

Daniel Chartier. 2018. Hvad er forestillingen om det nordlige? Ethiske principper. Flersproget udgave på dansk, men også på norsk, svensk, russisk, fransk, engelsk og nordsamisk. [Original title: Qu'est-ce que l'imaginaire du Nord? Principes éthiques]

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Volume 29, 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1099160ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.29173/scancan231>

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Éditeur(s)

Association for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies in Canada

ISSN

0823-1796 (imprimé)

2816-5187 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Willson, K. (2022). Compte rendu de [Daniel Chartier. 2018. Hvad er forestillingen om det nordlige? Ethiske principper. Flersproget udgave på dansk, men også på norsk, svensk, russisk, fransk, engelsk og nordsamisk. [Original title: Qu'est-ce que l'imaginaire du Nord? Principes éthiques]]. *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies / Études scandinaves au Canada*, 29, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.29173/scancan231>

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Daniel Chartier. 2018. *Hvad er forestillingen om det nordlige? Etiske principper*. Flersproget udgave på dansk, men også på norsk, svensk, russisk, fransk, engelsk og nordsamisk. [Original title: *Qu'est-ce que l'imaginaire du Nord? Principes éthiques*.] Harstad: Arctic Arts Summit / Montréal: Imaginaire | Nord. 157 pages. ISBN: 9782923385280.

This slim volume contains an essay (around 20 pages) about how the North has historically been and how it could or should be conceptualized; it is written in French with translations into six other languages.

The ideas of North and of the North as a region have many dimensions—political, economic, ecological, and not least cultural and artistic. What unites the people living on the top of the globe? What divides them from each other and from those further south? How is the North as an imagined space reflected in discourse and action? What ethical issues and imperatives apply in particular to approaching the North?

Since 2003, the “Laboratoire international de recherche sur l’imaginaire du Nord, de l’hiver et de l’Arctique”¹ [International Laboratory for Research on the Imagined North, Winter and Arctic²] at the Université du Québec à Montréal has been a unique mecca for research on images of the North (“Imaginaire du Nord—UQAM”). The Laboratory is the brainchild of Daniel Chartier, who introduced the concept “l’imaginaire du Nord” (translated in the book as “the imagined North,” e.g. 117) around a decade prior to this essay (120; 98; he does not give a reference for the original presentation of the term). The position “Chaire de recherche sur l’imaginaire du Nord, de l’hiver et de l’Arctique” [Chair of Research on the Imagined North, Winter, and Arctic], occupied by Chartier, was created at UQAM in 2015 (“Imaginaire du Nord—UQAM” > Chaire).

The Laboratory has played a significant role in promoting awareness of and reflection on the idea of North in a global context. This is important, among other reasons, because the Arctic as a region faces many common challenges (not least from global warming), while the areas bordering the Arctic Circle are politically and culturally diverse. The Arctic Council was established in 1996 to facilitate cooperation among Arctic states and Indigenous peoples (“Arctic Council”). Developing a sense of a shared Arctic identity and community (and destiny) that nonetheless acknowledges this diversity, and bringing different narratives of the Arctic past into dialogue with each other, is crucial in seeking solutions to environmental, economic, and political issues in the Far North. Ways in which the North as a region is imagined have implications not only for research but also for policy; Chartier states that a multidisciplinary viewpoint such as the essay promotes “must be imposed on any Nordic research, intervention, and exploration project” (130) [“devrait être imposée à tout projet de recherche, d’intervention et d’exploitation nordiques” (109)].³

The Laboratory is active in many different forms. It maintains a rich database and specialized library dedicated to representations of the North. It has a network of associated researchers around the globe and a steady stream of students producing theses (“Imaginaire du Nord—UQAM”). The Laboratory has taken a lead role in collaborative projects, e.g. with the Reykjavík Academy (Ísleifsson with Chartier). It arranges conferences and other events. In addition to theoretical discussions like the present work, the Laboratory’s publications include folkloric and ethnographic materials in a wide variety of languages, translations of literary works, ethnographic studies, and non-fiction (“Imaginaire du Nord—UQAM”).

