

Becoming Civilized: Iceland and the Colonial Project during the 19th Century

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Introduction

Scholars have widely discussed imperialism and colonialism in powerful European countries but barely considered these topics in relation to marginalized European countries or nation states. Furthermore, scholars have directed less attention to the question of *how* the colonized parts of the world provided an important counter-identification for changing European identities, and in this way contributed to shaping European identities. The current and past conceptions of basic ideological constructions of *the West* have often been seen as deriving from a context isolated from the colonial and pre-colonial periods (Mitchell 2000, 3; also Dirks, 1992), ignoring the importance of the racial and gendered policies in the overseas colonies for the forging of European identities (Stoler, 1995; McClintock, 1995).

In this essay, I show how 19th century Icelanders participated in colonized ideologies and how Icelandic discussions about Africa tended to be concerned with

European cultural identity. Iceland was under Danish rule at the time, lacking direct engagement in the colonial projects active in other parts of the world. Africa and other colonized parts of the world were still subjects discussed in various media in Iceland. I demonstrate by what means this marginal European country participated in the ideologies of colonialism and in the enforcement of European identity as intrinsically apart and different from identities of other colonized people – emphasizing that through descriptions of exploration and colonization Icelandic identity becomes a European and masculine identity. In this way Africa also becomes a space where masculinities and European-ness are enacted and realized (see also Loftsdóttir 2009b and 2008).

To this end, I examine three primary sources, texts published in *Skírnir*, an annual, carrying news about the world, and about Henry Morten Stanley – one of the most famous and controversial explorers in the 19th century – and contextualize the discussion with reference to the general representation of Africa in these journals, and then more specifically review their coverage of Stanley’s travel in Africa. In addition, I analyse the gendered and racialized notions embedded in those texts. Iceland’s position as under foreign rule and resistance to that rule did not mean that Icelanders identified necessarily with colonized people or spoke against colonization in general. On the contrary, in the textual material a strong identification can be seen with the predominant European racist and masculine identity. These suggest the dualistic subject positions available were to be a part of the civilized colonizers or of the subjugated ‘others’.

The journal *Skírnir*, published from 1827 to the present day, was along with its predecessor, *Íslensk Sagnablöð*, typically regarded as one of the most important journals of foreign news in 19th century Iceland (Sigurðsson, 1986, 22, 34). Travel narratives were extremely popular in Europe, providing information about the ‘rest’ of the world to Europe and so contributing to the shaping of European identity in contrast to that of the ‘other’ (Pratt, 1992, 5-6). Explorers in different parts of the world consciously manipulated the interest in the ‘exotic,’ embellishing their narratives with stories a general audience was interested in reading (Hammond and Jablow, [1970] 1990, 52). The accessibility of Africa to the majority of European audiences depended on accounts rather than actual encounters (Thornton, 1983). Even though publications played this significant role, Europeans could still on occasion observe ‘natives’ in their traditional dress during various festivals, circuses, and world exhibitions and there is documentary evidence of Icelanders traveling in Europe watching ‘others’ at such occasions (Loftsdóttir, 2009b). Laura E. Franey has argued in her analysis of European travel books, that these narratives served an important purpose in facilitating the European colonialization of Africa, pointing out especially at how African people are constructed in these texts as the subjects of imperialism rather than as citizens (Franey, 2003, 6). The analysis here is based on texts written by people who had never been to Africa nor participated directly in the colonial project. Their recycling of sources from elsewhere in Europe provides an interesting insight into how the colonial project was interpreted by those who did not have a direct stake in the matter.

