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# Imagology: On using ethnicity to make sense of the world

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**Abstract :** This article outlines the theory and method of imagology, the discursive study of ethnotypes (stereotypical attributions of national character). Imagology has a respectable history and academic presence, but adjustments are needed in the light of recent developments. These include: [a] the replacement of the national-modular categorization of literary traditions by a polysystemic approach; [b] the decline of print fiction as the premier narrative medium, and the rise of film, TV, and other media; [c] the realization that ethnotypes are often encountered in occluded form (deployed ironically or as “meta-images”; or in a «banal» or latent background presence, as dormant frames); [d] new, «intersectional» notions of identity formation; [e] the demise of Eurocentrism and the rise of postnationalism. While these emerging challenges call for an adjustment of imagological analysis, the present climate of identity politics also demonstrates an ongoing, indeed urgent need to address what remains the core business of

imagology: deconstructing the discourse of national and ethnic essentialism.

**Keywords :** Imagology, Stereotypes, Nation, Nationalism, Ethnicity

**Résumé :** Cet article décrit la théorie et la méthode de l’imagologie, l’étude discursive des ethnotypes (attributions stéréotypiques de caractéristiques nationales). Historiquement et dans le monde universitaire, l’imagologie jouit d’une respectabilité indéniable, mais des ajustements sont nécessaires en raison de certaines évolutions récentes. Ces évolutions comprennent : a) Le remplacement de la catégorisation modulaire nationale des traditions littéraires par une approche polysystémique ; b) Le déclin des ouvrages de fiction imprimés en tant que support narratif dominant, face au développement des films, de la télévision et d’autres médias ; c) Le constat que les ethnotypes sont souvent présents de façon cachée (employés de façon ironique ou

comme « méta-images » ; ou encore sous forme de présence « banale » ou latente en arrière-plan, comme cadres implicites); d) De nouvelles notions « intersectionnelles » quant à la constitution de l'identité; e) La fin de l'eurocentrisme et la montée du postnationalisme. Ces remises en question nécessitent évidemment un réajustement de l'analyse imagologique, mais le contexte actuel

des politiques identitaires démontre également qu'il continue d'être nécessaire, et même urgent, de s'attaquer à ce qui reste le cœur de l'imagologie : la déconstruction du discours essentialiste sur la nation et l'ethnicité.

**Mots-clés :** Imagologie, Ethnotypes, Stéréotypes, Nation, Nationalisme, Ethnicité

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To a very large extent, we schematize and make sense of the world by means of notions (prejudices, stereotypes) of national characters and ethnic temperaments. Alongside gender, ethnicity and nationality are perhaps the most ingrained way of pigeonholing human behaviour into imputed group characteristics.

Imagology, a long established specialism rooted in Comparative Literature, analyses the discursive articulations of such national characterizations; it studies them as a cross-national dynamics and from a transnational point of view. Imagology – an appellation which is less than perfect but by now too ingrained to tamper with – began as the study, in literary history, of images and representations of foreigners – *l'étranger tel qu'on le voit* – and was hailed, more than a half-century ago, by Jean-Marie Carré as a *domaine d'avenir*<sup>1</sup>. Since then, that future has neither fully materialized nor has it altogether evaporated. In the current climate of intense “identity politics” and resurging nationalism, imagology is quickly regaining the urgency it had in the post-1945 years. In what follows, I want to outline its development and established insights, its working methods and theoretical position, and indicate some challenges and perspectives for its continuing scholarly use in the current academic landscape<sup>2</sup>.

## Background and outlook

The earliest exercises in imagological research were factual inventories of foreign characters and of characterizations of foreigners in a given literary corpus. They were descriptive rather than analytical, and subject to naive essentialism (in that they saw no need to problematize the notion of “national character”). It was taken as a given that English people should have a different character, temperament and/or mode of behaviour than Spanish, German or French ones; and the literary representation of that state of affairs was seen as a straightforwardly mimetic derivative of

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1 Thus in GUYARD, Marius-François, *La littérature comparée*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, « Que sais-je? », 1951.

2 This programmatic survey follows and updates LEERSSEN, Joep, « The rhetoric of national character: A programmatic survey », *Poetics today*, 21 (2000), p. 265–290.

real-world facts. Only in some instances did authors take issue what was being said about this or that nationality. Famously, Julián Juderías in his *La leyenda negra* of 1914 denounced the “Black Legend” as mendacious war propaganda, taking issue with the traditional discursive characterization of Spaniards as driven by a morose, cruel temperament, exhibiting their evil character in their genocidal, inhumane colonialism, the cruelty of their soldiers, and the merciless, sadistic intolerance of the Inquisition. Yet Juderías, too, believed in an underlying anthropological reality of national characters – he merely denounced the Black legend for being an ungenerous, malicious distortion of how the Spaniards “really” were. Tellingly, the full title of Juderías’s book was *La leyenda negra y la verdad histórica*.

Given their unproblematic reliance on an underlying factuality of real national temperaments, such earlier studies are no longer academically trustworthy. However, they maintain some usefulness – if consulted with the necessary caution as to their interpretations and presuppositions – as digests of the relevant primary source material. The available primary literature was often diligently and exhaustively inventorized by these earlier studies, which gives at least their bibliographies a continuing value.

A critique of national essentialism slowly emerged in the course of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – an admirable harbinger being John Mackinnon Robertson’s *The Saxon and the Celt*, which sets out to “upset all such generalizations [concerning an Irish/Celtic ethnic character as opposed to an English/Saxon one], and to discredit all claims of innate and unchanging racial peculiarity”. As early as 1897, the year in which Robertson’s book appeared, this amounts to an agenda of deconstruction: to demonstrate that what is presented as an anthropological given is in fact a social and rhetorical, ideological construct.

