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Within a ‘white’ affective space: racialization in Iceland and development discourse

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Racialization does not always take place through discourses of blackness as emphasized in American research, or exclusively in relation to immigration, as emphasized in the European context. As an affective process, racialization is entangled with particular views of nation-states and a sense of belonging in a wider community of nations where humanitarianism can play a large role. By looking at international development in Iceland, the paper emphasizes that racialization takes place in different spheres of society where Icelandic racial subjectivities are shaped by global ideas of humanitarianism and international development that intersect with older Icelandic anxieties of belonging with sovereign northern European nations. The article emphasizes whiteness as being embedded in local Icelandic constructions of nationhood and belonging, entangled in global international development discourses that involve mobilizations of the idea of ‘humanity’.

Keywords: racialization; humanitarianism; whiteness; Iceland; development

Introduction

In 2010, my then second grade son brought several finished assignments home from school. One is about Africa and it evokes my interest because I have conducted research on Icelandic ideas of blackness and whiteness. The photocopied handout, which I have never seen before – presumably written by an Icelandic teacher – contains a story about a boy in a village in Africa where there is hunger and misery. But then, the text explains, ‘white people came to the village with strange things like cameras.’ They make wells for the villagers with their advanced technology and after that ‘life in the village became easier and better’. The story is less than a page long, and my son has replied to several questions that are probably to examine his reading comprehension. Surely it is unusual, even in Iceland in 2010, to see such blatant references to ‘white’ people as saving African people from their own ignorance. The text reflects, in its rather robust way, wider narratives of the interrelationship of whiteness with international development as connected to the project of modernization, in addition to locating Iceland indirectly within that narrative: produced in Icelandic for Icelandic school children.

My discussion focuses on whiteness in Iceland, stressing that whiteness is not only salient in discussions about immigration but has to be teased out in other contexts as well. I show that notions of whiteness in Iceland are entangled with notions of nationhood and belonging in an unequal international hierarchy, historically constructed around the lines of white-civilized/dark-uncivilized. Whiteness is thus entangled with emotions or affect and the creation of particular subjectivities, which can be part of explaining the resilience of racialized ideas. I see whiteness as part of racialization, following Steve Garner’s emphasis on understanding the process in which race becomes meaningful in a particular context, connected to his point that too fixed an emphasis on race relations presupposes race as a category of difference (Garner, 2010, p. 19). The focus on racialization helps to explain why in spite of racial discrimination being officially acknowledged as harmful and unjust (Crenshaw, 2000, p. 552), racist images and practices continue even among those who see themselves as anti-racist. My example here analyses how whiteness appears in the context of Icelandic development assistance. I demonstrate that whiteness is embedded in local Icelandic constructions of nationhood and belonging, as well as being entangled in more global international development discourses that involve a particular mobilization of the concept of ‘humanity’ (Feldman & Ticktin, 2010, p. viii).

Early twentieth century scholars, such as Franz Fanon, critically addressed the links between power and whiteness, but a systematic analysis of whiteness started relatively recently, with scholars stressing the power of whiteness as embedded in its invisibility and position of presumed normality (Puwar, 2004). There has been growing interest in the last few years in gaining a deeper understanding of whiteness in the European context (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Garner, 2006; Ponzanesi & Blaagaard, 2011). Philomena Essed and Sandra Trienekens suggest that whiteness needs to be seen as a ‘floating concept’ in the European context, encoded within other notions, such as national identity, western superiority and civilization (2008, p. 68) leading to the idea that whiteness must be analyzed in relation to other discourses and contexts instead of only as antithetical to blackness, as US research often seems to assume (see also Gullestad, 2005, p. 27).

Even within the Nordic countries, different types of engagements with colonial histories and global interrelationships have to be acknowledged, simultaneously refuting the persistent notions that the Nordic countries were not responsible for colonialism (Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). The analysis of Iceland in the context of the colonial shows the importance of destabilizing categories of ‘colonized’ and ‘colonizers’ (Smith, 2003; Stoler, 1992), wherein the meaning of whiteness was fluid and contextual.

Iceland’s peculiar position historically as part of the ‘white’ civilized/developed world makes it a significant site for analyzing whiteness. Iceland was a Danish dependency for centuries and one of the poorest countries in Europe. Its relationship with colonialism was ambiguous, characterized by anxieties of being classified with colonized populations while attempting to position Icelanders as belonging to the ‘civilized’ part of the world – partly accomplished with the use of racist and imperialistic images (Loftsdóttir, 2012a). In relation to international development, anxieties of belonging still seem to be at play, albeit articulated differently in the present. Neither racialization nor Iceland’s relationship with racist and imperialistic ideas in the colonial period has been a significant focus of research in Iceland (see Loftsdóttir, 2008a). Racism in regard to recent immigrant groups – increasingly a larger part of the population since the late 1990s – has, however, been discussed within Icelandic society. A focus on racism exclusively in relation to immigration can, however, perpetrate the notion that racialization is only a recent phenomenon in Iceland, or that racism only concerns immigrants.

