Systemic Colonial Aphasia and Civic Education in Denmark and St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands[1]

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ABSTRACT

Based on interviews, surveys and observations carried out in Denmark and St. Croix U.S. Virgin Islands in 2016 and 2019, this articles gives voice to Danish and Crucian high school students' perspectives on colonial history. Referring to the negotiation of civic education policies in the two regions as frame, the analysis focuses on how students perceive the relevancy of colonial history in their curriculum, how they explain certain key concepts and how they relate their learning to the available social and national identity positions. In a contrapuntal reading, where contributions from Crucian students, teachers, activists and scholars serve as grounding, the authors ponder whether Danish students are in fact subject to an education caught up in systemic colonial aphasia. And they suggest how students may be ready to initiate a decentered learning process.

"Overlapping territories, intertwined histories…"

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This article sets out to present some examples of what young people in Denmark and St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands respectively, know and think about what we may call their "overlapping territories and intertwined histories" (Said 1994: 50). We are here referring to the fact that St. Croix was a Danish colony from 1733 until it was sold (with St. Thomas and St. John) to the U.S. in 1916, and transferred into the status of a U.S. overseas territory the following year.

The first part of the data for this article was gathered by a group of students in Cultural Encounters Studies at Roskilde University during the spring of 2016.[3] The students worked from the hypothesis, partly based on their own experiences, that if high school students in Denmark are not trained to reflect analytically and critically about the construction of national and transnational historical narratives through their education, they will be unable to articulate nuanced arguments and ideas about the links between the past and the present in a globalized world.

This concern tied into debates about the learning objectives for the subject of History that have been at the center of political debates in Denmark. Our analysis will refer to some of the responses presented by Danish historians and scholars of education and didactics. Even if the Cultural Encounters students met discussions of migration, integration and racism in Danish media and in school, these issues were never connected to Danish colonial history and its legacy in History classes. Likewise, they had been given more knowledge about racism in the U.S. and British or French colonial history than about the genealogy of racialization and racism in Denmark and its ties to Danish colonial history.

One part of their investigation set out to find out whether their own experience was representative or not. The other part set out to investigate what high school students knew about this shared colonial history and what might be interesting similarities and differences. This concern was inspired by the desire to engage in a "contrapuntal" historiography (Said 1993), and to respond to Loftsdottir and Jensen's suggestion that we develop a historiographic *didactic* that could "abandon the idea of the universal narrative"

[3]Two of these students are co-authors of this article. Following this first part of the data collection, a follow-up visit in St Croix was carried out by the third author of this article in 2019.

(2012). In the following year, the work developed into a proper research project in cooperation with Associate Professor Heidi Bojsen.

Our point of entry into a conversation with students was the educational systems in St. Croix and in Denmark. Thanks to engaged teachers and culture bearers in both places, we were able to gather information via qualitative interviews of teachers and students in Denmark and St. Croix in 2016 and 2019 as well as via quantitative surveys among students in the two regions during the same periods.

As the title of the article suggests, we considered whether Stoler's metaphor of "aphasia" might apply. In her analysis of how prominent parts of French academia and public discourse have represented - or not - the Algerian War (1958-1962), she proposes aphasia as a metaphor for a situation in which a society (France in this case) does have knowledge available in its institutions and discursive repertoires, yet appears unable to articulate and activate that knowledge (Stoler 2011). Stoler does not use the phrase "systemic colonial aphasia", but her examples testify to the struggles and negotiations between different discourses of power that partake in systemic articulations of history. By adding "systemic", we hope to underline the movement and volatility of power articulations that are part of Stoler's examples, but may be occluded by the use of "colonial aphasia" on its own. As we dived deeper into the material we also realized that aphasia, if an adequate metaphor at all, was mostly relevant to describe articulations of Danish students since the majority of Crucians students had quite developed knowledge and competencies in articulating colonial history.

Annaly Guerra's doctoral thesis *Decentered Civic Education. Lessons from the Margins* (2018) was of tremendous help as it enabled us to situate our findings in relation to her salient analysis of the dynamics of civic education practices in U.S. Virgin Islands and students responses to these practices. Consequently, we will start out by presenting some of the battling culture and identity constructions that we found to be at work in the intersection of history didactics and civic education in St. Croix and in Denmark respectively. The last half of the article will then discuss our findings from the two groups of students, focusing on students' perception of colonial history as relevant, and on their knowledge and ideas about colonialism.

Based on the brevity of the periods of time we have spent in St. Croix, there is no way that we could give a balanced analysis of the two groups of students. The Crucian voices,

from students, teachers and scholars**,** are the rich lessons that we insist on including and fronting in our strategy of decentering our preconceptions and bias as Danish academics. Our data from observations, surveys and interview is rich and multi-faceted. It is still being processed. In this article, we have chosen to share some of those articulations and tendencies that might be laid out as lacunae or aphasia among Danish students, but which are also, we would argue, tied into, and consequences of, Danish civic education understandings and practices.

