

‘Pure manliness’:

The Colonial Project and Africa’s Image in 19th Century Iceland

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Abstract

Iceland did not participate directly in the 19th century colonial project, but the interwoven racial, gendered and nationalistic ideologies associated with the colonial project were very much a part of Icelandic identity as shaped by nationalist and imperialist discourses in Europe. This article focuses on representations of Africa in 19th century Iceland, claiming that the Icelandic discussions of Africa were not so much concerned with the continent itself, but through descriptions of the exploration and colonization of Africa that European masculinities were affirmed and Icelanders ‘natural’ location within that category. This was particularly important at times when Iceland was seeking independence and acceptance as a ‘white’ European country. I stress these 19th century texts as gendered testimonies that show the interaction of various poles of identity, being written by white, Icelandic men and originating from a marginal country within Europe.

Keywords – Africa, Iceland, colonialism, Nordic, identity

Introduction

Africa and other colonized parts of the world provided an important counter-identification for the emerging and changing European identities. The ways in which European colonial rule shaped African societies and economies has been widely discussed by scholars, but somewhat less focus has been placed upon how this contact shaped European conceptions of themselves and European societies. The meta-narrative of the Enlightenment as the age of discoveries that led to the advancement of science seems, for example, to ignore to a great extent the influence of the colonial project as stimulating and facilitating the ‘active exercise of the scientific imagination’ as phrased by Nicholas Dirks (1992:6). Timothy Mitchell argues that current and past conceptions of basic ideological constructions of the ‘West’ and ‘modernity’ have to be seen as products of the interactions with the non-West (2000:3). Ann McClintock (1995) has claimed that the gendered dimensions of these European ideas of progress, civilization and nationhood, were for a long time ignored by scholars but as Laura Ann Stoler (1995) has in particular shown, the racial and gendered policies in the overseas colonies were important for the forging of European identities.

My discussion focuses on narratives written in 19th century Iceland, showing that their discussions of Africa are not concerned with the continent itself or African people, but to a greater extent with European cultural identity. I demonstrate that these narratives stress European identity as a masculine identity, being partly produced by these descriptions of exploration and colonization. Even though scholars have shown how European men are generally in the foreground while European women are almost invisible, making Africa the space of men and masculinities, there has been much less focus on how marginal countries understood, resisted or

incorporated colonial ideologies. Iceland is particularly interesting in this context due to its lack of direct engagement in the colonial project, as the country was a Danish colony at the time. This example indicates that marginal European countries also participated in the ideologies of colonialism and the enforcement of European identity as apart and intrinsically different from an African identity. When originally analyzing the texts, I was primarily interested in racial representations but reading through them it was captivating to what extent racial and gendered notions intersected, to some extent, in similar ways as with the more powerful players in the creation of the colonial world.

I base my argument on Mary Louise Pratt's (1990) ideas of 'brotherhood,' claiming that these narratives served as a model for Icelandic men which enabled them to visualize themselves as part of the educated European and white elite. My approach to identity is based on theoretical insights largely developed by feminists that emphasize identity as a complex flux of various dimensions which gain importance at particular times, gender and racial identity constituting a part of those dimensions (see overview in Moore 1994; Abu-Lughod 1991). Identity involves a shifting – even a playful – process of identification but it also incorporates involuntary categorizations and processes of interpellation, where subjects learn to recognize themselves within certain pre-constituted subject positions. In line with these theoretical insights on identities, I stress otherness as historically constituted, implying shifting categories and gaining contradictory and incoherent meanings in different contexts. Edward Said's (1978) identification of Orientalism was important in demonstrating the creation of “otherness” through various discourses. But, as somewhat implied in Said's approach, studies of orientalism often have the tendency to take the dichotomy “us” / “other” as given rather than as shifting and hybridized.

The failure to problematize such binary categories can create a somewhat dualistic positioning of ‘us’ and ‘other,’ to some extent ratifying and naturalizing these categories. As Stoler has emphasized, it is important for scholars to re-evaluate the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized as comprising historically constructed categories that need to be explained (1992:321). Iceland has of course been in an interesting situation in that regard, being in a sense a colonized country in the 19th century but simultaneously not sharing a similar status as colonized countries in the southern parts of the world. Iceland has been overlooked in relation to studies of race and racism, reflecting the importance of analyzing how colonial and racist ideologies were recreated and reinforced not only within the center of colonial power but also on the margins. Iceland can certainly be seen as marginal during 19th century Europe; the total population in 1850 was composed of 60,000 people, the majority of which lived in houses made of turf and rocks turf-farms (Statistics Iceland 2008). Infant mortality was extremely high; one fourth of children born during this time did not make it to their first birthday (Garðarsdóttir 2005). In spite of this literacy was high and Icelandic intellectuals placed a strong emphasis upon further educating the rest of the nation.

I discuss the representations given of Africa in general in the journal *Skírnir* (published from 1827 through the present) and examine in more detail the gendered and racial implications of two travel narratives, situating them within a political and historical context. I stress these two 19th century texts as gendered testimonies that show the interactions of various poles of identity; the text being written by white, Icelandic men, and originating from a country marginal within a European context. The texts, furthermore, have to be read with a certain context in mind; the Icelandic intellectual elite were influenced by nationalistic ideas that swept through 19th century

Europe, creating rising nationalist feelings and an increased demand for the independence of Iceland. Icelandic ethnicity suddenly became something to be cherished and celebrated. Unlike some other analyses of travel journals, the analysis here is obviously not based on actual encounters between explorers and colonial subjects, but on texts written by people who had never been to Africa nor participated directly in the colonial project. As phrased by Robert Thornton (1983), the accessibility of Africa to the majority of European audiences depended on texts and that is the case with the authors of these Icelandic texts. The paper thus involves the re-reading and interpretation of these Icelandic texts as expressions of identity and selfhood, the texts being contextualized within the historical period in which they were written. Thornton's comment in relation to ethnographic text applies here, when he points out that European readers selected what served their 'own moral and intellectual needs' in texts referring to Africa (1983:518).