What I find particularly challenging is how racism simultaneously constitutes a global historical phenomenon as it engages with different histories and boundaries within a particular localized context. Such localized contexts should still not be idealized; as scholars focusing on globalization have stressed, different nationalities have become a part of the same global media-scape (Appadurai, 1996) and images of ‘others’ within Europe have, for a long time, been characterized by strong intertextuality (Miller, 1985). The current global media-scape creates even ‘imagined memories’ where individuals remember themselves as part of histories of which they have never been part, due to the massive popularity of particular western cultural icons (Huyssen, 2001, pp. 62, 64).

International development is an interesting site for examining this complex landscape of global and local intersections of racism – no less evident in the Nordic countries than elsewhere. As scholars have stressed recently, international development populations are not only governed and mobilized within different states, but by local and global organizations (Iltan & Phillips, 2008, p. 716), creating a complex landscape of global interrelationships that engages with the imagination of the world in a particular way. The ‘global’ constitutes a part of most people’s imagined worlds that they engage with and act on (Moore, 2004, p. 74), and, as observed by Bornstein and Redfield (2010a), the ‘suffering’ of others is popularized in our contemporary media-saturated world, where the care of ‘strangers’ is given a leading role (pp. 3–4). The discussion here looks at how racialization in Iceland can be understood as part of a larger global imagining of a particular people (for the most part white) as having a role in ‘helping’ others, without acknowledging their entangled histories of colonialism and racism. Drawing attention to this element of racialization further underlines the importance of affect in affirming and sustaining racial categories.

The discussion starts with a brief theoretical overview of international development and its links to power and racialization, simultaneously involving a particular moral claim and ‘acting’ on behalf of ‘humanity’. My analysis of Icelandic racialization is divided into three parts. I start by giving historical context of how international development was important in establishing Iceland as being on a par with other Northern European countries, simultaneously reifying the lines between white moral actors and black objects of development. Secondly, the discussion looks at these boundaries within a contemporary discussion of international development, with strong emphasis on commercialization and moral individualism. Finally, the issue is contextualized by

interviews with Icelandic individuals from different spheres of Icelandic society, engaged in development assistance. This gives deeper insights into the boundaries and markers of international development in Iceland.

Methods

The discussion draws from data from two research projects which are concerned with understanding racialization in Iceland. The first, focusing on international development in Iceland, involved interviews with 30 Icelanders working in the field of international development, the majority of whom were women (21, as opposed to 9 men). Most had worked extensively in development work outside Iceland, either for ICEIDA, the official Icelandic development institution, or in one of Iceland's NGOs. Even though these individuals were not selected according to racial categorization, all of them would be classified socially as 'white'. This reflects more on how recently extensive immigration started in Iceland, rather than on social class. These individuals come from diverse social backgrounds and were of different ages: some university students seeking experience by working briefly in international development, others having moved from careers in industry to international development, some having basic undergraduate education, while others had specialized graduate education.¹ These interviews give rich data with regard to practices conducted in international development by the Icelandic state and Icelandic NGOs but as the topic here is not international development as such, I shall only use those aspects that have to do with views on whiteness and the constitutions of the white subject in Icelandic discourses. In connection to the interviews, an extensive analysis was carried out on Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy documents about international development, as well as archival research in the National Archives of Iceland on documents relating to the initiation of international development in Iceland. The textual material also included advertisements and information booklets from different development organizations in Iceland.

The other project, on which this article is based, focuses on the economic crisis in Iceland, looking at creation of Icelandic subjectivities in relation to changing global connections in Iceland. Interviews were conducted for the project (30 with bank employees, 20 with people from an immigrant background), which inform the analysis here even though not referred to directly. Analysis also involves media discussion regarding Iceland's relationship with the outside world and in terms of immigration.

International development in the name of humanity

International development appeared in the context of the Cold War of the 1950s as a way of counteracting the spread of communism and to affirm the superiority of the USA (Escobar, 1995). It is based on an old and largely discredited evolutionary model of linear progress (Rist, 1997, p. 73). The idea of development had profound ideological and political affects upon 'the way the world was seen' (Rist, 1997, p. 73) and transformed former colonized countries into 'developing' nations in need of assistance in becoming modern nation-states. International development involved a particular reorganization of the world in which the Nordic countries were classified with the West and other developed countries. James Ferguson's (1994) description of development as an 'anti-politics machine' demonstrates how development is constructed as outside the field of politics, concealing how it involves power on many levels. The increased association of security with peace as a key development issue (Duffield, 2001/2006; UNDP, 2005, p.169) makes this even more apparent. International development has strategic and political purposes for the donor state (Yasutomo, 1989), as well as constituting a part of its general image building (Öhman, 2010). The Nordic countries for example, have gained prestige and power from the international community due to their contribution to peacekeeping (Stamnes, 2007, p. 449), and are often seen as particularly suited to the task due to their presumed lack of colonial history (Jakobsen, 2006, p. 382).

