

An African Caribbean Perspective on Flensburg's Colonial Heritage

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2017 marked the Centennial of *The Transfer*, Denmark's sale of the Virgin Islands (VI) and its people to the United States of America (USA) in for 25 million dollars in gold (\$530 million in today's money), 69 years after emancipation. This transaction also



resulted in a century of settler colonialism, whereby Virgin Islanders in their domicile enjoy roughly a third of USA citizenship² under the *Insular Cases* (Torruella 2013) conditionalities, with hurricane disasters revealing that the people living in the tri-island territory were denied full citizenship because they were predominantly of African descent.

The Transfer was a significant political finesse by the USA of Germany, which had also offered to buy the Virgin Islands, for a fifth of what the USA offered. With the VI, the USA acquired a convenient route to the Panama Canal on the eve of the First World War in 1917. After the Transfer, the rum that enriched Flensburg, earning it the nomenclature of “Germany’s Rum City,” was sourced from Jamaica, which accounted for the ubiquitous presence of the popular Caribbean island in the rum labels.

I was invited by the Flensburg Maritime Museum (FMM) to catalyse critical reflection on this colonial history and its enduring legacy from an African Caribbean perspective, intended to call into question the usual Eurocentric view and distortion of this heritage. It was fitting therefore that the collective conceptualisation of the *Rum, Sweat and Tears* exhibition, resulted in the creation of a time capsule composed of rum and a collage of the collection of rum labels pictured

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² This means that VI citizens are not eligible to vote for the President of the USA, unless they migrate to the USA mainland.

above, as the entrance to the exhibition. In the title phrase of the exhibition, Rum is a deliberate *double entendre*, manipulating the popular Blood, Sweat and Tears formulation to denote that rum drinkers symbolically consume the proverbial *Blood* of Africans who were enslaved in the Killing Fields of the Caribbean to make sugar (and rum) King. This message is didactic of the difference of meaning that results from the donning of value-loaded lens to view histories; the Eurocentric story about rum in Flensburg studiously denies involvement in enslavement with the popular disclaimer that “Flensburg was bringing the sugar and the rum; but we were not involved in slavery.” The dramatic irony is established when close scrutiny of some of the rum labels reveals images of Africans sipping rum under palm trees in a presumption of Caribbean paradise, which is belied by the cruelty entailed in plantation society (Beckford 1972; Hall 1992).

What was plainly visible though an African Caribbean perspective was that although the connections among rum and European wealth on the one hand, and enslavement and African impoverishment on the other, (requiring reparations), are glaring to someone like me, coming from the bowels of the Caribbean where Europe’s most dastardly deeds were enacted, most Europeans, who are literally and figuratively removed from the scene of this enduring crime. I observed that many people who still benefit from colonialism’s intergenerational largesse, are blinded by cognitive dissonance and amnesia about their colonial past, its legacy and intersections with countries underdeveloped by the Maafa. European memories of the past are blurred by emotional disconnection, distorted remembrance, and colonial nostalgia. The wealth derived from colonialism’s cruelties provide a thick veil, obfuscating acknowledgement of the obligations of transitional justice and in particular, reparations.

The core of this debate is on how to understand the word “responsibility”, and what it is all about. For CARICOM to take responsibility means to reconnect with the past, learn to convey it, and to accept the economic consequences that derive from it. But we have exhaustively demonstrated that several European countries and also Denmark do not share this interpretation. Even though critical voices are heard in the debate, they constitute only a relatively small, almost “radical” share in the debate, especially in front of the political “wall” built upon rejection and the widespread idea of discontinuity, relativisation and semi-racist comments (Jensen et al 2016: 56-7).

All these paradoxes are embodied in Flensburg’s annual Rum Regatta, which has been performed with great splendour for the past four decades. This celebration of the glory days of empire, when ships would ply the harbour with coveted colonial goods like mahogany wood,

cotton and sugar, the white gold of its time,³ is played out with the crowding of boats of every design and description onto the stage of colonial amnesia and nostalgia.

In this article, I will address some of the lessons learned from curating the exhibition that critically reflected on the infamous Virgin Islands Transfer. I will highlight the tremendous amount of work that remains to be done to rectify the cognitive dissonance about the Maafa⁴ and its enduring legacy in Flensburg, branded as Germany's Rum city but in denial of its colonial history, and its connections to the Caribbean and Africa, source of civilisation but complicit with her own devastation. I will also address the paradox of identifying the Maafa as the worst crime against humanity and a Holocaust, in a German context where reference to Holocaust exclusively refers to the Jewish massacre at the hands of Germans.

Curating the Rum, Sweat and Tears Exhibition

My journey to curate the *Rum, Sweat and Tears* exhibition, focusing on the colonial history of FMM began in Jamaica on December 14, 2015, one day before the unofficial onset of the silly season of Christmas. That was when I received an email from Dr. Thomas Overdick, then Director of the FMM, with an attachment from the Flensburg City Council in Germany, announcing a fellowship for a Junior Curator. I felt an adrenalin rush when I read the Terms of Reference of the "Cultural Transfer" project, which invited an interruption of the typically nostalgic or else non-existent discourse on colonialism that is characteristic of the Eurocentric perspective on the disturbing past from which cities like Flensburg derived their wealth.

My 18-month tenure as International Fellow and Curator began on April 1, 2016 and entailed ethnographic fieldwork on the colonial history of Flensburg and the connections of this colonial history to Ghana and the Virgin Islands, which Denmark colonised for 200 and 250 years respectively. The Danish possessions in Ghana were sold to the British in 1850. This study revealed Denmark's enactment of enslavement crimes against humanity, the common offence of all participants in this harrowing system. European exploitation of African labor to produce sugar and rum in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transformed Flensburg into one of the

³ Interview with Dr. Thomas Overdick, June, 2016.