I start the analysis by describing the historical background of the interconnectedness of the ideas of gender, race and class during the nineteenth century, as well as demonstrating the importance of emerging nationalistic themes and controversial ideas of high culture. I then turn to contextualizing *Skírnir's* importance for Iceland's intellectual elite, along with exploring the general images of Africa which the journal presented during the 19th century. Finally, I turn toward two extensive narratives which focus on explorers in Africa and which provide a more detailed analysis of discussions of Africa.

Historical Background

During the nineteenth century, gendered ideas of nationalism, race and belonging were shaped by Europe's various intellectual trends. To begin with, even

though the concept of race had appeared in previous centuries, it was reified and given scientific bases in the nineteenth century which employed a more comprehensive authoritarian voice for its usage in classifying human populations. Skin color had appeared as sign of inferiority in various European medieval sources but in no way were Africans always been referred to in negative terms from their skin color (Northrup 2002). In his *Essai sur l'inégalité de races humaines* (1853-55), Joseph de Gobineau's (1816-1882) work divided human beings into three main racial categories: black, yellow and white. In this text, Gobineau suggests that the 'black' race has limited or nonexistent (*nulles*) ability to reason and is thus controlled by desire (Miller 1985). Christopher L. Miller demonstrates that Gobineau's dual concept of nothingness and desire became a key aspect of Western understandings of Africa (1985:17-18), as the continent's great diversity of individuals and societies was encompassed by a single color term. Scholars have increasingly sought to deconstruct the normalization of whiteness (Frankenberg 1993; Hartigan 1997), showing that the invisibility of skin-colour and gender of certain social groups secures their positions of power (Puwar 2004). Their bodies become the normal bodies, needing neither sex nor skin color to be defined; whiteness thus reflects a certain relationship to power.

The forging of national identities in Europe took place through the discourses of otherness and boundaries, interacting in complex and diverse ways with ideas of race and ethnicity. Benedict Anderson (1983) observes that this new organization of the world was based on the ideology of a common history, origin and destiny of a certain group of people. Johann Gottfried Herder's hypothesis that language was the natural basis for nationhood became extremely important for nationalists' theories, coupled with his emphasis on the unique character of nations as expressed through language. Under the influence of Herder's ideas, educated elites in many cases played

a central role in rewriting history in accordance with this new way of understanding and organizing the world.³ Orvar Löfgren (1993) pointed out that this project was often a contradictory one, as it emphasized development and modernity while simultaneously conveying an image of timeless cultural heritage. Connected with the conceptions of African people and others colonized or to-be-colonized, nineteenth century nationalism placed a strong value on so-called 'high culture', devaluing those cultural groups that did not fall within their understandings of 'high culture,' both within and outside of Europe (see Amselle 1998:24). Such marginalized groups were labelled as domestic minorities, ethnic groups, or tribes but these groups were not seen as nationalities. Race was thus not the only marker of inferiority, but entangled with other ideas of boundaries and exclusion relating to nationality as well as class, gender and religion. Jean-Loup Amselle (1998) stresses that European nation-states needed counter-identification in order to avoid their fragmentation into multiple ethnic groups. He claims that their colonies served as such an identification, thus enforcing the imagined boundaries of European nation-states. The nineteenth century can thus be characterized as a period where these ideological streams were formed and reified: the idea of separate autonomous nations and of Europeans in some sense as intrinsically different from the rest of the world, expressed in racial hierarchies which became increasingly elaborate over the course of the century.

Iceland's position was quite interesting in this regard, because even though Icelanders were subjected to Danish rule and often subjected to quite negative stereotypes from foreign travelers, Icelanders had a history that fitted well within the rising nationalist ideologies. Iceland became united with Norway in 1262 after an extended period of civil war, thus ending Iceland's commonwealth period that started with Iceland's settlement in the ninth century. Iceland became a Danish colony in

1380 with the unification of the Norwegian and Danish Crowns. Iceland's 'struggle for independence' from Denmark is usually seen as starting in 1851 with Iceland's demand of nearly absolute autonomy in its internal affairs and only nominal ties to the Danish crown. These demands were rejected by Denmark on the basis that they were illegal but also seen as against Iceland's interest (see discussion in Matthíasdóttir 2000:693). This nationalistic emphasis was in sharp contrast with earlier conceptualizations of Iceland's relationship with Denmark: the eighteenth-century elite in Iceland would probably have seen Iceland's progress as initiated by the Danish king, while nineteenth-century nationalists regarded the Danish colonial government as a key factor which contributed to Iceland's decline from a glorious historical past. This criticism was not directed towards the Danish government in Iceland but rather presented as the result of the 'unnatural' arrangement where one nation ruled another (Hálfðanarson 2000:91).¹ Justifying their claims to independence, Icelanders emphasized their language and medieval literature, which was written in Icelandic. The Icelandic Sagas were thus "one of the most important factors in the creation of Icelandic national identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century" (Sigurðsson 1996:42), creating continuity between past and present as well as being testimonies to the more glorious past of the commonwealth period. The racial emphasis of these nationalistic discourses cannot be ignored, because the romantic emphasis on the Icelanders' past situated them within a supposed glorious past of a Nordic race, demonstrating, as claimed by Matthew Freye Jacobson (1998), whiteness as a shifting category. These ideas of race are markedly different from medieval conceptions of skin color that are visible in the Icelandic sagas, where dark skin color was not such a strong organizing symbol for the conception of other people, even though sometimes associated with dangerous creatures (Loftsdóttir