This radical skepticism as to the very ontology of national characters was bolstered in the mid-century by French sociologists and social psychologists who sought to replace the idea of *nation* or *people* by that of *ethnie* (meaning thereby, a group of individuals held together by a shared commitment to a joint self-image – regardless of the actual reality or historical basis of that self-image) and saw the oppositions between these *ethnies* largely as a distribution of such images along the axis of Self and Other. Notions of prejudice, stereotype and ethnocentrism were being developed at the same time by American social scientists, all of them subverting the earlier credence in objective national characters – which had in any case discredited itself in the hysterical xenophobia and ethnocentrism of the fascist and Nazi regimes. Even so, there were those who refused to follow this skeptical trend, and from the days of Geoffrey Gorer to the modern theorists of intercultural management, there is still a robust academic tradition invoking national characters as objective explanatory factors for social behaviour.

When the post-1945 humanities turned anti-essentialist, this was largely motivated by a desire for reconciliation between the torn nations of Europe, in a recoil from strident national chauvinism and racism. At the same time, there was the intellectual influence of structuralism, and Sartre’s existentialist emphasis on the interplay between regarding subject and regarded object. Sartre’s influence reached from early Lacan (in particular his notion of a *stade de miroir* in the development of subjectivity) to Beauvoir’s feminist critique of innate sexual identity (“on ne naît pas femme, on le devient”) and Frantz Fanon’s analysis of colonial self-alienation and racism (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, 1951). Literary scholars began to note that national characterizations related, first and

foremost, not to an external anthropological reality mimetically represented, but to an oppositional discursive economy of other national characterizations, most fundamentally along an axis of Self vs. Other (soon termed “auto-image” vs. “hetero-image”). Among the scholars who developed such an anti-essentialist imagology, outstanding names are Daniel-Henri Pageaux<sup>3</sup>, Franz Stanzel<sup>4</sup>, and above all Hugo Dyserinck, who programmatically defined imagology so as to make it a cornerstone of Comparative Literature<sup>5</sup>.

Not only did Dyserinck enshrine the opposition between auto-image and hetero-image, and the radical relativity of images, at the core of imagology, he also, crucially, saw it as a method uniting the intrinsic textual analysis of individual literary works and the historical analysis of literary dynamics, transcending the notorious dilemma between intrinsic and extrinsic analysis. National stereotyping, so Dyserinck argued, governed both the characterization of actions and actors within literary narratives and poetics, and the modality affecting the transnational diffusion and reception of texts (which were, and are, often read under the aspect of their national provenance and its associated cultural characteristics). This realization was central to Dyserinck’s understanding of Comparative Literature as a whole, which for him was the supranational study of literature as a multinational phenomenon, and therefore uniquely suited to problematize the national categories articulated in, and disseminated by, literature.

Dyserinck’s programme failed to have a major impact on the pursuit of Comparative Literature worldwide, but its theoretical coherence render it robust and workable, even a half-century after its formulation – which is no mean intellectual achievement. While some new theoretical and historical departures need to be factored in for a future application of imagology, the working basis which I shall outline in the next section is essentially of Dyserinck’s conception.

## Working basis

Imagology proceeds on the basis of a number of theoretical assumptions, some of which have become almost commonsensical since their first formulations in the 1960s<sup>6</sup>. These include:

[1] Representations of national character (henceforth called *ethnotypes*) cannot be empirically measured against an objectively existing *signifié*. They are, rather, discursive objects: narrative tropes and rhetorical formulae.

3 PAGEAUX, Daniel-Henri, « Image/imaginaire », in *Europa und das nationale Selbstverständnis: Imagologische Probleme in Literatur, Kunst und Kultur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Hugo Dyserinck & Karl-Ulrich Syndram (dir.), Bonn: Bouvier, 1988, p. 367-380.

4 STANZEL, Franz Karl, « Der literarische Aspekt unserer Vorstellungen vom Charakter fremder Völker », *Anzeiger der phi.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 111, 74, p. 63-82.

5 DYSERINCK, Hugo, *Komparatistik: Eine Einführung*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Bonn, Bouvier, 1991. *Id.*, *Ausgewählte Schriften zur Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2015.

6 As summarized and systematized in BELLER, Manfred & LEERSSEN, Joep (dir.), *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007. The various insights and older authorities, as well as examples from primary literature, cited and repertoried in that handbook will not be referenced separately here.

This point is not invalidated by the fact that in many cases, actual social behaviour can be in conformity with the characteristics encountered discursively. Such nationality-affirming or “true-to-type” behaviour (“As an Englishman, I shall keep calm during a crisis”) demonstrates the power of discourse to inspire behaviour, and raises the important question how such inspiration patterns emerge and manifest themselves, i.e. how cultural role models inspire behavioural choices. Two things should be emphasized. [1] The important, even urgent question – how do role models affect behaviour – cannot be raised if “true-to-type” behaviour were to be naively explained as a straightforward manifestation of a purported underlying character. This characterological fallacy (deducing cultural behaviour from cultural temperament, quasi-explaining true-to-type behaviour with the facile assertion “that’s just how these people are”) blocks any deeper analysis. [2] To explain nationality-affirming behaviour directly from an underlying operative character would belie the fact that such behaviour is a choice, not a determined necessity. Not everyone sharing the nationality will choose to share the behaviour; nor is the behaviour, or the invoked character, constant over space, time or society; but these problematic differentiations are lost from view in the massive confirmation bias that is inherent in the discourse of stereotype.

[2] Ethnotypes are either explicitly or implicitly oppositional. They invoke Self-Other oppositions (auto-image vs. hetero-images; ethnocentrism vs. exoticism or xenophobia) and/or will silhouette a given national character against the implied background of how it differs from other national characters.

This emphasis on external difference is characteristic of national essentialism and of ethnotyping, which always gravitates towards exceptionalism: a disinclination to consider a given society normal and unremarkable. Similarities between nations are usually drowned out by the emphasis on differences. The unremarkable characteristics (even fundamentally important ones) wherein a society is a non-salient part of its larger context are tacitly elided as being inconsequential – e.g. the fact that Germans are monogamous (that characteristic will only be activated, as a *repoussoir*, if a polygamous Other – e.g. an Arab sheik in Orientalist fantasy – also features in the representation.). The rhetoric of ethnotyping often involves a so-called *effet de typique*: the characteristics presented as being meaningfully representative of the nation as a type, are in fact selected and highlighted because they set that nation apart from others. In its ultimate reduction, this *effet de typique* can condensate into formulaic caricature: Spanish bullfights, German lederhosen, or a French “oh là là”. The underlying fallacy is the a-priori denial of normalcy: the assumption that a nation is most characteristically itself in precisely those aspects in which it is most different from others.

