelanders and my interpretations of the data may not fully capture its nuances. And a mentioned above, many of the assumptions about what it means to *look* or *be* Icelandic are still rooted in whiteness. In my case, my 'Icelandic-ness' is not inherently 'obvious' and is therefore, not often considered. As Narayan (1993) so eloquently puts it: "For those of us who are mixed, the darker element in our ancestry serves to define us with or without our own complicity. The fact that we are often distanced—by factors as varied as education, class, emigration—from the societies we are supposed to represent tends to be underplayed" (p. 677). She says this not to devalue that part of her identity but rather, as a way to illuminate how embedded assumptions about identity, authenticity, and origins—that follow the binary system of insider/outsider, either/or—do not often consider the hybridity of our identities (Narayan 1993).

Merriam et al. (2001) challenge the perceived simplicity of insider/outsider characterizations, arguing that the boundaries between the two positions are not, in fact, as precise as the juxtaposition might suggest. The process of conducting research as an insider/outsider, they note—which includes confronting assumptions about access, power dynamics, perceived homogeneity and the commonality of experience, etc.—is an exercise in

compromise, negotiation, surrender, and ultimately, acceptance (Merriam et al. 2001). Likewise, Narayan (1993) notes that all researchers[64]—though she does place some emphasis on those with mixed ancestry, as she is of mixed ancestry, herself — "belong to several communities simultaneously[65]" (p. 676), thus exhibiting what Rosaldo (1989:168-195) calls a "'multiplex subjectivity' with many crosscutting identifications" (p. 676). In this case, "[w]hich facet of our subjectivity we chose to or are forced to accept as a defining identity can change", she says, "depending on the context and prevailing vectors of power" (Narayan 1993:677). Even from the 'coveted' and so-called insider location, Narayan (1993) reminds us that this knowledge, too, is partial, situated—circumscribed by the shifts, patterns, and contingencies of personal experience. "To acknowledge our particular and personal locations is to admit the limits of one's purview from these positions" (Narayan 1993:679), she says. And in doing so, the static notion of objectivity is challenged, "because from particular locations", Narayan (1993) states, "all understanding becomes subjectivity based and forged through interactions within fields of power relations" (p. 679). In embracing these "positioned knowledges and partial perspectives" (Narayan 1993:679), we grant ourselves the permission to abandon the hapless pursuit of categorical knowledge—premised on positivist notions of 'Truth' and validity and coherence—and instead, reflex towards the unfamiliar, the unknown (Narayan 1993; Pillow 2003).

Reflexivity involves "an ongoing self-awareness…which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge during research" (Pillow 2003:178). And while reflexivity demands a certain level of self-reference on the part of the researcher—in terms of

[64] Narayan (1993) uses the term 'anthropologist' in her discussion. I have chosen to replace it with 'researcher' to reflect qualitative research's scope (beyond ethnographic field research).
[65] Among these communities, she says, is the community we were born into, as well as the professional academic community (Narayan 1993).

how their personal subjectivities and self-location (across axes such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, etc.) influence all stages of the research project—it is not a means for confession or catharsis, nor is it a vehicle for establishing truth (Pillow 2003).I situate my research within what Pillow (2003) calls a "reflexivity of discomfort" (p. 188). Within this sphere, the researcher is encouraged to practice an 'uncomfortable reflexivity'—a reflexivity that "seeks to know while at the same time, situates this knowing as tenuous" (Pillow2003:188). An uncomfortable reflexivity recognizes that research is open-ended, contradictory, relational, and 'messy' (Pillow 2003). Rather than continuing to conduct research that slouches towards the familiar, the hegemonic, Pillow (2003) challenges us to consider reflexivity "not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions" (p. 192).

A semiological analysis of visual images requires a high degree of rigour and involvement. In order to understand the meaning behind an image, the researcher must first examine and interpret the image, deconstruct it, and identify its signs—both visual and discursive—before exploring how it operates in relation to broader systems of power and social processes (Hall 1993; Rose 2016). Like Hall's (1993) statement that "[e]very visual sign in advertising connotes a quality, situation, value, or inference… [and are] intimately connected to broader ideological codes" (p. 97), semiology demands a thorough and in-depth understanding of the connections between visual images (representations), knowledge, and ideology (Hall 1993; Rose 2016). In an effort to adequately examine each campaign, I chose to keep my data sample small. As a result, the scope of my project is limited and my findings are not generalizable beyond Iceland in this particular, situated moment.

As I have come to realize over the course of this project, national identity—with all its particularities, tensions, vacillations, and textures—is highly complex and dynamic. It is a

concept that does not offer compact discussions and/or solutions. Iceland is illustrative of this. My hope is that in trying to understand the *why* behind some of Iceland's most enduring national mythologies—as represented in four of their tourism campaigns, released from 2020 to 2022—we can begin to better understand the myriad forces (history, memory, asymmetry, colonialism, market demands, globalization, modernization, collectivity, geography etc.) that intersect and inform Iceland's national identity. In a letter to Maggie Nelson regarding the possibility exchange and/or discussion about Nelson's (2011) book *The Art of Cruelty*, Björk (2019) writes, "i am sorry for my clumsy beginning and if you want to offer other subject matters / i am all in / or another format / or another angle to start from . . . . . / consider this a simply a suggestion / of where to start" [sic] (as cited in Nelson 2024:180). This project, if anything, is a call for further conversation. What I offer is a single thread that, as one can only hope, will contribute (albeit in a small way) to this discursive tapestry.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic when the tourism industry was effectively on pause, Iceland turned crisis into opportunity, releasing a series of commercials enticing tourists to visit the island when travelling resumed. The four travel campaigns—released 2020 to 2022 as part of the Government of Iceland and Inspired by Iceland's post-COVID tourism initiative, are analyzed in this project using a semiological analysis. Following the work of critical constructivist scholars in brands, branding, and consumption (Ardvisson; Aronczyk; Berger et al.; Bookman; Hearn; Klein; Pike), nation states and nationalisms (Anderson; Cox), place-making, geographies and spatializations (Johansson; Massey; Shields; Tuan) and visual representations, mythologies, histories, and imaginations (Bachelard; Essebo; Hall; Ricoeur), my project critically examines the role Iceland's tourism advertisements—an extension of the country's place/nation branding strategies—and tourist imaginaries play in the (re)articulation of a mythologized Icelandic national imaginary and identity. In my analysis of Inspired by Iceland's four tourism campaigns, 'Let It Out!' (2020); 'Introducing the Icelandverse' (2021); 'OutHorse Your Email' (2022); and 'Mission: Iceland' (2022), I develop four key themes—presented as 'mythologies'—have been central to the articulation of an imagined Icelandic identity. These mythologies are by no means new. They have long-figured into Iceland's nation-building strategies, told, re-told, and (re)manufactured to the point of naturalization.

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Iceland's nation brand Inspired by Iceland, was launched in 2010, in response to the negative press following Eyjafjallajökull's eruption. The crisis-turned-opportunity of Eyjafjallajökull's 2010 eruption mimics the 1783 eruption of the glacier-covered volcano, *Laki*, that resulted in the crisis referred to as 'the famine of the mist'

(*Móðuharðindi)* (Oslund 2002). As outlined in their historical sagas, the ‘famine of the mist’ devastated the nation’s population. There was, however, an unexpected outcome: European travellers began to regard the nation’s changed landscape—changes that had caused the Icelanders much distress—as beautiful and otherworldly (Oslund 2002). Following the eruption, Iceland was regarded as a natural ‘laboratory’ by early-nineteenth century geologists, naturalists, and travellers, who wrote romanticized interpretations of Iceland’s natural and social history in their travelogues (Oslund 2002). They also believed that Iceland’s unique landscape was reflective of the nation’s spirit and tenacity (Oslund 2002). Iceland’s positive reimagination—from bleak hellscape to sublime—was borne out of crisis. Since Laki’s eruption, other moments of profound crisis—the prolonged struggle for nationhood, natural disaster, economic crisis, a global pandemic—have structured the Icelandic experience and identity. And from each moment of rupture, a silver lining, a shimmering hope emerges. In these post-crisis positions, Iceland has been able to not only restore its national identity, but further cement the mythological and ideological pillars that uphold its nation brand and national imaginary.

4.2 Campaign Overview and Analysis

A descriptive overview and semiological analysis of each of the four ad campaigns, “Let It Out!” (2020); “Introducing the Icelandverse” (2021); “OutHorse Your Email” (2022); “Mission: Iceland” (2022) is outlined below. Following this, my four key findings are identified—supported by campaign discourse—and discussed thematically.

4.2.1 “Let It Out!” (2020)

In July 2020, several gruelling months into the COVID-19 pandemic, Inspired by Iceland, in partnership marketing agencies, Peel Iceland, SS+K, and M&C Saatchi Group, released the first campaign—in what would later become a three-year tourism-marketing campaign. Offering an

off-kilter coping strategy to help alleviate the lockdown-induced-blues, “Let It Out!” encourages viewers to release some of that pent-up frustration and scream to their hearts content. Not just anywhere, though: *in Iceland!* The campaign is two-pronged and features both a video advertisement and accompanying interactive component. Upon watching “Let It Out!” (2020), viewers are encouraged to record their screams and upload them to the Looks-Like-You-Need-Iceland website, where they will be emitted via loud-speaker in one of seven remote locations around the country. As of March 2024, the video has garnered 8 million views on YouTube. Below is a quick summary of the video campaign:

In the opening scenes of the advertisement, we see various depictions of life-in-lockdown: a woman watches the news in bed, sighing as the headline, “More Bad Things Happen. Again” illuminates her screen; a man attempts a DIY-haircut in his bathroom; a woman flips through TV channels on her remote; a man anticlimactically finishes his solo-puzzle only to realize he is missing the last piece; a young boy yells incessantly for his mother’s attention, while she, preoccupied with something else, responds curtly through clenched teeth. The anxiety, palpable, the tension, rising. The scene cuts to the woman watching TV in bed who lets out an enormous scream, the camera panning in close on her face. When she stops screaming, she looks around, puzzled, her screams echoing in the distance. The camera pans out and we see her sitting in her bed, looking at the enormous waterfall behind her. The video then plays a montage of the people shown at the beginning of the advertisement, all plucked from the banality of their lockdown-induced lives, screaming into the abyss in various Icelandic landscapes. The screams continue as other Icelandic landscapes are shown. Text appears on the screen that reads, “You’ve been through a lot. Looking for the perfect place to let it all out? It looks like you need Iceland. Record your scream at lookslikeyouneediceland.com and we’ll release it into Iceland. For Real”.

A large, bright yellow speaker tagged ‘Let It Out!” is shown amidst the landscapes, in lieu of the screaming people shown there earlier. The video ends with text on the screen reading, “Looks Like You Need To Let It Out. Record your scream at lookslikeyouneediceland.com”. During the writing portion of my thesis, the option to record and upload a scream to lookslikeyouneediceland.com no longer exists. The website’s link is still included in the YouTube video’s caption however, upon clicking it, users are redirected to Visit Iceland’s main landing page. Despite being unable to access the interactive, website component of the campaign, there was a sufficient amount of content that I was able to analyze in both the video portion of the campaign and in external media sources.

4.2.2 “Introducing the Icelandverse” (2021)

Released in November of 2021, Inspired by Iceland would release a parody of Mark Zuckerberg’s video “Introducing Meta’, titled, “Introducing the Icelandverse”. The video’s caption on YouTube reads, “The Icelandverse is unlike any other open-world experience with ‘-verse’ in name, because its real. Plus, you don’t need a funny-looking VR headset” (Inspired by Iceland 2021). Zuckerberg’s “Introducing Meta” announces a change in name to Facebook and the parent company behind the namesake app, Facebook Inc. to Meta. This change in name, he says, now “reflects the full breadth of what we do and the future we want to help build” (4:55 Meta 2021). More importantly, it functions as a decisive rebranding exercise, from Facebook-to-Metaverse, with Zuckerberg positioning his ‘Meta brand’ as “the next chapter of social connection” (Meta 2021), a gateway to an imagined future, a “new frontier” (time) that moves “beyond the constraints of screens, beyond the limits of distance and physics, towards a future where everyone can be present with each other, create new opportunities, and experience new things” (5:57). Ironically enough, the Metaverse—described by Nover (2021) as an “immersive

next-generation version of the internet that relies heavily on virtual reality technology”—proposes enhanced connectivity via digital means. Following the success of their first ad campaign, “Let It Out!”, in 2020, Inspired by Iceland and co. released their satirical take on Zuckerberg’s Metaverse, calling their version, the ‘Icelandverse’. In “Introducing Meta”, the camera tracks Zuckerberg as he walks around an expansive, brightly-lit, industrial-modern workspace—what I imagine is supposed to represent is Meta’s headquarters—festooned with windows and skylights galore, bleached wood accents, potted plants, strategic splashes of art and colour, and Scandinavian-mod furniture. As he walks through the space, an impassioned Zuckerberg, wearing an all-black ensemble, addresses the camera directly (albeit, rather awkwardly), making exaggerated hand gestures to really drive-his-point-home.

In “Introducing the Icelandverse”, the audience is greeted by a Zuckerberg-lookalike, Zach Mossbergsson, ‘Chief Visionary Officer’, sitting in a sleek, industrial-modern room, decorated with Scandinavian-mod furniture. Mossbergsson, like Zuckerberg, communicates via excessive hand gestures and addresses the camera in the same stark, awkward manner. He begins by saying, “Hi, and welcome to this very natural setting. Today, I want to talk about a revolutionary approach on how to connect with our world without being super weird. Some said, ‘It’s not possible’, some said, ‘It’s out of reach’. To them we say, ‘It’s already here’” (0:07). As Mossbergsson says this, he walks over to a window, gesturing outside to a cold, tundra-like landscape covered in snow. “Seriously, look” he says, “it’s right here. And what do we call this not-so-new chapter of human connectivity? The Icelandverse. Enhanced, actual reality without silly looking headsets” (0:28). He continues on, walking alongside a large panel of windows that reveal the snow-covered landscape and says, “In our open world experience, everything is real and has been for millions of years” (0:47). We then see Mossbergsson—wearing, still, an all-

black swimming ensemble and a clay face mask (a homage to the now-viral photo of Zuckerberg atop a surfboard in a face-full of zinc sunscreen)—walking on a thin deck bordering the building he was in earlier, leading to a steaming, pale blue pool of water. "It's completely immersive" he says, "with water, that's wet. Humans to connect with" (1:02). In the following scenes, Mossbergsson describes the various 'real' experiences you can have in the Icelandverse, with their accompanying images: aurora borealis, large lava formations, an exploding geyser, a flock of puffins perched mountainside, a small group of people approaching an enormous waterfall, followed by a waterfall montage, a trio riding Icelandic ponies amidst a beautiful mountain-scape, and a close up of an Icelandic pony—its mane billowing in the wind. Crouched on a snow and moss-covered lava formation with mountains in the background, gesturing towards the moss, Mossbergsson says, "In the Icelandverse there's real moss you can [reaches down to touch the moss and hesitates] look at but please don't touch. It's very delicate" (1:28). He then goes on to list the other experiences, which include, "Skies you can see with your eyeballs" (1:32); "Volcanic rocks you can caress" (1:34); "Really big geysers you can observe from a safe distance" (1:37); "Birds you can watch" (1:41); "Waterfalls you can stand near, like this one, that one, this one, that one, and even this one" (1:47); "Horses you can ride, with hair you can touch" (1:53). An aerial view of a vast, fissure-riddled glacier, a fog-draped, snow-covered hilly/mountainous landscape and the black-sanded beach, *Reynisfjara,* are shown as Mossbergsson's voiceover says, "The Icelandverse is a world with possibilities so endless, they'll be here forever (2:00). The video cuts back to Mossbergsson, who awkwardly concludes the ad by saying, "So, join us today, or tomorrow, or whenever. We are really easy going. Now, please enjoy our logo" [gestures uncomfortably towards the upper-left portion of the screen,

where the 'Icelandverse' logo appears] (2:04). As of March 2024, the campaign has received over 2 million views on YouTube, surpassing those on "Introducing Meta".

4.2.3 "OutHorse Your Email to Iceland's Horses" (2022)

Inspired by Iceland and co.'s third travel campaign titled, "OutHorse Your Email to Iceland's Horses" was released in May of 2022. The campaign, like "Let It Out!" (2020) features both an interactive component and accompanying video advertisement. On YouTube, the video's caption reads, "Nothing ruins a glacier hike like an email from your boss. Thankfully, Iceland's very special horses will reply to your work emails so you can enjoy your vacation in peace (Seriously). Visit OutHorseYourEmail.com to try it. https://www.visiticeland.com/outhorse-your-email/" (Inspired by Iceland 2022). Following the link redirects users from YouTube to the 'OutHorse Your Email' page on the Visit Iceland—Iceland's official tourism website, owned and operated as a faction of Business Iceland—website. Below the bold yellow "/OutHorse<Your_Email>" heading, the text reads, "Disconnect from work and let the horses of Iceland reply to your emails while you are on vacation (Seriously)" (Visit Iceland 2022). Users can click the provided link to watch the travel campaign or scroll down to read about/choose from one of three horses available to write your emails. Each horse is provided with a thumbnail photo, a very Icelandic name, and a small, buzzy bio describing them. The horses are listed as: Litla Stjarna Frá Hvítarholti: "Types fast but might take a nap"; Hrímnir Frá Hvammi: "Assertive. Efficient. Shiny hair"; Hekla Frá Þorkellshóli: "Friendly. Trained in corporate buzzwords" (Visit Iceland 2022).

Upon selecting one of the profiles, the user is led to a webpage where they are required to submit some personal information—name, email, date of vacation—and agree to the campaign's terms and conditions in order for their email to be 'OutHorsed'. Users also have the choice to

opt-into receiving promotional materials from Inspired by Iceland. Only after completing these steps can users write the email they wish to have sent while they are on vacation. An additional feature on the 'OutHorse Your Email' landing page is titled, "How Horses Learned to Write Emails" (captioned, "Did we really teach the horses of Iceland to type on a giant keyboard? Yes, we did") where viewers are offered a behind-the-scenes look that details "How a ridiculous idea became real" (Inspired by Iceland 2022). The video also gives a micro-glimpse into the treatment of the horses on set. Jelena Ohm from Horses of Iceland describes Icelandic horses as "a really special breed…one of the most purebred breeds in the world" (0:29). Clips of the horses interacting with the keyboards amongst a scenic rural backdrop of snow-covered mountains, craggy, ground rock, a small waterfall and creek, and *Kirkjubær* church —crew members watching nearby and laughing with delight—are shown with Ohm saying, "I think [the horses have] really been enjoying themselves today. They've been playing along really well and having some fun as well. I think you'll be able to see, and yeah, its been a great day" (0:43). Overall, the video depicts a fun, lighthearted experience and atmosphere, where viewers can witness firsthand, the fair and equitable treatment of Iceland's horses during the making of the campaign.

The video accompanying the ad campaign, released May of 2022, follows a twenty-to-thirty-year-old something Icelandic tourist who, amidst her various excursions—a glacier hike in *Sólheimajökull,* a soak in a natural hot spring, taking a selfie in front of an erupting geyser—is routinely interrupted by the incessant chime of her phone. A male voiceover says, "Nothing ruins your vacation like work. Thankfully, Iceland has created the perfect solution: OutHorse Your Email, a revolutionary service where Icelandic horses write real out of office replies, so you can relax" (0:08). Triumphant music plays quietly in the background as each of the three horses are shown, all standing atop a larger-than-life keyboard in front of different Icelandic landscapes—

on a patch of lush, green grass near a lake, in front of *Kirkjubær* church, standing ashore a waterfall—writing email replies (visible in the upper left-hand portion of the screen) such as, "8io: l:;l:oiiþ::" (0:20) and "wFwhxsqjnzgmsrqaaaaaaaaaaaa" (0:25). The voiceover continues, "They are trained in corporate buzzwords. Your boss will never know the difference. OutHorse your inbox and free up your vacation" (0:30). The triumphant music swells, and a short montage of some of Iceland's most iconic landmarks—*Stuðlagil* canyon, *Hallgrímskirkja* church in Reykjavik, *Hvítserkur* sea stack, and *Dynjandi* waterfall—are shown. An aerial view of Icelandic horses grazing in the wild are shown and text appears on screen that reads, "Pick a real Icelandic horse to write real work emails" (0:42). The ad finishes as the narrator says, "Visit outhorseyouremail.com to try for yourself" (0:49 Inspired by Iceland 2022). As of March 2024, "OutHorse Your Email" has approximately 326k views on YouTube.