2006; Jochens 1999). Though Iceland never participated directly in colonial enterprises, individual Icelanders engaged in explorations in other parts of the world, as discussed by Gísli Pálsson's (2001, 2004) autobiographical analysis of the Canadian-Icelandic Vilhjálmur Stefánsson's explorations in the arctic in the early 20th century. Pálsson (2004) draws out complications of racial and gendered aspects involved in Stefánsson's exploration, showing that Stefánsson was firmly located within the empire as an educated and cultivated person. Foreigners' images of Icelanders were still contradictory as mentioned earlier, in some cases glorifying the Icelandic sagas and past but in other instances portraying Icelanders in negative ways. Travelers to Iceland did, however, often portray Icelanders as lazy, dirty and childlike as demonstrated by Sumarliði Ísleifsson's (1996) studies of Iceland's image in European travel journals. Similar stereotypes were inflicted on some Icelanders who moved to the United States in the nineteenth century (Þorsteinsson 1940).

Feminist scholars, such as Mary Louise Pratt (1990), Joanne P. Sharp (1996) and Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), have criticized how theories of nationalism have generally tended to ignore its gendered nature and the different roles and conceptions of women and men in relation to the nation. Mary Louise Pratt (1990) points out that even though Anderson's discussion in *Imagined Communities* (1994) focuses on aspects such as ethnic origin, skin color and class, he uncritically uses concepts such as comradeship and fraternity as important for a sense of belonging; but, as Pratt notes, both of these concepts reflect the nation as a community of men. Icelandic nationalist politics assigned men and women different roles within the nation as well as normalizing the male role. In nationalist discourses, Iceland was metaphorically referred to as a woman's body, with an emphasis placed on its purity and beauty. Within these Icelandic nationalistic discourses women were primarily portrayed as

mothers and allocated an essentialized maternal role (Björnsdóttir 1994). Sigríður Matthíasdóttir's (2003, 2004) research, however, shows that the most valued attributes associated with the Icelandic self in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were associated with men, such as sensibility, courage and honour, thus making the Icelandic self a masculine self.

***Skírnir's* Discussion of Africa**

There was a vibrant publication of journals of various kinds in 19th century Iceland. Most journals focused exclusively on the internal affairs of Icelanders but *Skírnir* and its predecessor *Íslensk sagnablöð* were probably, according to historian Ingi Sigurðsson, the two most important journals in Iceland in regard to information from the outside world (1986:22, 34). The subscribers to *Skírnir* were individuals and 'reading societies' (*lestrarfélög*). The reading societies, inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment, had the aim of making information more easily accessible to the public in Iceland, and many became later a basis for public libraries (Sverrisdóttir 2005). The list of subscribers to *Skírnir* in 1900 includes priests, farmers, students, and merchants; the total number of individual members in the Association and thus subscribers to *Skírnir* were over 250 in addition to about 40 reading societies spread around the country (Skírnir 1990:99-108). The importance of *Skírnir* in distributing and stimulating nationalistic feelings in Iceland makes it an even more interesting topic for analysis. The journal *Íslensk Sagnablöð* mentions Africa in several issues, for the most part in relation to the European settlement in the southern part of the continent. *Skírnir's* discussion is, however, more broad in scope, covering a range of issues such as settlers, explorers and 'strange' African customs, as well as in some

issues providing somewhat long and detailed discussions on themes connected to Africa.

Elsewhere I have noted the general representations of Africa in *Íslensk sagnablöð* and *Skírnir* (Loftsdóttir 2008), based on a systematic analysis of both journals, in addition to exploring more scattered images of colonial ideology in other journals and texts used for teaching (Loftsdóttir 2007; forthcoming 2008). For the discussion here, I outline certain reoccurring themes within the narratives found in *Skírnir* in relation to Africa and provide a close reading of *Skírnir's* underlying emphasis on masculinity and race, selecting two narratives where these emphases become more vibrant and apparent. The two narratives in common serve to inform their readers in Iceland about European explorations of Africa.

Travel narratives were extremely popular in Europe for a long time, giving information about the 'rest' of the world to Europe and hence contributing to the shaping of European identity in contrast to 'others' (Pratt 1992:5-6). Not surprisingly, explorers in different parts of the world consciously manipulated the interest in the 'exotic,' embellishing their narratives with stories the general audience was interested in reading (Hammond and Jablow [1970] 1990:52.) Some were even able to finance their explorations with the profits made from such sales (Thornton 1983:505). Not surprisingly, the boundaries between adventure fiction and exploration narratives were often unstable and fluid (Drivers 2001:10). During the early nineteenth century, Africa was seen as an exotic background for adventure stories, and was constructed on the border between fiction and reality (Riffenburgh 1993).