⁴ "The word "Maafa" (also known as the African Holocaust) is derived from a Swahili word meaning disaster, terrible occurrence or great tragedy.. The term today collectively refers to the Pan-African discourse of the 500 years of suffering of people of African heritage through Slavery, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, rape, xenophobia, oppression, invasion and exploitation." See <https://africanholocaust.net/africanholocaust/>, retrieved January 10, 2020. In a landmark case brought by survivors of British atrocities during their imperialist invasion of Kenya, reference is made to the Maafa, to connote the racist terror, sanctioned by the British Queen, that was unleashed on Africans during British occupation; see <http://www.ligali.org/article.php?id=2357>, retrieved February 8, 2020.

most important cities in the whole state of Denmark. The results of my ethnographic fieldwork were presented in this exhibition and in an Anthology, which was published in 2018. My essay was translated into Danish (Tafari-Ama 2018) to make it available to a Danish audience, which is in denial of its colonial past.

The 2017 Centennial provided an important opportunity to rethink and reflect on the colonial history of Flensburg. The *Rum, Sweat and Tears* exhibition articulated the previously excluded African-Caribbean perspective and the inclusion of Ghana demonstrated Denmark's location at the three junctures of the transatlantic Holocaust. I worked with Dr. Overdick and Mrs. Susan Grigull, former and current Directors of the FMM respectively, to translate the themes emerging from the research data into an exhibition concept; it was arduous going but our epiphany moments were also sure-footed. Fortuitously, the Impuls-Design Graphics company from Hamburg joined the exhibition production team when the former Director left for his present position as *Referent Museen* at the Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg. Sven Klomp, Kathrin Meyer and the rest of the staff at the design company put in a lot of effort to ensure that this was a memorable exhibition experience.

Methodology

In the tradition of my multifaceted African ancestors, I am a Griot, a Storyteller who collects and disseminates the wisdom of subjects of multimedia research methodologies. The Griot memorialises the intergenerational experiences as a cultural transmission artefact of *remembering* for people dis-membered by the Maafa. Storytelling is also a pivotal platform for the crafting of an African Caribbean perspective on Danish colonialism and legacy but even more crucially, for contributing to the cacophony of dissent that ensured that a discourse of resistance would be chiseled into the psyche of the over two hundred million Africans dispersed and denigrated for over five hundred years⁵ and their progeny whose very lives were endangered by conspiracies of denial of access to the resources of this bank of memories as a key characteristic of the Holocaust of enslavement.

⁵ Dr. John Henrik Clarke *Africa before Slavery*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkFU2toufdQ&t=9s>, retrieved December 10, 2019.

I used a multidisciplinary approach to conduct the ethnographic study; I used myself as a tool of analysis and applied my multimedia, pedagogic, Participatory Action Research, development analysis and communication skills, informed my womanist and gender aware perspectives, playing multifaceted roles in order to produce an African Caribbean

131 Persons Interviewed

Virgin Islands: 72

Ghana: 31

Flensburg: 28

Figure 1: Research Participants by country

perspective on the Danish-German Colonial Legacy in Flensburg, the Virgin Islands of the United States and Ghana. I conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews, focus group and round table discussions, presented at co-related seminars and lectures, gave media interviews, engaged in participant observation, Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) techniques; did an extensive desk review, produced audio-visual documentaries, PowerPoint and Prezi presentations.

In this project, I am also using the communication process as an opportunity for conscientisation (Freire 1972; hooks 1994). It is therefore driven by a constructivist, developmental and integrated step approach that ensures the incremental building of knowledge from the acquisition of basic skills to analytical and evaluative skills.⁶ The justification for using this methodology was exemplified by the gift of Baobab tree seeds that Lennart Adam, journalist with *Flensburg Avis*, presented me with along with his centerspread interview with me about the project. The Baobab tree is referenced in the section of this paper focusing on resistance and is incorporated in the Exhibition. In the Virgin Islands, the Baobab tree is the quintessential symbol of African resistance, as I explain later in the paper; the choice of gift shows that the journalist internalised the story and chose to show solidarity with the ethics of critical reflection. This reflexive response from a media practitioner demonstrated the legitimacy of transformational thinking in the profession of news making.

I applied Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology for data gathering, which uses the social actor's experiences to demonstrate the project objectives and thus enables the conscientisation project to take root. This approach is appropriate for analyzing contexts of cognitive dissonance (Acharya et al 2015) exemplified by five centuries of Euro-American

⁶ The learning objectives will differ based on the age groups and their cognitive skills. Adjustments will be made where necessary to create an appropriate fit between the learners' skills and the cognitive skills required for comprehending the pre-/post-test instruments and the delivery of the curriculum. For example, if the learners are challenged because of their level of reading skills, the Instrument will be read to them.

colonialism and a consequent legacy of colonial denial, erasure and amnesia (Andersen 2013), which compounds the antecedent violence of domination and exploitation and constitutes an existential psychosis insightfully analysed as personality disorder (Hickling and Walcott 2013). Hickling and Walcott critically address the reductionist, normative and homogenizing tendencies of Euro-American classification of personality disorder, proposing instead to provide “A view of personality disorder from the colonial periphery.”⁷

I made mini documentaries, which were based on the research interviews, which were available on iPads, also placed on the floor, requiring the visitor to kneel to access this information, in respectful gestures of listening and embodied empathy, invoking principles of sensitive museum engagement.



Speaking of this model of museum curation in her book, *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon (2010) suggests that museums should be participatory in content and methodology to be relevant to their audiences. As she emphasises, “audience-centric design processes start by mapping out audiences of interest and brainstorming the experiences, information, and strategies that will resonate most with them.”⁸ The videos also act as the “talking heads” of the enslaved African ancestors whose bodies the visitors also walk over to demonstrate that the wealth of the Global North was garnered on the backs of enslaved Africans. I conducted several visitor tours, which were powerful opportunities for engaging in discussions. It was a tremendous portal provided by the 2017 Centennial.

