# BEING "THE DAMNED FOREIGNER":

## *Affective National Sentiments and Racialization of Lithuanians in Iceland*

**Abstract**
The discussion draws from recent writing on the meaning of 'whiteness' in the Nordic countries, emphasizing the importance to understand racialization in different localities. Racism is entangled with affective meanings related to discourse of the nation, furthermore, as shaped by global discourses and class. The discussion exemplifies this in the context of migrants from Lithuania in Iceland, demonstrating how they become racialized in Iceland during the boom period in the early 2000s.

Kristín Loftsdóttir*

University of Iceland, Iceland

## Introduction

In this article, I talk about racism in a Nordic context by focusing on Iceland. I emphasize racism as engaging with historical and global racist practices and images that are simultaneously produced within particular local subjectivities and histories. Thus, they are embedded in other affective meanings that are not necessarily racialized themselves (Gullestad 2005); focusing on the affect points to how emotions 'work' in particular ways and assign individuals to social spaces, or, 'align individuals within communities' (Ahmed 2004: 119). The affective aligning individuals within communities means that we have to look carefully at how these communities are created. I focus especially here on the experiences of migrants from Lithuania in Iceland, which during particular historical circumstances became racialized in Iceland. This racialization still drew from a historical positioning of Eastern Europe as not fully 'European' (Buchowski 2006). The discussion also stresses the concept 'innocence' as important in Icelandic perceptions of their relationship to the rest of the world (Loftsdóttir 2014a). This has been seen as one of key components in Nordic self-perception in relation to colonialism (Gullestad 2005; Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Svendsen 2014). 'Innocence' involves essentially the separation of racism from specific historical processes and indicates the importance of affectivity for deeper understandings of the persistence of racialized discourses (Loftsdóttir 2014a).

The first part of the paper focuses on the complexities in understanding affective and to some extent localized meanings of racism simultaneously, so as not losing sight of the globalized characteristics of racism. I then discuss how in the first decade of a new millennium, the figure of the 'Eastern' European became an important part of Icelandic racism. Interviews with Lithuanian migrants show how they became racialized within specific historical conditions where there was a strong emphasis on 'cheap'[1] disposable work force. This racism emerging in Iceland in a new millennium tapped into persistent historical notions in wider Europe of Eastern European subjects as not 'fully' European; as Europe's internal 'others' (Kalnačs 2016; Buchowski 2006), or as 'less mature' political subjects as phrased by Dace Dzenovska (2013), referring to articulation of such ideas in the present. I then stress on the importance of claims toward 'innocence' in Iceland and how they relate to affective historical understandings, as well as indicating how racism needs to be contextualized within class in a neoliberal economy.

Here, I use data from several research projects that have been primarily based on interviews and media analysis that all inform the perspective set forward. The primary set of data was gathered in relation to the Icelandic Identity in Crisis project[2] and included interviews with 18 individuals from Lithuania in 2012 and 2014 and 13 individuals from Latvia during the same period. Most of these individuals arrived in 2006 and 2007 or earlier. After careful reading of the interviews, key themes were identified, the content of the interviews was analysed with the assistance of the *Atlas.ti* program and then interviews read over again. While these interviews were the most significant data for analysis, my perspectives are also informed by interviews conducted between 2010-2012 in relation to the republication of children's book (entitled Negrastrákarnir) that

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caused intense debates in Icelandic society. Of those interviewed, 27 were 'white' Icelanders without immigration background and 22 'black'[3] individuals from diverse African countries (with the exception of one woman from the US). These interviews involved discussions around new migrants in general in Iceland and were analysed through content analysis, partly using Atlas.ti. Also, in relation to the debate, a media analysis was conducted on blog discussions and media debates, especially in 2007 and 2008. Discussions of Lithuanians often collides with discussion of Polish migrants (as the largest migrant group in Iceland), as both nationalities stood at the time strongly for the 'Eastern-European'. Thus, the analysis also concerns partly the depiction of Polish subjects, based primarily on secondary literature.