Laura E. Franey's (2003) observation that travel stories were important in Europe in order to create a basis and justification for European colonization of the continent draws attention to the interwoven gendered and racial aspects of

colonization, where most explorers and writers are white men. The phrase ‘man of science’ was thus not only used as a figure of speech (Driver 2001), but reflects a deep gender bias and association of men with rationality and exploration. The gender of travel story authors interacted of course with other dimensions of their identity, such as class, marital status and profession (Blake 1992). Durwood Ball (2001) claims that some of the key symbols of European masculinity in the nineteenth century were discipline and courage, but these characteristics were seen as distinguishing them from women and other ‘races’ or ethnicities. In travel narratives, the authors express their relations with the African people in a way that fits with the expectations of their respective societies’ notions of manhood (Blake 1992).

Mary Louise Pratt (1990) stresses the importance of military signs in creating the nation, using the concept of ‘brotherhood’ to tease out the masculine way in which the nation is generally conceptualized. I find Pratt’s ideas apt here: *Skírnir*’s discussions can be seen as referring to the brotherhood of white European men who initiate progress in Africa. They become – to use Pratt’s own phrase – the other Adam, because like the first man they claim power to discover nature by naming it and locate it within civilized society. These individuals stand, as phrased by Susan L. Blake (1992), ‘between’ Africa and the empire; they are ‘like imperial power’ in the sense that they assert authority and depend on the people they encounter (p.20). Franney (2003) furthermore affirms that the Africans are pictured as the subjects of imperialism but not as citizens with rights, something which was at this time evolving in Europe, thus underlining their intrinsic differences from European subjects.

The journal *Skírnir* has been published annually by the Icelandic Literary Society (*Hið Íslenska bókmenntafélag*) since 1827, and was distributed free to its

members.² The Literary Society was founded in 1816, celebrating Icelandic language and cultural traditions (Pálsson 1978:71; Línadal 1969:20). The main body of *Skírnir*'s texts comprised an overview of the major events that took place in Iceland and in the outside world, although there were occasionally more in-depth discussions of particular contemporary events or explanations of the historical circumstances leading to certain events. The overviews of foreign news were usually divided into discussions of countries or regions, thus giving the readers a comprehensive overview of the major events that took place in the world the year before. The journal was substantial, each volume being well over 100 pages in length. Many of *Skírnir*'s writers were based in Copenhagen, which was the intellectual center for Icelanders at the time. Copenhagen was in fact important in bringing about the feeling of rising nationalism in Iceland; most Icelandic scholars and students lived in the city and the majority of individuals with higher education had studied there, as Iceland did not have its own university at that time (Sigurðsson 1986:39). Many of these intellectuals became influential figures in Iceland's political and cultural lives, as pointed out by the historian Ingi Sigurðsson (2002). Under the influence of the Enlightenment movement in Europe, the Icelandic elite saw it as their goal to educate the general public of Iceland. The publication of *Skírnir* can be seen as one attempt at fulfilling that goal. The journal was published in Copenhagen, as transportation was better from there to most parts of Iceland than from Reykjavík (Sigurðsson 1986:22).

Most of the nineteenth century texts on Africa in *Skírnir* are short (with some notable exceptions) and mention Africa on a few pages, usually in relation to European settlers, exploration or conquest. Some issues have no discussion about Africa at all. An examination of *Skírnir* through the nineteenth century shows that Africa received less attention in the later part of the nineteenth century than in early

nineteenth century – which is interesting considering that contacts between Africa and Europe had increased. Furthermore, the focus on Europeans in Africa becomes progressively more dominant in later part of the century, with Africans increasingly moved into the background.³ Many of the texts emphasize the importance of Europeans as the bearers of civilization and progress. European males are those who discover and penetrate the continent, name and subjugate it under the march of civilization and progress. When discussing the slave trade, *Skírnir* condemns it strongly but stays silent for the most part regarding European participation. African participation in the slave trade is mentioned along with the British attempts to stop them, thus using the slave trade to reflect on the savagery of Africans simultaneously as constructing the British as bringers of civilization and order.

African women are almost invisible in *Skírnir's* texts; male bodies are thus normalized by the focus on male explorers, settlers and kings. In the few instances where women are mentioned they are usually seen as subjects to male control (for example 1874:54-58; 1884:18). Most texts emphasized the dark skin color of Africans, using various terms of reference (for example *blámenn*, *svörtumenn*, *blökkumenn*, *svertingjar*). References to dark skin color are mentioned repeatedly in some texts (for example *Skírnir* 1886:83), making skin color a central symbol for the continent. With personal characteristics such as gender, age and names missing from the descriptions, the individuals in question appear as a dark, homogenous mass. The 'white' skin color is in contrast generally not mentioned, thus normalizing and naturalizing white, masculine bodies; the subtext being that 'others' are black and have to be remarked on as such and that whiteness is so intrinsic to the identity of Europeans and their various qualities that it does not have to be mentioned. Some texts refer to ethnic groups which give the individuals some kind of distinctiveness,

but these ethnic labels are frequently used in a similar way as racial categories and seem, in some cases, to refer to some subgroup of racial classification. Even though it is difficult to generalize from the few and somewhat diverse instances in which Africa is mentioned, it seems that African individuals become less and less identified by their ethnicity and more categorized as 'black' (as stated previously, color terms appear frequently in older articles). This is supported by other material from the same period. The emphasis on racial categories is particularly vivid in geography books published in the second half of the nineteenth century, which increasingly stress the description of individuals as members of certain racial categories in an authoritarian 'scientific' language which often resembles a description of strange plants or animals (Loftsdóttir 2005). Even though African people appear for the most part as a homogeneous mass, specific African ethnic groups are in some respect singled out for differential treatment in most of the texts. The Zulu, for example, are discussed in the framework of 'blood-thirsty savages' while the Khoikhoi are generally discussed as 'childlike' and 'ignorant' (Loftsdóttir 2004). Such constructions are, however, a reminder of the dualistic view of other people as either noble children of nature or dangerous savages, which have appeared in various contexts (see for example Lindfors 2001).