World Café – Community Outreach

The FMM hosted monthly “World Café” discussions with the Flensburg community, in collaboration with friends and partners of the museum. These community conversations were designed to ensure that, as Guest Curator, I was accessible to the public. These encounters culminated in the *Eine Welt im Museum* conference,⁹ which was a partnership project between the FMM and Nicole Gifhorn, Promoter of Global Learning. Ms. Gifhorn was passionate about the need to address the implications of the exhibition, as a space for the community to critically

⁷ <http://caribbean.scielo.org/pdf/wimj/v62n5/a02v62n5.pdf>, retrieved September 26, 2016.

⁸ Nina Simon 2010. “The Participatory Museum.” <http://www.participatorymuseum.org>, retrieved, December 17, 2019.

⁹ https://www.bei-sh.org/files/Publikationen/2014_BEI_Publikation_Fachtagung_Eine_Welt_im_Museum-2014_www.BEI-SH.org.pdf, retrieved December 9, 2019.

reflect on the involvement of the state of Schleswig-Holstein in the Maafa, and the implications of this past for the self-identity politics of people still living in this space. As she explained,

Global learning facilitates communication, which is designed to improve the competence to shape one's own environment in a forward-looking and positive way, with regard to the personal and political dimensions. Global learning is based on the understanding that people are capable and willing to stand up for the well-being of all people and nature and to recognise the resulting added value for the general public.¹⁰

The intercultural communication that resulted from these conversations was transformative; views that were previously confined to impressions, repressions, conjectures and denials were ventilated with alacrity. One producer of the *Rum Regatta* admitted that until I introduced a critique of the colonial nostalgia embedded in this celebration, this was not seen as related to the bloody tribulations that European presence in the Caribbean caused indigenous and African people, as a consequence of sugar and rum production. Another participant noted that Danes/Germans, like their European and North American colonising peers, conspired “to put a blanket on the past”¹¹ in order to silence their culpability with colonial wrong-doing. For citizens living in underserved communities in the Caribbean, this past is still hauntingly present.

I cannot mention these World Café fora without paying tribute to Delali, from the group of women of German and African heritage called Sisters, which provided a moment of epiphany for my mentor, Dr. Overdick. He remarked that “the Sisters¹⁶, especially Delali, were saying the same things you was saying about the cognitive dissonance, which stymies the cross-cultural understanding and empathy required for effective communication.”¹² On December 7, 2016, one month after our encounter, Delali was murdered when her estranged husband poured petrol on her and set her on fire as she walked in the street.¹³ After another workshop encounter, the Sisters gifted me with a mini baobab tree, which was included in the exhibition.

Study Abroad Tour of Exhibition

I also did the last tour of the installation as a component of the Spring Break International Study tour, which I organised and which was attended by 21 students and their instructors, from three universities, as a component of my tenure at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts, as

¹⁰Translation of editorial excerpt, Nicole Gifhorn, https://www.bei-sh.org/files/Publikationen/2014_BEI_Publikation_Fachtagung_Eine_Welt_im_Museum-2014_www.BEI-SH.org.pdf, retrieved December 9, 2019.

¹¹ Karin Ahlers, participant in World Café, Flensburger Schiffahrtsmuseum, July 2016

¹² Personal conversation with Dr. Thomas Overdick, December, 2016.

¹³ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/740894/Woman-set-on-fire-Germany-Kronshagen-street>, retrieved December 8, 2019.

Fulbright Scholar, 2017-18. This cross-cultural seminar demonstrated the utility of the exhibition as a teaching tool and a conduit for social engagement.

FMM Director Susan Grigull admitted that in terms of visitor numbers, the RST exhibition attracted the highest volume of visitors over its nine-month run. Due to public calls for this attention-grabbing model to leave a permanent message in Flensburg, Mrs. Grigull took the initiative to create a film featuring me critically commenting on the meaning of the exhibition, which was recorded when I took the group of students to visit Germany during the Winter of 2017 and which is now part of the permanent exhibition.¹⁴

The Conceptual Context

This project was sponsored by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes' International Museums Fellowships programme and I was one of the 17 International Fellows/Curators in the mobile Fellow-Me! Academy, the exciting year-long forum providing a platform for deconstructing and debating the political economy of representation in museums around Germany. We were encouraged to use participatory, subjective and critical methodologies and reflexive models of museum engagement to ensure that, unlike many of the installations that we viewed around Germany, we would provide contextualised and critical representations of our subjective creations. By encouraging an alternative to a Eurocentric perspective on the Centennial, my project deliberately deconstructed the dominant racist view of colonial history which elicits no reflection or remorse for the horrors entailed in the centuries of enslavement.

The conceptual centrepiece of the interactive exhibition model is an artistic rendering of objectified African bodies on an enslavement ship, which come alive with the critical audio-visual memorialising from a selection of research participants. These viewpoints are complemented by a careful selection of objects that articulate the historical and contemporary consequences of the colonial conundrum.

Using myself as a tool of analysis, I am inserted bodily in the exhibition using a Griot (storyteller) mechanism; I summarise the exhibition story for the visitor from a big screen installation under the Baobab tree, painted on two walls, symbolising African resistance. The largest number of these trees outside of Africa are to be found in The Virgin Islands and were planted by enslaved Africans, notwithstanding the dire circumstances of being kidnapped, marched overland for over 300 miles, incarcerated in dungeons for up to five months at the

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Emy_1J7zAg, retrieved December 5, 2019.

Danish-built Cape Coast castle on the Gold Coast (now Ghana), before embarking through Doors of No Return on the torturous Middle Passage to the Virgin Islands. The Baobab tree does not blossom under a hundred years and then stands forever, bearing witness to the agency exercised by Africans who suffered the Holocaust of the enslavement Maafa, the greatest crime against humanity. The dehumanisation entailed in this process has rendered people of African descent so disadvantaged that the United Nations (UN) has declared 2015-2024 an International Decade for People of African Descent. In opening this Decade, then UN Secretary General, Ban-Ki Moon observed, “we must remember that people of African descent are among those most affected by racism... [and] denial of basic rights such as access to quality health services and education.”¹⁵

Paulo Freire analysed dehumanisation as one of the biggest tragedies of history. He argued that both coloniser and colonised were mangled by the dehumanisation discourse.

