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Thorkild Hansen and The Non-White
- A Critical Reading of the Slave Trilogy
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Introduction

This text concerns itself with the Danish author Thorkild Hansen and, more specifically, with his three-volume project, *The Slave Trilogy*, which deals with the history of the Danish slave trade. My reading of Hansen is inspired by insights from Postcolonial Studies and Critical Race and Whiteness Studies. I have chosen this angle for a number of interlinked reasons, which may briefly be described as follows: First and foremost, Thorkild Hansen wrote *The Slave Trilogy* with a clear, and in my opinion authentic, critical and anti-imperialist intention, and his work seems to have been celebrated and understood in this way by most critics. My analysis does not emerge from a desire to question the sincerity of Hansen's critical intentions, nor to diminish his importance in challenging the self-congratulatory views on the Danish (and more general European) colonial past that were common during his time. Instead, I intend to show how his vision has been partly shaped by colonialist and racialised discourses despite the author's clearly evidenced intention of doing the opposite. Seen from this critical perspective a re-reading of the critique provided by Hansen in the *Slave Trilogy* represents both a re-assessment of a landmark in Danish literature, and serves as a basis for a more general discussion of the development of colonial and racialised discourses and some of the critiques attempting to challenge them over time.

 I consider the discussion of Thorkild Hansen's work from a critical, anti-imperialist and anti-racist perspective to be relevant because of Hansen's position in Danish literary production. Thorkild Hansen was (in Denmark) one of the most widely read authors of his time, and *The Slave Trilogy* was a best seller, reviewed and revered by some leading Danish critics. *The Slave Trilogy* won the literary prize of the Nordic Council (Frederiksen 2012: 17, 117, 139). Others found his work more contestable. Hansen wrote in an era of worldwide political upheaval and class conflict: Anti-colonial struggles such as the war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights and Free Speech movements in the US, the Cultural Revolution in China, and the emergence of the New Left all contributed to a highly politicised literary climate, which usually (in Scandinavia at least) took an outspokenly leftist stance (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 16-18). Hansen, who besides being a writer of fiction often worked as an international correspondent, reflected these topics in his work, especially in *The Slave Trilogy*. His choice of topics mirrored, amongst other things, the strong interest in imperialism in his time. His engagement with the past was a way of commenting on the present. Hence *The Slave Trilogy* used the Danish slave trade to point to the exploitation and subjugation of poor countries in Hansen's own era (Stecher-Hansen 1997:

10, 16; Frederiksen 2012: 80, 83, 152, 168-169). *The Slave Trilogy* also challenged popular Danish perceptions of the imperial past, most notably the commonly held understanding that Denmark was the first Western country to abolish slavery, something that was thought to prove the exceptionally humane and charitable character of the Danish nation (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 80, 90-93; Frederiksen 2012: 129). Critics and historians were divided over how to categorise *The Slave Trilogy*, not least concerning what its truth value as historiography might be. While some read – and celebrated – the three volumes as an anti-capitalist critique, others criticised Hansen for his idealist philosophy of history, rooted in his existentialist outlook (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 18-19, 25-26; Frederiksen 2012: 128, 146). Yet all these debates, which underline the importance of Thorkild Hansen as a Danish writer, miss the question about Hansen's own possible internalised racial thinking.

What I intend to pursue in this work is to make visible the ways in which racialised, colonial discourses did manifest themselves in *The Slave Trilogy* despite Hansen's critical intentions, reflecting underlying, naturalised and internalised assumptions about the relationships between Europeans and non-Europeans, that the author's critique was not able to recognise, let alone transgress. It is my contention, then, that while Hansen attacks slavery, sometimes fervently, and speaks of it as clearly marked by racist attitudes, racism itself and its connection to whiteness remains understudied in Hansen's trilogy and in the work of his critics. My work aims at making these manifestations of whiteness visible.

A postcolonial approach provides a perspective that reads works like *The Slave Trilogy* as embedded in the cultural context of continued economic, cultural and political Western dominance over its colonies, also after formal decolonisation. As Edward Said's work has shown, whether imperial relations are obscured in a text or not, they will be present at a deep level, as power, identity and knowledge are to be understood as intimately linked (Said: 1993; 1995). *The Slave Trilogy* reflects a certain point or phase in the history of (white) European domination and can be examined as such in hindsight, as opposed to readings that understand it as marking a closure of the era of colonial relations. Edward Said has remarked that the environments in which texts are produced '…are irreducibly first conditions, and they provide limits and apply pressures to which each writer, given his own gifts, predilections, and interests responds". (Said 1983: 237, see also Mills 1997: 27). As I intend to show in my analysis, the era in response to which Hansen was writing *The Slave Trilogy*, with its political awareness about and interest in imperialism and the still strongly present cultural after-shock of the horrors

of the Second World War, mark a specific point in time regarding the development of racialised, or white, Western thinking. It also reflects a time in which the ideology of 'white supremacy' had lost much of its credibility due to its close affiliation with Nazism and the holocaust. While this constellation (at least to a certain degree) discredited racial differences as an explanation for global disparities in power and wealth, these disparities themselves did not disappear, and therefore required new vindications. This meant changes as to how these power structures could be articulated as legitimate in the West. The new ways in which the north-south relations would be articulated within the former colonial powers could differ regionally, but can be said to always draw on the racialised discourses of the past to a considerable degree. 'White supremacy' was thus bereft of its legitimacy as a coherently articulated ideology, while many, if not most of its basic assumptions stayed in place, reflecting a state of continued coloniality. *The Slave Trilogy* is written at a moment in time in which these changes in how whiteness, here understood as a discursive claim to social and epistemological superiority, is changing due to the historical processes just mentioned. The task is then to read Thorkild Hansen's *The Slave Trilogy* as a genuine attempt to criticise Western imperialism, but one ultimately written from a position of implicit, or internalised, whiteness, a position which will have to be described by tracing its historical development. As discourses form and develop out of and within a historically determined cultural and material context, their concrete manifestations within a text will also reflect this context in particular ways.

Placing *The Slave Trilogy* in its historical and cultural context, while focusing on the naturalised racial thinking that shows itself in the trilogy, in a way, also means linking Hansen's work to Denmark's past as a slave-trading nation in a different way than it is done usually. *The Slave Trilogy* appears sometimes to be understood as representing closure in Denmark's coping with its colonial past, as it puts some of the historiography that was commonly accepted at Hansen's time into question, thereby opening up for a Danish self-critique regarding the nation's role in the slave trade (see for example Stecher-Hansen 1997). Focusing on Hansen's own internalised racial thinking is then also an attempt to show that the imperial past cannot be understood as distant and sealed off, as racialised thinking shows itself as a continuity from that past into the now, and continues to inform the present. This is especially relevant in the case of *The Slave Trilogy*, as it demonstrates how even such a passionate critique of the colonial project is still entangled with its discursive heritage.

Last, but not least, I want to mention that it is interesting to look at *The Slave Trilogy* in the context just described, as it is part of the body of Danish literature that deals with the colonised other in Danish. My text also represents an attempt to connect more recent scholarship on Danish colonial history and especially on Thorkild Hansen with broader discourses on colonialism and whiteness outside the borders of Denmark. *The Slave Trilogy*, consisting of *Slavernes Kyst* (1967), *Slavernes Skibe* (1968) and *Slavernes Øer* (1970), had not been translated into English until the beginning of the 2000s, where the translations by Kari Dako, *Coast of Slaves* (2002), *Ships of Slaves* (2003) and *Islands of Slaves* (2005) materialised, interestingly released by a publishing house in Ghana. My analysis will concentrate on the original Danish text, using Kari Dako's translations only as a help for non-Danish-speaking readers. All passages cited from Thorkild Hansen's books are therefore taken from the original text in Danish. The English translations of the same passages are provided as footnotes and are taken from Dako's English translation[1].

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[1] If there are citations of single words or expressions from the Danish versions, the translations are provided directly in the text. These translations given here sometimes differ from Dako's translations, as the ones given directly in my text reflect the meaning that my reading has attributed to them more accurately. In such cases, Dako's translations of these words or expressions are to be found in the footnotes, including references.

1. Theorising the Danish Black Atlantic

My analysis draws on Postcolonial Studies on the one hand and Critical Race Studies with its 'twin-field' Critical Whiteness Studies on the other. The reason for combining these two fields lie in their overlapping critical approach to race and towards established Western thought paradigms about empire as well as about race, manifested in literature and scholarship. While Postcolonial Studies provides an explanatory historical framework for the entanglement of Western identities with racialised discourses, Critical Race Studies and Whiteness Studies provide us with a particularised focus on racialised thinking as a defining, but largely suppressed factor in shaping European thinking, substantiating the ways in which it manifests itself in practice. Race is present in Western writing and thought as a cultural hierarchy, but obscured or made invisible. The basic idea here is simple and comes from positioning theory: If identity and knowledge are linked, one must recognise that social experience is a defining source for the shape of one's knowledge. Thus, a scholar's position within the social field ultimately influences her/his social theorising (Mills 1997: 109; Cowlishaw 2004: 68). As Charles Wade Mills puts it, when talking about racial hierarchies, the irony is '… that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made' (Mills 1997: 18). White theorists and writers will in this perspective mostly continue to produce white patterns of thought as long as whiteness continues to signify a position of privilege – if that position is not reflected upon. Assuming then, that the viewpoint of somebody looking at a hierarchical structure from the bottom will be different from that of one who tries to determine the shape and extent of discrimination from a privileged position within the very same structure, Critical Race Studies and Whiteness Studies can provide us with a critical perspective that helps to make the unseen seen and that points out the blind spots that whiteness produces to uphold racial hierarchies (see also Mills 1997: 18).

The two fields just introduced are distinguishable from each other in their historical and geographical origins and particular scope, yet in my view clearly related in terms of their shared interest in how European colonialism, imperialism and the racism intertwined with it have shaped the contemporary world and our thinking about it (see also Jasen and Nayar 2010: 1, 4, 21). Furthermore, I find them to be congruent in their constitutive interest in throwing light on and challenging the cultural, political and economic structures with which the historical process of European expansion has left us. I will briefly discuss these fields here, especially with respect to how they relate to each other and my study. As Edward Said has argued, no theory is beyond

contextualisation (Said 1995: 9), which includes a historical trajectory as part of the process of locating its origins (Said 1983: 230). Such a narration of an idea's origin and listing of influences will necessarily remain incomplete (Said 1983: 227), but is nonetheless useful. As both fields in question have been developed in non-Danophone contexts, their applicability for the purposes of this analysis will have to be carefully considered. This section and the next will thus serve as a contextualization for the following inquiry into the theory I am going to use in my analysis, in order to clarify its origins and general scope. I will start with the historical origins of Postcolonial Studies and then Critical Race Studies, relating the fields to each other. After that, I will briefly consider how drawing on a combination of these two fields adds weight to my analysis.

Postcolonial Studies

A significant portion of the non-academic origins of Postcolonial Studies, Critical Race Studies and Whiteness Studies can be located within the post-Second World War anti-colonial and civil rights movements, which dealt a blow to naturalised assumptions about racial and cultural hierarchies (Schech and Haggis 2004: 178). Oppositional, intellectual engagement with these hierarchies can be traced back far longer, even predating other critical schools such as Marxism (Mills 2003: xvii). But it is in the second half of the twentieth century that these perspectives find their way into western academic discourse as well. This happens within the context of a number of historical developments. After the second of two cataclysmic wars, the European colonial powers began to experience the more or less rapid declines of their empires[2], starting with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, and finishing with the bloody emancipation of the last Portuguese colonies in Africa in the 1970s (Jensen 2012: 157-161). The long-term struggles for national independence in Asia, Africa and Latin America[3] also induced the writings of anti-colonial activists like Gandhi, Cèsaire, Tagore, Senghor, Cabral or

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[2] It should perhaps be noted, that not only the First World War, but also the outbreak of the Second World War to a significant degree were about conflicting imperialist ambitions amongst Western powers. A fact that today is often obscured by liberal narratives that portray the Second World War as a clash between democracy and totalitarianism, which afterwards was continued in form of the Cold War. For a detailed account of the struggle over different narrations of the more recent history of the West, its colonial tradition and the connections between the Second World War and colonialism, see for example Luciano Canfora: *August 1914* (2010) or Domenico Losurdo: *Der Kampf um die Geschichte* (2009) as well as his recently translated: *Liberalism – A Counter-History* (2011).
[3] For a detailed and enlightening account of The Third World as a political project and the continuity of colonial domination by the West, see Vijay Prashad: *The Darker Nations* (2007) as well as *The Poorer Nations* (2014).

Frantz Fanon (Jasen and Nayar 2010: 1). The diversity and heterogeneity of thought of these anticolonial thinkers can hardly be said to represent a common ideological standpoint, but their work collectively form the roots of Postcolonial Studies within academia (Larsen 2005: Section 1). At the same time, the emergence of anti-colonial and postcolonial intellectuals started to challenge Western thought paradigms. Their writings about questions of race, representation and identity and the connection of these issues to imperial power structures fundamentally shook many of the preconceptions that had served to install clear-cut demarcation lines between what Stuart Hall (2003) has labelled 'the West and the rest'.

Within academia, for many, the enabling moment for the emergence of Postcolonial Studies as a theoretical field was the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 (Loomba et al. 2005: 2; Botofte and Jensen 2006: 39, 80; Stoler and McGranahan 2007: 11; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012: 4; Hübinette 2012: 48) with its central claim that Europe's colonial interests have defined its view and imagination on and about the rest of the world to a significant degree and continue to do so (Said 1995: 5, 7-8, 58; see also Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012: 4). Taking this claim as a point of departure the task for the postcolonial field could then be described as an 'analysis of imperialism … [containing] … the projects of making visible the long history of empire, of learning from those who have opposed it, and of identifying the contemporary sites of resistance and oppression' (Loomba et al. 2005: 1).

In *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond,* Ania Loomba (et al. 2005: 1) and her co-editors argue that Postcolonial Studies since their early days have moved towards becoming more of a certain inspirational approach, or angle, than a clearly demarcated field, as it has defined different kinds of intellectual inquiries in different academic fields, even if those fields or their practitioners do not recognise the term 'postcolonial as applicable to their work. This expanded area of possible inquiries for Postcolonial Studies spans from its 'home' in literary criticism, over long established disciplines like history to more recent areas such as 'media studies, environmental studies, religious studies, linguistic and semantic analysis, auto-ethnography and the sociology of global cinema' (Loomba et al. 2005: 5)[4]. Postcolonial Studies can thus be understood as a theoretical point of departure that basically recognises the claims about the continuity of

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[4] Postcolonial Studies is also sometimes staged as closely related to Post-structuralism and the so-called linguistic turn (Loomba et al. 2005: 2) Others like to stress the defining influence of Martiniquan born Marxist psychoanalyst, Frantz Fanon, thus associating Postcolonial Studies with Marxism (Larsen: 2005: section 2 ; Buck-Morss 2012: 97). As should be clear from the above, Postcolonial Studies can hardly be ascribed to any of these schools of thought, but instead draws on a multitude of approaches, methodologies and paradigms within critical thinking.

Western domination and the significance the instalment and maintaining of these power relations have had and continue to have in the formation of thought paradigms, identities and knowledge production.

Within this diversity called Postcolonial Studies, I will mainly draw on one particular thesis, pioneered by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)[5], which is interested in how colonisation happened (and still happens) at the 'heart of European culture' (see also Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012: 1)[6] as 'colonised peoples and imperial spaces were crucial ingredients in the generation and consolidation of a European Identity and its master narratives' (Gikandi 1996: 5). Maintaining and legitimizing the hierarchy between coloniser and colonised worked to a large extent through the casting and representation of non-Europeans as the racial Others, more or less stuck on a lower level of civilisation than the Europeans themselves, essentially belonging to a lower order of humans. Racial thinking was thus one of the most fundamental building blocks for European empires and the identities that they spawned, yet its continued presence as a defining principle in how we understand the world is obscured.

Race (as an epistemological category for humans), as I will show in more detail later, is then primarily an outcome of European colonialism and imperialism, as Charles Wade Mills has argued. He points out how as a backdrop of Europe's colonial expansion, racialised thinking is pivotal to the foundation and evolution of Western identity over the last 500 years (Mills 1997: 19-31). Placing Mills' reading of race as constitutional to Western modernity alongside the previously stated argument about the generation of European identity against its colonial others, race and the idea of white supremacy can be said to be one of those 'master narratives' that propelled western thought. Thus, the critical study of race as a category and the identities and subject positions it generates are in my view constitutive of Postcolonial Studies. Critical Race Studies and Whiteness Studies can here be useful as a tool, as they are fields concerned with the ways in which race manifests itself, both in thought and material conditions, while at the same time *invisibilised* by the naturalisation of the inequalities it produces.

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[5] For an introduction to *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, but also the lesser-known texts of Edward Said see Botofte and Jensen (2006).
[6] For a detailed discussion of this thesis, see Stoler and Cooper (1997).

Critical Race and Whiteness Studies

Besides armed resistance to colonialism, another challenge to the global white supremacy regime that European colonialism had installed, was posed by the civil rights movements in the US in the 1960s, such as the Black Power and the Chicano movements, who were often associated with the black radicalism movement. Authors like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King Jr. are some of the constitutive influences (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 4-5). During the later 1970s, though, the various civil rights movements seemed to lose momentum and some of their achievements started to be rolled back as the reactionary political right gained ground again throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Delgado and Stefancic: 3, 101). Parallel to this, some scholars recognised an increasing 'colour-blindness' in American society, which led to the belief (mainly amongst white people) that racism was a problem of the past which simply had been legislated away in the 1970s. The fields of Critical Race Studies and Whiteness Studies can thus be said to have emerged as an attempt to react to this experience of regress, and as a tool to reinforce awareness about the actuality of race, especially amongst whites (Hübinette 2004: 46). Critical Race Studies and Whiteness Studies, then, are two relatively young and growing scholarly fields that, even though they mostly emerged from North America (Young 2004: 104), today have incorporated a diverse range of influences, from Black Feminism (Bell Hooks is frequently mentioned) over Indian, Latino/na and Queer and Aboriginal Studies to European thinkers like Gramsci and Derrida (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 4-5).

Whiteness Studies emerged from the 1980s amongst mainly white anti-racists as an offshoot from Critical Race Studies or Critical Race Theory, which developed mainly amongst non-white scholars. Often these twin fields are referred to together as Critical Race and Whiteness Studies, where Whiteness Studies concern themselves with the critical reflection of what it means to be white in a racist (and predominantly white) society. It has since been adopted by scholars elsewhere, for example in Australia (Russo, Brewster and Jensen 2011: 2-3; Jensen 2011: 85-86) and in a Scandinavian context (Hübinette 2012: 46). As a scholarly concept, whiteness does not have a universally accepted definition within the literature (Young 2004: 104). The basic idea, however, can be said to be an inversion of perspective. Historically, throughout their conquest of the globe, white Europeans had studied, quantified, mapped and categorised everyone else, installing their own cultural particularities as universal standards (see also Said 1993, 1995 ; Eagleton 2009: 40). This had the effect that the white colonisers

came to understand themselves not as holding any particular perspective, but simply embodying universality. The basic idea behind Whiteness Studies is to turn this focus around in order to make the contingency of white thinking visible (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 74-75).

The purpose of putting certain insights from Postcolonial Studies and Critical Race and Whiteness Studies to work is thus not restricted to an argument about its novelty. Both Postcolonial Studies and Whiteness Studies (at least in their most prolific variations) do not merely seek to provide new perspectives, but also to actively challenge predominant perspectives within Western societies by denaturalising them (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 3; Jensen 2011: 85). Postcolonial Studies is at times criticised for leading an out-of-touch-with-postcolonial-reality life within western academia, obsessed with self-centred theoretical details, while perceiving itself as a radical challenge to Eurocentric doxa (Loomba et al. 2005: 2; Larsen 2005: section 1; Jasen and Nayar 2010: 31). The inclusion of elements of theories on race developed by anti-racist activists can here be fruitful by providing a more empirically grounded focus. As most postcolonial theory does recognise the centrality of a critique of race to its own project, it only seems natural for it to let itself be informed by Critical Race and Whiteness Studies, which foregrounds race and ethnicity as key categories in the analysis of Western law, history, politics and culture, informed by a non-white perspective (Jasen and Nayar 2010: 21). The privileging of the postcolonial perspective and critique over other possible choices works as a meta-theoretical framework for my analysis here, enabling a critical perspective not only on Thorkild Hansen's trilogy, but on other sources as well. Drawing on Critical Race and Whiteness Studies is then also an attempt to borrow some analytical tools from a particular non-white perspective in order to be able to critically review a part of my own cultural archive. Here I am following Said who proposes that 'borrow we certainly must if we are to elude the constraints of our immediate intellectual environment' (Said 1983: 241). Postcolonial Studies, on the other hand, offers a broader context for the analytical tools that Critical Race and Whiteness Studies have to offer. Racialised thinking can then be linked up with its historical origins in colonial power structures and thus be translated into other contexts than the struggles of non-white groups within the US or Australia. Such a scholarly perspective is useful, as racialised thinking has regained some of its everyday-life significance in the former colonial powers in Europe after the arrival of migrants considered non-white. This constellation has also re-stated the problem of racial thinking as a largely unprocessed cultural heritage within European thinking.

Language, power and narrative

Meaning is constructed within the field of language, not found outside of it and then mirrored with words (see for example Laclau and Mouffe: 1997). But, as Slavoj Žižek (2009: 57) has maintained, the function of language which attempts to fix meaning contains an irreducible element of dominance, even violence. As language attempts to generate stable meanings, essentialise, or bind the world in its operation to represent it, language also draws towards a disclosure of reality. Thus, when the possible modes of communal life and the identities and social relationships present in it are articulated, they will tend to be fixed and defined (at least partly) according to the interest of the speaker. Obviously, this possibility of defining reality is not available to everybody to the same extent in a structure of dominance like colonialism. While meanings might differ according to one's place in the hierarchy, the operation of generating meaning according to the interests of one's own group without considering, or even having to know, the reality of other groups, requires a position of privilege and power. Holding a position of power therefore allows an easy going handling of language and the disclosures, or operations of essentialising one undertakes. By contrast, being in a dominated position, knowledge of the reality of the dominant is crucial, sometimes even indispensable for survival.

Further, the operation of trying to fix meaning can differ in its purpose, depending on who is speaking. Being able to impose (at least to a significant extent) one's own meanings and definitions on others entails a 'performative efficiency' (Žižek 2009: 62), by defining the very being of others. Awareness of power structures and the power of language, on the other hand, allows challenging or refuting the 'socio-symbolic identities' (Žižek 2009: 62) that have been articulated and allocated within the dominant group. The ultimate point of all this, then, is that the language of the powerful, especially when speaking about or to the less powerful, will try to generate meaning in such a way as to legitimise the power structure and uphold privilege. Speaking from a less powerful position about or to those in power can (but does not necessarily have to) lead to a subversion of the meanings generated at the top. The ways in which power shapes how subjects make sense of the world can thus be said to be directly reflected in the ways in which they understand the world and articulate their worldviews. Therefore, I want to briefly discuss some of the ways in which human experience is articulated in the following, beginning with the term 'narrative'.

'Narrative' is a term commonly used within the humanities. Even though Thorkild Hansen was not a professional historian, *The Slave Trilogy* has been read (at least by some) as a work of history, sometimes also by historians (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 105-107). As I will show in the analysis, Hansen's work refutes certain established narratives about Denmark's national history as well as history in general, while reproducing others.

A narrative can be described as an ordering principle that can be located at the very heart of human experience. To generate an experience of coherence of meaning, there also has to be positive relationships, like cause and effect. In order to create a coherent universe of meaning, events, entities, causal relations and social relationships are ordered into narratives, meaning particular ways of ordering and interpreting the world through stories, or tropes. These narratives explain the world and help to generate identities and their legitimacy. They confirm our current interpretations of the world, while their accounts of origin and history legitimise political rule, and ways of belonging (Said 1993: xiii, 1; Thisted 2008: 34). Narratives are contingent and culturally specific and they provide a set of commonly recognisable story lines and narrative structures that individuals can draw on, thereby establishing and maintaining collective meanings, sometimes overriding national borders (as in the case of whiteness). The maintenance of such collective narratives occurs mainly through texts, where text is to be understood in its broadest sense.