[3] Not everything that can be said of a given nation or country can count as an ethno-type. What is specific about ethnotypes is that they single out a nation from the rest of humanity by ascribing a particular **character** to it, i.e. a temperamental or psychological predisposition motivating and explaining a specific behavioral profile. One may even phrase this the other way around: descriptions of a given nation that do not in some way explain the nation’s peculiarities from an

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7 The fallacy of such a characterological explanation lies in its circular reasoning. Culture (as a behavioural pattern asserted to be typical of a culturally defined group, e.g. the unflappable sang-froid of the English) is invoked to explain culture (as a temperamental predisposition asserted to be typical of a culturally defined group); which means that notions about a “culture” (whatever is meant by that term) are invoked to both describe and explain assertions concerning behaviour. The actual basis for the assertions remains a mere say-so.

imputed underlying character, are not ethnotypes, and as such fall outside the scope of imagological research (e.g., “Sweden is a monarchy with a cold climate and a strong welfare-state system”). The preoccupation with character as an explanatory factor means that narratives, both fictional and non-fictional, are a privileged discursive genre for the imagologist, since narrative is very fundamentally concerned with motivation (describing acts and behaviour as motivated by character). The importance of motivation (character as providing a logical link between the actors in a story and the events of that story) was already recognized by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The conventions of Western, post-Aristotelian narrative will seek to represent an actor’s behaviour, choices and actions as *motivated*, i.e. logically plausible and coherent in terms of the sort of person the actor in question is. In the case of ethnotypes, that motivation will often invoke nationality as an explanatory element in the actor’s characteristic choices and actions – even apparently erratic ones (“Phileas Fogg went on an 80-days tour of the world because it was a wager, and *as an English gentleman* he was fond of such eccentric wagers”).

[4] While being predicated on the need to distinguish between nations, ethnotypes often invoke underlying temperamental oppositional pattern which are nationally unspecific. Among these are the temperamental opposition between a cool, cerebral-moral North and a hot, sanguine-emotional South; between a dynamic Centre and a static or backward Periphery; an apprehension of powerful great nations and an appreciation of harmless small nations. Eastern locations are often linked to despotic regimes, western ones to democratic values; in addition, standardized characterological oppositions are often called into play between honour- and status-based nations and duty- and contract-based ones. How these temperamental oppositional patterns are mapped onto specific national settings, anywhere between Iceland, the Sahara, and the Great Wall of China, is variable: any nation can, given an appropriate counterpart, be configured as reflecting northern or southern, central or peripheral, strong or weak, aristocratic or bourgeois values. These temperamental oppositions are also multi-scalar: they can be used at will to schematize distinctions between macroregions, between countries, or regions within a single country.

[5] Ethnotypes are by no means historical constants, even though they pretend to assert an unchanging truth. The ways in which “the” Irish, German or Spanish character has been portrayed over the centuries have vacillated wildly. These vacillations often occur abruptly, in a tipping-point process when a long-standing ethnotype suddenly gives way to (or is overlaid by) its opposing counterpart. An important task of imagology is to map these vacillations over time and to historically identify the tipping-point transitions from one register to another. The end result of those vacillations is that the available discursive-rhetorical reservoir of ethnotypical statements about a given nation contains a layered, historical accumulation of sharply contradictory elements: images and counter-images (the English as “reserved and stiff-upper-lipped”, or as “violent hooligans”). The entire bandwidth of these available images and counter-images is called the underlying *image*. The internal contradictions within any given image mean that the ethnotype is unfalsifiable: any counter-example to the ethnotypical assertion will conform with another available variant within the image. The contradictions within the image will often be rationalized by imputing the contradictions to the nation itself, as being a temperamentally bipolar “nation of contrasts”.

[6] By the same token, ethnotypes can be valorized positively or negatively, depending on what sympathies are at work. This can take place in two ways: either a given ethnotype is replaced

by an alternative, opposingly valorized counter-image (“The Irish are not violent benighted terrorists, but sensitive, otherworldly dreamers”), or else the ethnotype will be inflected with a different valorization (“the Irish, sensitive otherworldly dreamers that they are, are exasperatingly unfit for practical life”).

In international relations, periods of stability will usually tend to deflate ethnotyping in favour of a trend towards characterological neutrality and normalcy (“this nation is just like us / just like any other”), moments of tension will heighten ethnotyping (“the English/French/Hungarians are facing this crisis with a characteristic XYZ...”).

[7] There are certain valorizing constants. Moral tropes that will always rhetorically valorize a character positively are: being involved in a harmonious family life (as manifested in marital fidelity and in affectionate parent-children relationships); hospitality; honesty, a work ethic and fidelity to the given word. Opposite traits will correspondingly valorize the character negatively. Subsidiary to these, religious piety is a positive marker, even when describing the religion of foreign countries, but can, when negatively framed, tip over into the negative attributes of superstition, bigotry or fanaticism.

[8] As these moral markers suggest, ethnotypes are at their most salient in melodramatic black-and-white characterizations, where negative or positive traits are piled on in an overdetermined distribution so as to effect strongly contrasting patterns between “good guys” and “bad guys” or between the actantial figures of Hero, Villain, Victim, and Friend. This means that ethnotypes are usually encountered at their most explicit in genres like the sentimental comedy and popular or children’s fiction (particularly of the period 1700-1950). More complicated characters in serious narratives will usually have contradictory or nuanced moral profiles, with, especially since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a strong tendency towards ironic, ambiguous characterization or ambiguous motivation. However, even in such narratives the secondary characters will usually be delineated in less detail, a more sketchy manner and with a more unmitigated reliance on ethnotypes.

