

**INTRODUCTION: 'MADE IN DENMARK'  
INVESTIGATIONS OF THE DISPERSAL OF 'DANISHNESS'**

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The brand-name 'Made in Denmark' has, ever since Hans J. Wegner's iconic arm-chairs adorned the stage at the 1960 US presidential debates, been associated – at least locally in Denmark – with an added value (as brands do). The 'traveling chairs' became metonymic for a sense of a nation that, through notions of 'Danishness', dispersed its cultural values across the globe. The spread of Danish people, products and ideas has become part of local understandings associated with this brand: Be it development aid practitioners, technologies, philosophical ideas, design or bacon – the added value of 'Danishness' will be ascribed to it – if not globally, then at least in the local Danish imaginary, as an asset which affects positively on its surroundings wherever it travels; bringing with it a culture of democracy, idealism, innovation and proficiency. This idea of a traveling cultural value system, which reflects positively back onto the 'mother country' is obviously not unique to Denmark and 'Danishness'. Indeed, nationalism generally functions via this dialectic between home and away / us and them / global and local.<sup>1</sup> However, as the articles in this volume will demonstrate, this general dialectic contains a specific content in each case. The brand 'Made in Denmark' is related to ideas of Nordic exceptionalism,<sup>2</sup> and may indeed be associated with a broader Nordic brand. Christopher Browning argues:

So, the Nordic model has stood out both as an *identity* and as a *model* to copy. Indeed, I suggest that the idea of the Nordic model has become something of a *brand* by which to position the Nordics in the world and

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Browning: 'Branding Nordicity. Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism.' *Cooperation and Conflict* 2007, 42: 27, p. 31. Browning argues that brands are associated with identity narratives (like nationalism), but that they differ from these in being at one and the same time less fluid and – because of this – more open to change in the face of changing conditions.

<sup>2</sup> Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen: 'Nordic Exceptionalism and the Nordic 'Others''. In: Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen (eds.) *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region*, Ashgate, Farnham & Burlington, 2012.

provide them with an international role.<sup>3</sup>

Taking up the dialectic between the inside-out and outside-in gaze onto national self-understandings we – the editors of this volume – saw the need for disturbing the positive brand value ascribed to ‘Made in Denmark’; a provincializing of the ideas associated with ‘Danishness in the world’ – if you will.<sup>4</sup> As our allusion to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s notion ‘provincializing’ suggests,<sup>5</sup> our endeavor is postcolonial in that we wish to address a time/space dimension where the colonial past and postcolonial present become interwoven in contemporary notions of ‘Danishness’.

In our call for papers, we thus asked for articles concerned with three issues: 1) Studies of how ‘Danishness’ and/or Denmark become shaped, reimagined, practiced, modified, amplified – or perhaps annulled – amongst former Danish residents settling (or travelling) abroad on a more or less permanent basis. 2) Studies that relate to other kinds of circulation (representations of various kinds), and 3) Studies of Danish ‘enterprises’ associated with colonialism. The contributions to the volume do indeed respond to these themes. In terms of location, they are widely dispersed from New Zealand over Kenya and Zimbabwe to Iceland – and the authors are based in Sweden, Denmark, the US and Iceland. In terms of time, they cover a period from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

In the process of collecting and editing the articles for the volume, we realized that if not seen from the vantage point of Danish academia *Denmark is already provincialized*. Hence our ambition of applying critical postcolonial theoretical insights to versions of ‘Danishness’ in the world, seemed to lack one crucial component: the outside-in point of view. The authors who have contributed to this volume are all (but one) based outside Danish academia, a vantage point from which the dialectics of the dispersal of ‘Danishness’ looks very different than seen from Roskilde University, where this publication is based. As we will elaborate in what follows, this doesn’t necessarily mean that the view from the outside is *a better* vantage point from which to describe, theorize or judge (the dispersal) of ‘Danishness’. In contrast, we argue that *the tension*

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<sup>3</sup> Browning, *Branding*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lars Jensen: ‘Provincialising Scandinavia.’ *Nordic Colonial Mind. Kult* 7, 2010

<sup>5</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty: *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2008 (new edition)

*between positionalities* is a fruitful terrain to locate discussions of the ramifications of ‘Danishness’. The articles in this special issue of *Kult* speak to each other in a number of ways whereby the exotisation, valorizations and critiques of the hybrid spread of ‘Danishness’ across time and space are discussed and contested. In this introduction, we will especially focus on the tensions mentioned above; this means that we to some extent move beyond the explicit contents of the articles and, while also presenting them, try to tease out some of the implicit lines of flight between them.