Feminist scholars have emphasized identity as a complex flux of various dimensions that gain importance at particular times. The concept of intersectionality has increasingly been used to capture the crossing of these diverse identities. Scholars have emphasized the shifting and fluid nature of identities, as reflected, for example, in the theorizing of ethnicity and culture (see overview in Moore, 1994). Following Said's (1978) demonstration of how 'otherness' created a system of discourse and representations, studies of orientalism have tended to take the dichotomy 'us' / 'other' as given rather than as shifting and hybridized. These binary categories need to be problematized in order not to create a dualistic positioning of 'us' and 'other,' i.e. in order to avoid the risk of ratifying and naturalizing them (Loomba, 1998, 49). Ann Stoler has emphasized the need for scholars to re-evaluate the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized as comprising historically constructed categories, rather than as given and natural categories (1992, 321). To look at Europe from such a perspective is to recognize that European countries were not equal players in the colonization process. Iceland was, for example, under Danish rule in the 19th century even if it was treated very differently from colonized countries in the southern parts of the world. The increased emphasis placed on deconstructing the normalization of whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993; Hartigan, 1997) can be seen as exploring the category European, questioning how whiteness is created within a certain social and historical context (Puwar, 2004). Otherness is historically constituted, implying shifting categories which can gain contradictory and incoherent meanings in different contexts. The relationship between the Nordic countries and other countries within Europe in general shows how simplistic this binary position remains.

The below analysis begins by contextualizing the Icelandic case within the historical background of the interconnectedness of gendered, racial and class ideas during the 19th century, as well as, the related and emerging nationalistic ideas of culture and purity. It then locates *Skírnir* and *Íslensk sagnablöð* within this context and outlines their main points of emphasis in relation to Africa. Finally, the emphasis placed on Stanley's journeys in Africa and how *Skírnir's* writers approached this theme is discussed.

Nationalistic Ideas in Europe and Iceland

The concept of race had become, in the 19th century, reified and so was granted a scientific basis, which employed a comprehensive authoritarian voice for its use in classifying human populations. Christopher L. Miller demonstrates that Joseph de Gobineau's dual concept of nothingness and desire in relation to African people became a key aspect of the western understanding of Africa (Miller, 1985, 17-18). Simultaneously, the old idea of the Great Chain of Being was reconceptualized as an evolutionary ladder hierarchizing the diversity of human societies. It ranked societies on a single scale from lower to higher, i.e., from inferior to superior (Errington, 1998, 13-14). Racist ideas of African people, coupled with the evolutionary conception of their societies, meshed with the European imperialistic and colonial project, justifying it and imbuing it with meaning.

European men were considered to be self-controlled and brave, which differentiated them from the depiction of other races, who were often provided with what were viewed as feminized characteristics (Ball, 2001). Women, by comparison, were generally seen as more dependent on their physicality and emotions than men, and the feminization of African men thus suggested that African men were more emotional and lacking in self-control than their white counterparts. The rhetoric of gender was applied to the distinction of humanity into different racial types, the white race was viewed as the male while the black one was seen as female (McClintock, 1995, 55). As argued by Michael Pickering, racist discourse was still not static (2001, 125) and ideas of racial boundaries were entangled with other ideas of boundaries and exclusion(s) relating to nationality as well as class, gender and religion.

The idea of separate autonomous nations also gained substance in the 19th century. Nationalism privileged 'high culture', and devalued those cultural groups that did not fall within these nationalist definitions of 'high culture', both within and outside Europe. Such marginalized groups were labelled domestic minorities, ethnic groups, or tribes, but were not considered nationalities (see Amselle, 1998, 24; Löfgren, 1993). The idea of separate autonomous nations existed alongside the notion of Europeans as intrinsically different from other peoples in the world. This notion utilized racial hierarchies which became increasingly elaborate over the course of the century. Jean-Loup Amselle (1998) emphasizes that the colonies served as counter-identification for the emerging European nation states in order to avoid Europe's fragmentation into multiple ethnic groups. The creation of national identities in

Europe took place in a dialogue with such discourses of otherness and borderlines. Racial and gendered policies within the colonies, as Stoler's (1995) research has shown, were important to the forging of European cultural identities. Feminist scholars have criticized theories of the formation of nationalism for ignoring gendered aspects of nationalism and specifically the question of how women and men have been conceptualized differently in relation to the nation (Pratt, 1990; Sharp, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Pratt (1990) criticizes Benedict Anderson's immensely influential, *Imagined Communities* (1991), for his uncritical use of concepts such as comradeship and fraternity. In short, Anderson thus does not analytically engage with his own gendered constructions and thus associates nationalism with men (Pratt, 1990; see also Sharp, 1996).