4.2.4 Mission: Iceland (2022)

The final, and most recent ad campaign, "Mission: Iceland", was released in November of 2022. Despite its inaccessibility, dreams of space travel have always occupied a part of the public imagination. In the summer/fall of 2021[66], billionaire business oligarchs' Jeff Bezos, Richard Branson, and Elon Musk—owners of Blue Origin, Virgin Galactic, and SpaceX, respectively—all successfully launched their privately-owned space tourism programs, marking the dawn of a new era of space travel: space tourism (Margolis 2021). On their website, Virgin Galactic (2024) declares the democracy of space travel, claiming that space "belongs to everyone" (Virgin Galactic 2024). This, despite the fact that a seat aboard a Virgin Galactic spacecraft costs—at a

[66] In July 2021, Jeff Bezos (Blue Origin) and Richard Branson (Virgin Galactic) both successfully launched their suborbital space tourism programs from their spaceports in New Mexico and Texas, respectively. In September 2021, Elon Musk (SpaceX) launched the Inspiration4 orbital mission from the Kennedy Space Centre's renowned Launch Complex 39A (Margolis 2021).

minimum—a lofty six-figures[67]. With the emergence of space tourism, bona fide space expeditions are, indeed, a viable reality for some. The astronomical costs involved, however, have relegated such trips to the dream-world for most. Inspired by Iceland's ad campaign, "Mission: Iceland" (2022)—created in response to the growing discourse and interest in the global space tourism market—pokes fun at the absurdity of the phenomenon while simultaneously suggesting a much more financially-accessible but equally 'out-of-this-world' option: Iceland. The campaign is comprised of two components: a (supposed) giant billboard launched into space that reads, "Iceland: Better Than Space" and its accompanying commercial, "Misson: Iceland". As of March 2024, the video has received roughly 532k views on YouTube. Its caption reads, "[w]ith all of its otherworldly experiences, a trip to Iceland will take your breath away. Not literally, though. We have oxygen" (Inspired by Iceland 2022). Below is a quick summary of the commercial.

The video opens with a white, middle aged Icelandic man[68] wearing a space suit, pensively reading a book titled, "How to Spend Your 15 Minutes in Space" in what appears to be a sleek, futuristic-looking airport terminal. An automated voice on the overhead intercom says, "Attention galactic travellers: all space flights have been delayed. Again" (0:04 Inspired by Iceland). The astronaut lets out an exasperated sign, closes his book, turns towards the camera and says (in a thick Icelandic accent), "We've all been there. You book a million-dollar seat on a

---

[67] In August 2023, Virgin Galactic launched its first batch of civilian tourists into space. Eighty-year-old passenger, Jon Goodwin was among the first to purchase a ticket for the expedition when they went on sale in 2005, paying 200,000 USD to reserve his seat (The Associated Press 2023). As of 2023, ticket prices have rise to 450,000 dollars (The Associated Press 2023). This still, perhaps, chump change in comparison to seat on Musks' SpaceX orbital space tour, which costs an estimated 50 million dollars (Margolis 2021).

[68] The actor in the commercial is Icelandic actor, Sveinn Ólafur Gunnarsson (Nudd 2022). Viewers unaware of the fact that the actor is, indeed, Icelandic, can still surmise the actor in the commercial is Icelandic, by virtue of his heavy Icelandic accent.

spaceship and get all dressed up" [camera pans down to slowly, revealing the astronaut's spacesuit, adorned with an Icelandic flag, spaceship emblem, and a 'Visit Iceland' badge] "for a 15-minute space-vacation, then your space flight gets delayed. But did you know, there's an out-of-this-world experience that's a lot closer, doesn't cost millions of dollars, and has *oxygen*? (0:12). The scene cuts and the astronaut yells, "Right here, in Iceland!" (0:33) as he stands amidst a vast, jagged landscape, surrounded by volcanic rock formations and snow-capped mountains. His words, "In Iceland!" echo and each time, a different image of Icelandic landscape appears –dark-turquoise oceanic waters lapping against a large, black, moss-covered volcanic rock peninsula, a sprawling low mountain range covered in a blanket of moss, and a far-away view of a quaint interior costal town, little houses nestled between mountains and the ocean. "Look at these lunar landscapes" (0:38) he says as he walks through a lava field, wearing a full spacesuit. In the next scene, we see a close-up shot of the astronaut in his helmet, the reflection of the aurora borealis in his visor. He lifts his visor and looks at the sky, in awe. The camera turns, revealing the neon green lights dancing in the sky and the astronaut says, "Alien light forms" (0:47). Next, we see the astronaut approaching a couple dining in a rustic, dimly lit restaurant, fork-in-hand proclaiming, "Eat food that's fresh, not freeze-dried" (0:52), smirking, as he reaches down and heartily eats a potato off one of their plates. "In many ways", he says, "Iceland is a lot like Mars" (1:05) and some of Iceland's 'Mars-like' landscapes are shown: an aerial view of the sulfur springs, its cracked ground a blazing shade of paprika, mottled with steaming sulfur craters and charcoal-coloured vats of boiling mud; magma slithering down a volcano, a brilliant neon. In the next scene, lazing comfortably in a hot spring, the astronaut says, smiling, "…If Mars had hot tubs" (1: 11). A voiceover of the astronaut plays while we see him walking through very outer-space-like landscapes: "So, space tourists, you could keep waiting

for a trip to an endless void, or you could just come to Iceland. And if you already made it to space, just look out for our billboard". (1:19). The closing scene in the ad features a digitally-rendered image of Iceland's billboard that reads, "Iceland. Better Than Space" shown looming over the Earth.

4.3 Thematic Findings: A Tale of Four Mythologies

Following a semiotic analysis of the four ad campaigns and the discourse surrounding them, I have established four salient themes that I present as mythologies: 1) The Mythology of 'The Sublime Landscape' (Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild'); 2) The Mythology of Eccentricity (Iceland as 'Otherworldly' and 'Exotic') ;3) The Mythology of Inheritance (Iceland as 'Primordial': An Authentic Antidote to Modernity); 4) The Mythology of Irreverence (Icelandic humour as 'Irreverent and 'Ironic'). The four mythologies, although organized as discrete categories, are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they are overlapping and interrelated. All four ad campaigns—created by Inspired by Iceland, Peel Iceland, M&C Saatchi Group, and SS+K—were created in response to a pertinent and often polarizing cultural event—the COVID-19 pandemic, Mark Zuckerberg's Metaverse, the pervasiveness of work, and the novelty of space tourism. Each of the campaigns, though different in subject-matter, offer the same solution: a trip to Iceland.

4.3.1 The Mythology of 'The Sublime Landscape' (Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild')

According to Williams and Ólafsdóttir (2022), one of the unforeseen benefits of COVID-19's has been a renewed interest in and appreciation of nature. The pause in tourism brought on by the pandemic, coupled with harsh restrictions that prevented even localized movement, led many people to reconsider their relationship with nature. Like the 'famine of the mist' (*Móðuharðindi)* in 1783—a crisis-turned-opportunity that positively changed the perceptions of Icelandic

nature—the COVID-19 pandemic offered a fruitful opportunity to reimagine the Icelandic landscape (Oslund 2002). In all four campaigns, both visual and discursive depictions of the Icelandic landscape are featured prominently. In 'Let It Out!' (2020), Icelandic nature is at the center of the campaign with SS+K (2020) writing, "[w]hen the world went into pandemic lockdown and could not travel, the last thing anyone needed was another tourism campaign. Iceland gave would-be travellers something they did need—a gorgeous place to let out their pent-up frustrations as cathartic primal screams" where users were invited to record and submit their own screams that they could later, via livestream, "watch them be released [on one of seven yellow speakers situated on the island] among waterfalls, glaciers, cliffs, beaches, and a lighthouse in real time" (SS+K 2020). Lemos (2020) attributes the campaign's success to its participatory quality, where users "feel invested in the product they are being sold". In this case, users were able to—albeit, at a distance—interact with Iceland's landscape and, by virtue of the exercise, develop a more intimate relationship with the nation. Despite claiming that "the last thing anyone needed was another tourist campaign" (Inspired by Iceland 2020), "Let It Out" (2020) was, in fact, another tourist campaign designed to position Iceland as a top-of-mind tourism destination. According to tourism director for Promote Iceland, Guðmundsdóttir, the campaign aims to "…draw prospective tourists' attention to the fact that it's relatively safe to travel to Iceland…and experience beautiful nature without crowds" (Ćirić 2020).

4.3.2 Representations of Wilderness in Print and Visual Media

Right from the time of its settlement, Iceland has been discursively and socially imagined and constructed as 'wilderness'. As a concept, wilderness "often invokes meanings and images referring to wild, remote, untrammeled natural areas, untouched by human influences" (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011:249). Narrative travelogues detailing eighteenth and nineteenth century

European travellers' polar expeditions to Iceland, Greenland, and other North Atlantic countries captured Western imaginations (Oslund 2002; Schulz 2017). These travellers, in search of 'exotic' encounters, viewed The Far North' (also referred to as 'The North' and 'The Arctic')[69] as an undiscovered wilderness, an imagined Ultima Thule[70]. Writings about Icelandic nature eschewed the mundane and familiar for the spectacular and strange, emphasizing the difference between *homeland* and *wilderness* (Oslund 2011). Out of the Victorian era's "polar mania" (Schulz 2017) emerged many fictionalized literary works about Arctic exploration—a subgenre of literature whose genesis is attributed to Mary Shelley's (1818) horror/science-fiction novel, *Frankenstein*—that, as Schulz (2017) argues, "[used] the poles to tell premonitory tales about hubris, irresponsibility, the consequences of meddling with the natural world, and our own ultimate impotence in the face of the forces of nature". In the case of Iceland, earlier travelogues that constructed an image of Iceland as an exotic wilderness played an important role in how Iceland was constructed in fictionalized narratives. Over time, these narratives coalesced, providing the template upon which the overarching image of Iceland would develop (Lerner 2011).

Also, during this time, a growing interest in volcanic activity and eruptions helped catalyze Iceland—once a relatively obsolete rural farming community—into a scientific marvel, capturing imaginations worldwide (Campervan Reykjavik 2023). Despite having never visited the country himself, Jules Verne chose Iceland as the setting of his 1864 science fiction odyssey, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The story follows German Professor Lindenbrock and his

---

[69] The terms 'The Far North', 'The North' and 'The Arctic' are often used synonymously. As such, I use them interchangeably.
[70] Ultima Thule is the Latin (earlier Greek) name given by Greek geographer and explorer, Pytheas, to the Northern landmass he encountered—exactly *which* landmass he reached is unknown: potentially Iceland, potentially Greenland, potentially the Faroe Islands—during his 330 B.C travels to the Far North (Schultz 2017). The phrase (broadly) refers to a distant, Northern, and unknown land: "the land beyond all known lands" (Schultz 2017).

reluctant nephew, Axel who, upon discovering an encrypted clue in an old runic manuscript—written by the fictional 16th century alchemist, Snorri Sturlson—travel to Iceland in the hopes of reaching the planet's core (Bressan 2019). Accompanied by their tour guide, Hans, the men descend into the crater of the Snæfellsjökull volcano— gateway to the Earth's interior—where, in this strange, subterranean world, they encounter geological and biological anomalies, such as living mastodons, a fossilized hominid, and Jurassic era sea monsters (Bressan 2019). The *Mythology of 'The Sublime Landscape' (Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild')* is repeatedly constructed and reinforced in geographical representations of Iceland in popular media by activating what Potter (2007) calls "the [A]rctic spectacle[71]": a type of landscape gaze frequently employed in art history and literature where the "exotic otherness in polar areas' particular colours, landscape formations, seasons, and myths have been displayed" (as cited in Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:36).

The gratuitous use of arctic and wilderness landscape shots in Iceland's tourism campaigns relates to Toft Hansen and Marit Waade's (2017) discussion of local colour and its relationship to cinematic landscapes[72] and the landscape gaze. Cinematic landscapes on screen, the authors note, can "activate a landscape gaze" (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:34)—an art history concept related to eighteenth and nineteenth century bourgeois culture where

[71] Both Potter (2007) and Toft Hansen and Marit Waade (2017) do not capitalize the word *Arctic*. I have chosen, however, to capitalize Arctic, in line with the Canadian Style, which outlines that Arctic should be capitalized when it refers to a geographical region and/or species (Canadian Museum of Human Rights 2024).

[72] Canadian film scholar Martin Lefebvre (2006) makes the distinction between *setting* and *cinematic landscapes* in film. A film's *setting* relates to the film's story and signifies where the story takes place. it is also dependent on genre (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). The concept of *cinematic landscape* relates to the history of landscape imaginaries and practices in art, where place and landscape are used to "direct the spectators' attention away from the story, causing them to gaze at and contemplate the places in themselves" (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). The strategy of directing the viewers' attention away from the story and towards the exterior space, Lefebvre (2006) argues, "can be attributed to an intention to emphasize landscape" (as cited in Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:33). Although my application of the term 'cinematic landscapes' does not entirely fit—given I am examining travel campaigns as opposed to television shows/films—it is useful in that it highlights how landscapes and representations of space/place can illicit strong emotional responses from viewers.

particular landscape imageries, motifs and perspectives used in paintings produce a landscape iconography (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). In contemporary marketing and tourism practices this same landscape gaze plays an important role in shaping tourists' spatial imaginations. Toft Hansen and Marit Waade (2017) describe this trend as "a very obvious genealogy that runs from nineteenth century paintings into a present-day visual mind frame in film and television drama which is closely associated with the commercial place-branding of an island like Iceland" (p. 257).

In cinema, aesthetic considerations related to place and local identity—like choosing to emphasize iconic landscapes and sites recognizable with international audiences—can also help bolster tourism services, where tourists can experience and encounter places real and imagined (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). This process "from location to destination", the authors note, "includes an augmented experience of the places which are layered with fictional stories, while the stories are layered with actual places and travel experiences" (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:281). Following the 'Nordic wave' in consumer culture, depictions of sublime Nordic/Arctic landscapes in Nordic television dramas, like the internationally-acclaimed Icelandic crime noir drama, *Trapped* (2016), have helped transform the Nordic region into a marketable destination (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). In *Trapped* (2016), Iceland is represented as prototypically-Arctic—austere, isolated, and unpredictable, which, according to Toft Hansen and Marit Waade (2017), might actually "contradict commodification or tourist appeal" (p.255). However, by leaning into popular cinematic tropes, the show's burly, stoic-yet-soft, melancholic protagonist, Andri, in many ways, embodies the complicated yet sublime 'spirit' of the island's landscape, (Loftsdóttir, Kjartansdóttir, and Lund 2017; Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). As Loftsdóttir et al. (2017) note, *Trapped* provides a "distinct sense of place

where the location and landscape implicitly [reflect] the characters' inner mood and feelings" (p. 1234). Representations of Icelandic nature (as well as human nature, as seen in Trapped) in television and film often depict the Janus-face qualities of Icelandic wilderness—a land of fire and ice, severity and softness, permanence and ephemerality—as a way of highlighting the harshness and volatility associated with their landscape and way-of-life, while at the same time, contrasting these features with those that represent a certain plushness and humanity. In this way, representations of Icelandic nature adhere to a system of checks-and-balances that allows the fictionalized narrative of Arctic-Iceland/Iceland-as-Wilderness—a narrative that has become inextricable to spatialized imaginations about Iceland—to persist, but not to the point of alienation, reminding viewers that beneath their harsh exterior lies a gummy centre.

4.3.3 Commodifying Wilderness and the Icelandic Landscape

To assert a strong national identity and nation brand, television and film (co-)producers (both local and transnational) and Icelandic tourism agencies are involved in a close, mutually-beneficial partnership (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). In the emerging economy of screen tourism (also referred to as media tourism), memorable locations from Nordic television series and films—like those from *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and *Trapped*—have become marketable tourist destinations (Rejinders 2011; Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). In connection with the growing market demands of global tourism and place-based/nation branding, wilderness areas are becoming increasingly commodified and promoted as products and sites of consumption (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011; Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). According to Williams and Ólafsdóttir (2022), a renewed interest in nature following the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to create a boom in the landscape/nature-based tourism market. Aside from the pandemic, a rise in landscape tourism has also been attributed to consumers' anxieties

surrounding climate change and the framing of nature as respite from today's increasingly technologically-driven, urbanizing world (Williams and Ólafsdóttir 2011). Iceland's nation-branding and tourism efforts have—and continue to—capitalize on tourists' perceptions of Iceland's topography as pure, natural, and unspoiled (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011). Indeed, the phrase 'unspoiled wilderness' (*ósnortið víðerni)* was used for the first time in 1990 in the *Proposal for a Parliamentary Resolution on National Tourism Policy* which claimed that the notion of 'unspoiled wilderness' was one of the most important resources for Icelandic tourism (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011). Additionally, the recent sensationalization of all-things-Nordic has helped bolster tourism within the region. As the world continues to modernize and industrialize at what feels like rapid pace and the impending realities of climate change loom, 'wild', 'unadulterated', and 'remote' natural landscapes are framed as becoming increasingly rare (Williams and Ólafsdóttir 2023).

In Iceland, the influence of accelerated climate change is resulting in rapid glacial retreat, with many of the nation's small and medium sized glaciers at risk of disappearing, galvanizing tourists to engage in what is being referred to as 'last-chance tourism' (Abrahams, Hoogendoorn, and Fitchett 2021). Last-chance tourism is defined as, "tourists explicitly seeking vanishing landscapes or seascapes, and/or disappearing natural and/or social heritage" (Lemelin et al. 2010 as cited in Abrahams et al. 2021:2) and was first developed in response to a growing interest in tourism in the Arctic (Abrahams et al. 2021). It appears too that as we emerge from the pandemic—a period of uncertainties and limitations—a newfound awareness for the precarity of life and our current condition is developing. And there Iceland was, beckoning with open arms to the anxious, the restless, the overworked, the hopeful, and the adventurous, "*We are here. We always have been. Whatever it is you need, you will find it here!"*.

Iceland's nation branding and tourism marketing strategies have long relied on emphasizing the virtues of its geography and topography. Branding from a pandemic perspective, however, has also led to a reimagination of Icelandic wilderness as *restorative*. Iceland's 'restorative power' was touched on by SS+K Executive Creative Director, Archer (2022), who states, "Because Iceland is so incredibly unique, and it offers so much to people, both as a destination and the landscapes, [it also] makes you feel, and emotionally, it gives you this incredibly rich experience that many other places can't promise" (Nudd 2022). As constructionists would argue, nature is *itself* not ontologically 'wild' nor 'restorative': both concepts are cultural fabrications, shaped by social, cultural, and historical processes that, through the prism of human feelings, relations, and emotions, becomes saturated with meaning (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011). For this reason, Sæþórsdóttir et al. (2011) note that Iceland's 'wilderness' is "more subjective and social *idea* than *a reality* in a natural science sense" (p. 269). Representations/projections of Iceland as 'wilderness' are sustained by the tourist industry and tourists' 'wilderness experiences'. Even after their departure, tourists' may continue to circulate wilderness images and experiences as inherently 'Icelandic', thereby maintaining and perpetuating the mythology of *'Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild'* (Sæþórsdóttir et al.' 2011). This underscores Sæþórsdóttir et al.'s (2011) argument that the identification and construction of an area as wilderness is a "culturally and historically contingent process that evolves over time…marked by changing ideas and practices concerning meaning, value, and uses" (p. 249). In the exchange between imagined communities and imagined geographies, nature, Gremaud (2014) notes, is socially and culturally mediated via representations of nature that rely, primarily, on stereotypical images and motifs. Popular imaginations of Icelandic nature are not manufactured exclusively by tourists and outside agents, in what Oslund (2002) calls, "a simple

top-down model of colonial science, and power" (p. 334). Iceland, too, actively participates in the making of its imagined geography (Gremaud 2014; Oslund 2002). The mythology of *'The Sublime Landscape' (Iceland as Ontologically 'Wild')* —and its associated valuation—is constructed, performed, and negotiated by inhabitants, tourists, branding actors, branding audiences, and a variety stakeholders (Andersen et al. 2021; Gremaud 2014; Oslund 2002).