## Working method

Imagology is a working method, not in sociology, but in the humanities; the aim is to understand, not a society or social dynamics, but rather a discursive logic and representational set of cultural and poetic conventions. This is in line with the starting point that ethnotypes are unfalsifiable. Their empirical truth value is as undecidable as the statement “my love is like a red, red rose”; ethnotypes are, as the saying goes, “not even wrong”. Instead of an ethnotype’s truth value, the research focus is on its persuasive poetical and rhetorical power, and that in turn depends on its recognition value<sup>8</sup> and on the effectiveness of its discursive presentation.

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8 The distinction between truth value and recognition value is derived from the opposition, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, between the truthful and the apt (later adapted in the distinction between *vérité* and *vraisemblance*, or truth and plausibility). Aristotle sharply distinguishes the two, and points out that an author seeking to convince an audience is better off telling a plausible lie than proffering an implausible truth. Authors should subordinate their narratives to the audience’s prejudices; for which reason a slave ought



These starting points establish a threefold procedure, which can be rubricated as **inter-textual**, **contextual**, and **textual**. None of these can be satisfactorily pursued without the others.

Establishing an ethnotype's **intertext** means to trace the paper trail of textual occurrences of the commonplace in question. When encountering a given ethnic characterization, the first need to place it in the context of its general typology. The characterization of the Jewish characters in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, the old moneylender Isaac and his beautiful daughter Rebecca, cannot be understood without knowledge of the intertextual antecedent of Shakespeare's Shylock and his daughter Jessica. The characterological profile of a given ethnotype is the end result of a long accumulation of individual textual instances, and this accumulation in turn is the sounding board against which the individual instance reverberates. Indeed, any given instance of an ethnotype refers, not so empirical reality as such, as to the established commonplaces, and the imagologist's task is to retrieve these implied commonplaces from the dormant, latent condition of "the things one has heard before without quite knowing where and when". In addition, the historical vacillations of a given ethnotype are usually sharply demarcated in time, and these historical tipping points need to be understood when situating texts historically – think of the romanticization of the image of Spain between 1810 and 1840; the de-romanticization of the image of Germany after 1865; the rise and decline of philosemitic pro-Israel feeling between 1945 and 2015 (this last curve running its course differently in different parts of the world: the US, Europe, elsewhere).

By now the task of typologically inventorizing the intertextual record is, at least for Europe-connected imagery, largely accomplished, and scholars have a substantial body of secondary literature to fall back on.

**Context** refers to the historical, political and social conditions within which a given ethnotype is brought forward. When analysing Shylock and Jessica, or Isaac and Rebecca, we do not move in a timeless canon of Important Literature, but need to understand *The Merchant of Venice* and *Ivanhoe* as expressions of their country and period of origin – Shakespeare's London c. 1600, Scott's Edinburgh c. 1820, with the poetical and political climate in force there and then. The climate of Romanticism needs to be factored in for the understanding of Scott, and the different poetics governing the theatre and the novel at these two historical moments. When looking at Scott's poem *The vision of Don Roderic* (1811, on the Visigothic king Rodrigo), the historical context of Spanish resistance against Napoleonic dominance is indispensable for our understanding of the text. Yet, at the same time, we should be aware that in literary history the moment of enunciation is not all that matters in our understanding of a text. The continuing afterlife of Rebecca in the centuries since *Ivanhoe* (in adaptations, reworkings, spin-offs) should be factored into the literary analysis; and Shakespeare's Shylock should be situated, not only in London c. 1600, but ideally also in the subsequent moments when that canonical play was reproduced, recycled, re-staged. Contemporary debates about the stageability of *The Merchant of Venice* must negotiate that double historicity that is so typical of literature: the historicity of production and of reception. Can we perform a play with strident antisemitic elements after Auschwitz? If not, does that mean that we must ban Shakespeare retroactively for the antisemitism that led to genocide 350 years after his play? If not, does that mean that we as audiences can pretend to be as unaffected by Auschwitz as Shakespeare was?

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never to be represented as wiser than his master, or a woman more valorous than a man, even though such things might be encountered in real life.

The **textual** analysis, finally, will involve the actual study of the text itself to see how the ethnotype functions in it: which genre-conventions rule the text in question (fiction, rapportage, oratory etc.), what position the ethnotype occupies in the text, how foregrounded it is, to which extent it is juxtaposed with other nationalized characters or with an implied self-image or complicit target-audience, whether its presence in the text is heightened, counteracted, ironized or left unaffected by the authorial voice and the overall focalization and textual drift. If a certain character in a narrative is nationalized as X, what difference would it have made if the character's nationality had been Y or Z instead, i.e. what role does the nationalization actually play?

All these questions require a certain amount of finesse in textual (rhetorical, narratological or poetical) analysis. It is for that reason that expertise in the methods of literary criticism is indispensable to conduct properly imagological analysis. Imagology can address the interaction between literature and social or political realities; but the analysis in the final reckoning must be literary as much as sociological or politological.

## Recent and emerging perspectives

What has been set forth so far is by and large established consensus in the theory and methodology of imagology, as summarized in Dyserinck's collected articles and in the aforementioned handbook edited by Manfred Beller and myself, *Imagology* (above, notes 5 and 6). Even as that handbook was in preparation, important new insights were emerging, and indeed time has not stood still since the book's appearance in 2007.

To begin with, critics like Ruth Florack and others have been insisting that the deconstruction of a given image tends to leave a certain ontological essentialism intact if the question *who is looking* is not problematized at the same time<sup>9</sup>. The distinction between hetero-image and auto-image may not go far enough in this respect: analysing the image of nation X in the literature of nation Y may be critically deconstructive with regard to "nation X" but at the same time uncritically accept the category of "literature Y" as unproblematic and objective. To query the image of India in English literature may expose the first element of that topic, the image of India, to critical analysis and deconstruction, but may by the same token leave the second element unchallenged, even to the point of reifying the idea of a single, homogeneous body of literary texts unproblematically identified as "English" *tout court*.