In the first article, *Vikings of the Pacific*, Julie Allen takes her point of departure in the branding of the town of Dannevirke, New Zealand as home to descendants of Vikings. Since 2008 the town streets have been adorned with a cardboard spectacle of larger-than-life Vikings and their ships, with the aim of competing for the attention of tourists. The town was founded in the early 1870s by some of the 2,500 Danish immigrants that came to New Zealand as part of a government-assisted scheme to attract more European settlers to the British settler-colony. The Danish middleman in this scheme was D.G. Monrad, who had emigrated to New Zealand with his family in 1867 after having presided over Denmark’s defeat by Germany in 1864. Ironically, this war – which, along with Dannevirke itself, is a solid ingredient in Danish national historiography and mythology – meant that the ancient fortification system Dannevirke,<sup>6</sup> that gave the New Zealand town its name, was conquered by Germany. Allen argues that the Danes of Dannevirke took up and were awarded positions both as settlers and as migrants; as settlers they “took responsibility for both the physical burden of carving farms out of the native forest and the more abstract task of imposing European social and political order on their new home, while as migrants, [...] they experienced [the pressure] to conform to already constituted and entrenched British norms.” The native forest was in this case not only native in the sense of endemic to New Zealand, but also because it was part of Māori land.

The ambivalence of landownership in a British colonial setting is mirrored in the articles by Susan Brantly and Lene Bull Christiansen & Ashleigh Harris. Thus the

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<sup>6</sup> The earliest fortifications at the Dannevirke location can be dated back to around 500 AD – some 3-400 years before the period conventionally known as the Viking Age. As will be clear from Allen’s article, the link forged between the New Zealand town and the fortification has nothing to do with historical accuracy; it is rather the myth of the seafaring explorer-conqueror Viking that takes center stage as an exotic and remote reference in the identity branding effort.

positionality of – paraphrasing Homi Bhabha – being not quite (but almost) the colonizer,<sup>7</sup> which Allen captures through the migrant-category, reappears – albeit in different guises – in the articles by Brantly and Christiansen & Harris. The parallel partly derives from the fact that both of these articles take up aspects relating to British settler colonialism in Africa (Kenya and Zimbabwe respectively), where the Danish protagonists – like the Dannevirke founders – are working alongside the leading British settlers.

The focus in Susan Brantly's article is not settler colonialism in Kenya as such, but rather the academic debates over Karen Blixen within postcolonial circles. In *Karen Blixen's Challenges to Postcolonial Criticism*, Brantly argues – especially referring to *Out of Africa* – that Blixen tends to be dismissed as a racist colonialist by postcolonial thinkers based outside Denmark. To this outside-in gaze Blixen's 'Danishness' becomes invisible or irrelevant. Taking into consideration her hybrid positionality as non-British/Danish and as a woman, *Out of Africa* may in fact have much more to offer postcolonial critique than the moral (and binary) judgment suggests. In addition to reviewing the critical positions, Brantly points to Danish based research that paved the way for a less binary view of Blixen as *both* racist in some respects, and “as a cultural hybrid, negotiating the cultural expectations of Denmark, Africa, and Britain, [which] results in a fairly unique perspective on the colonial world she inhabited.” Brantly argues that this inside-out perspective may be grounded in a greater knowledge of Blixen's background, having access to extra-textual information, such as interviews and letters in Danish.

Blixen reappears in Christiansen & Harris' article on another and more recent Danish settler – a self-proclaimed pirate – in colonial Africa. In *The Danish African: Walle Kirk, whiteness and colonial complicity*, they analyse the racial self-representation of Walle Kirk in his memoir *Paradis i frit fald til helvede? En tilstandsrapport fra Zimbabwe* (2008). Fleeing Denmark after the accession to the European Union (or rather at the time: The European Community; this is the cause-and-effect established by Kirk himself) in 1973, Kirk bought a farm from the Rhodesian apartheid government. In 2002 he was violently attacked on the farm as part of

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<sup>7</sup> Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 86.