Scholars focusing on humanitarian aid have increasingly drawn attention to the creation of the moral subject through discourses of humanitarianism (Feldman & Ticktin, 2010), and thus how moral sentiments and affect are drawn into politics and policies (Fassin, 2010, p. 37). This also applies to international development, which rests on particular ideas of human responsibility.² As Bornstein and Redfield (2010b, p. 253) express it, international development and humanitarianism can be seen as 'key domains of contemporary moral discourse and affect' and as such they shape foreign policies and education. Also, as argued by Didier Fassin (2010, p. 37), the benefactor and the victim are both seen as endowed with moral sentiments which vaunt these subject positions above criticism. Those conducting international development are seen as 'acting for the good' of those who are vulnerable in one sense or another (p. 37). Recent concerns with governmentality in relation to international development make the links between power and discourses quite clear (Ilcan & Phillips, 2006, p. 61). As Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin (2010, p. 6) argue, the appeal to humanity can be seen as resting on the 'claim to govern or intervene on behalf of a universal humanity' which powerfully justifies the necessity of governing technologies.

Here, I am interested in how the humanitarian paradigm of international development creates certain racialized subjectivities through discourses that coexist with discourses in other spheres of society. Scholars have only relatively recently started to look at those involved in international development (see for example Fechter & Hindman, 2011; Leonard, 2010; Loftsdóttir, 2008b, pp. 200–211), as well as racialization and power in relation to international development (Goudge, 2003; Harcourt, 2009; Heron, 2007). As argued in the 1990s, discourses of development and humanitarianism create the object that they address, and are important in constituting western subjectivities (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994).³ Discourse, in Foucault's sense, refers not only to 'texts', as often seems assumed by those critical of poststructural approaches to international development, but involve lived relationships and practices (Foucault, 1972/1980; Rabinow, 1984, p. 10). This means that development discourse 'promotes and justifies very real interventions and practices with very real (though invariably unintended) consequences' (Crush, 1995, p. 6).

To capture how international development is not only about people in remote places, I have used the term 'developscape'. It grasps the importance of development in imagery and everyday lives of people in different parts of the world, tying together those who give and those who receive aid (see Loftsdóttir, 2009 for an elaboration).⁴ The visual affects of this strongly racialized developscape engage with predominantly 'white' donor countries, historically part of the colonizing world, and 'non-white' receiving countries, which were colonized by the former (Loftsdóttir, 2009). The developscapes in countries receiving aid are characterized by visual representations of development (e.g., signs advertising different development projects, cars marked with different development institutions) but also lived relationships between those performing different aspects of development. In countries giving aid, the developscape is embodied in the discursive shaping of particular parts of the world as in 'need', and international development as a way of responding to it (Loftsdóttir, 2009). Discourses of poverty, as argued by Ananya Roy (2010, p. 12), define the citizens of the global north as well as the 'West's place in the world', and thus create subjectivities that can be acted on.

John Cameron and Anna Haanstra (2008) maintain that international development agencies have historically used images of starving black children to raise funds, often labelled 'pornography of poverty' (p. 1477). In the aftermath of the 1983–1984 famine in Ethiopia, images portraying African people as helpless victims were criticized (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1478). More recently, international emphasis on development has shifted from these images of the starving

child toward efforts to ‘popularize development’ through various marketing campaigns (Biccum, 2007). This change can be linked to increased neoliberal emphasis on the importance of non-governmental organizations, as well as notions of the neoliberal subject as a moral subject (Muchlebach, 2012). International development is thus made ‘sexy’ (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008) even with the use of internationally recognized celebrities to advocate its cause (Ponte, Richey, & Baab, 2009). The Millennium Development Goals of 2000 can be seen as part of such marketing, aimed at creating a ‘global citizen’ who ‘embraces the architecture of globalization under neoliberal terms of trade’ (Biccum, 2007, p. 1114).

Iceland in the world

Iceland’s international standing was shaped by its position as a Danish dependency until 1944 (for a long time one of the poorest countries in Europe) in addition to its association with whiteness and privileged Northern Europe. Icelanders started demanding full independence in the mid-nineteenth century but Denmark was especially reluctant to give up Iceland, even though it had gradually lost its status as an empire (Agnarsdóttir, 2008, p. 71). This was possibly due to the fact that Iceland signified Scandinavia’s ‘living past’ for many Danes (Karlsson, 1995, p. 44). Icelandic intellectuals, influenced by nationalism in mainland Europe, claimed that Iceland’s dependency status was an unnatural arrangement of one nation ruling another (Hálfðánarson, 2000, p. 91). However, Icelandic racist stereotypes of subjugated people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflect that it was still not seen as unnatural that others were subjugated under colonial powers (Loftsdóttir, 2012a). For centuries, Iceland itself had been a subject for European writers who depicted the country as backward and primitive, much to the dismay of Icelandic intellectuals. Their anxiety over Iceland’s association with the colonies materialized in the preparation of the Danish colonial exhibition in 1905, where Icelanders felt humiliated that Iceland was supposed to be exhibited alongside other areas ruled by Denmark (Loftsdóttir, 2012a). Racist images of colonized people elsewhere in the world were probably important to nationalistic rhetoric that affirmed Icelandic membership as belonging to the family of ‘independent’ civilized (white) nations (Loftsdóttir, 2010a). This membership was also important to claims for sovereignty as an independent nation.

