

No One is an Island

No One is an Island:

An Icelandic Perspective

Edited by

Giorgio Baruchello,
Jakob Thor Kristjánsson,
Kristín Margrét Jóhannsdóttir
and Skafti Ingimarsson

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vii
Preface.....	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Giorgio Baruchello, Jakob Thor Kristjánsson, Kristín Margrét Jóhannsdóttir and Skafti Ingimarsson</i>	
Part One: Iceland's Image and Identity	
Chapter One.....	9
Twelve Years an Editor: Nordic-Mediterranean Perspectives on Iceland's International Image <i>Giorgio Baruchello</i>	
Chapter Two.....	25
Media in a Microstate <i>Birgir Guðmundsson</i>	
Chapter Three.....	41
Migrating to the High North: Experiences of Happiness among the Immigrant Population of Akureyri <i>Stéphanie Barillé and Markus Meckl</i>	
Part Two: Cooperation in the North-Atlantic and Iceland's Foreign Aid Policy	
Chapter Four.....	59
Little Fish, Big Pond: Icelandic Interests and Influence in Arctic Governance <i>Rachael Lorna Johnstone and Hjalti Ómar Ágústsson</i>	
Chapter Five.....	83
The West-Nordic Region and the Arctic <i>Grétar Thór Eythórsson and Gestur Hovgaard</i>	

Chapter Six	111
Iceland and Foreign Aid: From Recipient to Donor <i>Geir Gunnlaugsson, Þórdís Sigurðardóttir, Margrét Einarsdóttir and Jónína Einarsdóttir</i>	
Epilogue.....	135
<i>Guðmundur Heiðar Frímansson</i>	
Contributors.....	145

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1: Media independent or dependent on parties

Figure 2-2: A voter sample survey in November/December 2015

Figure 2-1: The news values of journalists

Figure 4-1: Arctic Populations

Figure 4-2: Iceland's maritime zones

Figure 4-3: The EEZs and High Seas in the Arctic Ocean

Figure 5-1: Definitions of the Arctic boundaries.

Figure 6-1. Iceland's Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the period 2000-2016.

PREFACE

We are pleased to have a hand in this book—we hope it will strengthen the international literature available on small states’ policy and identity, climate change, foreign aid, immigration, and Iceland and the North–Atlantic. The editors want to thank the contributors for their work and patience during the review and editing process. We also would like to thank Victoria Carruthers and Theo Moxham and the rest of the staff at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for all the help they have given us. We would also like to thank our anonymous reviewers for their critical comments, which have made this book stronger. We would also like to thank the University of Akureyri, AkureyriAkademia, the Icelandic Prime Minister’s office, the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Akureyri Municipality, Mannspil ehf, and KPMG in Iceland, for sponsoring the conference “No one is an island: Iceland and the International Community”, held at the University of Akureyri on March 19, 2016, whence many of the book’s chapters have emerged.

INTRODUCTION

GIORGIO BARUCHELLO,
JAKOB THOR KRISTJÁNSSON,
KRISTÍN MARGRÉT JÓHANNSDÓTTIR
AND SKAFTI INGIMARSSON

This book is about a small North-Atlantic state, Iceland, its image, identities and interactions on the international stage. The main theme of this book is how these image and identities play out in relation to other state and non-state actors. Is the image and identities of this small state hard to change? Are they carved in stone? And how does its own image influence Iceland's international behaviour; if it is even possible to figure out exactly what Iceland's image actually is? The premise is that ideas, the making of identities, and the purchase of norms are a driving force in small states, where the strategies by which states pursue their interests are connected to their international environment.

The book examines Iceland's image, identities and interactions that play an important role in Iceland's foreign and domestic policy, featuring a variety of perspectives on the subject from academics and officials. In 2016, the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs, The University of Akureyri and the independent research institute AkureyriAkademia held a conference entitled "No one is an island: Iceland and the International Community". The goal of the conference was to examine the position and future of Iceland in the international community. Even though the conference addressed traditional relations with North America and Europe, a substantial portion of the debate centred around the following issues: Iceland's international image in foreign academic circles; international affairs in the Icelandic media; Iceland and international cooperation in the Arctic; Iceland and climate change; immigration and refugee policy in Iceland; and Iceland's foreign aid policy. This book is a result of that conference.