## Theorizing Racism and Affect

As racism is seen now as socially unacceptable, the concepts culture and religion have increasingly been used as substitutes for the concept race (Balibar 1991). This particular configuration of racism in the present, often referred to as 'new-racism' or 'neo-racism', points towards the flexibility of racism and the difficulties in defining the concept. Racialization has, furthermore, always involved the conflation of cultural and biological arguments, and racism based on 'old' racist categorization centred on 'blackness' is still salient (Harrison 2002), while ethnicity also continues to be racialized (Brah 2000: 281). Based on his experience from the Holocaust during the Second World War, Zygmunt Bauman (2000) describes racism as intrinsically revolving around the systematic categorization of socially defined groups. For Bauman, some groups are seen as incompatible with modernity, with ideas of separate races intrinsically connected with wider discourses of modern society. Somewhat similarly, more recently Ramon Grosfoguel, Laura Oso and Anastasia Christou (2015) define racism as 'global hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority', which is produced politically, culturally and economically (p. 636). To Grosfoguel et al. (2015, 636), this open definition of racism allows for the conceptualization of different kinds of racism, which responds to criticism of many scholars that the Anglo-American experiences have been too dominant in theorizing racism. Here particularly, scholars criticize the prioritization of the binaries of black and white in theorizing racism, seeing it as limited in the European context (Ponzanesi and Blaagaard 2011: 6). As a racial categorization, whiteness constitutes a part of the racist system and is as the other racist categorizations historically negotiated (Hartigan 1997). Being 'white' is thus not inherent, nor are certain populations naturally white, but whiteness constitutes rather a category that populations can move in and out of during the process of racialization (Bonnett 1998: 1045; Fox *et al.* 2012). Furthermore, seeing racism as a part of affect suggests how race centred thinking involves constructing subjectivity where, as phrased by Steve Garner (2010), in a certain historical and societal context 'race' becomes meaningful (p. 19). To stress affect in relation to racism can not only assist with understanding racism in nuanced historical settings, but also make more visible – as importantly argued by Black American feminists (Tomlinson 2013) – intersections of racialization with other identities and subject positions (Staunæs 2003). Within the Nordic countries, racialized notions of whiteness have been seen as particularly important in local understandings of nationhood and belonging within the nation (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012), where claims to 'innocence' are based on affective views of the nation and interpretation of its history. The histories of racism, colonialism and imperialism are thus often rendered invisible in the Nordic context and consequently, as

insignificant in the present. While this creates in effect the same results as the post-racism discourse that can be detected in the UK and US (see Lentin 2014), it secures a position of innocence of Nordic populations toward the larger historical processes that continue to shape dynamics and their positions of power in the present.

However, the emphasis of local meanings of racialization risks giving racism a relative position and to reduce it to localized responses to difference, in which both the global perspective as well as the placement of racism within the historical roots of European colonialism and imperialism is ignored. This becomes particularly acute due to the need to confront persistent notions of Nordic exceptionalism in the present, rather than to confirm it (Svendsen 2014: 22). Here, it is useful to refer to the scholars' writings in relation to globalization in general and their emphasis on the same, while meanings are domesticated in particular localities, these understanding are always embedded in globalized contexts (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). The fact that different nationalities become a part of the same global mediascape (Appadurai 1991), means that racialization – even though analysed from particular localized contexts – has to be recognized as always and already embedded in conversation with larger, global histories, including mediascapes in which texts and images move not only between different localities but also times and contexts. Today, culture industries with a strong footing in the Global South play, for example, an important role in distributing and shaping discourses on race in the Nordic countries as elsewhere.

Also, Europe is not a monolithic construction but a dynamic one, in which there are intersecting histories of differently positioned subjects with intrinsic power dynamics existing within the space of Europe. Europe continues to be evoked as the cradle of civilization, equality and modernity (Lewis 2006: 88), while imperialism and colonialism's role in creating this modernity is safely hidden, indicating an affective notion within the construction of Europe. It has to be critically asked what people and what kinds of bodies become defined as 'proper' Europeans, and what bodies are excluded? As indicated earlier, the Eastern European states have regularly been approached as Europe's 'internal others', (Kalnačs 2016), with undeveloped European subjects (Dzenovska 2010). The migrants from Eastern Europe were in the 2000s often presented as the main threat to the imaginary space of Europe alongside differently constituted 'others' such as Muslims, refugees and asylum seekers (Fassin 2011), which shows how racialization of different populations overlaps at certain times in line with Grosfoguel et al.'s (2015) assertion of racism as involving hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority.