Dehumanisation, which marks not only those whose humanity, has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human. This distortion occurs within history; but it is not an historical vocation. Indeed, to admit of dehumanisation as an historical vocation would lead either to cynicism or total despair. The struggle for humanisation, for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons would be meaningless. This struggle is possible only because dehumanisation, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanises the oppressed (1972: 1).

Colonial rationalisation of dehumanisation saw Africans as more suited than Europeans to plantation work because they came from similarly warm-hot climate on the African Continent to the enslavement Killing Fields of the Caribbean and Americas. This was spurious reasoning however, especially in regard to objectification and dehumanisation of Africans as a whole.

According to Neville Hall, the European claim that African enslaved labor was paramount for the maintenance of the profit-making plantations was disingenuous and deceptive.

The ideological content of slave owning attitudes in the Danish West Indian Empire found its most formal representation in the legal codes of the islands. The image of the black in the white mind was most explicitly expressed in the laws devised to control slave behavior, in which slaves were conceived primarily as pieces of property but also as individuals

¹⁵ https://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/pdf/African%20Descent%20Booklet_WEB_English.pdf, retrieved December 5, 2019.

whose natural inclinations were depraved and inherently criminal (Hall in Higman 1986: 56).

Critiquing the contemptuous colonial attitudes and the actions that expressed this line of thinking, Neville Hall notes that

It is significant that four years after emancipation was a *fait accompli*, the planters made their last anguished cry to the crown for compensation, resting their case on the implicit premise of the sacredness of *property*. If that view prevailed among the plantocracy as late as 1852, it was an even profounder article of faith during the period of slavery...[I]n the Danish West Indies, slaves [sic] were the capital of their masters and mistresses, a circumstance which imposed a greater level of servility than the disobedience which the slaves displayed (Hall in Higman 1986: 39-40).

The wholesale appropriation of the resource use and surplus value of the labor of tortured Africans along the entire value chain was particularly profitable for the Flensburg environment. Therefore, the tendency to disassociate Flensburg from enslavement runs counter to the harsh evidence provided from documentation from Governors, missionaries and other archivists of the period under consideration (Hall, in Higman 1986; Tyson, in Highfield and Tyson 2009). It is also remarkable that there are disclaimers in historical accounts that represent Danish colonialism as “mild” when there was nothing hesitant about the application of two and a half centuries of racist colonial terrorism in Ghana, the VI or any other Danish colony.¹⁶

Outside observers, mostly American or British citizens escaping northern winters, constantly note the “mildness” of slavery that existed in the Danish West Indies. They did not understand, or did not acknowledge, slavery could neither exist in a gentler form, nor were that slaves subject to statutory considerations designed to keep them in bondage. Slave-owning ideology not only demeaned the African slaves, but also legally categorised them as “black,” or inferior, in their social relationships with white Europeans. Because African slaves were universally organised at the bottom of social hierarchies they were also materially bereft and at times severely lacked adequate sustenance (Meader 2009: 2).

Heru Neb Ka’Ra, advocate for Transitional Justice in St. Croix, offered an insightful critique of the political economy of this territorial transfer, which he did not think should be celebrated:

Celebration? For stealing, murdering and occupying someone else’s [indigenous people’s] property from them? You take stolen property to buy stolen property from a next thief...it’s criminals operating here so these are nothing but criminal contractual arrangements, trying to justify, trying to legalise the process though they have done something illegal, something unlawful in terms of the natural laws of humanity. That’s where we are going. Celebrate the same Maasa

¹⁶ Denmark colonised Tranquebar in India, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, which is outside of the scope of this project.

[Master] who brought us here and carried us through such atrocities? And now, we go to their army and their navy, their marines, their air force or whatever, and go and fight for them to keep their mastery over us and to gain mastery over other people and their resources.

When Denmark sold these islands, they sold all the archives¹⁷; they sold all the rights...if you read the Treaty that is what the Treaty says. They bought all the problems that they are having now with the inhabitants. The United States bought that problem; they said we are going to take that on. We will now decide what civil rights they are going to have, what status they are going to have. That is not to say that Denmark is getting away but right now, Denmark does not control the Virgin Islands now; who controls the Virgin Islands is the United States. We have to go after the United States and in the process of dealing with that disentanglement; you have to bring in all the people who are various strands of the *catta*¹⁸ and the bundle.

So, it is the United States, Denmark, it's France, it is England, it is The Knights of Malta, it is Spain, it is Portugal¹⁹; there are seven flags. And there is one other factor that we do not usually bring into this mix and that is the factor of the Vatican and what we call the Doctrine of Discovery. We cannot deal with the disentanglement unless we deal with all these strands, strand for strand because each of them contributed to the problem. The Vatican is important because they are the ones that granted sovereignty to the Kingdom of Spain, the Kingdom of Portugal, and the Kingdom of France – all those world powers at that time. The Vatican granted them, they said, the *Christian right* to go and conquer anyone that was non-Christian and what they considered enemies of the Christian faith, so they have to be involved.

It goes back to 1884, the Scramble for Africa and what we call the Berlin Conference; everything is all tied in. *So when we are dealing with this problem [of Danish colonial legacy] we have to look at all the factors and then we can disentangle our situation.* Another thing we have to consider is that the crimes that were considered for those five hundred years or more are still crimes. There is no statute of limitation to mass murder. Do the entities that committed those crimes still exist? Yes! We have for instance, the new state of Brazil, which is just an offspring of Portugal. Does Portugal still exist today? Yes; it even has its King and Queen. They have to answer for them because they still exist. Portugal was also in Africa, in Angola and those places. So we are not dealing with individuals; we are dealing with the entity of Portugal, the sovereignty and they have to be responsible as a person in court.

