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Memory and Forgetting in the North Atlantic

- Imagological and Postcolonial Perspectives.

Ph.d.- seminar and a small exhibition in Copenhagen at The Department of Arts and Cultural Studies University of Copenhagen and European Cultural Studies, Roskilde University. Arranged with the Copenhagen Doctoral School in Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen.

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Ethnic or national stereotypes and commonplaces form the subject of an approach in literary studies called "image studies". (...) In actual practice this means that, in studying national stereotypes and alleged "national characters" or national reputations, an imagologist is not concerned with the question whether that reputation is true, but how it has become recognizable. (...) For this reason the imagologist distinguishes between auto-images and hetero-images: the attitudes one has towards one own cultural values (self-image, auto-image) and the attitude towards the other (hetero-image).

Joep Leerssen

The English mentality historian Peter Burke has shown that some societies maintain a collective memory, while others build upon collective amnesia, or "social amnesia". Burkes testimony is exemplified by a comparison of an English historical horizon with an Irish. The English recall selected and good things within the common Irish-English history, the joint statehood and empire as a whole, while the Irish mind is differently designed around the bad sides of exactly the same story. Examples of such differences in conceptions of historical relations and contact zones are also seen in the North Atlantic field. What we will explore is the Icelandic, Faroese and Greenlandic images and culture of memory and commemorative design, that can be seen in: monuments, stamps, bank notes, textbooks for primary schools, street names, paintings, folklore, national heroes, exhibitions and scientific reports.

In this one-day Ph.d.-seminar we want to combine the study of how national stereotypes and national images have emerged in the North Atlantic, both in history and today, with a perspective on memory and forgetting in the North Atlantic. The underlying question and presumptions are how have images and ideological circumstances culturally, literally and in the arts created images of what was or is Icelandic, Faroese or Greenlandic, and how have these images and stereotypes been internalized into self-definitions and identity? From early travel writing and topographies, to the images of landscapes in art to modern day art and thriving music scene, we see Björk, Julie Edel Hardenberg and Eivør Pálsdóttir both use and deconstruct the images of the north. But how does the image become a self-image and how can we study stereotypes and characterizations traditionally ascribed to various ethnicities and nationalities? Are these areas to be studied in a post-colonial context or do we deal with the differences between the north versus the south, or the construction of these areas in terms of a cosmopolitan centre that has constructed the periphery of any given country as more 'natural', and at the same time more backward? Who is constructed in what way and who has agency in various cultural fields and scholarly disciplines? How can we apply memory studies and imagology as a frame of explanation? How does the image become a self-image and how can we study stereotypes and characterizations traditionally ascribed to various ethnicities and nationalities in various cultural fields and scholarly disciplines?

Kim Simonsen

PhD Fellow and Mag.art, European Cultural Studies, Roskilde University

Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud

PhD Fellow and MA

Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen

Kurator: Ole Wich