

POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE AND THE NORTH IN GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATIONS

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THIS ESSAY DISCUSSES THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN art, human imagination and post-colonial critique in the context of northern Finland. The ‘North’ is conceived here as an imaginative region, a myth, characterized by the stereotypes attached to nature and non-civilization, constructed through various socio-cultural institutions, both in art and science. In the case of Finland, the stereotype of the ‘North’ is a cold, snowy wilderness with reindeer herding Saami people and blazing northern lights. For several centuries, various forms and types of art have functioned in order to mystify, exoticize and legitimize the hegemonic understanding about the ‘North’ as a periphery. However, during recent years several northern artists have started to contest prevailing conceptions and challenge the stereotypes and myths attached to northernness. What follows introduces examples from various forms of northern culture – including literature, design, music, paintings and films – through which the ‘North’ as a myth has been constructed, but also contested.

Where is the ‘North’ – what is the ‘North’?

‘North’ is a complex concept and in different contexts it attains several alternative meanings and connotations. Dictionaries have several definitions for the concept, usually starting by defining it as a cardinal point of the compass, the opposite of south. Secondly, ‘north’ can also mean a point or place in that direction, or a region, when the term is usually written with a capital letter, ‘the North’. As a cardinal point, ‘north’ is relatively neutral word, but when the term becomes ‘regionalized’, specific ideological, cultural and political connotations are commonly attached. In the context of global well-being, ‘the North’ represents wealth and welfare, while in a British context ‘the North’ has stood for the regionalized stereotypes of (now declining) industry, economic depression and a cold climate.¹ What combines these two examples is how ‘the North’ and ‘the South’ are defined as categorical opposites, not just in that these regions are situated in opposite directions, but that the characteristics of these regions are, in stereotypical manner, opposed.

All this accentuates how imaginative the concept of ‘north’ or ‘the North’ actually is. It is important to underscore that imaginativeness does not refer to fictional or ‘unreal’. The term ‘imagination’ refers, rather, to the creative capacity of the human mind in narrativising the social, cultural and political environment within which we live. However, human imagination is rarely innocent. The

1 R. Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative geographies of modernity*, London & New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 231. See also Ysanne Holt’s chapter on northern UK in this book.

imaginative nature of regions, such as 'the North', is embedded in multiple ways in processes that are socially and politically charged. Edward Said's classic work *Orientalism* (1978) explicitly illustrated how various forms of art function as powerful political tools in the processes of writing our histories.² Said's main argument concerns how the Orient, as an imaginative region, enables the Western powers (Occident) to imagine and write the history of the Eastern world in such a way that it serves their imperialist needs. Based on Michel Foucault's discourse analysis, Said stresses how man's power to write history is also a privilege of imagination, with respect to one's own.

In the case of Finland, the concept of 'north' has gathered meanings along the social and cultural history of regional stereotyping, exoticism and mythology, with various forms of binary simplifications. A good example of Finnish northern binarism is one of the illustrations published in the 1950s by the Finnish regional geographer J. G. Granö; a map of Finland on which a straight line (transition zone) divides, as he felicitously formulates it, 'Culture-Finland' (the South) from 'Nature-Finland' (the North).³ According to binarism of this kind the northern part of Finland equals lack of civilization, while in the international context the whole country of Finland is often associated with northernness. Correspondingly, in Canada the idea of North is considered as an attribute characterizing the whole nation and national identity.⁴

When tourists plan to visit Finland, a virtual introduction to the stereotypes of north can be easily made with the help of the beautifully designed *The Official Travel Site of Finland* webpages.⁵ For international tourists, one of the main attractions of Finland, or images with which Finland is associated, is as a cold, snowy wilderness, somewhere in the far north.⁶ If the tourists are intending to understand what the North of Finland is all about, they find an article entitled 'The Magical and Mythical Lapland'. The pictures on the page are beautiful. First there are the blazing colours of northern lights and shining stars, followed by the reindeer standing on the road with a landscape of barren nature with autumn colours in the background. In the third picture local dwellings are represented in the form of a traditional Saami hut ('kota') covered in snow followed by an image of 'holy mountain', The Saana is barely visible from the white-blue landscape of shining snow. Then a cabin, four men, and more snow. A dead tree and a distant landscape of fells, northern lights upon frozen trees, two reindeer. When you scroll down the page, similar views follow: a man standing on a fell and an orange sky, more red sky, and more snow. This is what people expect from the 'North', or, this is how the Finnish travel agencies encourage people to perceive and consume the 'North' of Finland.

Even though cold winds, reindeer and northern lights can indeed be found in the 'North' of Finland, you can still come across warm houses, cars and traffic lights – civilization and culture. The categorical division between 'culture-Finland' and 'nature-Finland' is generally axiomatic in Finland, so the idea of having northern culture, 'culture in nature', is slightly paradoxical.⁷ In Said's *Orientalism*, this refers to the question of how different cultural practices are maintained artificially and

2 E. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Routledge, 1978.

3 J. G. Granö, 'Maantieteelliset alueet', in J. G. Granö, ed., *Suomen maantieteellinen käsikirja*, Helsinki: Otava, 1951, p. 379.