## Creating Multicultural Society in Iceland

The escalating boom period in Iceland in the mid-1990s led to a massive economic crash in 2008. Importantly, the boom has still stimulated a more globally integrated Iceland and increased mobility to and from the country. While some globalized transformations were largely celebrated in Iceland, such as the introduction of a more unified financial system, international fast food companies and the submission unto various international agreements, some Icelanders were concerned that labour migration to the country would change Icelandic society. Even though the myth of uniformed and homogenous society prior to this time has no basis in reality, migration during this time still created an important break from earlier periods in which migration to the country had been relatively low. In the beginning of 20th century, Iceland was populated by only about 80,000 people who shared a common language. Additionally, the strong sense of intimacy

fostered by this smallness was intensified by the fact that as late as in the mid-1990s, 95% of Icelandic citizens had parents with Icelandic origin. Further, those migrating to Iceland prior to the 1990s came predominantly from other Nordic countries (Hagstofa Íslands 2009). Even so, in Iceland, they were conceptualized as 'foreigners' while also representing to many as bringing superior technology and modernity. Iceland's subjugation under the Danish rule until 1944 and the shared poverty among majority of the population probably enhanced the sense of intimacy. Danes were, as argued by Christina Folke Ax, instrumental in 'defining foreignness' in Iceland, with Denmark ambiguously both an opponent in the struggle for self-determination and representing education and modernity (Folke Ax 2009: 13-15; see also Rastrick 2013), positioning Iceland as a post-colony to some extent. In 19th and beginning of 20th century, Icelandic intellectuals uncritically reproduced the racist imaginary from wider European discourses but such ideas engaged within Iceland's own position within global hierarchies (Loftsdóttir 2012a). The racist discourses of 'savage' others did not, thus, revolve around creating a 'black' and 'white' binary but more concern with positioning Iceland as a nation alongside other sovereign nations that should have full sovereignty in line with other European nations (Loftsdóttir 2012a). The salience of the category foreigner in Iceland reflects as well how Icelandic history has been interpreted as a struggle with different 'foreign' powers (Hálfdánarson, 1994: 97) that continues to be important in explaining historical processes in the present (Loftsdóttir 2014a).

During the economic boom, the number of migrants to the country grew rapidly from less than 2% prior to mid-1990s to 9% in 2009. In 1994, Iceland became a part of the mutual European labour market when it joined the European Economic Area (EEA). Iceland also joined the Schengen agreement regarding Europe's external borders in 2001, and subsequently, Icelandic immigration laws changed in 2002. This facilitated the entrance of citizens of those countries that were a part of the Schengen into Iceland, while access to others continued to be restricted (Skaptadóttir, Eydal and Sigurðardóttir 2012: 236-238). In 2006, new European Union members from Eastern Europe gained access to the Icelandic labour market, which coincided with an acute need in Iceland for more labour power due to large industrial projects and a booming construction industry (Skaptadóttir 2015: 176). Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir's (2015) extensive analysis of transnational migration to Iceland suggests that the majority of migrants came from Poland, and the migration to Iceland in general during this time was mostly driven by high wages in comparison those in their countries of origin. High wages in Iceland and gendered divisions of labour in home countries of migrants may explain, to some extent, the large percent of male migrants to the Iceland in this time. However, with increased difficulties of people from outside the EEA to access the Icelandic labour market, most of those who came from the countries that were not a part of the EEA arrived to join the families who had already settled in Iceland (Skaptadóttir 2015: 177).

During the boom period, migrants were defined primarily as 'labour' and thus were reduced to the phrase 'foreign labour power' (*vinnuafl*) in Icelandic policy and public discourse (Skaptadóttir 2015: 179). Their predominance in low-skilled jobs should not be taken as reflecting their education. Research shows a disparity between the education of workers from Eastern Europe and the work available to them (Parutis 2011a). However, when it became evident that some people came to stay, the primary concern of the government was how 'they' (the migrants) would 'adapt' to Icelandic society (Rice 2007: 430). The symbolic icon of 'the foreigner' became 'the' Eastern European in low paying jobs, reflected in a 2011 study that showed that 43% of all foreigners in Iceland were from Poland, with

Lithuanians constituting the second largest group at 8%. Even though prejudice against Muslims was certainly evident in Iceland at the time (see Loftsdóttir 2012b), they generally did not stand as symbolic 'others' possibly as they were few in numbers and somewhat invisible in Icelandic society at the time. This would change with increased numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the second decade of the new millennium.