Perhaps the most interesting point that arose from the conference concerned how a small state like Iceland can contribute to international

affairs. Iceland is defined as a small state both by academics and by politicians. The argument could be made, however, that in some matters Iceland is a *microstate*, for example in the fields of media and foreign aid. In this book Iceland is treated as a small state, based on how the Icelandic political elite define state interests with regard to the size and capability of the state at issue and whether they assume that they can influence the international system (Thorhallsson 2006).

It is often argued that a small state like Iceland must specialize and focus its resources on a few foreign policy issues to be successful internationally. The term used for this policy is ‘niche diplomacy’. This involves focusing on matters that are recognized and viewed in positive light by the international community in order to earn influence. One could argue that Iceland is doing just that by focusing on matters such as the Arctic, immigration and foreign aid. At the same time, Icelanders are concerned about their own image, status and position as a small state in international relations. In this book, the authors explore these issues and how they influence Icelandic policy internationally and in the North-Atlantic in particular. One of the lessons learned from this book is that it demonstrates how the international landscape after the Cold War changed the position, image and identities of Iceland as a small state, based on its status as a prosperous Nordic welfare state that could successfully participate in international cooperation in the North-Atlantic and the world at large.

Iceland became a republic during the Second World War. Until then, the main foreign policy goal of the Icelandic political elite had been neutrality. Specifically, from 1918 to 1944, Iceland had been a sovereign state in personal union with Denmark, sharing the same monarch. In that period Denmark continued to oversee Icelandic foreign affairs on its behalf. It was only when Denmark was occupied by the German army, in April 1940, that Iceland began to take care of international matters on its own. Iceland’s status as a neutral state changed during WWII—and after it. Iceland was occupied peacefully by the United Kingdom in 1940 and, after the war, Iceland joined the UN in 1946 and NATO in 1949. The time had come for this small state to learn the ropes as a republic on the international scene (Gunnarsson 1990; Ingimundarson 1996; Thorhallsson 2005; Kristjánsson 2016).

Iceland can be described as a ‘free-rider state’ or a ‘reluctant ally’ in the Cold War. Yet, at the same time, Iceland was in a strategically strong position to pursue its most vital foreign policy goal, namely the extension of the fishing zone around the island and the protection of the fishing stock (Rothstein 1968; Handel 1990; Gunnarsson 1990; Ingimundarson 2011;

Johannesson 2004; Kristjánsson 2016). One can therefore argue that Iceland's actual tactic was 'niche diplomacy' in the Cold War. In the same period Iceland received generous foreign aid, both from the US and from the World Bank. This aid allowed Iceland to build up rapidly its infrastructure and society, though many hurdles were on the way.

The end of the Cold War changed Iceland's position in the world and gone was the era of the free-rider state. Iceland began to participate more and more in international affairs, for example within NATO and under the banner of the UN, acting as a state ready and willing to take part in international aid operations on a much bigger scale than before (Kristjánsson 2010). Yet, in many ways, the international behaviour of Iceland is still marked by its smallness, its geographical position in the middle of the North-Atlantic, and its Viking heritage and as a Nordic state.

One can argue that in this book there is a difference in how foreign academics working in Iceland write about Iceland and how Icelanders write about their own country. Interestingly, the "foreigners" focus more on identity and the image of Iceland from an outside perspective. Whereas Icelandic authors are more concerned with Iceland's position and international reputation. Iceland and Icelanders are in many ways coming to terms with their own image, often in relation to neighbouring countries, and how other states view and judge Iceland. This is clearly demonstrated in the chapters in this book. Iceland sees itself as a North-Atlantic state where matters of the Arctic are of great importance, but at the same time Iceland wants to be recognised as state that contributes to foreign aid and to resolving humanitarian crises. But this has not always been the case, as demonstrated in the book.

When writing their chapters, the authors were asked to include at least two concepts from the following list: Iceland's identity, Iceland in international affairs, Iceland's image, international relations, and lessons learned. Perhaps unconsciously, the authors' responses reveal both similarities and differences—sometimes through what they don't say as much as through what they do say.