The essay is a kind of manifesto for the Laboratory. It states a program (117, 125; 95, 103) for research on the North to be multidisciplinary (130; 108–9), to consider the area as a whole and on its own terms (128–29; 107–8), and to take into account a complex view that includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices (130–31; 109). While one idea that motivated the foundation of the Laboratory was recognition of a system of signs that are common to northern areas across their linguistic and cultural diversity—for instance, he mentions “the colour pale blue” (121) [“la couleur bleu pâle” (99)], which evokes “a universe made of cold, vastness, and ice” (121) [“un univers fait de froid, d’immensité et de glace” (99)]—in the present work Chartier argues for a nuanced perspective considering the many faces of the North.

Chartier states that there is a dual imagination of the North: on the one hand external (“‘representations’ of the North” [118]) [“‘représentations’ du Nord” (96)], formed largely on the basis of English, French, German, and US-American viewpoints (118, 129; 96, 107), and on the other hand an internal one (“Nordic cultures” [118]) [“cultures nordiques” (96)], which is less widely known (117–18; 95–96). Internal perspectives include both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. In addition, the cultures of the North are themselves hybrid, combining influences from North and South (134; 113). The image of the North in Western cultures has largely been shaped by agents from outside the region (124; 103), who tend to present a simplified picture (117; 95). While some views from inside (e.g. Scandinavian, Russian) are well known abroad, most, especially Indigenous voices, remain little known outside their immediate context (119; 97).

Chartier discusses Zacharias Kunuk’s film *Antanarjuat* (2001),⁴ the first full-length fictional film in the Inuktitut language, as an example of an Indigenous inside voice. The film shows awareness of the conventional external images and makes use of this knowledge to defy expectations; for instance, no character suffers from cold (121; 99)—in fact, one complains of heat. Chartier suggests that the widespread success of *Antanarjuat* “permitted this film to play a role in the contemporary orientation of the imagined North” (121–22) [“a permis à ce film de jouer un rôle dans l’orientation contemporaine de l’imaginaire du Nord” (100)]—a step toward a fuller and more balanced picture. Chartier claims that the Western imagination has tended to conceive of the North as a space rather than

a place: “the insistence on its characteristics linked to emptiness, immensity, and whiteness led to the development of a system of representations that sometimes overlooks the human experience of the territory” (123) [“l’insistance sur ses caractéristiques liées à la vacuité, à l’immensité et à la blancheur a conduit au développement d’un système de représentations qui fait parfois fi de l’expérience humaine du territoire” (101)]. While the Arctic in general is sparsely populated compared to temperate regions of the world, the prevailing image of it as non-urban may lead people to ignore the particular characteristics of city life in extreme climates (132–33; 111–12).

The North has been viewed largely in relation to the South and the latter’s needs (129; 107). Chartier proposes replacing this “southist” (129) [“sudiste” (107)] (perhaps a neologism) perspective with a “circumpolar” (129) [“circumpolaire” (108)] view “considering the North in itself” (129) [“de le considérer *en soi*” (108)] “as a self-defined whole and as a diverse whole that reveals its richness and complexity” (129) [“comme un tout autodéfinatoire et comme un tout varié qui en dévoile la richesse et la complexité” (108)].

The essay presents a big idea, and inevitably, one could question some details. Montreal is mentioned as “the coldest large city (of more than a million inhabitants) in the world” (132) [“la grande ville (de plus d’un million d’habitants) la plus froide au monde” (111)] on the basis of its long, severe winters; one may wonder by what criteria it qualifies as colder than e.g. Novosibirsk or Ulaanbataar. In some places, more references or further explanation would be useful; for instance, he mentions the Inuit concepts of *nuna* and *sila* (130; 109) as components of a holistic view without expanding on what these are.