4.3.4 Northern Mythscapes: Wilderness as National Identity

Grant (1990) argues that "differing perceptions of northern wilderness have caused succeeding generations to attach special meaning to the idea of the north in relation to national identity" (p. 15). Canada's long-prevailing and all-encompassing core myth, the "myth of the North" (Grant 1990:37)—fortified by the assemblage of the nation's lesser and often contradictory myths that impart the North with "special meaning" (Grant 1990:15)—suggests that the country's vast wilderness regions have endowed the Canadian nation, its people, and its institutions with a distinctive quality and character (Grant 1990). Like Canadians, who's North, Grant (1990) says, "has inspired a sense of national unity by creating a unique identity in an American dominated continent" (p.17), Icelanders—in their perpetual struggle for national, and later, global recognition—too, have crafted a cohesive national identity and spirit connected to their wilderness experiences and political struggles.

The most common narratives about Iceland are connected to stereotypical ideas, assumptions, and imaginations about 'The North'—the 'Wealthy North'; the 'Original North'; the 'Utopian North'; the 'Far North'[73] (Gremaud 2014). Although viewed as a site of extreme

[73] Gremaud (2014) outlines Ísleifsson's (2011) different categories/imaginations of 'The North' and their association with purity. The 'Wealthy North' positions the North as a region with great natural riches, such as fish and energy (p.83). The 'Original North' is associated with "a logic of history and identity formation based on a narrative of exclusive lineage" (Gremaud 2014:84). The 'Utopian North' positions the North as "a privileged place where people

conditions, thanks to the 'polar mania' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Northern/Arctic landscapes—once considered merciless and austere—became "magnificent and sublime" (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011:262; Lerner 2011; Schulz 2017). In the 1900s, as a young nation searching for validity, Iceland was, as Lerner (2011) notes, drawn to the "higher value assigned to the North…along with the great importance assigned to nature" (p.239) and Icelanders' most-revered traits—their resilience, strength, tenacity, and courage—were considered a product of the nation's harsh natural conditions (Lerner 2011). United in struggle and circumstance—politically, in their ongoing fight for national independence and geographically, as an Arctic region with an unforgiving climate, topography, and history of catastrophe—Iceland has cultivated a distinct national identity and nation brand intimately tied to an ongoing discourse on survival and landscape.

In his study on spatial and geographical constructions of national identity in popular culture and everyday life, British geographer Edensor (2002) identifies six spatial categories[74] that shape how national identity is constructed and represented in media, examining their use and application in the 1995 film *Braveheart* (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). Of the six categories, the tourism campaigns analyzed in this project rely exclusively on representations of his first two categories: ideological rural national landscapes and iconic sites. Notably absent from Iceland's tourism and nation branding efforts are representations of familiar, interior spaces that Edensor (2002) would describe as quotidian or homely. Instead, Iceland is depicted *as* wilderness, as spatially, geologically, and culturally exceptional, exotic. Pictured in the

---

live in an Arcadian state, in balance with nature…nature becomes a contrast to modern civilization" (Gremaud 2014:84).

[74] Edensor's six categories are: 1) ideological rural national landscapes; 2) iconic sites; 3) sites of popular culture and assembly; 4) familiar, quotidian landscapes; 5) dwellingscapes; 6) homely spaces (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017).

campaigns are cascading waterfalls, rugged, lunar-like lava fields, steaming hot springs, geysers-in-action, black sand beaches, frigid snowscapes, glistening glaciers, and active volcanoes—landscapes that reinforce the ideological image and narrative of Iceland *as* Wilderness. Edensor (2002) argues that landscape imaginaries—and how they are constructed and expressed—play an important role in the formation of national identity and ideology (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). "Landscapes", he writes, "come to stand as a symbol of continuity, the product of land worked over and produced, etched with the past, so that history runs through geography" (Edensor 2002: 40 as cited in Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:43). Likewise, iconic sites—national and geographical symbols and/or landmarks are described by Edensor (2002) as "spatial symbols" (as cited in Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017:44) that invoke historical events from a 'Golden Age' or 'glorious past', maintaining the myth of the imagined community and its shared history (Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017). In the case of Iceland, what's important is not that tourists (or prospective tourists) know the names of these iconic sites and national landscapes but rather, that the *image* and *narrative* of Iceland is synonymous with wilderness.

4.4 The Mythology of Eccentricity (Iceland as 'Otherworldly' and 'Exotic')

According to Aronczyk (2010), nations are already de facto brands. The goal of nation branding (as claimed by the field's experts) is to help nations develop and promote a brand 'essence', or 'core idea' (Aronczyk 2010:75)—to advance national interests, attract foreign capital and investment, achieve domestic and global recognition etc.—that establishes their difference from their competitors. *'Essence'* is a particularly apt term, she says, "since the process of brand identity development is one of essentialism" (Aronczyk 2010:75). The overall effectiveness of the nation brand is based on its ability to "negotiate four spheres of identification: standardization, difference, rationality, and emotionality" (Aronczyk 2010:75). Differentiation is

key in developing and articulating a nation brand's 'essence' or 'core idea' as it is, ultimately, what distinguishes a nation from its counterparts—all of whom are competing against one another in the bid for recognition and resources (Aronczyk 2010).

This 'difference', however, must not be so unique that it is outside "the calculus of exchange" (Aronczyk 2010:75). Crucial, then, is how a nation's 'difference' can be packaged, circulated, and sold as a "viable commodity in the marketplace" (Aronczyk 2010:75). In order to be successful—in other words, palatable, consumable, and coherent—the nation brand must carefully construct, narrate, and perform its 'core idea' or 'essence' within what Aronczyk (2010) refers to as the "globally acceptable zones of recognition" (p.108). Guided by the optics of the brand, the diversity, tensions, pluralities, and multiple trajectories that exist within a nation state's corpus are discarded in favour of "unifying and universalizing tropes" (Aronczyk 2010:75) that unite them under a "common framework of a single 'public'" (p.75). Iceland's nation branding and tourism strategies that emphasize the 'exotic' character of the country are reflective, Loftsdóttir (2015) says, of "the commercial appropriation of the idea of the exotic" (p. 2). The ambiguity of Iceland's position within the colonial world—one in which Loftsdóttir (2015) describes as simultaneously central *and* marginal—highlights the Nordic countries' interlinked and overlapping histories, their relationships to power, as well as their engagements with colonial narratives about modernity, civilization, racialization, and superiority (Loftsdóttir 2015).

4.4.1 Difference Re-evaluated: Commodification of the 'Exotic'

Before the days of polar mania when Iceland was regarded as sublime, a scientific marvel, European writings described the country as 'hostile', 'exotic' and 'primitive' in relation to the rest of Europe (Loftsdóttir 2015). Dismayed by these ideas, Icelandic intellectuals—who, at the

time, were fighting for the nation's independence—sought hard to 'correct' them, attempting to distance themselves from the racialized groups living in places like Greenland and Africa (Loftsdóttir 2015). As time has passed, and geopolitical narratives have shifted, concepts related to notions of 'difference' (such as 'exoticness' and 'Otherness') have undergone profound transformations. Once considered a "devalued [token] of difference" (Loftsdóttir 2015:2), to be 'exotic' or 'Other' in today's globalizing, highly competitive, neoliberal marketplace, is to be different. And to be different is to be commodifiable and therefore, desirable (Loftsdóttir 2015).

Icelanders' reappropriation of their purported 'exoticness'—after centuries of trying to distance themselves from the concept and its 'primitive' connotations—highlights the ever-changing backdrop upon which identities are formulated, articulated, and performed (Aronczyk 2010; Loftsdóttir 2015). For this reason, Aronczyk (2010) reminds us that national identity is "contingent and relational, mobilized to center the collective self in relationship to an ever-shifting other" (p. 79). Factors both exogenous (international) and endogenous (domestic) work together dialectically in a process of mutual exchange and negotiation (Aronczyk 2010). Central in articulating a distinct and cohesive nation brand is inhabitants' wholehearted allegiance to and participation in the nation brand (Aronczyk 2010). By embodying and performing the behaviours and attitudes compatible with the branding strategy—often referred to as "living the brand" (Aronczyk 2010:76)—members are able to project and communicate a commodifiable image of identity—one that is consistent with the goals/interests of nation branding—while also reasserting the boundaries of identity and membership (Aronczyk 2010; Henderson 2007).

4.4.2 Appropriating and Performing 'Exoticness' in a Post-Financial-Crisis Context

Contemporary Iceland's nation branding strategies still, in many ways, mimic those developed during their century-long independence struggle. During this period, Icelanders articulated their

difference vis-à-vis the Danes by emphasizing their Viking heritage, rich linguistic tradition, and distinct cultural customs. Even after achieving independence in 1944, Icelanders' have long relied on the myth of difference in order to distinguish themselves from other groups. Kjartansdóttir and Schram (2013) argue that in a post-financial crisis context, "obscure heritage and exotic images of 'the North' have played a considerable part in the everyday life of Icelanders abroad" (p. 53). In the wake of 'The Crash', Iceland became the subject of intense scrutiny in the foreign media: a cautionary tale of economic mismanagement and hubris and—as reported by the *Financial Times* (2008)— "how excess credit can derail an economy" (as cited in Chartier 2011:92). The situation in Iceland also became a popular punchline for commentators who, despite their knowledge and familiarity with the facts, made jokes that "exaggerated the country's plight and highlighted the absurdity of it" (Chartier 2011:79).

For Icelanders living in Copenhagen during this time, the strategic (re)appropriation and performance of their perceived 'exoticness' and 'eccentricities' offered them the opportunity to reflexively (re)negotiate and (re)assert their identity within new localities (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013). By engaging in ironic performances of folk culture that exaggerated the 'exoticness' of traditional Icelandic Thorri food *(þorramatur)* and food traditions, Icelanders were able to, as Kjartansdóttir and Scram (2013) note, "[capitalize] on the sensational elements of ethnic difference" (p.55) and therefore, "gain access and influence within the strategies of new localities" (p. 56-57). This difference, however, exists within the overlapping spheres of acceptability and marketability and aligns well with what Rees (2015) has described—in her discussion of the 'Nordic-Quirky-Feel-Good' film genre—as "Nordic Quirkiness" (p. 148). While 'exotic' is no longer a feared term in the branding lexicon, the term, 'quirky,' is a softer,

more palatable version of ‘exotic’. Inspired by Iceland’s tourism campaigns appear to benefit from the visual and discursive (re)framing of Nordic exoticness is as quirkiness.

According to Rees (2015), ‘quirkiness’ represents a “kind of exoticism that is non-erotic; [a] foreignness in relation to the Anglo-American cultural context that emphasizes what is perceived to be the strange and charming oddness of Scandinavia rather than the perceived seductive or threatening otherness of more culturally distant societies” (p. 148). ‘Quirkiness’ has become a popular marketing strategy, used to “pique one’s curiosity and interest”, Rees (2015) says, “but [is] still safe and familiar enough not to be off-putting” (p. 148). ‘Nordic Quirky Feel-Good’ stories often vacillate between “representing the realities of human life as complex and nuanced” (Rees 2015:149) and “activating comedy and at times appearing unabashedly nostalgic and sentimental in relation to the groups and places represented” (p. 149). Apart from their aim to entertain, Rees (2015) argues that a more covert function of the ‘Nordic Quirky Feel-Good’ is to both present and uphold the idealized Nordic national imaginary of social cohesion, integration, and inclusion. And on a market-level, the ‘Nordic Quirky Feel-Good’ genre has—like ‘Nordic Noir’—become its own distinct brand “with a set of identifiable aesthetic and content elements” (Rees 2015:157) in a highly competitive, US-saturated market (Rees 2015; Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017).

4.4.3 ‘Otherworldly’ Iceland

“What’s authentic about Iceland—the brand, the country—”, Stern (2022) says, “is it is all about reality. It is about seeing and touching and feeling these magical places” (Nudd 2022). Here, the “cultural authentic nature of reality”, he says, is contrasted with the virtual (Nudd 2022). Guðmundsdóttir (2022) adds, “…yes, we have the Metaverse, but we also have a real, enhanced reality in the Icelandverse…the kind of experience you can have in the Icelandverse is just as

amazing and out-of-this-world as the Metaverse can be" (Nudd 2022). Similarly, in 'Mission: Iceland' (2022) Iceland is described as not only a more affordable option to space travel, but also a *better* one, where visitors can experience "incredible earthbound wonders without the need to launch themselves into the stratosphere" (Inspired by Iceland; M&C Saatchi Group; SS+K 2022). The core message of the campaign, Guðmundsdóttir (2022) states, "is simple: you don't need to leave Earth to have an experience that is out-of-this-world" (Nudd 2022). "There are otherworldly adventures to be had right here in Iceland", she says, "where you can enjoy the same lunar landscapes that NASA astronauts used as a training ground before the inaugural space walk" (Nudd 2022). Framing Icelandic nature as alien and space-esque harkens back to earlier depictions of the nation's landscape as both fearful and awe-inducing: a frontier and vast wilderness teeming with discovery (Oslund 2002; Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011). These tropes are employed in the video campaign—narratively and visually—and in its promotional texts. On Inspired by Iceland's website, accompanying the 'Mission: Iceland' (2022) video is a small text write up that reads:

> Are you looking to escape somewhere more extraterrestrial? Mission: Iceland is a new campaign to encourage travellers to seek otherworldly experiences closer to home. Iceland's landscapes have memorably stood in for distant planets in sci-fi films, such as *Interstellar, Oblivion, Star Wars,* and *Prometheus.* From desolate black sand beaches and rugged lava fields to mighty waterfalls and expansive glaciers, Iceland has the terrain for planning your epic sci-fi itinerary. Plus, we have plenty of delicious food, water, and complementary fresh air! Across Iceland there are alien experiences and topography that will help you truly escape from the ordinary. The lunar-like landscapes and rugged terrain were (and still are) the ideal testing grounds for NASA equipment before launch. Check out this out of this world experience guide with regional highlights across Iceland. Unless you have a NASA or ESA budget, why not look into the Mission Iceland calculator, where you can figure out what you could do with that money in Iceland instead! (Inspired by Iceland 2022).

Terms and phrases in the writeup, such as ‘extraterrestrial’, ‘lunar-like’, ‘out-of-this-world’, and ‘otherworldly’ are also used in the campaign, accompanied by images of the ad’s space-narrator traversing Iceland’s space-like topography of sprawling, rugged lava fields garnished with snow and looming ice-covered craters. In their book of travel and art essays, *The Importance of Being Iceland*, poet Eileen Myles (2009) considers the extra-terrestrial qualities of the island, writing, “Lava is everywhere here. Iceland’s dark grey sweater is everywhere covered in bright green lichen. These landscapes folding all over the country (I almost said planet) say what’s churning underground, what’s running things” (p. 21). Nature, here, is described almost mystically, with a metaphysical presence and force that extends beyond the earthly, reinforcing landscape imaginations of Iceland as esoteric and exotic—a lost planet among nations. Moreover, in the ‘Mission: Iceland’ (2022) campaign, Iceland is described as an ‘escape from the ordinary’. Here, the spectacle of the Icelandic experience is juxtaposed—albeit tacitly—against the mundanity of tourists’ everyday, ordinary lives.

4.4.4 Appropriating and Performing ‘Exoticness’ in a Post-Financial-Crisis Context

Contemporary Iceland’s nation branding strategies still, in many ways, mimic those developed during their century-long independence struggle. During this period, Icelanders articulated their difference vis-à-vis the Danes by emphasizing their Viking heritage, rich linguistic tradition, and distinct cultural customs. Even after achieving independence in 1944, Icelanders’ have long relied on the myth of difference in order to distinguish themselves from other groups. Kjartansdóttir and Schram (2013) argue that in a post-financial crisis context, “obscure heritage and exotic images of ‘the North’ have played a considerable part in the everyday life of Icelanders abroad” (p. 53). In the wake of ‘The Crash’, Iceland became the subject of intense scrutiny in the foreign media: a cautionary tale of economic mismanagement and hubris and—as

reported by the *Financial Times* (2008)— "how excess credit can derail an economy" (as cited in Chartier 2011:92). The situation in Iceland also became a popular punchline for commentators who, despite their knowledge and familiarity with the facts, made jokes that "exaggerated the country's plight and highlighted the absurdity of it" (Chartier 2011:79).

For Icelanders living in Copenhagen during this time, the strategic (re)appropriation and performance of their perceived 'exoticness' and 'eccentricities' offered them the opportunity to reflexively (re)negotiate and (re)assert their identity within new localities (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013). By engaging in ironic performances of folk culture that exaggerated the 'exoticness' of traditional Icelandic Thorri food *(þorramatur)* and food traditions, Icelanders were able to, as Kjartansdóttir and Scram (2013) note, "[capitalize] on the sensational elements of ethnic difference" (p.55) and therefore, "gain access and influence within the strategies of new localities" (p. 56-57). This difference, however, exists within the overlapping spheres of acceptability and marketability and aligns well with what Rees (2015) has described—in her discussion of the 'Nordic-Quirky-Feel-Good' film genre—as "Nordic Quirkiness" (p. 148). While 'exotic' is no longer a feared term in the branding lexicon, the term, 'quirky,' is a softer, more palatable version of 'exotic'. Inspired by Iceland's tourism campaigns appear to benefit from the visual and discursive (re)framing of Nordic exoticness is as quirkiness.

According to Rees (2015), 'quirkiness' represents a "kind of exoticism that is non-erotic; [a] foreignness in relation to the Anglo-American cultural context that emphasizes what is perceived to be the strange and charming oddness of Scandinavia rather than the perceived seductive or threatening otherness of more culturally distant societies" (p. 148). 'Quirkiness' has become a popular marketing strategy, used to "pique one's curiosity and interest", Rees (2015) says, "but [is] still safe and familiar enough not to be off-putting" (p. 148). 'Nordic Quirky Feel-

Good' stories often vacillate between "representing the realities of human life as complex and nuanced" (Rees 2015:149) and "activating comedy and at times appearing unabashedly nostalgic and sentimental in relation to the groups and places represented" (p. 149). Apart from their aim to entertain, Rees (2015) argues that a more covert function of the 'Nordic Quirky Feel-Good' is to both present and uphold the idealized Nordic national imaginary of social cohesion, integration, and inclusion. And on a market-level, the 'Nordic Quirky Feel-Good' genre has—like 'Nordic Noir'—become its own distinct brand "with a set of identifiable aesthetic and content elements" (Rees 2015:157) in a highly competitive, US-saturated market (Rees 2015; Toft Hansen and Marit Waade 2017).

4.5 The Mythology of Irreverence (Icelandic Humour and Performances of Nonchalance)

Humour is becoming a driving force in branding, with twenty-five percent of consumers citing it as the most effective tactic in generating "earned conversation" (Nudd 2022). According to the Director of Visit Iceland, Sigríður Dögg Guðmundsdóttir, humor has become somewhat of an Iceland signature, allowing the nation to stand out in a competitive tourism market (Nudd 2022). "We are competing with destinations and countries that are much bigger [with] millions of inhabitants," she states. "We are 360,000 in Iceland, so we really need to think [things through] differently, [do] things differently…[and] create campaigns that are worthy of people talking about, writing about, and sharing" (Nudd 2022). Inspired by Iceland's post-COVID tourism campaigns have been compared to those released by the branding agency, Maximum Effort, owned by Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds. Both Inspired by Iceland and Maximum Effort's campaigns are celebrated for their ability to tap into the cultural zeitgeist (Nudd 2022). "Taking advantage of a cultural moment" is described by Stern (2022) as the "sort-of holy-grail of where

you see your work get amplified" (Nudd 2022). For such an approach to be successful, "it has to be authentic," he says (Stern as cited in Nudd 2022).