As Benedict Anderson has argued in *Imagined Communities* (2006), nations construct for themselves genealogically useful pasts, in this way providing meaning to their collective structures, while they exclude unwanted elements (see also Said 1993: 16). The history of localities, collectives and the encounters between them thus vary over time, they get instrumentalised, rewritten, purged and put to new uses, according to needs for explanation and legitimacy in the now (Said 1993: 2; Thisted 2008: 34). This operation is by no means limited to national historiography. As the idea of European civilization and the corresponding European identities to a significant part emerged as a response to the contact with the non-European other, certain narratives about European Enlightenment, modernity and civilisational authority can be seen as having functioned as myths,[7] grand narratives produced by colonialism, providing meaning to European expansion and rule, alongside with narratives about racial superiority

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[7] I am here not suggesting that terms like European Enlightenment or modernity can be reduced to their function of legitimising rule over non-Europeans. However, it is crucial to notice that the narratives about them always have been intimately entangled with various colonialist projects.

which served as the ultimate explanation for their legitimacy (Gikandi 1996: 80, 167, 226; Frello 2012: 105). If understood as claims to authority by the coloniser over the colonised while at the same time granting legitimacy to the European self, these myths can be made visible within allegedly objective accounts of history as underlying (grand) narratives. The function of these narratives is then to provide a naturalised legitimisation for the superiority of the (white) European self vis-à-vis the (non-white) other, 'proving' how the perspective of the dominant group has to be accepted as universal.

The methodological point to be taken from this conceptualisation is a simple one. A reading interested in manifestations of whiteness searches for the underlying colonialist, racial narrative, the way racial thinking might be at the very heart of what the text treats as truth. The representations that the text produces will reveal the underlying narratives either by directly referring to them, or by implicitly drawing on certain figures of speech, clichés, and narrative structures that make the representations generated in the text recognizable to the reader by representing the world 'as we all know it happens to be', thus assuming a shared perspective with the reader.

Discourse, text and knowledge

Identities and the narratives legitimising them are held collectively, generating and upholding group-identities, providing them with actual reasons for existence as a group by offering common origins or a shared fate. The way these 'cultural archives' are passed on between individuals and from one generation to the next is through texts, including written and oral accounts of all types, including pictures, films and monuments (Thisted 2008: 34). Discourse operates as a cultural archive, where it passes on narratives and the representations of oneself and others, and its analysis thus helps understand how all of these maintain or change their form over time. What is relevant here in particular, is of course the collective body of Western texts, which emerged over the last five centuries under the influence of colonialism, and which have produced and established the knowledge the West held and holds about itself and 'the rest'. Race as a category of identification and marker of difference and superiority has after all been developed within and out of this body of knowledge.

As postcolonial historians Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (1997: 1) have noted, imperial expansion is by no means a European invention, nor was the economic exploitation of the peripheries a novelty in world history. However, it was the Europe that emerged out of liberalism and the Enlightenment whose imperial expansions laid all the foundations for the militarily, economically, politically and intellectually dominant way of organizing social relations worldwide that we today understand as 'globalised capitalism', with all its historically grown inequalities and exploitative relationships. That Europe consisted of profoundly imperial powers, which came to understand themselves as the epitome of civilization during their conquest of most of the globe. Western dominance spread itself over most of the globe teaching Western civilisation as universalised truth to colonial subjects. The disciplines of Geography and Anthropology helped to make the conquered territories manageable, even if they also had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with colonial rule (Stoler and Cooper 1997: 13-14). The particular forms, in which European humanism (with its bold, universal claim to what it means to be human) was articulated, have been shown to be fundamentally shaped by empire (see also Said 1993). The universalised claims of dominant liberal economic theory have revealed themselves to be reflecting a colonialist economy in which the metropolitan regions in Europe allocated themselves the lucrative parts of the value chain, while the peripheries were sentenced to produce the raw, primary commodities through slave labour or coerced cash crop production (Mills 1997: 36-37; Stoler and Cooper 1997: 17, 19; Young 2001: 44). Western psychology actively supported the colonialist project by producing accounts of the non-European mind as inferior and in need of European guidance (Bulhan 1985). As Edward Said's work (1993, 1995) has shown, the production of texts on Europe's others did not only produce the representations of (and particular discourses on) 'them' as inferior and in need of European control, it also produced the images (and thus the self-understanding) of the Europeans as superior, more civilised and in their right to colonise. While the metropolitan areas in this way reached a self-understanding that emphasised difference towards the periphery, this self-understanding was generated against figures of otherness. These figures were mainly found in the colonies and portrayed as the primitive, backward anti-civilisation that served as a distorted mirror image of an idealised metropolitan European self.

Even though himself sometimes accused of Eurocentrism (Young, R. 1995), the insistence of Michel Foucault on the 'inextricable relationship between knowledge and power' (Stoler and Cooper 1997: 11) is the key to understand the implications of recognising the importance of the colonial venture for the development of European thinking. It is especially the use that Said

makes of Foucault's concept of discourse (with Said's more distinct emphasis on the importance of material power relations (see also Frello 2012: 109)) that I find useful for my purposes here. Said understands discourse as a kind of knowledge tradition, but one that is decisively involved in forming the material reality it tries to describe. This is so, since texts, especially when authoritative expertise is attributed to them, help to determine the experience a reader later might have of what the text has described to her. If the reader becomes an author both the choice of subjects to write about as well as the number and form of viewpoints that are imaginable for this author have to a massive extent been determined by the textual tradition that managed to present itself as authoritative in the first place (Said 1995: 94). [8] This dialectic between human experience and the fabrication of accounts of it, then, is not to be understood as an innocent relativistic attitude to describing common reality, but as fundamentally shaped by political interests and existing power structures (see also above). Said emphasises that a discourse on a single topic never exists in a vacuum. It is always embedded in defining relationships to the institutions that helped produce it, as well as to the dominant culture surrounding it, its trends, doctrines, doxological ideas. Discourses, or the production of knowledge in social institutions (such as academies, ministries and media), are thus entangled with power structures in a dialectical relationship. The texts that make up a discourse help to shape and define the dominant culture as they feed back into it (Said 1995: 5, 22). They also shape the future by providing arguments for possible courses of action. Knowledge production always draws on already existing knowledge, so a discourse will always exist through time, as a sort of tradition, with the newer texts building on the ones before them.

Thorkild Hansen, even though sympathetic to non-white struggles against racism (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 88), wrote from the position of a white Dane, writing about colonised Africans as racialised others. If we consider this racial identity intrinsic to Hansen as a writer, it must be manifest in his texts as well. This is what makes the representations he generated interesting as representations, as they might reveal more about the writer than the subject he writes about (Said: 1995: 21). Furthermore, it can be assumed that the representations generated in *The Slave Trilogy*, together with the vocabulary used to generate the representations, can be approached as attempts to fix meanings, but from a troubled identity position. As I will argue in the analysis, the desire to transcend racism that can be found in Hansen's texts conflicts with his socialisation

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[8] With this I do not so much mean personal circumstances that might have pertained to the author at the time of writing, even though these can be interesting when focussing on the work of a single author. For example, John Locke's justification of colonial slavery (while condemning it in metropolitan England) cannot be abstracted from his own considerable investments in the slave trade (Buck-Morss 2011: 48; Losurdo 2011: 3-4).

as white, manifested in his epistemologies and articulations of and about the racial other. This tension generates an ambivalence with respect to racial identities that not only reveals Hansen's own attempts to come to terms with racism, but which can also be read as reflecting a particular historical moment. The racialised, colonialist discourses in the West were challenged by social and anticolonial struggles, thus posing troubling questions about who was who and why. Thorkild Hansen in his work as a journalist and writer often sided with the insurgencies against the power structures that colonialism and imperialism had installed throughout the world. However, his critique of these structures voiced in *The Slave Trilogy* is framed by epistemologies and representations that to a large extent are the product of exactly these power structures. My analysis thus tries to uncover these ambivalences and relate them to the particular point in time when the text was produced. The aim is to shed new light on the text by placing it within a broader discursive shift that accompanied the change in the relationship between the centre and periphery from direct, imperial subjugation to the order of indirect coloniality that have characterised north-south relations after the collapse of the European empires post-1945 (see for example Deppe, Salomon and Solty 2011).

2. Historicising Danish Whiteness

Whiteness does not have a commonly accepted definition in scholarly literature (Young, S. 2004: 104), and both Postcolonial Studies and Critical Race and Whiteness Studies are theoretical approaches that could still be called somewhat of a novelty in a Danish context. Establishing a relevant theoretical angle that draws on these fields and that can prove itself productive for the purposes of this study will therefore require careful consideration. The questions this chapter addresses are how to understand whiteness generally, and why and how it can be conceptualised in relation to the writings of Thorkild Hansen. This discussion of whiteness and its application will be divided into three parts. The first part will deal with the historical development of whiteness, its emergence within the framework of European colonialism and its significance in Western (and Danish) identity formation over time. The second section will discuss possibilities for a productive definition of whiteness as a contemporary scholarly concept keeping in mind two basic insights: On the one hand, race is a to be understood as a social construct, as opposed to an objective, biological, value-free category (See Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 3, Painter 2010: 390), while on the other, the discourse on race has to be seen as inextricably entangled with very concrete power structures, which manifest themselves both in the subjectivities and every-day life of countless people. So while race is a historically and socially constructed category, shaped by contingent circumstances, its effects on the lives of the people who are categorised by it in one way or another are very tangible. My discussion will draw on conceptualisations of different scholars (both Danish and non-Danish) in order to arrive at a useful conceptualisation for the analysis that follows. The third and last section of the discussion will briefly relate this conceptualisation to Hansen's work.

Whiteness Studies would obviously be unthinkable if not for the (self-)identification of certain groups of people as white. So as a first step into the discussion, I want to look at the discourse on whiteness from a historical angle and take a brief look on how Denmark positioned itself within the hierarchies of 'global white supremacy' (Mills 1997: 36-37). Historicisation here serves as a demonstration of the contingency and arbitrariness with which the label 'white' was granted to some and not to others, how these designations could change and how it worked as a marker of exclusion and inclusion. I draw primarily on the work of Charles Wade Mills, but also others, most notably the Italian philosopher of history Domenico Losurdo and the US historian Nell Irvin Painter.

Roots of whiteness

Scholarly discussions of race are often linked to a discussion of slavery in early capitalism. The emergence of race in its modern sense is seen as massively entangled with slavery during the beginnings of modernity. There is some disagreement, though, about when exactly the concept of race came into being in Europe and when it actually started to gain real social significance. In her extensive study on the historical discourse on the 'white race', *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter (2010: 38) maintains that while European antiquity certainly knew the concept of slavery, the idea of a white race in its modern sense seems not to have existed. According to Painter, who could be enslaved legitimately during antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages seemed not to depend on skin colour, but on geography. Slavery existed throughout the Middle Ages and in early modernity, but it was the accelerating European expansionism that turned the slave trade as well as the increasing subjugation of non-Europeans into a global operation.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries colonialism as an economic system (enabled and sustained through military intervention where necessary) shifted more and more from the establishment of trading posts and settler outposts to the seizure of land for the cultivation of crops like tobacco, cotton or sugar cane, most extensively in the Americas. The growth of these crops was arduous, backbreaking labour. The business it generated was profitable on a hitherto unseen scale for the Europeans that either established or facilitated the plantations and mining operations in the New World. And it required a steady supply of unfree labour. In the beginning, this supply consisted partly of political prisoners, kidnapped vagrants and convicts from Europe. Britain with its rapidly growing population of poor individuals was the biggest supplier. There was a rapidly growing demand for labour on the plantations, as the market for especially sugar in Britain as well as the rest of Europe experienced a boom from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. This was by no means a strictly private operation, with the mercantilist (later increasingly liberal) governments of Europe being major players in this enterprise. Plantation owners were either represented within the governments or at least had the ruler's ear as fellow stakeholders in the colonial undertakings (Painter 2010: 40-42; Losurdo 2011: 67).

It was not before the eighteenth century the shipping of enslaved Africans to the Americas exploded. The production of commodities in the colonies, enabled through the seemingly inexhaustible supply of free land, wood and other raw materials created the rare instance of goods that dropped in price while demand rose, resulting in a long-lasting incentive to boost production further (Galloway 1989: 6, 45, 48). This was made possible through advancing technologies, but also due to the ever rising supply of enslaved Africans, the capturing and trading of whom continued to boom throughout the eighteenth century. It is during this period Painter locates the origin of the discursive 'now familiar equation that converts race to black and black to slave' (Painter 2010: 42). Losurdo connects the boom in European investment in the colonies with all its ghastly effects to the emergence of a more liberalist social order within some European countries (especially Britain and the Netherlands), calling the emergences of liberalism and racial slavery a 'twin birth' (Losurdo 2011: 35). Racialised thinking, then, seems to have increased in significance in tandem with the economic significance of slave labour.

Charles Wade Mills locates the starting point for the discourse on race in its modern sense, that is, (superior) white, vis-à-vis (inferior) non-white somewhat earlier, at the outset of colonialism. The discussions of whether the inhabitants of the New Worlds could actually count as humans with souls, mark, for Mills, the definite starting point for the discourse on whiteness, and thus what he terms global white supremacy (Mills 1997: 20). Mills here points to a second root of whiteness, the dichotomy heathen/Christian. Religion had provided a common European identity vis-à-vis especially Islam during the Middle Ages, and provided a common identity for the explorers venturing into what they experienced as New Worlds during early modernity. This dichotomy does not disappear at the outset of colonialism, but is gradually transformed. Racial divisions, according to Mills (1997: 21-23), replace the religious divide with the growing secularist discourse during the Enlightenment. Mills claims that this deepened the dichotomy between Europeans and non-Europeans. The religious differentiation could, at least in principle, be overcome through conversion, while racial inferiority was practically impossible to wipe off.

With regard to an explanation of the connection between these phenomena of the European colonial enterprise and the idea of a superior white race, Mills, Painter and Losurdo point to a set of differing but connected factors. Racial thinking, and thus the historic invention of whiteness as an articulated point of self-identification serves to legitimise the designation of others as sub-human in a number of contexts. Painter points to the conveniences that a racialised

social order offers to the rich and powerful (especially slave owners) using the following quotation from Max Weber:

> The fortunate man is seldom satisfied with the fact of being fortunate. Beyond this, he needs to know that he has a right to his good fortune. He wants to be convinced that he 'deserves' it, and above all, that he deserves it in comparison with others …Good fortune thus wants to be legitimate fortune (cited in Painter 2010: 193-194)

What Painter emphasises here is the psychological advantage of declaring the subordinated group as positioned in their unfortunate situation by nature, as opposed to historical circumstances. This operation then serves as a naturalisation of one's own privilege, thereby precluding any notion of potential social change. Racial hierarchies put the rich and powerful on top and cast the poor, the subjugated and those designated for a life of slave labour as born inferior (Painter 2010: 193).

Losurdo (2011: 107) also describes the ordering of people into whites and non-whites as a mechanism of socio-political exclusion, but for him it is directed at who is recognised as adequate human beings and the political and social rights that follow with this recognition. He sees racial thought as originally stemming from class privilege and as constructed to uphold these privileges (see also Anderson 2006: 149). It is here that Losurdo, along with other scholars (see Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 61, 206 – 209), identifies the third root of racial thinking: The self-designation of ruling classes as born superior to their subjects. As naturalised feudal privileges started to erode with the beginning rise of the European bourgeoisie and advancing secularism, parts of the nobility developed a defensive position that explained their social advantage with their belonging to a superior race. Through this they sought to preserve the idea of an exclusive birth-right for nobles by jumping on the accelerating train of racial discourse.

Mills puts things more bluntly. Racial categories divide the world into white Europeans and non-white colonial subjects, with the former designated to reign over the latter. Political power, cultural hegemony and the payoff of feeling superior are all significant benefits from being designated as white, but the bottom line, according to Mills, is and has always been material advantage (Mills 1997: 32-33). Constructing oneself as white legitimised European domination and worked hand in hand with the explanation of imperialist expansion. As world-system theorists have argued, early modern Europe was in fact a peripheral region in global trade (see also Loomba et al. 2005: 27). Mills (1997: 33) argues that the European take-off from an

existence as an economic backwater was mainly the result of successful colonialism and the profits it generated. One of the narratives explaining and legitimising this process was the idea of a racial superiority of white Europeans, which gained immense popularity as a meta-narrative for explaining world history during the nineteenth century. Racial thinking came to be understood as science (see also Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012: 5-6). It provided one of the most authoritative but also most convenient narratives for crediting something different than merely predatory interests in explaining the 'European miracle'. Observed through the 'whitened' lens, Europe was the home of rationalism, science proper, innovativeness and inventiveness as opposed to the perceived backwardness of the rest of the world, perceived as a natural consequence of racial traits. Progress and Enlightenment belonged to the white man because he was understood as the only one born with the capacities for it (Mills 1997: 33-34). Racial categories are then to be understood as social, or maybe rather socio-political, discursive constructions, the origins of which lie in their function of legitimising the authority of the coloniser over the colonised, the slave-owner over his slaves.

Who counts as white?

Historically, the struggle over political and social rights often invoked whiteness as an explanation for social disparities, but racial categories certainly also proved useful when engaging in polemics against another group, be they another class within one's own polity, a generalised notion of the members of another European people or simply everyone outside of Europe. Consequently, the discourse on whiteness has historically been a messy affair in terms of logical rigour and categorical clarity, thus never being able to live up to the standards of science it claimed to be following. Who was white and who was not was often a contested matter. German, French and British aristocracies, for example, regarded the lower strata of their subjects as belonging to a different, inferior race (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 208; Schech and Haggis 2004: 177; Painter 2010: 100-101, 311-316; Losurdo 2011: 145). The interesting feature of such discussions, however, was that race theorists could never agree whether races were to be sorted according to classes, nationalities, regions or phenotypes and that the particular orderings that were put forward over time inevitably reflected the theorist's own social and political standing. As Painter (2010) shows, settlers in the North American colonies cast immigration waves coming after themselves whom they considered to be competitors for

economic gains, as non-white. British commentators cast the Irish population as non-white (Stratton 2004: 233). White male scholars often cast both white women and whoever they considered as non-white as constituting more primitive forms of humans than themselves (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012: 6). Likewise, throughout both world wars, the war propaganda of all parties would often feed on discourses about the racial inferiority of the enemy (Losurdo 2009: 180).

Whiteness could then seem a somewhat arbitrary category, signifying any group which happens to exercise dominance over another. This is of course not exactly the case. It is important to note that 'being white' not only came to designate the power of any group with something to say. Over time, the category of whiteness became enlarged, at least within Europe and the US, thereby more and more assigning superiority to people of European descent in general, allegedly recognizable by the tone of their skin,[9] but also, and perhaps more significantly, by national origin. This enlargement of a category designed to be exclusive had its roots in the political and social upheavals Europe underwent internally.

Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (1997: 1-4) have established that .the formation of Enlightenment Europe had one particular feature that distinguished it from other regions rising to imperial power. The political discourse amongst the European elites tended, from the late eighteenth century onwards, to increasingly adapt universalist principles as the foundational claims for what was perceived as the just organization of a polity. Simultaneously, modernity provided the idea of an open future, radically dependent on political decisions taken in the now. This led to bitterly contesting visions of the social good within Europe, accompanied by the reactions to the eroding feudal order. In short, Europe started to experience various social struggles, some of them discursive, some involving more concrete measures and means, but all of them fundamentally over the question of who was to be included in a proper body politic

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[9] Discourses which claimed whiteness and meant superiority had, of course, to ground their claims on some sort of observable reality. Therefore, certain physiological traits as well as geographical origins also had their role to play. Painter (2010: 43) describes the emergence of 'white' as a beauty ideal in European writing during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, emphasising the influence of the work of German Enlightenment icons like Immanuel Kant and Johan Gottfried Herder. These authors claimed that beauty ideals were universal and presented the figure of the female, Caucasian slave as belonging to the highest order of beauty. Interestingly, in this discourse, (white) slavery is associated with beauty. On the conflation of aesthetic and moral judgement that the installation of this beauty ideal often resulted in, see Mills (1997: 61). For its later entanglement with science see Painter (2010: 59). For the relationship between white self-representation and aesthetics, see Richard Dyer's *White* (1997).

(see also Losurdo 2011: 181). These struggles resulted in the enlargement of whiteness to a seemingly class-free category, aligning it with the idea of the nation instead.

As noted earlier, the construction of collectives, like peoples, inevitably contains an element of story-telling about origins and relation and this is what makes the re-writing of the past necessary when a new collective is constructed. Narratives about race readily offered themselves for this purpose in the construction of national identities. Not only did they offer a feeling of 'kinship' with one's 'race-peers', but it also made everybody who was accepted part of an exclusive, elevated club. Including a formerly undesirable group into the community can be achieved by simply 'whitening' them. Thus, the extension of political rights within the Western world led to a more or less congruent expansion of whiteness (Mills 1997: 78).

Painter (2010: 132, 201, 359) has shown in great detail how the definition of 'white' in the United States changed over time, although it was always classified against a backdrop of a white/black dichotomy. The social unrest in Europe of the 1840s in combination with the famine in Ireland produced a mass exodus towards the United States, where especially the Irish immigrants were not welcome. The American definition of whiteness was at the time bound up on Anglo-Saxon ancestry and protestant faith, so the Irish were clearly not proper white Caucasians. Over time, they managed to manoeuvre themselves on the upper side of the colour line (which did not mean they became popular with the English), mainly by forming an increasingly significant group of voters. Politicians who were striving for Irish votes could simply not afford to address them as non-whites anymore, so the Irish gained a grudgingly accepted status as whites. This story roughly repeated itself with respect to Italian immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century. A similar fate met the Irish immigrants in Australia. At first, they found themselves shunned and despised by the dominantly British derived population, who understood whiteness as designating the 'British' race, and who lumped the Irish together with Aborigines as 'Africanoid', and ultimately, as 'races in decline'. As the Australian discourse in the 1880s shifted toward attempts of imagining a national population, the Irish came to be included as whites, thereby pitting them against the Aborigines (Stratton 2004: 233-235).

These two examples show a general trend for the development of the racial discourse during the nineteenth century, especially during its latter half. While the property-owning classes of Europe aspired to universalise their particular values and cultural forms (Stoler and Cooper

1997: 2-3), race became a more and more popular lens through which to view and explain the world, gradually elevating itself into a science (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012: 5-6). In this way, racialised narratives became part of the bourgeois project of rationalising and civilising state and society, while still serving as the legitimizing narrative for European expansion. By becoming part of the historiographies about the origins of the European nations, the idea of race provided a discourse that made it possible to claim a national racial identity, while the white/non-white dichotomy prevailed as a common marker of superiority over the colonised. This in turn helped constructing social cohesion by helping to disavow class conflicts and give national culture a sense of immanence, by providing a sense of 'inclusive' superiority. Race was to a certain extent 'ethnicised', thereby expanding into a popularised category of identification (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 96, 206-210), ultimately making whiteness 'accessible' for the (European) working classes as well (see also Schech and Haggis 2004: 177).

However, the bonding offered by race to the freshly imagined communities of Europe (see also Anderson 2006) was far from its only let alone most significant function. From the outset of the process of constructing European citizenship, the articulation of even the most egalitarian projects within Europe usually excluded non-Europeans, the racial Other, from membership in the community of 'free men'. While the French Revolution contained stray elements that looked with sympathy on the almost simultaneous plantation slave uprising on Saint Domingue, France as a nation quickly joined the ranks of the other Western powers (most notably the two self-proclaimed pioneers of independence and freedom, the United States and Great Britain) in condemning the formation of an independent, self-governed nation by former African slaves as a deviation from the natural order. The newly founded Haiti was thus quickly turned into the symbol of demonic anti-civilisation it has remained until the present day (Stoler and Cooper 1997: 2; Losurdo 2011: 145-158).

This trans-national solidarity of whites against non-whites showed itself frequently, be it in the immediate help European nations would provide each other in the case of slave insurgencies in the colonies or in the mutual recognition of each other's 'civilizing mission' in the colonies as a common white interest (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 43; Mills 1997: 112-116). It is especially here in Europe's various colonial possessions that the white/non-white distinction proved itself most momentous. Stoler and Cooper (1997: 3; see also Mills 1997: 63-64) argue that even if bourgeois claims to universalisation of their culture (and its perceived civility) could be driven by an honestly felt urge to improve the world, the civilising missions in the colonies

could never escape their intimate entanglement with the brutal realities of economic exploitation and military subjugation. This includes the practices of genocidal colonialism in settler colonies like Australia or the United States. It is at these moments in history that whiteness shows its most terrifying face: While on the one hand legitimizing paternalistic, educational projects, supposed to teach the colonial subjects civilization, racial theory also delivered excuses for enslavement, random killings, brutal subjugation and straightforward extermination of whole peoples. After all, racial theory taught that non-Europeans, as racial inferiors, were not fully human and hence expendable (see also Mills 1997: 28, 97-101; Losurdo 2011: 329).