These nineteenth century images of Africa showed a marked change from medieval representations of the continent. In some Icelandic medieval texts dangerous creatures or dark skinned giants are located in Africa, while others do not mention dark skin color in relation to the continent (see discussion in Loftsdóttir 2006; Jochens 1999).

European Explorers and *Skírnir*

The texts discussed in more detail are located within in the issues published in 1861 and 1890. Due to their length in pages, they are somewhat distinguished from most of *Skírnir's* texts as they provide a detailed discussion of specific phenomena while most discussions of Africa in *Skírnir* are limited to a few pages or more frequently lines. These two texts are not randomly selected or chosen only due to their length but are analyzed more closely due to how they reflect in a vibrant way issues that appear more scattered in other shorter texts published throughout *Skírnir*. Both focus on the European exploration of Africa, a common theme in *Skírnir's* reference to Africa in general, attempting to provide a comprehensive overview over specific events. These are far from being examples of the most negative or stereotypical texts on the continent to appear within this publication nor are they the most celebratory and positive. I see them as giving more intimate insights into the racial and gendered representation of self and other, as seen by the two individuals who wrote these texts.

Skírnir in 1861

Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1827-1889) wrote *Skírnir's* news report in 1861 but he was the editor of *Skírnir* for a few years. Born in Iceland, Vigfússon moved to Copenhagen where he was recognized as an outstanding scholar, later holding a post as a reader in Scandinavian at Oxford University, and was thus a respected member of the European scholarly community. He prepared and edited the Icelandic Sagas (Vigfússon 1860) and *Flateyjarbók* (Vigfússon and Unger 1860-8), ancient texts written in Old Icelandic between 1380-1400. He was also involved in the publishing and collection of Icelandic folklore stories, all of which were important in fostering the nationalist identity of Icelanders.

A section of *Skírnir's* news report in 1861, labeled 'Africa,' starts with the introduction: 'We will now briefly explain exploration and travel within this continent, which for ages has to some extent been hidden from the eyes of men, even though seen as a part of the old world' (p. 93).⁴ Vigfússon's opening words underline the continent as ancient and as mysterious, but also his use of the word 'men' brings out the collectiveness of European white men as his prime point of reference and source of knowledge about the world. The use of the concept 'man' is of course also a product of the masculine nature of Icelandic language itself but, as pointed out by Ball (2001), the male-centered society which this text is the product of – and thus its social and historical context – cannot be ignored. Vigfússon gives a brief historical overview of the relationship of Europe to Africa, stating that in the past 'men' did not know much about the northern coast of Africa; here, obviously, 'men' again refers only to European men. Following this is a list of how Africa has entered history, such as that Moses left Egypt and that Alexander the Great built the city Alexandria in the fourth century B.C. He also points out that Ptolomaeus, who was born in the second century B.C., vaguely mentioned countries south of the Sahara. After demonstrating the place of Africa in ancient history, Vigfússon states that in the last few centuries, 'Africa all has become known' (p. 91), and colonies have been established there. The opening paragraph of the text thus locates Africa within the historical continuity of the exploration of the world or, more accurately, within European knowledge as hegemonic and important.

The main body of the remaining text is divided into two sections: one pertaining to Central and West-Africa and another to the southern part of Africa. The first section discusses the German explorer Henrik Barth in an exhaustive manner, the text giving somewhat detailed biographical information about him and his travels and

crediting him for the existing knowledge about West Africa and its ethnicities (p.91-97). The text also discusses Barth's meeting with Ali, sultan of the Sokoto state, referring to Ali in a very favorable way, stating that: "The powerful Sultan of Sokoto, Ali, received Barth with respect and kindness, and promised him protection because his travel was meant for good causes, to create connections with ethnicities far away" (p. 96).⁵ It is also stated that Ali has a great desire for education, referring to the fact that the explorer Clapperton had left some books with him (p. 97).

Few other explorers are mentioned but very briefly and usually within the context of Barth. At the end of the section, the text gives some ethno-historical overview, stating that in the past only 'heathen' blacks (*Heiðingjar, blökkumenn*) lived in the Sudan area but that Islam was introduced in the beginning of the 16th century. Wars arose as a result, the text claims, and it continues with a brief but somewhat detailed discussion about the Fulani's role as rulers of the Sokoto state (p. 98). It is furthermore elaborated that states and cities disappear quickly in the Sudan: the weak clay or straw huts are swept away when the rivers rise and similarly the states are swept away during wars and rebellions (p.98). Along with locating Africa within the realm of history, the text implies state building within some kind of natural rhythm. As well, the text seems to assume conflict to be a major element of state construction.

The section on southern Africa is almost entirely devoted to David Livingstone, outlining his explorations and work within the continent (p. 98-102). Livingstone brought the Christian religion to 'savages,' such as 'Hottentots and Kaffir,' (p. 98), and, along with the Swedish explorer Anderson, 'he' can be thanked for information on this part of the continent (p. 99). The text continues by further describing Livingstone's explorations and his 'discoveries' of rivers and natural phenomena,

highlighting European men as the source of knowledge. On the two final pages the author offers his own more subjective thoughts on Africans and explorers in general, stressing the honor and courage of these European men and their importance in enlightening 'savage' nations. The text states that for Christianity and the education of our continent, new opportunities have appeared for countries where slave dealing was earlier conducted (p. 102).