Icelandic geography books elaborate the association with white Europe at this time as well as the familiarity with racist classification of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

These texts locate Icelanders firmly as members of a ‘white’ or Indo-European race. In addition they simultaneously reflect the disorder of classifying races, the conflation of physical and cultural descriptions, of racial labels and ethnic labels, in addition to the customary assumptions of males as the normative human being (Loftsdóttir, 2010a, p. 87). These classifications gained an even deeper meaning in world history textbooks, where European male explorers were constructed as the embodiment of civilization and progress (Loftsdóttir, 2010a). Interestingly however, schoolbooks focusing on the history of Iceland separate Icelanders from other Europeans. Icelanders, these texts claim, originated from the ‘best’ stock of Norway, and were shaped through generations by the hardship of their own country. The emphasis on Iceland’s uniqueness must have been quite important in order to foster the notion of national identity as different from others (Loftsdóttir, 2010b). This also proved important in order to claim independence as a separate nation from Denmark.⁵ Thus, Icelandic schoolbooks reproduced certain hegemonic ideas of racial difference, but in other contexts emphasized Icelandic uniqueness in terms of body and culture, and in some senses superiority over their closest neighbors.

Icelandic discourses in the early twentieth century were shaped by narratives emphasizing modernization in order to show that Iceland was modernizing on a par with other Western nations (Brydon, 2006; Rastrick, 2013). The Icelandic government did not prioritize international development as evidenced by how late official Icelandic development was established, in addition to the lack of interest the government showed it after its establishment.⁶ Only in 1971 were the first laws regarding Iceland’s assistance to developing nations enacted, as well as an institution established to execute such goals. From the beginning, the institution was extremely poorly funded despite attempts by its director, Ólafur Björnsson, to stress to the government the importance of such an institution for Iceland as a nation-state (Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands [Icelandic National Archives], 1977).

The aims and rhetoric of international development discourse were, however, more successful in capturing the imagination of the Icelandic public. The Icelandic initiative *Herferð gegn hungri* – a local version of the *Freedom from Hunger* campaign initiated internationally by the FAO – indicates the global interrelationships involved in the process of imagining of the world as being split into developing and developed countries. The campaign shows the importance of development discourse in shaping public perception in Iceland. In addition, one of the campaign goals was to put pressure on the Icelandic government to start official Icelandic development

assistance (Heimsókn á hungurvöku, 1969), thus integrating development as part of the Icelandic nation state. It is tempting to speculate whether or not this connects to the notion of Icelanders establishing their identity as an independent nation, which should take on similar responsibilities to other western nation states. The campaign managed to popularize the idea of development, and mobilize people through various kinds of activities involving cultural institutions and schools. The high level of enthusiasm for the campaign is demonstrated by the amount of money that it raised. For example the collection in 1966–1967 generated triple the anticipated amount (Loftsdóttir, 2011, pp. 314–315). A discussion about the campaign in a special issue of *Morgunblaðið*, entitled ‘Youth and the Future’ (*Æskan og framtíðin*), reflects the naturalness of the binary opposition of ‘white’ and ‘black,’ and Iceland’s role and responsibility to the world. The heading ‘Freedom from hunger and ignorance’ (*Herferð gegn hungri og fávísku*) echoes the sentiments of the article:

We Icelanders are well capable of sending a group of young specially trained men to participate in the extensive and noble task of teaching and helping the weak to sustain themselves. – Even though such help is most important and basic for underdeveloped states, Icelandic youth could in a similar fashion participate in extensive collection under the label ‘freedom from hunger’ because who is so badly maleficent that he does not want to participate when life or death is at stake of small, innocent children, even though with different skin color and who live in distant countries. (Íslenzkt æskufólk leggi eitthvað af mörkum, 1964)⁷

The different players and the issues are clearly defined here: Young Icelanders have a global responsibility of ‘helping’ and ‘teaching’ those who cannot help themselves. Judging from the title of the article this is presumably due to ‘ignorance’. The emphasis on children’s lives stresses moral obligations, in line with Fassin’s (2010) comment cited above. The writer assumes ‘white’ as the normative skin color of Icelanders, which is perhaps not surprising due to the relatively homogenous population in Iceland at that time. But the author also feels the need to emphasize *that even though* these children look ‘different’ and live far away they *still* deserve ‘our’ help. Photos of white Americans working in the field of development and three pictures of black malnourished children looking into the camera intensify the racialized opposition drawn in the article. The text under the photos asks: ‘Who would not want to assist these children?’ The left-wing newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* responded by suggesting that of course they want to help even though there was disagreement on how this was to happen in practice. Despite the difference in political perspectives, the narratives in both newspapers shared the same mindset about how to solve the

‘problems’ of the poorer parts of the world. Additionally, they both emphasized the importance of technology and specialists as the main movers of progress for the undeveloped world, while downplaying colonialism (Loftsdóttir, 2011).

The targeting of Icelandic youth is possibly in conjunction with the notion of a ‘young’ nation establishing itself within an international community. The entire Icelandic nation, according to the newsletter *Herferð gegn hungri*, is seen as deserving thanks (Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands [Icelandic National Archives], n.d.). Similarly, when the newspaper *Vísir* reports on an international Freedom from Hunger conference by FAO, it celebrates the fact that the Icelandic collection had been noted by participants, concluding that the honor belongs to the Icelandic nation as a whole. Furthermore, *Vísir* elaborates: ‘Our contribution is the biggest that had ever been contributed by one nation, relative to the number of people. But even though the Icelandic nation is taken here [at the UN] as a special case of sacrifice and generosity, we should not stop’ (Starf Herferðar gegn hungri mun verða aukið, 1966).