The most exposed manifestation of racialised violence was the German death camps during the Second World War. As Mills (1997: 78, 98-105) argues, part of the outrage that the West felt over the discovery of Auschwitz and Dachau can be attributed to a discrepancy in the definition of who was white. While the project of the Nazis had been to become the 'highest of the master races', they had also designated Jews as non-whites, thus defining them as a contaminant, non-white presence that had to be exterminated to retain racial purity. What shocked the rest of the West so profoundly, Mills argues, was the fact that the Nazis had carried out their atrocities on European soil - in the midst of the civilised metropolis. And what was worse, the atrocities were committed against a population the rest of the West had grudgingly accepted to be 'sort of' white Europeans. The Nazis had thus taken the practices and mentalities that were reserved for the colonies and their non-white inhabitants and applied them in the middle of Europe. The violence carried out in the colonies had boomeranged back into the metropole (Arendt 1986; Mills 1997: 103).

White European thinking

The connection between European, white identities, and race as one of their structuring principles, is not hard to trace, as Mills shows. European thinkers have nearly without failure helped to reproduce, or even promote the white/non-white dichotomy. Locke speculated on the incapacities of the primitive mind and Hobbes deemed colonial slavery necessary. Hume denied that any other race than the white had created anything that could be called a civilization, Hegel denied that Africa even had any history at all and suggested that enslavement meant a moral improvement for Africans. Voltaire described blacks as a different (and inferior) species, while John Stuart Mills concluded that the 'races in their non-age' were only fit for despotism. Even

Rousseau insisted on the dichotomy between (white) civilization and (non-white) anti-civilization, paternalistically depicting non-whites as child-like and culturally immature. The crucial thing to notice here is that even if many of these political philosophers represent opposite poles within (Western) political thinking, they all agree on the relegation of non-Europeans to a state of half-animalistic non-civilization, thus denying them full personhood, humanity and capacities (Mills 1997: 59-60, 64, 68, 93).

The installation and maintaining of this superior/inferior dichotomy had to be backed up by a specific kind of discourse on history that was able to explain the perceived ontological differences between coloniser and colonised as natural. As Mills (1997: 33) notes, there are differing accounts of how Europe (and thus the peoples that consider/ed themselves white) rose to its position of global dominance. Besides the one simply attributing this process to the racial superiority of Europeans, the triumphalist narrative has taken on more subtle hues, referring to climate, geological or other environmental determinants, and, of course, cultural or theological differences. What they all have in common, though, is that they attribute the rise of the European empires to autochthonous, European features. This meant the creation of narratives that wrote off the economic and cultural influence that European presence in the colonies had on Europe itself. The domination of non-European territory and the racial others inhabiting it, was cast as an inevitable consequence, rather than the condition of Europe's advancement in wealth and power, generating widely endorsed narratives such as 'the white man's burden'. If a history of the European encounter with the rest of the world was to be written, everything that happened had simply to be described as a part of the inevitable process of Europe civilising the rest of the world. The processes and structural mechanisms for achieving white, European dominance, as well as sustaining the merits flowing from it, were thus naturalised in European scholarship. Empire and racial domination were legitimised by treating them as a process that simply unfolded, independently of the choices of the agents involved. Paradoxically, this has led to an understanding in which Europe on the one hand is bound to 'civilise' all that is non-Europe, while on the other denying any connection between European identity formation and the ruthless extraction of wealth from the colonies. Furthermore, the cultural, economic and political Europeanization of the world was naturalised along with colonial conquest, by re-articulating it as the natural process of development that all societies follow over time, with Europe sometimes assisting the most backward by teaching them European civilisation. The westernisation of the world is here understood as a matter of fate, a higher force, the workings

of which are inevitable, abstracting European particularities into the apparently culturally neutral term of 'progress' (Mills: 1997: 33, 41).

Europe 'came to see itself as a "planetary process", rather than simply a region of the world' (Mary Louise Pratt cited in Mills 1997: 41). This self-image was accompanied by the denial of the violence, subjugation, exploitation and outright theft that Europe had committed in order to elevate itself into the dominant position. Europe had to uphold a narrative that confirmed 'the assumption that Europe functions autonomously from other parts of the world; That Europe is its own origin, final end, and agent; and that Europe and people of European descent in the Americas and elsewhere owe nothing to the rest of the world' (Sandra Harding cited in Mills 1997: 34). The history of Europe, then becomes the history of the world and of human civilisation in general, with Europe's peoples happening to be the ones who 'do it best', while the rest simply do not seem to 'get it' (Mills 1997: 74).

This fundamental division into (white) Europe as civilization and all the rest lumped together as one big mass of (at best) half-civilised, traditionalist backwardness results in both spatial and cognitive effects. Spatially, it helps to explain and thus uphold the human geography of the First/Third World- or North/South divide which has followed directly from European colonialism, with the (white) descendants of the colonisers owning a share of global wealth 'grossly disproportionate to their numbers' (Mills 1997: 36). What is important for the purposes of my analysis is the outlook this dichotomy creates, both in its material reality as a global social structure and its corresponding discourse for the individuals designated as white. The discourse on the 'white race' itself, as described by for example Painter (2010) is here to be understood as only a part of the entire construction of whiteness. As I have already argued, whiteness always relies on a white/non-white dichotomy, but also allows for a certain degree of flexibility in terms of how exactly this dichotomy and its demarcation lines are historically constructed, at least within whiteness (see also Elder, Ellis and Pratt 2004: 208-209). As discourse exists in a dialectical relationship with the world surrounding it the particular ways in which whiteness is manifested in discourse, cognition and behaviour will naturally have to undergo changes if historical processes render a particular way of constructing whiteness untenable.

The transformation of whiteness after 1945

The death camps on European soil the Nazis built during the Second World War gave the concept of race a problematic reputation. Mills argues that the embarrassment over this obvious manifestation of (white) European barbarism simply 'led the post-war European intelligentsia to a sanitization of the past record, in which racism became the aberrant invention of scapegoat figures such as Joseph-Arthur Gobineau' (Mills 1997: 117). Mills cites Leon Poliakov, who claims 'a vast chapter of western thought is thus made to disappear by sleight of hand, and this conjuring trick corresponds, on the psychological or psycho-historical level, to the collective suppression of troubling memories and embarrassing truths' (Mills 1997: 117-118).

This purging of European history in order to relegate racial thinking to a now overcome remnant of the dark ages, explains why referring to racialised thinking as an important part of European culture is today often met with puzzlement or disbelief. In reality, white supremacy with all its accompanying mythologies was completely taken for granted, at least in the Western world, as late as the 1940s (Mills 1997: 27). These taken-for-granted essentialisms about a racial order of humanity were, as already pointed out above, central to modernity. Nonetheless, the changes in the metropole/periphery relationship as well as the cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s made a re-articulation of the white/non-white relationship inevitable. The grandeur of being a colonial power and even more the self-designation as a superior race were hastily abandoned, while knowledge about the atrocities and subjugation of colonialism often went out of the window with it. Colonial history became a silent embarrassment for most Western nations (Jensen 2012a: 106-110).

Together with the embarrassment over the concentration camps, these challenges gave racism a bad name, even among those privileged by it: 'In the 1950s the very idea of race began to be seen as carrying an abusive, emotive and dangerous heritage from the Nazi era and from colonial practice' (Cowlishaw 2004: 59). Academics purged it as an analytical category and state institutions in most western countries followed suit, re-articulating difference by talking about culture instead. What was forgotten in this discursive move were two things: First, structural inequality and socio-cultural hierarchies did not vanish with the popularity of biological racism (Cowlishaw 2004: 60). Secondly, discourses on race and culture had always been closely entangled, as the representation of other cultures as primitive or backwards had

been a vital part of the discourses on racial inferiority and the 'necessity of empire' (Stoler and Cooper 1997: 11; Cowlishaw 2004: 59-60).

The white/non-white hierarchy was thus able to survive the anti-racist campaigning in western countries after the Second World War, albeit in re-configured forms. The campaigns allowed many western countries to successfully repress the racialised aspects of their cultural heritage, but it was not done away with. Instead, it reappeared in Europe with full vigour when immigration from the former colonies suddenly brought a significant non-white presence to the white nation states in Europe, in which this more direct engagement with the other came to be perceived as a threat (see for example Rasmussen 2005: 12). What academic discourse has labelled 'new racism', 'cultural racism', or 'postcolonial racism' (Wadham 2004: 197), essentialises difference just as much as the former, biological racism, but does so by ascribing the perceived inferiority to a static and monolithic culture, which has replaced race as an inescapable category. The white/non-white distinction is re-inscribed into European discourse as incommensurable differences between cultures. The re-naturalisation of racialised hierarchies (without biological race) has been accompanied by a corresponding re-naturalisation of coloniality (without official colonialism). Both of these discourses are eagerly backed up by narratives of aggressive neo-liberalism, which casts measures against racial inequality (like affirmative action) as 'reverse discrimination', and understands the articulation of global inequalities as relations of coloniality as 'excuses' for nations performing comparatively badly in terms of annual GDP (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 101; Schech and Haggis 2004: 178-179; Wadham 2004: 197).

What is crucial to point out here is that while racial hierarchies persisted and were articulated in new forms, whiteness (as a marker of self-identification) shifted. While upholding the white/non-white distinction and a naturalised sense of superiority, whiteness came to re-install itself with a self-perception as anti-, or at least non-racist, while paradoxically still understanding non-whites as raced, or at least 'cultured'. Whiteness thus survived by re-inventing itself as the raceless, or even as an anti-racist norm.

It would make little sense to suggest that the 1960s and 1970s, with their cultural revolution and the integrationist hopes this fostered in the United States for example, are to be understood as a period 'free of whiteness', which then later resurfaced. Nonetheless, this period can be understood as one in which worldwide socio-cultural and political changes forced whiteness to

reinvent itself from a very outspoken category of identification ('I am a proud member of the white race'), to an internalised sense of entitlement and 'representing the universal norm'. In the latter form it is often subconscious, and sweeps both its historical roots and awareness of the merits gained from belonging to 'the right group' under the rug. I will look more closely at this more recent construction of whiteness in the next sub-section. For now, it is important to note that I see Thorkild Hansen's *Slave Trilogy* as located at a point in time in which whiteness is in a process of discursive re-configuration.

Whiteness defined broadly

Charles W. Mills subsumes the white/non-white dichotomy and its consequences as follows:

> There will be white mythologies, invented Orients, invented Africas, with a correspondingly fabricated population who never were – Calibans and Tontos, Man Fridays and Sambos – but who attain a virtual reality through their existence in travellers` tales, folk myth, popular and highbrow fiction, colonial reports, scholarly theory, Hollywood cinema, living in the white imagination and determinedly imposed on their alarmed real-life counterparts. One could say then, as a general rule, that white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are amongst the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy physically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement … which requires a certain schedule of structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity. (Mills 1997: 18-19)

Mills here directs his readers' attention from the discursive manifestations of whiteness to their dialectical counterparts, the effects on self-understanding and cognition as practiced in 'everyday life', but also 'the white polity', which denotes the systematically socio-economic favouring of whites over non-whites. Racism works as 'a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties' (Mills 1997: 3). Thus, it is important to underline that whiteness is not just a discursive phenomenon. It manifests itself materially in employment discrimination or political decisions about resource allocations, but most importantly in the racialised division expressed in 'capital wealth, and its global flows of goods, finance and… people' (Stratton 2004: 235). This racialised order is backed up by patterns of cognition that work to obfuscate and legitimise this structure, an internalised blindness, or unwillingness to question these patterns of distribution of poverty,

property and opportunities (Mills 1997: 18, 73). As we have already seen in some detail, the explanatory model of racial inferiority based on essential biological traits is frowned upon in the West today. Mills argues that this means a

> shift from straightforward biological racism to a more attenuated 'cultural' racism, where partial membership in the epistemic community [read: white community] is granted based on the extent to which non-whites show themselves capable of mastering white Western culture. (Mills 1997: 61)

If we thus understand racism (biological or its cultural heir) as a socio-political structure which: a) is the norm rather than some ideological aberration, b) discursively privileges white over non-white but denies doing so, c) serves certain material and psychological purposes, and will thus d) resist dismantling (Mills 1997: 32, 122, 123, 126 ; Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 7), we can understand whiteness as the position, or point of view, which springs from inhabiting a position of privilege within this structure. This position is paraphrased by Mills as follows: 'The fish does not see the water, and whites do not see the racial nature of a white polity because it is natural to them, the element in which they move ... there are contexts in which claiming racelessness is itself a racial act' (Mills 1997: 76).

The point Mills is making here is crucial. The discourse of colour-blindness which took hold in the West after the Second World War has allowed whites to avoid analysis of the racial and colonialist origins of both their material privileges and the structuring of their own worldview. Western white culture is thus naturalised and universalised as culturally neutral, and detached from racial discourse. At the same time, whiteness constructs itself as 'raceless' by 'racing' everybody else (Mills 1997: 76), in this manner working as an 'unmarked category against whom difference is constructed' (Hvenegård-Lassen and Maurer 2012: 121).

The allegedly colour-blind position of whiteness as culturally neutral, the normal, the centre – against which everybody else is measured – is thus a racialised position itself, nourished by the ability to be invisible to itself, thus casting its own particularities as what is 'just human', thereby creating the contrast to the ethnic, cultural or racial determinedness of everybody else. Together with the more material heritages of colonialism, including the global, material distribution of wealth and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion within white nations, this normalisation of whiteness as the normative 'human condition' against which difference is constructed, is of course the legacy of the Western self-understanding as a superior race. I will

now briefly turn to the subject of Danish whiteness, before moving on to a discussion of how to engage with whiteness in *The Slave Trilogy*.

Danish whiteness

In this section, I will take a brief look at how whiteness may be understood in a Danish context, which entails listing a number of historic and cultural specificities. This is necessary, as race, as a socially constructed category, is shifting and contested in its particular articulations. Bridget Byrne has pointed out that whiteness 'needs to be approached as a historicised and contextualised construction' (cited in Hvenegård-Lassen and Maurer 2012: 121). European identities are thus specific in their entanglement with whiteness depending on particular historical and cultural circumstances (see also Jensen 2008: 59; Loftsdóttir 2012: 58).

One characteristic feature of Danish (and, more broadly, Scandinavian) whiteness is its non-engagement with the imperial past and its racial ideologies. Scholars have pointed to a discourse of 'national innocence' regarding empire, and a self-understanding of Danish (and Scandinavian) culture as generally post-racial and marked by benevolence and exceptional humanitarianism (Hübinette 2012: 45; Petterson 2012: 31; Jensen 2012a: 111). This national self-perception can be traced back to two points in history that required the re-narration of Danish identity. Contemporary Danish identity has been formed strongly by the military defeat of 1864 and the following loss of the duchies Schleswig and Holstein which left Denmark amputated. As a reaction to the threatening demoralisation in the wake of the defeat the state actively promoted catchwords like democracy, popular culture, education, social equality, welfare and pacifism as allegedly traditionally Danish values. An imperial identity was thus superseded by a self-understanding as a peaceful, homogenous Lilliput-state, a picture that then started to be projected onto pre-1864 Danish history by Danish historians (Bregnsbo and Jensen 2004; Bregnsbo 2008: 77). While 1864 marked the last point in a long succession of military failures and territorial losses, Denmark had by no means been an introvert nation of pacifists before. Danish charter companies (often sponsored by the Danish king) brought wealth to the mercantilist empire over a 200 year period, facilitating exploitative trade with colonial possessions in Greenland, Iceland, West Africa, India and the Caribbean. Especially the latter half of the eighteenth century saw Denmark prospering from slave trade and goods, an

enterprise helped by the fact that Denmark kept itself neutral in the wars over colonial possessions and trade monopolies. This lasted until the beginning of the nineteenth century, where the new power balances resulting from the Napoleonic Wars left Denmark in a compromised international position (Jensen 2008c: 59 ; 2008b: 67).

So while Denmark had already dismantled its colonial empire to a significant extent before the rise of late nineteenth-century high imperialism (Bregnsbo 2008: 79; Jensen 2012b: 57), Denmark (and the other Nordic countries) were by no means innocent bystanders in the production of racialised and colonial discourses. Racism and contempt for non-white others were as common in Denmark as in other European countries, as documented by the moral panic over the possibility of miscegenation from the 1770s until ca. 1800, caused by the presence of around 50 black slaves in Copenhagen. As a reaction, the Danish administration considered segregation laws, an idea that was only abandoned because the administration feared scaring away the wealthy planters who owned the slaves (Jensen 2012b: 244). As racial discourses reached their peak in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the exhibiting of 'exotic peoples' (non-whites) in zoos became frequent and large-scale popular spectacles in Denmark. Greenlanders, Indians and Africans were cast as primitive others, considered to represent lower stages of civilisation (Høiris 2008: 63; Petterson 2012: 31). The history of racialised discourses produced by and about Icelanders provides an example of the 'whitening' of a group in a Danish, colonial context. Particular branches of white supremacy discourse had throughout the nineteenth century begun to favour Scandinavians as the 'whitest of all whites' (Hübinette 2012: 45), resulting in a transnational 'Viking-hype'. Thus Denmark came to see Iceland as a sort of reserve for authentic Viking culture (it also resulted in Sweden founding the world's first institute for race science). Icelanders, who had for centuries been portrayed as backwards and barbaric by other Europeans and who had struggled to be accepted as white, were suddenly cast as bearers of the primordial, cultural identities of their colonisers, and (for example) asked to pose in Viking clothing for the visiting Danish royalty (Magnússon 2010; Loftsdóttir 2010; Loftsdóttir 2012). Racism, and colonialist discourses about the other were thus no less formative of Danish identity than of any other European country. The Nordic region even temporarily came to understand itself as representing the purest breed of the white race.

A second formative shift in Danish identity discourse appeared after the Second World War and was largely in line with the overall re-narration of national identities in the West already touched upon. Denmark followed the wider consensus established against biological racism

36

(Rasmussen 2005: 12) and became, together with the other Nordic countries, outspoken supporters of de-colonisation and anti-racism from the 1960s onwards, promoting an egalitarian 'colour-blindness', whereas 'race' became a term reserved for (neo-)Nazi and other extremist ideologies (Petterson 2012: 31; Hübinette 2012: 45). Scholars have pointed to the fact that this prescribed colour-blindness – not only in Denmark - led to a re-emergence of racial discourse and whiteness under the terms of ethnicity and culture (Cowlishaw 2004: 59; Jensen 2012b: 17; Petterson 2012: 31; Hvenegård-Lassen and Maurer 2012: 120-121). The re-narration of the 'white man's burden' as the 'deliverance of progress and development' to the world's poor supported the Danish self-perception as a small, peaceful and progressive nation, and offered the possibility to also re-narrate Denmark as a benign, rational, humanitarian, global player that helped to lift peoples out of poverty and barbarism. Part of this narrative consisted in the re-articulation of the colonial relations with Greenland and the Faeroe Islands as the *Rigsfællesskab*, accompanied by a massive 'modernisation program' aiming to 'bring Greenland up to Danish standards', and which ultimately served to avoid pressures from the UN for a de-colonisation of Greenland (Jensen 2012b: 40, 157-158, 186; 2012a: 111-112).

Since the 1980s, Danish immigration policy and the discourse on non-white immigrants have become increasingly restrictive and rigid. The othering of migrants is mainly articulated in terms of culture and ethnicity as the barrier to social inclusion (Hvenegård-Lassen 2008: 82-84; Jensen 2012b: 232). Racism, on the other hand, is mostly understood as a phenomenon of the past, and not connected to contemporary Danish culture. Scholars here point to a Nordic 'exceptionalism' that opts out of the discussion on the colonial heritage by pointing either to the alleged irrelevance of colonialism to Danish identity formation, or to a proclaimed Danish benevolence in past colonial relations, thus projecting the self-image of the nation as a helper (Petterson 2012: 29-31; Hvenegård-Lassen and Maurer 2012: 120-121). The Danish self-perception as a benign, progressive, peaceful nation helping the needy is in this way entangled with Danish whiteness. This self is constructed around a sense of 'Danish infallibility', in which the unquestionable (white) rational, pragmatic and well-intended Dane is put up against the recalcitrant non-European other, who is understood to be ultimately defined by his backwards culture which he is unable to transgress. (White) Danishness becomes the naturalised, unquestionable norm against which everything else is measured. This norm incorporates a notion of colour-blindness, thereby immunising itself against accusations of racism (Jensen 2008c: 59; 2012b: 230-233; 2012a: 114).

The analysis of whiteness in *The Slave Trilogy*

After briefly historicising and contextualising whiteness, the question is how to analyse whiteness in Thorkild Hansen's *Slave Trilogy*. Following the historicised account of whiteness, it cannot be conceptualised merely as an 'authentic' or essential 'identity', given the fluidity of its constructions as well as its more recent construction as non-racial and culturally neutral. Furthermore, as Jane Haggis has pointed out, 'perceiving whiteness as identity slides past the issue of white race privilege' (2004: 51). Treating whiteness as just another identity amongst many others reproduces the fundamental mistake of many discourses on multiculturalism which obfuscate the dimensions of unequal power relations and privilege as structuring subject positions, by placing everybody on an initially level playing field. Homi Bhabha has more productively described whiteness as a discursive strategy of authority, locatable in its naturalised claims to social power and epistemological privilege. Bhabha suggests that instead of treating whiteness as a monolithically defined and settled identity based on a racist ideology, it is more productive to expose the inner inconsistencies of whiteness, its historical amnesia about its roots and the contradictory 'elements that make it the unsettled, disturbed form of authority that it is' (Bhabha 1998: 21; see also Russo, Brewster and Jensen 2011: 4).

In the context of analysing *The Slave Trilogy*, Bhabha's insight means that a number of points will have to be considered: Firstly, we have to consider the historic context that Hansen was writing in. The 1960s were a period in which colonialism and racism ranked high on the political agenda of especially the emerging new left that linked both terms to global anticolonial struggles and anti-racist movements. Secondly, it was a period in which the West was still clearly marked by the experience of the Second World War, which had seen 'civilisation' and modernity torch itself into ruins and revealing its violent sides through the horror of the death camps. As argued earlier, these events were driving forces in the transitions the construction of whiteness underwent during the latter half of the 20th century. All of these topics are reflected in *The Slave Trilogy*. The reason for focusing on exactly these elements of the historical context in which *The Slave Trilogy* was written is, of course, their connection to whiteness. Clearly positioning himself in opposition to racism, Thorkild Hansen was nonetheless writing from a position that contained elements of internalised whiteness. His choice of topic, and his 'burgeoning interest in the African American experience' that he showed prior to writing *The*

Slave Trilogy (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 88), as well as the entire project of exposing the cruel violence perpetrated by the Danish colonialists, do in my view not only reflect his own, personal attempt to overcome the entanglement with Danish, imperialist discourses. They can also be understood as reflecting a broader, increasing anxiety within the former colonial powers over categories like race, culture, national belonging and morality (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012: 5).

A reading of *The Slave Trilogy* informed by Critical Race and Whiteness Studies will thus seek out the ambivalences within the manifestations of whiteness present in the text. The historical context of the 1960s, as we will see throughout the analysis, is present in *The Slave Trilogy* not only as choice of topic or reference point. It also reveals itself as a series of ambivalences in which the whiteness to be found in the text is temporarily unsettled, betraying the anxieties caused by the confrontation with its topics of colonialism and racial slavery. At the same time, the examination of these ambivalences shows how whiteness re-installs itself, manifesting itself as a discursive strategy to reclaim or maintain authority and epistemological privilege.

3. Analysis

Thorkild Hansen's epistemology and method

I.

The first section of the analysis will be discussing Thorkild Hansen's epistemology and method in *The Slave Trilogy*. This discussion will lay the groundwork for a substantial part of the analysis. It will also serve to get some minor technicalities cleared up, by helping to clarify some of the terms I have used in the rest of the analysis. As Hansen did employ a multiplicity of voices in *The Slave Trilogy*, I will allocate and name these voices when discussing passages in detail. Further, this section will contain a short discussion of the 'documentary style', which has been a popular label with Hansen scholars. I will also briefly touch upon the question whether Hansen should be read as a historian or a novelist, and how he presents himself in *The Slave Trilogy* vis-à-vis the reader. I will start with a very brief discussion of Hansen's philosophical inclinations and some of the ways they manifest themselves in *The Slave Trilogy*. As I will argue, Hansen's epistemology and method contribute to making his position as auteur white. This section draws mainly on Kurt L. Frederiksen's (2012) recent work on Thorkild Hansen, as well as Marianne Stecher-Hansen's study (1997) for factual or biographical data where relevant. The first section of the analysis in this way differs slightly from the later ones in that it does not so much seek to identify ambivalences in the manifestations of whiteness in Hansen's text, but instead aims to show and establish my reading of Hansen's overall perspective.