Maximum Effort—who's brand power comes from Reynold's celebrity-status, signature humour and irreverence—has been lauded by audiences and marketing-officials alike for their refreshing, relatable, and authentic ads (Besen 2023). Creating "emotional investment" through "storytelling" (Vega 2023), Reynolds says, is at the centre of his branding efforts. The campaigns released by Inspired by Iceland follow the same tongue-in-cheek approach. And like Reynolds, Iceland's success as a brand is attributed to the nation's commitment to authenticity. "[T]he beauty of Iceland," Stern of SS+K notes, "is that it takes what it offers very seriously—sustainable beauty, all sorts of adventure and experiences—but it doesn't take itself too seriously…if you meet Icelandic people, if you experience it, there is a wink, there is a nod, there is a giggle—that is very authentic to the brand. And I think if you look at all the work, it does have that sense of irreverence…this is very true to who the people are and its allowed us to have a ton of fun with the work we've done" (Nudd 2022). On the surface, the use of humour and parody in Iceland's tourism/branding efforts appear to back up their claims of insouciance. Beneath this veil of comedic irreverence, however, a deep anxiety persists.

4.5.1 Comedic Relief: Comedic Performance as Self-Preservation

When considered in the context of responding to and trying to overcome a crisis, Kjartansdóttir and Schram's (2013) account of Icelanders exaggerated and exoticized performances of national identity illuminates the politically-mediated and cautiously-managed strategies of self-preservation. Icelanders "premediated, and almost defiant [performances]" (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013:63), the authors argue, could emerge only after undergoing "an internal recalibration of self and national identity" (p. 63). By tactically reappropriating these exoticized

representations and discourses in their satirized and exaggerated folklore performances, Icelanders were able to symbolically resist, challenge, and (re)negotiate the terms of their national identity, both imagined and embodied (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013; Schnurr and Rowe 2008). Additionally, Icelanders "darkly ironic sense of humour" (Chartier 2011:81) and ability to "laugh at themselves and…demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity" (Chartier 2011:81) was met with a certain fascination: a quality inhabitants and outsiders alike deemed as distinctively *Icelandic* (Chartier 2011). Studies have shown that in times of acute stress or crisis, dark humour (also referred to as 'black' or 'gallows' humour) is often employed as a protective coping mechanism (Christopher 2015).

4.5.2 Parodic Expressions of Dissent

In their exploration on the use of subversive humour in the workplace, Schnurr and Crowe (2008) note that humour can be a powerful tool for workers to express their frustration and dissatisfaction while simultaneously maintaining the status quo in what Holmes and Marra (2002:84) describe as "socially acceptable and linguistically sophisticated ways" (as cited in Schnurr and Rowe 2008:111). Similarly, Riewald (1966) considers parody[75] to be an effective critical device due to its ability to exhibit a "controlled exaggeration of the salient characteristics of its subject" (p. 127). The perfect parody, he says, "is a kind of critical performance" (Riewald 1966:127), an artful blend of reverence and mockery aimed at "re-creating and exaggerating the fictional imaginative world of its model" (Riewald 1966:129). When delivered accordingly,

[75] According to Riewald (1966), for parody to operate effectively as a critical device, it "must be a willful distortion of the entire form *and* spirit of the writer…capable of following and exaggerating a style and train of thought precisely along the lines that the original author would have pursued from the given premises" (p. 126). The *Oxford English Dictionary's* (1966) definition of parody as "[a] composition in prose or verse in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way to make them appear ridiculous…" is supplemented by Riewald (1966) who notes that it is the "*distorted imitation* of what the OED calls the 'characteristic turns of thought and phrase…'" (p.126 emphasis mine) that is essential for parody to function as criticism.

critical parodies are viewed as palatable and lighthearted due to their indirect and impersonal approach—one he considers a kind of "Criticism without Tears" (Riewald 1966:131). This, Riewald (1966) says, is what makes parody a "delightful form of criticism" (p. 131). "By raising a harmless laugh the parodist," he writes, "contributes to the business of criticism a lightness of tone and an atmosphere of fun which enable the critic in him to escape the imputation of too great seriousness" (Riewald 1966:131-132). Referring back to Schnurr and Rowe's (2008) discussion of subversive humour as an 'acceptable' means of expressing dissent, in developing a 'funny' nation brand—as exemplified in their parodic tourism campaigns—Iceland has strategically cultivated a space to (subtly) challenge and resist the aspects of contemporary culture with which it does not align.

4.5.3 Humour as Protection, Humour as Negotiation

According to Nudd (2022), "[a]s unexpected as it was, the Icelandverse didn't completely come out of nowhere". "This was a brand", Nudd (2022) describes, "that had already been using humour to stand out in a competitive tourism market for many years with impressive results", enabling them, at this particular time, to release what could, perhaps, be described as a more 'edgy' campaign: emblematic of Icelanders' sense of humour (Nudd 2022). What made the campaign so successful, according to Stern (2022) is Icelanders ability to toe the line between being funny and provocative without becoming mean or malicious: a feat he describes as "not very easy, but…very true to the brand of Iceland" (Nudd 2022). And for a nation that has been—since gaining full independence in 1944—as Bergmann (2017) writes, "struggling to find its proper place in the world" (p. 107), the allure of nation branding offers just that. In Iceland's case, although their branding efforts might, on the surface, suggest to viewers a sense of detachment or acceptance, even, of the negative narratives and characterizations that have

plagued Iceland over the years (for example, the narrative of hubris and irresponsibility following the 2008 financial crash), the country's 'funny' nation brand functions, in many ways, as a protective shield or veneer designed to deflect and insulate the nation from the woundings of words and negative stereotypes.

In discussing Iceland's nation building tactics, Bergmann (2017) writes that "the fragility of the nation is always present" (p. 104). Loftsdóttir (2012) too, considers the interplay between Iceland's desires and identity an integral part of the national discourse, stemming back to the nation's fears of being associated with other subjugated or colonized peoples (Bergmann 2017; Loftsdóttir 2012). The financial crash of 2008 reinvigorated these anxieties. Iceland's once-shimmering, internationally heralded image—as the tiny nation whose transformation from (seemingly) 'archaic' to 'advanced' in a matter of years, becoming one of the most prosperous nations on the planet—dissolved when the news of their financial crisis began to circulate. In the weeks following the crash, Booth (2014) writes that, "[t]here was a real fear of social breakdown…there was extreme anger, [a]t times there has been a kind of public depression" (p. 119). Bergmann (2017) notes, too, that misreporting about the crash by international media further exacerbated Icelanders "long-standing fear of misrecognition by foreigners" (p. 104). Iceland's efforts to positively re-establish their image abroad is explored in Kjartansdóttir and Schram's (2013) research on Icelanders tactical (re)appropriation and exaggeration of exoticized stereotypes and folkloric practices in their ironic performances of national identity. The use of humour and quirkiness in Iceland's tourism advertisements functions in a similar manner.

Outsider perspectives (most of which have been circulated by the media) about Iceland—as otherworldly, a wilderness space, an obscure fringe culture etc.—are (re)appropriated and performed in Iceland's tourism advertisements. In exaggerating the traditions of *Thorri* food

culture at dinner parties/events, as Kjartansdóttir and Schram (2013) note, Icelanders engage in what they describe as “an act of pre-emptive irony…to the extent that [there is] no room for ridicule from dinner guests” (p. 56), Icelanders were able to capitalize on their perceived eccentricities. It is apparent that in their tourism campaigns, too, the emphasis and appropriation of Iceland’s quirkiness—a form of self-exoticization—is a strategic move, both in terms of altering the power dynamics in the relational process of identity negotiation as well as in the performance of an identifiable and marketable nation brand and compelling tourist destination (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013). The use of humour and ironic performance in Iceland’s tourism ads can, thus, be considered as a means of re-asserting and/or establishing control over identity narratives (Christopher 2015; Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013).

4.5.4 Laughing Through the Pain: Humour as Communion

Cultivating a nation brand that celebrates Icelanders wry sense of humour also operates as a unifying device. In describing how Icelanders in Copenhagen congregate to perform food traditions and calendar customs, Kjartansdóttir and Schram (2013) highlight the sense of kinship and connection that is nurtured and strengthened in the sharing of cultural practices. From the time of their independence struggle, Icelanders have continued to foster this sense of ‘we-feeling’ by invoking the notion of a collective fate and imagined common origin (Anderson [1983] 2016; Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017). As noted earlier, Iceland’s national imaginary and cultural-political identity (both presently and in its future formations) is developed through what Gremaud (2010) calls a “historically based cultural memory” (as cited in Bergmann 2017:98) where shared historical struggles, ancestry, language, etc. are referred to as evidence of, and to reinforce a sense of duty and community (Bergmann 2017). Humour, too, serves a cohesive function by

reinforcing group solidarity and camaraderie by affirming common values and invoking a collective fate (Christopher 2015; Schnurr and Rowe 2008).

True to Renan's (1882) claim that "the profound complications of history" (p.19) unite members of a nation in forming a collective purpose, Iceland's past—despite being replete with bruises —plays an integral role in maintaining the nation's foundational myths. In developing a 'funny' nation brand—one that emphasizes their perceived 'exoticness'/quirkiness in a playful, almost self-deprecating kind of way—Icelanders have developed a strategy to confront the injuries of their past while, at the same time, maintaining an air of nonchalance. In Quebec's heritage film, the memory of Québécois culture's oppressive and "ignoble past" (Czach 2020:47) "as a conquered people living in virtual enslavement under a foreign power" (Patriquin 2018 as cited in Czach 2020:47) is recalled with a certain reverence. The reason, Czach (2020) says, is that it "reaffirms a past in which Quebec identity was cohesive, shared, and binding" (p. 47); a past that had yet to experience the sense of destabilization that came along with mass societal change. In the same way, by referring to their shared history of suffering, Icelanders, too, can continue to (re)orient the parameters of identity and citizenship around this imagined sense of unity and collectivity.

4.5.5 Satire, Parody, and the Carnivalesque: Communion Through 'Carnival Laughter'

In his analysis of satire in a multicultural world, Julin (2019) examines Mikhail Bakhtin's (1965) political and philosophical views on folk culture, satire, 'the carnival', and 'festive laughter'. Developed during a period of significant political unrest—the Russian Revolution of 1917, and later, the oppressive Stalinist regime of the 1930s—Bakhtin (1965) understood the subversive power of satire—exemplified by the fact that in the 1930s, most forms of satire and irony were prohibited in an attempt to force Russian authors to conform to the singular, homogenous

“monologism of Stalin’s Cultural Revolution” (Julin 2019:268). Because of this, Bakhtin (1965) viewed satire and other forms of Carnivalized literature as a means of empowerment and resistance against the oppression of official culture (Julin 2019).

According to Bakhtin (1965), one of the oldest and most basic forms of folk humour is the ‘carnival’—described by Julin (2019) as “the various festivities and comic spectacles of the marketplace” (p. 262)—dating back to the pagan era of antiquity and the Roman festival of Saturnalia, which would inspire subsequent festivals of the Middle Ages, such as the Feast of Fools and the Feast of Asses (Julin 2019). Though these festival rituals and traditions were, as Bakhtin (1965) says, “linked externally to the feasts of the Church” (as cited in Julin 2019:262), they were fundamentally different from the ‘official feasts’ and ceremonials which sought to reinforce rank, feudal hierarchy, and inequality. The carnival was, instead, an ‘unofficial feast’ that subverted power structures and abolished hierarchies (Julin 2019). For Bakhtin (1965), the carnival was its own “self-sustaining world” (Julin 2019:263)—one temporally distinct from the ‘real world’. As a subversion of the hegemonic power structures and hierarchies that structure everyday life, Bakhtin (1965) considered the carnival, by nature of design, egalitarian, participatory, and all-inclusive: a reprieve from the ‘existing world order’, sphere devoid of oppressive structures of official culture, where group members temporarily engage in “the Utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (Bakhtin 1965:9 as cited in Julin 2019:262).

Engaging in carnival festivities was not, however, simply an act of temporary escape, for Bakhtin (1965) saw the carnival (and its attendant ‘carnival spirit’) as “revelatory and liberating” (Julin 2019:263). As Julin (2019) writes, “For Bakhtin, the true value of the carnival is its ability to shake people from the convention of the *status quo* through presenting the world and human

nature in all its complexities and incongruities…the playfulness of the carnival experience is not derivative and secondary, but instead an authentic expression of the droll carnival spirit underlying human nature that is frequently distorted by the officialdom of culture and society" (p.263). Important here is Bakhtin's (1965) contrasting temporal frameworks that present two opposing approaches to truth: carnival time—one that, as Julin (2019) describes, is "embraced by the whole of folk culture" (p. 263) where time is approached in opposition to the official world, where incompleteness, renewal, and change are embraced—and official time, rooted in notions of truth as pre-established, indisputable and fixed. Emerging from moments of crisis, carnival festivities, Bakhtin (1965) notes, served to reaffirm culture's mutability (Julin 2019). And while carnival festivities have diminished, Bakhtin (1965) maintains that the carnival spirit has managed to persist throughout history via its "new life" (Julin 2019:265) in, most notably, the literary outlets of satire and parody—two literary forms part of his "serio-comic" (p.265) genre, classified by its rejection of the "stylistic unity" of other dominant literary genres, in favour of a multiplicitious and "dialogical" (p.265) approach. Bakhtin's (1984) notion of the 'dialogic' refers to, as he states, "a…means of seeking truth…counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth" (p. 108 as cited in Julin 2019:266).

Like Schnurr and Crowe's (2008) discussion of subversive humour as both a powerful and socially acceptable tool for expressing dissent, Bakhtin (1965) too, identifies the political and social benefits of satirical humour and 'carnival laughter' (Julin 2019). According to Bakhtin (1965), unlike private laughter in response to a "private comic event" (p.9 as cited in Julin 2019:264), 'carnival laughter' is, on the contrary, a shared, ambiguous, universal laughter of "all the people…directed at all and everyone" (p. 11 as cited in Julin 2019:264). As such, he considers carnival laughter to be egalitarian and inclusive as well as liberatory and ambivalent—

a reflection from the "polyphonous and amorphous culture from which it erupts" (Julin 2019:265). Given the multiplicity of voices in the choir of carnival laughter, Bakhtin (1965) recognizes it's "Janus-faced" (Julin 2019:265) nature that can be both "destructive and degrading…and restorative and regenerative" (p. 265). Within the spirit of folk humour, mockeries and parodies of the official culture are driven by, as Julin (2019) writes, "a positive power which seeks to *rebuild and renew*" (p.265) the world after it has been liberated from the dogmatism of official culture. An issue arises, however, Bakhtin (1965) notes, when satire becomes backward-looking and concerned with "consecrating the past" (p.270) by reifying previously established 'truths' and protecting the social order (Julin 2019).

In "Introducing the Icelandverse" (2021), the advertisement satirizes Mark Zuckerberg's 'Metaverse' by juxtaposing it with the 'Icelandverse'. Here, we see an Icelandic look-a-like of Zuckerberg awkwardly engage with the audience—looking rather dumbstruck and uncomfortable as he slowly paces through his surroundings—as he explains the virtues of the 'Icelandverse'. Later in the ad, Zuckerberg's Icelandic doppelganger, Mossbergsson, dons a white clay mask as he sits in Iceland's Blue Lagoon—a cheeky homage to a viral photo of Zuckerberg wearing a full-face of zinc sunscreen while vacationing. Officials from Inspired by Iceland, SS+K, and M&C Saatchi claim the advertisement was not designed to be malicious rather, it was an opportunity to highlight that although the Metaverse exists, there too, exists the "real, enhanced reality of the Icelandverse" (Nudd 2022). Stern (2022) adds in: "There's humour, but [Inspired by Iceland] is not a mean brand, and I think the proof's in the pudding. Mark, ultimately, recognized that and to his credit, acknowledged it, said '*This is amazing. I've gotta go'* and sure enough…about a month ago, he and his family travelled to Iceland, and he dropped a photobomb from 'Icelandverse' on his own feed with all the pictures and talked about the

Icelandverse. So, I think everybody understood it for what it was, and I think, finding that way of being funny without being mean is not always easy but it is very true to the brand of Iceland" (Nudd 2022). Though the advertisement is not overtly mean, it is provocative and immediately after its release, became the subject of countless headlines—from Forbes, Business Insider, People, the National Post, and so on—celebrating the 'hilarious' ad for 'mocking' and 'trolling' the tech billionaire. And by Stern's (2022) accounts, Zuckerberg did appear to approach the advertisement with a good sense of humour, but to become the subject of a viral parody—even at the exalted celebrity level (this is not an endorsement of celebrity culture, but a reminder, rather, that celebrities are people, too, who share the same sensitivities and anxieties as us regular folk) might, in fact, sting. And like Bakhtin's (1965) account of 'carnival laugher', while Zuckerberg may have claimed to be laughing along with the audiences, as the target of Iceland's parody, he becomes the subject of mockery and 'negative laughter' (Julin 2019). Within the ad too, the juxtapositioning of the Icelandverse *vis a vis* the Metaverse presents 'real', tangible experiences as inherently better than those had online. The rise of the Metaverse is framed as a symptom of the modernization of contemporary culture. In a Bakhtinian sense, modernity is the status quo or official culture Iceland seeks to subvert. But unlike Bakhtin's (1965) conceptualization of the carnival spirit/carnival laughter as a means of reorientation and renewal, where the singularity and stasis of official culture is rejected in favour of a dialogic view of culture as mutable and multiplicitious. Iceland, instead, looks to their imagined past as a template for 'authentic' living.

4.6 The Mythology of Inheritance (Iceland as Primoridial: An Authentic 'Antidote' to Modernity)

With the release of their second, third, and fourth travel campaigns "Introducing the Icelandverse" (2021); "OutHorse Your Email" (2022); and "Mission: Iceland" (2022)—a spoof of Zuckerberg's world-building-next-generation-fully-immersive-virtual-reality-driven-

Metaverse and commentary on the rise of space tourism, respectively—Iceland would position itself vis-à-vis the Metaverse and outer space. In response to the 'Metaverse'—the hypothetical, digitally-anchored experience of the future, 'Introducing the Icelandverse' (2021) asks viewers, 'Why settle for virtual when the *real* already exists and has, for millions of years?'. Throughout the video, Mossenbergsson frequently reminds viewers of Iceland's authenticity and tangibility ("Today I want to talk about a revolutionary approach on how to connect our world without being super weird…it's already here…"; "…the Icelandverse: Enhanced, actual reality without silly looking headsets"; "In our open world experience, everything is real"; "…the Icelandverse is a world with possibilities so endless, they'll be here forever").

4.6.1 Escaping the Ordinary: Disconnecting from Tech in a Post-COVID Context

This notion of escaping the banalities of everyday life is also present in "OutHorse Your Email" (2022). When the campaign was released, international travel was once again viable. Like 'Let It Out!' (2020), 'OutHorse Your Email's' (2022) campaign was designed to be interactive, encouraging prospective tourists to select an Icelandic horse to manage their emails while *Out of Office* and on vacation, in Iceland. The campaign set its sights on the modern worker: technologically-connected, increasingly mobile, and—as a result of smartphone technology—almost always tethered to their work email.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first swept the globe, both social and spatial distancing strategies were implemented[76] that required everyone—especially students and workers—to

[76] During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, socio-spatial limits on physical, face-to-face human contact—often referred to interchangeably as 'social distancing', 'physical distancing' or 'spatial distancing'—were imposed to reduce the airborne transmission of the virus. This includes restrictions on social and/or physical events and gatherings outside the household (including the in-person attendance of workplaces deemed non-essential and classes at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary level), the closing of all non-essential businesses, travel restrictions, public-masking, and self-quarantining measures (Cheshmehzangi et al. 2023).

swiftly readjust to a 'new-normal' of virtually-mediated forms of communication and interaction (Arif 2021; Cheshmehzangi et al. 2023). In lieu of physical, face-to-face interactions in schools, workplaces, public spaces, and private dwellings, students, co-workers, neighbours, friends, and family members logged onto digital teleconferencing platforms (such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet) to stay connected (Arif 2021; Cheshmehzangi et al. 2023). Eventually, the restrictions lifted, and social/spatial distancing was no longer compulsory. In-person, face-to-face interactions were once again permissible! Yet, many people continued to work, study, and/or socialize remotely via Zoom-era digital interfaces. Virtual and/or hybrid workspaces, Arif (2021) says, are a more cost-effective alternative to physical workspaces, offering certain flexibilities that were not previously afforded to employees and students. The virtues of Zoom-based, remote work are extoled by some—Lizard (2023) claims it represents "a more holistic approach to life" and it "the key to more temporally and geographically flexible work"—and fiercely opposed by others, claiming a growing reliance on video conferencing technologies is causing a form of burnout referred to as 'Zoom fatigue'[77] (White-Gibson 2021). Critics also attribute 'zoom-fatigue' to a lack of structure, the blurring of personal/professional boundaries, having to multitask and process various modes of information simultaneously, the overscheduling of meetings etc. (Cheshmehzangi et al. 2023; Riedl 2022).