4 S. E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

5 The Official Travel Guide of Finland, <http://www.visitfinland.com>, accessed 28 December 2016.

6 See J. Ridanpää, 'Laughing at northernness: postcolonialism and metafictional irony in the imaginative geography', *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 8, no. 6, 2007, pp. 907–928; P. Raento, 'Tourism, nation, and the postage stamp: Examples from Finland', *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2009, pp. 124–148.

7 Ridanpää 2007, op. cit.

how regions come to have cultural and social features with no actual basis attached to them. Said underlines the arbitrary nature of Orientalism: ‘this universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary.’⁸ Orientalism is thus a process in which fictiveness, reality, artificiality and the representativeness of space interconnect through the artistic, political and also scientific creativity of the human mind. Said’s research has stood for a long time as a significant signpost in the field of postcolonial studies, and on the conceptual level ‘orientalism’ has moved from its original context and turned into a general abstraction under which all discussion concerning imaginative spaces and otherness can be gathered.

To sum up, in Finland, the North as a region, is a myth. A myth is depoliticized speech, which does not define or deny objects, images or situations; rather ‘it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.’⁹ To make a myth believable requires an enormous institutional guarantee behind it. Different forms of art – literature, paintings, design, music, films – have all functioned as routes to naturalizing the stereotypes of exotic north. Here the discussion focuses on how the idea of ‘north’ has been mystified through various fields and forms of art and how the mystification of northernness both limits and prescribes northern cultural and artistic practices. What is also acknowledged here is how different forms of art can function as ‘emancipatory tools,’¹⁰ with which the romanticized expectations and stereotypes can be contested. Several examples from the different fields of Finnish northern art are used here in order to illustrate how artistic creativity is socio-politically charged in multiple ways and has both negative and positive impacts.

Northern Exotics at the Intersection of Art and Science

Different forms of art naturalize myths and stereotypes, but it is the institution of science that makes them appear as (officially) ‘true.’ At the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries, scientific studies conducted in Northern Scandinavia were inseparably interwoven with Romanticism. Angela Byrne has described the background of British scientific and antiquarian perceptions and representations of Scandinavian North: ‘The travelers studied here were simultaneously scientific, religious, Romantic, and interested in “the people” and landscapes.’¹¹ The northern part of Finland, Lapland, has been for centuries a culturally unknown territory and all the information about it has been based on a few imaginative travelogues from the end of the 18th century and from the colonial ‘scientific’ research of the 19th century. These northern explorations bore obvious similarities to the British colonial effort to conquer the Tropics in the 19th century. The concept of the Tropics can be perceived as constructed by the scientific institutions of the times, which along with the African expeditions of David Livingstone and the like, turned into the worship of mythology.¹² In world atlases the unknown

8 Said, *op. cit.*, 54.

9 R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1973, p. 143.

10 J. Ridanpää, ‘A Masculinist Northern Wilderness and the Emancipatory Potential of Literary Irony’, *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2010, pp. 319–335.

11 A. Byrne, *Geographies of the Romantic North: Science, Antiquarianism, and Travel, 1790–1830*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 4–5.

12 F. Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire*, London: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 68–89.

territories of “darkest Africa” were often filled with imagined rivers, mountains and animals, while alongside the development of printing technologies, the visual image of savage, primitive, childlike, apelike, lazy, exotic, sexually attractive or deviant Negro was mediated for European readers.¹³ Fact and fiction entwined into mythical and romantic travelogues, characterized by a paradoxical dualism between the aesthetics of the garden of paradise and a pestilential landscape of primitiveness, violence and destruction.¹⁴

Lapland myth, or how we currently conceive it, developed during the years between the World Wars, a period when the Petsamo region, formerly and currently a part of Russia, belonged to Finland (1920–1940) and offered attractive economic possibilities with its reserves of nickel with important access to the Arctic Ocean. These economic and industrial possibilities were also reflected in other fields of society and culture, and suddenly it was being emphasized, in the field of geographical studies, for example, that this unknown territory required thorough scrutiny. The economic exploitation of Lapland was possible only after more spatial and environmental data had been collected and, as sufficient topographical maps were drawn. In addition, naming territories as being ‘blank’ functioned as a proper strategic excuse for why entering the north was justified. Marking territories ‘blank’ has functioned, for all the Western colonial expansion, as a discursive strategy that has ‘produced the rationale to justify the process of filling them in by the West, through the introduction of Western institutions.’¹⁵ Suddenly, the necessity to map Lapland turned into a written declaration among the Finnish geographers,¹⁶ and similarly it was the mission of literature to collect ‘data,’ to map the unknown wilderness in order to lend more credibility and authenticity to northern romanticism.

Economic exploitation would have been impossible without the topographic mapping of the region, which meant that the discipline of geography played a crucial role in the process of northern colonialization. The prerequisite for investigating the region was that the language and terminology of local ethnic minorities, the Saami people, was not familiar. If we consider the North as an othered space, discussion of othered cultures and people turns immediately into discussion about the position of the Saami culture and the Saami people. The Saami is the northern ethnic minority of 75,000 people of which approximately 10,000 live in Finland. Their social status is in many ways ‘political’: for example, the discussion over their landowning rights, analogous to the discussion over the landowning rights of Aboriginal people in Australia, has continued for several decades. The Saami are the only indigenous people in the EU, conceived as ‘nature people,’ a harmonious ageless community. This idea has been supported by the romantic stereotyping of the outsiders, but also by the Saami people themselves.¹⁷

In order to conquer the North, the Saami culture needed to be conquered too, and geographical studies had a specific role in that mission. The geographer Väinö Tanner,¹⁸ for instance, published in

13 L. Koivunen, *Visualizing Africa in nineteenth-century British travel accounts*, New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 1–4.