What is an auto-image and what a hetero-image is not the stable polarity that it was once thought to be. Mme de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* outlines a German character to a French readership, and the rhetorical *dispositio* of her presentation accordingly created a strong French-German polarity. (Indeed critics have long recognized that her celebration of German culture was really a coded

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9 FLORACK, Ruth, *Bekannte Fremde: Zu Herkunft und Funktion nationaler Stereotype in der Literatur*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 2007. More strident and less convincing: PERNER, Claudia, « Dislocating imagology, and: How much of it can (or should) be retrieved? », in *Postcolonial translocations: Cultural representation and critical spatial thinking*, Marga Munkelt et al. (dir.), Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2013, p. 29-44.

critique of French society through-the-German-looking-glass.) But her “hetero”-image relied in large measure on a Romantic vision of how German culture should be, as suggested to her by her guide and lover August Wilhelm Schlegel, so that the German “other” used by Staël to criticize France was really the French adoption of a German auto-image conceived in an anti-French spirit... In addition, her book, destroyed as its first edition was by Napoleon’s police, initially failed to reach its intended French readership and from its first successful edition on (London, 1813) has been read by many readers outside France, and the proffered image of Germany assimilated by readers in Britain, Poland, Russia and Italy, whose countries stood in a totally different relationship to France, and yet adopted a French-determined vision of Germany.

For reasons like this, the underlying notion of a discursive identity in ethnotypical discourse has turned out to be more of a crux than scholars realized in the 1970s. This crux was also highlighted by the insight that many auto-images, especially among subaltern nations, are really interiorizations of a hegemonic, exotic view from outside – in the spirit of Frantz Fanon’s dictum that *C’est le blanc qui crée le nègre. Mais c’est le nègre qui crée la négritude*<sup>10</sup>. The lingering echo of interiorized exoticism can be so strong that an auto-image can take the form of auto-exoticism, a self-image thematizing how very unusual and non-normal the own nation is, a failure to see oneself as in any way normal.

For that reason the study of identity, in its various layerings and degrees of self-awareness and explicit self-reflection, is one of the great emerging topics in imagology; as is the realization that this identity is as mobile as the text in which it is expressed. A film like *Casablanca* brings refugee actors from various European nations together in a Hollywood studio to play refugee characters from various European nations assembled in a Moroccan casbah. That American production by European refugees for (initially) American audiences is in turn viewed by audiences all over the world. Given such nesting impersonations in shifting contexts, a stable distinction between auto-images and hetero-images dissolves into multiple ironies, even though the ethnotypes remain recognizable enough (rakish Frenchman, bloody-minded German, tough American).

[2] While the auto-image used to count as the implied ethnocentric starting-point from which authors would begin to map their *Fremderfahrung* or “experience of otherness”, it is now seen as a complex construct taking shape in an ongoing encounter with shifting manifestations of otherness. What is nonetheless stable, even so, is (as Ricœur and others have pointed out) its function as a locus of permanence across time. The “I” now may have a different profile from “I” in the past, and may shift as it silhouettes itself against different others over time, nonetheless the “I” subjectivities at different instances will identify their self-sameness (*ipséité*) across time. Promises made in the past bind us in the present or future, memories from the past determine how we now look at the world, and these diachronic links tie me to myself at different moments in my life, establishing, in the firm sense of the word, an identity<sup>11</sup>.

Auto-image as identity, and identity, as such, as a discursive construct, has become a promising field of research given the rise of *memory studies* in recent decades: the informal, non-academic, broadly cultural ways in which a society takes account of its past, its traumas and traditions. In a further extension, imagology may also prove to be highly valuable for the study of *nationalism*,

10 FANON, Frantz, *L’an V de la révolution algérienne*, Paris, Maspero, 1959, p. 27.

11 RICŒUR, Paul, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990.

as it is increasingly recognized that a sense of national identity derives from such historical self-usages and master narratives, and the nation's self-attribution of a distinct, historically invariant character. I have elsewhere put forward a possible definition of nationalism as "the political instrumentalization of an auto-image", and this may be particularly applicable in the analysis of modern ethnopopulism. The study of national images in the news media is an especially important new application of imagology<sup>12</sup>.

The rise of memory studies likewise gives us scope to trace the operative influence of memory-scapes and historical self-images as projected through other than literary fields, e.g. in museums, commemorations, monuments etc. This extends even further the already existing awareness that the narrative fields nowadays are no longer exclusively located in genres like the novel, but also in film, TV serials, graphic novels and other such media.

## Post-essentialist: Irony and meta-images

As literary devices, ethnotypes are crude. We can therefore expect them in crude (broad-brush) genres like farces, sentimental comedies, opera libretti, melodramatic romances or spy thrillers, or in the background details of more serious work where authors allow themselves to work more sketchily than in the more fine-grained central parts of the action. In most "serious" literature, ethnotypes will be used back-handedly, as part of a more troubled or conflicted psychological profile or as an ironic interplay between how people see themselves, what the world expects from them, how these expectations are anticipated upon, and what misunderstandings or self-beguilements ensue from there (as in the novels of E.M. Foster or Thomas Mann). This mode I have labelled "ironic", and I have traced the various meanings of that term elsewhere. Indeed most contemporary use of ethnotypes is ironic, even in broadly comic popular media such as the movies *French Kiss* or *European Vacation*, or the TV serial *'Allo 'allo*: national peculiarities are presented as something to be smiled at rather than as something to be believed in. Even so, the fun that is being poked presupposes the recognizability of the ethnotype involved and so, by affirming the recognizability (if not the believability) of the cliché, its currency will be perpetuated, and the possibility maintained of its deployment in less ironic modes. Also, an ongoing repetition of an ironical point may blunt its mocking, subversive edge and erode it, in the long run, into a mere iteration of the original cliché. The jive-talkin', edgy, self-styled "niggers" of Tarantino-style movies may have been originally intended as a challenge both to racist stereotypes and to patronizing, politically-correct pieties, by now the difference between the challenge and the stereotype is wearing thin; similarly, the "Stage Irishman", long decried as a demeaning figure of fun for supercilious English audiences, is now alive and well and noticeably present in many Irish self-presentations in the comic mode since Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*. The critical analysis of an ethnotype's backhanded, ironic deployment remains a special challenge to the imagologist's analytical powers.