Certain forms of digital communication—that at one point in time, were strictly computer-based—have, by means of personal cell phones, become accessible in real-time. This type of immediacy, however, has created certain expectations around response time etiquette.

[77] 'Zoom fatigue' (a synonym for videoconferencing fatigue) is a relatively new concept describing feelings of fatigue or burnout stemming from the overuse of videoconferencing platforms. It is defined by Riedl (2022) as "somatic and cognitive exhaustion that is caused by the extensive and inappropriate use of videoconferencing tools, frequently accompanied by related symptoms of tiredness, worry, anxiety, burnout, discomfort, and stress, as well as other bodily symptoms such as headaches".

Implied here is the assumption that a message delivered in real time deserves a reply in real time. The solution to the modern worker's affliction, let Iceland's horses do the work for you. No longer burdened with an unrelenting stream of emails, the worker can properly fulfill their tourist role and enjoy Icelandic wilderness uninterrupted. Here, Iceland presents itself, as noted by Archer (2022), as an "alternative to virtual reality and…living inside a Zoom screen" (Nudd 2022). A "side effect" of this new remote reality we live in, he says, is "[the] work doesn't ever stop. You're always having email and Slack[78] and all those things follow you" (Nudd 2022). The campaign's marketing hook—that Iceland's horses will steward your inbox while you're on vacation—is described by Archer (2022) as a "delightful pun" developed in response to the challenges of living in "this new hybrid universe" (Archer as cited in Nudd 2022). OutHorse Your Email' (2022) revisits the same themes—reality and unreality, technological and tangible, authenticity and imitation —explored in 'Introducing the Icelandverse' (2021) but this time, through a post-pandemic lens. The driving narrative and core strategy behind 'OutHorse Your Email (2022)—as well as Introducing the Icelandverse (2021) and Misson: Iceland (2022)—is centred around the idea of Iceland as a reprieve from the "the speed, chaos, and unreality of the modern world" (Nudd 2022).

4.6.2 Parodic Expressions of Dissent: Nostalgia for an Imagined, Pastoral Past

The overarching theme of Iceland's tourism campaigns, as developed by Inspired by Iceland and marketing firms SS+K and MC Saatchi, Archer (2022) states, "is that Iceland is, in many ways, a respite from the speed, chaos, and unreality of the modern world…[an] antidote to whatever the rest of the world was throwing at us and be a place where you can really get what you need as a

[78] Slack is an Artificial Intelligence-powered work platform/" digital-work ecosystem" (Slack 2024) that integrates emails, apps, customers, etc. into one place (Slack 2024).

human being" (Nudd 2022). The idea of Iceland as an 'antidote' or reprieve from the "unreality of the modern world" is one with an ideological undercurrent. Like Berger et al.'s (1972) discussion on publicity images as an aspirational framework for the consumer-spectator who, dissatisfied with their present way of life, is offered an 'improved' (market-based) alternative, touristic representations of Iceland—discursive and visual—sell viewers a nationalist version of Iceland, one suffused with a nostalgia for their pre-technological, ancestral past.

In their analysis of Québécois cinema, Czach and Loiselle (2020) argue that many of the genre's films echo the same socio-political sentiments sweeping the province. The authors note that Quebec's nationalist movement—despite claims that it is not, in fact, motivated by nostalgic yearnings—is concerned with preserving the traditional cultural values and rural heritage of Quebec's past (Czach and Loiselle 2020). Although the movement, according to one of its staunchest supporters, Bock-Côté (2016), is reflective of a conservatist stance, it is not, he says, "a nostalgia for an old world to which no one would want to return, [r]ather, it expresses the desire to find some solid foundation for the future" (as cited in Czach and Loiselle 2020:2; authors translation). Czach and Loiselle (2020) contend, however, that within Quebec cinema, a 'restorative nostalgia'—a term developed by Boym (2008) in her typology of nostalgia (as either 'restorative' or 'reflective') that, as she says, "does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition" (Boym 2008: xviii as cited in Czach and Loiselle 2020:2)— and a deep, painful longing to return to Quebec's (imagined) provincial past persists. Maintaining an unbroken link to the past is important. Like Ricoeur's (1994) argument that the future must adhere to the pre-determined boundaries of the historical imagination—in which history is presented as teleological, singular, non-negotiable—nostalgia follows this same temporal re-orientation; a cyclical return to the past as a means of structuring the future (Santoro 2020).

There are many similarities between Quebec and Iceland, particularly in their denial and/or misrecognition of nostalgia (in both its politics and cinematic/spatial representations). Like Quebec, the fervency in which Iceland protects its language, customs, history, etc. is framed not as nostalgia—a concept often conflated with sentimentalism or melancholia, or with the evocative discourses utilized by far-right populists (Donald Trump's "Make American Great Again" slogan is an example of the blatant profession (and weaponization) of nostalgia); characterizations which both fail to capture the full scope of the term, as both an affective *and* political force —but as a collective obligation, concerned with the preservation of tradition and national identity in the face of its erosion (Mallon 2023; Santoro 2020).

When "Introducing the Icelandverse" (2021) was released, Iceland's sharp satirical skills and marketing agility caught the attention of international audiences. Released as a cheeky rejoinder just days after Zuckerberg's initial unveiling of the Metaverse, the campaign quickly cemented Iceland's status as a 'funny' brand that could deliver an unflinching critique of the cultural zeitgeist. Again, in 2022, Iceland would offer its cultural commentary on the phenomenon of space tourism with the release of the campaign, "Mission: Iceland" (2022). There is an undercurrent of disillusionment with these new, alternative dimensions of contemporary culture—virtual *á la* the Metaverse and metaphysical via space travel—in both ads. A pre-occupation with, or nostalgia for the past often emerges, according to Pratt and San Juan (2014), as "a reaction to the ruptures and displacements of modernity and globalization" (p. 115 as cited in Czach and Loiselle 2020:5). This, too, relates to Hafstein's (2010) work on Icelanders longstanding belief in supernatural folklore as a means of negotiating of cultural identity in the face of social change. "Narratives about the insurrection of elves", he writes, "demonstrate supernatural sanction against development and against urbanization; that is to say,

the supernaturals protect and enforce pastoral values and traditional rural culture" (p. 93). Although the four tourism advertisements analyzed during this project do not discuss Iceland's folkloric culture and elf-traditions, it is worth nothing these narratives of Iceland's "Otherworld" (Hafstein 2010:94)—the 'Otherworld and its supernatural dwellers representing a 'mirror image' of contemporary society; a space in which the traditional, pre-modern, pre-industrial peasant society remains fully intact—the enduring resilience of Icelanders "pagan imagination", as Gíslason (2015:3) calls it, highlights the significant role it plays in Iceland's national culture and national identity and how it is articulated to others (Gíslason 2015; Hafstein 2010).

Foreign-audiences' fascination with Icelanders reverence for the mythical has become a popular promotional strategy for the nation, in which their 'eccentric', 'weird' and/or 'exotic' cultural customs and beliefs are routinely invoked in their marketing and tourism efforts, piquing tourists' interests (Gíslason 2015). Such representations of Icelanders beliefs as simply just 'odd' or 'unconventional' fails to, as Gíslason (2015) asserts, "appreciate the profound historical, psychological, and mysterious bond between Icelanders and the 'hidden ones'" (p. 1). Contemporary inflections of Iceland's elf culture—which Hafstein (2010) describes as multivalent, "situational and context-sensitive" (p. 93)—represent an "extended metaphor" or "narrative framework" (Hafstein 2010:96) in which Icelanders can contemplate and negotiate paradigms of social change. Iceland's hidden people *(huldufólk)* are, as Hafstein (2010) argues, "a representation of the [authentic] Icelandic identity" (p. 98): an embodiment of the nation's traditional values and pastoral ideals. Through elfin narratives, Icelanders are supplied with a channel in which they can negotiate the parameters of their national identity, resist the effects of modernity and urbanization, and draw upon the nostalgia of the past to re-orient the future (Hafstein 2010). Representations of the past in Iceland's contemporary elf legends, Hafstein

(2010) writes, “are not ideologically neutral … [and are] fraught with a nostalgia that has both cultural and political implications” (p. 95) and may be taken as “a sign of orientation toward the past” (p. 96).

Like Quebec’s heritage films—which—the nostalgia invoked in Iceland’s tourism advertisements is in reference to a bygone era, a time of imagined simplicity (pre-alternative-virtual-realities, pre-space-tourism, pre-Zoom) governed by traditional, pastoral values (Czach 2020; Santoro 2020). As the ads suggest, engaging with these emergent technologies is a violation of tradition and authenticity. This, in contrast, with the Icelandic experience where everything is distinctly *real,* natural, and enduring, bearing the traces of antiquity and inheritance (as Mossbergsson tells viewers in “Introducing the Icelandverse” (2021): “In our open world experience, everything is real and has been for millions of years”). Released after the dust from the COVID-19 pandemic—a time that was, for many, deeply destabilizing but equally illuminative—had barely settled, Iceland’s tourism advertisements expertly tap into the duality of anxiety—of lost time, digital omnipresence, dis-connectedness, stasis—and desire for connection, experience, authenticity, mobility, and simplicity. Touristic representations of Iceland were, thus, (re)framed and (re)imagined with post-COVID consumer-market demands in mind (Dela Santo and Anril Tiatco 2019). In doing so, Iceland presents itself as the antidote to counter the ‘artificiality’ of contemporary culture where tourists, too, can quell their nostalgia by returning to (an imagined) past.

4.7 Conclusion

Iceland’s population base and budget, relative to other nations, is small. This, Stern says, puts extra pressure on Icelanders, who, often times, must adopt a “Swiss army knife mentality” (Nudd 2022) in order for their campaigns to be realized. Yet, despite this, Iceland’s tourism sector has,

post-pandemic, managed to make a steady rebound, both domestically and internationally (OECDiLibrary 2024; Statistics Iceland 2024). Over the last twenty-five years, Iceland's tourism industry has experienced dramatic growth, with international tourism being the main driver of the sector. The industry's growth has, however, ebbed and flowed, experiencing moments of regress following economically damaging events, such as the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption and 2020 COVID-19 pandemic., over the course of its history, become adept in responding to moments of crisis and eclipsing expectations. Iceland's tourism marketing tactics and nation branding strategies have been vital in their ability to perform a distinctly Icelandic nation/place brand that (re)produces a mythologized representation of space.

Following a semiological analysis of four of Iceland's tourism advertisements released over a three-year period, from 2020 to 2022, my findings reveal how of nation/place branding strategies, tourist representations, memory, and the imagination are involved in the complex, highly mutable, and often contradictory process of identity formation. As scholars in critical geography and nation/place branding have argued: place informs identity and identity informs place. Important in this dialectical exchange is the role of the imagination in its ability to materially and ideologically structure place through the (re)construction of spatializations, or place-myths (Shields 2013). At the core of spatialization is, according to Shields (2013), "a process of simplifying for cognitive purposes, and stereotyping as a pragmatic strategy for everyday life" (p.33). Spatializations function similarly to the nation brand: both require a (re)organization of national identity based on a "geography of difference" (Shields 2013:31) that is socially constructed over the long term, resulting in the crude distillation or flattening of place—as territorially-bounded, internally coherent, singular, palatable etc.—that, ultimately, has

the power to eliminate alternative national imaginaries and trajectories (Aronczyk 2010; Shields 2013).

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

Representations of Iceland in touristic media (re)produce a mythologized and nationalistic image and narrative of place—first developed during the country's long-fought independence struggle during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—that fulfills the duties of nation branding, responds to consumer-market demands, and reflects the socio-political context in which they were created. As suggested in my findings, the four key themes or 'mythologies' I develop are by no means new: in fact, they are some of Iceland's most enduring tropes that continue to activate among its members—by invoking the imagined community, blurring the temporal boundaries of past, present, and future, and altering social and historical memories through the process of what Shields (2013) calls, "memory spatialization" (p. 34) –a sense of unity, camaraderie, and allegiance to the wider collective. And for the viewers/consumers, this idealized, socially-constructed version of Iceland offers certain visual and discursive 'cues' upon which they can (re)formulate their conceptions and future engagements with the nation (Aronczyk 2010; Johansson 2012; Shields 2013).

Consistent with the research on semiological analysis, the underlying sentiments and ideologies behind each of the three 'mythologies' I develop here are not always overt or easily discernable. Their emergence comes from an overarching analysis of Icelandic culture, politics, economics, history, etc. over the course of over a century. Like Hall's (1993) statement that "[e]very visual sign in advertising connotes a quality, situation, value, or inference… [and are] intimately connected to broader ideological codes" (p. 97), semiology demands a thorough and in-depth understanding of the connections between visual images (representations), knowledge, and ideology (Hall 1993; Rose 2016). In an effort to adequately examine each campaign, I chose

to keep my data sample small. As a result, my findings are cursory, contextually-specific, and explorative. Future research might address the limitations of this project. What my findings do offer, however, is a glimpse into how the images, tropes, discourses, and ideologies of nationalism and nation branding are often utilized and invoked obliquely, as they are in Iceland's tourism advertisements.

Like Boym's (2008) typology of "restorative nostalgia" (as cited in Czach and Loiselle 2020:12)—a nostalgia that sees itself not as nostalgia but as 'truth' and the preservation of history and tradition—nationalism need not be brash and overt to be considered nationalism: it can be quiet, unassuming, and sometimes even humorous call for 'restoration', a return to the past. At surface level, Iceland's socio-political and ideological motivations behind their 'silly' tourism advertisements might not be entirely obvious, but upon deeper inspection, their representations of place—as *Ontologically 'Wild'; as Otherworldly and 'Exotic'; as Primordial and 'Authentic'; and as Irreverent and 'Ironic'* —remain deeply rooted in maintaining the mythology of Iceland as an imagined community. Identifying the role Iceland's tourism advertisements play in the perpetuating some of the nation's most pervasive myths allows for an opportunity to consider how national identity is often (re)constituted, (re)performed, and (re)naturalized in quotidian ways. Though I argue that nation brands and spatializations of place alter reality in material ways, the scope of this paper does not allow for an in-depth exploration of this. In considering the question, *what's at stake?*, I offer a few examples of spatial imaginaries and their material impacts. First, I explore some opportunities and possible avenues for future research.

5.2 Avenues for Future Research

Pritchard and Morgan (2001) describe tourism as a "multi-sectorial activity involving multiple stakeholders [involving a] complex geographical pattern of supply and demand, which is continuously evolving" (p. 13). Even over the course of this project[79], the tourism industry experienced significant upheaval—thanks, primarily to the COVID-19 pandemic—and tourism-dependent nations, such as Iceland, were forced into a state of revision. Within this moment of rupture, Iceland emerged with an updated tourism strategy—one steeped in nostalgia, where the artificiality of contemporary life is juxtaposed against an image of Iceland (as ancient, wild, authentic, unadulterated, and provincial) by leveraging consumer anxieties and desires—many of which (re)emerged and/or intensified because of the pandemic.

Future research might consider examining a larger subset of Iceland's tourism advertisements and branding strategies in conjunction with their official reports. Here, one could map the trajectory of Iceland's nation branding strategies over time, taking note of any changes and/or continuities in how Iceland is visually and discursively constructed/represented to audiences. Such an analysis could offer better insight into the relational character of images/advertisements, particularly in response to other images, wider systems of meaning, cultural shifts, and market demands (Rose 2016). A useful starting point could, perhaps, be the shift in discourse and representations of Icelandic nature and culture in Iceland's *Iceland Naturally* brand strategy—the nation's existing brand strategy for food producers and the tourism industry, launched in the United States in 1999 and later, Europe in 2006—following the economic crisis of 2008 (Gremaud 2014). As part of the nation's official strategy to advance their

[79] I began writing my thesis in the spring/summer of 2020. The last round of writing and revisions were completed in the spring/summer of 2024.

image and brand value and promote/strengthen Icelandic industries (tourism, natural resources, etc.) *Iceland Naturally* reconfigured old, nationalist narratives of Iceland as a pure and pristine Arctic wilderness in a way that would compliment the country's nation-building and nation branding strategies (Gremaud 2014; 2017). Gremaud (2017) writes that, "The representations and ideas of the North are in a reciprocal relationship with ideas from nation-building processes and thus with political ideas and the power play of jockeying for a favourable position in the geopolitical system" (p. 202). Examining Iceland's nation-branding and tourism strategies over a longer period of time could reveal not only the durability of particular images and mythologies but also how they are (re)negotiated and/or manipulated to cater to changing realities and value systems (Gremaud 2017).

Future research might also explore the burgeoning relationship between the global "creative economy" (Garrison and Wallace 2024), the tourism industry, and representations of place. Scholars in visual culture, consumer culture, and brands and branding have mapped the evolution of the advertisement—from analog to digital, mass-mediated to individually-aggregated etc.—as well as a shift in both market and consumer trends and behaviours (Barnet 2009; Rose 2016). The transition from office-based to hybrid and/or virtual work has opened up a new and highly lucrative avenue in digital entrepreneurship: user-generated content creation (Garrison and Wallace 2024; Ren 2023). As noted by Scarpocchi (2020), international travel is one of the biggest drivers in the tourism industry. Its relative distribution, however, is not spread evenly across the globe. This is due to the fact that tourism is "subject to a range of influences and factors that determine its relative distribution" (Scarpocchi 2020:17). With the emergence of social media platforms, decentralized user-generated content (uploaded to a variety of digital

content platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok etc.) is changing the landscape of tourism—both in the way content is generated and consumed.

In the travel/tourism industry, user-generated travel-based content (such as long and short form videos, blogs/vlogs, podcasts, Instagram posts/reels etc.—is becoming increasingly popular, particularly among the 'Gen Z' (those born in between 1996 and 2010) population (Garrison and Wallace 2024). Moreover, as Garrison and Wallace (2024) note, the degree to which travel content creators work within the tourism industry varies. For this reason, they describe the work as "orbital", wherein creators "move between real and virtual spaces as they seek to build up their businesses in a way that orbits the industry" (Garrison and Wallace 2024). As a personal brand/business built around a love of travelling, many travel content creators prioritize their brand, their community, and their business values over straightforward profit-making when seeking out and negotiating partnerships and contracts, opting out of particular brand and/or destination partnerships that does not align with the ethos of their personal brand (Garrison and Wallace 2024). Future research might consider exploring the cultural impact of travel-based content creation—at the consumer level, the industry level, or both—as well as its impact on existing nation brand narratives and mythologies. Are creators shifting and/or destabilizing these narratives and mythologies, or simply recirculating them?