14 D. Arnold, “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World’, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2000, pp. 7–8.

15 L. Bloom, *Gender on ice: American ideologies of polar expeditions*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 2.

16 See *Petsamon maa. Suomen alue Jäämeren rannalla. Hieman historiaa ja maantiedettä*, J. E. Rosberg, ed., Helsinki: Otava, 1919; V. Tanner, ‘Voidaanko Petsamon aluetta käyttää maan hyödyksi? Keinoja ja tarkoituksiperiä’, *Fennia*, vol. 49, no. 3, 1928, pp. 1–122.

17 M. Niskala & J. Ridanpää, ‘Ethnic representations and social exclusion: Sáminess in Finnish Lapland tourism promotion’, *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2016, p. 377.

18 V. Tanner, ‘Petsamon alueen paikannimiä. I Lappalaisia paikannimiä’, *Fennia*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1928, pp. 1–36.

1928 a listing of geographical terminology in the Saami language. This consisted of morphological details of various landforms and biotypes, forms of settlement, certain predicative definitions (for example 'large', 'deep', 'long', 'black') and a list of place names with some explanations for their origins. Tanner's publication noted how people living in the wilderness are, by their instinct, particularly skilled in making observations of their physical environment.¹⁹ At the same time it was noticed that it would be a serious loss for geographical research if Saami terminology was forgotten.

During the Petsamo period the region of North changed from a peripheral wilderness into an attractive tourist destination and a number of novelists moved from southern Finland to the north in the wake of Lapland romanticism. The myths of Lapland represented a viewpoint through which, instead of industrialization, urbanism, internationalism and hectic modernism, it was possible to find the purity and virginity of human nature. The 'Petsamo boom' materialized in the form of an increasing amount of non-fictional works and travel books, but in terms of northern stereotypes and Lapland identity, semi-fictional Lapland literature played a more substantial role. As an example, we may consider Arvi Järventaus' novel *Risti ja noitarumpu* (The Cross and the Shaman Drum, 1916), a work considered to have kick-started the genre of Lapland literature, which first emerged at the time of the Lapland romantics.²⁰ *Risti ja noitarumpu* is a fictional tale about the Christian conversion of the heathen Saami people from the 17th century, a major period in the colonialist history of Lapland. In the novel, the Saami are represented as primitive nature people with several characteristics reflecting moral decay, such as drunkenness, deviousness and lewdness. The prime question for the novel is how to chasten a heathen shaman, a thrilling topic for a drama when the priest, the principal character Olaus Sirma, is a Saami himself. The stereotype of a heathen drunk Saami man has a long history: Heli Saarinen considers the xylographs of Olaus Magnus (1490–1557), from the 16th century, as originary representations of Lapland and the Lapland-myth. In Magnus's representations, both literary and visual, people in Lapland are heathen barbarians, who exercise witchcraft and reindeer herding.²¹

Saami terminology played a significant role in the rhetorics of Järventaus' novel, as the authentic feel of mythical strangeness is mainly constructed through the continuous repeating of unfamiliar Saami terminology. The Saami expressions are unfamiliar to the southern reader, but what Järventaus did was that he elaborated their meaning and, by the same token, provides a certain authenticity and feel of realism for a story which otherwise would probably be too unfamiliar and strange to be identified with. Järventaus makes voluminous use of Saami rhetoric, while here and there he translates occasional words and expressions into Finnish and 'enlightens' readers about what being a Saami is really about. Järventaus reveals the truth behind the unknown, which does not remove mythicism but instead strengthens it.

The novel is full of strange Saami words, but as a concession to the readers, their semantics is explained thoroughly – not as a fluent part of the narrative itself but in the form of separate footnotes, a literary convention commonly used in scientific works. In some cases, the style makes it seem as if the book was actually an ethnic dictionary. For example, the clause 'and the last time he was given a saivo baptism was when he became a witch' is accompanied by a footnote: 'Saivo, orig. meaning "holy", a commonly occurring appellation in the ancient Saami religion. Saivo, Saivoland means underworld. Saivo baptism means the baptism by means of which witches were ordained';

19 Tanner, op. cit., p. 3.

20 A. Järventaus, *Risti ja noitarumpu: Olaus Sirman tarina*, Porvoo: WSOY, 1916.

21 H. Saarinen, *Valkoisen peuran myyttinen Lappi: Lappi-myytin tie keskiajan kuvastosta suomalaiseen elokuvaan*, Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press, 2011, pp. 64–72.

like an extract from an explorer's diary.²² Järventaus interweaves ordinary prose with rhetoric and the methods of science at the same eliminating the strangeness without losing its mythology. As the 'Petsamo boom' continued, the manner in which Saami people were described did not really develop. Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja has emphasized, for instance, how during the period of the 1930s, also called 'laponism', the Saami culture was excluded from paintings of Lapland; 'Saami people were still thought to be primitive or Mongolian and not accepted as part of Finnish culture'.²³

During the Petsamo period approximately 60 novels were published, and what was characteristic of these works was that the majority of writers came from the South, which meant that the literary perspective remained that of an outsider;²⁴ the North was perceived as a simple categorical opposite to the self-portrait of southern culture.²⁵ Some authors tried to attain a certain northern authenticity by living for years, or even decades, as insiders in northern communities, but in many cases the purpose was simply to confirm their own romantic, stereotypical presuppositions, to insert a sense of realism into the myths and romanticism.²⁶ Although the actual experiences did not often match romantic expectations, this did not prevent Lapland from turning into a romantic wilderness of exotic exaggerations.