Giving a somewhat more nuanced reading of the creation of the 'faceless foreigner', one of the first signs of changing mobilities in Iceland was the building of the massive hydroelectric power plant, Kárahnjúkavirkun, starting in 2003. Predominantly male foreign workers came through subcontractors (starfsmannaleigur) with the Icelandic labour unions expressing deep concern over their living conditions, salaries and apparent lack of rights. While these concerns were to some extent taken up by the wider Icelandic society, they were not prioritized by the Icelandic government (Jóhannesson et al 2010: 228). The booming building industry also required 'labour,' and the industrial neighbourhoods in Reykjavík and the neighbouring municipality housing became, in some cases transformed into sleeping spaces for foreign workers (Sindradóttir and Júlíusdóttir 2008: 8). Occasionally, advertisements could be seen for rental apartments 'well suited' to host 'Poles'. Such adds implied that these bodies needed *different* accommodation than others, or as phrased by one Icelandic woman, it reduces them to 'tools' that are put in 'storage during the evening' (Magnúsar- Völudóttir 2006). To a large part of the Icelandic population, men in working clothes became visible in the first half of 2000s as walking alongside heavy traffic roads holding plastic bags from low budget grocery stores on the way to the industrial areas where they stayed. Ample job opportunities attracted migrants from other parts of the world including a growth in numbers of people from African countries that still constituted a very low minority of migrants and were, as such, not really a topic of wide discussion in Icelandic society. However, the movements of populations from African countries were, as for other non-Schengen populations, strongly restricted and those arriving from these countries mainly came as students or due to close relationships to an Icelanders, rather than as migrant workers (Loftsdóttir 2014b).

The negative discussions about immigrants in general in Icelandic society became particularly intense in 2006 and 2007. The rise of the now non-existent centre-right conservative liberal political party, Liberal Party (*Frjálslyndi flokkurinn)*, well known for its anti-immigration attitudes (Wojtynska, Skaptadóttir and Ólafs 2011)[4] reflected both the fruitful environment for such discussion and its intensification through the party's discussions. This wider societal discussion was also probably the result of increased visibility of migrants in Iceland and growing realization that they were becoming a part of the Icelandic society. In 2008, the web-based *Society Against Poles* in Iceland was created, apparently by a 14-year-old boy, who received within few days 700 supporters to the page, most of whom were Icelandic youth (Vísir, 2008). The creation of the website stressed even further the creation of a specific community as dangerous to the Icelandic society, that is, the emotional positioning of Icelandic subject as possibly 'damaged by the "invasion" of others' (Ahmed 2004: 118). The creation of the society caused a strong reaction and was taken down soon after, but was probably for many an eye opener regarding the existence of racism against Polish people in the Icelandic society.

Simultaneously, as this new conception of the foreigner became solidified in the boom period, the Icelandic subject was strongly advocated for in the Icelandic media and by leading politicians and social commentators who focused on Icelanders as descending

from Vikings, with resilience and creativity that was perceived to be unprecedented by other national populations. Thus, the iconic image of 'the' Icelander became that of a white, masculine body of the businessman (Loftsdóttir 2015a). The characteristics of the Icelandic nation were thus at the forefront of Icelandic discussions at that time. Not only was this discourse exclusionary in terms of emphasizing bloodline, but created an affective sense of the different roles that existed in varied nationalist bodies within the processes of globalization, assigning in Ahmed's sense (2004), individuals within particular communities. The negative and often dehumanizing portrayal of 'the' Eastern European as the racialized other can thus be contextualized within the long-standing Icelandic desire acknowledge themselves as fully European, and thus, to completely shed away their colonial past. The Polish and Lithuanian subjects became, in a sense, multivocal symbols. They all at once symbolized what was perceived to be 'wrong' or negative for Iceland with more global integration, that is, organized crime activities and prostitution. They naturalized that that some nationals have disadvantaged status within the global economy as a low income labour force; and finally became almost as a counter image to Icelanders as symbolizing how 'far' Icelanders had been able to reach on hierarchal ladder of better and inferior nation states.

After the economic crash, interest in migration and multicultural society reduced considerably, as reflected in the reduction of media discussions on such issues (Wojtynska, Skaptadóttir and Ólafs 2011). Many Icelanders became economic migrants in Norway. Some explained Iceland's marginalization within Europe by referring to their position in Norway as the same as Poles in Iceland before the crash but also, as shown by Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir (2014), other Icelandic migrants in Norway tried to position themselves as 'better' migrants than those of other nationalities. Anti-immigration sentiment, however, did not seem to rise considerably after the crash, even though some migrants in Iceland did find increased hostility (Skaptadóttir's 2010; Wojtyńska and Zielińska 2010: 8). Suvi Keskinen's (2013: 226) uses the phrase '"worrying" about the nation', to capture discourse characterized by concern with migration to the country, its consequences, as well as critical reference to those seen as welcoming all migrants. Such discourses have continued in Iceland, but people from Poland and Lithuania are no longer the primary topics as they were during the time of the interviews and prior to the crash, with the focus moving more strongly on refugees and asylum seekers. Thus, very likely, the racialization of individuals is different in the present than when the interviews were taken.