As scholars in brands and branding note, brands operate as specific cultural resources that guide consumer feelings, behaviours, and relations (Arvidsson 2006; Bookman 2018). Brand engagement also necessarily involves the act of consumption: a co-generative process that is "active and productive…bound up with complex cultural and social processes" (Bookman 2018:6), whereby consumer practices and interactions assist in the co-creation of urban spaces, identities, and cultures (Bookman 2018). The culture of "self-branding" (Hearn 2008:198) is

described by Klein (2023) as “yet another form of doubling, an internal sort of doppelganging” (p.55). Given that in today’s digital age, branding is considered a near requisite, a “cultural imperative” (Klein 2023:64)—as individuals, businesses, organizations, nation states—in the competitive bid for respect, resources, attention, legitimacy, profit etc.—an exploration into this growing market and its impact on tourism practices, national narratives, expressions of identity seem worthwhile. A comparative study of Iceland’s nation branding studies alongside other countries’ nation branding studies might also be useful.

5.3 Discussion: What’s at Stake?

In attempting to answer this project’s two-pronged research question, *How do Iceland’s tourism advertisements contribute towards the country’s nation-branding strategies? How do the visual and discursive representations of Iceland in tourism media (re)inforce and (re)articulate a mythologized Icelandic national imaginary and identity?,* I have explored the intersections between branding and tourism practices/strategies, spatialities, the imagination, and identity. My findings show that Iceland’s tourism advertisements play a crucial role in the continued circulation, articulation, performance, and narration of a mythologized Icelandic identity. Because spatializations (or place myths) are often (re)established in media and popular culture, the way place is depicted is important, particularly so when the parameters of citizenship and belonging are often bound up in these (exclusionary) images and narratives.

As a nation branding strategy, Iceland’s tourism advertisements work to (re)articulate and (re)circulate a mythologized Icelandic national imaginary and identity—one that upholds the myth of a homogenous nation bound together by history, memory, tradition, and vocation. In considering the question, *What’s at stake?,* there are two points I wish to address. The first is one being: Iceland’s population *is* small. If representations of Icelandic culture continue to

manufacture this illusory image of 'Iceland-ness' based on an idealized or preferred reconstruction of the nation's past, I worry that the 'conditions' of what it means to be Icelandic will become so rigid—as evidenced in their nationalist language policy--those who wish to participate and share in the nation's culture, language, and traditions (like newcomers, for example) will be excluded from doing so. Skaptadóttir and Innes (2017) note, however, that a growing number of immigrants in Iceland are learning Icelandic for instrumental reasons and not necessarily "because they want to claim access to common roots or out of interest in Icelandic literature or history" (p. 25). Participating in Iceland's linguistic and cultural traditions, even if motivated by purely practical purposes, is still a form of engagement. Newcomers' willingness to learn Icelandic—whatever their motivations might be—should be welcomed and encouraged, but not necessarily expected. The growth in Iceland's immigrant population over the last two decades requires a shift in Iceland's policies on immigration, integration, and language: a shift towards a *mutual* respect of minority language rights (as well as cultural practices), where the primacy of Icelandic and expectations of assimilation are discarded in favour of more flexible and inclusive policies (Albury 2016; Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017).

My second point relates to the endurance of particular mythologies. Neither pure fact nor fiction, the power of the myth, according to Essebo (2019), "lies not in its correspondence of truth but with naturalized societal and individual beliefs" (p. 516). Experienced as a "particular kind of mutual experience" (Essebo 2019:521), myths have the ability to, through shared fantasies, bring people together. Schöpflin and Hosking (1997) note that myth can "establish resonance, mobilize people exclude others, screen out certain memories, establish solidarity, or, indeed, reinforce hierarchy of state and values" (p. 22 as cited in Essebo 2019:521). Though this represents an extreme case, one need only think of Israel and its ongoing and unrelenting

genocide against Palestine—which, at the time of writing, has been underway for nearly eleven months—to understand how national myths, when re-affirmed and circulated so extensively, can come to be regarded as 'Truth'. Essebo (2019) writes that "[a] myth performs when it is held tenaciously by its adherents…[its] purpose is not to offer metaphysical truths…[r]ather, it works as a sticking plaster for the social structure" (p. 523). Myth's value, in this way, is "is metaphorical and its functions are social as it legitimises social structures and actions" (Essebo 2019:523). The process of naturalization is crucial. When myth becomes so deeply entrenched in the minds of its adherents, to so much as question its reliability or suggest its mutability—like we have seen in the case of Israel and the logic of Zionism—is framed as an attack, as it exposes the shaky foundations upon which the myth was built.

"The mutability of place-images in spatialisations and their susceptibility to poetic license and witty manipulation", Shields (2013) writes, "demonstrates their deep role in cognition" (p. 35). Here, Shields (2013) is referring to memory and its malleability and how, through its entanglements with the imagination, it becomes porous, provisional, and subject to augmentation. Bachelard (1958) too, considers the imagination to be "a major power of human nature" (p. 18) that decisively shapes our engagements with the world. "Great images", he writes, "have both a history and a pre-history: they are always a blend of memory, with the result that we never experience an image directly. Indeed, every great image has an unfathomable oneiric depth to which the personal past adds special colour. Consequently, it is not until later in life that we really revere an image, when we discover that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in our memories (Bachelard 1958:53). The past develops a certain patina and becomes imagined as "an idealized, simpler time" (Czach and Loiselle 2020:5). This becomes an issue when origins are invoked. Like Quebec, Iceland's national identity has developed around

this idea of heritage, homogeneity, genealogy, and historical continuity (Czach and Loiselle 2020). A connection to Iceland's shared, painful past is seen as a pre-condition for belonging. For the nation's immigrant population, such a prevailing attitude can make it difficult to integrate and feel a sense of belonging (Faingold 2023; Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017).

There are several studies that point to what Pétursdóttir (2013) describes as "hidden prejudice or 'everyday prejudice and discrimination' towards [immigrants] with non-Icelandic backgrounds" (p. 2). Until the early-mid 1990s, Iceland's population was overwhelmingly homogenous—so much so that in 1996, 95 percent of the population had Icelandic parental origins—however, with the arrival of newcomers (owing, in part to Iceland's EEA membership as well as growing labour market demands), the nation's population has diversified slightly (Heleniak and Sigurjonsdóttir 2018). While Poles comprise the largest immigrant group at 32.4 percent[80] of the country's immigrant population, citizens from other Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, Lithuania, and Romania are also among Iceland's largest immigrant groups. Citizens from the United States, Germany, Thailand, the Philippines, and other Nordic countries represent some of the nation's smaller immigrant populations (Heleniak and Sigurjonsdóttir 2018; Statistics Iceland 2022). Though there is much variation among the immigrant community, Loftsdóttir (2017) describes a "hierarchy of migrants"—a phrase coined by Daukšas (2013)—in Iceland, where immigrants are differentiated on the basis of race, class, skill-level, and perceived 'foreignness'. The racialization of Lithuanians in Iceland, she notes, stems from a re-configuration of historical discourses that positioned Eastern Europe states as not fully

---

[80] Based on 2022 data provided by Statistics Iceland. As of January 1st, 2022, people born in Poland made up the majority of Iceland's newcomer population. In 2021, Polish immigrants accounted for 34.2 percent (20, 896) of the total immigrant population. The second and third largest immigrant groups were Lithuanians and Romanians, accounting for 5.6 and 4.1 percent of the total immigrant population, respectively (Statistics Iceland 2022).

‘European’, Europe’s symbolic ‘Other’ (Loftsdóttir 2017). Depictions in popular media of Lithuanians as ‘criminals’ involved in organized crime and gang activities—a trope that utilized in the Icelandic television series, *Trapped*—is in line, Loftsdóttir (2017) states, “with the historically shifting racist categorizations of people [as well as] a different conceptualization of the ‘foreigner’ Iceland (p.74). The shifting parameters of what constitutes ‘foreign-ness’ and ‘acceptability’ in Iceland highlights how the formation of identities is relational and contextual. Iceland’s historical background—including their entanglements with colonialism and racism as a former colonial dependency that *also* aligned with Europe’s racist/colonizing discourses *vis á vis* other colonized subjects—played an important role in the development and articulation of their national identity (Loftsdóttir 2011). This is not to suggest that the nationalist inflections of Icelandic culture are somehow excusable, rather, it draws attention to the fact that identity is structured and mediated by interlocking, multidimensional (and often conflictual) circumstances, values regimes and power dynamics (Crenshaw 1989; 1991).

As mandated in Iceland’s policy on immigration and integration from 2007, newcomers are required to learn the Icelandic language if they are to join the Icelandic labour market and/or obtain citizenship (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017). Despite a willingness to learn the language, many migrants cite a host of barriers—long and/or inconsistent work hours (common in low-wage occupations like construction, fish processing, food production and manufacturing, care and cleaning, etc.), a lack of accessible classes in rural communities, cost, familial/childcare demands, learning difficulties etc.—that prevent them from enrolling in Icelandic language classes (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017). In addition, many of the participants interviewed by Skaptadóttir and Innes (2017) noted that working Iceland’s segregated labour market made it increasingly difficult to converse with native Icelandic speakers. While some participants

claimed that their willingness to learn and speak Icelandic was met with praise, others describe the ridicule and criticism they received due to their inability to speak "perfect Icelandic", as one woman lamented (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017:25).

The desire to maintain an 'unbroken link' to medieval, 'pure form' Icelandic is, as Albury (2016) notes, reflective in the nation's protectionist language policies and ideologies. Moreover, he argues that Iceland's immigration and citizenship laws "recognize linguistic diversity only by anticipating linguistic assimilation whereby permanent residence applicants must demonstrate completion of Icelandic studies… [and] pass an Icelandic language examination" (Albury 2016:365). Several studies show, however, that migrants lack of historical or genealogical 'connection' to the island's linguistic and cultural traditions necessarily excludes them from fully integrating or participating in what is deemed an indispensable feature of 'Icelandic-ness' (Albury 2016; Pétursdóttir 2013; Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017).

Albury (2016) argues that despite claims of being a minority language in need of protection, Iceland's monolingual policy framework actually threatens other minority languages. "Minority language maintenance" he says, "is constrained by legislation that stipulates Icelandic as the only acceptable medium of instruction in compulsory education… [which, coupled with] the ongoing marginalization of migrants, creates pressure to abandon minority languages, especially in formal domains" (Albury 2016:366-367). Iceland often invokes its cultural/linguistic 'minority status' as justification for its fiercely protectionist language policies. According to Svarvarsdóttir (2009), as the "overwhelmingly predominant language of Icelanders, with a standardized form and strong literary tradition" (Albury 2016:367), Icelandic is, in fact, a majority language. With a population of less than 400,000 people, Iceland's fear of erasure has been enduring, palpable. And while it is unlikely that the Icelandic language will cease to exist

any time soon—given the fact that it is considered a hallmark of Icelandic nationality—the island's smallness, relative to other nations, is a pervasive feature of Icelandic life (Albury 2016; Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017).

Amidst a flurry of cultural changes and challenges, Icelanders continue to, as Hálfdanarson (2000) notes, "[renew] their pledge to unity in the present with past generations…[and] maintain a strong sense of cultural unity in spite of intensified relations with the outer world" (p. 23). Likewise, Czach describes the "nostalgia investment in familiarity and apparent simplicity" (p.151) of the past as a "reactionary impulse" (p. 46) to the destabilizing forces, upheavals, displacements, and disorientations of contemporary life. As a microstate, minority culture, and former colonial dependency, Iceland, like Quebec, has developed what Bouchard (2015) calls "a memory under tension" (p. 12 as cited in Czach 2020:48): a memory that reaffirms a shared, collective memory of suffering and colonization. In order to quell the anxieties associated with a (perceived) erosion of culture, Iceland and Quebec's 'return to the past' is—like the use of humour—can be understood as a strategy of resistance borne out of an overriding fear of erasure or obsolescence.

To say that the forces of modernization, globalization, neoliberalism, capitalism, migration/mobilities etc. have not altered our previously-held conceptions of identity, belonging, citizenship, nationhood etc. would be misleading. To illustrate the sheer scope of these changes, Hafstein (2010) offers an example on Iceland's population distribution: "modernization has taken the rural population down from 88.1% to a mere 9.3% of the national total in only one hundred years" (p. 95). In the case of Iceland, the tension of between what May (2014) calls the "cosmopolitan and the local" (as cited in Albury 2016:363): a desire to be English-proficient, modern, competitive, and globally recognized while at the same time, maintain their imagined

homogeneous, mono-linguistic community with collectively-shared past and historical memory (Albury 2016; Aronczyk 2010; Czach and Loiselle 2020). Moreover, as a microstate, Iceland has had to adopt what Stern (2022) calls a "little engine that could attitude" (Nudd 2022). Iceland's scrappy 'can-do' attitude and hard work ethic, he says, is part of what makes the nation so endearing. The Director of *Visit Iceland,* Guðmundsdóttir (2022) notes that relative to other nations, Iceland's resources are much scarcer, and their population is much smaller. In making *Introducing the Icelandverse* (2022), the commercial coming together so quickly is, as Guðmundsdóttir (2022) puts it, "a very typical thing in Iceland: we have many hats" (Nudd 2022).

On a continuum of states and their 'powers' are the global hegemons on one end and microstates at the other: this is reflective, Simpson (2022) says, "of the practical realities regarding international politics and microstates" (p. 73). Duursma (1996) writes, "Microstates, due to their limited territory, population, and natural resources, have to adapt themselves to find solutions in order to survive" (p. 145 as cited in Simpson 2022:68). Vulnerabilities experienced by microstates can be countered to a certain degree, then, by adopting strategies of survival and self-determination (Simpson 2022). Smallness, however, remains a pervasive feature of everyday life. It is "an everlasting struggle", according to University of Iceland professor of philosophy, Hannibalsson, "for sovereignty and independence" (as cited in Hálfdanarson 2000:17) that small states must continue to unite in. In his writings about the dialectics of the small and large, Bachelard (1958) describes "miniature [as] one of the refuges of greatness" (174). He goes on to say, "[f]or me, the vastness of the world has become merely the jamming of these waves; [t]o have experienced the miniature sincerely detaches me from the surrounding world and helps me to resist dissolution of the surrounding atmosphere" (Bachelard 1958:179). Though their

smallness must, at times, feel limiting or frustrating, Iceland's smallness has, I believe, been fundamental in the preservation and continued cultivation of their imagined national identity.

When the realities of contemporary life—increased mobility, diversification, technological shifts, and a purported 'blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries'—are framed as inherently threatening to nation states and cultures, the impulse to re-assert an even stronger, even *more* coherent national identity makes sense, especially when, for so long, national borders were viewed as natural, impermeable (Massey 2005). This notion, Massey (2005) argues, is just that: a notion, "an attitude, a cosmology" she says, "reflected in all those nostalgic responses to globalization which mourn the loss of the old spatial coherences, [i]t is a nostalgia for something that did not exist" (p. 65).

Over the course of its history, Iceland has faced many critical junctures, whether it be a financial crisis, an environmental catastrophe, or most recently, a global pandemic. Following the economic 'crash' in 2008, the depreciation of the Icelandic *krona* (ISK)—which led to foreign exchange volatility and soaring inflation rates—had a devastating effect on Icelandic households (Benediktsdóttir et al. 2017). As a result, more than 50,000 Icelanders lost their savings, plunging them into debt (Boyes 2009). In addition, approximately 25 percent of homeowners faced mortgage default (Boyes 2009). By the end of November 2008, capital controls were adopted in order to, as Benediksdóttir et al. (2017) note, "stem the ongoing capital flight and continuous drop in the value of the currency" (p.32). In the twelve-month period before capital controls were implemented, the Icelandic krona depreciated against the value of the euro by about 50 percent (Benediksdóttir et al.2017). The combination of capital controls and devaluation the krona are cited as two fundamental factors that aided in the nation's quick recovery from economic crisis (Benediksdóttir et al. 2017). A devaluation in the Icelandic krona also meant that travel to

Iceland became much more affordable for foreigners, and the country experienced an enormous uptick in international tourism. And later, in 2010, when Iceland made international headlines after the Eyjafjallajökull's volcanic eruption led to an unprecedented closure of European airspace, tourists were, once again, coming to Iceland in droves.

During these moments of destabilization-turned-opportunity, Iceland has turned to their (imagined and historically reconstructed) past—a bygone era; a 'Golden Age' of national unity and cultural homogeneity free from foreign influence—to re-establish the mythology of mutual experience "united by continuity, past, and future" (Nora 1992:57 as cited in Hálfdanarson 2000:20). Not only do these myths reinforce the 'imagined community' among Icelanders, but they also aid in the construction of an alluring national narrative that draws tourists in. Hálfdanarson (2000) is cautious of claims suggesting that the emergence of a 'global culture' signals the end or erosion of national identities. The possibility of this seems unlikely due to the fact that national identity, he says, is "not ultimately based on 'living memory' or organic ties to the past" (Hálfdanarson 2000:22). What makes the nation state so durable is its ability to stabilize—Hálfdanarson (2000) contends that "[n]ations survive because they form the most important frame of reference for people's identities, and they have become an essential part of how we position ourselves in the world" (p.22).

5.4 Concluding Remarks: Forging Ahead Amidst Uncertainty

Scholars like Aronczyk (2010) and Bergmann (2017) remind us that Iceland's national myth is not, in fact, unique. Many states base their nationhood on similar types of myth creation: one that Anthony D. Smith (1993) calls the 'Cult of a Golden Age' (Bergmann 3027). Smith (1993) contends that in times of hardship, national leaders will often refer to the era of the 'Golden Age' to reinforce a sense of community (Bergmann 2017). In an attempt to 'push back' against the

spatial/temporal forces of globalization, migration, mobility, etc., many nation states are turning to place/nation branding as a form of self-preservation. In the case of Iceland and Quebec, we see a return to an imagined past of common origins and collective suffering. When Vancouver hosted the 2010 Winter Olympic games, for example, the performance/celebration of sport and patriotism (what director of the 2017 film, *Luk'Luk'I,* Wapeemmukwa calls "glib patriotism[81]") was centered around the myth of national unity and pride, conveniently scrubbed of Canada's shameful (and enduring) colonial legacy (Mullen 2017). Set amidst Vancouver during the 2010 Winter Olympics men's gold medal hockey game, Wapeemmukwa's film explores how the fantasy of patriotism (as well as the affluence and spectacle associated with the Games) in relation to the lives of five people living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. It is here where we see the fantasy dissolve.

In her memoir, *The Yellow House,* Broom (2019) excavates the histories and mythologies of New Orleans and her relationship to them, as a resident of New Orleans East: a neighbourhood seven miles distance from the city's distinguished, oft-romanticized French Quarter, a neighbourhood she says, the rest of the city tried to forget. Through this act of discovering, excavating, and "building a counter-narrative" (Broom as cited in Greenridge 2019) she says, "myths are laid bare". In interrogating the stories "told and retold about New Orleans" as Broom (2019) says, "then you begin to see the cracks, start to see how deeply the city's image

---

[81] The phrase 'glib patriotism' is used by the director of the 2017 film *Luk'Luk'I* to describe the performance of an imagined patriotism during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, Canada. He uses the phrase because, as he says, "I'm interested in the way in which different things, such as sports, and specifically hockey, for example, can be deployed by the settler state in order to advance the interests of colonization and theft of land, which we could also call 'renoviction' today, or gentrification, so that's the thing I think I'm interested in with the patriotism is what is it that allows the settler state to not only continue colonization but continue colonization in insidious ways that come off as patriotic, or as pleasurable, I guess. And so, the patriotism involved in spectating hockey, I guess, is one of the things I'm interested in about that mechanism of about what makes colonization, what enhances colonization and what allows it to perpetuate" (Wapeemukwa 2017).

of itself is based on illusion and a kind of front that belies deep dysfunction. Myths are sustained too by those who love the city…[t]hey don't want their narrative challenged" (Broom as cited in Greenridge 2019). Important in writing this memoir, Broom (2019) asserts, was to "break open the American notion that once the individual is born the world begins! No. When we are born, we inherit ideas, philosophies, heritage, mythologies, the weight and trauma of systemic racial injustice". Important, here, is Broom's reminder that there really is no such thing as a *tabula rasa*: our personal histories—whether we want them to be or not—are etched into us, informing our identities, sense of self, and positionality from the moment of our emergence. When we consider the ways in which identity, familial origins, and place are often sutured together, it makes sense that in moments of destabilization and dissolution—both real and perceived—returning to and reaffirming the myths of our identity and histories as part of an overarching, linear, singular history offers a certain reprieve or sanctuary. It counters that feeling of 'unravelling' that heterogeneity seems to invoke.

