7 The dissemination of Vikings

Postcolonial contexts and economic meltdown

Sigríður Guðmarsdóttir

During the first years of the new millennium, the Icelandic banking system grew rapidly and was boosted by the risk-seeking confidence of financial tycoons. The financial tycoons were nicknamed *útrásarvíkingar*, that is, “Outvasion Vikings”. Instead of the violent invasions of the Vikings of yore, these new Vikings represented themselves as leading peaceful conquests, “outvasions” into the global market. In 2008, the three main banks of Iceland suffered an economic meltdown. The news was mediated to the nation by a national address on the television by Iceland’s prime minister.

We were all watching, gathered round TV sets and computers screens in our workplace, in cafés and at home on that misty afternoon. It was not just that this sophisticated and usually perfectly composed man seemed shaken but that he concluded his unique address by asking God to bless Iceland. This is when we knew we were in serious trouble.¹

The downward spiral of the Icelandic economy has deeply affected the living standards of Icelanders, and simultaneously opened up the potential for complex cultural identities. Eiríkur Bergmann has described the boom as a “postcolonial project”² and the meltdown as a political crisis that was “simultaneously a crisis in capitalism and a crisis of national identity”.³ Bergmann maintains that “the enthusiastic behaviour of the outvasion Vikings and the widespread, almost cheerleading acceptance of their endeavours at home must be explained in relation to Iceland’s history and through its post-colonial national identity”.⁴

Homi K. Bhabha envisioned (with a little help from Jacques Derrida) that instead of looking at the scattered peoples on the margins of cultures and societies as dispersed crowds, they might be seen as a “gathering” in their own right, a “dissemiNation” as it were. Bhabha argues for the complexity of discursive strategies of cultural identification which form identity as a nation, or as a people, and “make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives”.⁵ This chapter takes its cue from Bhabha’s pun of dissemiNation as a disseminal identity and probes the literary devices and contexts that formulate a national identity as “Viking identity”.

The chapter reads and interprets the economic meltdown of the Icelandic economy and its aftermath through the lenses of contextual theology. If Bergmann is right (and I think he is) that the postcolonial context must be taken into account in understanding the economic bubble and its aftermath, this contextual theological approach needs some help from postcolonial and poststructuralist theory and theology. The chapter comprises four sections. The first one lays out some of the premises of contextual theology which are important for our methodology. The second section analyses the Icelandic economic “miracle”. To deepen the analysis, the third section ventures into postcolonial and poststructuralist theory and theology, while the fourth recontextualises the analysis within contextual theology.

Contextuality, recontextuality, and kontextuality

Bhabha is adamant that dissemin^ation is not the discourse of nationalism per se. Rather, he is pointing to what he calls “living the locality of culture”, namely, focusing on complex and hegemonic temporalities, the symbolics of communal life, and the differences and hybrid mythologies that challenge common ideologies and stable identities.⁶ If Bhabha thus puts a name on the ambiguity of lived cultural localities, Stephen Bevans addresses such subtleties as context. Bevans argues that “all theology is contextual theology”, and that those who advocate for more universal types of theology are usually “deeply rooted in European, Western culture, shaped by Greek thought and the Roman genius for order and law”.⁷ Bevans explains how the turn to the subject in modern theology flourished into political theology, theology of liberation, and the various forms of feminist theology, and argues that “contextual theology could include both reflections on the mutual interaction between the Christian tradition and culture, as well as the struggles of the poor and marginalized for dignity and basic rights”.⁸ For Bevans, rooting theological inquiries in diverse contexts is justified by the incarnational, trinitarian, sacramental, and catholic nature of the enterprise.⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid reminds us that all theologies are political, economic, and sexual, although not necessarily consciously so.¹⁰ For her, the aim is “to explore the contextual hermeneutical circle of suspicion in depth by questioning the traditional liberationist context of doing theology”. Althaus-Reid makes it clear that she is not criticising the contextual endeavour of liberation theology to read theology from the standpoint and context of the poor. Rather, she points out that contextualisation is a continual process of social transformation. “Liberation Theology”, she says, “needs to be understood as a continuing process of recontextualization, a permanent exercise of serious doubting in theology”.¹¹ Like Althaus-Reid, and from the standpoint of indigenous theology, Jione Havea treats contextuality with suspicion and argues that contextualising is a dynamic process. “Whether any contextual statement can be inclusive enough, I am not sure. But the contextual raft must still be pushed forth”.¹² Although Havea has