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12 VAN DOORSLAER, Luc, « Translating, narrating and constructing images in journalism: With a test case on representation in Flemish TV news », *Meta: Journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal*, 57.4, 2012, p. 1046-1059.

This ironical deployment hints at the fact that nowadays ethnotypes are operative as background assumption rather than as explicit assertion. A very astute insight in this respect, due to Hercules Millas, has been labelled “meta-images”<sup>13</sup> : images which are neither an auto-image nor a hetero-image, but the projection of something between the two. Meta-images exist wholly by way of imputing to Others the way how we think that they look at Us. Interestingly, intense antagonism usually takes shape at this meta-level of imputation. What intensifies ill-will is not how We see the Other, or how We see ourselves; nor does it consist in how the Others see themselves or how they see us. The antagonism comes in when We imagine how the Other thinks of us, and when the Others speculate about what We think of them. In times of conflict, these imputations are characterized by a disconcerting lack of generosity: we believe the others guilty of ill-will, a refusal to be reasonable, a deep animus, without realizing that it is us ourselves who display such ill-will and animus by imputing it to the Other. We suspect the other of being suspicious, without being aware that to do so is an act of suspicion on our part. Millas has demonstrated the working of such meta-images in Greek-Turkish antagonism, I myself have seen them at work in Flemish-Walloon conflict<sup>14</sup>. In both cases, they seem to be the operative factor, not so much in the substance of the mutual stereotyping, as in the intensity of the antagonism. The insight is to me one of the most promising perspectives of further imagological study, and for its practical usefulness in conflict management. Meta-images are also an important literary device in the ironical, literary evocation of the muddled complexities of prejudice and imputed prejudice.

## Frames, triggers, latency states

The cognitive-psychological model of “frames” and “triggers” has deepened our understanding of ethnotyping, and of stereotyping in general. Briefly summarized and drastically simplified, it boils down to the notion that we carry in our mental repertoire a set of “frames”, schemata of the plausible connections between situations and what we believe to be their underlying patterns, and that these “frames” can be activated by actual stimuli, “triggers”; these can arise from real-world encounters and experiences, or from cultural processes such as following the twists and turns of a narrative. In the last case, the experience of “triggers” activating pre-existing explanatory “frames” is close to the hermeneutics of reader response theory, the “frame” being fairly close to the social-psychological notion of prejudice, or what Jauss would call an *Erwartungshorizont* or horizon of expectations. A “frame/trigger” approach to imagology accounts for the fact (in itself a highly puzzling one) that we can carry so many different ethnotypes of a given nation around in our heads without these leading to mutual-incompatibility conflicts – any active frame will push other potential frames into a state of latency. Thinking of the frame “ebullient, irascible Frenchman”

13 MILLAS, Hercules, « Perceptions of conflict: Greeks and Turks in each other's mirrors », in O. Anastasakis, K. Nicolaidis & K. Öktem (dir.), *The long shadow of Europe: Greeks and Turks in the era of postnationalism*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 95-114.

14 LEERSSEN, Joep, « Postmoderne *belgitude*, meta-images en de actualiteit van de imagologie », in Stéphanie Vanasten & Matthieu Sergier (dir.) *Littéraire belgitude littéraire: Hommage aan Sonja Vanderlinden*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2011, p. 153-164.

when viewing a Louis de Funès movie will block out the alternative frame of the severely reserved, Cartesian-formalist Frenchman<sup>15</sup>. Indeed the fact is noteworthy that stereotypes and ethnotypes are part of a usually dormant, even latent repertoire of possible mental attitudes. Latency is always a default state for ethnotypes and prejudices: they are present in our minds even while we are not conscious of them, and to treat them as continually active and ceaselessly present ideologemes may not do justice to their actual ontology (except in the case of fanatical racists, who may be the most visible, but by the same token not the most representative, manifestations of ethnotypical thought). Similarly, in the world of discourse, limiting our source material so as to select for the operative presence of active ethnotypes in documented evidence may give a skewed notion as to their actual prevalence, as if they are always there, in your face and at our fingertips. In reality what makes ethnotypes challenging and problematic is their ontological half-life, their diluted presence in texts that are often unread and half-remembered, at the back of our minds. Imagology will, I feel, have to come to terms with the specific way in which ethnotypes seem to function, in a constant interaction between latency states and activation triggers<sup>16</sup>. Interestingly enough, this ontology, these hermeneutics are also foregrounded in recent scholarly concerns with cultural memory and with “banal nationalism”, and there is promising common ground between these specialisms.

## Ethnicity as (one) frame (among many): the need to triangulate ethnotypes and sociotypes

We can take this frame-trigger insight one step further by recalling what Daniel-Henri Pageaux identified as the fundamental rhetorical characteristic of ethnotypical discourse: “la confusion entre *l’attribut* et *l’essentiel*”. In actual practice this often boils down to seeing the mere attribute of ethnicity as the essential motivating character in a person’s actions. If, in real life or in a text, a Dutchman of Moroccan descent is seen to commit a traffic offense or an act of vandalism, this will be “framed” as somehow meaningfully linked to that Moroccan ethnicity. By contrast, if a blond-blue-eyed Dutch football hooligan is witnessed in these same acts, the idea that his vandalism has something to do with his Dutchness will *not* arise; and in that difference – the uneven distribution of ethnic framing – lies the root of ethnic prejudice and racism. Once ethnic identity is an essential characteristic rather than an incidental attribute, each act will be framed against this ethnic background and each individual will always be seen as a representative of his/her nation.

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<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, the ironic deployment of an ethnotype could be seen as triggering a frame while at the same time signalling its insufficiency, e.g. to say, on seeing a football hooligan, “that’s an English gentleman for you”.