The relationship between self and space (the imagination and intimate, interior space) is one Bachelard (1958) explored with a great reverence. "Our house", he writes, "is our corner of the world…it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (Bachelard 1958:26). The nation state, in many ways, a scaled-up version of the house-image as an embodiment of home, an embodiment of dreams (Bachelard 1958). Even more so, the house we were born in, he says, "becomes imbued with dream values which remain after the house is gone" (Bachelard 1958:36). For many—if not most of us—although access to this house may no longer be physically accessible, the proclivity to return, to re-inhabit it once again, remains. And so, we dream, we imagine. Much like Bachelard's dream house that, through the poetic imagination, can be re-visited, we can revisit the nation state *as it once was/as we once knew it*

through historical memory and acts of 'remembering' and 'forgetting' (Bachelard 1958; Renan 1882).

Trying to navigate what feels like life's unrelenting need to uproot and destabilize—think: warnings of a looming climate catastrophe, the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, the dystopian plummet of Western politics (a different kind of 'race to the bottom'?) etc.—is, undoubtedly, challenging, frustrating, and often grief-laden. In forging ahead, retreating to an imagined past—a past that never was—feels unproductive or counterintuitive, rather. Nelson's (2021) essay, "Riding the Blinds" outlines one of the most—if not *the* most—pressing predicament of contemporary life: the climate crisis, essentially posing the question of, "*how do we cope with knowing what we know?".* Despite the gloom realities of global warming, Nelson (2021) offers the idea that knowing—awareness—is its own kind of freedom. Acknowledging the conditions and constraints of our time, she says, is our best way to figure out how to forge ahead.

Part of this acknowledgement is moving past the antiquated notions of us/them, right/left, local/global and towards a kind collectivity or mutuality that recognizes our interdependency (Nelson 2021). The goal is not to revert to individualisms or nationalisms where borders, identities, and imaginations are (re)fortified in an attempt to stave off change (by 'maintaining' a sense of stability, coherence, an accumulated history) but rather, develop a new imagination about what it means to be a part of a community: one that supersedes nations/origins as the basis for connection (Nelson 2021). If the COVID-19 pandemic taught us anything—though I would argue it taught us many lessons equally painful and rewarding—it is of our relationality. In conversation about the politics of love, Hardt and Berlant (2011) dares us to think about love as a political project, as a proposition of alternatives, a means of informing alternate social

imaginaries (Davis and Sarlin 2023). “Love as a concept for the possibility of the social, is that love always means non-sovereignty” Berlant (2011) says. In considering love as a non-sovereign political project, Hardt (2011) notes, notions of sovereignty are ruptured, thereby opening up a space for collective structures, “structures of multiplicity” (as cited in Davis and Sarlin 2023) that defy singularity and coherence and instead, welcome discontinuity with delight. Rupture, in this sense, is an opportunity for transformation: a moment in which we can (re)imagine new possible futures and re-write the story—the ‘story’ being the narrative of the nation (and history, more broadly) as continuous, immutable —or perhaps, abandon it altogether.

Exactly *how* we forge ahead is a big question, and it is one I cannot pretend I know the answer. I do think its useful, however, to begin grappling with—at the most basic level—the fear that is so inherently a part of processes of change. In his writings on improvisation in life and art, Nachmanovitch (1990) describes a common misconception with the concept of ‘improvisation’. “When we think of *improvisation”,* he says, “we tend to think first of improvised music or theatre of dance; but beyond their own delights, such art forms are doors into an experience that constitutes the whole of everyday life. We are all improvisors. The most common form of improvisation is ordinary speech…[e]very conversation is a form of jazz” (p. 17). Leaning into the spirit of improvisation is very much an exercise in “continuous surrender” (Nachmanovitch 1990:21). He calls improvisation an “acceptance…of both transience and eternity” (p. 21). Though we know what *might* happen in the future, we cannot know what *will* happen and locking ourselves in the fixity of the future is to “insulate ourselves against those essential surprises” (Nachmanovitch 1990:21). To surrender is to “[cultivate] a comfortable attitude with toward not-knowing [and] being nurtured by the mystery of moments that are dependably surprising, ever fresh (Nachmanovitch 1990:21-22). One of the ways to overcome our fears of

the unknown associated with improvisation is to engage in play. Play, Nachmanovitch (1990) writes, is "always a matter of context, [i]t is not what we do but how we do it" (p. 43). "To play", he says, "is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action…[it] enables us to rearrange our capacities and our very identity so they can be used in unforeseen ways" (Nachmanovitch 1990:43). Adopting a sense of play and improvisation, particularly during difficult times, Nachmanovitch (1990) notes, is a fruitful exercise—not just for the musician or artist—but for all of us, in our everyday, quotidian encounters. Despite being written in 1990, Nachmanovitch's arguments feel as current as ever. In his concluding chapter, "Art For Life's Sake", he goes on to say,

> Looking at international politics, looming multiple ecological and economic catastrophes, resurgences of fundamentalist fanaticisms and racisms, it is fair to say that conventional logic and conventional ideas have brought us to an impasse. What can pull us out is the fresh perception fostered by a creative attitude, as well as openness to the free play of possibilities. In politics more than any other sphere of life, what most clogs creativity is fear. What we see behind the seeming impossibility of humans to make peace among ourselves or with the planet that nurtures us is a kind of rigidity, freezing us into outmoded categories and frames of reference…[t]here are no prescriptive solutions, no grand designs for solving life's problems. Life's solutions life in the minute particulars…" (p. 182-183).

As evidenced in Iceland's tourism advertisements, Icelanders carry with them a sense of humour, lightness and, indeed, play, in their branding efforts. Beyond that, however, these qualities of playfulness suffuse the Icelandic spirit and sensibility. Amidst moments of crisis or uncertainty, Icelanders often playful and poetic approach has allowed them the space to negotiate the terms of their identity, and subvert harmful, misrepresentative, and/or repressive narratives. Like Nachmanovitch's (1990) call for improvisation and 'free play' in art and culture, Foster (2019) invites sociologists to take inspiration from, and infuse their work with a "surrealist spirit" (p. 148). Icelanders engagements with irony, satire, and parody is, in many ways, an act of

resistance, and a means of challenging hegemonic modes of knowledge production (Foster 2019). And as argued by Bakhtin (1965), participating in 'carnival' festivities and 'carnival laughter', too, is act of play rooted in defiance, hope, and community that celebrates the multiplicitiousness, abundance, and incoherence that characterizes societies (Julin 2019). "Because irony involves paradox and contradiction, [and] seeing things from opposing viewpoints", Foster (2019) states, "it constitutes the art of social science" (p. 160). Moreover, adopting a poetic, "surrealist sensibility" (Foster 2019:160) in sociology, she says, offers researchers the means to grapple with "that which is hidden or non-literal and often remains stubbornly out-of-reach" (Foster 2019:160).

Icelanders belief in mythical phenomena and 'Otherworld' traditions remains at the heart of Icelandic culture (Hafestin 2010). As Christian elf deity, Áslaug, in Indriði Einarsson's nineteenth century play, *Nýársnóttin*, on Iceland's elves (*álfar)* and 'the hidden people' *(huldufólk*), states: "We elves are the result of the people's imagination and have always lived in this country…Imagination is a powerful thing. The elves are the *hidden soul* and life of the nation, within the rocks and hillocks, that people create…" (as translated by Gíslason 2015:15-16, emphasis mine). Icelanders deep respect for their hidden inhabitants is, in my opinion, a testament to the uniqueness of their culture, as well as their ability to engage with the surreal, the intangible, and the 'unusual'. And in terms of asserting their 'difference' among other cultural groups, this is, perhaps, one of the clearest examples of a characteristic that is distinctly Icelandic—a characteristic, I believe, is one we all should feel inspired to cultivate.

In her discussion on space—as open, horizontal, heterogeneous, multiplicitious, a constellation of overlapping and intertwining social relations and histories—Massey (2003) delights in what she calls, describes as the "surprise of space" (p. 116), for it is always mutating,

unfolding, Though the performance and articulation of a structured and highly-refined nation brand might offer the appearance of stability, legitimacy, and cohesiveness, its fatal flaw resides in its rooted-ness. Aronczyk (2010) reminds us that branding "cannot account for the plurality of voices, legacies, and competing visions of the nation state" (p. 81) and as a result, "has the power to eliminate alternative national imaginaries" (p. 85). Nation branding prioritizes a narrative image of place that is highly illusory and inherently limiting. During this process of distillation, what gives place its resonance and lushness—its relations, engagements, tensions, multiplicities, and incoherences—becomes lost. Many places, including Iceland, have attempted to—through the (re)circulation of their most enduring national myths—reanimate an imagined, 'bygone' version of place—a practice, which Massey (2003) says, attempts to "hold [these] places in aspic" (p. 123). The nostalgia invoked in yearnings to 'go back' in space and time, is as Massey (2003) argues, impossible. And even if we somehow *could* go back in space-time*,* we would see that just as we, ourselves, have changed, so too has that imagined place (Massey 2003).

Place is formed, Massey (2003) says, "through a myriad of practices of quotidian negotiation and contestation; practices, moreover, through which the constituent 'identities' are also themselves continually moulded. Place, in other words does—as many argue—change us, not through some visceral belonging…but through the *practising* of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us" (p. 154). It is here, within this new, ever-unfolding space of practice, negotiation, and improvisation, that we may begin to forge ahead. To forge ahead and adopt alternative imaginaries of space does not mean we necessarily need to abandon history or tradition. Both, I believe, can be honoured. The attendant task is to nurture an ongoing conversation between the past, present, and future. A conversation that is open, integrative, imaginative, and expansive, guided by the politics of

mutuality, reciprocity, and a "geographies of care"[82] (Massey 2003:193). Pursuing an alternative imagination of place, one that resists the static narratives and mythologies of nation branding—narratives centered around notions of coherence, palatability, singularity, and so on—and instead, embraces the qualitative differences and multiple trajectories of place is to, as Massey (2003) puts it, "take some delight in the possibilities it opens up" (p. 14). In conversation/correspondence with Maggie Nelson, Björk (2019) signs off writing, "let's imagine a continuity . . . ." [sic] (as cited in Nelson 2024). I say, let's also imagine a *discontinuity*.

[82] The term 'geographies of care' is a concept developed by Robinson (1999) that is rooted in a "critical ethics of care which integrates the relational ethics of care with a critical account of power-relations, difference, and exclusion in the globalizing world order" (Massey 2003:193). This kind of care, according to Massey (2003), "entails a recognition (of coevalness) and is learned" (p. 193). In addition, this type of care, Robinson (1999) notes, is based not on proximity. "The relationality of care", Massey (2003) states, "need not be localized or territorialized…the relations of care can be long distance too" (p. 193).

References

Abrahams, Z G. Hoogendoorn and J. M.Fitchett. 2021. "Glacier tourism and tourist reviews: an experiential engagement with the concept of "Last Chance Tourism". *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 22(1): 1-14.

Albury, Nathan John. 2016. "National language policy theory: exploring Spolsky's model in the case of Iceland". *Language Policy* 15(4): 355-372.

Anderson, Benedict. 2016. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso Books.

Andersson, Jenny. 2009. "Nordic Nostalgia and Nordic Light: the Swedish model as Utopia 1930-2007". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34(3): 229-245.

American Psychological Association. "APA Dictionary of Psychology". Retrieved February 7th, 2023. https://dictionary.apa.org/autostereotyping

Arctic Adventures. 2021. "Where is Iceland Located?". *Arctic Adventures.* Retrieved October 27th, 2021. https://adventures.is/information/where-is-iceland/.

Arif, Raul. 2021. "In The Post-COVID-19 World, Zoom Is Here To Stay". *Forbes.* Retrieved March 30th, 2024. https://www.forbes.com/sites/raufarif/2021/02/26/in-the-post-covid-19-world-zoom-is-here-to-stay/?sh=505f87fa55b5.

Aronsson, Peter and Lizette Gradén. 2016. "Introduction: Performing Nordic Heritage – Institutional Preservation and Popular Practices". Pp. 1-26 in *Performing Nordic Heritage: Everyday Practices and Institutional Culture* edited by Peter Aronsson and Lizette Gradén. London and New York: Routledge.

Aronczyk, Melissa. 2010. *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Arvidsson, Adam. 2006. *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture..* New York: Routledge.

Ayliffe, Chris. 2021. "Why Is Iceland Called the Land of Fire and Ice?" *Krauma*. Retrieved October 27th, 2021. https://www.krauma.is/why-is-iceland-called-the-land-of-fire-and-ice.

Bachelard, Gaston. 2014. *The Poetics of Space.* New York: Penguin Books.

Barnet, Belinda A. 2009. "Idiomedia: The rise of personalized, aggregated content". *Continuum Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 23(1): 93-99.

Benediktsdóttir, Sigríð, Gauti B. Eggertsson, and Eggert Þórarinsson. 2017. "The Rise, the Fall, and the Resurrection of Iceland. Brooking Papers on Economic Activity, BPEA Conference Drafts, September 7-8, 2017.

Bentsson, Jón Bjarki. 2024. "Will tourist numbers rise this year?". *Islandsbanki.* Retrieved March 4th, 2024. https://www.islandsbanki.is/en/news/will-tourist-numbers-rise-this-year.

Berger, John, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, and Richard Hollis. 1972. *Ways of Seeing.* London. The British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books Limited.

Bergmann, Eiríkur. 2017. *Nordic Nationalism and Right-Wing Populist Politics: Imperial Relationships and National Sentiments.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Besen, Gabriela. 2023. "I studied Ryan Reynolds' marketing strategy so you don't have to". *Linkedin.* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/i-studied-ryan-reynoldss-marketing-strategy-so-you-dont-besen-m6j7e.

Bookman, Sonia. 2018. *Brands and the City: Entanglements and Implications for Urban Life.* New York: Routledge.

Boyes, Roger. 2009. *Meltdown Iceland: Lessons on the World Financial Crisis From A Small Bankrupt Island.* New York: Bloomsbury USA.

Bressan, David. 2019. "The Geology Of Jules Verne's Journey To The Center Of The Earth". *Forbes.* Retrieved April 4th, 2024. https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidbressan/2019/02/08/the-geology-of-jules-vernes-journey-to-the-centre-of-the-earth/?sh=4a393e335197.

Chartier, Daniel. 2011. *The End of Iceland's Innocence: The Image of Iceland in the Foreign Media During the Financial Crisis.* Ottawa. University of Ottawa Press.

Cheshmehzangi, Ali, Zhaohui Su, Ruoyu Jin, Ayotunde Dawodu, Maycon Sedrez, Saeid Pourroostaei Ardakani, and Tong Zou. 2023. "Space and social distancing in managing and preventing COVID-19 community spread: An overview". *Heliyon* 9(3): 1-10.

Ćirić, Jelena. 2020. "Iceland Invites You to Scream Out Your Lockdown Frustrations". *Iceland Review.* Retrieved March 5th, 2024. https://www.icelandreview.com/tourism/iceland-invites-you-to-scream-out-your-lockdown-frustrations/.

Corfield, Karen. 2023. "Geographical Reflections; the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull Eruption". *Discover rez, Sathe World Education.* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://www.discover-the-world.com/study-trips/blog/geographical-reflections-the-2010-eyjafjallajokull-eruption/.

Cox, Lloyd. 2020. *Nationalism: Themes, Theories, and Controversies.* Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics". *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1(8): 139-167,

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43(1241): 1241-1299.

Crowe, Sarah et al. 2011. "The case study approach". *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 11(100): 1-9.

Czach, Lis. 2020. “The Quebec Heritage Film”. Pp. 41-59 in *Cinema of Pain: On Quebec's Nostalgic Screen* edited by Liz Czach and André Loiselle. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press.

Czach Liz and André Loiselle. 2020. “Introduction”. Pp. 1-12 in *Cinema of Pain: On Quebec's Nostalgic Screen* edited by Liz Czach and André Loiselle. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press.

Danbolt, Mathias. 2016. “New Nordic Exceptionalism: Jeuno JE Kim and Ewa Einhorn's *The United Nations of Norden* and other realist utopias”. *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 8(1): 1-15.

Davis, Heather and Paige Sarlin. 2023. “No One Is Sovereign In Love: A Conversation Between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt”. Retrieved March 10th, 2024. https://coalition.org.mk/archives/646?lang=en.

De Haas, Hein, Steven Castles and Mark J. Miller. 2020. *The Age of Migration.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Dela Santo, Edieser and Sir Anril Tiatco. 2019. “Tourism, heritage and cultural performance: Developing a modality of heritage tourism”. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 31: 301-309.

Eide, Elisabeth. “Strategic Essentialism and Ethnification: *Hand in Glove?*”. *Nordicom Review* 31(2): 63-78.

Eide, Elisabeth. 2016. “Strategic Essentialism”. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies.*

Essebo, Maja. 2019. “A mythical place: A conversation on the earthly aspects of myth”. *Progress in Human Geography* 43(3): 515-530.

Eydal, Guðný Björk and Guðbjörg Ottósdóttir. 2009. “Immigration and economic crisis: The case of Iceland”. REASSESS, Strand 5 Work Shop, Reykjavík 4-6 May 2009, Rannsóknarritgerðir / Working papers; nr. 4 2009.

Faingold, Eduardo, D. 2023. “Language Rights and the Law in Iceland”. Pp. 169-217 in *Language Rights and the Law in Scandinavia.* Cham: Palgrave MacMillan.

Federal Communications Commission. 2023. “About the FCC: The FCC's Mission”. *Federal Communications Commission.* Retrieved July 6th, 2023. https://www.fcc.gov/about/overview.

Fonatine, Andie Sophia. 2019. “Ten Years Later: The Protests That Brought Down The Government”. *The Reykjavik Grapevine.* Retrieved February 28th, 2024. https://grapevine.is/mag/articles/2019/01/30/ten-years-later-the-protests-that-brought-down-the-government/.

Foster, Victoria. 2019. "The Return of the Surreal: Towards a Poetic and Playful Sociology". *Qualitative Sociology Review* Vol. XV(1): 148-164.

Gaitens, Josie. 2022. "Instagram vs. Reality: How The Digital Age of Tourism Changed Iceland Forever". *The Reykjavik Grapevine.* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://grapevine.is/mag/2022/07/01/instagram-vs-reality-how-the-digital-age-of-tourism-changed-iceland-forever/.

Garrison, Stephanie and Claire Wallace. 2021. "Media Tourism and Its Role in Sustaining Scotland's Tourism Industry". *Sustainability* 13(6305): 1-13.

Garrison, Stephanie and Claire Wallace. 2024. "What tourism content creators tell us about the future of work". *Digital Futures at Work Research Centre,* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://digit-research.org/blog_article/what-tourism-content-creators-tell-us-about-the-future-of-work/.

Gieseking, Jack et al. "Section 11: Spatial Imaginaries". *The People, Place, and Space Reader*. Retrieved October 27th, 2021. https://peopleplacespace.org/toc/section-11/.

Gíslason, Björgvin Franz. 2015. "Pagan Imagination in Popular Culture; the Relationship Between Elves, Ghosts and Icelanders as Cultural Identity". Master's Thesis. Department of Liberal Studies. University of Minnesota.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* New York: Anchor Books.

Gore, Wayne. 2010. "Tourism Promo Campaign Helped the Industry". *Tourism Review.* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-inspired-by-iceland-successful-tourism-promotion-campaign-article1399.

Government of Iceland. 2023. "Quota Refugees in Iceland from 1956". *Government of Iceland.* Retrieved March 19th, 2023. https://www.government.is/topics/foreign-nationals/quota-refugees-in-iceland-from-1956/.

Government of Iceland. 2024. "Tourism in Iceland". *Government of Iceland.* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://ipa.co.uk/knowledge/documents/how-social-media-helped-iceland-s-tourism-sector-case-study-2014.