thus affirmed the main principles of contextual theology, he doubts that all contexts are created equal, and postulates that “the North still controls the theological game”.¹³ Havea asks what it means to be contextual: “Can one be contextual without being rooted, actually, in the context of interest?”¹⁴ He answers his own question by relocating the hyphen from context- to con-, or even to kon-, because his own Tongan language does not have a c in its alphabet. Havea names five “cons” that he detects in contextual theology. The first is contextuality’s hidden agendas, which run the risk of presenting a complex context as a thin guise for their own essentialism. Havea asks, “Whose interests do contextual theologies serve?” Second, Havea points to the importance of native languages and the difficulties of translation: “As long as we fail to account for the maneuverings of language and translation, in my opinion, our contextual project is naive”. In other words, if the North still runs the theology game, English and other colonial languages run the language game. Havea’s third point has to do with globalisation, which for Havea forms a “trinity of power” with colonialisation and the Christian mission.¹⁵ The fourth con in Havea’s vocabulary is the different borders that shape consciousness, culture, and identity, in spirituality and relationships. For him, the need to contextualise arises from the lack of relations to ancestors and spirits, which are results of colonialisation. Finally, Havea addresses the danger that contextual theology runs when it seeks to harmonise and simplify the context too much. Instead of harmonisation and oversimplification, Havea emphasises the importance of respecting and understanding the differences within cultures and contexts.

These methodological insights from contextual theology serve as leads for interpreting the Icelandic meltdown. Bevans insists on reading texts from location, to honour the cultures of diverse peoples and disturb the universal idea of theology as one. This acknowledgement of diverse cultures as vital resources for theology is important for the present chapter, which claims that the economic meltdown in Iceland has relevance as a resource for contextual theology. Likewise, Althaus-Reid’s point that recontextualisation is a perennial affair is an invaluable insight for this chapter, because it addresses the complexity of the lives and narratives of the people involved. Such complexities can only ever be partly addressed. Bhabha, in his dissemination of discursive strategies, points us to this complexity, away from the homogenous narratives to the gathering of the dispersed, from the centre to the margins. Finally, the method of the paper can be understood as a nod from an Arctic islander to the Pacific islander Havea, who reminds us that sometimes we need to con our own contexts, kontekstualise, bring out fates, cultures, thoughts, dreams, failures, and languages of the few, to destabilise the rhetoric of the powerful and universal and to question everything. Islanders understand that “the contextual raft must be pushed forth”, or else all of us drown.

Outvasion Vikings: “You ain’t seen nothing yet”

Iceland was settled by Viking dissidents in the year 874, won by a Norwegian king in the 13th century, colonised by the Danish crown in the seventeenth, and given partial independence in 1918 and full independence during World War II. Kristín Loftsdóttir argues that a strong sense of Icelandic national identity was created through exceptionalism during independence struggles of the 19th century. Loftsdóttir explains such exceptionalism as the discursive attempts to belong to the Western civilised world, indoctrinated and maintained through schoolbook texts where Icelanders are presented as descendants of the prime of the Norwegian population. Loftsdóttir writes: “Within such narratives, Icelandic exceptionalism is laid out, emphasising Icelanders as different from anyone else”.¹⁶ She maintains that the “nineteenth century nationalists tended to regard the Danish colonial government as the result of Iceland’s decline from a glorious historical past”, but that the relationship between the two nations was “unnatural”, since the Danes ruled over the Icelanders as if they were uncivilised. According to Loftsdóttir, the national mythology that later became the drive in the economic boom takes its energy from this postcolonialist struggle.¹⁷

In 2005, the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, gave a speech in a business club in London to distinguished business leaders. The presidential discussion of the Icelandic business consisted of 13 points, which all pointed to the national characteristics of Icelanders which make such impressive foreign business relations possible. President Grímsson’s speech in 2005 exhorted businesspersons to re-examine their previous beliefs and the norms that they thought would guarantee results. “Third”, Grímsson postulated, “Icelanders are risk takers. They are daring and aggressive”.¹⁸ Most of the traits on the presidential list have to do with attributes of aggression, risk, and mastery that have in Western symbolism historically been linked to diverse myths of masculinity. Grímsson continued:

Eighth on my list is the heritage of discovery and exploration, fostered by the medieval Viking sagas that have been told and retold to every Icelandic child. This is a tradition that gives honor to those who venture into unknown lands, who dare to journey to foreign fields, interpreting modern business ventures as an extension of the Viking spirit, applauding the successful entrepreneurs as heirs of this proud tradition.¹⁹

The “Viking spirit” allusions are interesting in light of history, since the interactions between the Celtic populations of the British Isles and the Nordic Vikings were violent. Thus, Icelandic allusions to “Viking spirit” function as a political and sexual economy, which erases the past of enslavement which runs in Icelandic veins, as well as the seven and half centuries of humiliating Icelandic colonisation under the Norwegian-Danish empire.

This historical reading of Icelanders as the descendants of brave and adventurous Vikings situates cultural fantasies of conquest back in the “good old days” when Nordic people terrorised the British Isles and their surroundings. The Icelandic glorious past is naïvely explained with images of conquest, where everyone wins and the sufferers have been erased.

Grímsson concluded his analysis by promising the advent of even greater signs and wonders in the years to come: “Let me leave you with a promise. . . . I formulated it with a little help from Hollywood movies: ‘You ain’t seen nothing yet’”. The President’s public enthusiasm for the Viking business spirit was in no way unusual or unique at the time. The Icelandic Chamber of Commerce published a report in 2006 that argued that Iceland should “no longer compare itself to the other Nordic states, as we overreach them in most fields”.²⁰ The University of Iceland Business Department founded a research project called “INTICE: Outvasion of Icelandic Companies” and Icelandic musicians referred to themselves as part of a “cultural outvasion”, “wanting to conquer nations and peoples”.²¹ These sentiments of economic acuity and superiority were echoed in an 88-page report on the image of Iceland sponsored by the Prime Minister’s Office in Iceland in April 2008 called “The Image of Iceland: Strength, Status and Prospects”. The report ambitiously starts by stating the importance of Iceland continuing to be “the best in the world, the country with the highest living standard in the world”.²² According to the report, the term that best describes Icelandic people and their economic relations is “Natural Power”, and they advise an Icelandic image-campaign that emphasises this natural strength of the people as well as the place. The report describes the national myth of Icelanders in this way:

The first Icelanders were people who came to this country in search of freedom and better standards of living. The nation was poor for a long time, but rose with more freedom and political independence from being a developing country to one of the richest nations of the world within a century. The Icelanders are a nation industrious and proud, marked by their struggles of inhabiting tough, rural areas.²³

There seem to have been few challenges to the national Viking mythologies during the boom, and criticisms and warnings from economists abroad were generally classified as ill will, interference, or jealousy over the Icelandic economic “miracle”.²⁴ A notable exception to the rule was the Icelandic Society of Historians, which in June 2008 criticised the Prime Minister’s image report for its naïve metanarrative of Icelandic origins and traits in a public letter. The historians pointed out some of the inconsistencies and myths of the report, especially the notion of the Viking freedom fighters and the Golden Age of Independence. They equate its rhetoric to the political ideology used to achieve independence at the beginning of the 20th century.

They end their letter by directing the prime minister to recent historical research on representations and constructions of Iceland.²⁵

The downward spiral of the Icelandic economy after the crash has affected the living standards, employment, and savings of Icelanders, and has had an impact on neighbouring countries as well because of high-interest personal saving accounts. Privately owned Icelandic banks opened online saving branches in the United Kingdom, called Icesave and Kaupthing-Edge. These savings accounts were promoted with pictures of the Icelandic countryside and attractive slogans of natural purity and transparency. “Icesave” was owned by Landsbanki and its particular slogan was “Clear Difference”, placed under a picture of a blue Icelandic waterfall.²⁶ The Icesave website promised “Peace of Mind” to prospective customers, whose savings were to be doubly guaranteed by UK laws and by the state budget of Iceland as collateral. Haukur Már Helgason succinctly described the political situation in Iceland after the recession in 2008: “Our beloved Vikings took the money and ran, and left the Icelandic state with a foreign debt of €20 billion. Divided between the country’s [300,000] inhabitants, that is almost €[67,000] per person”.²⁷ Not only did the banking system in the country collapse, but because of the online savings abroad, Iceland ran into a tough crisis in terms of foreign relations after the British government decided to freeze all the assets of Landsbanki in Britain under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which froze all of the assets of Icelandic banks for a period of time, the Central Bank included.²⁸ This unusual move launched a wave of protest in Iceland, and InDefence, a grassroots movement, was formed to protest the freezing orders. InDefence formed the largest petitions in Icelandic history by posting photographs of thousands of Icelanders online, under the heading “I am not a terrorist”. Cultural critics in arts and literature pointed to the racial undertones of using the faces of blonde-haired and blue-eyed families to convey the message that theirs was not the face of the Other. Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir derides these racial undertones in the short poem “A Letter to Mister Brown”:

stundum eru augun í mér svo blá	sometimes my eyes are so blue
að þau skelfa mig í speglinum	that they startle me in the mirror
lít ég út fyrir að vera	do I look like I’m a terrorist? ²⁹
hryðjuverkamaður?	

In a short period of time, the Icelandic Viking myth morphed from public cheerleading of the outvasions of the financial tycoons to the stay-at-home Viking who defends his family and country from evil foreigners who wrongfully call “us” terrorists, freeze “our” accounts abroad and demand that “we” pay the debts of the Vikings in full. I have in this chapter cited Bergmann’s careful account of the early days of the economic boom. Bergmann indicates in the preface to the book that he was one of the founders of the

InDefence movement.³⁰ He describes the campaign and the petition, but omits the photographs and the criticism of the project.³¹ Bergmann meticulously explains the postcolonial project of the outvasion Vikings and the national cheerleading of their business ventures, but curiously omits the part where the InDefence group contributed to the reinforcement of the Viking values and exceptionalism.

Third space: postcolonial and poststructuralist perspectives

Bhabha reminds us that the discursive practices of addressing the “self-hood” of a nation are formed by double-writing or dissemination, that is, first, by positing this nation as different from other nations, and second, by denying the heterogeneity and cultural difference of those that do not fit the fictional national identity.³² A presidential address can thus be interpreted as a discursive strategy of representing some of the nation’s identities. Public speeches through which this symbolism is expressed are thus of importance for those who are interested in the way national identities are built, disseminated, and built anew. Such discourse shapes the hopes, values, and desires of people, and is as such a valuable and important resource for a theological investigation.

Hardt and Negri maintain that the rhetoric of the national state and international capitalism emerges through new empires of international corporations:

The passage to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty. In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow.³³

Hardt and Negri thus explain the deterritorialisation of an Empire that mimics the fluidity of the postmodern condition while simultaneously making use of myths and metanarratives of national identities for its own purposes. The presidential speech at the Walbrook Club reveals discursive strategies of a myth of origin. Such myths shape national identities and reinforce the glorification of the new financial tycoons, who peacefully explore and “out-vade” new territories for the benefit of all. If empire is shaped by the fluent currents of international currency, the Icelandic “Vikings” of the Icesave bubble considered themselves to be the strange hybrid surfers of the capitalistic wave, “a clear difference” in the muddy soup of postmodernity. Thus, the presidential speech reveals a curious example of national identities that

rise in no relevant proportion to the nation's boundaries, economy, population, or production.

The economy of the world and the national economies are relational affairs, some of which are addressed by other chapters of the book.³⁴ Joerg Rieger asks, "On which authorities, powers, and energies do we rely? What is it that gives us ultimate hope, shapes our desires, and provides reasonable levels of stability?"³⁵ Loretta Napolioni reminds us, "Economics is the unpredictable science of interdependency",³⁶ and Althaus-Reid points out that "economics like theology is the old science of human relationships".³⁷ If Rieger, Napolioni and Althaus-Reid thus remind us of the mutuality and interdependency of the world's economic systems, one might ask what constitutes such joint assurances of trust, credence, and credit.