In sharp contrast to other Nordic countries, right-wing populist parties have not been highly successful in Iceland after the crash. This is evidenced by the low success rate of the Liberal Party. However, the Progressive Party, which was elected into government with the Independence party in 2013, has flirted with anti-immigration attitudes, especially after 2014 (Bergmann 2015). Also, while a new Nationalist-populist party was created for the elections of 2016, it failed to get a representative elected as only receiving 0.2% of total votes.

## Lithuanians as the Racialized Other

In 2011, Lithuanians were the second largest migrant group in Iceland, at 11% of total migrants to the country. Most of those interviewed from Lithuania came to Iceland in the 2000s and worked in low-income jobs, often as a part of a considerable mass emigration from Lithuania to other European Union's countries that began in 2004 when Lithuania joined the EU. According to Charles Woolfson, the 'transition to capitalism came at a high price for many' in Lithuania

in which people experienced the change to a market system as 'coercive economic dispossession' (2010: 492).

Interviews with Lithuanians show their subject position in Iceland as primarily associated with organized crime and gang activities. Here, the affective position of Lithuanians as community that threatens Icelandic society in this particular way can work partly towards justifying or at least neutralizing their discrimination within the Icelandic labour market and treatment by majority of the society in Iceland. Victoria, who has lived in Iceland for 10 years, claims that the Icelanders' knowledge about Lithuania consists of a belief that people from Lithuania are 'criminals and that you have to be really careful, [they are] dirty and all very dark'. Similar is expressed by Povilas, when he tells that at social gatherings consisting of Icelandic men and Lithuanian, he and his friends were asked on a few occasions if they were 'let out of Litla-Hraun' (name of a prison). Dorotjéa describes that when she was working as a store clerk in a low budget grocery store, she was often asked jokingly if she sold drugs, and also, a few times how much she would cost, implying her association with organized crime and prostitution. Victoria's words quoted above, furthermore, tease out an association of Lithuanians to darkness, which can simultaneously be read as referring in physical sense and their association with something alien and dangerous. Thus, the association with darkness evokes a persistent perception during the boom period that these nationalities were physically different from the general Icelandic population. Some Icelanders even wondered if 'Poles' were a special race, and even though such speculations were perhaps simply incendiary 'trolling'.[5] They still expose the relevance of the question to Icelandic society at the time, as well as the conflation of ethnicity and race (Brah 2000: 281). In one web discussion, the question of whether Polish people were of a different 'race' was explained by the online participants as them being 'Slavic' while Icelanders were 'Germanic' (Vísir, 2008). In other countries, such as Norway and the UK, migrants from Lithuania are often stressed as 'white,' which can give them a more privileged status in the 'hierarchies of migrants' as phrased by Daukšas (2013; see also Parutis 2011b), even a 'cloak of invisibility' as phrased by some (McDowell 2008: 51). However, research in the UK has also shown that whiteness of Eastern-Europeans is not self-evident but has to be performed and claimed, and not always successfully (Erel 2011: 2063). In some communities and contexts in the UK, scholars have observed racialization of Lithuanians. Evans and Piggott's (2016) research on basketball in East of England observes, for example, the racialization of Lithuanian basketball players from UK basketball players. Similar point is made by Fox et al. (2012) when observing racialization of Eastern Europeans in the UK, as they stress how media discussions and policies can work at 'whitening' and 'darkening' certain populations (p. 692). This indicates the fluidity of the category 'white' and how it has to be contextualized historically and situationally. The references to Eastern Europeans as another race in Iceland were neither consistent nor conceptualized coherently, but they imply varied categories of bodies that can be treated differently, as well as make a meaningful distinction between inferior and superior populations. A recent popular TV series at the public television station RUV 'Trapped'[6] demonstrates the potency and ubiquity of this image of the Lithuanian as the *a priori* criminal. In one of the first episodes, the trafficking of two young women in a key subplot is carried out by a Lithuanian man who is, not surprisingly to viewers, part of an organized crime circle. His visual appearance clearly situates him as almost subhuman, with dark uncombed, greasy hair. Icelandic conflation of cultural characteristics and presumed bodily features of Polish and Lithuanian subjects is thus in

line with the historically shifting racist categorization of people. This also implies a different conceptualization of 'the' foreigner in Iceland from earlier times in which foreignness was represented as both object of admiration (through discussion of Danish modernization projects), and as danger to Iceland (Loftsdóttir 2012:601).