Iceland's subjection to foreign rule in the 19th century dated from 1262 when Iceland was integrated into Norway after an extended period of civil war, thus ending Iceland's commonwealth period. (The commonwealth period had started with Iceland's 9th century settlement.) With the unification of the Norwegian and Danish crowns in 1380, Iceland came under Danish rule. In the 19th century, Icelanders became deeply affected by nationalistic discourses in Europe; the 'struggle for independence' usually established in 1851 with Iceland's demand for an almost absolute autonomy in its internal affairs retaining only nominal ties to the Danish crown. The Danish government rejected these demands on the rationale that they were against Iceland's best interests (see discussion in Matthíasdóttir, 2000, 693). Icelandic students in Copenhagen, which was the intellectual center of Iceland at that time, played a significant role in stimulating the rising nationalism in Iceland (Sigurðsson,

1986, 39). The Romantic nationalistic ideas bolstered their pride in Icelandic culture, which had been present (as historian Guðmundur Hálfðánarson has demonstrated (2000)) before Romanticism's spread throughout Europe. Earlier conceptualizations of Iceland's relationship with Denmark had not expressed much dissatisfaction with this arrangement, but the 19th century nationalists perceived the Danish colonial government as a key factor in Iceland's decline from a glorious historical past. This criticism was not directed at the Danish government in Iceland but focused instead on the 'unnatural' arrangement in which one nation ruled over another (Hálfðánarson, 2000, 91). Justifying their demand for independence, Icelanders emphasized their language, and medieval literature – which was written in Icelandic (Sigurðsson, 1996, 42). The Romantics' emphasis on the organic Icelanders' past situated the Icelanders within a glorified Nordic history, a narrative which drew upon the interwoven nationalistic and racialized discourses.

Foreigners' images of Icelanders had, by contrast, been contradictory. In some cases they glorified the Icelandic sagas and past but in other instances Icelanders were portrayed negatively. Travelers to Iceland often portrayed Icelanders as lazy, dirty and childlike as demonstrated by Sumarliði Ísleifsson's (1996) studies of European travel journals' representations of Icelanders. These contradictory images also indicate how whiteness is a shifting category (Jacobson, 1998), constantly negotiated and historically changing. Even though Iceland as a country did not participate directly in colonial enterprises, individual Icelanders engaged in explorations, as discussed by Gísli Pálsson's (1998) biographical analysis of the Canadian-Icelandic Vilhjálmur Stefánsson's survey of the Arctic in the early 20th

century. Icelandic explorations go still further back in time, the story of the Icelander Jón Ólafsson being probably best known. He left Iceland with English ship in 1915 and traveled, for example to the Danish West-Indian colonies (Óskarson, 1992).

Icelandic nationalist politics, like those in other countries, were gendered, assigning men and women different roles within the nation. Sigríður Matthíasdóttir's (2003, 2004) research shows that the most valued attributes associated with the Icelandic self in the 19th and 20th centuries were related to men and masculine conceptions of men, including ideals such as good sense, courage and honor. A woman's body also became a metaphor for Iceland with emphasis placed on purity and beauty within a nationalistic discourse. Such discourse primarily portrayed women as mothers and allocated to women an essentialized maternal role (Björnsdóttir, 1994), concurring with observations made elsewhere regarding the relationship of women to nationalist imagery.

Skírnir and Africa

The Icelandic Literary Society (*Hið Íslenszka bókmenntafélag*) – founded in 1816 and based in Copenhagen – published the annuals *Skírnir* and *Íslensk sagnablöð*. As the number of members in the association obviously fluctuated, (for example, it grew from 319 in 1855 to 730 in 1866 (Sigurðsson, 1867, 4)) its aspirations also evolved over time. Initially, the society celebrated the importance of the Icelandic language and cultural traditions (Pálsson, 1978, 71; Línadal, 1969, 20), and aimed at publishing classical works and material concerned with Iceland (Sigurðsson, 1986,

33-34). For instance, Sigurður Líndal's discussion of the association shows that it changed earlier interest, which was engaged in historical Iceland and ancient Icelandic, to a celebration of national culture in Iceland under the guidance of autonomous Icelanders (1969, 46). This suggests that the association was important in contributing toward the positioning of Icelanders as belonging to the 'civilized' part of the world. Another interesting shift in relation to the society had to do with its move from Denmark to Iceland in 1880; Copenhagen was, as previously stated, the centre of Icelandic educational life during most of the 19th century. (In a classic colonial pattern, transportations to various parts of Iceland were actually better from Denmark than from Reykjavík.)