Imaginations of Northernness in the Aftermath of World War II

After World War II – or to be precise, the Lapland War between Finland and Germany from September 1944 to April 1945 – most of the roads, bridges and houses were systematically destroyed and Lapland turned into a construction site. From the viewpoint of tourism, Lapland was not so appealing and although the romantic myths of Lapland were not of interest after the war, old and familiar exotic symbolism was sustained when the new Lapland was built, even in material terms. The biggest town Rovaniemi had been completely destroyed and when the new street plan was established, designed by Alvar Aalto in 1945, the form imitated the shape of reindeer horns. The northern nature theme, and reindeer as its icon, played an important role when Lapland and the identity of the people there were reconstructed.²⁷ Along the centuries, the reindeer has turned into a key symbol for identity, both in terms of how Lapland has been mystified and stereotyped by outsiders, but also in terms of how local people construct their self-image today.

Although on a national level the fascination with the north had diminished in the aftermath of World War II, internationally the exoticism of the Finnish north and its artistic representations received attention. The film *Valkoinen peura* (The White Reindeer) 1952, directed by Erik Blomberg,

22 Järventaus, op. cit., 116.

23 T. Hautala-Hirvioja, 'Rajamaan maisema – Lappi suomalaisessa maisemamaalausperinteessä', *Terra*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2005, p. 159.

24 V.-P. Lehtola, *Rajamaan identiteetti: lappilaisuuden rakentuminen 1920- ja 1930-luvun kirjallisuudessa*, Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997, p. 31.

25 S. Tuohimaa, 'Pohjois-Suomen unohdetut naiskirjailijat', in Katja Majasaari & Marja Rytönen, eds., *Silmukoita verkossa: sukupuoli, kirjallisuus ja identiteetti*, Oulu: Oulun yliopisto, 1997, p. 48; Lehtola, op. cit., 24–25.

26 See O. Jama, 'Haaparannan lukiosta sipirjaan: Torniolaakson kirjallisuus kahden kansalliskulttuurin marginaalissa', in *Marginalia ja kirjallisuus: Ääniä suomalaisen kirjallisuuden reunoilta*, Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1995, p. 121.

27 See T. Hautala-Hirvioja, 'Lapin kuvaajat ja kulkijat', in *Lapin taika: Lappi-aiheista taidetta 1800-luvulta nykypäivään*, Helsinki: Ateneumin taidemuseo/Valtion taidemuseo, 2011, pp. 78–109.

for example, gained much attention in various international film festivals. In 1953, the film won the Fairy Tale Film prize at Cannes Film Festival and five years after its release the Golden Globe Award as the Best Foreign Film. In terms of northern exoticism, *Valkoinen peura* is an intriguing narration, a horror story about love between a man and a beautiful witch (Mirjami Kuosmanen), who during the full moon takes the shape of a white reindeer vampire. Heli Saarinen, who has conducted an exhaustive study of how the film represents mythical Lapland, describes the context:

In the film, the reindeer herder folk dressed in their beautiful Lapp costumes live in a timeless, everyday world, where wrongs can be righted by the use of ancestral ancient magical powers. The witch-reindeer-sorceress dies from a stab wound from a cold iron she had forged herself and the image of a death trap, surrounded by wizards at the Holy Mountain, lingers as the final scene of the film. In the 1950s Finland was recovering from a harsh war and longed for the lure of fantasy as did all the Europeans. The Lapland of mythical tales, reindeer and imposing fells and its peculiar inhabitants was a timely response.²⁸

Although after World War II the political, social and cultural circumstances in Lapland were somewhat changed, the impact of mysticism was highlighted in different fields of northern art. Reidar Särestöniemi (1925–1981), the most famous painter of Lapland, for instance, lived in the middle of the wilderness, beyond routes, beyond ‘civilization’. In his paintings, wilderness themes and landscape of Lapland were constantly present.²⁹ For northern artists to get rid of old stereotypes attached to northernness has been extremely difficult. It has been argued that Timo K. Mukka was the first novelist from Lapland who was considered as a Finnish (national) author instead of ‘just’ a regional author. However, his publisher Gummerus labelled him ‘Sexus of Wild North’, and promoted his first work *Maa on syntinen laulu* (‘The Earth is a Sinful Song’) 1964 as a ‘novel [which] depicts a northern village community living by their instincts.’³⁰ It is obvious how the sense of an antithesis to civilization characterizes the work of northern artists, no matter what their art is actually concerned with.