The multilingual publication presents the same text in parallel versions in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Russian, French, English, and North Saami. This seems at first glance like an unusual collection of languages. The order of languages beginning with the three Scandinavian ones appears to frame the book as intended for a Nordic market (in the sense of the area served by the Nordic Council of Ministers), but for a publication targeted at readers in the Nordic area in this sense, one might expect Icelandic and Finnish (and perhaps Faroese and Greenlandic) to be represented rather than French and Russian. French has traditionally been less widely known in the Nordic region (in the Nordic Council sense) than e.g. German (which Chartier mentions among languages that “play an essential role in understanding” (133) the North [“jouent un rôle essentiel dans sa compréhension” (112)]), although there is also a long French tradition of Arctic expeditions and writings about these (Borm 20–21); some Europeans may forget that French is a language of the Canadian Arctic. The Russian neighbour is often viewed by Scandinavians as culturally distant. Placing the French text in the middle subverts the convention of putting the original either first or last.

The essay has been published in several editions that combine languages in different ways. The original French version of the essay appeared in *Études*

germaniques (Chartier 2016a, cf. 95). A Russian translation by Ol’ga Kuz’menko, edited by Elena Filippova, was also published in 2016 (Chartier 2016b, cf. 73). The piece has appeared in a total of fifteen languages (to date), including Estonian, Faroese, Finnish, German, Icelandic, Inuktitut, Japanese, and Yakut in addition to the ones collected in this volume. Some versions are available for free download through the UQAM website (“Imaginaire du Nord—UQAM” > Publications), including the arrangement of languages seen in the present volume (Chartier 2018).

While this far from covers all the languages of the Arctic region, the inclusion of minority as well as national languages is a gesture in support of language revitalization and a reminder that the stakeholders in the Arctic future are not only states. The publication of several translations in one volume is itself a political act. Some of the translations have value more for symbolic and language political reasons than reaching additional audiences. The presentation of academic texts in minority languages helps to develop and maintain these as languages of scholarship and intellectual discourse. Chartier expressly calls for multilingualism and translation as necessary for a full and inclusive view of the North (133–34; 112). He also mentions some terms coined in French in the context of research on the North that have been translated into other circumpolar languages: *nordicité* (nordicity), *hivernité* (winternity), and *glissité* (slipperiness) (135; 114). These terms render smoothly into most of the languages in the volume, e.g. Swedish *nordicitet*, *vinterhet*, *halkighet* (69), Russian *северность*, *зимность*, *скользкость* (91), but are left untranslated in the North Saami (155). Their use in connection with the imagined North is not explained further.

Comparing the different translations, it is interesting to observe the varied solutions and note ways in which reading the essay in several languages makes different aspects feel salient. The translated texts generally seem faithful and clear, but I noticed a few minor inconsistencies and what seem to be stylistic artifacts of literal translation. In some places in the English translation, the choice of a word derived from the same Latin root as the one used in the French original leads to a marked formulation that may leave the reader wondering whether a specialized meaning is intended, for example: “Scandinavian cultures, whose reception in Europe benefits from a clearly ameliorative prejudice” (118) [“des cultures scandinaves, dont la réception en Europe bénéficie d’un préjugé nettement mélioratif” (96)]—perhaps “favorable predisposition”?; “Iceland appropriates in its manner the imagined North” (124) [“l’Islande s’approprie à sa manière l’imaginaire du Nord” (102)]—perhaps “incorporates”?; “Iqaluit was long determined by Ottawa, Fairbanks by Washington, Nuuk by Copenhagen, and Yakutsk by Moscow” (128) [“Iqaluit a longtemps été déterminée par Ottawa, Fairbanks par Washington, Nuuk par Copenhague et Iakoutsk par Moscou” (107)]—perhaps “governed”? In these places, Elin Svahn’s Swedish translation sounds to me more idiomatic: “de skandinaviska kulturerna vars reception i

Europa drar fördel av positivt förutfattade meningar” (52); “Island använder sig till exempel på sitt eget sätt av föreställningarna om det nordliga” (58); “Iqaluit styrdes länge av Ottawa, Fairbanks av Washington, Nuuk av Köpenhamn och Jakutsk av Moskva” (63).