So, if they committed and allowed to be committed, genocide, illegal theft and occupation, stealing of peoples' gold and their resources, enslavement of people and the conditions that we had to live under in terms of the criminal acts that were committed and the conditions that we had to live under in what we call the slave trade and the whole slave economy et cetera, they have to be responsible for the crimes that they committed. The same thing with England, the same with Spain, the same with France, the same with Germany, the same with Denmark

¹⁷ This needs to be questioned in light of Denmark's recent opening up of access to online archives.

¹⁸ African lingua franca for a coiffed bundle used to cushion the head from the loads carried. It was often made from carefully plaited strands derived from banana trash.

¹⁹ The Virgin Islands were colonised at different points in time by these European countries.

or any particular entity that committed any of these crimes against peoples' humanity and more so, indigenous peoples' humanity, inclusive of indigenous Africans, indigenous Caribbean people – those they call Amerindians today, the Polynesian Islands or wherever they are, they have to be responsible.

And it is our responsibility now – not their responsibility – our responsibility, those of us who are conscious and aware, to use our resources, our intelligence, our research and our financial resources and all the other resources we have in terms of our unified resources to now create those legal avenues to do so. This is where, personally, I have been taking what I am doing.

It is this resolute attitude of resistance that was responsible for the Fireburn of 1878 which featured the four Queens, led by Queen Mary, which put paid to the perception that Peter von Scholten had magnanimously emancipated Africans in the Danish West Indies, a myth tied to the colonial nostalgia syndrome.

On October 1st, 1878, workers on St. John had had enough. People had gathered in Frederiksted to draft new contracts, and here a revolt broke out. The rumor had spread that ships and thus workers were prevented from leaving the islands. Enraged, workers started ravaging the city. They set fire to houses and shops, and a night of unrest followed. Only the next day did soldiers arrive in Frederiksted to arrest the rioters. Some rioters avoided arrest and were simply thrown out of town, but some of them proceeded to the plantations where they destroyed houses and burned down crops. Rhum and petroleum burned particularly well, and the sugar works were destroyed. For this reason, the revolt became known as the Fireburn.²⁰

The *Fireburn* is represented in the RST exhibition as a prominent discourse of resistance.

The Mobile Fellow Me! Academy and the Art of Mentorship

It was awesome to not only have a *de facto* mentor in Thomas Overdick, but also a *de jure* mentor in Susan Grigull, the present Director of the FMM. As expected by the Fellow Me! Academy,²¹ they guided me expertly through the rigors of museum curation. In the process, I became acquainted with the challenges of translating research data into a palatable concept that could be easily digested by the public. I was obliged to immerse myself into the connected histories of Germany and Denmark; revisit African history – before and after colonialism; indigenous histories in the Caribbean and the violent clash of cultures that resulted from colonialism, which constantly reproduced the contradictions of domination and resistance. For my mentors (by their own admission), having me as an interpreter of these combined histories was enlightening because they, like many scholars and students I encountered, admitted that

²⁰ Museum Vestsjælland: Kasper Nygaard Jensen and Ida Maria R. Skielboe, *Our Stories - A teaching material about Danish colonialism in the West Indies*, [file:///C:/Users/itafa/Downloads/OUR+STORIES+UK+\(enkelte sider FINAL\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/itafa/Downloads/OUR+STORIES+UK+(enkelte sider FINAL).pdf), retrieved December 12, 2019.

²¹ <http://fellow-me.de/akademie/?anim>, retrieved December 10, 2019.

colonial history had been erased from the European curriculum and replaced by a concentration on Holocaust studies and the reparations that healed that breach.

The interface of knowledges provided epistemic advantage up the value chain of providing a transformative methodology as an output of evidence based, participatory and relevant models of museum curation. Again, I add the Impuls-Design team to this process of conversion; the crew admitted that they experienced psychosocial transformation in the process of doing the RST project, which broadened the scope of their worldview and perception of themselves. My mentors helped me with the process of learning functional German²² to enable me to attend meetings with and without translation and navigate the peculiarities of the curation experience as I integrated into this organisation, a tremendous experience of professional enablement.

I proudly represented the FMM at conferences and seminars within Germany, in Denmark as well as on my research journeys to the Virgin Islands and to Ghana. Those visits enabled me to expand the project vision of a Transatlantic dialogue between Flensburg and the Virgin Islands into a more panoramic vision of a Trialogue among Flensburg, the USVI and Ghana. This expanded triologue more accurately pinpointed the involvement of Flensburg where merchant families like the Dethleffsens were strongly associated with the expansion of the wealth of Flensburg through the rum trade. Copenhagen, the colonial capital of Denmark, was chief protagonist in the illicit barter of guns and alcohol in exchange for the human bodies that were delivered to dungeons on the Gold Coast now known as Ghana. I was stunned to realise that Ernst Heinrich, Graf von Schimmelmann, who was Danish Finance Minister and Foreign Minister, owned the gun factory that produced the weapons that were traded for dehumanised Africans on the Continent. He also owned Caribbean plantations. Notably however, after he died, it was revealed that,

[t]he most valuable pieces of property were the four West Indian sugar plantations (conservatively estimated at 680,000 rix-dollars), the large sugar refineries in Copenhagen (173,000 rix-dollars), the Kronborg gun factory (156,000 rix-dollars), and the townhouse in central Copenhagen (80,000 rix-dollars) (Gøbel 2016).

This inheritance description provides a compelling case study for reparations.

Following my tenure in Flensburg, I was Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at Bridgewater State University in the United States of America and I initiated a Study Abroad tour for 11 students to join students from Flensburg-Europa University and the University of Augsburg in March, 2018, for me to host the last tour of the exhibition, as part of an International Seminar to mark

²² I cycled half an hour to my classes with Frau Dethleffsen!