The society published *Íslensk sagnablöð* for a brief period (1817-1826), but it published *Skírnir*, as stated in this article's introduction, from 1827 until the present. (Even though the content and goals of the journal have changed somewhat – today it is a refereed scholarly journal of literature and arts.) These journals delivered an overview of major events within and outside Iceland; the main body of the text stating what its various writers viewed as the most important occurrences in different continents and countries. Occasionally, it contained detailed discussions of particular contemporary happenings, or background briefings on particular events. *Skírnir* was voluminous; each edition contained more than one hundred pages, and provided additional information to the news overview, such as elegies and Danish book publications for the year past. An issue from 1888, written by Jón Stefánsson, shows that he cited a variety of sources, referring to books and journals written in Danish, German, English and French. *Skírnir* reflects an aspect of the Enlightenment's

heritage in Europe in the production of a publication through which the Icelandic elite were (and still are) able to educate the Icelandic public. While most of the articles in *Skírnir* are unsigned, the author's name is usually discoverable elsewhere in the journal. It is noteworthy that many of those who wrote the texts became renowned and influential in Iceland's history. *Skírnir*'s 19th century texts were all written by men and this reflects the power of men to both explain and define the world, and as such is an illustration of the inequality that existed in Iceland at that time.

The Icelandic Literary Society's first journal *Íslensk Sagnablöð* is possibly the oldest Icelandic news journal. It contains little coverage of Africa, even though the fact that it has some news from the continent is perhaps in itself remarkable. Each edition has around thirty pages that report what the particular author writing that edition views as major events around the world. *Íslensk Sagnablöð* mentions the European settlement in southern Africa and the settlers' interactions with the Zulu, but also mentions Egypt and the abolition of slavery in Northern Europe. In the 1819-20 issue, one of the texts interestingly informs a reader that the English had tried to expand their colonies at the Cape of Good Hope but that the 'Kaffirs' a common name used for the Zulu at the time – had given them great difficulties (22).

Skírnir's discussion is broader in scope than its predecessor – which is in part due to it being published over a much more extended period – covering a range of issues from settlers, explorers to 'strange' African customs, as well as, at times, somewhat detailed discussions on particular themes connected to Africa. Most of *Skírnir*'s issues, however, mention Africa in only a few lines. This is apparent up until

1861 when longer texts appear on Africa, in which ‘Africa’ features as a specific heading; most of the subsequent texts are, however, brief with few notable exceptions. The discussions in the writing also tend not to focus on Africa, but more on European settlers, and European exploration or conquest. Some editions make no substantial reference to Africa at all, and in 1828’s *Skírnir*, the writer states that no major events took place in Africa in that year. The texts in the various issues have a continued focus on Europeans as the bearers of civilization and progress, especially in the tales of exploration where European males are those who discover and penetrate the continent, name and subjugate it – their march being the march of civilization and progress. The attention on the European civilizing project is especially apparent in *Skírnir* in 1874 where it is emphasized that only Europeans are capable of teaching Africans good manners. The writer intriguingly adds, this would depend on the Europeans using that power wisely, and so questions the existing forms of European domination in Africa (57). The texts are generally written from the perspective of the white Europeans as illustrated by this discussion in 1841, in which it is stated that the dark skinned men originating from Africa (*blámannættar*) often have conflicts with white men, the white men viewing themselves as superior. And sometimes, the writing continues, these conflicts become dangerous to white men if they are fewer in numbers (65). The writing does not admit that danger is anything that Africans had to face.