Thus, the wilderness theme has been a selling point for advertising northern artistic products. One of the best examples is *Lapponia Jewelry*, a design company founded by Pekka Anttila in 1960, and joined by designer Björn Weckström three years later. *Lapponia Jewelry* has gained high international recognition and especially during their early years, northern themes were particularly present in their production. On their web pages *Lapponia Jewelry* – ‘Lapponia’ meaning Lapland in Latin – describe their northern roots as follows:

Björn Weckström (b. 1935) is a recognized jewelry artist and sculptor. He was the forerunner in designing sculpture-like jewelry for Lapponia Jewelry, drawing his inspiration from the shape and matte surface of gold nuggets from Finnish Lapland. Designing silver pieces, his aim was to use silver to portray the snowy, Finnish winter landscape with its frozen lake surfaces. This is how the unique surfaces of Lapponia pieces and the creation of distinctive Lapponia design language were born.³¹

28 Saarinen, op. cit., 372.

29 See Hautala-Hirvioja 2005, op. cit.

30 E. Paasilinna, *Timo K. Mukka: Legenda jo eläessään*, Juva: WSOY, 1988, p. 65.

31 Lapponia Jewelry, http://www.lapponia.com/en_en/bjorn-weckstrom, accessed 6 January 2017.

Although the connotations of northernness have been constantly present in their design, at the same time the company has started promoting themselves more and more in terms of how internationally respected their brand is. On their webpages, they proudly present with a separate long story how the Planetoid Valleys necklace by Lapponia Jewelry was worn by Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) in *Star Wars* (1977), which is also considered as a turning point in the history of company.³² However, the manner in which jewelry is designed as specifically 'northern' is familiar: artists attempt to find shapes and forms associated with the wilderness theme through design, at the same time making the possibilities for finding alternative versions of northernness extremely difficult.

While after the World War II tourism in Lapland was on the wane, a new boom began along with the success of ski resorts. Nature tourism along with other outdoor recreation activities has turned into a significant industry in the northern parts of Scandinavia. For the Saami people, this development has meant the commercialization of cultural heritage: 'As such Saami culture and the Saami attractions constitute an exotic backdrop to outdoor recreation, while at the same time promoting northern areas as the last "true" wilderness of Europe.'³³ In gift and souvenir shops the heritage of Saami culture is turned into cheap kitsch. 'Suopunki', the lasso that is used in reindeer herding, several forms of ornamental items made of reindeer horns as well as Four Winds hats, a part of the traditional Saami costume, for example, are offered for sale to tourists. Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi is another northern tourist attraction, where you can not only see the 'real', 'official' Santa Claus, but also buy numerous souvenirs with a Lapland theme, for example handmade Taigakoru jewellery, hanging in an exotic Saami shaman's drum (image 1).

In similar fashion as the Saami culture, the myth of exotic northern nature is commercialized for tourism. For several decades, the journeys of Arctic exploration have functioned as aesthetic experiences, travels from where the paintings of northern lights, the artifices of amazement, were brought back home for southern people to wonder. Today these exotic expeditions have been arranged by local tourism entrepreneurs, who organize northern lights tours for example in Tromsø, Norway, where the use of photography has replaced the excitement of marvellous paintings.³⁴

Re-imagining the North I: Emancipatory Literature

As emphasized in this chapter, the image of north and the whole (theoretical) idea of North as a region, is based on mystification and stereotypes.³⁵ This also means that people have certain strong preconceptions about northern art. First of all, in southern/hegemonic preconceptions northern art should be ageless, irrespective of all the influence of modern society. This resonated especially with how the northern aesthetics is elementally associated with the cultural heritage of the indigenous Saami people. Secondly, the image of northernness or the North as a region is embedded in (respect for) masculinist values, which is noticeable in basically all forms of northern art

32 Lapponia Jewelry, http://www.lapponia.com/eu_en/lapponia-jewelry/history/star-wars/, accessed 6 January 2017.

33 Niskala & Ridanpää, op. cit., 380.

34 G. Bertella, 'Photography and Northern Lights Tourism in Tromsø, Norway', *The Northern Review*, vol. 37, no. Fall, 2013, pp.167–186.

35 See P. Davidson, *The Idea of North*, Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Cromwell Press, 2005.



Image 1. Taigakoru jewelry for sale in Santa Park, Rovaniemi, in 2016. Founded in 1981, Taigakoru is a local jewelry design company, producing items with northern themes and making use of old stereotypes and Lapland myths. In the Western (occidental) illustrations of the 17th century, the shaman drum associated with ‘diabolical’ non-Christian rituals, had a particular role in constructing the Saami as ‘the other’.³⁶ The drum of the heathen Saami shaman is a part of northern history, but it is also an item closely associated with worship and the myths of Lapland. Here the shaman’s drum is used as a support for selling jewelry to international tourists. Photo: Juha Ridanpää.

36 R. H. Bergesen, ‘Hybrid Iconoclasm: Three ways of Viewing the Sámi as the Other’, in S. Aamold, E. Haugdal & U. Angkjær Jørgensen, eds., *Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017, pp. 31–48.

and cultural life.³⁷ This is in connection with how early polar explorers have perceived phrases such as ‘the virgin snow and the untrodden land’ particularly attractive.³⁸ In addition, and partly related to the masculinist values attached to northernness, northern art is commonly expected to be ‘serious’ in nature, with no humour or playfulness involved.³⁹ However, during recent years, in fact starting from the 1950s, some northern artists have contested these conventions by visualizing northernness in an intentionally alternative manner. From the viewpoint of postcolonial criticism, these artists have operated as cultural ‘agents’, challenging the stereotypical conceptions by re-imagining the North in new atypical ways. This is illustrated here with a few examples of artists, who by their choice of ‘doing differently’ contest the prevailing stereotypes attached to northernness.