International Women's Day and to demonstrate the utility of the *Rum, Sweat and Tears* installation for critical reflection on the current settler colonial status of the Virgin Islands of the US, resulting from the 1917 Transfer. We partnered with Pilkentafel Theare, Curators Kim Todzi and Hannimari Jokinen, who provided brilliant historical tours of the city of Hamburg, revealing its colonial embeddedness while Dr. Overdick provided a contextualizing lecture tour of Hamburg, elaborating on the project he is in charge of, to redefine Hamburg in terms of its colonial heritage and efforts to build a sensibility of accountability and renewal.

The Maafa and the Jewish Holocaust: Crimes against Humanity

The 2017 Centennial opened casks containing the rum/blood, sweat and tears of enslaved Africans, the creators of rum in the Caribbean and the contradictions in the stories told about conquest and colonialism. Flensburgers' *disconnect* from this history also reveals the dilemma of attributing responsibility when Denmark now emphasises its small size, compared to its glory days of empire and Germany, a country populated by migrants as much as natives, refuses to claim responsibility for an era when Denmark deserved Shakespeare's declaration that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" and Flensburg reigned supreme.

When I explained in an interview with the German newspaper Taz²³ that the Maafa, the total disaster of five centuries of African enslavement by Europeans, was the worst crime against humanity, especially because of its enduring legacy, I did not realise that I was unleashing a firestorm. In the German context, this statement was interpreted to mean that I was inappropriately comparing Holocausts whereas in Germany, *the Holocaust* that the Jews experienced at the hands of Germans seems to be the premier interpretation of the concept of Holocaust. Further, because Jews were paid reparations for the crimes committed against their humanity, "for industrial purposes," one exhibition visitor told me, I was not at liberty to refer to the Jewish Holocaust in a critical way because "Germans had dealt with that."

When I was taken to task by German-British journalist Alan Posener²⁴, I was flabbergasted because where I come from in the Caribbean, critics typically refer to slavery/enslavement as The Holocaust with no awareness that this concept is treated as a proverbial holy cow in Germany. One of the tragedies of enslavement is the extent to which people of African descent have internalised and reproduced colonial world views as their own, in classic expressions of hegemony, declaring incredibly that one of the benefits of enslavement is our ability to speak

²³ <https://taz.de/Kuratorin-Tafari-Ama-ueber-Sklaverei!/5416099/>, retrieved December 12, 2019.

²⁴ <https://www.belltower.news/ernst-nolte-juergen-zimmerer-jakob-augstein-relativierer-des-holocausts-45786/>, retrieved December 12, 2019.

English and other such indicators of cognitive dissonance. Those more aware of the impact of the psychosocial brutality of enslavement will be more quick to point out the fissures in the identity complex most didactic of the deleterious impact of the Holocaust. European justification of colonialism as a civilising mission demonstrates the compound violence that is done in the denial of the horrors of this version of Holocaust and the detrimental effects suffered by progenitors and progeny alike.

Responding to the prevailing oxymoron of colonial amnesia and nostalgia in Europe, which resists the validity of an African Caribbean perspective, which I embody and which centers the Maafa as the worst crime against humanity, my then mentor, Dr. Thomas Overdick, responded that my reference to the Holocaust of African enslavement was not intended to constitute a comparison of Holocausts, On the contrary, he argued,

the Jewish AND African Holocaust are both horrible crimes against humanity and have immense traumatizing political and economic consequences – until today; that placing one above the other does not really make it better for the people who suffer the crimes and consequences. – You cannot measure one life against the other. But I actually wouldn't understand the expression of the "African Holocaust" as a denial of the Jewish suffering under Nazi-Germany. I understand it as a rhetorical figure to express the immense horror of 500 years of enslavement.

I think it is important to listen to such views uttered by people like Alan Posener. I think his article reveals an underlying ideology of a "civilising mission" that is often argued with to justify the European colonial expansion. His ignorance towards colonial racism and violence is really frightening! In the context of Pan-Africanism discourse I think that the "Holocaust"-expression is correct and it is, in my view, also adequately contextualised and explained in the exhibition.²⁵

This sensitivity reflects the truism, alluded to by Chris Weedon, that identities are constituted in discourse. Discourse is also a mechanism that is employed, or deployed, in the re-constitution of displaced identities.

We learn who we are and how we think and behave through discursive practices. Moreover, subjectivity is embodied, and discursive practices shape our bodies, as well as our minds and emotions, in socially gendered ways... The individual is the site for competing and often contradictory modes of subjectivity, which together constitute a particular person (Weedon 1999: 104).

This allusion to embodied discourses and their ontological significance brings to mind the monotonous regularity with which visitors for whom I did tours of the exhibition, hesitated on

²⁵ Dr. Thomas Overdick, professional conversation, Fall 2017.

the threshold of the installation space, expressing discomfort with walking across bodies, with realisation of their own complicity with the exhibition theme.

Political Contradictions

In tackling the conundrum of Denmark's colonial administration in the Virgin Islands, I was cautioned against a reductionist approach by a reminder from Professor Malik Sekou²⁶ in one of the round tables in which I engaged in St. Thomas that "not every white person was a coloniser and not every African was innocent." Professor Sekou also indicated that he was involved with a project to interrogate the status quo and to steer the Centennial discussions in the direction of self-determination and self-government. As he elaborated,

We are trying to work in concert with the Centennial discussions in a way that focuses more on self-government and transitional development, in ways that entangle with and overlap our interests. I am also a UVI²⁷ Professor so I work with David Edgecombe and I have been teaching History for the past 18 years so this topic [Danish colonial legacy] is actually the focus of one of my classes. I am also interested in and ideologically attached to a Pan-Africanist perspective. Pan-Africanists look to Ghana where Kwame Nkrumah is from and that is where Hubert Harrison's ideas matured and he is considered the father of modern Pan-Africanist thought and is one of the foundational philosophers of our thinking.