Sigurd Bergmann points out that the shift from exchanging physical objects to trading commodities builds on what Marx called "fetishism of commodities", and consists of a separation between human labour and its products.³⁸ According to Bergmann, fetishism replaces the animistic skill of relating to an interconnected physical place with the labour of the individual. If economic theory is a science of relation, Bergmann reminds us that economic systems build on relations that are decontextualised and asymmetrical.³⁹ Rieger argues that economic models have produced their own dogmas, sometimes called "market fundamentalism". Dogmas such as the optimistic idea of the self-organising freedom of the "free market", of the goodness of individualism, and the idea of wealth as breadcrumbs that trickle proportionally down to the poor go almost undisputed under capitalism.⁴⁰ Rieger points out that the same people who have a fundamentalist view of religion are also likely to be uncritical of economic dogmas.⁴¹ Instead, Rieger proposes "the logic of downturn", that is, practices that are sensitive to the asymmetry of power and in solidarity with the poor, powerless, and disadvantaged who live on the margins of the economy.

Marion Grau points out that

behind the use of the oracular term "the economy" in popular political rhetoric stands the ancient theological term *oikonomia theou*, the economy of God, describing divine agency within the cosmos, the way in which the universe functions and develops throughout the course of human history, specifically as it relates to redemptive agency.⁴²

Grau argues that many contemporary theologies are too stuck in either/or categories in economic structures to offer room for reflections on resistance, agency and subversion. She writes,

Theological critiques of economic systems remain incomplete if they simply replace one grand narrative of omnipotence with another, a theological for an economic dominology. Attempting thus to address both economic and theological oppressions, we must ask what kind of

oikonomia serves as the basis for a reconstruction of economic theology. Until we begin to ask that question, our position as contemporary interpreters of Christian “economic” traditions may be dangerously compromised.⁴³

Grau proposes a “theology of countereconomy” and offers readings of Christian narratives through the lenses of poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial criticism. For Grau, a critical reading of the divine economy reveals “that the line between economic justice and exploitation is not comfortably located outside ourselves but goes right through our investments, theological, relational, and financial”.⁴⁴ Such abundance and terrors of scarcity, such mysteries of excess and lack blur the binaries of inside and outside and shake up the very ideals, trust, values, and currencies which build our ontological establishments of cultural, religious, political, and national identity constituted through a “clear difference” from the Other. Grau writes of her vision of the divine economy as finding “kinship” with what Catherine Keller locates in the biblical beginning of creation: the chaos that is “always already there, that is now being recognized as an alternative order that had been so long mistaken for disorder”.⁴⁵ Thus, Grau is probing the abjected notion of the chaotic in the grand narrative of the West, and finding ways of expressing its unruly power in political, economic, and theological relations. If Rieger has suggested turning the tables and getting to the margins of society, Grau is trying to stay put in the third space between the lines, and between the opposites, in order to disrupt the binaries between those in power and those without it. John Milbank once remarked that “the Christian *mythos* . . . is able to rescue virtue from deconstruction into violent, agonistic difference”.⁴⁶ If Milbank proposes the Christian narrative as the antidote to capitalism and its heretical, chaotic connotations, Grau probes the anxieties and contradictions built into the theological household, as well as its contemporary counterparts in neo-classical capitalism and neo-Marxism. Grau proposes the sacred image of the trickster as a theological “third space” metaphor to counter the false stability of capitalism. Grau asks herself if her image runs the risk of being connected to the image of the confidence man, or con man. She answers her own question by pointing out that the interpretation and locality of the figure is ambivalent and can point in many directions. For her, the trickster imagery is attractive, because divine tricksters can “de-monstr-ate, show forth the monstrous, perform perfidy, hail the hysterical, provide a hyperbole, a syntax of sarcasm, and invent idioms of irony”.⁴⁷ For Grau, the mythological trickster image thus serves as an important reminder that instability and chaos are a part of the messy relationships of human existence, the economy included.