As a young student in Paris, Thorkild Hansen was introduced to French existentialism by his patron, Baron Jean de Seillière, who also enabled his young student financially to live what Kurt Frederiksen (2012: 35) seems to understand as the corresponding bohemian lifestyle. More important for the context of this analysis though, Hansen seems to have adapted the existentialist outlook as his basic approach towards literature and authorship. The influence of authors like Camus, Malraux and Sartre, but also thinkers like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard on his entire work are underlined by both Stecher-Hansen (1997: 9-10, 18, 145) as well as Frederiksen (2012: 35, 51, 146, 149). These influences are reflected in two themes, or motifs, in *The Slave Trilogy,* which are relevant for the analysis. The first is a certain bitter fatalism, which undermines Hansen's critical standpoint to a certain degree, bordering at times on outright cynicism. The second is the highly visible focus on 'great men' and their tragic fates,

meant to personify the human condition as such, thereby installing a very particular perspective as universal. The first problem is exemplified in the following passage from the first chapter of *Slavernes Kyst*:

> Maa vi saaledes I mange henseender støtte os til spredte kilders ofte sparsomme, altid indirekte efterretninger, er der dog et punkt, hvor vi forsynes med oplysninger I overflod. Mange interesserer sig for livet, som det kunde være. Endnu flere beskæftiger sig med livet, som det burde være. De vil alle med god samvittighed afbryde læsningen her. Hvor det ene menneske kan købe, eje og sælge det andet, frilægges der sider af tilværelsen, som maaske findes til alle tider og paa alle breddegrader blot i en bedre maskeret og mindre tilgængelig form. Det er det opbyggelige træk ved slavernes historie. Den handler ikke om livet, som det kunde eller burde være. Det er en fordel. Den er meget menneskelig. Den handler om livet, som det faktisk er. (Hansen 1967: 23)[10]

This passage introduces Hansen's first story-line, the description of the beginnings of the Danish slave trade, comprising a general description of the encounter between African and European culture and the damaging consequences for the local (African) societies. Hansen seems to modify his account already at the outset by pointing to slavery as something (at least potentially) inherent to the human condition. At the same time, Hansen seems to mock what seems to be an idealist, or utopian approach to life, which he seems to view as naive. In Hansen's view those who concern themselves with how life could or should be seem unfit to face 'life as it really is'. The passage conveys this 'transparent view' is reserved for the author and those readers who are willing to accept his perspective as their own. While this on the one hand could be described as a competent literary gimmick to engage the reader, the claim to an unfiltered access to what is 'real', to 'life how it actually is' when stripped of political ideologies and utopian ideals, can be said to be symptomatic to Hansen's outlook in *The Slave Trilogy*. His stance towards the slave trade is of course critical, he exposes the cynicism of the slave traders and their sponsors in Denmark (see for example Hansen 1967: 145, 1970: 247), yet his criticism is compromised by his own underlying fatalism. It lends the atrocities of the past a touch of inevitability, thereby also watering down Hansen's ability to use the past to comment critically on the present. After all, if mutual exploitation and cruelty amongst humans are part of a universal human condition, which first must be faced and accepted to be overcome as

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[10] 'Even if we have to base ourselves on sparse information from diverse sources that is invariably abstruse, there is still one point about which we get masses of information. Many were interested in life, as it at times turned out to be. Many others were interested in life, as it ought to be. They will, with the best of conscience, disrupt the reading here. Where one man can buy, own and sell another, some aspects of our existence are exposed that might be found at all times and all latitudes, but merely in a better concealed and less accessible form. This is the edifying trait in the story of the slaves. It is not about life as it could be and ought to be. That is an advantage. It is very human. It is about life, as it really is.' (Hansen 2002: 34-35)

something that concerns everybody, change might be possible, but there is ultimately no real blame to pass on or accept when considering the past or the present. Hansen's fatalism is thus not only fatalistic, because it casts the atrocities of colonialism as exemplifying 'life as it is', but can also be seen as a manifestation of whiteness in *The Slave Trilogy*. While Hansen in the passage above establishes his position as an author who concerns himself with human suffering, he simultaneously places everyone involved in the slave trade in one way or the other, at eye level. The slaves and their enslavers thus become part of the same universal human condition of suffering – and thus avoid any question of particular responsibility. Furthermore, Hansen's outlook claims epistemological privilege, if not regarding the historical details of his account, then in claiming a 'realism' that through its deeper understanding of life is superior to other 'distorted' perspectives. At the same time, this 'deep perspective' arguably attempts to 'level the playing field'. While Hansen does evoke a collective, national responsibility for the atrocities of the slave trade, exemplified in his ironic references to the work of Karen Blixen (Hansen 1967: 9; 1970: 9), his perspective also underlines right from the start that the trademark violence and cruelty of European imperialism is universally human. The violence of modern colonialism is thus lifted out of its specific context and its particular connection to white, European culture. Besides making a particularly European outlook universal, whiteness can be said to delineate its borders. As author and reader move into the territory of a critical inquiry of (white) Danish and European history, Hansen assures the reader and himself that the reader will find truth in his accounts. This truth is not a product of Hansen's own ideologies and perspectives, but of a moral birds-eye point of view, based on an unfiltered experience of life, and thus capable of shrugging off disturbances as 'ideological distortions'. This omnipotent perspective presents itself as transcending its own cultural context, claiming neutrality, and thus upholding the authority to file the Danish slave trade under the relativising label of universal, human suffering. This normative position can then be understood as one of whiteness, whose claim to epistemological privilege is used to make room for a critique, but relativises it at the same time, thus containing it.

Thorkild Hansen's claim to a point of view unimpeded by ideology, unhindered by ideology as well as the capability of seeing beyond the culturally specific, moral inhibitions of others, is not only to be found in *The Slave Trilogy*. Hansen in his work generally took a position from which he asserted a deeper insight into what it meant to be human (for everybody). He took a dim view of what he saw as the 'theories' or 'ideology' of many of his contemporaries, who he condemned for politicising art. Hence they stood in opposition to what he assigned the same

purity (freedom from ideological distortion) as 'life', which he believed to be accessible as unmediated, universal experiences (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 19, 142, 145; Frederiksen 2012: 137, 79, 144-145).

II.

The other existentialist theme in *The Slave Trilogy* that needs to be problematised here is Hansen's focus on and conception of the individual. One of the underlying literary themes of *The Slave Trilogy* is the individual who comes into being as an actual individual by trying to resist, or actively challenge the social and historical forces that surround him, and who pays for this claim of autonomy through his repudiation by society (see also Frederiksen 2012: 141, 144). This motif partly explains Hansen's fatalism. All the main characters (regardless of whether the reader is admonished to sympathise with them or not) have to face the futility of their endeavours, and they are usually brought down by grudges and jealousy of their less autonomous contemporaries (in most cases personified by the bureaucracy in Denmark). As this outcome seems to be the inevitable result of the individual's struggle with its surroundings, most of Hansen's characters in *The Slave Trilogy* are ultimately tragic figures, whose efforts to change their own fate and the world around them form the actual dramatic element in Hansen's book. I will show several examples with particular details of this in later sections of the analysis. For now, I will limit myself to discussing two general aspects of this theme which concern whiteness.

The problem with Hansen's existentialist individuals is two-fold. Firstly, all the individuals that are described in detail are white males. Hansen does give us short accounts of a few slaves that lead insurrections against the colonialists, but for reasons that will be detailed later, these figures remain stereotypical and lifeless. Following the fate of several Danish colonialists and their futile efforts to find fame, riches or happiness far from home remains the actual driving force of Hansen's account. The story of Danish colonialism thus often becomes a story of adventurers, whose ideas and character-traits seem to be the essential driving forces in its history. Secondly, the focus on the autonomously acting individuals following their consciousness or ambition puts all agency on them, that is, on the side of a few single white men. These individuals seem to have determined the course of history by making decisions

which came at a personal price. Whiteness thus also installs itself as a matter of focus. Danish imperial history is focused around the lives of a succession of 'great men', whose motives and the resulting efforts seem to explain most of the historical account. The only figures Hansen brings to life are these white men, mostly soldiers of fortune, whose efforts in the colonies are usually betrayed by the incomprehension of their contemporaries in Denmark.

In the first chapter of *Slavernes Kyst*, Hansen gives us an early hint of how he is going to bring the forgotten events and individuals to life. As the slaves have not left behind any written accounts, we need to find evidence of their voices through the slave owners' account. Hansen presents the reader with his sources for inspiration, which he presents as the accounts of eyewitnesses, who can *'sammenkaldes'* [be evoked] (Hansen 1967: 22). Their credibility is accredited and relativised at the same time in the following passage:

> Den fremstilling, de gav af slavehandelen, var i modsætning til det billede, der kan fremdrages af arkiverne, en fremstilling, som samtiden kunde stifte bekendtskab med. Hvis den vilde. De maatte tage hensyn til, at deres oplysninger kunde efterprøves, være forsigtige, afholde sig fra overdrivelser, ja i visse tilfælde undgaa den fulde sandhed. Det giver os en fast grund under fødderne, som vi ogsaa kan udbygge paa anden vis. Endnu i dag kan mange af deres udsagn afkontrolleres. Det er stadig muligt at opsøge de steder, hvor begivenhederne foregik, rejse ned til Guldkysten og ord for ord sammenholde de gamle beretninger med omgivelserne. (Hansen 1967: 22-23)[11]

Hansen here introduces us to his method of combining his reading of historical documents with first-hand accounts of his travels to relevant historical sites. What he leaves out is his occasional comparisons of the historical documents with contemporary scholars. This does not occur often, but plays a vital role for the way Hansen lets his account unfold.

Hansen uses historical documents as his base, weaves passages from these in and out of his text and backs up these historical accounts with accounts of contemporary visits at historical sites as well as fictional passages. This creates a multiplicity of voices through which the author speaks, which we will name here in order to be able to distinguish them more easily throughout the analysis. Firstly, there are the passages in which Hansen describes his visits to

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[11] 'The account they gave of the slave-trade was contrary to the one that can be pulled out of the archives, a presentation that the contemporary world could become familiar with. If it so wished. They had to keep in mind, that their information could be verified, avoid exaggerations, and in some cases avoid the full truth. That gives us firm ground to stand on, and that we can expand on in different ways. Even today, many of their utterances can be verified. It is still possible to visit the places where the events took place, travel down to the Gold Coast and word for word compare the old accounts with the surroundings.' (Hansen 2002: 34).

contemporary, historical sites. In these, Hansen often describes the events as if recalling them in his own head, addressing himself as 'you' (*'du'* in Danish - thereby in fact addressing himself and the reader at the same time), when describing his own experience. As Hansen here almost writes in the style of reportage, I will call this the journalistic voice. Then there is the omnipotent, authorial point of view, which is the actual narrator of the historical accounts, and which is congruent with my earlier discussion of Hansen's voice. This will be called the normative voice. Then there is the long line of eyewitnesses, which will not be listed in detail here, but who are sometimes cited, sometimes summarised, but sometimes also spoken for in the normative voice. Here Hansen can be located in a hermeneutic tradition that Marianne Stecher-Hansen (1997: 6) associates with thinkers like Dilthey and Collingwood.

Hansen's chosen approach creates certain problems. He installs himself as the authority that can distinguish between reliable and unreliable statements in the eyewitness accounts, a position that he drives further home by his tongue-in-cheek reference to himself as a *'seriøs forsker'* [a serious scholar] at several points in the second volume (1968: 143, 149, 153). Furthermore, he repeatedly draws on contemporary scholars, either comparing their findings to claims made in the historical texts or simply passing on information from these more recent sources. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that Hansen believed everything he wrote to be literally true. The problem is that the illusion of authenticity he creates often obfuscates the difference between his own viewpoints and the perspective of his eyewitnesses. Hansen relativises the authenticity of some particular sources by pointing to the authors' less than noble motives for writing some of the presented accounts[12] as well as by underlining the particular cultural perspective of some of his eyewitnesses (Hansen: 1967: 180 ; 1970: 190, 211), or by simply portraying them as outright despicable. At the same time Hansen grants some of his other eyewitnesses (not surprisingly the ones in which the 'great men' motive is embodied most strongly) plenty of room for his description of their character and perspective in the normative voice, presenting them as figures for emphatic identification. In the actual text, this creates the problem of the different voices – and thus perspectives – of some of the eyewitnesses and the normative voice floating in and out not only in terms of who is speaking, but also whose perspective is presented to the reader as the one that 'speaks the truth'. Kurt L. Frederiksen (2012: 110) has described this technique as a special mixture of subjectivity and objectivity. But this misses a crucial point, as it is exactly Hansen's attempts at being objective (or using

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[12] See here Hansen's contextualisation of the account written by Hans West in *Slavernes Øer* (Hansen 1970: 256).

his own terms 'realistic') that mark the strongest subjectivity in his work. Hansen builds an idiosyncratic, cultural perspective, shaped by whiteness, that is not only blind to its own contingency, but bases its claim to authority on actively denying it. The normative voice thus often ends up being indistinguishable and thus complicit with the idiosyncratic perspectives presented (at times there is also a very open complicity, as we shall see in the example of Governor Edward Carstensen). Thus, the normative voice in *The Slave Trilogy* takes a white perspective, which also at times is congruent with the colonialist Danes and their viewpoints.

III.

Thorkild Hansen's method was at the time of writing called 'documentarism', a label which he accepted (Frederiksen 2012: 147). In this respect, Hansen seems to have been fairly congruent with the literary trends of his time, at least with its craving for 'facts and documents', a sort of hunger for realism, which reflected the highly politicised atmosphere of the 1960s (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 16). Apart from this, Hansen seems to have understood himself as at odds with most of the cultural trends of his time. He saw himself as out of step with the modernists of the pre-war era who at his time struggled to fathom the shock of the World Wars, and he openly shunned the Marxist predilections of many of his contemporaries (especially their insisting on art being political). He understood them to be dogmatic, or ideological, even if he coquetted with having made use of Marxist theory when constructing *The Slave Trilogy* (Frederiksen 2012: 144-145,153-154).

Part of Hansen's method is to let the reader participate in parts of the construction of the account, thereby creating the illusion of authenticity that forms the foundation for his proclaimed 'realism' discussed above. He finds, chooses and interprets his sources with the reader always at his side, sometimes playing the role of a historian, sometimes of a journalist, but in reality acting as an authoritative author who is writing a novel. In *Søforhør*, Hansen (1982: 122) at one point emphasises, how his work as a journalist had taught him to choose the 'right' sources, as opposed to how a scholar would have worked, getting lost in details instead of focusing on the essential. Furthermore, in *Slavernes Kyst* (1967: 208) the dramatic peak is Hansen's journalistic research in the town of Orsu, in which his comparison of the artefacts he

finds with the historical sources leads him to conclude that the Danish colonists must have continued the human trade illegally after the government ban.

Hansen was thus first and foremost writing a fictionalised account, when he produced *The Slave Trilogy*, rather than actual historiography. Nonetheless, the claim to epistemological privilege and 'realism' that he makes is not only to be seen as a conscious strategy to spell-bind the reader through an illusion of authenticity. It is exactly the points at which he tries to be authoritatively 'realistic' that Hansen reveals his strongest bias, the need to keep the critique against Western imperialism within a bearable framework, one that keeps it from starting to contaminate all that 'is Western'. His weaving together of voices throughout *The Slave Trilogy* often contains sarcasm and irony towards his eyewitnesses and their viewpoints, but Hansen's admiration for and focusing on the 'great men' reveals a certain complicity in the take on life that Hansen assigns to them. Further, this complicity ends up as a universalisation of the perspective of the white man and his perceived urge to 'conquer the wild'.

Representation of non-whiteness in *The Slave Trilogy*

I.

Richard Dyer (1997: xiii-xiv) has remarked how much more control white people historically have had over their definitions of themselves and others, thus being able to cast themselves as embodying humanity. In her celebratory study of Thorkild Hansen's writings, Marianne Stecher-Hansen remarks how it is to his credit that Hansen 'never attempts to enter the minds of the Africans sold into European captivity' (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 99). Instead, he stays true to his principle of 'documentary authenticity', relying solely on the 'documentary eyewitness accounts of contemporary Europeans'. This can be said to be true only to a certain extent. Hansen *does* at several points characterise the Africans and their Caribbean descendants through his normative voice (often in tandem with some of the eyewitnesses` voices, or by evoking scholarly voices), assigning both generalised traits to blacks as well as brief attempts at psychological explanations for some of the actions of individual slaves that he focuses on. This has a two-fold effect on Hansen's text as a whole. Firstly, these characterisations, even when they are mainly coming from Hansen's normative voice, nonetheless still draw on the general, racialised discourse that is already manifested in Hansen's eyewitness accounts,

thereby reproducing racialised stereotypes about the slaves. The normative voice, the eyewitnesses' voices and the journalistic voice collectively produce a canon of voices which are often overlapping, sometimes discordant, but all of them ultimately white.

To explore this issue in more depth I want to examine how the term race itself is presented in *The Slave Trilogy*. Even though direct references to the concept of race are few, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss them in order to clarify how Hansen treats the matter. Early in the first volume, Hansen mentions race in his historical account, listing *'racekonflikterne'* [racial conflicts] (1967: 26) amongst the consequences of the slave trade. The term is here listed amongst all kinds of other things (including the trumpet of Louis Armstrong) and the conflict between races is stated as a simple fact. Hansen here obviously refers to the political unrest manifested in the American Civil Rights movements which Stecher-Hansen (1997: 80; 2008: 74) states to be one of the contemporary events that actually made Hansen write *The Slave Trilogy*. Nonetheless, it also shows a display of 'race' as a neutral, objective term. Later in the same volume, Hansen engages with racial thinking in a somewhat more critical manner. In his description of Wulff Joseph Wulff, a Danish officer who is depicted as a purely unsympathetic character, he writes: 'Som de andre danskere ansaa han negrene for at være en mindreværdig race I sammenligning med de hvide' (Hansen 1967: 180)[13]. Wulff's racism is here listed as one of his many deplorable traits, and the normative voice formulates the sentence in such a way as to distance itself from such thinking.

Further references to race (all very brief) are to be found in the third volume, *Slavernes Øer*, of which I find one particularly striking. In a passage describing the view that the Herrnhuter missionaries had on their own slaves, especially the fears that the white community had in connection with the nightly dances the plantation slaves held, Hansen suddenly cites the historian Lawaetz:

> Brødrene [the Moravian Brothers] havde tilvisse al mulig grund til at søge at hæmme negerdansen, ... (...) … Den mangler næppe noget I at være et fuldendt billede af dyrisk hæslighed og modbydelig sanselighed. Intet viser maaske tydeligere, hvor fornedret racen er, end netop dansen. (Hansen 1970: 178)

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[13] 'As the other Danes, he looked on the Negroes as an inferior race compared with the Whites' (Hansen 2002: 189).

Hansen then continues in the normative voice:

Ordene staar I pastorens doktordisputats fra 1899. Hvad maa brødrene og søstrene fra Herrnhut da ikke have sagt hundrede aar før? Hjemme havde de siddet i hver sin stue naar Zinzendorf [Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, founder of the Herrnhuter mission] prædikede, og aldrig gaaet tur i parken paa den samme dato. Saa kom de til Dansk Vestindien og saa slaverne danse. (Hansen 1970: 178)[14]

This passage is interesting in respect to its several ambivalences regarding race. On the one hand, Hansen uses Lawaetz as an illustration of racial prejudice. The latter's vicious tone and clear evocation of a racial hierarchy with blacks at the bottom is presented as an example of a mentality that Hansen clearly distances himself from, and that he assumes must have been much worse at the time of the Moravian Brothers, a century earlier. It is interesting to note Hansen's assumption that racism seems to get worse the longer one would go back in time (especially as Lawaetz writes during high imperialism), but the actually ambivalent part lies in the two last sentences. The Moravian Brothers are here (as throughout the chapter) described as prudish and mainly characterised by their restrained sexuality, a trait Hansen spends a considerable number of pages ridiculing (Hansen 1970: 140). While this stance could be understood as reflecting the Western discussion on sexual revolution in the 1960s, the interesting point is that Hansen presents the slaves and their dancing as the antithesis to the uptight, restrained, and thus out of touch with their own bodily functions, missionaries. This then, ironically, conjures the racist cliché (just condemned in the writing of Lawaetz) of blacks as overtly sensual and animalistic ('addiction to rhythm' is another cliché). This ambivalence can be said to reflect the general stance on the concept of race within *The Slave Trilogy*. Hansen seems aware of the problems connected to the concept of race, and takes a critical stance towards the hierarchy implicit in it. But even though the use of the word 'race' is nowhere directly connected to traits that then would be ascribed to be essential to such 'races', racialised clichés are not uncommon in *The Slave Trilogy*. Subsequent references to 'race' in *Slavernes Øer* are all of the allegedly value-neutral type we have seen in the first example and are thus not discussed in detail here. I now

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[14] 'The Brethren had surely all possible reason for seeking to restrict the dance of the negroes …Compared with animalistic ugliness and disgusting sensuality, it lacks nothing. Nothing demonstrates more clearly how base the race is then the dance." [Hansen then continues in the normative voice:] "These words can be found in the pastor's doctorial dissertation of 1899. What might not the Brethren and the sisters from Herrnhut have said one hundred years before this? At home they had sat separated in different rooms when Zinzendorf preached, they had never gone for a walk in the park on the same day. Then they came to the West Indies and saw the slaves dance' (Hansen 2005: 196).

want to go on with demonstrating the presence of racialised traits by looking at the vocabulary Hansen uses when describing the slaves.

Throughout all three volumes of *The Slave Trilogy*, Hansen mainly uses the term *'Negrene'* [the Negroes] for the slaves as well as their descendants as a group, even though occasionally he uses 'Africans' (especially in the first volume, dealing with the Danish colony in Guinea) or simply 'the slaves'. Most would probably agree today, that (in Danish) the term 'neger' is to be considered a racialising, derogatory term, but at the time Hansen was writing *The Slave Trilogy*, it was a commonly – even unproblematically - accepted Danish term. In this context, it is interesting to note that the first volume, *Slavernes Kyst*, comes with a disclaimer: 'Den moderne praksis, hvorefter indbyggerne i Afrika rimeligt kaldes for afrikanere, er enkelte steder fraveget af hensyn til det historiske' (Hansen 1967: 277)[15]. Again, this can only be said to be true to some extent. While Hansen does seem to accept that 'neger' is not entirely unproblematic (hence the disclaimer), it is by far the most used identifier for black people throughout all three volumes. Furthermore, all of the voices Hansen evokes, use it, the eyewitnesses, the normative and the journalist voice, and even when the voice occasionally takes the perspective of the slaves themselves. So this means that Hansen also uses the term in his journalistic accounts, hence it undermines his claim that he uses the term to create a feeling of 'historical authenticity'.

The point here is not that an author like Hansen should have abstained from using such a term at all because today it is to be considered politically incorrect. Rather the problem lies in the fact that Hansen, even though apparently not totally unaware of its implications, uses the term at all times, no matter if he is sarcastically reproducing the white slave-owners thoughts about their property (see for example 1967: 27, 150; 1970: 190), describing the actual, horrifying cruelties to which the slaves were subjugated to in the normative voice (1968: 55; 1970: 243-246), or inviting the reader to participate in his personal encounters with locals throughout his travels to historical sites (1967: 169; 1970: 37, 81). Even though it has to be noted here, that Hansen *does* make use of the term *'afrikanere'* on quite a few occasions in the first volume, especially when writing in the journalistic voice, there is never a clear demarcation to be seen in the text. *'Afrikaner'* remains interchangeable with the racialised, anonymising *'neger'*, also in Hansen's descriptions of contemporary Guinea and the West Indies. That is to say, Hansen's

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[15] 'The modern trend whereby the inhabitants of Africa are, as a matter of course, called Africans is not necessarily adhered to, for historical reasons' (Hansen 2002: 283).

slaves are first and foremost defined by their blackness, which is depicted as essential and homogenous, as I attempt to show in the following.