Elaborating on Danish colonialism in the Virgin Islands, Professor Sekou said:

I have some hesitation in the discussion because in the past, whenever we in the Virgin Islands are discussing our heritage and our history, it has brought out some of the worst discussions we have had. I think that once we do this correctly, which is to focus on a very comprehensive analysis, which encompasses all victims of oppression we can take a step forward. I give you an example. The Virgin Islands is one of the few societies where we have produced some of the greatest philosophers on identity yet we lack a common identity at the same time. We have produced a Hubert Harrison, Edward Blyden, Frank Crosswell; these are some heavyweights. But we have produced them like an incubator but when it comes to us having a least common denominator, something that can define us, we don't have it here. The reason for this is because of our complexity.

One of the reasons why the Danish issue is so difficult to understand is that Danes, unlike any other European power, never sought to Scandinavianise the African population. We were never forced to become Danish or turn into Danes. Unlike the British who sought to make their British subjects as slaves British, the French, the Spanish, the Dutch, this is the only instance in this hemisphere where the coloniser had no

²⁶ Prof. Sekou is a Lecturer at the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI).

²⁷ University of the Virgin Islands.

intention of us becoming Danish. The language we spoke was like a Dutch Creole.²⁸ We did not get the Danish language... They came as government officials and there were government people who were of upper class and some of lower class. Those of lower class who stayed behind after Emancipation became Virgin Islanders. One set went “home” [making sign of the quotation marks] and another set stayed and became Virgin Islanders in terms of their orientation. Although many still have genetic ties to Scandinavia in many cases, they inter-marry.

So that unique situation makes it more complex. They don't fit the traditional *Caribbean white* group. And then the French population who came here came after slavery. They had no history of being slave owners. And I must say that even among some of our own people, some of them were slave owners too. In St. Thomas, in 1837, the majority of slave owners were African people, freed African people. In Neville Hall's book, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, he shows that by the 1830s, the majority of slave owners were “freed negroes” [again making the quotation mark sign with his fingers]. So it is not that simple.

I checked the reference cited by Sekou and sure enough Neville Hall had his usual clarity of this intermediate group of Africans:

In the entire slave societies of plantation America there emerged an intermediate group of non-European free persons separating the superordinate whites from the blacks over whom they exercised hegemonic control. The very existence of such a category of “free” persons upset the neatly symmetrical schema in which white was virtually a synonym for free and black for servitude. This group existed in the midst of the slave society rather than, as in the case of the maroon communities, on its fringes. It included slaves who through grand marronage had escaped their owners and established viable identities as freedmen but its core consisted of individuals who had been manumitted by the conscious will of white persons (Hall, in Higman 1994: 139).

The phenomenon of enslaved Africans owning their fellow Africans and treating them with the violence and racialised attitudes practiced by Europeans demonstrates the hegemony of internalised oppression and racism and the psychotic behaviors this entails (Acharya et al 2015; Hickling and Walcott 2013; Leary 2004; Woodson 1914) . The re-production of learned violence is an inevitable response to abuse. Rationalising this behavior in the context of colonialism also acknowledges that the denial syndrome that characterises cognitive dissonance responses, qualifies the enslaving Africans for this prognosis (Acharya et al 2015).

The trading in African human beings as objects to be owned and exploited in the production of sugar and rum enriched royalty and merchants and consequently, benefited the empires Europeans and North Americans constructed in the first thrust of globalisation. However, in the

²⁸ Triangulated in interview with Oceana and Freundelle and with Prof. Sprauve.

discursive perception of Flensburgers,²⁹ this leg of the transatlantic trade is usually deemed less deleterious than the inhumane trafficking in which Copenhagen was involved.

The exhibition also provided a platform for interrogating the long legacy of colonialism, which manifests in prevailing racialised class distinctions at the level of the political economy and widespread distorted self-identities. The persistent belief in a white God/Jesus, also reveals the enduring mechanisms of ideological violence that engendered mental enslavement. Widespread loss of African cultural memory and resultant cognitive dissonance in contemporary representations of self-identities in Caribbean popular culture in general, prevents many Caribbean citizens of African descent from locating themselves in a paradigm of sustainable development. These themes were pictorially presented in the RST exhibition, which proposed a reparations solution for the intergenerational costs of the Maafa.

According to John Henrick Clarke, religion was and continues to be employed as one of the principal mechanisms to alienate Africans from the epicenter of our humanity. As he says, “there are people who solicit their God to endorse their enslavement of other people. All forms of present day organised religion are an endorser of some form of slavery and some form of oppression of other people. Therefore all forms of organised religion are ungodly.”³⁰ As he also emphasised, this reference to religion is not a denunciation of spirituality, which as he emphasises, “must stay with us all along because it is organised spirituality that lifts man [woman, girl and boy] higher than the dog.” Clarke reinforces my conviction that “our biggest crisis today is that we have lost our historical memory,” resulting in what Clarke refers to as myriad attempts to “crawl back on the plantation.”

Loss of African Identity

The most devastating impact of European colonialism has been the large-scale loss of African identity, compounded by the internalisation of racist values about identity and self-representation. Over four centuries of brutal reconditioning in the Maafa, the Holocaust of African enslavement resulted in psychosocial dysfunction so severe that it may be regarded as an international public health crisis. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (Leary 2004), typifies the lack of self-confidence evident in myriad patterns of pathological behaviors, the most degrading being worshipping white representations of God and defining and performing beauty in terms

²⁹ Discussions stimulated by the onset of the Koloniales-Erbe project have been met with repeated protestations to this effect.

³⁰Dr. John Henrik Clarke, Africa Before Slavery, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkfU2toufdQ&t=9s>, retrieved December 10, 2019.

of a white standard, which negates African self-worth. As Senator Myron D. Jackson observed in this regard, “don’t forget the Bible when it comes to the violence done to our people.”³¹ The plethora of churches present across the vast Ghanaian landscape, often with images of a Caucasian representation of Jesus proudly displayed, denotes the extent of the application of religious violence in that domain.