Based on the chosen concepts, the book was divided into two parts. The first part focuses on Iceland's image and identities, discussing Iceland from the inside, e.g. Iceland's tiny media, its immigration policy, and academic publishing. The second part focuses on international cooperation in the North-Atlantic, Arctic issues and Iceland's foreign aid policy. This shows what foreign policy issues are perhaps most important for the small North-Atlantic state at that moment. This does not wish to suggest that relations and cooperation with Europe and North-America are not important for Iceland or the North-Atlantic in general. It indicates, rather,

that a change in foreign and security relations with Europe or the U.S. is not a priority policy goal for the Icelandic political elite. Specifically, after recent developments in Europe and in the U.S., the discourses about Iceland's international image and its policies in the Arctic, especially with regard to climate change, immigration and foreign aid, are even more vocal than before.

The book concludes with an epilogue that discusses the main theme of the book and it is wisely suggested that, even though we might be closer to understanding the smallness of Iceland, as well as its image, identities and academic and political relations with the outside world, these are perhaps not as clear-cut as one would think. The gist is, perhaps, that the Icelandic perspective is more idiosyncratic than international.

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PART ONE:
ICELAND'S IMAGE AND IDENTITY

CHAPTER ONE

TWELVE YEARS AN EDITOR: NORDIC-MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVES ON ICELAND'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE

GIORGIO BARUCHELLO

Introduction

Since its inception in the year 2015 I have been volunteering as unpaid editor of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum: Icelandic E-Journal of Nordic and Mediterranean Studies* (hereafter *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*), published by the University of Akureyri. As such, I have received, read, reviewed and released a number of contributions by foreign and, in particular, by Italian scholars, dealing with Iceland under a broad variety of scientific perspectives. Also, especially during and immediately after Iceland's 2008 financial meltdown, I was contacted and interviewed by a number of media outlets, primarily Italian, and I keep being contacted by them in connection with Iceland's seemingly miraculous quick recovery from that collapse as well as the recent legislation on gender equality (i.e. the legal requirement for medium- and large-size businesses to provide evidence of gender-equality policies within the companies and, as of 2020, equal pay). Thanks to these experiences, I can contribute to the present book with an eminently personal yet qualitatively rich account of Iceland's image among Italian and foreign academic circles. Above all, I believe the materials accumulated in the reasonably long life of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* to be a truly interesting source of insight in the academics' interest points, if not even the educated commonplaces, about Iceland. What is offered here is therefore not a standard research piece, as I myself have produced by the dozen *qua* middle-aged professional academic, but a more unusual yet hopefully helpful set of remarks on the journal's history and on my own experiences as its editor.

Albeit in charge of the journal since its inception and a citizen of both Iceland and Italy, I am not its real father, who is instead a scholar that has been working for many years at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík, Maurizio Tani. Almost twelve years ago, he approached me with the idea of a scholarly journal devoted to the many and diverse historical exchanges between the North and the South of Europe and, in particular, between Iceland and Italy. Nothing of the sort existed on the academic scene. Needless to say, his suggestion was taken aboard. Then, thanks to the small yet vital financial support of the University of Akureyri, plus the crucial help *qua* webmaster of Mr. Fabrizio Veneziano of Schiller International University in Paris and of Ms. Sigrún Magnúsdóttir *qua* Akureyri-based editorial assistant, the journal was officially born. A niche product in spirit and in fact, *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* aimed at becoming an international, multi- and interdisciplinary forum for the presentation, discussion and exchange of ideas, studies and resources dealing with Mediterranean and Nordic matters. In particular, though by no means exclusively, *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* was meant to be a venue for the exploration of the ties between Iceland and Italy: historical, cultural, economic, political, scientific, religious and artistic. Above all else, *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* wished to foster the awareness and the understanding concerning the common origins, intertwined traditions and shared problematics of the Eurasian communities of the North—hence *Nordicum*—and of the South—hence *Mediterraneum*.