‘White’ skin color is still ordinarily unmentioned in the annuals (with few exceptions) the white, masculine bodies of explorers or settlers are thus normalized. In this way, whiteness seems intrinsic to being European, something, which is

especially apparent in the late 19th century. However, by contrast, most of the writing on Africa emphasizes the dark skin color of Africans. Other personal characteristics such as gender, age and names are generally missing from these descriptions, making the individuals in question invisible (as against, for instance, normalized white men). As such, African men and women are largely invisible in *Skírnir*.

In few cases *Skírnir's* writings mention the interactions of the British with the Zulu and Khoikhoi, generally referred to as Kaffir and Hottentots, as was common in European sources during that time. The dualistic view of other people as noble children of nature, or as dangerous savages that is a feature in writing at this time (see for example Bernth Lindfors 2001), is clearly apparent here. *Skírnir* in 1853, states that 'Hottentots' and 'Bushmen' (referring to the San) are weak in strength, and do not do much harm, while the 'Kaffir' are characterized as a tough nation of savages (71). Such an oppositional perspective seems to have been persistent and Michael Taussig (1993) has argued that the noble savage, barbarian savage dichotomy appears related to the relationship of the ethnic group in question to the Europeans. Mary Louise Pratt's discussion of images of the Khoikhoi reveals that when first arriving in South-Africa, Europeans adopted the representations of the San given by the Khoikhoi as wild and dangerous. But by the end of the 18th century, when the settlers were no longer threatened by the San (due to extensive enslavement and killing) the San were then represented as innocent and isolated as if they had never been in contact with Europeans (46). Z S Strother's (1999) discussion of the Khoikhoi shows that a similar pattern can be established in relation to them. After 1720, the Khoikhoi were increasingly represented in European texts as lazy and passive, the word

‘Hottentot’ becoming almost synonymous with ‘lazy’ as a dictionary from 1721 illustrates. The Zulu are discussed in the framework of ‘blood-thirsty savages’ while the Khoikhoi are conventionally discussed as ‘childlike’ and ‘ignorant’ (Loftsdóttir, 2005).

Skírnir's articles were not completely uncritical of the European presence in Africa. Commentary in 1888 bluntly states, ‘some say that Europeans teach black people as many bad customs as good ones and have accomplished more bad than good in Africa’ (70).¹ And in 1836, when referring to the slave uprising in South and North America, *Skírnir*'s writer and editor comments that one would wish that different people would stop enslaving each other (4). Although the subject matter of this text is not Africa, nonetheless, it reflects that *Skírnir*'s authors did also not always take the side of the more powerful Europeans. For instance, *Skírnir*'s discussion on the Boer is sympathetic towards them and critical of the British. In a section on South Africa in 1853, one *Skírnir* writer stated that the English missionaries had incorrectly claimed that the Dutch were treating the ‘natives’ badly (71-72). This is especially evident in the detailed descriptions of the Anglo-Boer war in the 1899 and 1900 issues of *Skírnir*. This viewpoint was not unique to Icelanders, because according to the Norwegian scholar, Arne Gunnar Carlson (2002), it was not uncommon for marginalized European nations to take the Boer side in the Boer War. However, even while the texts generally seem to support the Boers against the British, they underscore the legitimacy of both Boer and British authority over dark-skinned South

¹ In Icelandic: “Ýmsir segja, að Evrópumenn kenni Sveringjum eins mikið af vondum siðum eins og góðum og hafi afrekað meira illt en gott í Afríku.”

African people. The long and detailed discussions of the war in 1899 and 1900 rarely mention the black majority, except in passing references to ‘savages’ or ‘blacks’. Interestingly, *Skírnir*’s sympathy with the Boer is also expressed through a focus on their masculinity. The text compares them to Roman soldiers, said to be rough, but incorruptible, religious and disciplined (1899, 35).