Greta, who has lived in Iceland during a similar period as Victoria, when asked how the Icelanders see Lithuanians, describes: 'The damned foreigner.' Her choice of words reveal her sense of objectification and the strong salience of the category 'foreigner' in Iceland and how those from Poland and Lithuania became the primary embodiment of this category. It also indicates the changes of the category 'foreigner' in the present where it continues to evoke particular emotions but does not refer to those holding more power but less within the Icelandic society. Those interviewed explained that they sometimes tried to hide where they were from. Lucas pointed out that by specifying his nationality to people, he would be 'closing' a lot of opportunities as he phrased it, meaning that his possibilities for success in society were less in terms of work and social options. Thus, he explained: 'I don't tell everyone that I am from Lithuania.' Similarly, Anna describes:

> It was like the door was slammed into our face, it was enough saying I am from Lithuania [and then I did not get work] […] I work hard, I don't care what kind of jobs I have to take. But it was sufficient just to ask me: where are you from? Lithuania. Thanks, goodbye and bye.

These views appear, however, to be new in Iceland. Skaptadóttir's (2004) earlier discussion in 2004 on Polish migration to Iceland indicates their positive experience, where those who were interviewed felt that Icelanders saw them as hard working and industrious, which was different from their experience elsewhere in Europe. As those from Poland in the early 2000s, the early Lithuanians migrating to Iceland experienced different attitudes from what they felt later when migration to the country became more extensive. In their experience, they felt that they were seen as exciting to Icelanders, especially in relation to Iceland being the first nation to acknowledge Lithuania's declaration of independence in 1991. Possibly for Icelander's at that time, this was a strong source of identifications with people from Lithuania, due to the fact that people saw themselves as receiving independence relatively recently. Some of those interviewed trace a criminal case in 2004 as a turning point in changing this neutral or positive image into one of criminality. A man from Lithuania was found murdered in one of Iceland's harbour and as the case unfolded, his involvement with organized crime in Lithuania became clear (Sigurjónsdóttir 2004). At the same time, extensive media reports of gangs and Lithuanian criminals became increasingly dominant. The analysis of the Icelandic media portrayal of migrants between 2006-2010 shows that in 2007 one third of the discussion about immigrants in Iceland was in relation to crime and police matters (Ólafs and Zielinska 2010: 77), with emphasis on crime increasing extensively between 2006 and 2007 (Wojtynska, Skaptadóttir, Ólafs 2011: 49). A report by ECRI (The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance) especially remarked on the role of media in portraying immigrants in a negative way (ECRI 2007).

The contrast of the experiences between migrants from Latvia and Lithuania also indicates that not all individuals of Eastern European origin were deflated together in one mass. Those Latvians interviewed did not feel the same sense of discrimination and prejudice, except if confused with the Lithuanians or Polish people, as several individuals pointed out. In some cases, people were asked

if they were from Poland or Lithuania and when it became apparent that they were not, the attitude became positive. The Latvian couple Ivars and Marija explained this as following:

> Ivars: First thing they [the Icelanders] ask are: are you from Poland, and I say no I am from Latvia, and they say oh, [from] Lithuania. No Latvia. Oh Latvia! Ok, that is very good.
> Marija: You are always [first] seen as from Poland, people see foreigners and they think you are from Poland […].