In the beginning, the journal published material dealing exclusively with such commonalities, intertwining and shared elements. Later, upon pressure by its growing readership, it started fostering them by including works dealing with Nordic and Mediterranean issues at large. It was and still is the firm belief of the journal's editorial board that culture is a public good and, as such, it must be available to the public as easily and as economically as possible. Publishing *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* in the electronic format has served this twofold goal, not to mention its reduced environmental impact. Rather than mimicking standard paper publications, the electronic character of the journal has been intentionally highlighted by choice of font, overall look and user interaction (e.g. font-resizing options, scroll-down browsing in lieu of a virtual table of contents, in-text hyperlinks, restricted log-in area for authors). No processing fees or submission charges have ever applied. Curiously, we later discovered that *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* had *ipso facto* pioneered open-access academic publishing in Iceland, upon which the journal has opened a window for scholars, scientists, students and the reading public at large. Hopefully, the window will remain open for many years to come.

Foreign contributions about Iceland: Numbers and titles

Given the time-frame during which the present chapter was written, the break-up of the publications listed below covers the years from 2005 to 2016, but it does not include the 2016 special issues 11(2) and (3) (both of them being conference proceedings), nor the regular issue 12(1) of 2017, which too is to be followed by two special issues at the point in time during which I revise this chapter *per* the publisher's formal requirements (these two special issues being also conference proceedings).¹ As a result, it reads as follows:

Regular issues: 11 (2006–2016)

Special issues: 12 (2006–2016 i.e. up to 10(3)/2016)

Of which:

Conference proceedings: 11 (2008–2016)

Other subjects: 1 (2006)

Amounting in total to 333 contributions

Of which:

New articles: 42

Reflections on Iceland's economic crisis: 13

Conference proceedings: 102

Conference-related notes: 11

Review essays: 5

Book reviews: 121

Interviews: 6

Memoirs: 6

Translations: 5

Republished books: 2

Degree theses: 1

Other contributions (short notes, reports, surveys, non-peer-reviewed articles, etc.): 19

Of all these published materials, 45 contributions can be said to deal with Iceland's image in the eyes of foreign scholars, whether directly or indirectly, e.g. as reported in books reviewed for the journal (in the case of book reviews and review essays, I attribute each entry to either the

¹ The present chapter is based entirely on the paper accepted for, and presented at, the conference "No one is an island: Iceland and the International Community", held at the University of Akureyri on the 19th March 2016. As such, it was included in the conference proceedings published in the special issue 11(2)/2016 of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*. It is republished here with a few integrations.

reviewer's nationality or the book author's nationality, depending on who emphasises Iceland more). Longer pieces (e.g. articles, conference papers) amount to 21, while shorter ones (e.g. book reviews) to 24. Most of them are in legal studies (12), linguistics and/or literature (7) and history (5). Then we have contributions in philosophy (4), economics (4), geography (4), politics (3), psychology (2), art history (1) and personal memoirs (3). The countries of relative observation can be listed as follows:

Argentina: 1
Faroe Islands: 1
Finland: 1
Germany: 3
Ireland: 2
Italy: 25
The People's Republic of China: 2
Romania: 1
Russia: 2
Scotland: 6
Spain: 1

True to the original spirit of the journal, publications by Italian scholars on Icelandic or Italian-Icelandic matters stand out as far more numerous than the others. This geographical predominance and the limited overall as well as specific number of published contributions make a quantitative analysis unlikely to provide valuable information, though it could make for some nice graphs and colourful charts to look at.² Their qualitative value as academic exploration of Iceland's heritage and historical experiences persists, then, especially if we consider that

² In our positivist academic culture, quantitative analyses are expected even when avoidable. They are then as commonplace as they are sterile, and they offer ways in which the qualitative assumptions of their authors can be kept in the background, in a high-brow pretence of impersonal neutrality. Yet, as the great chemist Michael Polanyi (1958) argued many years ago, all knowledge is, ultimately, personal knowledge. Though we can and must rely upon socially constructed means of learned investigation and communication, behind each and every scientific statement there is a person that decides freely and responsibly to commit herself to it. Given the limitations just mentioned, I gather that it would be silly on my part to launch into a quantitative dissection of the available data. That is my methodological call. My remarks are my remarks, as these can be produced upon the basis of many years of professional and human experience *qua* editor of a scholarly journal.