It would be simplistic to characterize Icelandic engagement with development assistance as aimed only at establishing Iceland within the ‘civilized’ category; one that has historically been conflated with the notions of being white and western. In one of his letters, Ólafur Björnsson, the director of Iceland’s institute for international development emphasizes that despite a higher level of economic development in Iceland, as he phrases it, ‘we’ share a common interest with these countries where they could be ‘more understanding’ in many of those matters of great interest to Icelanders than the superpowers (Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands [Icelandic National Archives], 1972). Also, a report from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Icelandic Parliament claims that Iceland has been more supportive to the demands of colonized nations for independence than other Nordic countries in the United Nations. Regardless of whether this is correct or not, it is interesting that he adds that ‘one can say that this is fully consistent with our own history,’ presumably referring to Iceland as a dependency (Löggjafarþing, 1973–1974). Nevertheless, Iceland participated in racially categorizing human diversity by actively reproducing racist images and discourses. The narrative of international development containing an implicit division of the world into white developed people/black impoverished people must be seen as coexisting with other discourses of Icelanders. These include the notion of Icelanders belonging within the space of civilization, and Europe, as well as the notion of them belonging to a white racial group. Thus, even in a small

Nordic nation like Iceland, international development on a global scale was important in giving ideas of whiteness more of a solid foundation.

International development and racialization in Iceland

In the late 1990s, Iceland became more globally connected with the increased liberalization of its economy, enjoying high levels of economic prosperity. This ended abruptly in 2008 with an historic economic collapse (Sigurjónsson & Mixa, 2011). Finance had been the main source of revenue in the 2000s. Coupled with this, the revitalization of nationalistic narratives focusing on the uniqueness of Icelanders and the importance of their global expansion led to a naïve envisioning that Iceland would be a leading center of global finance (Loftsdóttir, 2010b, 2012b). The celebration of Iceland's international expansion was not limited to Icelandic business people and bankers. For example, the Icelandic government emphasized more direct engagement in international affairs from the mid-1990s (Þórhallsson, 2006). This included international development that had, until then, little significance for Icelandic foreign policy (Þórhallsson, 2005, p. 126).

Subsequently, more financial resources were devoted to it including the establishment of peacekeeping forces in 2001. This publicly emphasized non-militaristic participation, in line with Iceland's status as not having an army. Ironically, many of the projects were located within military spaces in countries like Afghanistan (Björnsdóttir, 2011; Loftsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012). International development has continued being highly celebrated by the public, as reflected by a 2013 study in which 77.5% of participants agreed that they felt that international development helped against poverty in the 'developing countries', and 80.6% agreed that the Icelandic government should be engaged in international development. Also 76% had in some way participated in international development through donations or voluntary work (Markaðs- og miðlarannsóknir, 2013).

The economic boom and heightened global integration also meant increased immigration to Iceland, with foreign nationals rising from 1.8 percent in 1996, to 8 percent of the national population in 2008 (Statistical Series, 2009). There was a strong emphasis that uniquely Icelandic characteristics would explain Iceland's success on the international front which had close relations to the representations in early twentieth century schoolbooks. These narratives can, in some respects, be seen as implicit with notions of whiteness, stressing Iceland's original population of

Norwegian Vikings; but not fully, as they stress the Icelandic population as being superior to their neighboring populations (Loftsdóttir, 2012c). This emphasis however, in the light of increased plurality of the origin of Icelandic citizens was exclusionary. Public debates concerning multicultural society in Iceland were often predicated on the notion that Iceland was exempt from colonialism and its racist ideologies. Therefore, racist terms and even jokes were often seen as neutral within the Icelandic context, as well as a normative assumption of Icelandic-ness involving white bodies (Loftsdóttir, 2013). The complex, and not always fully obvious, entanglement of whiteness with notions of nationhood and belonging in a Western space were also indicated in peacekeeping discourses in Iceland. The emphasis on ‘rescuing’ women in war situations in Afghanistan often took central stage without any public acknowledgement of the greater political context in which this took place. These images were easily comparable with other Western civilization missions of white men rescuing black women from their own countrymen (Björnsdóttir, 2011; Loftsdóttir, 2012c).

During the years of economic prosperity in Iceland in the 2000s, large private firms frequently donated considerable sums of money to NGOs, which was subsequently discussed positively in the media. As elsewhere in Europe, marketing campaigns of NGOs and multilateral organizations characterize the Icelandic devopscape. These marketing campaigns seem to fit well with a current neoliberal emphasis on commercial markets as a preferable solution to global poverty (Roy, 2010), emphasizing also the moral subject previously discussed. It should be noted here that narratives of Icelandic individuals going to far away places in the name of international development have been popular themes in Icelandic newspapers and journals, revolving around the personal experience of the person involved as well as stressing her identity as an Icelander. More recently, such narratives have been supplemented by campaigns by different organizations. ABC International, an Icelandic NGO established in 1988 focusing on assisting children in developing countries, has been visible in the Icelandic devopscape, prominently displaying posters, and newspaper advertisements. They have been highly aggressive in their marketing strategies, including advertising on chocolate bars and on ice buckets with free ice-cubes available in supermarkets (Figures 1 and 2). Most of these advertisements feature black children’s faces,