One translation problem concerns the designation of the region and concept itself. Terms such as *North*, *Northern*, and *Nordic* and their analogues in other languages have cultural connotations stemming from precisely the tradition of representation that Chartier aims to deconstruct and renew. Some of the translations aim to distinguish two senses of “North”: a footnote in the Norwegian translation by Solveig Helene Lygren and Birgitte Vågnes Bakken explains that *le Nord* is translated as *det nordlige* to show that it is not simply a geographic area (e.g. the Nordic countries) but encompasses geographic, cultural, artistic, and human aspects of the circumpolar area. For disambiguation, *de nordlige områdene* or *nordområdene* are used when the geographical sense is intended (31). An analogous note in the North Saami translation (for which the translator is listed not as an individual but as the agency Ámmá giella) explains that *davvi* [north] is used inclusively and *davviguovllut* [northern areas] for the geographic region (137). The abstract to the English version uses the adjective *Northern* in this broad sense (117), but the main text uses *Nordic* (e.g. 118) and refers to the region as the “*North*,” capitalized and variously with and without scare quotes (e.g. 118–19). Quotation marks and italics are used liberally but to different extents in the different translations, and it is not always easy to infer the principles of their distribution.

I find it curious that Sara Høystrup’s Danish translation employs the Canadian-inclusive *nordamerikanere* (23) in one place where the others use expressions that commonly refer mainly to the US (Norwegian *amerikanere* 44, Swedish *amerikaner* 65, Russian *американцы* 87, North Saami *amerihkálaččat* 151), and this is explicit in the English *US-American* (130) and the French original *États-Uniens* (109) (but the Danish uses *amerikansk* on 10, cf. *US-American* 118, *états-unien* 96). As the name appears in a non-exhaustive list of non-Indigenous cultures living around the Arctic, the difference does not change the truth of the statement. The Danish translation also substitutes a general *nordamerikanske indianere* (9, 10, 23) for the more specific reference to Cree found in the original (*cries* 95, 96, *Cris* 109) and the other translations (e.g. *Cree* 117, 118, 130)—again, this is part of a list of examples.

This concise essay condenses some of the principles of research promoted by the Laboratory, which is a significant actor in the field of Arctic studies. The multilingual publication makes it a curiosity at the same time as it models inclusion. One cannot but agree that the North is multifaceted and multicultural and that it is desirable for this diversity and multitude of perspectives to be reflected in work on the region across disciplines.

The main target audience seems to be researchers in the humanities and social sciences. The original publication venue was a journal of Germanic studies, and the style assumes readers to be conversant in contemporary humanistic discourses (e.g. the distinction between space and place mentioned above). However, the basic message is relevant to anyone who works on, with, or in the North. The same points can and should also be made in forms more easily grasped by political actors and by the general public.

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NOTES

1. Until 2020, the Laboratory was known as “Laboratoire international d’étude multidisciplinaire comparée des représentations du Nord” [“International Laboratory for the Comparative Multidisciplinary Study of Representations of the North,” translation by Elaine Kennedy from “Imaginaire du Nord—UQAM”].
2. My translation.
3. In this review, except when discussing translation issues, I refer primarily to Christina Kannenberg’s English version of Chartier’s essay (117–36), as the language of the review and one of the languages of the publication. This is followed by the corresponding page numbers and quotations in the original French text (95–115). Page numbers within one of these versions are separated by commas, while a semicolon divides page numbers in the English from ones in the French text.
4. The film was released in cinemas with the English subtitle *The Fast Runner*, but Chartier—in all the versions—gives only the Inuktitut title (e.g. 121; 99).

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