Nordicum-Mediterraneum is unique in its thematic focus on North-South relations across disciplines and historical periods. The typology, depth and length of these 45 contributions varies enormously. I list them below in chronological order, specifying their category, in accordance with the journal's internal system of classification. In the pages following the list below, I refer to the underlined authors and the relevant year of publication in the journal; when Icelandic-foreign collaborative projects are included, I underline and count for the country list above only the foreign specialists involved. Given how central these explicit and detailed references are to the present chapter, I do not reiterate them in the final bibliography.

1(1)/2006

Article

Antonio **Casado da Rocha**, "Narrative Ethics and the Ecology of Culture: Notes on New Italian-Icelandic Sagas"

Note on conference proceedings

Maurizio **Tani**, "Italo Balbo, Iceland and a Short Story by Halldór Laxness. Notes on the Conference 'La trasvolata Italia-Islanda del 1933' (Reykjavík, 7 June 2003)"

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Francesco **Milazzo**, "Teaching Roman Law in Iceland"

1(2)/2006

Translations

Maria **Savi Lopez** (1848–1940), "Akureyri", *Nei paesi del Nord*, Torino: Paravia, 1893

Italo **Balbo** (1896–1940), "Nella terra dei Vichinghi", *La centuria alata*, Milano: Mondadori, 1934

3(1)/2008

Articles

Emanuela **Finocchietti** & Luca **Zarrilli**, "Paesaggio naturale e politiche di sviluppo territoriale in Islanda"

Conference proceedings

Manuela S. **Campanini**, "Iceland as a Landscape Investigation Pattern"

Book reviews

By Antonio Calcagno: Paolo **Borioni**, Cesare **Damiano** & Tiziano **Treu**, *Il modello sociale scandinavo*.

Tra diritti e flessibilità (Roma: Nuova Iniziativa Editoriale, 2006)

4(1)/2009***Interviews, memoirs and other contributions***

Federico **Actite**, *Ancient Rome and Icelandic Culture - A Brief Overview*

5(1)/2010***Articles***

Diego **Feroli**, “On the Oral-Formulaic Theory and its Application in the Poetic Edda: The Cases of *Alvíssmál* and *Hávamál*”

Manuela S. **Campanini**, “Imagine a Collective Landscape”

Viola **Miglio**, “Old Norse and Old English Language Contact: Scandinavian Legal Terminology in Anglo-Saxon Laws”

Reflections on the economic crisis

Giorgio **Baruchello**, “Eight Noble Opinions and the Economic Crisis: Four Literary-philosophical Sketches *à la* Eduardo Galeano”

Maria Pia **Paganelli**, “Learning from Bjartur About Today's Icelandic Economic Crisis”

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Antonio **Costanzo**, “Fyrirlestur um bókina *Hávamál*. La voce di Odino”

Marinella **Lorinczi**, “Dracula in Iceland”

6(1)/2011***Article***

Adriana **Di Stefano**, “Northern Steps of EU Enlargement: The Impact of ‘Cohesion’ Policies on Iceland’s Accession Process”

Book reviews

By Rachael Lorna **Johnstone**: H. Beale et al., *Cases, Materials and Texts on Contract Law*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010); and T. K. Graziano, *Comparative Contract Law: Cases, Materials and Exercises* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009)

By Rachael Lorna Johnstone, Natalia **Loukacheva** (ed.), *Polar Law Textbook* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2010)

Dissertation

Fabio **Quartino**, *La Costituzione Islandese: storia ed evoluzione*

6(2)/2011***Article***

Garrett **Barden**, “Responses to the contributors”

7(1)/2012**Article**

Birgir Guðmundsson & Markus **Meckl**, "'Karlson' - A Stasi 'Kontakt Person'. An episode of Iceland's Cold War legacy"

Book reviews

By Andrea Hjálmsdóttir: Aðalheiður Ámundadóttir & Rachael Lorna **Johnstone**, *Mannréttindi í þrengingum: Efnahagsleg og félagsleg réttindi í krepplunni* (Akureyri-Reykjavík: Háskólinn á Akureyri og Mannréttindaskrifstofa Íslands, 2011)

By Anita Einarsdóttir & **Tiantian Zhang**: Herman Salton, *Arctic Host, Icy Visit: China and Falun Gong Face Off in Iceland* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010)

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Jorge **Mejía**, "Some impressions after a quick visit to Iceland"

8(1)/2013**Articles**

Hjálti Ómar Ágústsson & Rachael Lorna **Johnstone**, "Practising what they Preach: Did the IMF and Iceland Exercise Good Governance in their Relations 2008–2011?"