The Journal *Skírnir* and Henry Morton Stanley

Henry Morton Stanley is the subject of several news reports on Africa in *Skírnir* and in 1890 all the news from Africa that year were committed to his explorations. Three issues 1876, 1888, and 1889 all contain extensive coverage of Stanley’s journeys and *Skírnir* also mentions him in several other issues. Travel stories draw attention to how imperialism had both textual and gendered dimensions, since most explorers and writers were male. As Felix Driver states, the phrase ‘man of science’ was used not only as a figure of speech but also reflects the association of men with rationality and knowledge. The gender of the authors interacted of course with other dimensions of their identity, such as class, marital status and profession (Blake, 1992). The extensive coverage of Stanley’s exploits in *Skírnir* is interesting because Stanley is considered by many to be the most infamous explorer of the 19th century, strongly criticized in his own lifetime (Driver, 2001, 126). Stanley was extremely popular in Europe at the time and as Driver notes, Stanley’s telegrams describing his explorations caused more ‘excitement than the threat of a European war’ (2001, 121). His writings, and contemporary writing about him, tended to blur – as do many other such texts from the same period – the borders between exploration

narrative and adventure fiction (Driver, 2001, 10). This served the purpose of making the text more exciting while it remains a part of ‘real’ history and events. The title of an article, ‘What Stanley Has Done for the Map of Africa’, published in 1890 establishes the authority of Stanley as colonial explorer (Driver 2001, 126).

Skírnir’s commentaries in 1876, 1888 and 1889 do not refer to Stanley as a controversial figure or mention the disputed nature of his trips. Rather Stanley stands as a masculine symbol of imperialist conquest and European superiority. *Skírnir*’s discussions refer to the brotherhood of Europeans who initiate progress in Africa, discover nature by naming it and place locales, previously unknown to them, within the realm of scientific knowledge. These individuals, as asserted by Blake, stand ‘between’ Africa and the empire; they become a substitution for ‘imperial power’ through the assertion of their authority (Blake, 1992, 20). Martial signifiers have been important in creating the nationhood as underlined by Pratt (1990).

The *Skírnir* article from 1876 places Stanley alongside several other explorers. It emphasizes the importance of exploration in stating that: ‘one heroic and energetic person after another has spent his entire life in exploring the southern continent, but few have managed to return back home, because the atmosphere there is unhealthy for people from the Nordic part of the world, and also because the residents in most places are deceitful to tourists and cruel’ (25).² The narratives speak occasionally of blacks (*svertingja*) and savages (*villimenn*) but the majority of the

² In Icelandic: “Hver hetjan og þrekmaðurinn eptir annan hefur varið öllu lífi sínu til þess að rannsaka Suðurálfuna, en fæstir þeirra hafa getað komizt heim aptur, því að bæði er loptslag þar afar óheilmæmt Norðurálfumönnum, og svo eru íbúarnir víðast hvar mjög svikulir við ferðamenn og grimmir.”

space is devoted to descriptions of the explorers themselves. The text speaks of an expedition by Stanley in 1874, where half of his ‘men’ had died due to sicknesses and ‘savages’, but ‘Stanley himself was always in good health, gave little notice to these obstacles and difficulties and wanted eagerly to continue’ (26).³

Stanley is an important topic in *Skírnir*’s journal of 1888; the annual contains a three page overview of his importance as African explorer, as well as a reference to the misnamed *Emin Pasha Relief Expedition*, which includes Stanley’s trip to Africa during 1887-89. That particular journey is regarded as Stanley’s most controversial one to Africa and was criticized in his own lifetime (see Driver, 2001, 126). This expedition is also the topic of *Skírnir*, 1890. The writing from 1888 refers to Stanley in a relatively neutral way, listing the main events of his journey and his decisions without mentioning that the expedition was considered controversial. One sentence notes that a missionary association once refused to lend him a steam-boat, so Stanley *had* to take it by force (4, emphasis added).