Having been spiritually, socio-economically, psychosocially and politically disempowered, African people have had no recourse but to resort to the very implements of their oppression – the machete and fire, utilised as tools for planting and reaping cane, the occupation of their oppression, to provide alternative cosmological, ideological, spiritual, metaphysical, political and socio-economic mechanisms of self and social transformation in order to not completely fall prey to the myriad mannerisms of disempowerment that attend the postcolonial condition. Even the model of domination, its inclusions and exclusions become relevant in formulating an understanding of the contradictions of colonialism and its legacy.

While identifying this relationship of dysfunctional past to present does not absolve contemporary perpetrators from responsibility for their crimes, there is reason to believe that current behaviors of protagonists of violence in the African Diaspora are directly linked to the fact that no psychosocial intervention was introduced after the realisation of Emancipation and much of the systemic forms of oppression and exploitation against people of African heritage have remained intact. The present performance of violence as a social norm is therefore rooted in a complex racialised, sexualised system of domination, which depends on the use of violence as an organising principle and mechanism of control (Tafari-Ama 2006) while leaving deep cultural trauma in its wake (Leary 2005; Hickling 2011)..

According to Roy Eyerman (2001), cultural trauma results in “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion.”³² He emphasises that cultural trauma is made more devastating as it is replayed in individual consciousness and collective memory. Similarly, denial, which represents a distorted form of remembering, entails more pain as issues remain unresolved.

Conclusion

³¹ Roundtable Discussion, Charlotte Amalie, June 27, 2016.

³² <http://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/08286/sample/9780521808286ws.pdf>, retrieved, September 19, 2011.

How are we going to redeem the wounded and traumatised (Leary, 2004; Hickling and Walcott 2013) Africans and Europeans, victims and perpetrators, collectively and separately traumatised, from the entrapment of configurations of identity narratives that reinforce racist notions of supremacy? By what means shall the coloniser come to accept responsibility for their collective redemption from the covered trauma of colonialism and its legacy?

Crucian artist LaVaughn Belle offered a succinct summation of transitional justice demands, which are relevant to consider in this context.

When you think about it in terms of finance, you could think of leverage as something that you are able to use although you do not have a lot but you are able to use this fulcrum, this leverage to get more, to get somewhere else. That simple physics equation of leveraging your weights but it does not mean that you yourself are so big and important or have so much was to create a dynamic where you were able to leverage to get something more, knowing that you did not start off with a lot. We can leverage what we have to be able to get more and that more for us is acknowledgement; it's an apology; it's understanding, and it is money.

Often, when people think about reparations they jump to money but I don't mean money as if you are trying to pay off the descendants. That conversation often descends into *how are we going to find the descendants and give them actual cash...no!* It's investing in our infrastructure; it's investing in education; its giving a hundred scholarships every year for people to learn Danish and be able to go into the archives; it's about investing in our institutions and to develop new ones because those that you let us with are dysfunctional. We have to build through education and programming.³³

I met students in Denmark who were part of the technology transfer cooperation project that is the incremental step in the right direction for realisation of reparation considerations, which Pan-Africans in the Caribbean are resolute should be realised.

At the first Roundtable discussion in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, David Edgecombe also provided an insightful perspective on the preferred outcome for taking a critical, African-perspective look at Danish colonialism and its legacy in the context of the Transatlantic trade. He endorsed Okera's suggestion that change has to entail working through endemic patterns of trauma towards sustainable efforts of healing.

It is very important for us to try to avoid getting into a kind of maze of recriminations and pointing of fingers about who oppressed who because I have seen so often that we get bogged down in that. Probably one of the best ways of avoiding that is to take an account of where we are. When you look at the Virgin

³³ Research interview, June 2016.

Islands today, where are we? What are the things that have happened? We have to try to see the general things, the patterns, rather than just the minute things.

I do not want to envision or suggest a society based on us against them. We are all here in the Territory together so some rationale should be found for some collective way to move forward. If the poverty level of children in the Virgin Islands moves from thirty-one percent to twenty percent, it benefits everybody; it benefits us all. If we look at our major problems and say, how can we fix those problems? We may find that by looking back at the past, we find the roots of some of those causes.

Another thing that I have to say is that we must examine carefully the things that we do. And I know that reparations is a hot issue and I know that they have put together a body of intellectuals...these were put together by the heads of CARICOM [the Caribbean Community] and the leaders of CARICOM. And the man who spoke for the Reparations Commission is a brilliant man...now [Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Hilary Beckles]. So he ends up in England in the House of Commons and this is the case that he has put: how we have been brutalised. Absolutely, we have been brutalised and make no mistake about it; we should not put that under the counter.

We should emphasise that so that we are reminded all the time so that we understand man's capacity to be inhumane, what we have been through and surpassed. So I am not saying that we should whitewash that and put it away. But at the end of the day, this is [Sir]³⁴ Hilary Beckles' argument: if you do right; you came here and you agreed, first of all that the Bill was put and recommendations made of what should be given to the slaves. But in the House of Lords, they objected to that. So what are the slaves doing? We are losing our property...you should be paying reparations to us. You went ahead and did that and benefited and continue to benefit. Now, if you know the right thing, please do what is right by us; if you do that then we will be a better nation. But how is that going to win this case?

This last rhetorical conjecture denotes the contradictions that undermine the sustainability of claims made to repair damage caused by the Maafa. Yet South Africa's model of Truth and Reconciliation provides an attractive precedent for making sustainable efforts to leverage a politics of transitional justice, which will benefit the progeny of oppressed.

³⁴ Although David Edgecombe did not refer directly to the oxymoron of the chief spokesman for reparations in the Caribbean having been knighted by the Queen of England, the butt of the reparations claims, this is the crux of the self-denial syndrome. It is inexplicable that he felt the need to be validated in this manner by the quintessential symbol of oppression and exploitation against which he so eloquently campaigns.

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