Here, I want to continue to dwell on the vocabulary employed for a moment. What is peculiar about the descriptions of slaves is the frequent mentioning of certain bodily traits in combination with a quite narrow variety of mental traits that black people display in *The Slave Trilogy*. As Richard Dyer (1997: 14-15) has remarked, in white representations, blacks tend to be reduced to their race, the corporeal. A repeated motive are the *'uldne hoveder'* [woolly heads] in combination with *'hvide øjne'* [white eyes] contrasting with *'den sorte hud'* [the black skin] (see for example Hansen 1968: 106; 1970: 86, 205, 348). While the use of these adjectives in themselves do not necessarily reflect a racialised perspective, they inevitably come to embody this view because they represent the only physical traits that blacks seem to have (again, these descriptions are not limited to the use of only one voice). They are simply used as primary markers that constitute the bodies of blacks. Even though this is not explicitly stated anywhere, the slaves all seem to look the same, as there are never any other physical traits mentioned. Furthermore, it is striking that every black individual that Hansen describes, both the historical figures and those he meets on his own journey, can be divided into two character-types. All blacks seem either remarkably jolly fellows, loving *'stærke farver og larmende trommer'* [strong colours and noisy drums] (Hansen 1967: 9-10; 1970: 81) or they are profound, thoughtful, silent types, which usually seems to designate them to be the leaders of slave insurrections.

II.

The first description of Africans and their culture (and the first to present them in a remarkably homogenous fashion) opens *Slavernes Kyst*. Hansen introduces us to the traces of Danish colonialism in Guinea standing on the bastion of the remains of a Danish fort pondering the view over the landscape and the locals inhabiting it. After citing a local folk song in which the singer bemoans being caught and sold like a young chicken, Hansen reflects on who the local captives might have been that were brought forward to be sold during the age of Danish colonialism:

> De var som unge høns. Deres mænd var slanke og smidige. Mænd og kvinder besad det samme fornøjede væsen. Frygtede hurtighed. Forstod ikke at skynde sig. Holdt af stærke farver, larmende trommer og langsomme beslutninger. De kendte de store kløfter i

regnskovens dyb, hvor vandfald dundrede ned i forstøvede taager kun overdøvet af eftermiddagens korte tordenbyge. De havde set flodhesten parre sig under fuldmaanen. De vidste, at krokodillens galde er et hurtigt virkende giftstof. De mente, at det fedtlag, der sidder under hunløvens skind, er godt mod gigt. Men de havde aldrig oplevet havet, aldrig set et hjul, aldrig set en hvid mand. (Hansen 1967: 10)[16]

The African population is here placed in a context of an idyllic, panoramic view of nature to which they and their way of life ultimately belong. The picture of society evoked here is one of a pre-civilisational state of nature, where the untouched wilderness includes the local population as a part of itself, while their socio-political relationships reflect a life in a state of symbiosis with the beauty surrounding them. This tranquil state of affairs is interrupted by the sea (contact with other peoples), the wheel (technology) and the white man (colonial subjugation).

The picture of a paradise soon to be corrupted by the influence of the European colonisers is reiterated at several points in the following chapters. The Atlantic slave trade *'knuste en gammel samfundsstruktur i Afrika'* (Hansen 1967: 26), subjugating a *'befolkning af stærke og sunde mennesker, glade og venlige af væsen, gæstfri over for de fremmede'* (Hansen 1967: 27)[17]. Again, these formulations evoke a picture of vigorous 'naturalness', reflecting the ideal of 'uncorrupted' mankind. The 'authentic' human, happy in his child-like ignorance of the evils of modernity is here cast as the victim of the forces of modernity, described by Hansen with bitter sarcasm:

De havde ikke fulgt ordentlig med i verdenshistorien. De var lukket ude fra den. Af Atlanterhavet. Af det indiske Ocean. Af Sahara. Paa tre væsentlige omraader stod de klart tilbage for de fremmede. De havde ikke noget skriftsprog. Og værre end det: de kunde ikke destillere brændevin. Og værre end det: de kunde ikke blande kulstøv, salpeter og svovl i det rette indbyrdes forhold. De var ikke civiliserede. De kunde ikke lave krudt. (Hansen 1967: 28)[18]

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[16] 'They were like young hens. Their men were slim and agile. Both men and women had the same happy countenance. Feared haste. Didn't bother about hurrying. Loved strong colours, resonating drums and cautious decisions. They knew the deep gorges in the tropical forest, where the waterfalls thundered down into misty fogs only superseded by the ear-splitting crescendo of the afternoon's thunderstorm. They had seen the hippopotamuses copulate under the full moon. They knew that the crocodile's gall is a swift and powerful poison. They believed that the layer of fat from under the lioness's skin is good for arthritis. But they had never encountered the sea, never seen a wheel and never met a white man' (Hansen 2002: 20-21).

[17] 'destroyed the societal fabric and old culture in Africa.' … 'a population of strong and healthy human beings, happy and friendly by disposition, hospitable to strangers' (Hansen 2002: 36 and 37).

[18] 'They had not properly followed the developments in world history. They had been excluded. By the Atlantic Ocean. By the Indian Ocean. By the Sahara. In three important areas they clearly lagged behind the strangers. They did not have a writing system. And even worse: they did not know how to distil liquor. And even worse still: they did not know how to mix coal-dust, saltpetre and sulphur in the right quantities. They were not civilised. They did not know how to make gunpowder' (Hansen 2002: 38-39).

The arrival of especially gunpowder and booze has devastating consequences:

Rakte europæerne med deres ene hand afrikanerne en hidtil uset mulighed for magt, tilintetgørelse og grusomhed, saa tilbød de dem rigtignok ogsaa med den anden haand en hidtil uhørt mulighed for glemsel. Det mærkelige var, at begge gaver virkede paa samme vis. Ingen af dem var givet en gang for alle, med dem begge fulgte den følelse, der maaske er Europas største bidrag til menneskeheden: følelsen af at være utilfredsstillet, begærlig, umættelig. Behøvede negrene flere og flere geværer, saa fandt de snart ud af, at de ogsaa for enhver pris maatte have mere og mere brændevin. ... Der gik betændelse i de stolte karakterer. Slavehandelen nedværdigede høvdingerne, men samtidig øgede den deres personlige magt. ... Det førte til teokratiske terrorregimer, de aarlige rædselsscener i Benin, hvor kasserede slaver ofredes i tusindtal. ... Af alle de kræfter der trak det fatale aarsagshjul, var denne demoralisering af afrikanerne maaske den stærkeste. Jo brutalere de behandlede deres egne, jo flere undskyldninger fik europæerne for at gaa lige saa haardt til værks. (Hansen 1967: 31)[19]

Hansen's attack on the slave trade in general seems here to be combined with a critique of Western culture, maybe even capitalism (greed as a 'European invention') and its corrupting influence. The picture of a paradise lost, which might have existed prior to the European arrival, and the depiction of the African population as having been violently torn out of a state of idyllic happiness serve as a strong contrast to the apologetic cynicism that he ascribes to the white slave-traders:

Nøgne vildmænd, der lige var rystet ned fra træerne. Primitive stenalderfolk, som ikke kunde regere sig selv. Dyriske kannibaler og blodige afgudsdyrkere. Saadan lød danskernes syn paa afrikanerne, og heri saa de den rimelige berettigelse i at bringe dem over til De vestindiske Øer. De vilde hjælpe dem ud af regnskovens dæmoniske mørke og ind i civilisationens lys. (Hansen 1967: 27)[20]

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[19] 'While the Europeans on the one hand gave the Africans an, until now, unimagined possibility for power, destruction and cruelty, they also on the other hand offered them an, until now, unheard possibility for oblivion. The amazing thing was that both gifts worked in the same way. None of them was given once for all, along with both came the feeling that might be Europe's greatest contribution to humanity: the feeling of dissatisfaction, greed, insatiability. If the Africans needed more and more muskets, then they also quickly found out that they at any cost needed more and more liquor. …The proud characters caught an infection. The slave trade debased the chiefs, but at the same time increased their personal power. …This led to the theocratic terror regimes, the yearly scenes of carnage in Benin, where rejected slaves were sacrificed in their tens of thousands. ….Of all the powers that initiated the cycle of causes, the debasement of the Africans was perhaps the strongest. The more brutally they treated their own, the more the Europeans could defend behaving likewise' (Hansen 2002: 40-41).

[20] 'Naked savages that had just been unstuck from the trees. Primitive stone-age people who could not govern themselves. Beastly cannibals and bloodthirsty pagans. This was the Danish view of the Africans, and herein they saw a reasonable justification for taking them across to the West Indian islands. They wanted to help them out of the demonic darkness of the rain forest and into the light of civilisation' (Hansen 2002: 37-38).

Hansen then goes on to oppose this characterisation by citing contemporary scholarly works that rebut the description of the 'authentic' African societies as primitive and savage.

> De stenaldermennesker, danskerne mødte, kunde udvinde og forarbejde jern og havde kunnet det i 1500 aar. De blodige kannibaler levede i velorganiserede samfund baseret paa et effektivt landbrug, et højtstaaende haandværk, et afbalanceret økonomisk fordelingssystem og en række fast etablerede love. (Hansen 1967: 28)[21]

It is noteworthy that Hansen here uses a discursive strategy to reject the colonialist claims about the Africans. He contrasts the Danish perception of Africans as *'stenalderfolk'* [stone-age people] and *'kannibaler'* [cannibals] with evidence of their advanced society. Hansen picks up the same thread a few pages later where he invokes the British historian Basil Davidson's claim that African societies of that time were *'jernaldersamfund'* (Iron Age Societies) (Hansen 1967: 31).

The normative voice thus here evokes contemporary scholarship to present the reader with how African societies 'really' were when the European colonisers arrived. While this perspective is in stark contrast to the one he ascribes to the Danish slave traders, it remains a white, Eurocentric perspective. Davidson's work (and thus Hansen's 'borrowed' normative voice) takes African societies and place them on a progressive scale of stages of civilisation. The underlying narrative here is of course the one of all cultures following the same, inevitable path towards progress. All civilisations must go through a defined number of stages on their way towards reaching the level of (white) European civilisation. According to this view then, Africans could be said to be more civilised than the European colonisers took them to be, but it still clearly places all African societies at a lower stage of development than the Europeans. The degree of civilisation Africans then could or could not have 'reached' at the point of European arrival is measured against European, white self-understanding, which sets the standards for what can be considered as civilisation at all, thus keeping the naturalised assumption of its own superiority intact. The quoted passage provides us with an example of reinstalling white epistemology – while trying to undo the gaze of the white slave-holder. While the normative voice demands a more positive evaluation of the Africans and even emphatically decries their fate and accuses the white colonisers of cynically misrepresenting their victims,

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[21] 'The stone-age people that the Danes met could extract and work iron, and had done so for 1500 years. The bloodthirsty cannibals lived in well-organised societies based on an effective agricultural production, a highly developed craftsmanship, a regulated economic distribution system and a series of well-established laws' (Hansen 2002: 38).

white superiority (and thus authority) is sustained in the scholarly discourses Hansen draws on in order to reject the descriptions given by the slave traders. The poetic voice is not only claiming authority here, but also backs itself up with the power of scholarship, thus enabling itself to claim objective truth beyond the authorial position. The effect of this setup is a re-instalment of white authority, which ultimately settles potential anxieties for the white self that might have arisen from the embittered attack on Danish colonialism and its mentalities vis-à-vis the African population that had just unfolded on the previous pages. The white narrative of progress as exclusively embodied in European history thus remains unchallenged as the underlying philosophy of history in Hansen's account of the African encounter with European modernity.

III.

A perhaps even more remarkable example of whiteness reinstalling itself through Hansen's use of scholarly discourse occurs towards the end of *Slavernes Skibe*. Again, Hansen contemplates what kind of people the captives on the ships might have been prior to their enslavement. Hansen then refers to a source, he presents as 'the Malawian ethnologist Chisiza', who, according to Hansen, has investigated the 'national character' of Africans in several analyses:

> Ifølge Chisiza besidder afrikanerne hverken østens meditative eller vestens udforskende aandsform. Han betragter dem fortrinsvis som kontemplative naturer, gode iagttagere, der stoler mere paa intuitionen end fornuften. Mens man i vesten mener, at mennesket lever for at arbejde, vil afrikanerne normalt gaa ud fra, at mennesket arbejder for at leve. Deraf den 'forkærlighed for leddiggang' der ofte blev bebrejdet dem af de hvide. De føler instinktivt, at det er vigtigere at søge lykken end at søge skønheden eller sandheden, og lykken ligger ikke hos den enkelte men udspringer af samlivet med andre. Den afrikanske levemaade tager afstand fra individualisme og isolation, de typiske aktivitetsformer i Afrika, jagt og fiskeri, agerbrug, kanosejlads og dans, er gruppeaktiviteter. De egenskaber, der tjener fællesskabet, som gavmildhed, hjælpsomhed og forsonlighed, opmuntres, mens ambitioner og hævnfølelse holdes nede. Chisiza finder her baggrunden for afrikanernes berømte humoristiske sans, deres utilbøjelighed til melankoli og deres fordringsløse levevis. Det drejer sig gennemgaaende om lettroende og overbærende naturer, der føler sig skabt til at nyde livet, og som synes, at andre mennesker skal gøre det samme. De er tilfredse med tingene, som de er, og deres ideal er en tilværelse, hvor arbejdet kommer i anden række til

fordel for fællesskabets glæder, som først og fremmest har rod i de usædvanlig stærke følelser, der knytter den enkelte til sin familie. (Hansen 1968: 192)[22]

The use of Chisiza's text by Hansen is remarkable in several respects. Within the context of the chapter, it serves to reinforce the tragedy of a 'native people', torn out of their natural habitat and thus deprived of the social relations that formed the very basis for their friendly, even though (in Hansen's representation) ultimately primitive society. The first thing to note here is Hansen's presentation of Chisiza as an ethnologist from Malawi, who is said to have published several studies on the national character of Africans in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*. A perusal of the issues of the year given as reference (1963) reveals that what Hansen is referring to here is a single article, written by Malawian political activist Dunduzu Chisiza, in which he is promoting political unity for the entire continent Africa, which he saw as the only way forward after the completion of decolonization. Chisiza did in fact not study ethnology, but 'various religions' in Uganda, and later economics, sociology and political sciences in Birmingham, after which he became a Malawian politician (Power 1998: 373). In the article in question, Chisiza is promoting a common future outlook for all of Africa, the ideal future of which Chisiza sees rooted in the development of a political union based on a strong collectivism, which he claims to be present in all African societies and which makes western individualism 'naturally abhorrent' to Africans. Chisiza's article is a call for transnational economic and political unity amongst Africans to look for an alternative political future together, not a series of ethnological studies.

One could of course simply accuse Hansen of bricolage, or of maybe taking his poetic license a little too far, motivated by a simple urge to maximise the authoritativeness of his claims, especially when considering that Chisiza had died in 1962 (the article was published posthumously) (Power 1998: 369). But then again, Hansen spent three years doing meticulous

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[22] 'According to Chisiza, the African possesses neither the meditative mentality of the east nor the explorative mentality of the west. He views the African primarily as a contemplative nature, good observers that rely more on intuition than on common sense. Whereas one in the west is of the opinion that man lives to work, the African will for the most assume that man works to live. Whence the "love of inactivity" that the Whites often accuse them of. They feel instinctively that it is more important to seek happiness than to seek beauty or truth, and happiness is not an individual enterprise but springs from the communion with others. The African way of life distances itself from individualism and isolation, the typical forms of Activity in Africa, hunting, fishing, cultivating, canoeing and dancing are all group activities. That which serves the communal such as generosity, helpfulness, and reconciliation are encouraged, whereas feelings of ambition and revenge are suppressed. In these Chisiza finds the cause for the Africans` famous sense of humour, their tendency towards melancholy and their undemanding ways of life. It is on the whole about easygoing and indulgent natures, that feel created to enjoy life and who thinks other people should do the same. They are satisfied with things as they are and their ideal is an existence where work is secondary to the joys of community that first and foremost has their roots in the exceptionally strong feelings that bind the individual to his family' (Hansen 2003: 188-189).

research for *The Slave Trilogy* and seemed genuinely devoted to what he understood as accuracy in his research (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 28, 86). Hansen's seemingly contradictory authorial practice invites speculation regarding this apparent slip. In the passage in question, the normative voice is again granted the authority of scholarship and provides us, once more, with a description of the 'essence' of 'African nature', albeit this time presented through the voice of an African intellectual. It seems that this could be the reason for Hansen's somewhat bold use of Chisiza's text. What if Hansen simply saw it as a matter of accuracy and authenticity to include what he understood as a genuine, African voice, thereby paying homage to African struggles for national independence - something that most clearly is reflected in Chisiza's article – or maybe even honouring the deceased activist? Making Chisiza's words more credible in the eyes of the Danish reader by presenting his mainly politically motivated reflections as the results of a series of ethnological studies could then be understood as a conscious strategy to support the anticolonial struggles in Africa that Hansen and his contemporaries were witnessing. But, as we will see in a moment, this act of solidarity is also effectively saturated by whiteness.

To a present day reader the essentialism that lies in the generalisation of an 'African folk character' and in the ascription of inherent traits like the *'udforskende aandsform'* of Europeans or the Orientals' *'meditative'* counterpart, which Hansen bases on Chisiza's (1963: 31) text ('explorative' - and 'meditative mentality' in Hansen 2003: 188) might be obvious. Both of these ascriptions, as well as quite a few of the traits attributed to the Africans by Hansen (averseness to work, gullibility, child-like hedonism) seem to draw on long-standing white, discursive traditions of representation of Europe and its others (especially Europe as embodying rationality and exploratory spirit). It is crucial to notice the difference in who is speaking, though. Chisiza might be drawing on representations of Africans common at his time, but certainly with different intentions than Hansen, as the two writers speak from very different positions in the racialised power structure, just as their representations serve very different purposes. While Chisiza's article seems to have been aimed at a positive re-articulation of naturalised discourse on Africans, and an evocation of a common African identity which he saw as necessary for building a future political project, Hansen simply uses the text as proof of his own, generalising perspective on 'African nature', thereby ascribing a whole new meaning to Chisiza's words. The latter seems in his article engaged in groundwork for creating representations that could found a common identity – the claim of which Hansen then uses as proof of an African character that always was, and apparently is monolithically stable through

time. After all, what Hansen uses Chisiza's evocation of a common African identity for, is to claim to know what kind of people the Danes were enslaving in the 1700s. Hansen's use of Chisiza is thus structured by whiteness, which manifests itself most visibly in slight reformulations/odd translations of Chisiza's representations. Where Chisiza (1963: 32) evokes the open-mindedness of Africans in religious questions, stressing how Africa is not committed to one faith, Hansen translates this passage into a claim of Africans being *'lettroende'* (gullible)[23]. Hansen simply misuses the text, creating a representation of Africans sharing an essential, fixed nature, which seems to transcend time and space. Whiteness here seems primarily to structure Hansen's reading of Chisiza, picking out the parts he finds useful in order to create a representation that supports his overall claim about Africans as friendly, and a little simplistic. The apparent analogies between the representations created by the colonisers and those created by the (formerly) colonised, can in such a reading simply be taken as proof of their 'truth value', as both 'sides' seem to agree on them. The statements are then used to reclaim authority over who is to be represented how and by whom, which is exactly what Hansen is doing.

IV.

I now want to switch to a scene which takes place in the first volume of the trilogy, *Slavernes Kyst*, in which Hansen presents the reader with the most detailed descriptions of his journeys to historical sites. On a hot day, Hansen takes us to a village somewhere near the former Danish possessions in Guinea, inhabited by the Akwapim-tribe. We quickly understand that this is not the first visit, the football Hansen has brought as a gift was promised and awaited. After a meal, Hansen sits down on a bench with Akuffo who seems to be the highest authority in the village. The journalistic voice tells us how 'you' are at pains, trying to get a conversation going with Akuffo, who shows himself to be genuinely unimpressed

> Der er ikke noget at gøre. Du ved det. Det er længe siden, du begyndte at forstaa. At du ingenting forstod. Du kender ham ikke, du vilde ikke komme til at forstaa ham, om du saa blev siddende resten af livet paa denne bænk. Det faar være; der er saa meget, du ikke forstaar. Men du kan ikke frigøre dig for en følelse af, at han for længst har taget bestik af dig. Han har en maade at betragte dig paa, som om han kendte dig ud og ind, din

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[23] 'indulgent' in the Dako-translation (Hansen 2003: 189)

utaalmodighed, din tilbøjelighed til at køre hurtigt, aldrig undervejs til noget, altid paa vej bort. Saadan har han det ikke selv. Han er ankommet. En blankslit træbænk under et mangotræ var øjensynligt hans maal i livet, og det blev opfyldt. Han kan ikke læse, ikke køre bil. Han behøver ikke at arbejde, og han prøver ikke at faa tiden til at gaa. Naar han ikke fører cigaretten til læberne, ligger hans hænder ubevægelige i skødet; det eneste levende i ham er hans øjne, der interesseret følger aben oppe i mangotræet. Han laver ingenting. Han sidder og lever. (Hansen 1967: 34-35)[24]

Hansen here seems to allow us a peek into the anxiety provoked by his encounter with Akuffo. Unsettled by the latter's seemingly impregnable stoicism Hansen cannot help but feel seen through. The feeling that Akuffo might know more about Hansen than Hansen can ever know about him, casts Akuffo as the disturbing other to Hansen, who presents himself as the incarnation of 'Western restlessness', a constant urge to move. We can here easily recognise the description of the 'African outlook' from the earlier passage based on Chisiza's writing. Hansen's gaze on the elder African here describes him as impenetrable, while at the same time giving an authoritative account of his mentality. Most of the attributes seen in the passage on 'African national character' quoted earlier are present. The fondness for leisure and slowness, ultimately paired with an aversion to work. The apparent satisfaction with meagre living conditions and a frugal attitude towards life paired with the preference for contemplative time over anything else. Hansen then goes on to describe the idyllic scenery of the village:

Akuffo kigger op paa aben. Naar den springer over paa den anden gren i mangotræet, falder draaberne fra bladene ned og danner ringe i vandpytten for foden af stammen. To uldne, nyfødte gedekid vakler rundt med den vaade navlestreng daskende mellem bagbenene og henne ved et bambushegn er Akuffos yngste ved at lære sig selv at gaa. Hvad er saa fredeligt som en landsby i Akwapim? Hvor sidder man bedre og lever? ... (...) ... Intet sted kunde man finde et mere gæstfrit folkefærd, skrev lægen Isert i 1788. Menneskene i Akwapim var lattermilde og venlige, tillidsfulde som børn. De levede i et storsindet og sagtmodigt samfund, de var ikke særlig gode til at finde paa nye ting, men det gjorde ikke noget, de havde ikke noget særligt behov for at ændre deres tilværelse. Men de saa op til de fremmede, de beundrede deres herlige sager, og der var ikke grænser for alt det gode, de gerne vilde gøre for dem. 'Akwapimerne leve endnu ligesom i Uskyldigheds-Standen,' sagde Isert." ... Foran husene har konerne tændt de smaa baal af trækul, hvor jamsen til aftensmaden om lidt skal koges. Og nu kommer de yngre kvinder tilbage fra brønden med vandet, som jamsen skal koges i. ... De gaar i en lang række med bar overkrop og hver sin spand paa hovedet.

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[24] 'There is nothing to be done. You know it. It is long since you began to understand. You do not know him; you will not get to understand him even if you sat here forever. Let it be, there is so much that you do not understand. But you cannot get rid of the feeling that he has long since made you out. He has a way of looking at you, as if he knew you inside out, your impatience, your tendency towards high speed, never underway anywhere, always leaving. He does not have it that way himself. He has arrived. The wooden bench under the mango tree, polished by years of seated contemplation, is obviously his ultimate goal in life and it is being fulfilled. He can not read, not drive a car. He does not need to work, and he does not try to get the time to go. When he does not move the cigarette towards his lips, his hands rest immobile on his lap, his eyes the only part of him alive. He doesn't do anything. He sits and lives' (Hansen 2002: 45).