Figure 1. On Saturday afternoon I went to two shops with my daughter Alexía. Both of them had collection boxes by ABC.

eagerly looking into the camera. In addition to selling items such as Christmas cards and T-shirts, the national UNICEF⁸ committee in Iceland uses celebrities for fundraising purposes and to advertise its cause. They frequently invite celebrities to particular countries and the celebrity then reports on the trip in the media. In Iceland, the singer Páll Óskar Hjálmtýsson visited Sierra Leone in 2011 to advertise the cause of UNICEF. He spoke about his experiences in Icelandic newspapers and on television. In addition to emphasizing poverty and the important role of UNICEF in Iceland in improving the lives of impoverished children, he also strongly emphasized how much the trip had affected him personally (Páll Óskar annar maður eftir Afríku, 2011).



Figure 2. Funding campaign of ABC.

This corresponds to Goudge's (2003, pp. 15–16) analysis of recruiting booklets for an international aid organization in the USA, where the leaflets highlighted international development as a way of changing the lives of the development worker.

Furthermore, the use of celebrities and the sale of various consumer items for fundraising purposes has a strong neoliberal message encoded within it that encourages people to solve the development 'problem' through increased consumption. This allows people to comfortably ignore questions of how global inequality and poverty are directly linked to the production of cheap commodities for western markets that are manufactured under intolerable labor conditions (Ponte et al., p. 313). The lack of critical engagement with discussions about racism allows individuals to understand poverty and marginalization as racialized, and to affirm whiteness as a natural marker of Western-ness or Icelandic-ness rather than a privilege due to historically established racism. The care of 'strangers' that Bornstein and Redfield (2010a, p. 4) point out so strongly prioritized in contemporary media is, thus, generally the care of a white stranger. In such a light, being white is associated with moral humanity, which Icelanders become part of. With an increase in the number of Icelanders with an immigrant background, images of white Icelandic bodies – often engulfed by groups of thankful black people – can enhance the association of whiteness with Icelandic-ness.

International development organizations can still contest such images. The NGO *Hjálparstofnun Kirkjunnar* has historically been high-profile in popularizing international development in Iceland, being established as early as 1970. Their recent ads clearly reflect a self-reflexive stand. They juxtapose people from the poorest parts of the world with their Icelandic counterparts, contrary to the older ads where the audience is invited to gaze at the impoverished child alone. One of these posters features a familiar image of a black child carrying firewood but photoshopped into an everyday Icelandic context, thus affirming the child as part of the same reality while starkly pointing out the different conditions of living. Another ad from the same campaign (not all of them involve children) depicts a small girl with a large water container, who is placed in a picture of Icelandic (camera) children playing at a preschool. The Icelandic children all look away from the viewer at something else, while she looks directly into the eyes of the person looking at the photograph. Contrary to many others, these advertisements seem to draw attention to inequality and strikingly different living conditions Figure 3.

The unintended consequences of the recent popularization of international development is that it strengthens the conceptions of the poor black subject and a white Icelandic one that expresses his or her commitment to common humanity through consumption. What makes such images especially problematic is the lack of acknowledgement of racism or structural relationships between different parts of the world. As such, these images perpetrate old ideas of black versus white, recreating Icelandic notions that engagement in international development affirms their membership as belonging with the Western moral subject acting on behalf of humanity.

Experiencing whiteness in international development

It is interesting to see how international development was experienced by those acting in its name, i.e. Icelanders, who simultaneously shape the Icelandic devopscape and are shaped by it. As indicated earlier, it is difficult to claim that those working in international development in Iceland are part of a particularly privileged group in Iceland in terms of social or economic background. All of those interviewed would still have been socially classified as white, which was not a factor



Figure 3. Advertisement by Hjalparstofnun Kirkjunnar. Reprinted with the kind permission of the Icelandic Church Aid (Hjalparstofnun Kirkjunnar).

in selecting people to interview. The predominance relatively of whiteness within this sector in Iceland historically can possibly be explained by low levels of immigration until quite recently. The majority of those interviewed however, had not reflected much on their own position as ‘white’ westerners, even though they used the terms ‘white’ and ‘black’. Whiteness is not usually consciously reflected upon by those who are socially classified as ‘white’ (Hartigan, 1997), which is consistent with what I have noted in other research on Icelandic racialized ideas (Loftsdóttir, 2013). As I show in the following discussion, international development creates space that appears to many of these individuals as both apolitical and unracialized, while others attempt to contest and critique their allocation within it.