European explorers are thus the center piece of the article, as is in fact stated in the beginning of the text. Their masculinity appears in various ways such as through the emphasis on European military power and their bravery in the land of savagery. Livingstone is said to have subjugated many tribal groups (*lagt undir sig*) and endured difficult conditions. In discussing Barth's explorations, the text emphasizes the dangers that he put himself through and his cunningness in saving himself. Nobility, particularly in Livingstone's case, is stressed and is articulated in a story where Livingstone was offered by one chief to have what ever he wanted. Livingstone asked for the ethnic group's conversion to Christianity, and the text thus stresses his lack of selfishness (p. 100). The end of the article states directly that the white men had been far above (*borið ægishjálms*) the 'savages' because of their own mental and intellectual capabilities. The 'savages' are depicted as crumbling in front of the honor, courage and righteousness that characterized these men, elaborating in turn the brotherhood of European maleness as characterized by inner strength and qualities which place them above all others. The European men are, furthermore, not only feared but also 'loved' for their intellect and justice. This passage also reveals how the term European is synonymous with 'white,' the author moving easily between speaking of Europeans to speaking about 'white' men.

The way in which the author situates himself and Icelanders, or at least other Icelandic males, as a part of these imperialistic explorations is detected in terms such as collective ‘men’, but is also evident in phrases that speak of ‘we’ and ‘our continent’. The Icelandic location within the European community of explorers and within civilization is thus established and strengthened. The discussion about Barth and Livingstone can as a whole be seen as characterized by what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) has labeled anti-conquest, referring to the strategy of representation where the explorers’ innocence is secured simultaneously as European hegemony is affirmed.

The text does not often mention the inhabitants of Africa. African people appear for the most part in the background as a faceless mass, as background material to the European explorations. The prejudices against Africans are directly expressed in the comment at the end of the discussion. The author states that: “Black people’s mentality is not much and their thoughts seldom extend beyond mouth or stomach, like a beast in the field; their language is like baby-talk, missing words over spiritual things but not missing words related to food” (p. 102). An exception to this is the section which focuses on Ali, the Sultan of the Sokoto State. The fact that he appears under his own name is interesting and which gives him certain dignity and individuality. It can, however, be pointed out that in the nineteenth century Europe a very static image of the FulBe⁶ was projected; they were represented as being on a higher cultural and intellectual level than their neighbors. They were frequently categorized as a part of the ‘hamatic’ race, reflecting the racist ideology of that time as the racial identification ‘hamite’ was often used to explain various aspects of African culture that were seen as superior in some ways by the Europeans. Similar ideas can be inferred from *Skírnir’s* discussion of the Fulani, where it is said that the inhabitants of the Sudan are black except for the Fulani who are thought to be mixture

of Blacks and Arabs and are rulers in the countries they have under their control (p. 98).

Skírnir in 1890

Skírnir in 1890 was written by Jón Stefánsson who was born in Iceland in 1862. He moved to Copenhagen and then to London where he worked as a teacher at the Kings's College in London from 1918. The 1890 journal features a long section focusing on Henry Morton Stanley's trip to Africa during 1887-89, often labeled the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. It is interesting that Jón Stefánsson chooses to give such a detailed account of Stanley instead of another explorer due to the fact that Stanley is considered by many to be the most infamous explorer of the nineteenth century. This particular trip is also seen as Stanley's most controversial trip to Africa (see Driver 2001:126). *Skírnir's* discussion of this trip could, however, be due to Stanley's popularity in Europe at the time; after all, Stanley's telegrams that described his explorations did, as phrased by Driver, cause more 'excitement than the threat of a European war' (2001:121). Stanley, furthermore, tended to blur – as can be seen in many other such texts from the same period – the borders between exploration narrative and adventure fiction (Driver 2001:10), probably making the text more exciting but still a part of 'real' events. In a sense, Stanley stands as a masculine symbol of imperialist conquest and of European superiority. For example, within an article written in 1890 entitled 'What Stanley has done for the map of Africa' the author compared the map of Africa 'before' and 'after' Stanley. Stanley himself saw it as his mission to strike a white line across the 'Dark Continent,' and was quoted as saying that 'pure manliness' is needed for the exploration of Africa (Driver 2001:126), thus bluntly emphasizing the continent as a space for the construction and reinforcement of European notions of masculinity.

Skírnir's text in 1890 starts with an explanation of how Stanley had recently arrived back from his great *fame and adventure mission (glæfra- og frægðarför)* to Africa. The discussion acknowledges at the beginning that this is not the first time that Stanley's explorations are discussed in the journal, and the aim is not to repeat what has earlier been said of him (p. 1). The text then gives a detailed overview of the events leading to Stanley's rescue mission. In describing how the East-Africa Association asks Stanley to go on this mission, emphasis is placed on how efficient Stanley was and how rapidly the mission was set in motion, as evident with the use of the term "immediately" four times in four sentences:

Members [of the association] immediately thought to ask Stanley to lead this exhibition. He was in New York when he received a telegram (*hraðskeiti*) from the association. He accepted their terms and immediately and went to England on a steamboat immediately. When he had arrived, he immediately started preparing himself (p. 2).