Hver gang de passerer et af de smaa trækulsbaal paa jorden, falder det varme lysskær ind over de dejlige kroppe og aftegner den slanke arm i en kurve op til spanden. De kan ikke bevæge hovedet, men naar de kommer forbi Akuffo, faar han et langt sideblik fra de bløde dyreøjne. Akuffo besvarer det med et værdigt nik. (Hansen 1967: 36-37)[25]

At this point, Hansen introduces one of the colonialist eyewitnesses, whose accounts make out a major part of historic sources for *The Slave Trilogy*, the German born doctor Paul Erdmann Isert. Isert, who will be of further concern to us later, is here cited to show his predilection for Rousseau. As we learn later, Isert (at least according to Hansen) was heavily influenced by the French Enlightenment philosopher. Rousseau's sympathising, but also paternalistic representations of non-Europeans as noble savages form an important part of his legacy. Even though Rousseau was not the first one to invoke this kind of representation, he could be said to be one of its most widely read proponents. His descriptions of non-Europeans were nostalgic in the sense that they evoked the idea of the non-European representing an earlier, and thus more innocent, stage of civilization.

We will later see that Hansen's admiration for both these authors was by no means unqualified, but these reservations did not extend to their descriptions of Africans. In the passage at hand, the immediately noticeable thing is how completely uncritically Hansen integrates Isert's description of the locals into his own account of a contemporary scene. Of course, what we see here is an example of the frequent conflation of voices that Hansen undertakes, in this case to let present and past flow into each other. The journalistic voice here naturally evokes the eyewitness voice, thereby letting the two voices support each other in their claims to truthfulness, but also, and more crucially, conjuring a feeling of timelessness to the scene. As

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[25] 'Akuffo glances up at the monkey. When it leaps over onto another branch in the mango tree, the drops fall from the leaves and form a small puddle at the foot of the trunk. The woolly, newly born kid staggers around with its wet umbilical cord dangling between its hind-legs, and over at the bamboo fence, Akuffo's youngest is about to teach himself how to walk. What is as peaceful as a village in Akwapim? Where does one sit and live more comfortably? … Nowhere could one find a more hospitable people, writes the physician Isert in 1788. The people in Akwapim were friendly and laughed readily, trusting as children. They lived in a gentle and magnanimous society, they were not very apt at inventing new things, but that did not matter. There was not much need for changing their way of life. But they looked up to the strangers. They admired their wonderful things, and there were no limits to the good they wanted to do for them. "The Akwapims still live as if in a world of innocence," said Isert. … In front of the houses the women have started their small charcoal fires where they will cook the yam for supper, and now the younger women return from the well with water to boil the yam in. …They walk in long file , each carrying a vessel on the head, the upper part of the body bare. Every time they pass one of the small charcoal fires, the warm light falls over their lovely bodies and outlines the slim arm curving up to steady the vessel. They cannot move the head, but when they pass Akuffo, he receives a sidelong glance from the soft doe eyes. Akuffo responds with a dignified nod' (Hansen 2002: 47).

the 'noble savages' were back then, so they are now, peaceful, happy and unassuming, but also simple creatures.

If we read this passage against the one cited before it, the motivation behind the rendition of Akuffo's impenetrable otherness becomes clearer. Even though Hansen seems to look at the African elder with a certain admiration, this admiration is merely based on a curious wondering about the ultimate detachedness of Akuffo from the Western world. As he does not work, read or drive a car, he is simply still miles away from Hansen. Akuffo does not belong to civilization. Hansen relentlessly pursues the correspondence between the scenery of the African village he depicts and Rousseau's 'noble savages', when he describes the younger women as having *'bløde dyreøjne'* (soft animal eyes)[26] and *'dejlige kroppe'* (lovely bodies), thereby also connecting the scene to his earlier description of the Africans as part of the landscape, harmoniously blending into the scenery of untouched idyll.

In fact, there is a strange paradox to be found in this. While Hansen's earlier depiction of the African societies shows them as natural, harmonious and happy, only to be corrupted by the arrival of European civilisation, the same picturesque description of the locals repeats itself in his contemporary account. The timelessness of the idyllic scenery thus has a deeper effect than simply making the reader feel regret over European injustices committed against 'vestal' Africa. It also casts the Africans as outside civilisation after all, assuring the reader of their static nature as uncivilised. 500 years of colonialism or not, they are still the same, unassuming, unknowing savages, barely comprehensible to Western, civilised man.

The self-critical tone that Hansen adopts when he describes Akuffo as the impenetrable other, as well as when he casts European colonialism as a corrupting force could thus be seen as in fact displaying another ambivalence with regard to whiteness. While there is a certain nostalgia for a society 'before the fall', Hansen after all ends up reinforcing the dichotomy of (white) Europe as progressive, against the Africans, who are understood to remain the timeless 'noble savages'. In fact, the attempted critique thus remains at a detached level. What makes the colonisation of Africa a regrettable affair is only partly that it constitutes the violent subjugation of another society with all its accompanying horrors, it is also to a large extent the destruction of beauty and of the 'authentic' state of nature. Whiteness here allows for an apparent attempt

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[26] The translation in the English version here is *doe eyes* (Hansen 2002: 47).

at self-critique, based on a sentimental nostalgia for an imagined (European) paradise lost, which becomes instead a projection of that nostalgia onto Africa and Africans, rather than a truly interested description of Africans societies. The white discourse thus remains closed, circling around its own moaning of a long-gone Garden of Eden, thereby effectively universalizing the European hankering for the 'good old times' of the world before the onslaught of modernity. So while this contemplation of the white European's own concerns sets the framework for the reader to understand what really is at stake in the European-African encounter, the Africans, who Hansen was aiming to give a voice to, remain an intrinsic part of the untouched wilderness.

Violence

I.

I have chosen to devote a whole section of the analysis to the representation of violence in *The Slave Trilogy* for several reasons. Firstly, the choice of the overall violent topic of the Danish slave trade was, according to Hansen himself, meant to function as a form of processing (amongst other things) the Jewish holocaust for the author, an analytical trajectory linking *The Slave Trilogy* with questions regarding race (and thus whiteness) that go beyond the events directly described in the book. Secondly, the colonialist, racialised violence carried out by Danes against the Africans is what lends its urgency to the text, linking the events described in *The Slave Trilogy* to questions concerning Danish national identity and collective guilt. In Hansen's account, the violence carried out by the white Europeans is sometimes met by counter-violence by the slaves, which Hansen implicitly seems to see as justified, given the situation they were in. Nonetheless, Hansen's descriptions, especially of acts of counter-violence, evoke and reinforce a dichotomy between a white (and more human) civilisation and the looming threat of savagery (or non-civilisation), waiting to erupt in brutish violence if not controlled. This chapter then continues the discussion of the representations Hansen creates, but with a special focus on how whiteness manifests itself in the passages discussing colonialist violence (and counter-violence) and thus guilt.

In his semi-autobiographical book *Søforhør*, Thorkild Hansen (1982: 143) asks himself about how the idea of *The Slave Trilogy* came up. He begins by speaking about a general interest in the former Danish colonies that he had nourished for some years. Interestingly, he describes this interest as motivated aesthetically to a big extent, inspired by paintings that had shown him the continued existence of a Danish *'Guldaldermiljø'* [Golden Age environment] (Hansen 1982: 143), which he had discovered had survived overseas. But, as he then adds, there was a darker side to this field of interest, thereby, of course, pointing to the slave trade. This darker side forced itself upon him after he had visited Auschwitz together with a Danish delegation of writers in 1965 (Hansen 1982: 143; See also Frederiksen 2012: 110). According to *Søforhør*, the visit to the extermination camp left a deep impression on him and had a clear influence on his decision to write about the slave trade, as he saw the two as comparable forms of violence, the latter carried out by normal, average Danes, or in his own words: *'ganske almindelige danskere ligesom jeg selv'* (Hansen 1982: 145). Hansen here describes his work on *The Slave Trilogy* as partly an effort to come to terms with the experience of being a contemporary of the genocide against the Jews, in this way relating it directly to the atrocities carried out under Danish colonialism. Considering the status the murdering of the Jews has taken in post-1945 constructions of whiteness, this is interesting to note. I will start with how the German death camps are represented in *The Slave Trilogy*.

Another of the scholarly voices used in Hansen's accounts is the Danish historian Jens Vibæk. Remarkably, 2 out of 3 direct references to Vibæk in *The Slave Trilogy* cite the same passage: *'De vestindiske øer var krematorier, der ikke alene opslugte fødseltilvæksten, men også for St. Croix` vedkommende aarligt forbrændte en tilførsel af 575 nye slaver'* (cited in Hansen 1967: 145, 1970: 254).[27] This citation shows up both in *Slavernes Kyst* and *Slavernes Øer*, thereby clearly taking up a central position within *The Slave Trilogy*. Vibæk's passage can be seen as yet another modern scholar lending authority to the claims Hansen makes in the normative voice. Yet it is, however, also clearly a reference to the German extermination camps. There is the obvious analogy in labelling the Danish West Indies as a whole as 'crematoria' that 'swallow' and 'burn up' their victims, who have been captured elsewhere and brought there by their tormentors. Hansen seems to want to make sure that the parallel to the more recent genocide invoked by Vibæk is clear to the reader. In *Slavernes Øer*, Vibæk's statement can be said to be brought to life by the following description of a nightly work shift during the peak of

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[27] 'The West Indian islands were the crematorium that not only devoured the increase in population, but as in the case of St. Croix, yearly burnt up a supply of 575 slaves' (Hansen 2002: 154).

a sugarcane harvest season around 1760, taking place in one of the sugar mills of the type 'Cecilia'. The slaves are mercilessly forced to work around the clock, constantly at risk of losing a limb or their lives by being dragged into the machinery of the sugarmill:

> 'Cecilia' havde endnu sine vinger, de hvide sejl steg og faldt under stjernerne, ilden fra kogehusets fyrsteder kastede deres sorte skygger ned over bakken, som om den vrede bomba [overseer] inde i møllen trakterede stedet med stokkeprygl, slaverne løb rundt og slæbte de friske sukkerrør til møllen, den vaade magasse til tørring og den tørre magasse til fyrbøderne, de dukkede sig ubevidst, naar de lange skygger hvirvlede ned over dem, bakken var som forhekset ... 'Cecilia' drejede stadig rundt og rundt, fyrbøderne stod nøgne og sorte, drivvaade i den utrolige hede, og hev det ene neg efter et andet ind under kedlerne, ilden knitrede og bragede og lyste op paa røgmasserne, den hvide damp, der væltede ud mellem vinduernes tremmeværk, den tykke, sorte skorstensrøg, som bulnede gnistrene op i luften og skjulte fuldmaanen, aah, det var for mangen en bussal [newly arrived slaves], som om hele verden skulde gaa under, vinden blæste stærkere efter solnedgang, og straks blev 'Cecilia' vildere, bakken dirrede under hans trætte ben, luften havde fortabelsens søde og berusende lugt ... Hvad var der nu? Lød der et gennemtrængende vræl oppe fra møllen? Blev den grønne saft, der pulsede ud i bassinet, et øjeblik rød og svulmende, som om de havde madet 'Cecilia' med kirsebær i stedet for sukkerrør? Var der igen en stakkels djævel, der fik det, der var tilbage i ham af livssaft, klemt ud af den magre krop? Aah, denne heksekunst krævede også sine menneskeofre; det var, som om der foruden den læskede kalk og det gode lysetalg ogsaa maatte dryppes lidt blod i den kogende gryde, 'Cecilia' lod sig ikke standse, 'Cecilia' drejede rundt, som en forhekset kælling dansede hun rundt om sig selv, rundt og rundt og rundt, nat og dag, aar efter aar, nej, hende kunde man ikke stoppe, hun trak hele historien, halede afrikanerne over havet og sendte sukkertønderne til København. (Hansen 1970: 241-242)[28]

Hansen here describes the exploitation of the slaves as merciless and deadly, and as indicated by the frequent reference to the never-ending turning of the mill, driven by economic interests, which connect the violence in the colonies with the sugar market in Copenhagen. Consequently, this passage has been read as a critique of capitalism, which 'consumed slave labour' (Stecher-

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[28] 'Cecilie still had her wings, the white sails rose and fell under the stars, the fire from the boilery's furnaces threw their black shadows over the ground, as if the angry bomba with a stick served the place with a beating, the slaves ran around and dragged the fresh sugarcane to the mill, the wet magass for drying and the dry magass to the stokers, they bend automatically, when the long shadows swirled down over them, the hill was as if bewitched, …Cecilie still turned round and round, the stokers stood naked and black, soaking wet in the incredible heat and threw the one sheaf after the other under the kettles, the fire crackled and roared and lit up the mass of smoke, the white steam that vaporised out between the window bars, the thick, black chimney smoke that threw sparks as it spewed into the air and hid the full moon, oh, it was for many a bussal as if the world were about to go under, the wind blew stronger after sunset, and soon Cecilie got wilder, the ground shook under his tired legs, the air had the sweet and intoxicating smell of perdition …What had happened now? Was there not a penetrating scream from up at the mill? Did the green juice that pulsed out into the basin not for a moment become red and plentiful as if they had fed Cecilie with cherries instead of sugarcane? Had once more a poor devil had what was left in him of life juices squeezed out of his emaciated body? Oh, this sorcery also demanded its human sacrifices; it was as if apart from the quenching lime and the good candle tallow also had to drip a little blood into the boiling cauldron. Cecilie could not be halted. Cecilie turned round, like a bewitched chicken she danced round herself, around and around and around, night and day, year after year; no, she could not be stopped, she pulled the whole story, dragged Africans across the ocean and sent the sugar barrels to Copenhagen' (Hansen 2005: 259-260).

Hansen 1997: 83). However, this description of a night in the mills can also be read as a reference to the death camps in Europe: the apocalyptic scene, driven by the relentless, merciless turning of the mill being overseen by the mass of chimneys, spewing black smoke towards the sky, hiding the moon from sight, while the air is saturated with the smell of death. The slaves must go on with their work, completely at the mercy of their brutal overseers, even if it kills them one by one. What we are also presented with is a picture of the industrialised, mindless destruction of people in vast numbers, thus connecting the early horrors of modernity with the most recent ones. In fact, in chapter six and seven of *Slavernes Øer* Hansen provides several accounts of the working and living conditions of the slaves in the Danish West Indies, in which he evokes the picture of a more or less systematic excoriation of the slaves that could be connected to the German death camps, as they all serve to explain the high death tolls, Vibæk had presented, by showing the inhumane conditions the slaves were subjected to (Hansen 1970: 224-225, 237, 244-245, 249).

The parallel Hansen draws from the practices of Danish colonialism to Nazi-Germany was not lost on his contemporary critics. One of the Danish slave ship captains described in *Slavernes Skibe* was directly compared to Adolf Eichmann in an article in the Danish newspaper *Information*, while another reviewer (in *Politiken*) called the slave ships 'floating concentration camps' (Frederiksen 2012: 123). As described earlier, the racist ideologies of Nazi-Germany can be said to have been de-contextualised after the Second World War, thereby breaking any links between the death camps and the wider cultural discourse of the West. Hansen interestingly makes an explicit linkage, which did not seem to completely appal his contemporaries (although they might have disagreed). The parallel between the two that Hansen evokes here is a means of underlining the brutality of the slave trade by comparing it to what probably was felt to be the biggest horror his own generation (in the West) had been witnessing, thereby casting colonialism (and Danish complicity in it) as a vicious crime of epic proportions. In an earlier work, *Det Lykkelige Arabien,* Hansen had called colonialism '200 years of misdeeds' (Frederiksen 2012: 83)[29]. Perhaps even more crucial is the fact that this evocation of the Second World War compares Danish history with Nazi-Germany. This move scandalises the Danish colonial past as much as possible, while at the same time it connects the German death camps to colonialist genocides outside of Europe. Hence the parallel drawn by Hansen is interesting to note because it seems to blur the white/non-white distinction with regard to the

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[29] Furthermore, Hansen stages himself as essentially anti-racist in *Søforhør* by coquetting strongly with his Roma/Sinti roots (his grandfather on the mother's side) suggesting that this would immunise him to racist thought. Remarkably, he talks about these roots in strongly racialised terms (Hansen 1982: 9, 12-13).

treatment of genocides in much (white) mainstream Western historiography, as criticised by Charles Wade Mills. While the holocaust in Europe, according to Mills, gained its particular status as incomprehensible and beyond comparison by the fact that it was committed against a group that the victors of the war recognised as white, Hansen does not seem to have problems equating it with colonialist practices. Now, one could suggest that this overt parallel reflects a greater awareness of the connection between Nazi ideology and the practices of colonialism in Hansen's generation, for example to be found in the work of Hannah Arendt's *Elemente und Ursprünge Totalitärer Herrschaft* (1986)[30]. Another possible interpretation could be to read it as an attempt to humanise the non-white slaves by directly comparing their fate to more recent events, thus trying to make their suffering more comprehensible for the reader. Finally, it could be seen as Hansen's ultimate stab at Danish self-contentedness by confronting the Danish reader with a direct, historical comparison of Denmark with its historical foe and former occupational power Germany. In all three cases, it is interesting to note Hansen's conscious equation as a moment of blurring the borders of an exceptionalist, national historiography. It needs to be noted though that the notion of a shared ideology of white supremacy is not made explicit anywhere in *The Slave Trilogy*. As we already have seen, the racial aspect of colonialism seemed not to be a major consideration for Hansen who clearly focuses on the economic motivations behind the slave trade and the atrocities that followed from it. Hansen saw the connection between the Danish slave trade and Nazi-Germany in what he understood as a comparable level of cruelty and brutality, rather than connected to overlapping discourses of white supremacy.

There are other passages describing the violence the colonialist slave trade fostered that seem to run counter to a possible attempt to humanise the slaves, thereby presenting us with another ambivalence. While trying to humanise the slaves at certain points, Hansen at other points uses the dichotomy of a human (white) civilisation and a savage wilderness that surrounds it as a means to create suspense in his account and to present his reader with points of identification:

> Kippido er en stille, spinkel dreng med fine træk og et tankefuldt væsen. Han har lært sig selv at læse. Han kan den store tabel. Han véd, at jorden ikke er flad, og at det er noget sludder, naar de andre siger, at man kan skyde stjernere ned med et gevær. Hvad kunde menneskeheden under andre omstændigheder have faaet ud af ham? Nu faar den sukker.

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30 I am here referring to the full version of the book, including the section *Imperialismus* which was shortened in some later versions

Kippido arbejder mellem marknegrene. Han siger aldrig noget. (...) Da han døde, skar de hans hjerne op for at se, om den havde flere krøller end andres, og lange Takki sneg sig til at æde en haandfuld. (Hansen 1970: 243-244)[31]

This passage clearly is meant to emphasise with the plight of the slaves. It also challenges racialised perceptions about the minor intelligence of Africans by emphasising the intellectual potential wasted by condemning Kippido to a life of slavery and an early death. Yet, in the last line, Hansen evokes the trope of cannibalism as something that seems to be a natural feature of enslaved Africans, thereby reinstalling the picture of African savageness. Hansen does not specify whether the cannibalism he describes is something he sees as connected to the African origin of the slaves, or if it could be attributed to the brutalization the slaves have been subjected to. However, considering the long history of white European discourse equating Africans with cannibalism, the last sentence in the cited passage points back to exactly those discourses. Thus the passage can be read as drawing on racialised pictures of the African continent and its inhabitants familiar to European readers of imperial texts such as *Heart of Darkness*. The passage, however, also paints a picture of Africans as originally uncivilised people, whose savagery can only be overcome by teaching them to read European languages and algebra. The human capacities of the enslaved Africans thus seem to be dependent on proper (European) schooling and thus something that does not stem from their African societies.

II.

This next part will deal with the occasions on which Hansen describes the slaves as capable of acts of violent resistance, in fact almost the only agency they ever seem to represent except for their nightly dancing on the plantations. The slave insurrections do not only serve as enthralling sequences of blood-dripping action, they also reveal another aspect of the white representation of blacks in *The Slave Trilogy*. The non-white shows itself here as a demonic, threatening other, the looming menace that the presence of the savage is to the white man and his ordered world.

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31 'Kippido is a quiet, frail boy with fine features and a thoughtful way. He has taught himself to read. He knows his multiplication tables. He knows that the earth is not flat and that it is nonsense when the others claim that the stars can be shot down with a gun. What would humanity under other circumstances have got out of him? Now it gets sugar. Kippido works among the field slaves. He never says anything (…) When he died, they opened his brain to see whether it had more curls than others and Lange Takki ate a handful in secret' (Hansen 2005: 262).

I will start with the slave uprising on the Danish slave ship *Christiansborg*, which Hansen describes in the chapter entitled *Styrmanden* [The Mate] in *Slavernes Skibe*. This chapter appears to be based entirely on the notations of the captain of the slave ship, Johan Frantzen Ferentz, supported by longer passages of Hansen's normative voice, which often makes it unclear who is speaking. Some passages are marked as citing Ferentz, or are recognisable as his, due to their old-fashioned language. Other passages seem to be Hansen summarising Ferentz' writings, while others again are most likely freely imagined by Hansen himself. The intermingling of the latter two kinds of passages, the constant coalescence of the eyewitness account and the normative voice, inevitably make the two develop a complicit perspective on the events taking place during the uprising. This set-up creates a lens for the reader in which the perspective of the outnumbered white group on the ship is conflated with the supposed bird's eye perspective of the normative voice. At the point at which the following passage takes place, a short fight has taken place, the enslaved Africans have managed to free themselves from their chains and control the entire cargo hold of the ship (which they have started to vandalise), while the Danish sailors have succeeded in keeping the deck and the cabins under their control:

> Inde i salonen med de gule silkegardiner og forgyldte spejle havde passagererne søgt sammen i den største angst. Ud over dem var der kun lidt over tredive hvide mennesker ombord. Hvor længe vilde de kunne holde stand mod de mere end ti gange saa mange negre, der tumlede rundt i lasten? Og hvilken skæbne ventede der dem, hvis søfolkene ude paa dækket bukkede under? Assistent Cruse, hvis opgave det var at passe paa passagererne, gik ligbleg frem og tilbage med sine pistoler i haanden, spejlene paa væggene gengav mindst ti assistenter Cruse samtidig, som om de ved denne mangedobling af den enlige livvagt vilde trøste de andre. Enkefru Knudsen mindedes med rædsel synet af slaverne i kulen og lå daanefærdig på sofaen ... Pastor Feltmann havde fordelt skibsbønnebøgerne fra hylden og sad hensunket i bøn. ... De fire tavse mennesker lyttede til den øredøvende larm under dem, bræddevæggene, der splintredes, fragtkasser, der styrtede i dørken, bøsseskud og øksehug, de saaredes og de skoldedes skrig. Det var tydeligt, at slaverne havde faaet hul paa de første brændevinsankre, raabene dernede blev højere og højere, efterhaanden som rusen steg, og for Catharina Knudsen, den eneste hvide kvinde om bord, lød det, som om de vilde allerede dansede krigsdans omkring deres værgeløse bytte. (Hansen 1968: 103-104)[32]

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[32] 'In the salon with the yellow silk curtains and the gilded mirrors, the terrified passengers had sought refuge. Apart from them there were only slightly more than thirty white men on board. For how long could they hold out against ten times as many Negroes that roamed about in the hold? And what fate awaited them if the men on deck were defeated? Deputy Cruse, whose task it was to look after the passengers, walked up and down pale as a ghost with his pistols at ready; the mirrors on the wall reflected at least ten Deputy Cruses as if they by multiplying this one bodyguard would comfort the others. The widow Knudsen remembers with terror the sight of the slaves in the hollow and lay about to faint on the sofa …Pastor Feltmann had distributed the prayer books from the shelf and sat in deep prayer … The four silent persons listened to the ear-splitting noise from below, the board walls that were splintered, freight cases that were thrown on the floor, gun shots and the sound of axes

This passage illustrates the identification of the normative voice with the perspective of the Danish passengers in full effect. The chapter in itself is surely not only to be read as intended for descriptive purposes, but also to present an enthralling narrative that grabs the reader by the throat. In order to create such a thrilling sequence, Hansen wants the reader to identify himself with the group of passengers. This identification is created by the description of the fear the passengers feel, but also, and for us more crucially, through the invocation of racial markers. In the cited passage, the passengers are twice characterised as *'mennesker'*, once even as *'hvide mennesker'* (white humans)[33]. The insurgent captives by contrast are called *'negrene'* or just the slaves. This contrast of humanity versus savagery peaks in the last line where the only white woman aboard fears what *'de vilde'* (the savages, Hansen 2003: 103) will do when they get hold of her. Furthermore, the passengers, as opposed to the captives in the cargo, have names, and show understandable emotions. Meanwhile, in the dark bowels of the ship, the Africans remain invisible to the passengers (and thus to the reader), but are engaged in what seems like mindless destruction, crazed by the alcohol they have found. At the same time, their increasing, drunken shouting notifies the growing threat that the loss of control over them means to the little group in the cabin. The differing, and clearly racialised, vocabulary for the two groups, as well as the contrast of the concerned, but calm whites, preparing to die in the cabin, and the slaves mindlessly vandalizing the ship, amount to the well-known dichotomy between civilised (white) humanity and brutish non-whiteness. Only this time the identification of the reader with this narrative is far more direct, as the thrill of the chapter clearly is underscored by the identification with the Danish group, which is explicitly marked as white.