At the beginning of the interviews, most emphasized that they had a good relationship with local people in the countries they worked in while not giving indication of any self-reflection on the differences of power between them, and to those their work was directed. However, when I inquired further about the relationships established during their work in ‘developing countries’ very few people seemed to have established relationships that they saw as friendships. It was evident that most people had, for the most part, associated with other Icelanders and sometimes with others from the international aid community. Even though this was more likely to be the case with people with shorter field experience, it also applied to those who had more extensive experience. The majority of women talked to (who were generally much more open in the interviews and, as earlier stated, greater in numbers) expressed a deep sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with these relationships, of which they inadvertently found themselves a part. They did not, however, in the majority of cases, frame these sentiments as being connected to unequal power relationships and racism, but rather as more neutral ‘loneliness’. Ólöf, who worked for a couple of years for her agency in an African country, thus tells me that she did not get to know anyone. She says very honestly: ‘That was really the worst thing about staying; you know I was just so lonely. I just got to know myself really well!’ Another woman, Krístrún, articulates a similar sentiment when speaking of distance between her and those who were supposed to benefit from her work. She stresses the importance of these individuals to her and her desire to have a different kind of relationship, while not clearly reflecting on racism or historically constituted inequalities. Similar ideas are broached by another woman with an extensive development experience in different countries when she explains that in spite of a positive experience and good relationship with those her work was directed at, she never managed to create a real friendship. She elaborates

that even though she went to people's houses and was invited to social gatherings, she never felt she had a real friend. These sentiments overlapped with the fact that often, when people spoke openly about the power relationship between them and those their work was directed at, it was without any critical reflection on how that relationship was situated in an historical and contemporary context. Rather, the reference was more along the lines of the local people not understanding that 'we' were just like them: the term 'we' supposedly referring to white Icelanders. For these individuals, their lived experience as working in the name of international development within highly racialized and hierarchal relationships in terms of economic wealth and power, probably conflicted with their ideas of themselves as acting humanitarian subjects, doing good things for vulnerable others, as Fassin writes (2010, p. 37). The idea of international development as un-political works toward making the issue of power invisible (Ferguson, 1994), thus further muddling the inherent dynamics of power between those who deliver aid and those supposed to receive it. The Icelanders thus experienced themselves as positioned in a particular racialized discourse and, to quote Edward Bruner, as being 'allocated a space within it' (2005, p.70). The space positions white and black individuals in a particular way and structures the relationships between them.

Few of those interviewed, however, approached the matter strikingly differently and harshly criticized the colonial history and racialization that shaped their relationships in the countries in which they were working. Some specifically mentioned the international community of expatriates and people engaged in international development. For example, as Aðalheiður puts it: 'It becomes a certain group; internationalists who go from one country to another, often they have no roots anywhere'. She adds: 'you come to a cocktail party and they start telling stories about their cook. And how . . . how should I explain this . . . the gardener, and are complaining and whining, and you almost say: What the hell are you doing here? Why don't you just go back home?' A similar view is expressed by Þór, who talks about his experience of seeing people drink and party without any regard to local culture, spending time in coffee houses and brothels, furthermore adding that some seemed to have no goal other than 'collecting countries.' He described a UN meeting in the country where he was staying by saying: 'I felt bad after having just been in the same house as these people, . . . the drivers waited in the cars for the people coming out really drunk.'

Those who offered this critical view of the broader international community were also much more critical of their own subjectivities. They directly addressed the importance of colonialism and whiteness to their development experiences and their frustration about being boxed within these identities, thus feeling no less positioned in a particular way from the categories black and white. Maria reflected upon this, stating that even though she lived in the country for a long time, ‘this’ – referring to her skin color – ‘was something you never get rid of.’ These individuals expressed frustration with being unable to transcend these relationships, many telling me that they believed in the goals of development while feeling deeply frustrated by a racialized global order.

Also of interest in these interviews in the context here was a shift by some from a sense of isolation to a sense of sameness. The sense of isolation was associated with personal relationships and the lived experiences in the field, as earlier discussed. The sense of sameness did not, however, derive most strongly from globalized discourse of universal humanity (as discussed by Feldman & Ticktin, 2010) but in some cases from abstract notions of Iceland sharing past conditions with present-day Africa. This was exemplified in statements about how Iceland was a ‘primitive country’ not so long ago, as one individual phrased it. Another man explained that Icelanders themselves had to go through a process of modernization in only a few decades; a process which occurred in other western nations over several hundred years. This view was also elaborated on by Oddný in her interview with me: ‘I see better and better how Icelanders are really similar to Africa. It is not such a long time ago that we were in similar circumstances so it is often easier for us to identify with their conditions and understand their conditions than someone who comes from New York or something.’ These viewpoints echo those claims made in connection to Iceland seeking a seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2009–2010. At the time, the application for a seat on the council was spoken about by leading politicians as connected to Iceland once being a poor colony, which had then become one of the richest countries in the world. In relation to this application, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2007 stated that Icelanders can ‘assist former colonies in Africa, remembering that we were a colony ourselves and a developing country until the mid-twentieth century . . . It is unique in the West that a country as wealthy as Iceland does not want to take responsibility’ (Gísladóttir, 2007a; see also Gísladóttir, 2007b).

Discussion and conclusion

The story about my son at the beginning of this article reflects that international development is one means for individuals to learn to recognize themselves as white individuals, that is being interpellated by such discourses (as suggested by Althusser's (1972) use of the concept of 'interpellation'). By reading the text about African subjects being saved by white people and replying dutifully to the questions, to some extent my son was unknowingly learning the meaning of racial categories, as well as learning to understand his own subjectification and recognition as a white individual within them. Early on, international development seemed to constitute a powerful way to mobilize people globally, as reflected in the *Freedom from Hunger* campaign in Iceland, engaging with identity and affects. As the preceding discussion showed, this discussion was organized around racialized subjects. In Iceland, it was probably consistent with longstanding desires to be acknowledged as part of the civilized progressive world, as well as explaining global relationships between different parts of the world. Even though early international development in Iceland created an association between the idea of blackness and underdevelopment, it was also entangled with ideas of civilization, and the identity of the Icelandic nation. The neoliberalization of aid, where people donate money to different projects through the consumption of (even luxury) products obfuscates, rather than clarifies, issues concerning global inequality. In Iceland, such practices have been embedded with notions of Icelanders as having an important role to play in the world.