<sup>16</sup> DYSERINCK (*Komparatistik...*, *op. cit.*) has drawn attention to Karl Popper’s ontology of a world-3 – between the ontological categories of the material and the notional. (Material: the Eiffel Tower and a first edition of Proust’s *La prisonnière*; notional: the mathematical definition of a parabola and Marcel’s suspicion of Albertine’s lesbianism). Popper has attempted to define an ontological status accounting for the interaction between those two, and for an ontological state of thoughts which are not thought-about-right-now but encoded in physical objects like books, and capable of being activated. Popper’s world-3 it appears close to the frame-trigger hermeneutics described here and what I call a latency state.

Imagologists should heed this as a caveat. If an earnest MA thesis will single out characters of a given nationality X in a selected corpus of novels (say, Italians in English Victorian literature) and then proceed to interpret their actorial role patterns and narrative presence in terms of that nationality, the effect will be<sup>17</sup> to reproduce in concentrated form the diffuse, latent attitudes that went into the books, representing a lazy prejudice as if it were a conscious, unremitting preoccupation and thus presenting a British-Italian contrast in heightened and intensified terms that may not do justice to the historical laxity of the ethnotyping, and the degrees of indifference, offhandedness, or mixed feelings that were also at work.

The “mixed feelings” apply in particular to the fact that ethnicity is never operative in isolation, just by itself. A person or character with a given ethnicity always possesses more attributes than only that ethnicity, and to ignore these while foregrounding ethnicity reproduces precisely the problem that Pageaux identified. Shylock, Isaac the Jew, Jessica and Rebecca are all Jewish characters, but that statement is as good as meaningless if we do not factor in the additional elements of Shylock and Isaac as old men, protective fathers, and money-lenders, and Jessica/Rebecca as desirable young women of marriageable age. Gender is one obvious element, but so is age and social position (money lender / marriageable). Indeed the operative element in Jewish ethnotypes may be precisely this age/gender distribution (either feeble old men or nubile young women). The Israeli counter-image of the *sabra* Jew (prototype: the hero of Leon Uris’s *Exodus*) was a conscious attempt to escape from these stereotypes of “diaspora Jews” and replacing it with a fresh, more self-celebrating auto-ethnotype instead: energetically young, brashly assertive, masculine.

Research over the last years has driven home to me that ethnotypes never function by themselves; they always work in conjunction with other frames, especially gender, age and class. What does “French” even mean? That attribute is always inflected with others, to give the types of Proustian aristocrats and *grande bourgeoisie*; left-bank/Montmartre artistic/intellectual bohemians from Murger on; the country-dwellers of Daudet and Pagnol; and so on, all of them equally “typically French”... In sum: literary stock characters are always triangulated on the intersection between ethnotype, gender and sociotype, and while imagologists can foreground the first of these, we should always realize that ethnicity as a frame is not an absolute and never operates in isolation.

Even for the social analysis of race relations this point seems to be worth bearing in mind. While ethnicity is a given, social self-presentation, while determined by the social paths open to individuals from different circumstances, is still to some extent a choice. Whether an African-American presents himself/herself to society as a gangsta rapper, as a conservatively-dressed churchgoer<sup>18</sup>, or as a career academic will from case to case inflect the ethnotype with different sociotypes. One of the most promising perspectives in future imagological studies may be to map how certain ethnotypes will gravitate to certain sociotypes, and what tactical negotiations of the resulting over-determined characterizations may be noticeable in individual instances.

<sup>17</sup> I pass in silence over the most obvious shortcoming of such imagological close readings: that of labouring the obvious. Identifying, in technical vocabulary, features in the original texts that were pretty obvious to commonsensical readers in the first place, is merely a first step towards an imagological analysis, which must go beyond the plodding inventory and technical labeling of ethnotypes.

<sup>18</sup> The sartorial severity of the Nation of Islam, for example, represents a conscious counterpoise against the transgressively flamboyant default sociotype of African-American males; such sociotypical dress codes are reflected on in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.



## In and beyond Europe

Within Europe, notwithstanding a continuing strong tradition in Germany and the Low Countries, imagology is now especially promising in the North, the South-East and the South-West: exciting new projects are undertaken in the Nordic countries, and the Balkan and Iberian peninsulas. One of the great challenges would be to bring these areas into mutual contact; but given the language choices of the scholars concerned this may run into some practical problems.

Heretofore, imagology as a pursuit and field of interest has been anchored predominantly in Europe because the national and racial ideologies that fuelled its *raison d'être* were of European provenance; and that also applied to the relationships between the European cultural sphere (and its colonial outriders) with the rest of the world. The complex problem of a European (auto)image, left open in the *Imagology* handbook, has since then become the topic of a book-length essay (which has appeared only in Dutch<sup>19</sup>). To which extent imagology could be applied to ethnotypes taking place in Japanese-Korean-Chinese encounters, or other cultural spheres of encounter bypassing a European presence, has also been left open, but as far as I can see few scholars familiar with those parts of the world have felt called upon to step into the lacuna – although promising signs of interest are coming in, from countries like Iran and from the field of Translation Studies<sup>20</sup>.

Going global would present an interesting challenge for imagology. As a specialism, its roots are in the discourse and analysis of European, especially French-German cultural ideologies of the last two centuries, traced back to mainly to their early-modern roots. The study of the eurocentric mindset reaches back in history as far as Herodotus, and will involve attitudes to other nations, continents and ethnicities from around the globe, but is still – as the word indicates – tethered to a European anchoring point; and that also goes for the post-imperial and post-colonial critiques of Western supremacism.

Were imagology to go truly global – involving, say, Turanian-Iranian ethnotyping between Turkey and Persia/Iran, or ethnotypes between South-Asian or East-Asian nations, or in the Uganda/Kenya/Ethiopia triangle – a number of European-based working methods and a priori models would need to be re-calibrated, and that in itself would be an exciting and enriching intellectual enterprise. To which extent is the climatological-temperamental opposition between a cool north and a hot south (adopted in the English- and French-language traditions of North America) invoked in other continents, especially those south of the equator? What are the values of urbanity and rusticity in societies outside the Greek-Roman tradition, in literatures unaffected by the rise of Romanticism? What does “stereotyping” mean in literary traditions outside the Aristotelian tradition, and to which extent have such Aristotelian notions affected the Arabic literary tradition? What does national character mean in literary traditions with non-Aristotelian concepts of motivation, character, narrative plausibility? And how have such traditions responded to the confrontation with an Aristotelian poetics that was exported worldwide, either as part of the Arabic reception of Aristotle or as part of the Western hegemony of the last two centuries?