If Milbank warns his readers against the “violent, agonistic difference” of deconstruction, Chantal Mouffe welcomes the multiplying agonies of the political subject. Like Grau, Mouffe is looking for a “third way” to think

about relational and political economy. For Mouffe, Derrida's "constitutive outside" functions as a way to understand

the antagonism inherent in all objectivity and the centrality of the us/ them distinction in the constitution of collective political identities. . . . In order to be a true outside, the outside has to be incommensurable with the inside, and at the same time, the condition of emergence of the latter.⁴⁸

Mouffe opposes any easy return to dialectics of the inside/outside, friend/enemy binaries, or "antagonism proper". Instead, she advocates a Derridean "third way", which she calls "agonistic pluralism", as the second and more viable notion of antagonism leading to democratic politics. According to Mouffe, agonism

involves a relation not between enemies but between "adversaries", adversaries being defined in a paradoxical way as "friendly enemies", that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way.⁴⁹

Mouffe argues that relationality has been expressed too narrowly in terms of ethical goodness and empathy. Instead, she wants to bring dark, antagonistic, and conflictual sides of sociability to the fore. For Mouffe the democratic role of agonistic pluralism is not to eliminate the antagonistic, but rather to turn enemies into adversaries and "antagonism existing in human relations into an agonism".⁵⁰

Grau and Mouffe are thus both trying to speak about economic and societal relations by holding together nonessential and ambiguous notions of subjectivities – an economy of difference, as it were. Both thinkers connect such a notion of human reciprocity to the mythological and biblical concept of chaos. Mouffe writes, "Every consensus appears as a stabilization of something essentially unstable and chaotic. Chaos and instability are irreducible, but this is at once a risk and a chance, since continual stability would mean the end of politics and ethics".⁵¹

Moving from the third space of ambiguity, ethics, tricksters, and democratic agonism presented by Grau and Mouffe to the turmoil and cons of current Icelandic politics, I turn back to the myths of the Icelandic economy which so perplexed British business people and gave the president an exhilarating sense of mystery and revelation.

Recontextualising the meltdown

Havea's method consisted of the five "cons": the agendas of the stories we choose to tell, the problem of linguistic interpretation, the trinity of power,

our relational borders, and finally the risk of false harmonies. The contextual approach that Havea adheres to has been an inspiration to this chapter, to question everything, even one's own motives. I concur with Havea that "the north still controls the game" in sorting and harmonising stories and metanarratives in the proper language of the empire. I would add that the geographical North also harbours its own anxieties and doubt of civility. The indignant blue-eyed families posing for photos to convince the prime minister of Britain that they were not terrorists because they look Western provide an important example of this type of colonial exceptionalism and fear of the other. "Clear Difference", the slogan of Icesave, and the clear waterfall included in the transaction are directly linked to the cultural and economic representation of Icelandic bodies as white mythologies of natural power-Vikings and their natural, powerful, pure, virgin land as different from, purer, cooler than the bodies of anyone else. This same natural-power identity exudes from the Prime Minister's Office Report on Natural Power and the image of Iceland. Clear Difference and Natural Power point to Icelandic Viking exceptionalism as a special nation, different from and superior to other nations.

Havea's contextuality that "cons" contextual theology chimes with Grau's trickster. Grau has pointed us towards the divine trickster economy as an ambivalent model of possibilities as well as crisis, of new hopes as well as insecurities. In comparison to the Viking testosterone exuding from the official reports and speeches in Iceland during the economic boom, Grau's trickster readings might help us to detect the vulnerability and anxiety of such overcompensations in the deified relations of contemporary capitalism, and write new identities which accept the hybrid as gatherings and identities in their own right. Keeping in mind Havea's cons and Althaus-Reid's hermeneutics of suspicion, I would pay careful attention to the type of accounts and accountabilities that one chooses to tell of when identifying a context, the economic meltdown in Iceland included. One should also be sensitive to the stories that are omitted. "The symbol of God functions", as Elizabeth Johnson wrote.⁵² Likewise, the mythologies that are existentially meaningful to us are resilient and tend to morph easily. More than a decade after the crisis, several explanatory stories and selected contexts have emerged, some criticising the Viking myth, others reinforcing it. Some of these explanatory stories put the blame for the financial crisis on the Icelandic public for having caused the crash by buying flatscreens and SUVs during the boom and having thus increased inflation in the economy. The so-called flatscreen theory was first put forward by the majority owner and chairman of Landsbanki, Björgólfur Guðmundsson, a few days after the crash.⁵³ Other stories have put the blame on particular individuals, corrupt politicians or reckless tycoons. While none of these explanations necessarily excludes the others, the focal choices may have a strong impact on the narratives of representation of national identity involved.