Importantly, international development creates a sense of racialized spatial organization in the world. Although this racialization is not the goal, it still constitutes an unintended outcome. Aid, just like immigration to Europe and North America, is linked to historical structures and connections rooted in colonialism. The global flows of mobility which aid and immigration involve are seldom spoken about in connection to each other (Loftsdóttir, 2012c, p. 50). As Steve Garner (2007) has pointed out, the categories of mobility which Schengen⁹ is based on overlaps with distinctions of geography and class. Furthermore, it can be seen as racialized in the sense of clearly distinguishing rights on the lines of predominantly European white and Third World non-white factors (2007, p. 69). On the other hand, expatriates and others working in relation to international development, along with others moving from the global south to the global north (such as tourists, academics etc.), represent a more privileged mobility. The term expatriate, as Pauline Leonard points out, is usually used to refer to 'privilege – . . . well paid members of the

professorial middle classes; and whiteness' (Leonard, 2010, p. 6). Also, as scholars have shown there are links between ideas of 'humanity', humanitarian aid and the moral subject in the West.

This discussion has attempted to show that racialization in Iceland or other Nordic countries does not only take place through discourses of blackness as the American model often implies, nor only in relation to immigration. Global ideas of humanitarianism and international development are important for creating racial subjectivities, within which Icelanders learn to recognize themselves, as well as intersecting with older anxieties of belonging with sovereign northern European nations. It is often difficult to untangle ideas of whiteness from such ideas of belonging, as well as ideas of Icelandic exceptionalism. By only focusing on racialization in relation to immigration we can perpetuate the idea that racism is a recent phenomenon starting with 'multiculturalism', when in fact it is a part of much wider processes embedded in different spheres of society. Contrary to what is widely thought in Iceland, Iceland is not exceptional in how subjects are racialized. It involves a similar process to what can be seen elsewhere, shaped by similar global discourses, even though it takes on a particular texture in Iceland. Racialization is an affective process entangled with particular views of nation states, as well as affects being important in maintaining and securing racialization as entwined with humanitarianism. The construction of spaces where 'whiteness' interlinking with power does not have to be reflected on resonates well with Icelandic self-perceptions as belonging outside the history of colonialism.

Some Icelanders in this research, however, felt uncomfortable within that space. Even though ultimately 'believing' in the objectives of development, they felt frustrated with their own subjectification as 'white', and the inability of international aid to deal with global inequalities. Assigning people into certain racial groups was usually not reflected on in any critical way by most participants, which reflects how they found racialization a natural process. The failure of some to see racism as a key factor in their relationships in the field made their experience confusing and frustrating. For these people, the developscope thus becomes ironically a global space where white privileges can be safely exercised without having to be reflected on critically.

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Notes

1. A primary concern expressed by many was not to be recognized, and thus all names are pseudonyms. The development community in Iceland is not numerous, which means I give scant background information.
2. While international development is usually seen as involving response to more immediate crisis, while development involves long-term goals, the boundaries between these two fields of engagement have been blurred. The difference however, is not relevant for this article.
3. A critical focus on discourses in relation to international development has been criticized for failing to recognize the disjuncture between policies of international development and actual practices (Mosse, 2004). This criticism importantly identifies development as an inconsistent project comprised of different actors in different positions, pointing out the need for a more nuanced analysis focusing on actual individuals engaged in the development encounter.
4. In some sense the idea of the ‘developscape’ is similar to the term ‘Aidland’ (for example Fechter & Hindman, 2011, pp. 2–3) which also attempts to capture the materiality of international development as lived and embodied practices, but I see ‘developscape’ as more useful in drawing attention to how international development interlinks the world in particular ways.
5. This narrative was revived in the context of economic boom years even though articulated slightly differently (Loftsdóttir, 2010b).
6. In Icelandic: “Some multilateral and non-governmental (NGO) engagements had taken place earlier” (Loftsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2010).
7. In Icelandic: “[V]ið Íslendingar erum þess vel megnugir að senda hóp ungra, sérþjálfaðra manna til að taka þátt í því víðtæka og göfuga starfi að kenna og hjálpa vanmáttugum að hjálpa sér sjálfir. – Þó svo að sú hjálp sé vanþróuðum ríkjum hvað mikilvægust og undirstöðumest, gæti íslenzkur æskulýður að sama skapi áorkað miklu með víðtækum söfnunum undir kjörorðinu ‘herferð gegn hungri’ því að hver er svo innrættur að hann vilji ekki leggja hönd á plóginn þegar um er að tefla líf eða dauða lítilla, saklausra barna, þó af öðrum litarhætti séu og í fjarlægum löndum búi”

8. See note 6 above.
9. The EU immigration policies are initiated through Schengen, Iceland being a member of Schengen.

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