Culture and identity battles in education - St. Croix

The period of the Transfer Centennial in 2017 was marked by an increased focus on the shared colonial histories between Denmark and USVI. Political leaders, museums, historians, artists, and educators mobilized many people on both sides of the Atlantic in conversations and debates about the history, particularly in 2016 and 2017. Many of these initiatives can be perceived as strategies of decolonizing education. The USVI still qualifies as a Non-Self-Governing Territory, and the UN has called on the responsible governments for improvements in its **"**Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" (Guerra 2018).[4] Many of the initiatives carried out by scholars, students, schoolteachers and activists follow Hickling-Hudson's recommendations for a decolonializing educational practice (Hickling-Hudson 2004). They inscribe themselves into a long genealogy of protests and struggles for social justice that goes back to the Danish period and appeared in new forms during the administration period of the US Navy after the Transfer in 1917 (Olwig 2010; Tyson 1995; N.A.T. Hall 1985; Roopnarine 2010; Lewis 2003; Hendricks 2009). Recent initiatives include bringing more USVI material into History classes and organizing field trips to local museums and historical sites. Culture bearers share oral histories and knowledge about local ecological, cultural and social history in synergy with the scholarly work of George Tyson, Neville Hall, Arnold Highfield, Olasee Davis, Jeanette Bastian, and many others. Yet, in our conversations with teachers and students, we detected frustrations about the fact that the overall structure and learning objectives of a U.S. mainland framework have not yet been seriously challenged.

[4] See note 12 for a reference to the Declaration.

Hickling-Hudson also emphasizes the importance of teachers' awareness of their own biography, positioning and bias in a colonial, racialized and economically hierarchized society (2004). Our conversations with teachers documented a high concern with these matters, but also a certain lack of capacity to address these issues in an action-based way. One English teacher commented: "Obviously our textbooks are made in the States, from Texas to Connecticut to Iowa, and with that comes that mythology of white superiority in a lot of ways." The high school teacher felt compelled to teach black history as much as possible to make sure that the Crucian students acquaint themselves with at least parts of the history from a non-white perspective, and thus empower them to identify as protagonists of history and not as its passive victims. Another factor was the socioeconomic, ethnic and racial diversity of the Crucian population, which fostered differential responses to the curriculum (Roopnarine 2010). We consulted USVI history school manuals, used by some of the teachers, such as *The Umbilical Cord* (1995) by Harold Willocks, which was the book best known by students and Isaac Dookhan's *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States* (1975) and William Boyer's *America's Virgin Islands* (2010). The last two books also seemed to be appreciated as a rule**,** but were only used by students with a strong interest or capacity for extra-time work.

Crucian students' learning about the colonial past and present also happened outside of the school. Fieldtrip destinations such as the harbor area of Christiansted and inside the forts of both Christiansted and Frederiksted, provided examples of how the lack of Virgin Islander access to the archives, mentioned by Bastian (2003) and Hall (2003), were remedied by various posters with images and texts on slavery and the slave trade. These texts referenced archival sources in Denmark amongst others, but had a clear Virgin Islands perspective focusing on the links between slavery and capitalism with titles such as "A Price for Humanity", "Tolerance for Profit" and "Order for Profit".

In addition, it is important to signal the important contributions from culture bearers, activists and artists in St. Croix who reached out to students in St. Croix, even if we do not have the space to properly unfold their work in this particular article. In this group, we managed to identify high school teachers in both Denmark and St. Croix who have committed to the UNESCO program of *Breaking the Silence: Transatlantic Slave Trade*

(TST)[5] and other teachers who have generously shared their knowledge, ideas and constructive criticism with us during our visits. The Crucian scholar, activist and culture bearer, Frandelle Gerard, and her team at the Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism (CHANT), based in Frederiksted, offered guided tours in the areas of the town where the free Blacks have lived since the eighteenth century. In addition, CHANT offered outreach activities via art, woodworking, story-telling and photographic documentation. Another important culture bearer is artist La Vaughn Belle whose art pieces and *House that memory built*[6] permitted students and other groups to see how the reconstruction and generation of memory work is not a schoolbook exercise but an existential**,** intellectual and practical gesture that may also be carried out via art.[7]

We have also seen the sharing of historical and cultural knowledge both in schools and museums by the culture bearers Cariso singer Cidelle Petersen Christopher and her team of musicians. Finally, we witnessed how Crucian based scholars such as environmentalist Olasee Davis, Dr. Annaly Guerra and others interacted with students and teachers.[8] However, the two category five hurricanes that brought massive devastation to the USVI in 2017 have meant a major setback to some decentered civic education efforts.