Zimbabwe's 'fast-track' land reform program. In his memoir, Kirk, who was a former development volunteer in Africa, proudly presents himself as *Danish* and configures this identity as associated with his down-to-earth benevolent attitude towards the African workers, whom he seeks to educate and develop. This self-conscious benevolence is set up by Kirk as a contrast to the colonialist attitude of the British settlers. Taking their point of departure in recent work on Nordic exceptionalism,<sup>8</sup> Christiansen and Harris claim that this I-am-not-like-the-other-settlers self-representation does not counter his complicity with colonial formations of race. In the article they ask: "to what extent does Kirk's memoir – and his subsequent stylizing of his public persona in Denmark – tacitly accept the privileges of his whiteness in the Zimbabwean context? Since this whiteness does not carry the same meanings in the Danish context, how does one find critical leverage in addressing the ways Kirk represents the historically and racially fraught scene of land reclamation in Danish to a Danish audience, as though he and that audience are positioned as innocent bystanders to colonial history?"

Blixen appears almost explicitly in the Danish news-coverage of Kirk, where Kirk's farm in Zimbabwe is referred to as 'his African farm' dubbing the Danish title of *Out of Africa: Den Afrikanske Farm* [The African Farm]; and while the prose of Kirk's memoir hardly bears a comparison with Blixen's book, the self-representation seems to be heavily indebted to Blixen's positioning of herself in that book. What emerges here – between the articles – is a tension between what the figure of Blixen has become in the Danish context on the one hand and an evaluation of Blixen's work as such and/or outside the Danish context on the other. Thus irrespective of whether Blixen or her work can or should be judged as racist/colonialist in itself and in its own time frame, the figure of Blixen has in Denmark become articulated to a discourse of exceptionalism.<sup>9</sup> Christiansen & Harris argue, that Kirk represents British whiteness as colonialist and Danish whiteness as anti-racist, whereby "his own white privilege and collusion with the colonial past becomes irrelevant; a manoeuvre that exemplifies the ways that the very claims to exceptionalism are themselves complicit with colonialism".

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Suvi Keskinen, Sari Irni and Diana Mulinari (eds.) *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, Ashgate, Farnham & Burlington, 2009; Serena Maurer, Kristín Loftsdóttir et al. (eds.) *Nordic Colonial Mind. Kult* vol. 7, 2010; Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen (eds.) *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region*, Ashgate, Farnham & Burlington, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kirsten Holst Petersen: 'Blixen-igen-igen: Nationalt ikon, national stolthed.' In; Lene Bull Christiansen et.al. (eds.) *Jagten på det eksotiske, Kult*, 2006.

Blixen can hardly be held responsible for Kirk's self-representations, and in addition it makes sense to argue that reiterating this performance in 1973/2008 makes it far more ominous than 'the original'. What we would, however, like to suggest is that the location from where postcolonial critique is uttered as well as the assumed target are important to take into consideration; thus the evaluation of Blixen and her oeuvre does take on different hues depending on the specific context it speaks to. Blixen is in a way Made in Denmark; but she equally plays into the history of Kenya, as well as representations of Africa – and when we read her and her work through a postcolonial lens, she may also feed into our more specific understandings of the hybrid positionalities of colonialism and whiteness.<sup>10</sup>

The breaking down of whiteness into specific versions can be associated with the last article in this special issue as well. Auður Hauksdóttir's *Language and the Development of National Identity. Icelanders' attitudes to Danish in turbulent times* takes us in another direction where Denmark is the colonial power rather than an associated partner. Hauksdóttir follows the relationship between the Icelandic and Danish languages in Iceland from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the recognition of Iceland as a sovereign state by the Danish government in 1918.<sup>11</sup> Seen from the vantage point of Iceland, her focus is not so much on how Danish language was imposed on the Icelandic population as on the changing relation of this population to language use. During the 100-year period, the article covers, Danish language goes from being a marker of distinction for its users to being a sign of inauthenticity. That language becomes a major national trait and central to the formation of the Icelandic nation is a shared feature of many of the other European nation formation processes that were taking off in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – including the Danish.<sup>12</sup> Hauksdóttir points out that Icelandic nationalism as well as the struggle for independence from Denmark to a large extent was formed in Copenhagen and spearheaded by Icelandic intellectuals residing there. The picture is, of course, more complicated than that. First of all, Iceland's status as a 'dependency' vs. a sovereign –

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lasse Horne Kjældgaard: 'En af de farligste bøger, der nogen sinde er skrevet om Afrika? Karen Blixen og kolonialismen.' In: *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek*, 2009, Vol. 30.