In case of northern literature, the process of ‘gatekeeping’⁴⁰ has occurred in various forms and at various institutional levels: among the publishers, libraries, art shops, art critics, reviewers and consumers. In order to maintain a label of being ‘northern’, the artistic work was supposed to fulfil all the expectations familiar from the old myths and stereotypes, while works somehow conflicting with northern romanticism have encountered insurmountable difficulties in getting published. One central thematic requirement for publishing literary works concerned romantic admiration for the dangerousness of northern nature. At the same time the North, as a mental space, became strongly charged with gender overtones.⁴¹

As discussed, a boom in northern literature took place in the 1920s and 1930s, but the first northern novel written by a woman, *Poro-Kristiina* by Annikki Kariniemi, was not published until 1952. In the conventional literature of Lapland, the man was active, geared to encountering the fear of the wilderness, while the woman’s part was more passive, remaining in the background and staying at home.⁴² As a northern author, Kariniemi was on the periphery of the Finnish literary canon, and as a woman, she also represented a gendered minority within a masculinist context. Sinikka Tuohimaa has argued that Kariniemi’s marginality was actually two-fold.⁴³ As a female author she represented a counterpart to the conventional northern romanticism, which also meant that her own northern romanticism, based on the popularization of old myths and stereotypes, prompted some polemic.⁴⁴ From the positive point of view, this has also been interpreted as the act of bridge-building between the southern culture and the northern margins.⁴⁵

Kariniemi’s semi-Saami origins led automatically to a certain form of exoticisation, a label that she self-consciously maintained in her literary production. On the other hand, the values she had internalized in the course of her childhood upbringing were distinctively non-traditional and strongly

37 Ridanpää 2010, op. cit.

38 H. Eglinger, “Traces against time’s erosion”: The Polar Explorer between Documentation and Projection’, in A. Ryall, J. Schimanski & H. Howlid Wærp, eds., *Arctic Discourses*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010, pp. 2–18.

39 Ridanpää 2007, op. cit.

40 R. Phillips, ‘Politics of reading: decolonizing children’s geographies’, *Ecumene*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2001, p. 132.

41 Ridanpää 2010, op. cit.

42 Lehtola, op. cit., 120.

43 Tuohimaa, op. cit., 47.

44 R. Kontio, “Se oli vain se toinen joka hänen sisimmissään asui...” Annikki Kariniemi pohjoisen identiteetin kuvaajana’, in S. Tuohimaa, N. Työlähti & I. Leppihalme, eds., *Jäiset laakerit: Artikkeleita pohjoisista naiskirjailijoista*, Saarijärvi: Gummerus, 1998, p. 81.

45 Tuohimaa, op. cit., 50.

influenced by southern culture⁴⁶ so that a certain ‘in-betweenness’ can easily be recognized from her production. To stay positioned ‘in-between’ is the life-blood of culturally and socially emancipatory activity, which in the case of postcolonial theory is apparent in the works of Gayatri Spivak, one of the leading scholars in the field. Born in Calcutta, West Bengal, a female academic represents a (two-fold) marginality, but her educational position as a university professor makes her a part of the world of power, hegemony and elitism. What is most interesting here is that Spivak is especially conscious of this⁴⁷ and makes her contradictory position a thematic topic in her own studies.⁴⁸ In the same manner Kariniemi has turned her northern in-betweenness into a thematic subject for literature, at the same time (implicitly and possibly unconsciously) underlining the argument that the regionalized categories of Nature-Finland and Culture-Finland should not be approached as a matter of course.

The actual impact of artists who ‘do differently’ is hard to estimate, but Kariniemi’s work has at least been recognized by *local* culture activists, which is actually not a minor achievement at all, considering the historical background of the region. To honour her artistic career the statue of Kariniemi, sculpted by Ensio Seppänen, was erected on the top of Aavasaksa hill in 1990 (image 2). Aavasaksa is one of the 27 national landscapes of Finland, famous for being the most southern point from where it is possible to see the midnight Sun. In the Aavasaksa Tourist information brochure the function of the statue is described in the following manner: ‘It honours the women of Lapland and the writer Annikki Kariniemi in particular. She was the first published author from Lapland and one of a few women to write wilderness stories.’⁴⁹ Is it justifiable to ask whether the statue is raised as an honest memorial to the northern female voice or rather to salute the fact that female writers are able to produce art from the same point of view as men?