Irina **Zhilina**, "The Security Aspects in the Arctic: the Potential Role of NATO"

Review essay

By Carlo **Penco**: Juha Manninen & Friedrich Stadler (eds.), *The Vienna Circle and the Nordic Countries. Networks and Transformations of Logical Empiricism* (Vienna: Vienna Circle Institute Yearbook vol.14, Springer, 2010)

Book reviews

By Gísli Aðalsteinsson: Maurizio **Tani**, *La chiesa di Akureyri: Guida storico-artistica alla parrocchiale luterana della «capitale del nord»* (Grafarvogur: Snorri Sturluson, 2010)

By Guðmundur Heiðar Frimansson: Brian **Lucey**, Charles **Larkin** & Constantin **Gurdgiev** (eds.), *What if Ireland defaults?* (Dublin: Orpen Press, 2012)

By Herman Salton, "'Arctic Host, Icy Visit': A Response" (cf. **Tiantian Zhang**)

By Rachael Lorna **Johnstone**: Jesús Ballesteros, Encarnación Fernández Ruiz-Gálvez & Pedro Talavera (eds.), *Globalization and Human Rights: Challenges and Answers from a European Perspective* (Ius Gentium: Comparative Perspectives of Law and Justice, Vol. 13, Leiden: Springer, 2012)

By Rachael Lorna **Johnstone**: T. Kue Young (senior ed.), Rajiv Rawat, Winifred Dallmann, Susan Chatwood & Peter Bjerregaard (eds.), *Circumpolar Health Atlas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012)

By Tero **Mustonen**, C. Raudvere & J.P. Schjödtt (eds.), *More Than Mythology – Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012)

Translation

Luana **Giampiccolo**, “Leiðarvísir, an Old Norse itinerarium: a proposal for a new partial translation and some notes about the place-names”

9(1)/2014

Article

Matteo **Tarsi**, “On Loanwords of Latin Origin in Contemporary Icelandic”

Book reviews

By Federica **Scarpa**: Natalia Loukacheva (ed.), *Polar Law Textbook II* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2013)

By Giorgio **Baruchello**: Þorlákur Axel Jónsson, *Dagur Austan. Ævintýramaðurinn Vernharður Eggertsson* (Akureyri: Völuspá, 2009)

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Birgir Guðmundsson & Markus **Meckl**, “Regaining Iceland for the Catholic Church in the mid-19th Century”

9(2)/2014

Conference proceeding

Giorgio **Baruchello**, “The Picture—Small and Big: Iceland and the Crises”

10(1)/2015

Conference proceeding

Thomas **Hören**, “IMMI and Whistleblowing in Iceland – the new regulatory framework”

Book reviews

By Giorgio **Baruchello**: Sven-Olof Olsson (ed.), *Managing Crises and De-globalization. Nordic foreign trade and exchange 1919-39* (New York: Routledge, 2014 pbk.)

By Giorgio Baruchello: Gaetano Roberto **Buccola**, *Forme del centro. Percorsi analitici dal "Viaggio al centro della Terra" al nucleo dell'uomo* (Palermo: Nuova Ipsa, 2013)

By Rachael Lorna Johnstone: **Kári á Rógvi**, *West-Nordic Constitutional*

Judicial Review: A Comparative Study of Scandinavian Judicial Review and Judicial Reasoning (Copenhagen: Djøf Publishing, 2013)

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Roberto **Buccola**, “The Unconscious and the Island: Fragments of Research on the Self”

10(2)/2015

Conference proceeding

Giorgio **Baruchello**, “Enemies of Interculturalism: The Economic Crisis in Light of Xenophobia, Liberal Cruelties and Human Rights“

Foreign contributions about Iceland: Recurring themes

What sort of recurring themes can be found in this collection of diverse scholarly and scientific texts? The titles give away some common elements. Having read and edited all of the texts over my twelve years of editorial work, I have identified four.