Throughout the text Stanley's toughness is emphasized in the discussions of the dangers awaiting him and how he survived and dealt with them. The text foregrounds his relations to other Europeans and the various ongoing political plots in relation to the exploration. A great part of the narrative is devoted to long sections from Stanley's text, along with correspondences with other Europeans. In a few instances it is difficult to distinguish between Stefánsson's discussion and Stanley's autobiographical text. By directly quoting long sections of Stanley's letters to other Europeans and correspondences sent to him, the text places the experiences of these individuals in the foreground.

This text also mentions Africans in a very few places. Where they are present, African people appear solely as servants, porters or enemies. In one place, the text remarks that the ‘savages’ who Stanley encountered spoke five languages (p.5). Stefánsson does not elaborate further on this fact. It appears in no particular context within the remaining text and was probably included because he thought it remarkable and surprising; perhaps it did not quite fit in with his earlier view of these presumably ignorant ‘savages.’ In a few places there are brief references to the porters’ attempts at escaping and Stanley’s methods for preventing such further escapes, as well as a mention of Stanley’s raid on a village in order to provide enough food supplies for his men. There is also a brief discussion of some of Stanley’s geographic explorations. The text mentions the pastoralist group Wohuma, who Stefánsson describes as ‘strong and good looking’ and having an appearance similar to Abyssinian people with ‘regular’ facial features (*reglulega andlitsdrætti*) and light skin color, which makes them appear similar to Europeans (p.19). Interestingly, this description bears a resemblance to the discussion of the FulBe in 1861, which was discussed earlier.

Different European nationalities are important in the text and ethnic differences between Germans and English are drawn out when discussing the preparation of Stanley’s mission. This is evident in the statement that the Germans discussed back and forth how to assist Emin Pasha but the English acted immediately (p.2). In two instances the European explorers are referred to as ‘naked.’ One instance is when Stanley’s group had been forced to sell their weapons to be able to afford food and – according to Stanley’s text – therefore the Europeans were ‘naked and unclothed’ (p. 6). The other instance refers to Stanley losing his porters and not receiving certain supplies that he had expected, referring to Stanley as ‘naked and without everything (*allslaus*)’ (p. 8). This reference to nakedness is probably not to be taken literally, but

serves to evoke the images of the white body of the European as defenseless and vulnerable without his weapons and other objects of power. In Mungo Park's travel narrative to western Africa, Pratt points out that Park claims to lose everything and survives. As Pratt states, by that he "proves himself greater than all of it in the end." The emphasis on Park as losing everything allows the readers to see him as 'naked,' stripped of his possessions and, by implication, as a powerful white man (Pratt 1992:81). The reference to Stanley (even though Stanley is of course a very different kind of explorer than Park) can as such be seen as a rhetorical device that serves to underline the inherent power and manliness that Stanley embodies. Even when metaphorically naked in the hostile forest, he still survives. The final words of *Skírnir's* article highlight the obstacles that Stanley overcame, pointing out that naturally Stanley had started to look elderly, considering the hardships he had endured.

Discussion

Even though Icelanders did not participate directly in the colonial and imperialist project in Africa, they took part in refining and perpetrating the racial and hegemonic ideology of which it was partly constituted. Nineteenth century images of Africa in Iceland primarily centered on Europeans, seeing Africans and Europeans as different kinds of people, making these representations in that respect similar to other images of Africa in Europe during the same period. This similarity is in fact not surprising considering that the information which Icelandic texts were based upon were derived from various European sources, journals, magazines, travel books and so forth. The images in *Skírnir* place an emphasis on European men, seeing civilization and progress as belonging to 'white' men. As the historian Sigríður Matthíasdóttir

(2000, 2004) has pointed out, the Icelandic self in the late nineteenth century was based on aspects primarily assigned to men such as logic and sensibility. Discourses of civilization and progress seems thus to have fitted well with the image of masculinity in Iceland. Susan L. Blake (1992) stresses that narrative representations of the relationship with Africa and Africans constitutes models for the relationship between self and other, the other being in this case the subjugated African subjects (p. 21-22). Through the repetition of these narratives, the Icelandic authors are naturalizing and accepting these relationships, in turn situating themselves within a collective category of the white and the ‘civilized.’

There exist still accounts of more actual ‘meetings’ of African subjects and Icelanders in the late-nineteenth century, accounts that reflect how firmly the racial ideology was embedded within notions of civilization and Europeanness, as well as Icelandic anxieties of being categorized with other colonized nations. One example is found in the travel journal by Matthías Jochumsson, one of Iceland’s most beloved nineteenth century poets and who wrote the Icelandic national anthem. Jochumsson traveled to Chicago but also recounts his visit to London where he saw an exhibition in the Chrystal Palace by 50 West-African women from Dahomey. Jochumsson identifies them, as customary in Europe at that time, as a part of the ‘black’ king’s bodyguard, and elaborated on their appearance and clothing, stating that they were ‘surprisingly ugly’ with ‘cruel expression’ (1893:103). He states that even though these women showed good military skills, he was repulsed by the entire episode. Jochumsson comments that he finds the women ‘ape-like’ and that if all humanity has the same origin, their ancestors must have been very isolated (p. 103). These words can be contrasted with his comments taken from the same book in regard to the art exhibition at the World’s Columbian Exposition, where artworks from Europe and the

United States were exhibited. He states: “Oh, the poverty of a single nation who does not have any paintings or artworks! Arts are the nations’ brightest mirror in regard to their culture, their mental abilities and moods. The arts and artwork are the fruits of a mature nation and culture”⁷ (Jochumsson 1893:145).