Marija's comment that people assume that foreigners are from Poland also indicates how Polish people have taken the stage as the embodiment of the foreigner in Iceland. When asked to confirm that it was better being from Latvia, both replied with a strong 'yes!' The similarity between Latvians and Lithuanians from an Icelandic perspective makes this difference even more striking. Latvians are only slightly fewer in Iceland, about 4% of those identified as foreign nationals (Skaptadóttir, Ólafs and Wojtynska 2011). Latvia is a small nation as Lithuania, sharing similar history of Soviet occupation. Just as with the Lithuanians, the Latvians interviewed had low-income jobs in Iceland and in both groups, the majority had come primarily in search of jobs. The striking difference between the experiences of these two groups clearly indicates the power of social discourses (and in particular, the media) in marking certain groups as different and branding them as incompatible with modernity. While Lithuanian's fall into the desirable migrant populations – with the Schengen regulations drawing almost a line between undesirable non-white and more desirable white populations (Garner 2007) –still in Iceland at the time, they were seen as a particular type of people. As has been pointed out regarding the Polish nationals, they continue to be seen as 'outsiders' in the 'EU family' (Goździak and Pawlak 2016). Here, the state policies of emphasizing 'cheap' labour, inadequate housing and failure to respond to abuse of these workers, mainly identified as Polish and Lithuanians, can facilitate the racialization of particular groups. The reference to Lithuanian's darkness or difference from Icelandic population physically, further positions them as racialized subjects.

## Racism in Iceland: Claims of innocence

While the placement of the Nordic countries as outside the space of colonialism (Keskinen *et al*. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012) has been important as self-identification, claims to innocence are, however, not limited to the Nordic countries, but exist in other European countries on similar lines (Hipfl and Gronold 2011; Purtschert 2015). Elsewhere in the global north, they become articulated as claims of post-racism, where the era of racism is conceptualized as having ended without spilling into the present (Lentin 2014). Post-racial ideas became particularly important in the U.S. with the election of Barak Obama as the president, where for some, his election symbolized that now there was a need to nurture 'white' people especially – a backlash and misunderstanding of unequal power of historic racial hierarchies in the U.S. (Lentin 2014). My research on a debate regarding the republication of a racist nursery rhyme from 1922 in 2007 indicated how the claims towards innocence in Iceland centred strongly around an image of non-colonial, and thus, a non-racist past. Such an atmosphere can make it more difficult to acknowledge racism against others and partly explains how the overt discrimination and hateful remarks to other nationalities can be seen as acceptable by those who speak to them, just as the ones encountered by the Lithuanians in Iceland

during and after the economical crash. Similarly, as Blaagaard and Andreassen (2012) observe in relation to Denmark, the present-day racism is based on forgetting, making it easier to claim in the present that certain acts have nothing to do with racism.

In Iceland, racism is more constructed as coming from the outside, penetrating the national body in the present. The discussion here has looked at racism against certain subjects who have a national background within Europe and who were apparently *not* racialized previously in Iceland, yet whose racialization is dependent strongly on class. Thus, within certain social economic conditions, the historical image of the Eastern Europeans as not fully European did gain salience in Iceland. Schengen regulations that themselves are based on intersecting categories of race and class (Garner 2007) were instrumental in making the booming Icelandic labour market accessible to precarious populations from this part of the world, rather than other precarious and racialized populations such as those from Africa. While the African migrants in Iceland have grown more numerous along with other migrant populations, they still constituted, if compared with Polish nationals and Lithuanians, a small group that is not very visible in Iceland. Also, due to Schengen, people from African countries arrive to a larger part due to their marriages to Icelandic partners or as students, rather than as 'inexpensive' labour power. While most of those interviewed from diverse African countries felt that direct racism in Iceland was not intense in contrast with their experiences elsewhere in Europe, they felt constantly racialized in the sense of being consistently aligned to a racial group. This racialization often took the form of excitement about or stereotypical ideas of what it means to be 'African' or 'black' (Loftsdóttir 2014b). Interviews with specialists working with migrants in Iceland also indicated that often Icelanders are more positive toward working with people from different African countries than, for example, Eastern Europeans, as the former were perceived as more 'exciting' (Loftsdóttir 2015b). Such association of African populations with something exotic and exciting constitutes of course a part of history of racism (Loftsdóttir 2015b) Thus, the point is thus not that the African population does not experience racism in Iceland, but that at the time of these interviews, individuals identified by majority populations as 'black' generally did not feel as marginalized as they had earlier experienced in the US or some other European countries. Rachel Simon-Kumar's (2015) discussion on intersection of class and racism in New Zealand points toward the growing complication in the intersection of class and racism within the new neoliberal economy. Simon-Kumar points out that while in the past the most desirable migrants were seen as those 'whitening the nation,' today the most desirable ones are the more educated and highly skilled (instead low-skilled). This distinction between skilled and non-skilled migrants is of course globally racialized and non-skilled workers often have education and skills that are simply not recognized. Simon-Kumar's analysis draws attention to seriously taking class into consideration, complicating the existing discussion of racial marking involving whiteness, where the 'difference *among* the raced are more pronounced' (2015: 1186; emphasis in the original). Similarly, regarding how the neoliberal economy regards the 'correct' kind of difference as a consumer orientated one, Mark Graham (2014) stresses that both queer people and British black persons of the third generation have increasingly become tokens of 'Cool Britannia' (p. 80). Here the question is not that racism and prejudice against black populations and queer people has stopped or has become less, but that it coexists with a celebration of the consumer-orientated packaging of difference. Certain kind of difference can

thus be celebrated if it involves highly skilled migrants or one is perceived as adding to the presumed multicultural landscape.