Does God bless Iceland, like the prime minister asked the divine to do? If the economic meltdown in Iceland has theological relevance for those outside the island, what would be the possible lessons, images, and metaphors drawn from the crash for contextual theology? The blame game in Icelandic politics and finance almost automatically translates into the powerful models of sin-repentance-forgiveness registers in Christian theology. Do the people need God's forgiveness for driving around the golden calf in their SUVs while watching flatscreen TVs? Who gains from such an interpretation of the meltdown? Are the outvasion Vikings prodigal sons in disguise? Are the Icelanders the Canaanites or the Israelites in the story? Is individual greed presented as the problem, or the collective hubris? Should one accept such models of translation or "push the contextual raft further" still?⁵⁴

In this chapter, I have chosen to present a postcolonial reading of the economic bubble exploring white Viking mythologies and exceptionalism of a postcolonial nation in economic meltdown. Bevans maintains that the incarnational, trinitarian, and sacramental character of theology coincides with rooting theological enquiries in the diversity of contexts.⁵⁵ Likewise, Grau points to *oikonomia theou*, divine economy, as an appropriate metaphor for divine relationality, which counters some of the prevailing myths of economic theory and dogma. For her, the trickster image serves as an incarnational model of ambivalence and third space. Mouffe reminds us that "continual stability would mean the end of politics and ethics",⁵⁶ which in this context might mean that the ethical lesson to be learned from the crash is to allow oneself the risk of deconstructing old, dangerous, and exclusive narratives of the past. If Havea has provided us with indigenous "cons" to challenge contextualities of the economic meltdown, Sigurd Bergmann likewise lays out a reconstruction of Christian pneumatology more sensitive to animism and indigenous sensibilities of relation and spiritualities, which might serve as an instance of countering the fetishisation of Viking mythologies and exceptionalism. Might the theological work, perplexing and bewildering as it is in the current context, lie in these broken images of blue-eyed Vikings, natural power, and clear difference? Might the chaotic spaces where new departures are born, and where past insecurities become resources for dissemination, provide new cons for contextualisation? Perhaps we ain't seen nothing yet.

Notes

1 Eiríkur Bergmann, *Iceland and the International Financial Crisis: Boom, Bust and Recovery* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 3.

2 Ibid., 17.

3 Ibid., x.

4 Ibid., 6.

5 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 140.

6 Ibid., 140.

- 7 Stephen Bevans, "Contextual Theology as Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, eds. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 45–60, 45–46.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 47–48.
- 10 Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 4.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 12 Jione Havea, "The Cons of Contextuality . . . Kontextuality," in *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Steven B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (Cambridge: Wipf & Stock and James Clarke & Co, 2011), 38–54, 39.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, 44–46.
- 16 Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Belonging and the Icelandic Others: Situating Icelandic Identity in a Postcolonial Context," in *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities*, eds. Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 57–72, 61.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 18 The transcript of the speech given at The Walbrook Club, London, 3 May 2005, may be found at Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, "How to Succeed in Modern Business: Lessons from The Icelandic Voyage," *The Reykjavík Grapevine*, October 10, 2008, accessed February 14, 2020, <https://grapevine.is/mag/articles/2008/10/10/how-to-succeed-in-modern-business-olafur-ragnar-grimsson-at-the-walbrook-club/>. The speech was available on the official website of the President of Iceland until 2016, when President Grímsson resigned from office. Most of the former president's speeches are available electronically from www.forseti.is, but this one seems to have been deleted. The speech was published in the magazine *Grapevine* two days after the financial crash in 2008.
- 19 Grímsson, "How to Succeed in Modern Business."
- 20 Bergmann, *Iceland and the International Financial Crisis*, 85.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 22 The Prime Minister's Office, *Ímynd Íslands: Styrkur, staða og stefna* (Reykjavík: Forsætisráðuneytið, 7 April 2008), 4, accessed February 14, 2020, www.stjornarradid.is/media/forsaetisraduneyti-media/media/Skyrslur/Forsaetisr_arsskyrsla_END2.pdf.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 24 Bergmann, *Iceland and the International Financial Crisis*, 86.
- 25 The Icelandic Society for Historical Research (Sagnfræðingafélag Íslands), "Letter to the Prime Minister of Iceland," *Sagnfræðingafélag Íslands*, June 12, 2008, accessed February 14, 2020, www.sagnfraedingafelag.net/2008/06/12/11.34.26/.
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