The same volume of *The Slave Trilogy* contains another account of a slave insurrection on a slave ship, the *Patientia* in 1753, which I will also briefly touch upon here. The most remarkable thing about the account of this second insurrection is how the description of the insurgent captives as losing all inhibitions as soon as they are rid of their white owners is here taken one step further. After a messy fight between the slaves and the crew, the whites abandon ship and the *Patientia* is left floating along the coast. The Africans hereafter engage in remarkably undignified behaviour, as they plunder the cargo to hold a feast. First (and seemingly as an obligatory part of these accounts) they craze themselves with all the booze they can find on the

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cutting things apart, the cries of the wounded and scalded. It was clear that the slaves had managed to open the first caskets of brandy, their shouts became louder and louder as the state of intoxication rose, and for Catharina Knudsen, the only white woman on board it sounded as if the savages already danced a war dance around their defenceless prey' (Hansen 2003: 102-103).
[33] In Dako's translation 'white men' and 'persons' (Hansen 2003: 101 and 102).

ship. Hereafter, they vandalise everything they can find. They slaughter a pig only to forget eating it. The children present on the ship booze together with the rest (and the adults seem not to mind at all), while the adults are breaking Chinese porcelain and silver cutlery, throwing up and defecating on the ship, only to continue the crapulence afterwards (Hansen 1968: 124). Again, it is as if the loss of control over the blacks can only result in unleashed savagery. The slaves' carnally determined behaviour and apparent enjoyment in breaking items of culture as well as their complete lack of self-control show us the Africans as the essential other to 'Western civilisation'. This behaviour, then, results in the slaves' defenceless state, when the ship is boarded to recapture them. The only exception from this mindless behaviour is a young slave named Qvabena, who is a kind of tragic figure in his capacity as the only African, to whom Hansen seems to admit a capacity for thinking beyond the immediate. Having led the slave insurrection to the point of gaining control over the ship, he then has to helplessly watch everything dissolve into a bacchanal. All his efforts to actually save his fellow Africans from themselves turn out to be in vain, he ends up re-imprisoned and in the end is killed (Hansen 1968: 116).

Certain elements of this picture of the insurrections on the ships are to repeat themselves in every description of a slave insurrection we encounter in *The Slave Trilogy*. While the slaves as a group always consist of a mindless mass, apparently only interested in getting drunk and breaking things, and thus always on the brink of, or already engaged in, brutish violence, there is always one exception. This exception is always the leader of the insurrection, who as his foremost problem always has to deal with the mindlessness and lack of self-restraint exercised by his followers.

III.

Slavernes Øer includes the account of the slave insurrection of 1733 on the Island of St. John, led by the figure of *'Kong Juni'* after whom the third chapter of the book is named (Hansen 1970: 89). Kong Juni is described as a thoughtful and serious type. As all slave leaders in *The Slave Trilogy* are characterised in quite similar ways, one could remark that they seem to serve as a contrast to the otherwise irrational behaviour of their followers. Kong Juni and the other insurrection leaders seem to gain their authority primarily by not sharing the inclination to

mindless behaviour of the other slaves. Hansen's description of Kong Juni is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, Hansen describes him as an African chieftain who is naturally belligerent, and who understands the social antagonism between the slaves and their owners as a direct continuation of the 'tribal warfare' he was engaged in back in Africa[34]. Hansen underlines this perception through citations where Kong Juni calls the Danish Governor *'den hvide høvding'* or *'den fremmede høvding'* [the white or strange chief] while he thinks of the white planters and soldiers on the Island as *'de hvide Ashiantier'* [the white Ashiantis] (Hansen 1970: 52, 55, 100; 2005: 75, 119).

Following the plan of Kong Juni, the slaves attempt to exterminate all whites on the island as quickly as possible. Kong Juni himself starts the killing by beheading the local white Sheriff (who is also his owner) and the 13-year old daughter. The killing shows us the slaves as marked by a primitive, 'tribal' mentality. They are said to understand the killing carried out by their leader as a kind of blood sacrifice, something they appear to need in order to enable themselves to carry out similar acts (Hansen 1970: 90-91). In the following, the violence unleashed by the slaves on the white planters and their families is described with a predeliction for gruesome details. The slaves go from plantation to plantation killing the whites, dressing themselves up in the bloody clothes of their victims and consuming whatever alcohol they can find: *'solen blinkede i havet og i deres sukkerknive, de var frie, de kunde gøre hvad de vilde, dræbe og drikke og dræbe igen'* (the sun shimmering in the sea and their sugar knives, they were free, they could do what they wanted, kill, drink and kill once more) (Hansen 1970: 97; 2005: 116). The ecstatic crowd then reaches a farm the planter has left, leaving behind his wife with six children, who are to be the next victims of the insurgents:

> Kvinderne var de vildeste … Mange af dem havde set deres egne børn blive solgt til fremmede. Andre havde mistet dem paa vejen ned gennem regnskoven i Afrika eller faaet dem vristet fra sig paa stranden før indskibningen eller set dem sygne hen paa slaveskibenes mellemdæk og blive væltet ud til hajerne, endnu før de var helt døde. Nu var det deres tur. … Hæmmet af de lange, blodplettede selskabskjoler jog de rundt efter møllebyggerens skrigende børn, som om ungerne blot havde været uartige og skulde afklapses, huggede efter dem med sukkerknivene, ramte forkert og huggede igen. Tværs over dørtærsklen laa moderen med halsen skaaret over, ude i solen stod de fulde negre og tissede, inde i huset flygtede de seks piger og drenge med gabende saar i ansigt og skuldre fra furiernes vildskab, viklede sig ud af deres greb, krøb ind under senge og borde, gemte sig bag trapper og døre,

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[34] A description that Stecher-Hansen seems to adopt as unproblematic (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 103).

blev halet frem igen, værgede for sig med de bare hænder, skreg op i panisk dødsangst ... Der gik næsten en time før der blev stille i møllebyggerens hus (Hansen 1970: 97-98).[35]

Even though Hansen here gives an explanation for the brutality and cruelty of the African women, thus casting the killing of the six children as a form of counter-violence, the scene remains a spine-chilling description of savage violence breaking into the idyllic scene of the home and the family. Again, the behaviour of the slaves is mainly described as uninhibited and undignified, paired with their obvious bloodlust that Kong Juni seems to have triggered and that the slaves themselves fuel with uncontrolled consumption of alcohol. The 'dressing up' of the slaves in the finest clothing of their victims is maybe the most chilling aspect. Hansen here gives us a grotesque reference to the idea that civilisation for the non-white is never more than a dress, which is made overtly explicit in the comparison between practices of motherly upbringing, and the violence against the white children carried out by the non-white women, who seem to have dressed themselves up as the already dead mother for this purpose. This ghastly scene appears to be a product of Hansen's own imagination, at least no references to eyewitness accounts are given over the pages in question, and the account of the atrocities carried out against the white families by the drunken slaves is kept exclusively in the normative voice.

The primitive behaviour the slaves show as soon as they are free to do what they please (drinking and mindless violence) is always the same, no matter if on a slave-ship, at the St John insurrection in 1733 or later at the insurrection that leads to their emancipation in 1848 (which will briefly be discussed later). Hansen thus does not seem to distinguish between the Africans at home, in their own societies and the slaves in the West Indies, they all share the same behavioural patterns. It is underlined several times that Kong Juni and his followers were *bussalas*, slaves fresh off the boat (Hansen 1970: 104) whose existence had hitherto not been shaped by slavery. The same applies to the insurgencies on the slave ships discussed earlier, but not to the slave insurrection of 1848. The complete lack of self-control (with a few

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[35] 'The women were the wildest. …Many had seen their own children sold to strangers. Others had lost them on the way through Africa's rain forest or had had them wrestled from them at the beach before the shipping or seen them waste away on the slave ships` tween decks and be thrown to the sharks even before they were fully dead. Now it was their turn. …Handicapped by the long, bloodstained evening gowns they chased the mill builder's screaming children as if they had merely been naughty and were to be given a slap, hewed after them with the sugar knives, hit badly and hewed once more. Across the door stock lay the mother, her throat cut, outside in the sun stood the drunk Negroes and peed, in the house the six boys and girls with gaping wounds in the face and shoulders from the wildness of the furies, got out of their grip, crept under beds and tables, hid behind staircase and doors, were dragged forth again defended themselves with only their hands, screamed in mortal fear. … Nearly one hour passed before all was quiet in the mill builder's house' (Hansen 2005: 117).

exceptions) seems to be a universal feature of non-whites in *The Slave Trilogy* and is what makes them a danger to anyone else. The brutality of the slaves on St John in 1733 seems in Hansen's view attributable to their inability to interpret the situation on the plantations as anything other than a tribal war between themselves and the whites. The slaves are motivated by their culture, which is cast as primitive and belligerent. Even though Hansen puts the overall responsibility for the eruption of violence on the plantation system, the perspective on the violence carried out by the slaves remains structured by whiteness: The figure of the non-white other threatening order and civility by his simple presence (as that is his essential nature) is clearly visible in the accounts of the slave insurrections.

If we accept Hansen's claim that the German death camps were one of his main motivations for writing *The Slave Trilogy*, we can read his use of the holocaust motive as blurring the borders of whiteness, albeit only for a moment and probably not even intentionally. But the descriptions of the slave insurrections are in stark contrast to this. The unrestrained bloodlust and mindless behaviour demonstrated by the slaves whenever they get the chance to do so function as stabilisers of whiteness, both for the author and the reader. By re-establishing the dichotomy between white/non-white as civilisation/non-civilisation, as well as vice/virtue, with non-white savagery as a constant threat to all that is good and beautiful, whiteness can be said to re-assure itself that 'not all is lost' in the face of its own misdeeds. While the whole project of *The Slave Trilogy* can be said to inevitably point to a certain admittance of European (white) guilt, the deeper implications of this admittance are fenced off by upholding the figure of the savage non-white as a matter of fact, a simple, objective part of a 'realistic' account. The usual equation of white/non-white with virtue/vice might have temporarily been displaced and could even be seen as the actual motivation for the project of writing *The Slave Trilogy*, but the representation of non-white counter-violence helps to curb the identity crisis that potentially looms within the re-consideration of the white/non-white relationship.

Colonialism and the Facilitation of Progress

I.

In the first volume of his *Slave Trilogy*, *Slavernes Kyst* (1967), Thorkild Hansen offers an explanation of his intentions with the three-volume project. He points to a 'hole', or a gap, in national Danish historiography:

> De danske koloniers historie er fejret i adskillige beskrivelser og skal ikke gentages her. Men det vigtigste led i denne historie, mennesketransporten mellem Guinea og Vestindien, er aldrig gjort til genstand for en selvstændig fremstilling. Der findes, uvist af hvilken grund, ingen bog om den danske slavehandel. Lydløse paa deres nøgne fødder vandrer slaverne gennem to hundrede aar af Danmarkshistorien uden at efterlade sig andre spor end skolebøgernes lille oplysning om, at Danmark var det første land, som afskaffede slavehandelen. Tusinder af mænd, kvinder og børn. Og bagefter en enkelt sætning. Som er forkert. (Hansen 1967: 21)[36]

Obviously, the author is here introducing his scope for the following three books. The reader is presented with what Danish national historiography is missing, namely a book about the Danish slave trade and its victims. Furthermore, Hansen challenges the conventional understanding of Denmark's role in the Trans-Atlantic triangular trade as the first nation to abandon slave trade. While Hansen ironises over the self-congratulatory Danish historiography, he seems to accept the dichotomy between Danish colonialism and what Hansen calls its most important element, the trading in humans. While Hansen is not trying to diminish the importance of slavery – which would make his project as critique redundant – he still seems to present us with a history of the Danish colonies as something that can be thought of in isolation from slavery, and which, accessed on its own, could possibly still contain positive elements. Hansen does of course recognise how slavery was a major driving force for Danish colonialism, with the Danish colony in Ghana, in the end, only serving to acquire slaves. Furthermore, one of the sources for the high profit margins in sugar production in the Caribbean was the possibility to lower production costs by burdening slaves with work loads and living conditions that would kill them at breath-taking rates, arguments that Hansen does himself state elsewhere (Hansen 1967: 49,

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[36] 'The Danish colonial history is celebrated in several detailed accounts and will not be repeated here. But the most important link in this history, the human transport between Guinea and the West Indies, has never been told on its own as a distinct and separate narrative. No book about the Danish slave trade exists, amazingly. The slaves walked on their naked feet through two hundred years of Danish history without leaving any other trace than the bit of information we find in the school textbook about Denmark being the first country to abolish the slave trade. Thousands of men, women and children. And one sentence to tell it all. And the claim is also wrong' (Hansen 2002: 33).

189, 255; 1970: 222). There is, nonetheless, a certain complicity with a particular vision of the Danish colonialist project, which runs counter to Hansen's critique of the way Denmark remembers its imperialist past and which is connected to narratives about progress and 'taming the wild'.

Thorkild Hansen saw his work as a necessary corrective to Danish national historiography and this view seems to have been widely accepted (Stecher-Hansen 1997: 80; Frederiksen 2012: 129, 152). Frederiksen (2012: 168) furthermore understands all of Hansen's documentary novels as challenges to a certain Danish closedness, a mental detachedness from the rest of the world that he also saw manifested in Danish literature. As I have already pointed out, in *The Slave Trilogy* this petty-mindedness is personified in the anaemic bureaucrats in Copenhagen, who are contrasted to the energetic adventurers making their fortune in the colonies. In *Slavernes Kyst*, Hansen presents us with a particular version of this variant of the periphery/metropole dichotomy. In the 1840s slavery has lost its economic significance to the Danish bourgeoisie and nobility, and has, according to Hansen, almost vanished from public consciousness. At the same time, the Danish public is coping with Denmark's failure as an imperial power by engulfing itself in a hedonistic, but slightly unworldly, or detached, aestheticism:

> Hvad udad tabtes, skal indad vindes; ...Vend mod dit indre dit blik! Hvad i din verden foregik, vil i din tanke du finde; alt det forsvundne derinde, liv og tilværelse fik. Var Norge gaaet tabt? Man kunde dog stadig skrive *Fodreisen til Amager*. Englænderne havde taget flaaden, men sejlede fregatterne ikke videre, skønnere end nogen sinde, i Eckbergs malerier? Der var mangel paa skibe, skibe til Kinafarten, skibe til Ostindien, til Trankebar, Frederiksnagor, Nikobarerne. Det var paatrængende nødvendigt at sende en orlogsbrig ned og standse menneskehandelen paa Volta. Men havde Frederik den Sjette ikke for længst med ædel kiækhed negrens lænke brudt? Og kom monarken selv ikke sejlende for alles blikke, paa kanalen i Frederiksberg Have, siddende i en robaad, klædt i fuld admiralsuniform, med den ene haand beslutsomt knuget om rorpinden og de alvorlige øjne ufravendt rettet fremad, som om ukendte farer ventede bag kanalens næste krumning? Folkets glade klapsalver lød ud mod ham fra land. Her skal det aabenbares, hvad du har tænkt saa tit, at den skal højest glædes, som allermest har lidt. (Hansen 1967: 256-257)[37]

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[37] 'What is lost outwardly, shall be won inwardly; …Turn your eyes inwards! What you lost in the world you will find in your thoughts; all you had lost, found life and existence within. Was Norway lost? One could still write *The Journey on Foot to Amager*. The English had taken the fleet, but did not the frigates sail on, more beautiful than ever, in Eckersberg`s paintings? There was a shortage of ships, ships for the China trade, ships for the East Indies, to Tranquebar, Frederiksnagor Nikobarene. It was urgently necessary to send a navy brig down to stop the human trade on the Volta. But had Frederik VI not long ago with noble courage broken the chains of the Negro, and did the monarch himself not come sailing for all to see on the canal in Frederiksberg Garden, sitting in a rowing boat, in full admiral`s uniform, with the one hand resolutely clasping the tiller and the solemn

What Hansen is aiming at here, is the shift in Danish self-understanding and representation, mentioned in the section on Danish whiteness, even though he dates the discursive shift from an empire to a minor state further back than 1864, pointing to the long series of military defeats and losses of territory the Danish empire had already gone through. The immediate purpose of the passage quoted above can be said to be to expose Danish hypocrisy with respect to its enterprises overseas, together with a self-centred nationalism that refuses to recognise the outside world. At the point in time the passage is set, slavery persisted in the West Indies, simply ignored by the Danish bourgeoisie (according to Hansen), which rather basked in the idea of having relegated this institution to a thing of the past. As Hansen states in *Søforhør*, he understood this exposure of Danish self-righteousness as an underlying theme for the whole *Slave Trilogy*, as he saw Danish national character marked by a disposition for self-contentedness (Hansen 1982: 173).

It is, however, hard not also to notice a thick streak of bitterness underlying Hansen's sarcasm, with which he describes a self-deceiving public opinion and especially in his depiction of the king. Denmark is not only ridiculed for being hypocritical, it is also ridiculed simply for being narrowminded. There is condemning tone haunting the descriptions of how the nation fails to maintain its contact with the colonies, here listed in the same sentence as the necessity of clearing the situation at the Volta, which here almost gains the status of a humanitarian mission (while the problematised slave trade of course had been created by the Danish presence in the first place). What we see in this passage is not only a mockery of Denmark acting self-centred and pretentious (the king seems like the domesticated caricature of one of Hansen's 'great men'). There is also an underlying accusation of not performing its role in the wider world, of sticking the head in the sand when faced with international obligations. The derisiveness for the Lilliput-nation and its mentality seems to mix with a certain nostalgia for the participation in the mission of civilising the non-European parts of the world. This nostalgia becomes clearer, when looking at the following passage, in which the journalistic voice gives us a description of Orsu, a contemporary town in Guinea, marked by Danish colonialism:

> Ak ja, hanernes galen i Orsu, den rammer dig lidt i hjertet, hvor mange af dem er ikke efterkommere af haner og høns, der blev sejlet herned paa danske skibe? Det var de eneste husdyr, danskerne fik til at trives i de fremmede omgivelser. De levede videre, naar deres ejere døde af klimatfeberen, de blev i Orsu, da Danmark rømmede Guinea, og nu spankulerer

eyes unswervingly looking ahead, as if unknown dangers waited behind the canal`s next curve? The happy applause from the people reached him from land. Here it will be revealed what you have so often thought, that he shall be made most happy who has suffered the most' (Hansen 2002: 264).

de stadig rundt hernede mellem de afrikanske perlehøns og galer paa dansk. Palmernes skyggetæppe ligger hen over dem, ligesom det hviler over husresterne fra guldalderen og den florissante tid. Det hænger ned over en port med danske navnetræk, en gavl med kranbjælke og loftsluge, de delvis sammensunkne pakhuse og købmansgaarde, og det er, som om du, hvis du blot kunde trække det til side, vilde befinde dig i en sidegade i det gamle Helsingør. (Hansen 1967: 170)[38]

In this passage we appear to be presented with a streak of nostalgia for a past in which Denmark left its mark on the world, as the sight of its remains provokes melancholia in the narrator/reader. The melancholia points to an understanding of colonialism that seems to set itself apart from the critique of the Danish slave trade found elsewhere in *The Slave Trilogy*, as the account of the re-visit to the formerly Danish possessions also seems to contain an element of longing, maybe even recognising a sort of 'colonial glory'. Now, as Denmark has withdrawn, the European architecture (the style of which points back to a period of wealth and power in Danish history) is left to rot in the shadows of the palm trees, thus making the experience of recognising the town as 'typically Danish' one of looking at a languishing past, the contemplation of which also seems to contain elements of affirmation or even admiration. Considering this nostalgia for a greater national past in the light of the mockery of Danish provincialism points to another ambivalence in *The Slave Trilogy*, which seems to grow out of the nexus between the underlying nostalgia just described, and Hansen's open admiration for some of the Danish colonialists. As Hansen connects his affirmative descriptions of some of these figures to their professed roles as facilitators of progress in the non-European wilderness, a strange caveat to the anti-imperialist agenda of *The Slave Trilogy* emerges. Besides the critique of the slave trade, there also seems to be present the idea of holding on to a 'good colonialism' – or at least its 'better sides' -   which justifies itself by drawing on narratives of progress as a cultureless and inevitable 'force of nature', thus upholding a paternalistic whiteness towards non-Europeans in general and the former colonial subjects of Denmark in particular. In the following, I will attempt to show this tendency in *The Slave Trilogy* by looking at the way Thorkild Hansen draws some of the more affirmative portraits of Danish colonialist

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[38] 'Oh yes, the crowing of the cocks in Osu, that hit you straight in the heart. How many of them are not descendents of those cocks and hens that sailed hither on the Danish ships? They were the only domestic animals the Danish managed to get to thrive in the foreign environment. They lived on when their owners died of climate fever. They stayed in Osu, when Denmark left Guinea, and now they will strut around among African guinea fowls and crow in Danish. The shadowy carpet of the palms lies over them, just as it rests over the ruins of houses from the golden age and the trade boom. It hangs down over a gate with Danish initials, a gable with cathead and loft-shutter, the partly collapsed warehouses and merchant houses, and it is as if you, if you could just pull it aside, were to find yourself in a side street in the old Helsingør' (Hansen 2002: 179).

figures that *The Slave Trilogy* contains, and what roles he assigns to them in relation to their surroundings.

II.

I have already established Hansen fondness for 'great men' and their individual stories and tragic fates. In the following four of these figures are singled to examine them as figures symbolising progress in contrast to what is cast as the non-European wilderness. Hansen lets these figures shine in a predominantly positive light, and a major part of his admiration for the these characters draws on their engagement and dedication to what Hansen understands as progress featuring as a natural and culturally neutral process. Progress might bring tragic events with it, but it still ultimately works as a marker that identifies some of the characters as admirable, drawing on the (white) narrative of 'civilisation conquering the wilderness'. The figures are divided into pairs reflecting, or mirroring, each other. The first pair is Jens Adolf Kiøge and Paul Erdmann Isert, the second pair is Edward Carstensen and Peter von Scholten.

Kiøge and Isert are contemporaries (1780s) in the Danish colony in Ghana, where they, in Hansen's account, become close friends despite their vast differences. While Kiøge functions as the governor of the colony for several years, Isert is the doctor on the Danish fort. Kiøge disciplines and rationalises the Danish slave trader outpost, while Isert, grounded in his experiences as a colonialist in Ghana and later in the West Indies, turns into a prolific campaigner against the slave trade. Hansen describes the two as antithetic: *'Den ene* [Kiøge] *modig, haandfast og alvorlig, rastløs og storslaaet, handlingsmenneske og soldat. Den anden vigende og frygtsom, lys i sindet, naiv i alle praktiske anliggendender, iagttager og intellektuel'* (Hansen 1967: 82)[39]. A closer look quickly reveals this opposition as superficial. In fact, the two colonialists supplement each other in the representation of a white narrative about Europe's role in history. Kiøge's significance is first and foremost that he represents an ordering force in the colony, which hitherto has been marked by loose debauchery and sloppiness (and thus economic and, between the lines, 'civilisatory' ineffectiveness) in every possible way. Even

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[39] 'The one courageous, stalwart and serious, restless and quite coarse, a man of action and a soldier. The other elusive and timid, light hearted, naïve in all practical things, observant and intellectual' (Hansen 2002: 93).

though, as Hansen tells us, information on Kiøge is sparse and conflicting, the 'true picture' characterises him as

> en god og myndig organisator, de indfødtes patriakalske konge, en oprigtig omend kortfattet elsker af ro og orden, der ikke veg tilbage for at slaa til i retfærdighedens navn og gøre alt det, en senere tidsalder sammenfattede i det praktiske begreb: at pacificere. Maaske var han selv en forløber for denne tidsalder, kolonialismens menneshetype, den paa en gang kultiverede og haardhændede officer ...Jens Adolf Kiøge vilde pacificere Guinea. Indføre lov or ret og orden. Diktere den fred, der altid kan nedskrives paa landkortet med forter, kanoner og blod. Han gik ud fra at mennesket var ondt og skulle tugtes. Han fik en bitter død. (Hansen 1967: 79)[40]

Kiøge is presented to us as a patriarchal figure, whose righteousness points to a later (and apparently better) period in time, oddly enough termed 'colonialism'. Hansen here repeats the differentiation between the slave trade and 'the other form' of Danish colonialism, which here emerges as an endorsement of Kiøge's character, who overall is depicted with open admiration as energetic and straightforward, though at times also as insensitive and rough. The figure of the slave trader Kiøge (who just happened to be born into the wrong period), thus points forward to progress to come, a future colonialism marked by order and sincere intentions.