Grant, S.D. 1990. "Myths of the North in the Canadian Ethos". *The Northern Review*: 15-41.

Greenridge, Kaitlyn. 2019. "Sarah M. Broom Knows What You Think of Her Hometown". *The Cut.* Retrieved April 8th, 2022. *https://www.thecut.com/2019/09/sarah-m-broom-on-her-new-book-the-yellow-house.html.*

Gremaud, Ann-Sofie Nielsen. 2017. "Icelandic Futures: Arctic Dreams and Geographies of Crisis". Pp. 197-213 in *Arctic Environmental Modernities: From the Age of Polar Exploration to the Era of the Anthropocene* edited by Lill-Ann Körber et al. Cham: Palgrave McMillan.

Hafstein, Valdimar Tr. 2000. “The Elves’ Point of View: Cultural Identity in Contemporary Icelandic Elf-Tradition”. *Fabula* 41(1-2): 87-104.

Hálfdanarson, Guðmundur. 2000. “Þingvellir: An Icelandic “Lieu de Mémoire”. *Indiana University Press* 12(1): 4-29.

Hálfdanarson, Guðmundur. 2006. “Severing the Ties – Iceland’s Journey From a Union to Denmark to a Nation-State”. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 31(3-4): 237-254.

Hall, Stuart. 1993. “Encoding, decoding”. Pp. 90-103 in *The Cultural Studies Reader* edited by Simon During. London and New York: Routledge.

Halnik, Simon. 2014. “The Icelandic mythscape: sagas, landscapes, and national identity”. *National Identities* 16(3): 209-223.

Heleniak, Timothy and Hjördis Rut Sigurjonsdottir. 2018. “Once Homogenous, Tiny Iceland Opens Its Doors to Immigrants”. *Migration Policy Institute.* Retrieved October 27th, 2021. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/once-homogenous-tiny-iceland-opens-its-doors-immigrants.

Hemstad, Ruth. 2018. “Scandinavianism: Mapping the Rise of a New Concept”. *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 13(1): 1-21.

Henderson, Ailsa. 2007. *Hierarchies of Belonging: National Identity and Political Culture in Scotland and Quebec.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Hilmarsson-Dunn, A.M. 2006. “Protectionist Language Policies in the Face of the Forces of English. The Case of Iceland”. *Language Policy* 5(3): 293-312.

Huijbens, Edward H. 2011. “Nation-Branding: A Critical Evaluation. Assessing the Image of Building in Iceland”. Pp. 553-582 in *Iceland: Images of the North* edited by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier. Quebec and Reykjavik. Presses de l’Université du Québec, “Droit au Pôle Series” and Reykjavíkur Akademían.

Infection Prevention and Control Canada (IPAC). 2023. “Coronavirus (COVID-19) SARS-CoV2”. *Infection Prevention and Control Canada (IPAC).* Retrieved January 24th, 2024. https://ipac-canada.org/coronavirus-.resources#:~:text=Pandemic%20Coronavirus%20(COVID%2D19)&text=On%20March%2011%2C%202020%20the,downgraded%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic.

Ingvarsson, Ásgeir. 2020. “’Screaming’ tourism campaign gets mixed response from Icelanders”. *Iceland Monitor (Morgunblaðið).* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/news/2020/07/16/screaming_tourism_campaign_gets_mixed_response_from/.

Inspired by Iceland. 2024. “Inspired by Iceland”. *Inspired by Iceland.* Retrieved January 24th, 2024. https://www.inspiredbyiceland.com/about.

International Trade Administration. 2024. “Iceland – Country Commercial Guide: Market Overview”. *International Trade Administration.* Retrieved April 30th, 2024. https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/iceland-market-overview.

Invest in Reykjavik. 2024. “Reykjavik Capital Area: Quality of Life”. *Invest in Reykjavik.* Retrieved July 1st, 2024. https://investinreykjavik.com/why-reykjavik-capital-area/quality-of-life/.

IPA Social Works. 2014. “How social media helped Iceland’s tourism sector case study”. *IPA Incorporated by Royal Charter.* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://ipa.co.uk/knowledge/documents/how-social-media-helped-iceland-s-tourism-sector-case-study-2014.

Íslandsstofa. 2024. “Marketing Initiatives: Inspired by Iceland”. *Íslandsstofa.* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://www.islandsstofa.is/en/marketing-projects-inspired-by-iceland.

Jansson, André. 2022. “Spatial Phantasmagoria: The Mediazation of Tourism Experience”. *European Journal of Communication* 17(4): 429-443.

Javette Koefoed, Nina and Mette Frisk Jensen. 2020. “Open Online Course in Danish History Module 5: Absolute Monarchy, 1660-1884”. *Danmarkshistoriendk Aarhus Universitet.* Retrieved February 13th, 2024. https://danmarkshistorien.dk/en/open-online-course/modules/module-5-absolute-monarchy-1660-1814

Johansen, Jens Chr. V. 2006. “Absolutism and the ‘rule of law’ in Denmark 1660- *c.* 1750”. *The Journal of Legal History* 27(2): 153-173.

Johansson, Marjana. 2012. “Place Branding and the Imaginary: The Politics of Re-imagining a Garden City”. *Urban Studies* 49(16): 3611-3626.

Julin, Grant. 2019. “Satire in a multi-cultural world: a Bakhtinian analysis”. Pp. 261-281 in *The Routledge Comedy Studies Reader* edited by Ian Wilkie. Routledge: London.

Karl, Katherine A, Joy V. Peluchette, and Navid Aghakhani. 2022. “Virtual Work Meetings During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly”. *Small Group Research* 53(3): 343-365.

Karlsson, Gunnar. 1993. “A Century of Research on Early Icelandic Society”. Pp. 15-25 in *Viking Revaluations* edited by Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins. Birmingham, AB: Viking Society for Northern Research,

Karlsson, Gunnar. 2000. *The History of Iceland*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Keskinen, Suvi, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Mari Toivanen. 2019. “Narrations of homogeneity, waning welfare states, and the politics of solidarity”. Pp. 1-17 in *Undoing Homogeneity*

in the Nordic Region: Migration, Difference and the Politics of Solidarity edited by Keskinen et al. London and New York: Routledge.

Klein, Naomi. 2010. *"No Logo: 10th Anniversary Edition".* New York: Picador.

Knowledge at Wharton Podcast. 2018. "How Iceland Dealt with a Volcanic Financial Meltdown". *Knowledge at Wharton.* Retrieved February 14th, 2024. https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/podcast/knowledge-at-wharton-podcast/icelands-economic-recovery/

Kristinsson, Ari Páll. 2018. "National language policy and planning in Iceland – aims and institutional activities". Pp. 244-249 in *National language and institutions and national languages: Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2017 in Mannheim* edited by Gerhard Stickel. Budapest: Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Legutko, Agnieszka Joanna. 2018. "Iceland's Financial Crisis in 2008. Political, Economic, and Social Consequences". *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 20(1): 113-130.

Lemos, Silvia. 2020. "Let It Out: The Anatomy of a Campaign". *Sookio.* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://www.sookio.com/blog/the-anatomy-of-a-campaign-promote-iceland-let-it-out.

Lerner, Marion. 2011. "Images of the North, Sublime Nature, and a Pioneering Icelandic Nation". Pp.229-253 in *Iceland and Images of the North* edited by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson in collaboration with Daniel Chartier. Québec and Reykjavik: Presses de l'Université du Québec, "Droit au Pôle" series and Reykjavíkur Akademían.

Lidard, Christopher. 2023. "Zoom may be the future of flexible work". *The Daily Princetonian.* Retrieved March 30th, 2024. https://www.dailyprincetonian.com/article/2023/03/princeton-covid-zoom-virtual-work-liberate-workday-workplace.

Lipsitz, George. 2007. "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race". *Landscape Journal* 26(1): 10-23.

Loftsdóttir, Kristín. 2011. "Negotiating white Icelandic identity: multiculturalism and colonial identity formations. *Social Identities* 17(1): 11-25.

Loftsdóttir, Kristín. 2014. "Going to Eden: Nordic exceptionalism and the image of blackness in Iceland". *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 7(1): 27-41.

Loftsdóttir, Kristín and Helga Björnsdóttir. 2015. "Nordic exceptionalism and gendered peacekeeping: The case of Iceland". *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22(2): 208-222.

Loftsdóttir, Krisítn. 2017. “Being the “Damned Foreigner”: Affective National Sentiments and Racialization of Lithuanians in Iceland”. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 7(2): 70-78.

Loftsdóttir, Kristín, Katla Kjartansdóttir, and Katrín Anna Lund. 2017. “Trapped in clichés: masculinity, films and tourism in Iceland.” *Gender, Place, and Culture* 24(9): 1225-1242.

Lundström, Catrin and Benjamin R.Teitelbaum. 2017. “Nordic Whiteness: An Introduction”. *Scandinavian Studies* 89(2): 151- 158.

M&C Saatchi Group. 2024. “Who We Are”. *M&C Saatchi Group.* Retrieved January 24th, 2024. https://mcsaatchi.com/about.

Mallon, Thomas. 2023. “What If Nostalgia Isn’t What it Used To Be?”. *The New Yorker.* Retrieved July 15th, 2024. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/11/27/yesterday-a-new-history-of-nostalgia-tobias-becker-book-review.

Mambrol, Nasrullah. 2016, “Strategic Essentialism”. *Literary Theory and Criticism.* Retrieved February 4th, 2023. https://literariness.org/2016/04/09/strategic-essentialism/.

Manning, Jennifer. 2024. “Critical Constructivism”. *Global Social Theory.* Retrieved July 2nd, 2024. https://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/critical-constructivism/.

Margolis, Emily A. 2021. “Space Tourism: Then and Now”. *National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian.* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/space-tourism-then-and-now.

Massey, Doreen. 2005. *For Space.* London: Sage Publishing.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 2024. “Phantasmagoria”. *Merriam Webster.* Retrieved July 30th, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phantasmagoria.

Mullen. Pat. 2017. “The Façade of Settler Patriotism: Wayne Wapeemukwa Talks Luk’Luk’I”. Retrieved July 30th, 2024. https://povmagazine.com/wayne-wapeemukwa-talks-lukluki/.

Nachmanovitch, Steven. 1990. “*Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art”.* New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam a member of Penguin Putnam Inc.

Narayan, Kirin. 1993. “How Native is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?”. *American Anthropologist*, New Series 93(3): 671-686.

Nelson, Maggie. 2024. “A Continuity, Imagined: A Conversation with Björk”. Pp. 173-195 in *Like Love: Essays and Conversations.* Toronto. McClelland & Stewart.

Nelson, Maggie. 2021. “Riding the Blinds”. Pp. 171-218. *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint.* Toronto. McClelland & Stewart.

Nora, Pierre. 1989. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire". *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory: 7-24.

Nover, Scott. 2021. "Why Facebook changed its name". *Quartz.* Retrieved March 1st, 2024. https://qz.com/2081663/why-facebook-changed-its-name-to-meta#:~:text=What%20was%20formerly%20known%20as,now%20called%20Meta%20Platforms%20Inc.

Nudd, Tim. 2022. "A Return to the Icelandverse, SS+K's Perfect Metaverse Parody" July 28, 2022 in *Tagline: A Muse by Clio Podcast* produced by GSTV, podcast, 30:51. https://musebycl.io/tagline/visit-iceland-icelandverse.

Obiegbu, Chinedu James, and Gretchen Larsen. 2024. "Algorithmic personalization and brand loyalty: An experiential perspective". *Marketing Theory* 0(0): 1-21.

OECD iLibrary. 2024. "OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2022: Iceland". *OECD iLibrary.* Retrieved March 10th, 2024. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/12f10c2a-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/12f10c2a-en.

Oslund, Karen. 2002. "Imagining Iceland: narratives of nature and history in the North Atlantic". *British journal for the history of science* 25(126): 313-334.

Oslund, Karen. 2011. "Icelandic Landscapes: Natural Histories and National Histories". Pp. 30-60 in *Iceland Imagined: Nature, Culture, and Storytelling in the North Atlantic.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Österlund-Pötzsch, Suzanne. 2013. "Walking Nordic: Performing Space, Place, and Identity". Pp. 27-52 in *Performing Nordic Heritage: Everyday Practices and Institutional Culture* edited by Peter Aronsson and Lizette Gradén. London and New York: Routledge.

Paragg, Jillian. 2017. "What are you?": Mixed race responses to the racial gaze". *Ethnicities* 17(3): 277-298.

Park, Eunkyung, Byoung-Kil Choi and Timothy J. Lee. 2019. "The role and dimensions of authenticity in heritage tourism". *Tourism Management Perspectives* 74: 99-109.

Pétursdóttir. Guðrún. 2013. "Manifestation of hidden discrimination and everyday prejudice towards immigrants in Iceland". *Intercultural Iceland.* Retrieved October 27th, 2021.http://www.ici.is/assets/Everyday_discrimination_in_Iceland.pdf.

Pritchard, Annette and Nigel J. Morgan. 2001. "Culture, identity and tourism representation: marketing Cymru or Wales?". *Tourism Management* 22: 167-179.

Quist-Adade, Charles. 2019. *Symbolic Interactionism: The Basics.* Delaware and Malaga: Vernon Press.

Rees, Ellen. 2015. "Chapter 10: The Nordic 'Quirky Feel-Good'. Pp. 147-158 in *Nordic Genre Film: Small Nation Film Cultures in the Global Marketplace* edited by Tommy Gustafsson and Pietari Kääpä. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

Ren, Qutian. 2023. "Advertising and Content Creation on Digital Content Platforms". *Marketing Science Articles in Advance*: 1-17.

Renan, Ernest. [1882] 1990. "What is a Nation?". Translated by M. Thom. Pp. 8-22 in *Nation and Narration* edited by Homi K. Bhabha. London and New York: Routledge.

Ricoeur, Paul [1994] 2016. "Imagination in discourse and action". Pp.118-135 in *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity.* 2nd ed, edited by Gillian Robinson and John Rundell. Abingdon: Routledge.

Riewald, J.G. 1966. "Parody as criticism". *Neophilologous* 50(1): 125-148.

Rose, Gillian. 2016. *Visual Methodologies: 4th Edition.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Salonen, Kirsi and Kurt Villads Jensen. 2023. "Rise and Fall of the Kalmar Union". Pp. 229-243 in *Scandinavia in the Middle Ages 900-1550.* London and New York: Routledge

Santoro, Miléna. 2020. "The Rural (Re)Turns of Young Protagonists in Contemporary Quebec Films. Pp. 149-179 in *Cinema of Pain: On Quebec's Nostalgic Screen edited by Liz Czach and André Loiselle. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press.*

Scarppochi, Cristina. 2020. "Chapter 2: Tourisms and tourists: Where are people going?". Pp. 11-24 in *Place Branding: Connecting Tourist Experiences to Places* edited by Foroudi, Pantea, Chiara Mauri, Charles Dennis, and T.C. Melewar. London and New York: Routledge.

Schmidt, Garbi. 2019. "Myths of ethnic homogeneity: The Danish case". Pp. 35-49 in *Undoing Homogeneity in the Nordic Region: Migration, Difference and the Politics of Solidarity* edited by Keskinen et al. London and New York. Routledge.

Schulz, Kathryn. 2017. "Literature's Arctic Obsession". *The New Yorker.* Retrieved April 4th, 2024. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/24/literatures-arctic-obsession.

Schnurr, Stephanie and Charley Rowe. 2008. "The 'Dark Side' of Humour: An Analysis of Subversive Humour in Workplace Emails". *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 4(1): 109-130.

Shahin, Ingólfur. 2018. "The Complete History of Iceland." *Guide to Iceland*. Retrieved October 27th, 2021. https://guidetoiceland.is/history-culture/history-of-iceland.

Shields. Rob. 1991. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity.* London. Routledge.

Shields, Rob. 2013. *Spatial Questions: Cultural Topologies and Social Spatialisations.* London. Sage Publications Ltd.

Sigmundsson, Freysteinn and Kristján Sæmundsson. 2008. "Iceland: a window on North-Atlantic divergent plate tectonics and geologic processes". *Episodes* 31(1): 92-97.

Sigurdardóttir, Ragnhildur. 2024. "Iceland Keeps Feeding Its Tourist Boom. Will It Push Locals Out?". *Bloomberg.* Retrieved March 6th, 2024. https://www.islandsstofa.is/en/marketing-projects-inspired-by-iceland.

Simpson, Archie. 2022. "On the identification and Definition of Microstates". *Journal of International Affairs* 74(2): 67-79.

Skaptadóttir, Unnur Dís and Pamela Innes. 2017. "Immigrant Experiences of Learning Icelandic and Connecting with the Speaking Community". *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 7(1): 20-27.

SPACETOURISMO. 2022. "A comparison conversation between orbital and suborbital". *SPACETOURISMO.* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://spacetourismo.com/a-comparison-conversation-between-orbital-and-suborbital/.

SS+K. 2024. "About". *SS+K.* Retrieved January 24th, 2024. https://www.ssk.com/#about.

Statistics Iceland. 2022. "Immigrants 16.3% of the population in Iceland". *Statistics Iceland.* Retrieved July 15th, 2024. https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/immigrants-and-persons-with-foreign-background-2022/#:~:text=Immigrants%20in%20Iceland%20were%2061%2C148,2021%20to%206%2C575%20in%202022.

Sæþórsdóttir, Anna Dóra, C. Michael Hall, and Jarkko Saarinen. 2011. "Making wilderness: tourism and the history of the wilderness idea in Iceland". *Polar Geography* 34(4): 249-273.

The Associated Press. 2023. "Virgin Galactic rockets its 1st tourists to the edge of space". *CBC News.* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/virgin-galactic-tourists-1.6932451#:~:text=Like%20Virgin%20Galactic%2C%20Blue%20Origin,but%20no%20passengers%2C%20landed%20intact.

Toft Hansen, Kim and Anne Marit Waade. 2017. *Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to the Bridge.* Cham: Palgrave European Film and Media Studies, Palgrave Macmillan.

Tranøy, Bent Sofus and Throstur Olaf Sigurjonsson. 2022. "Back From the Brink: Iceland's Successful Economic Recovery". Pp. 388-408 in *Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges* edited by Caroline de la Porte, Guðný Björk Eydal, Jaakko Kauko, Daniel Nohrstedt, Paul T. Hart, and Bent Sofus Tranøy. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Tweed, Fiona and Allan Watson. 2019. "The screams all sound the same: The music of *Of Monsters and Men* and the Icelandic imaginary as geographical discourse". *Area* 51: 126-133.

UN Tourism. 2024. “Tourism and Culture”. *UN Tourism.* Retrieved June 5th, 2024. https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture.

UNHCR. 2023. “Iceland”. *UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency.* Retrieved March 19th, 2023. https://www.unhcr.org/iceland.html.

Vega, Nicolas. 2023. “Ryan Reynolds breaks down the investing strategy that has made him millions: ‘My job is storytelling’”. *CNBC.* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://www.cnbc.com/2023/04/17/ryan-reynolds-explains-his-investing-strategy.html.

Virgin Galactic. 2024. “Welcome to the Spaceline for Earth”. *Virgin Galactic.* Retrieved March 3rd, 2024. https://www.virgingalactic.com/.

Webb, Peter and John Lynch. 2010. “Utopian Punk”: The Concept of the Utopian in the Creative Practice of Björk”. *Utopian Studies* 21(2): 313-330.

Wegner, Phillip E. 2002. “Genre and the Spatial Histories of Modernity”. Pp. 1-26 in *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Wickström, Mats. 2017. “Nordic brothers before strange others: pan-national boundary making in the post-war naturalization policies of the Nordic countries”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40(4): 675-693.

Williams, Allison and Rannveig Ólafsdóttir. 2023. “Nature-based tourism as therapeutic landscape in a COVID era: autoethnographic learnings from a visitor’s experience in Iceland. *GeoJournal* 88(2): 1737-1754.

World Travel and Tourism Council. 2023. “Economic Research Impact”. *World Travel and Tourism Council.* Retrieved December 30, 2023. https://wttc.org/research/economic-impact