## Conclusion

The division into differentiated and hierarchal spaces of 'being' and 'non-being' (Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou 2015), or superior and inferior populations (Bauman (2000), acknowledges that marking of racial hierarchies takes place in various ways. Experiences of migrants from Lithuania during the economic boom in Iceland indicate how 'races' are constructed and made meaningful – even though inconsistently – through specific social discourses and relationships, in addition to showing how racism intersects with class and nationality. Iceland's participation in Schengen shaped from which countries a pool of inexpensive labour force could come during the country's economic boom in the 2000s. The Polish migrants and Lithuanians came to be primarily seen as low-skilled workers, and as such they represented at the time the lowest 'step' within the hierarchies of interconnected world of work and nations. Positioned in that way, the Polish migrants and Lithuanians were in a sense too similar to Icelanders to be exotic, while their perceived lack of compatibility with the Icelandic nation state also positioned them as too dissimilar. The racialization of the small African populations often in the form of excitement or celebration of difference, can be seen as positioning 'race' and 'racial differences' in general as salient and viable constructs and markers of difference, which can then more easily filter into categorization of others. However, with larger and more marginalized population of people from African countries such as asylum seekers, the sense of excitement towards people from different African countries is likely to change.

Even though this case example points out how different groups of migrants in Iceland are classified in the ambiguous group 'foreigners' and are seen as different from the general populations, it also emphasizes how this dualism intersects with certain populations within the group 'foreigner', which are then categorized as inferior in specific historical circumstances. This indicates that race should not be perceived as 'an essential trait of the migrants but the ongoing contingent outcome of these dynamic processes of racialization' (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012: 692). The aligning of individuals to socially and historically created communities during the economic boom in Iceland during the period of increased globalization indicates, furthermore, the importance of recognizing how it affects work toward (Ahmed 2004) both narrating the nations and communities of those perceived as others. In Iceland, the nationalistic narratives perceiving the Icelanders as having a unique role within the increased globalization of work in the larger world cannot thus be fully separated from equally emotional narratives that 'glue' the negative aspects of these same global processes with Polish and Lithuanian subject. The position of Lithuanians in Iceland reflects, furthermore, the importance of focusing more closely on racism within Europe as intersecting with the construction of other subject positions, as well as shaped by certain historical conditions and globalized discourses on better and inferior bodies.

**Kristín Loftsdóttir** is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Iceland. Her research focuses on postcolonialism, whiteness, gender, racial identity, mobility and crisis, specializing in Iceland and Europe. She has also conducted research on migrant work of indigenous community in Niger in West Africa and irregular migrants in Brussels. Loftsdóttir received recognition and award from the

University of Iceland for outstanding research in 2014. Loftsdóttir directs the research project 'Icelandic Identity in Crisis' funded by RANNIS – Icelandic Centre for Research, and is co-organizer of the project 'Mobilities and Transnational Iceland' that received grant of Excellence funded by RANNÍS.

## Notes

1.  I use the provocative word 'cheap' intentionally as it reflects a certain discussion where human beings are often referred to in this way. I place the term within quotation marks to draw attention to that no labour is in fact inexpensive. The social costs are in most cases carried by the workers themselves.

2.  The funding for this project was received from Rannís - The Icelandic Center for Resarch (130426-051). The finalizing of the article took place within the Project of Excellence funded by Rannís in 2016 (163350-051).
3.  The concepts 'black' and 'white' here are used to refer to social categorization arising in particular historical context.
4.  The party was originally created to protest fisheries policies by the Icelandic government, but in 2006 the party started mobilizing anti-immigration rhetoric (Bergmann 2015). In parliamentary elections after the crash in 2009 it lost all its seats at the parliament.
5.  Trolling on the world wide web is when individuals consciously express particular non-mainstream views to get others to react.
6.  Ófærð in Icelandic.

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