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19 LEERSSEN, Joep, *Spiegelpaleis Europa: Europese cultuur als mythe en beeldvorming*, 3rd ed. Nijmegen, Vantilt, 2015.

20 VAN DOORSLAER, Luc, Peter FLYNN & Joep LEERSSEN (dir.), *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2016.



So many questions; unable to address these myself, I would love to see them tackled by more qualified scholars worldwide.

## Post-national

The nation-state is no longer the self-evident category it used to be. We are now intensely aware that states and “nation” or ethnicity almost never map congruently onto each other, and this awareness is also opening new research questions and perspectives for imagology. Images of Spain turn out to be a nesting, complex vortex within which subsidiary Catalan, Basque, Romany (“Gypsy”) images intersect with Andalusian *costumbrismo* and a generalized Spanish type largely constructed by foreign travelers; and while the Flemish and Walloon ethnotypes are sharply contrasting and even conceived in terms of their mutual antagonism, their long cohabitation in the context of the Belgian state and around the metropolis of Brussels has given rise to a hybrid imagery associated with a notional *Belgitude*. As the case of Brussels illustrates, the images of metropolitan cities are proving to be a more and more intriguing imagological working ground. Long-established metropolitan centres like Paris or Rome have a traditionally codified set of characteristics associated with them, and such cities are often presented as a concentrated microcosm of the nation of which they form part: Vienna, Berlin, Venice/Naples/Florence, Amsterdam, or New York/Chicago are a synecdoche for (the urban aspects of) Austria, Germany, Italy, Holland or America. To be sure, in this synecdoche the city stands for a country/society rather than for an ethnicity/“nation”, especially in more modern representations where the city is usually seen as a confluence of differently-rooted people. In this societal vs. ethnic cleavage we see another manifestation of the ongoing problematization of the national category. By the same token, cities become thematically more fascinating to the extent that they are more than just a proxy for the country they belong to. The multi-ethnicity of modern cities presents especially intriguing research questions and topics. A recent imagological study of Amsterdam, for instance, has thematized the city as a cohabitation space of “tribes”, lifestyle groups from different origins all finding themselves sharing the city’s physical and imaginary ambience<sup>21</sup>. The tribalization of society, both in terms of lifestyle groups and in terms of the multiculturalization of immigration societies, confronts us with a sharp departure from traditional notions of culturally or temperamentally homogenous nation-states. Identity-constructs and identity-oppositions are now articulated concurrently at urban, national/ethnic and translational (global and/or diasporic) levels. How does the self-image of Turkish Germans position this group vis-à-vis native-descended Germans and vis-à-vis Turks in Turkey? Any diaspora group will be a minority in its country of residence and an outrider in its ethnicity of origin. How this double positioning is negotiated in narratives and representations is an exciting topic, all the more so since the documentation involved may be of a hitherto uncharted nature, involving blog posts, websites etcetera.

Conversely, the discourse of xenophobia is developing a mode where foreigners are no longer specifically characterized by country of origin, but as a mobile, non-territorial “swarm”, whose

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21 ARBONÉS ARAN, Núria, *Capturing the imaginary: Students and other tribes in Amsterdam*, PhD thesis, Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2015.

provenance is immaterial and shifting with great volatility according to the political crises and phobias of the moment, each generating its own ephemeral media frenzy. In addition, foreignness is increasingly linked to non-ethnic categories such as religion. Possibly as a result of the taboo and legal ban on ethnic hate-speech, foreigners are targeted as “Muslims” and xenophobia takes the form of anti-Islamism, in an ethno-religious confusion mirroring the anti-Western hatred of jihadism. Tellingly, the discursive antonym of “Islam” is not a different religion but rather “the West”, or “Europe” (itself usually characterized in terms of Enlightenment values rather than the Christian religion). Demonstrably, therefore, such discourse is not theological or religious in nature; religion is merely used as a proxy label for ethnicity, and the term Muslim is deployed as a code-word to denounce an ethnic origin or social lifestyle that is deemed incompatible with domestic (“Western”) moral or social values.

## The ongoing need for imagology

As these last examples illustrate, xenophobia and nationalism (both in the form of patriotic self-celebration and xenophobic stereotyping) are as strong as they have ever been, and in the current ethnopopulist climate gain new political virulence. Grassroots movements like UKIP or the Dutch website *GeenStijl.nl*, or political leaders (or would-be leaders) in the Berlusconi mode (Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán) rely on ingrained ethnotypes of Self and Other as deeply as did the most melodramatic 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels and early-20<sup>th</sup>-century movies (indeed, those novels and movies, now being recycled in many countries as epic-historical TV series, is probably where they got the ethnotypes from in the first place).

Literary theory may have turned its focus to more recently emerging concerns; many critics and theorists may in their interests be stimulated by contemporary cultural production and by artists whose concerns are far beyond the national essentialism that is the subject of imagology. As a result, imagology may seem to be outdated and critiqued as being bound to the outmoded national essentialist paradigm which it set out to analyse<sup>22</sup>.

In my opinion, such presentism is misguided; it mistakes the emergence of the new for the obsolescence of everything else. To deny the ongoing need for a critical analysis of ethnotypes is to isolate the contemporary avant-garde in art and cultural theory from its own historical antecedents and rootedness (not to mention the mundane realities of the social and political world surrounding our ivory towers). The condition of being post-national or post-identitarian means that the previous stage (the national, the identitarian) is still present as an implied precondition within its later *Aufhebung*, and often as an inherited condition or situation informing, even *en creux*, our present-day cultural responses. Imagology is as ongoing a concern as literature and cultural production itself, and particularly urgent in the world of contemporary identity politics.

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22 BLAŽEVIĆ, Zrinka, « Global challenge: The (im)possibility of transcultural imagology », *Umjetnost riječi*, 58.3-4, 2014, p. 354-367.

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