In 1889, there is a section entitled Africa and a subsection labeled ‘Stanley’. That this is the only subsection under the heading ‘Africa’ underlines the importance of the figure of Stanley, since he becomes the exclusive newsworthy item for the whole continent during that particular year. The writer introduces the subsection with the heading: ‘Bula Matari [Rock Breaker – referring to Stanley] is unbeatable’. Below, in parenthesis, it reads: ‘What the Africans say about Stanley’ – setting the

³ “Sjálfur var Stanley ávallt heilbrigður, og skeytti lítið um allar þessar torfærur og erfiðleika og vildi fyrir hvern mun halda áfram”

tone for what follows (72). Even though most of the discussion presupposes the acceptance of a set of values about Stanley, its goal seems still to be to show that Stanley is ‘unbeatable’ and unstoppable. The article underscores the hardship that the celebrity explorer and his men had to endure, through a detailed description of his journey. The difficulties are highlighted by the inclusion of a brief text which describes how Stanley and his men emerge out of the forest, through which they have struggled, and walk into the sunlight under a the blue sky, whereupon they drop to their knees screaming and crying with happiness. The text simultaneously brings out an image of the ‘darkness’ associated with the continent and underlines the hardship they endured by emphasizing their unexpected ‘softness.’ Stanley becomes a Moses who leads his people to the promised land, in the following paragraph where this incident is reported, he tells his men that soon they will see the lake Albert Nyanza. They do not believe him but when they realize a moment later that he is correct, they fall in front of him, kissing his hands, asking forgiveness (73).

Stanley’s brutal actions are, as in the case of an article from the same year 1889, justified by the word *had*, in the statement he ‘had’ to hang two of his men because twenty-six men had tried to sneak away from him (72). *Skírnir’s* text in 1890 explains that Stanley had now recently arrived back from his great *dangerous and adventurous mission (glæfra- og frægðarför)* to Africa (1), directly referring to the 1889 discussion of Stanley. Long sections from Stanley’s own writing are included in the 1890 annual, along with correspondences with other Europeans. In several instances, it is difficult to distinguish what *Skírnir’s* writer wrote and what is Stanley’s autobiographical work. By directly quoting lengthy selections of Stanley’s

letters to other Europeans and correspondence sent to him, the text also foregrounds the experiences of these individuals. In spite of most of the text occurring within Africa, the writing hardly mentions African people. When present, they appear solely as servants, porters or enemies. The article, however, remarks in one place that the ‘savages’ encountered by Stanley spoke five languages (5). *Skírnir*’s author does not elaborate upon this proficiency and it appears out of context with the remaining text. Perhaps it was included because the writer thought it noteworthy and surprising; possibly, it did not conform to his earlier view of these (presumably) ignorant ‘savages’.

The article gives a detailed overview of the events leading to Stanley’s rescue mission and here the heroic component of Stanley’s recorded life is emphasized in even more detail than in the two *Skírnir* articles referred to above. The writing highlights Stanley’s toughness in the discussion of the dangers awaiting him and how he dealt with them and survived. The final words of the feature highlight the obstacles overcome, pointing out that naturally Stanley had begun to look older, considering the hardships he had endured. At the end of the extensive coverage of Stanley’s exploration, *Skírnir*’s text gives a brief overview of geographical features of the areas covered and of the pastoralist group, the Wohuma (19).

In describing Stanley’s acceptance of the East-Africa Association request of his help, the emphasis is placed on Stanley’s efficiency and how rapidly the rescue mission is set in motion, as becomes evident with the use of the term *immediately* four times in four sentences (2). This accent upon Stanley acting immediately constructs

him as a man of action. In the article, his interactions with other Europeans are highlighted, and the various ongoing political plots in relation to exploration are detailed. Ethnic differences between Germans and Englishmen are emphasized when the preparations for Stanley's journey are discussed. This is evident in the statement that the Germans debated among themselves how to assist Emin Pasha, whereas the English acted at once (2).