<sup>11</sup> From 1918 until 1944 Iceland was still united with Denmark under the Danish Crown and under Danish jurisdiction when it comes to foreign policy and military defence.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Uffe Østergaard: 'Peasants and Danes: The Danish National Identity and Political Culture.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1992, Vol. 34, No. 1.

and if dwindling yet still imperial – Danish state implies that the power relation between the Danish and Icelandic nation-formations were unequal; secondly, Iceland holds a special place as the perceived cradle of authentic ‘Nordicness’ throughout the Nordic region. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark, this cultivation of ‘Icelandicness’ as authenticity was related to language as well as to the Sagas. As Hauksdóttir points out: “The central position of Icelandic language and literature among leading Danish poets was also significant, especially Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig, who to a large extent sought the subjects of their works in the sagas and Old Norse myths.”

There was thus a lot of support for the promotion of Icelandic culture and language amongst the 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish (nationalist) intellectuals. Seen from their point of view, the Icelandic population was *part of the Danish us*, in that they incarnated a more authentic and purer version of ‘us’.<sup>13</sup> When related to the question of race, Iceland becomes the timeless cradle of Nordic whiteness. On the other hand, the idea of Icelandic authenticity also opened up a temporal distance, in that it could be represented as a past left behind by a modern Denmark.<sup>14</sup> The position of Iceland on the colonial/racial scale of difference is therefore ambivalent. Racial difference is there and not-there, almost-but-not-quite? The Colonial Exhibition in Tivoli (Copenhagen) in 1905 put the empire on display. The original plan was that Iceland should be included in the Exhibition, but following protests from Iceland, Iceland *and* the Faroe Islands were taken out of the *Colonial* Exhibition, but were still included in the event as a *separate* exhibition of various arts and crafts.<sup>15</sup> The status of Iceland and the Faroe Islands as inhabited by people *like us* (i.e. white) was in other words under dispute; and even if it fell out to ‘the white side’, it shows that this was not necessarily firmly established at the time.

That whiteness comes in shades, is, according to Julie Allen, pertinent in the New Zealand context, where “Popular perception of the Māori by New Zealand

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<sup>13</sup> Kristín Loftsdóttir: ‘Belonging and the Icelandic Others: Situating Icelandic Identity in a Postcolonial Context.’ In: Loftsdóttir and Jensen (eds.) *Whiteness and Postcolonialism*; p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> Kristín Loftsdóttir: ‘Going to Eden: Nordic exceptionalism and the image of blackness.’ *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 2014, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Rikke Andreassen, Rikke & Anne Folke Henningsen: *Menneskeudstilling. Fremvisninger af eksotiske mennesker i Zoologisk Have og Tivoli*. Tiderne Skifter, København, 2011, pp. 254-7. In the 1900 World Fair in Paris, Iceland was located in the ‘Colonial Pavilion’. See: Karen Oslund: *Iceland Imagined. Nature, Culture, and Story Telling in the North Atlantic*. Washington University Press, Seattle & London, 2011.p. 15ff.; see also: Kristín Loftsdóttir: *Belonging*, p. 61ff.

Pakeha as more ‘white’ than other indigenous peoples was legally codified by the 1920 Immigration Restriction Bill, which explicitly classified Māori as ‘white,’ with the result that ‘unlike many parts of the Empire, including Australia, where indigenes function as the racial “other”, Māori could not be used in this way.’”

Thus we have returned full circle to Dannevirke, New Zealand and the Viking Iconography used to brand the town since 2008; might we suggest that these images are a reminder of the Saga age of Nordic national myths. It also brings us back to our original interest in ‘Danishness’ as a branding strategy. The iconography of Blixen, the Danish Pirate in Zimbabwe, the Vikings of the Pacific and the Nordic mythology of authenticity ascribed to Iceland all in different ways correspond to the value systems ascribed to ‘Made in Denmark’ – the ways in which this brand is understood inside-out and outside-in; we hope, this will inspire new ways of reading ‘Danishness in the world’.