1. Iceland as “the land of the Vikings”

This is the title given by the aviator Italo Balbo (2006) to the chapter on Iceland in his 1933 memoirs, who also recalls how the Vikings discovered America before Columbus himself. Spanish-Portuguese philosopher Casado da Rocha (2006) mentions too the Vikings’ “stories of warriors and wise men, poets and politicians of the golden age of settlement and commonwealth.” The marauding hordes, their adventures and their legacy are very much a focus-point for many commentators. They are a reason for distinctiveness, if not distinction. For instance, law professor Milazzo’s (2006) account of his teaching experience emphasises how Iceland is not as much part of the legal tradition based on Roman Law as most other European countries. Legal scholar Johnstone too, in her 2011 review essay on comparative law, mentions the enduring island-centric character of mainstream legal education in Iceland. This is not to say that classical culture did not reach or influence Iceland’s cultural development. Quite the opposite, Actite’s 2009 text offers a concise account of the deep, extensive and sometimes surprising impact of the Latin tradition on this island: “For instance, the Latin phrase *Rustycus es, Corydon* gave origin to the Icelandic words *rusti* [farmer] and *dóni* [rude people]”. Tarsi (2014) offers an even longer account on the same subject. Even some elements of the later Catholic *Christianitas* endure, as noticed by Cardinal Mejía (2012) and Tani (2013). Still, the land of the Vikings is

distinct and original, which is shown by the interest of foreign scholars, and Italian ones in particular, in the history, development and influence of Old Norse or ancient Icelandic, and its literary accomplishments in the Edda and the Sagas, e.g. Ferioli (2010), Miglio (2010), Costanzo (2010), Lorinczi (2010), Tani (2006), Barden (2011), Mustonen (2013) and Giampiccolo (2013). It is therefore no surprise that the Icelandic language has been playing a very important role in the generation and establishment of the national consciousness, which can still rely on it at a time in history when other criteria have become morally and politically unacceptable (e.g. racial identity). Thus, in a possibly totally unaware manner, these philological studies published in *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*, by recognising the uniqueness and value of the Icelandic language, contribute to continuing and feeding Iceland's self-identity *qua* land of the Viking and of the Vikings' language, which is probably the last real living legacy of theirs, given that most of the tenets of their way of life were abandoned long ago (e.g. polytheism, warrior ethos, clan-based chieftainships, slavery).

2. Iceland as a Nordic State

Former Italian governmental ministers Damiano and Treu, together with the historian Borioni (2008), lump Iceland together with the other Scandinavian countries, as though Iceland had as strong a social-democratic tradition as Sweden, Denmark or Norway. However, Iceland does not have it. It was never a welfare State, in the sense and to the extent these other countries have historically exemplified. The right-wing Independence Party has marked its history much more than the various incarnations of democratic socialism in Iceland (cf. also Meckl's 2012 article on Iceland's Cold-War history and Baruchello's 2014 book review), as also reflected by the largely unnoticed repression of Falun Gong demonstrators in Iceland in 2002 (cf. Tiantian Zhang 2012 & 2013). Difference does not mean intransigence, however. Thus, Hören (2015) and Johnstone (2013a) reveal significant changes in a more Nordic direction led by the historically weaker left-wing forces of the country, in freedom of the press and in human rights provisions respectively. Perhaps, the most obvious manifestation of the "un-Nordicness" of Iceland was the neoliberal boom-and-bust hot-money cycle that led to the notorious *kreppa* of 2008, about which a number of contributions have been published, i.e. Baruchello (2010), Paganelli (2010), Johnstone (2013), Lucey, Larkin & Gurdgiev (2013), Johnstone (2013a & b), Baruchello (2014 & 2015b). Penco (2013) adds another layer of "un-Nordicness" by noticing how Iceland's philosophical tradition owes more to Anglophone and Dutch