The relationship between the imperial explorer and the African subjects of the text embodies power relations in various ways. Perhaps the most visual representations of this are two instances where the European explorers are referred to as 'naked.' One instance occurs when Stanley's group had been forced to sell their weapons to be able to afford food the Europeans were – according to Stanley – 'naked and unclothed' (1890, 6). The other instance describes Stanley, when he lost his porters and consequently did not receive the expected supplies, as 'naked and with nothing (*allslaus*)' (1890, 8). To elaborate using Pratt's analysis of Mungo Park as an example, Pratt indicates that in Park's travel narrative to western Africa, Park claims to lose everything and survives even though separated from his objects of power. Pratt states that he thus 'proves himself greater than all of it in the end.' Park's loss of objects of power and his ability of surviving in spite of it allows the readers to see him as 'naked,' stripped of his possessions and thus inherently as a powerful white man (Pratt, 1992, 81). The Icelandic texts on Stanley can be read in similar way as evoking the image of Europeans as defenseless and vulnerable when without their weapons and other objects of power but simultaneously as inherently dominant. Even though the text from 1889 only speaks of Stanley and his men as crying when they succeeded

in escaping the forest, the narrative can similarly be seen to be showing their vulnerability and strength at the same time, underlining the innate power and manliness that Stanley embodies. Even when metaphorically naked in the hostile forest, Stanley still survives; even when crying because of his occupation of the space of ‘darkness’ he does not give up.

European Explorers and *Skírnir*

The Icelandic narratives about Africa written in the late 19th century are testimonies to how the connection between different parts of the world were conceptualized in a marginalized European country, as well as, to how the world itself was categorized into ‘white’ civilized Europe and dark savage ‘others’. In these *Skírnir* pages, Africa is an empty space occupied by Europeans who subjugate the continent by exploring it, while exercising their masculinity. This masculinity is celebrated by foregrounding Stanley’s explorations in Africa. Through these narratives, ideas of strength, courage and ruggedness are perceived as valued characteristics embodied by European men. The images represented in *Skírnir* reflect a wide circulation of these ideas in Iceland at this time, as shown in research on the representation of Africa and other colonized people in schoolbooks from the late 19th and early 20th century (Loftsdóttir, 2009a) as well as in travel books (Loftsdóttir, 2009b and 2005). The world history textbooks, for example, establish Icelanders as a part of colonial encounters between European people and non-Europeans – a meeting which inevitably features the heroism and resilience of European individuals. These racial classifications in geography books, along with descriptions of colonization and

imperialism, are portrayed as natural steps on the route towards the progress of humankind, reflecting simultaneously a system of thought that is both sexist and Eurocentric (Loftsdóttir, 2009b; Loftsdóttir, 2007).

Skírnir's representation of Africa reflects familiar European constructions of Africa indicating the intertextuality of European narratives, in which certain themes are recycled. Africa appears as a space of passive individuals, i.e., savages that require European guidance and the various European writings and pictures reflect this (Miller, 1985). The construction of European men and masculinity that is evident in these texts, furthermore, can be seen as a part of constructing African people and countries as subjects of imperialism – as discussed at the beginning of this essay in relation to Franey's ideas (2003). While it is important to recognize this intertextuality, *Skírnir's* textual representations must be viewed as other texts i.e., as given meaning within the historical and geographical context in which they were written and read. The authors of these articles found these narratives to be of interest and significance to their Icelandic readership. In publishing them, they selected perspectives that they judged relevant for Icelanders. As Ania Loomba emphasizes, discourse analysis is about placing texts within 'social and historical conditions within which specific representations are generated' (1998, 97). Iceland's position as a colonized country gave these narratives specific meaning, separating Iceland from primitiveness and locating it within the realm of progressive civilization as undertaken by white men. To Icelandic intellectuals in the late 19th century, such a positioning must have been particularly important (see also Loftsdóttir, 2009b). The similarities existing from text to text and the copying of different texts between different countries and periods is

subject matter for exploration, but correspondingly it needs to be acknowledged that the context of writing and reading of these texts differ radically.

Interlinked with this is the question of the different relationships to colonialism among the European countries. William F. S. Miles argues when speaking about the effects of colonization on African people, that lumping together different countries and ethnic groups is to risk the “loss” of the “cultural contact” aspect of colonialism’ (1994, 12). Analyzing colonialism within the different Nordic countries allows us to better understand the texture of experiences of colonial ideologies and practices; i.e., to better understand how these ideas became meaningful and manipulated by various individuals to various ends, within a particular nationalistic context.

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