Another example is a protest made by Icelandic students against Iceland’s participation in the Danish colonial exhibition in 1904. They felt that by participating, Icelanders were being reduced to the same status as other colonized people, such as those from Greenland and Africa. It is not surprising, considering the context of such exhibitions, that Icelandic male students would protest heavily in what could be viewed as an assertion of Iceland’s status as a subjected country rather than as one of the ‘civilized’ nations. Gísli Sveinsson, a student in Copenhagen, asserted that Iceland was ‘being posed along with uncultured savage ethnicities (*siðlausum villipjóðum*) [...] to disgrace us in the eyes of the cultivated world’ (*Fjallkonan* 16 December, no. 50 p. 197). Vilhjalmur Finsen asks: ‘Must Iceland be known for participation in such an exhibition, where Icelandic women in national costumes are posed next to Eskimo and Negro women? (My translation: quoted in Kristján Sveinsson 1994:169). Gísli Sveinsson referred also to Icelandic women in national costume, stating that they would be exhibited next to half-naked ‘blacks.’ The reference to half-naked Africans can perhaps be seen as an allusion to the continent’s presumed lack of culture and history. Even though the representation of Iceland at the exhibition ended up being completely different from what was originally intended, mostly focusing on Iceland’s history and nature (Jóhannsson 2003:146), the students’ protests remained an important source of expression of the ideas of sameness and otherness. Nationalism and independence were important issues in nineteenth century Iceland, reflected in pride over Icelandic culture, worries over the country’s status and hopes for

independence. By repeating European stereotypes of Africa, educated Icelandic males associated themselves with Europe in contrast with those they saw as savages. It is also important to stress that the recycling and repetitions of images in Icelandic texts does not stand outside the political context of that time, but one has to ask why certain things are emphasized and their meaning in a historical context. These examples show the ambiguity of classifications made by Icelanders which reflects, to a certain extent, how 'whiteness' became important at a certain historical period even though it had to be negotiated and constructed.

These racist ideologies can be seen as reflected in incidences more closely connected to the present. Kristján Sveinsson's discussion of Icelandic attitudes toward Greenlanders, who also were Danish colonial subjects, reflects the complete disregard with which the Icelanders had for Greenlanders, reflected in the discussion whether Icelanders could lay claim to Greenland (Sveinsson 1994). Such claims reveal that Icelanders did not see anything wrong with the idea of one country subjugating another, but objected to the fact that their own country was itself subjugated. The demands made after the Second World War by the Icelandic government to the US government that no "black" soldiers would be stationed at the United States' military base in Iceland, brutally reflect racial ideologies recreated and enacted through the state (Ingimundarson 2004). The gendered dimensions are clearly reflected in that the presence of black soldiers was conceptualized as threatening to Icelandic women (Ingimundarson 2004:69). Also, the fact how little racist practices and conceptualizations have been analyzed in relation to Iceland is a testimony to how invisible this racial past continues to be in the present.

Skírnir's representations of Africa reflect the various engagements with imperialism and colonialism, providing but one example of how nations that were not

directly involved in these projects still engaged with the racist and imperialistic ideologies of the time. Ngugi wa Thiongo's classical work *Decolonizing the Mind* (1958) vividly reflects the all-embracing ideology of the colonial project, striking to the core of the selfhood and identity of the colonizers and the colonized. *Skírnir's* narratives reflect European identity as masculine and white and furthermore, as Iceland's colonial position shows, the construction of 'us' within certain historical contexts. It indicates that studies of various forms of imperialism in the Nordic countries are interwoven with 'whiteness' as a potent social category, and its shaping within nationalistic and racist ideologies. The nineteenth century rearrangement of selfhood through the development of racial and nationalist identities signalled a change of position for certain people, such as the Icelanders, where they could actively position themselves within the category of masculinity and whiteness.

Notes

¹ As pointed out by Guðmundur Hálfðánarson, the Icelandic student community in Copenhagen was influenced by various Romantic nationalistic ideals, which fit well with their strong pride in Icelandic culture and which had been apparent even prior to Romanticism gaining currency in Europe (2000:90).

² *Skírnir's* publication continues to the present day, although the content and format of the journal are completely different. The modern day articles consist of historical and scholarly investigations of specific issues.

³ Obviously, images of Africa in the nineteenth century changed throughout the century. My research did not, however, emphasize these changes or compare

representations from different years in this period. The reasons for this are twofold: First, nineteenth century representations are just one time period that I have focused on; secondly, the fact that texts addressing Africa in *Skírnir* are quite scarce makes it somewhat difficult for the purposes of comparison.

⁴ Vér munum nú í stuttu máli skýra nokkuð frá landaleit og ferðum um þessa heimsálfu, sem um allan aldr hefur verið hulin að miklu leyti fyrir sjónum manna, enda þótt hún sé talin með hinum forna heimi.

⁵ „Hinn voldugi soldán af Sokoto, Alíu, tók Barth með virtum og vinsemdum, og hét honum vernd sinni, af því ferð hans væri stofnuð til mannheilla, að tengja samaband við fjarlæggar þjóðir.”

⁶ Ali was a part of the FulBe ethnic groups who ruled a large part of West Africa during this time.

⁷ Ó, þann auð og yndi, sem listin skapar! Ó, þá örbyggð einnar þjóðar, ef hún enginn málverk á eða listamyndir! Listirnar eru skærasti spegill þjóðarinnar, hvað menning þeirra snertir, andlegt atgjörfi og skapseinkunnir. Listirnar og listaverkin eru aldini hins þroskaða þjóðlífs og menningar.

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