academic traditions and establishments than to Scandinavian ones. Still, there exist clear connections with Scandinavian political experience, notably the Danish roots of Iceland's constitution (cf. Quartino 2011). In fact, in addition to its linguistic-literary roots and heritage, the legal tradition of Iceland seems to be, at large, the most Nordic feature of Iceland's culture, at least according to Kári á Rógvi (2015). Baruchello (2015) adds another line of continuity, i.e. the cartelisation of strategic industries during the 1930s. Taken together, all these works offer a multi-faceted picture of Iceland's relationship with its "cousins" in Scandinavia, which have historically been a source of inspiration for politicians and legislators, but also a source of resentment (e.g. the Danish colonial "masters"). As commonly experienced by siblings and close relatives, one's own identity is as much a matter of family resemblances as it is a matter of unique traits and quirks distinguishing them all from one another. Whether the dissimilarities are grossly exaggerated, it is difficult to say. They do not appear so to the one trying to distinguish herself from the others. They may seem so to external observers, who may also come across as objective assessors *prima facie*, but who also come onto the scene with their own set of prejudices and a possible lack of understanding of how meaningful the distinguishing elements may be to the one trying to separate herself from her close relations—this meaningfulness being also unmeasurable and variable because of specific circumstances. Whatever the case may be, this second recurring theme is, among contemporary Icelanders, the least obvious, insofar as it is charged with political implications and connotations.

3. Iceland as an Arctic State

Less controversial is this third commonplace notion. Iceland is located in the North Atlantic, which is cold, dangerous to navigate upon, remote. This is the tone of the account by Savi-Lopez (2006), who pioneered the study and dissemination of Icelandic literature in Italy in the first half of the 20th century. As to later accounts, it would appear that being located in the North Atlantic is strategic. It is so for NATO (cf. Zhilina 2013), for the EU (cf. Di Stefano 2011), but above all for the Arctic nations and the governance of the region, as emphasised by Loukacheva (2011), Johnstone (2013c) and Scarpa (2014). Indeed, Meckl's 2014 studies on the Catholic Arctic mission of the 19th century show the Catholic Church being the first international institution to conceive of the Arctic as a geographically, politically and culturally strategic region of the World. This set of studies is growing steadily, for the interest in the Arctic region *qua* gateway of the

future is also growing. It may be the prospect of economic gain to be had from new sea routes or tourist opportunities. It may be the fear of the Earth's ecological collapse, which the Arctic displays at a much higher level and pace of development than most other regions on the planet. Either way, the cold Arctic is more and more a hot topic for scholars, businesspeople, diplomats, local inhabitants and international scientists. Iceland, given its geography, cannot but be part of their debates, plans and prospects. There may be disagreement on what to do about the Arctic, but that Iceland be close to it is *per se* no cause for disagreement.

4. Iceland as a dimension of the spirit

Iceland's unique landscape, the result of equally unique and rather extreme geographic, geological and climatic conditions, lead to awe and deep existential reflection. Scientific observations are the beginning of more profound considerations about the relationship between humanity and the natural environment, the struggle for survival that we have fought throughout our journey on this planet, and the most disturbing question of all: why do we keep fighting? More or less explicitly, this is the tone of the contributions by literary scholar Finocchietti (2008) as well as geographers Zarrilli (2008) and Campanini (2008 & 2010). The same applies to those of Jungian psychologist Buccola (2015a & b). What is more, as an editor, I can testify to the fact that it is the mystique of Iceland's remoteness and wild natural beauty, indeed its inspiring characterisation along Romantic if not even neo-pagan lines, is a key motive in leading foreign scholars to seek opportunities, if not sheer excuses, to investigate or merely approach Iceland. Even when the actual written texts do not reflect this fascination, as they mostly do not in fact, what lies behind the authors' interest in the country's Viking past, Nordic present or Arctic future is something far less scientifically defined or definable. It is curiosity mixed with awe, which the informal exchanges that I have with the colleagues submitting material to the journal or offering to collaborate with it candidly discuss with me. The questions that I have regularly received tend to be variations on a common theme and on a deeper, common subtext: "Isn't Iceland beautiful?", and "what is it like to live in such an inhospitable place?". The beautiful and the sublime, in the Romantic interpretation of these terms, still apply to Iceland, or at least to what foreign observers think of it. On the one hand, as the local tourist industry has been exploiting to the marrow, beauty cannot but be attributed to the vast, empty and, in the summer, colourful landscapes of the country, its majestic glaciers and cliffs, its pristine waters and skies. On the other hand, the rugged soil, the