While Annikki Kariniemi was the author who opened the door for northern female artists, Rosa Liksom, the pseudonym of Anni Ylävaara, has been regarded as an artist who has managed to challenge the masculinist expectations directed at northern art. Liksom is a postmodern novelist/visual artist who has self-consciously turned her artistic expression into a strategic tool against northern colonialism. Finnish cultural life in the late 1980s was not yet integrated into Western/European culture, and thus ever since her first collection of short stories, *Yhden yön pysäkki* (1985) Liksom has been on the cutting edge of Finnish cultural modernization. Her postmodern flirtation with the mixed themes of urban angst, sex, violence and northern tradition became nationally and to some extent internationally recognised, but the fact that all this was happening in the context of northernness put her works, and northern art as a whole, on a new level of cultural appreciation. In her ‘absurd folktales’, as they have been called, northern themes were not rejected, but subject to irony, to making fun of the public discussion that centred around the social and cultural inequality between the South and the North.⁵⁰

All this ‘crazy northernness’ was very self-consciously established, not necessarily as a cultural and political project to fight against social disadvantages, but more as an artistic project with emancipatory

46 Kontio, op. cit., 78–79.

47 R. Selden & P. Widdowson, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p. 193.

48 Cf. A. Bonnett, “‘Alternative’ Film or ‘Other’ Film? In and Against the West with Trinh Minh-Ha”, in M. Crang & N. Thrift, eds., *Thinking Space*, London: Routledge, 2000.

49 Aavasaksa Lapland: Sensational Ylitornio, https://issuu.com/ylyitornionkunta/docs/esite_english, accessed 7 January 2017.

50 Ridanpää 2007, op. cit.; see also K. Sandbacka, “‘All That Endures Turns to Dust’: The Melancholy Retrospection of Modern Utopias in *Kreisland* by Rosa Liksom”, *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2015, pp. 189–213.



Image 2. Statue in honour of Annikki Kariniemi on top of the Aavasaksa Hill in Ylitornio. The inscription at the base of the statue reads: 'Authoress Annikki Kariniemi 1913–1984, the powerful narrator of the fabled Lapland region'. Photo: Juha Ridanpää.

consequences, of which Liksom was somehow conscious. If the old northern description was exaggeratedly romantic, her version would be ironic, with both feminist self-assertion and childish absurdity, a contrast to the masculine seriousness of earlier representations of north. Liksom has used her irony as an emancipatory strategy,⁵¹ by moving northern themes, myths and stereotypes to the contexts into which they should not fit, creating an alternate version of northernness. Intriguingly, though, Liksom's own image was based on exoticism, myths and otherness, hiding behind her pseudonym, her comic sunglasses and her systematic refusals to give interviews. After she won the most prestigious literary award of Finland, the Finlandia Prize, in 2011, she has partly changed her public image, giving interviews and speaking openly about her artwork in front of public audiences.⁵²

Re-imagining the North II: Contemporary Saami Music

In the process of the exoticisation of the Saami culture and heritage, music has played a special role. Saami music, that is, traditional 'joik singing', has usually been interpreted as an 'integral part of Saami culture'.⁵³ Joik singing resembles a melodic and rhythmic 'tone painting' in which lyrics are not conventionally used. The received view has been that singing joiks in the middle of the dark winter nights has been a ritual performance to keep wolves away from the reindeer herd and to help keep herders awake. A more developed form of joik involves poem-singing based on improvisation, with lyrics focusing on themes such as animals (reindeer, wolves), sacred places, the beauty of nature as well as humorous events from the daily lives of Saami people.⁵⁴ The main function of joik singing, i.e. sustaining a communal sense of togetherness, has also been considered the reason why it was strongly attacked during the era of Christian colonisation.⁵⁵ Joik singing, along with shaman singers and their 'shaman drums', was and still is strongly associated with heathenism and witchcraft. In addition, it is crucial to note that, as in Järventaus' literature, in Saami music the words of songs are unfamiliar and strange to Finnish audiences, which, yet again, functions in order to sustain the exoticism of north.

All this establishes a framework against which (southern) people set their expectations towards Saami culture. Thus, the idea of Saami people performing, for instance, rap, or heavy rock, sounds more like a contextual paradox. However, during the past decade we have witnessed Saami musicians who through their unconventional genre choices have contested the common stereotypes attached to Saami culture and northernness. With his exceptional and extraordinary choice of a music genre, rap, Mikkael Morottaja a.k.a. 'Amoc' (Aanaar Master of Ceremony), has garnered national and international media attention. Singing rap in Saami is an intriguing process of re-localizing cultural heritage 'from the Bronx to the wilderness' which in several ways challenges the conventional

51 Cf. L. Hutcheon, 'Introduction', in Linda Hutcheon, ed., *Double-Talking: Essays on Verbal and Visual Ironies in Canadian Contemporary Art and Literature*, Toronto: ECW Press, 1992, p. 13.

52 K. Sandbacka, 'Työtä vai leikkiä? Rosa Liksommin ambivalentti taiteilijakuva'. *Kirjallisuudentutkimuksen aikakauslehti Avain*, no. 2, 2012, pp. 19–33.

53 K. Paltto, *Saamelaiset*, Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1973, p. 68.

54 Paltto, op. cit., pp. 68–70.

55 Lehtola, op. cit., p. 106.

expectations directed at Saami culture.⁵⁶ When a genre of music that originates and is normally associated with urban ghettos is performed by an indigenous minority normally associated with subsistence living in the middle of the arctic wilderness, the old stereotypes are questioned and a new version of northernness is established. At the same time, Amoc became very popular among local youth and increased their motivation to learn their own endangered language, Inari Saami, which has only approximately 350 speakers left in the world.