Isert, on the other hand, is presented as an apparent contrast to Kiøge's crude sides, but the opposition between the two colonialists is already partly dissolved in the following passage:

> Som Kiøge begyndte han drømme om en ny tid på slavernes kyst, ogsaa han vilde paa sin made pacificere Guinea, virke for menneskelighed og fremgang, etablere den fred, der kan indskrives mellem folkeslagene med frihed, lighed og broderskab. Han mente med Rousseau, at mennesket var godt og skulde hjælpes. Han fik en bitter død. (Hansen 1967: 82)[41]

The advance simultaneous notice of the *"bitter død"* (bitter death) of the two men places both of them within Hansen's line of tragic, existentialist figures. Both of them are shown to be

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[40] 'a courageous and firm organiser, the native`s patriarchal king, upright, albeit a lover of peace and order, who did not hesitate to compromise in the name of fairness, and to do all that, what later times were to intend by the practical concept: to pacify. May be he portended this age, the type of character we associate with the coloniser: the cultivated gentleman and hard-handed officer …Jens Adolf Kiøge wanted to pacify Guinea; introduce rights, law and order; dictate that peace that always is written down on a map with forts, cannons and blood. He started with the assumption that man was evil and had to be punished. He got a bitter death' (Hansen 2002: 89-90).
[41]   'Like Kiøge he started to dream of a new era at the Coast of Slaves, he also wanted to pacify Guinea, work for humanity and progress, establish that peace that can be enshrined among the peoples with freedom, equality and brotherliness. He agreed with Rousseau that man was good and had to be assisted. He too met a bitter death' (Hansen 2002: 93).

energetic, sincere men, who decide to change the course of history in the face of injustice and/or savage disorder, a decision which inevitably has to end tragically. This common ground also unites them in what they come to represent in Hansen's account. The two 'great men' represent two sides of (white) 'Europeaness'. Kiøge personifies rationalisation and the effectiveness that it is thought to produce, but also the (white, male) urge to conquer and tame. Isert, a hobby-botanicus, is very explicitly portrayed as a child of the Enlightenment and a philanthropist, representing idealism and the beginnings of (white, European) democracy and rule of law. Tellingly, Hansen several times underlines how both of them almost gain the status of demigods amongst the local population (Hansen 1967: 79, 82, 96, 102, 121, 143), pointing us back to the friendly, but child-like nature of 'the Africans' discussed earlier, but also to a motive of white supremacy, legitimised by the immaturity of the non-whites.

Kiøge and Isert forming two sides of the same coin, invites the question of how Hansen positions himself vis-à-vis them. Kiøge is referred to as a *'Cæsar'*, a character resembling the quintessential Roman conqueror (Hansen 1967: 83, 97, 99; 2002: 109). Hansen's Kiøge is a conqueror, and a man who assiduously works for his guiding principles of order and discipline. Even though Hansen does allow for a certain critique of Kiøge (describing him as hard-headed, sometimes even brutal), he openly admires the slave trader for his achievements in bringing order to a messy colonial enterprise.

Hansen's depiction of Isert carries a remarkably different tone. Isert wrote long Rousseau inspired accounts of the local culture. In fact, Hansen attributes most of Isert's actions and thoughts to the influence of the French philosopher. While, as we have seen, Hansen's own description of contemporary Ghana draws strongly on Rousseau as well, his account of Isert's life and doings are saturated with ironic remarks about the doctor's affiliation with the thoughts of the French philosopher, which Hansen depicts as naïve and unworldly. Isert sometimes comes across as a slightly ridiculous figure, just as tragic as Kiøge in his attempt to alter the course of history, but also as a little pathetic in his idealism, which prevents him from seeing the world 'as it really is' (see for example Hansen 1967: 113, 120-121, 128). Kiøge is thus cast as a man who does what the situation requires, while Isert fruitlessly dreams of a better world. This culminates in the snide remark, made by the normative voice, that Isert's decision to work for the abolition of the slave trade, is solely to be understood as a stubborn attempt to prove Rousseau's claim that the individual, at its core, is of a good nature. As this trajectory (combating slavery) will not only bring Isert, but also his wife and newborn child to their deaths

by assassination in Ghana, Hansen here gives us a rather dismissive picture of Isert, whose idealism is cast as almost child-like in his insistence on fighting against the slave trade. Hansen insinuates that Isert could have foreseen the gruesome fate of his family, had it not been for his egotistic insistence on his Enlightenment ideals (Hansen 1967: 130). Hansen here takes an almost hostile stance towards what he sees as Isert's utopian idealism, which he looks at with less respect than the pragmatic attitude of a Jens Adolf Kiøge. This animosity towards Isert's idealism can be read as another comment on Hansen's contemporary surroundings, as it could be said to mirror his dislike for the leftist ideologies that saturated the literary landscape at his time and that often manifested itself in criticism against certain aspects of Hansen's writing. It is, however, also to be understood as another claim on knowing life as it really is, free of ideological distortions. In the end, Kiøge falls victim to economic and political forces beyond his control (the bureaucrats' viciousness), while Isert's ruin is (at least partly) of his own making. Hansen, it would appear, in this case favours the law-and-order attitude of Kiøge as 'realistic' and thus better suited for life in the colonies, over Isert's naïve dreaming.

The figures of Kiøge and Isert, however, are not only marked by their opposition to each other. Seen from a critical whiteness perspective the two form a pair that represents a narrative in which European culture represents civilisation as such. Kiøge and Isert might represent two different streaks of European thinking (conservatism and radicalism), but together they embody white supremacy: While they might disagree over certain things, they also supplement each other in representing the white man and his pre-eminence, confirmed by the unconditional admiration by the local Africans.

III.

The second pair of 'great men' is formed by the last Danish governor in Ghana, Edward Carstensen and the famous West Indian governor Peter von Scholten, who proclaimed the emancipation bill in 1848, earning him a disputed role in both West Indian and Danish historiography (Jensen 2008: 62; Thisted 2008: 36; Jensen 2012: 106). Carstensen and von Scholten are, unlike Kiøge and Isert, not brought together by personal affiliation, but by the fact that they are contemporaries, governing Danish Ghana and the Danish West Indies roughly in the same period. Carstensen and von Scholten are not characterised by the apparent opposition

81

between Kiøge and Isert, but are both depicted as smart and energetic. Yet they are also seen as uncompromisingly humanistic abolitionists engaged in the question of their colonial subjects' well-being, which is what brings them into conflict with bureaucrats at home and the profiteers of slavery in the colonies. Hansen makes the connection between the two explicit, drawing direct parallels between the two in *Slavernes Øer* (Hansen 1970: 331-333).

The Danish governor Carstensen is presented to the reader as *'den første gentleman i Guinea'* (the first Gentleman in Guinea) (Hansen 1967: 224 ; 2002: 231), who , like Kiøge before him, brings order into the neglected colony, causing concern amongst the ruffian Danish colonists with his proclamation of *'civilisationsarbejde,* [som] *guvernøren vilde sætte i stedet for menneskehandelen'* (Hansen 1967: 226).[42] In describing Carstensen's struggle with the authorities in Copenhagen for financial and military support, Hansen cites the governor himself, who proposes

> at hæve Negerlandet og bringe det til i Tiden at danne et Led i den Kjæde af civiliserede Stater, som ved Cultur, Handel og Industri bidrage gjensidigen til Samfundets Velværen. ...(...)... [resulting in] ...saadanne ordnede, civiliserede Neger-Samfund i Africa, hvis Institutioner have den Styrke, at de seierrige kunne bestaa Kampen med Indlandets skjævt tilseende Barbarisme. (Hansen 1967: 258)

After this citation by Carstensen, Hansen comments in the normative voice: *'Dette program havde alvorlige ulemper. Det var forud for sin tid. Det foregreb de næste hundrede aars udvikling i Afrika. Og det kostede penge'* (Hansen 1967: 231)[43]. Carstensen's struggle against the narrow-minded administration in Copenhagen is then not only a struggle against the trading in humans, it is also a struggle for the active 'advancement' of the Danish colony, with the aim of lifting the local African societies out of their state of 'living in the dark ages'. This points us back to the idea of a chronological order of predestined 'stages of civilisation' that human societies will go through, with the (white) West in the indisputable lead. This discourse is closely related to the narrative of the 'white man's burden'. Thorkild Hansen identifies himself with Carstensen's idea of progress and its inevitability. Of course, the comments of the normative voice cited above are first and foremost sarcastic. But the sarcasm, which seemingly

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[42] 'civilising work, the Governor wanted to put in place of the human trade' (Hansen 2002: 234).
[43] 'to raise the Negroland so as to enable it at some time to form a link in the chain of civilised states, that with culture, trade and industry would mutually contribute to the welfare of society …such ordered, civilised Negro-communities in Africa, whose institutions have the strength to win the fight against the acceptance of barbarity in Africa's interior…The Programme had serious disadvantages. It was ahead of its times. It anticipated the following hundred years of development in Africa. And it cost money' (Hansen 2002: 265).

suggests the possibility that the administration *could* have done something more appropriate instead, directs the reader back to a positive evaluation of Carstensen's vision. Hansen seems to be suggesting that Carstensen maybe wanted too much too soon for the colony, but overall, the normative voice appears to affiliate itself with the idea that Denmark could have played a positive role as a colonial power facilitating progress, had it not be for the provincialism and stinginess of the bureaucrats in Copenhagen and an indifferent public.

It should be noted, though, that Thorkild Hansen was not uncritical of what he understood as progress. In two articles about Greenland, written in the early 1970s, Hansen wrote about how humans (here specifically Greenlanders) have to adapt to modern times, but how they risk losing their soul in the process, often with fatal consequences for the individual (Frederiksen 2012: 173). We here get a sense of Hansen's mixture of critical positioning and fatalism, already familiar from *The Slave Trilogy*, where Hansen's critique of progress still remains a white one. It still accepts 'progress' as an inevitable process albeit sometimes with tragic effects.

The embracing of Edward Carstensen as a great visionary, whose plans for Danish Guinea also meet with the approval of the author, can be read as another ambivalence with respect to whiteness. While there is an overall condemnation of the slave trade and the plantation system, which after all became the driving force of Danish colonialism, Hansen also seems to recognise the 'civilising mission' of the West as a reality. Furthermore, his nostalgia for the times when Denmark was still an imperial power is saturated with the vision of a possible (positively evaluated) participation of Denmark in the colonial mission. Carstensen's vision of 'civilising' Guinea by installing European cultural, economic and cultural standards is remarkably reminiscent of later developmentalist discourses, which can be read as reformulations of the 'white man's burden' and which were prominent in the West in 1960s. In Denmark this occurs especially with respect to colonial policy in Greenland ('modernisation'), but also with respect to development aid. The figure of Carstensen and Hansen's uncritical portrayal of him can here also be said to partly reflect the shift within the discursive construction of whiteness that took place within the latter half of the twentieth century. Race as an explicit, explanatory category disappears, while the civilising mission stays, reformulated into a discourse about development aid, structural reforms, and military intervention to 'install democracy'. In the casting of an imperialist like Carstensen as an admirable humanitarian (including his use of military means to pacify the local population, see Hansen 1967: 240), Hansen thus reflects the discursive rearrangement that whiteness went through in the latter half of the twentieth century.

83

The struggle of the single visionary projected against the reluctance to invest public money in social progress in the colonies after they have lost their economic significance, is another motive that unites Carstensen with von Scholten, with whom Hansen seems to have been even more fascinated (see also Thisted 2008: 36). This fascination is visible when, in the chapter *General Buddo* (Hansen 1970: 355), dealing with the leader of the 1848 slave insurgency, Hansen devotes almost more space to von Scholten than Buddo, thereby creating the massive presence of von Scholten's character in the last parts of *Slavernes Øer* (another chapter is devoted only to von Scholten). Secondly, Hansen builds a remarkably more detailed characterisation of von Scholten in comparison with his other figures, often drawing on statements by contemporaries of the governor, but never letting the reader in doubt that the negative characterisations are the talk of grudgers and political opponents, while often giving positive characterisations in the normative voice (see for example Hansen 1970: 300).

Of course, von Scholten is also one of Hansen's individuals struggling against his fate, which in his case is manifested in his life-long antagonism to the plantocracy in the West Indies and (as with Carstensen) the administration at home in Denmark. One of the things driving him in Hansen's rendition is a strong sympathy for the black population (Hansen 1970: 309), partly caused by his relationship to the coloured Anna Heegaard, who is said to have wrenched the promise of an emancipation of the slaves from von Scholten, and who supports him financially at times. Apart from this, Hansen gives us another reasoning for von Scholten's sympathy for the slaves:

> I hans glade ungdomsaar havde de brune piger i Charlotte Amalia lært ham de første broker af slavernes kaudervælsk, kort sagt, før den unge mand ret vidste af det, talte han flydende kreolsk. Siden snakkede han altid med negrene paa deres eget sprog. Hans barnlige glæde ved farver og pragt, hans ligefremme og impulsive natur, dette blink i øjet af humor og ironi, hele den varme, tillidsvækkende udstraaling, der udgik fra hans person – det var altsammen træk, der havde vældig appel til det sorte folk. Negrene tilbad ham, og von Scholten solede sig i deres tilbedelse, han elskede at være elsket, over for dem blev han den, han allerhelst ville være, en landsfader i Vestindien som kong Frederik var det hjemme i Danmark. Negrene følte med deres sikre instinkt, at han var deres ven, og hyldede ham ved enhver lejlighed. (Hansen 1970: 304-305)[44]

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[44] 'In his happy youth, the brown girls in Charlotte Amalia had taught him the first fragments of the slaves` jargon, in short, before the young man was aware of it, he spoke creole fluently. Later he always spoke with the negroes in their language. His child-like pleasure at colour and splendour, his openness and impulsive nature, this gleam in his eye of humour and irony, this whole warm and confidence-inspiring aura that emanated from his person, - those were all traits that had enormous appeal for the Black people. The Negroes worshipped him, and Scholten basked in their adulation; he loved to be loved; for them he became the one he most preferred to be,

This passage is symptomatic of Hansen's depiction of von Scholten and his relationship to the black population on the islands. Being the uncomplicated bon vivant Hansen makes him, he appeals to the 'childish nature' of the slaves as well as to their 'instincts', which assure them of his good intentions. Von Scholten is cast as a paternalistic figure for the black population, who instinctively accept his authority and leadership. This peeks in the description of the 1848 uprising. The transition has not developed as Buddo (allegedly with assistance or at least goodwill of von Scholten) has planned, and the situation threatens to escalate. The slaves show their usual lack of self-restraint, begin drinking and are on the edge of starting to loot and kill, with General Buddo as the only reasonable non-white present, being at pains to keep the mob under control. When von Scholten finally arrives at the scene, the slaves (as they, according to Hansen, always do, when they see the governor) start chanting *'Massa Peter! Massa Peter!'* thrilled by his arrival. The threat of the slaves giving in to their essential savagery quickly returns, though: *'Mængden hidsede sig selv op, rytmen blev vildere og vildere som en tam-tam i regnskoven'* (Hansen 1970: 382).[45] Von Scholten solves the situation by proclaiming emancipation.

It is crucial to note that even though Hansen here seems to recognise that von Scholten acted out of a situation over which he had little choice but to agree to emancipation, the overall account attributes the freedom of the slaves to him, leaving the slaves the role of a mindless mob, whom the governor can only prevent from causing damage to themselves and the white population on the islands by an impressive exertion of himself. The emancipation is planned and channelled by him right from the start (Hansen 1970: 296, 314, 320). Even von Scholten's plan to build schools for the slaves is by Hansen seen as part of the plan to emancipate the slaves, thereby providing von Scholten with an extraordinary farsightedness. The whiteness of this description does not only lie in the fact that Hansen in his description of the events around the insurgency seems to attribute the capabilities of political planning and overall agency (almost) solely to the white, paternal governor. Von Scholten here also represents the 'necessity' of paternalistic whiteness altogether, representing the bulwark of white rationality against the irrationality of the jungle. Through attributing the emancipation mainly to his planning and work, the figure of von Scholten reassures the author/reader that social progress still belongs to the white man, as it is seen to stem from him. Again, we can see the discourse of 'Europe as a process' shining through, in which colonialism and westernisation simply are

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a national father in the West Indies, just like King Frederik was at home in Denmark. The Negroes felt instinctively that he was their friend and applauded him at any opportunity' (Hansen 2005: 321).
[45] 'The masses got excited, the rhythm wilder and wilder as a drum in the rainforest' (Hansen 2005: 396).

inevitable forces of nature, culturally neutral and taking place independent of the choices of the agents involved, but ultimately having to be carried out by the white man, whose leadership is simply destiny. Emancipation is here invented and then given to the non-whites by the whites who thankfully accept it.

The slave trilogy can then be said to harbour an underlying streak of imperial nostalgia, which is closely intertwined with the (white) Eurocentric narrative of colonialism as the spread of culturally neutral progress that inevitably has to lead all human societies along the same path. While attacking the slave trade and Denmark's handling of its involvement in it back then as well as now, Hansen also seems to bemoan the fact that Denmark abandoned its colonial projects, thus shunning unexplored possibilities. Whiteness here reveals itself in the form of an underlying theme of a 'national duty' to facilitate progress in the colonies. This can be read as a connection between the 'civilising mission' that colonial powers saw themselves as carrying out in late colonialism, and the development discourses of the 1960s, which were engaging Denmark with respect to Greenland and the Faeroe Islands, but also its former colonies. Even though Hansen often (that is, also in other works) took a critical stance in his descriptions of the consequences the encounters between the West and the rest of the world had had, whiteness can again be said to delimit this critique, due to his insistence on the rescue of the figure of the heroic white men who embody Western progress. As we have seen, Hansen lets the local African population admire the ordering activities of Jens Adolf Kiøge and the enlightened ways of Paul Erdmann Isert, as they seem to see the two colonialists as almost god-like. Hansen's respect for the energetic zest for action of Kiøge and his paternal authority is still marked by critical undertones. But the continuously positive description of the visions of Edward Carstensen and the instalment of Peter von Scholten as a naturally recognised paternal authority for the non-white population in the West Indies are all motives that point back to the inevitability of universalised progress embodied and led by Europeans, and thus, the 'white man's burden'. The hierarchical order between black and white is thus reinstalled by pointing to the objectivity of universal progress and the white man's ownership of this narrative.

Conclusion

I have attempted to analyse Thorkild Hansen's *Slave Trilogy* from a theoretical standpoint informed by insights from both Postcolonial Studies and Critical Race and Whiteness Studies. Edward Said's thesis on the crucial role that empire has played for the formation of European culture and identity has formed the meta-theoretical framework for an investigation of how first, race and racialised thinking have been crucial for forming European self-perception and identity discourse, and then second, how these discourses and perceptions have helped to shape *The Slave Trilogy* as a text. The approach I have used has been heavily focused on a historicised conceptualisation of whiteness, thus understanding it as a socio-cultural or – political construct that exists and operates in tandem with its historical and cultural context. As these historical and cultural contexts change, the particular ways in which whiteness has been constructed through times have differed, even though whiteness has always been dependent on the claim of an essential white/non-white dichotomy that favours whiteness and naturalises this hierarchy with narratives about its own inevitability.

Internal differentiations within whiteness can also be spatial. As racial thinking became a vital part of processes of European identity formation and then also more particular processes of nation-building in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the details of how whiteness constructs itself as a naturalisation of white privilege and power are regionally differentiated. This being said, even though Whiteness Studies is still a novelty in Danish-speaking contexts, Danish, and, more broadly, Scandinavian scholars have started to apply insights from this field in Nordic contexts in the last few years. Thus it was possible to integrate a (brief) discussion of Danish identity formation and its relation to imperial and racial discourses historically, and the question of to what extent one can speak of a particular, 'Danish' whiteness. This discussion helped to place *The Slave Trilogy* as a text into its historical and cultural context, but with a special emphasis on manifestations of whiteness and how they have shaped Thorkild Hansen's critique of the Danish participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and, more broadly, European imperialism, as well as the ways in which Danish historiography had dealt with these topics at the time of Hansen.

This analysis, then, shows us *The Slave Trilogy* as a text written from a position that, in spite of its outspokenly anti-imperialist stance draws on discourses that are saturated with whiteness. This can be said to reflect the fact, that whiteness (here understood as an identity marker) was

in crisis at the time Thorkild Hansen produced *The Slave Trilogy*. Worldwide social and political upheavals of the 1960s, here most notably progressive worldwide de-colonisation and the Civil Rights Movements, as well as the way that racial thinking had discredited itself through the discovery of the Third Reich's death camps, had shaken the naturalised racial hierarchies that European self-perception had operated with over the last centuries. I see this reflected in the ways in which racialised clichés often frame and delimit the critique of colonialism that is exercised in *The Slave Trilogy*. It thus seems safe to say that centuries of entanglement of racialised discourses with European identity formation takes its toll on Thorkild Hansen's critique. But the analysis also points to another, later development, the re-constitution of whiteness as racial privilege that could be characterised as a 'racism without race'. Western dominance prevailed also after formal de-colonisation, and so did whiteness, albeit it had re-configured itself discursively. With the re-formulation of the 'white man's burden' as narratives about the necessity of facilitating progress and later, the self-proclaimed right to militarily intervene in non-Western countries as a way to secure Western interests in non-Western regions went hand in hand with a construction of whiteness that obfuscated and denied its roots in older discourses on the inferiority of non-whites and re-naturalised racial hierarchies by speaking of 'culture' instead of 'race'. *The Slave Trilogy* cannot exactly be said to promote such a view, but as discussed in the analysis, Hansen's habit of elevating white, paternalistic, colonialist characters into figures for emphatic identification, especially in his depictions of Edward Carstensen and Peter von Scholten, can be read as reflecting a certain nostalgia for the narratives of heroic, great white men and their desires to 'tame the wild'. In these narratives of bringing progress and order, non-white people are often depicted as part of the chaotic wilderness that needs to be tamed, which in the case of Hansen's work mainly shows itself in his repetitious underlining of how the creative power and impressive character of his main white figures causes the black populations to worship them as a form of demigods, thereby demonstrating their backwardness.

Summing up, the pervasive, racialised discourses in *The Slave Trilogy* is not only a collection of odd remnants of an unfortunate delusion within the history of ideas. The ways in which whiteness manifests itself in the analysed text can be read as reflecting a (white) racialised identity in crisis, but they also point to the lingering of the Western claim to social and epistemological authority, which mirror the continuity of colonial structures after formal decolonisation. Thus, both the consistency of power structures and the claims to natural superiority which accompany them, as well as the identity crisis that a shift in such power

structures can bring with it, can be said to have contributed to forming Thorkild Hansen's critique of the Danish slave trade. Furthermore, the ways in which these claims to (white) superiority manifest themselves as racialised clichés and discursive strategies in a text like Thorkild Hansen's show how racialised ways of understanding the world gain their power through their naturalisation. Thus, pointing to the entanglement of the vivid critique of Danish colonialism that Hansen undertakes in *The Slave Trilogy* with discourses saturated by whiteness does not call for a questioning of Hansen's motivations or his skills as a writer. It can more productively be understood as an illustration of how Hansen's critique of Danish self-perceptions regarding the role of the Danish nation in the slave trade should not be understood as marking a closure in the reworking of a distant past. The self-critique that Hansen exercises on behalf of his nation should rather be understood as pointing to the need to ask further critical questions. Thorkild Hansen's work used the colonial past to comment on the present. Situating *The Slave Trilogy* in its own historical context makes it possible to read this text as being part of a line of continuity that reaches from the past into the present. Since *The Slave Trilogy* reflects some of the ambivalences dealt to racialized identities that the historical changes which took place in the period it was written in, it also begs the question how far current Danish, and more broadly Western, identity constructions continue to be embedded in similar or parallel racialised discourses. Grappling critically with the past as a slave trading nation in the way Hansen did, can in this light be understood as a first step towards an actual reworking of exceptionalist perceptions about the Danish involvement in the global project of colonialism, as opposed to inscribing his work into those same perceptions as the final stroke under an unpleasant, but sealed off, national past.

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