Tiina Sanila-Aikio, currently President of the Saami Parliament, has also made a career as a musician, and importantly, with music removed away from conventional Saami themes. Sanila, whose first Skolt Saami rock album came out in 2005, is a partly contradictory heavy rock artist, sometimes posing with a traditional Saami costume on, yet at the same time emphasising the importance of dismantling stereotypes. According to a press release, 'the lyrics of Tiina Sanila tell about the life of a young woman, love and men. She does not want to emphasize the clichés of northern nature and exoticism, but tells about things from the viewpoint of a young Saami.'⁵⁷ What connects Sanila with Amoc is their goal-oriented work for revitalizing the endangered languages. Sanila sings in Skolt Saami, a language that has somewhere around 300 speakers left in the world. According to Sanila herself, 'having rock in their own language is one way to get young people interested in their roots and bring the language to life in the modern day.'⁵⁸

The third example of unconventional northern ethnic music is the Northern Saami-singing hard rock band SomBy. The band, whose first album *Álas eana* (2010) won several music awards, is introduced comprehensively in the previously discussed official travel site of Finland (VisitFinland.com). The web-pages include an inconsistent interview with the members, in which it is emphasized how most people in Finland have a distorted and an 'ill informed' image of Saami culture. The act of performing modern rock instead of joik singing is considered as a step away from the stereotype of the Saami as an exotically primitive native people living beyond civilisation in the middle of a frozen wilderness. Contesting stereotypes through rock music is represented as a positive change, while at the same time the text is accompanied with clichéd visual images of exotic northern nature, the decorative traditional ethnic footwear, traditional Saami jewelry etc. All this contradicts the main argument of the text while at the same time illustrates how difficult it is to resist exoticizing northern art, culture and heritage. Although the argument in the text is properly formulated, the message is still, in a paradoxical manner, reflected against the stereotypes of Saami people as joik singing, reindeer-herding arctic aboriginals.

Future of the North

Defining 'the North' or northernness is deeply connected with the processes of mystification and as illustrated here, this process has a long history. However, it is essential to note that today there

56 J. Ridanpää & A. Pasanen, 'From the Bronx to the wilderness: Inari-Saami rap, language revitalization and contested ethnic stereotypes', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2009, pp. 213–230.

57 Lehdistö tiedote (press release) 30.1.2006. Saamelaisten kansallispäivän klubi tulee taas! (The Sami National Day Club is coming again!) <http://www.saunalahti.fi/corona/citysamit/samiklubi.htm>, accessed 8 January 2017.

58 S. Väyrynen, 'Traditions rock!', *Latitude: The University of Lapland Magazine*, 2010, <http://www.ulapland.fi/InEnglish/About-us/News--Events/Latitude-ndash;-University-of-Lapland-Magazine/Magazine-2010-Theme-Our-Glocal-North/Our-Glocal-North/Traditions-rock!>, accessed 8 January 2017.

are alternate, competing discourses of northernness, also serving different purposes, such as saving endangered languages. In various contemporary global discussions, the Arctic is often articulated through technical and 'realist' vocabulary. Global warming, ice meltdown, environmental protection, geopolitical struggle for landownership and security, are discourses, pragmatic issues, which dominate contemporary discussion over polar regions, which also are filled with the rhetoric of realism and arguments based on contemporary scientific 'facts'. These discussions, to a certain degree, redress the heritage of northern mystification, but my sense is that no matter how pragmatic these issues are, they contain a huge amount of speculation about the future, cloaked with uncertainty and mystery. For the most part, these discussions follow and maintain the legacy of Arctic colonialism. Another topic of discussion is whether northernness should even be approached within the context of Arctic or not. Although according to some opinions, separation between the discourses of 'Arctic' and 'the North' is essential, the definitions of these two discourses have been and still are overlapping and fuzzy.⁵⁹

In the Canadian context the idea of North has been harnessed as a positive attitude towards promoting national identity while northern art, within that Canadian context, is perceived as a 'tool' helping to put nationalistic interests, in a positive manner, into action.⁶⁰ In the Finnish context, to deconstruct or re-write the stereotypes attached to northernness through culture, through music for instance, is a more complicated process, returning us to the same dilemma that postcolonial studies have long been criticised for: How can one deconstruct stereotypes without at the same time retaining and repeating the (theoretical) composition on which the critique itself is based? Although in modern northern art and culture, as in Saami music, the aim is to somehow dismantle the stereotypes of northernness, as well as to 'let the object speak for itself',⁶¹ at the same time it is often grudgingly admitted that the exotic dimensions of northern nature are indeed worth sustaining, for example for the benefit of developing northern tourism. The re-creation of northern culture entails new spatial understandings, but the context in which the cultural re-creation takes place appears to remain unchanged, that is, the context based on the stereotypes of primitive northern nature people living in the middle of the arctic wilderness. Thus, the essential task is to eliminate the obstacles that constrain artists from being creative, in the ways they want to be, while at the same time retaining a northern and ethnic identity.

59 H. Hanson & A. Ryall, 'Introduction: Environmental, Exotic, Everyday Arctic', in H. Hanson & A. Ryall, eds., *Arctic Modernities: The Environmental, the Exotic and the Everyday*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2018, pp. 2–3.

60 Grace, op. cit.

61 Cf. C. Spies, 'Ethnographic Objects in Between Self-Presentation and Contextualisation', in S. Aamold, E. Haugdal & U. Angkjær Jørgensen, eds., *Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017, p. 196.