Crucian students mostly learned about colonial history in History, English and Social Science classes. The perspective and priority given to Virgin Island history or other colonial history varied from one teacher to another. As pointed out by Annaly Guerra

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[5] The programme was launched in 1998 and the second cycle, initiated in 2010/2011 focused on assisting schools that sought to use the tools and ideas developed during the first cycle. http://www.unesco.org/new/en/archives/education/networks/global-networks/aspnet/flagship-projects/transatlantic-slave-trade/. http://www.unesco.org/new/en/archives/education/networks/global-networks/aspnet/flagship-projects/transatlantic-slave-trade/new-ideas-for-teaching-tst/.

[6] See http://www.lavaughnbelle.com/. The house has been closed to the public after the hurricanes in 2017, but is planned to reopen.

[7] As part of the Transfer centennial activities, she worked closely with Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers, a Danish-Caribbean artist of color. Together, they produced a memorial sculpture of Queen Mary, one of the leaders from the Fireburn rebellion in 1878. After some deliberation, it was decided to erect the monument on the Copenhagen waterfront. Its inauguration and presence in Denmark has proven to be important as it is the first and only memorial statue of a woman of color in Denmark and only the second statue of a person of color.

[8] In April 2019, The V.I. Studies Collective, launched by La Vaughn Belle, Tiphanie Yanique, Hadiya Sewer and Tami Navarro, launched a debate on the theme “What is a Virgin Islander?” in each of the three islands.

(2018), their territorial status excludes Virgin Islanders from vital democratic rights such as the right to vote in U.S. congressional and presidential elections and gives them only partial rights to certain benefits such as medical care. This puts Virgin Islanders in a particularly marginalized position. Guerra's study provides valuable insights into what she terms the "Republican civic education". This position stresses patriotism, defends continental American values and a historiography that is based on narratives on the white**,** mainland male hero. Native Americans and African-Americans are either absent or appear intermittently as foes to be fought or as the enslaved or segregated other. In our interviews and informal conversations with students, teachers and other people we met, we learned that a sense of exclusion was felt by most people who had experienced how little the mainland media and population knew about USVI. For people of color, it was a double bind as they experienced a racial exclusion as well.

Indeed, Guerra argues that the Liberal ideal of a civic education in the name of multiculturalism has its limitations as it often feeds into a narrative of harmony and solution by tolerance without properly addressing the structures of systemic racism and other structural dynamics of socio-economic inequity and exploitation (Guerra 2018: 10-13). Our interviews and observations show that most Crucian students are very much aware of these structures and dynamics. Guerra proposes what she calls a decentered civic education that would have the four following components:

1) the understanding that students enter a classroom with political interests and identities and should be respected and nurtured with love and care;

2) the promotion of dialogue that does not merely disseminate dominant national myths, but seeks to expose historical and current power structures and promote social justice;

3) a commitment to helping students cultivate their conceptions of justice and civic identities;

4) a focus on preparing students for action (Guerra 2018: 25).

Through our interviews and observations with students, teachers, activists and culture bearers that interact with students, we learned that at least some teachers and all the culture bearers and artists we met did in fact practice such a decentered civic education in different ways. Yet, these activities were often relegated to the margins of the traditional curricula or in extracurricular activities organized by the USVI educational system, such as Cultural Day or field trips. We heard numerous teachers and students complain that Virgin Islands history had much less time and space than U.S. mainland history. At the macro-structural level, the decentering civic educational practice was pushing against U.S. mainland curricula requirements that must be followed if schools wished to obtain national educational support.

Culture and identity battles in education - Denmark

Concerning the Danish context, our study suggests that high school students in Denmark learn mostly about colonial history in History and English classes. The interviews and observations were all from public schools, one in a relatively privileged area, the other in a more socioeconomically mixed area[9]. The didactic research and debates within these disciplines did not appear to have in-depth discussions about teaching colonial history as such, nor did we find any surveys documenting the learning outcome among students on this topic comparable to the work of Guerra.

Most of the scholarly work that acknowledges the racialized, cultural, linguistic and social diversity embedded within the classroom and in Danish society more broadly seeks to address what is construed as "problems/issues of integration" and social strategies of immigrant students or descendants of immigrants. This has sparked an increased interest in the implicit or explicit cultural normativity embedded in notions such as "integration" and "democracy competences" in Danish educational and anthropological journals.[10]

[9]We are aiming at developing this study by making interviews from high schools with high percentages of students with migrant backgrounds, but have not had the possibility to do so yet.
[10] I.e. Dansk Pædagogisk Tidsskrift, Sprogforum.

In some ways, the idea of Denmark is taken for granted as a monolingual, homogeneous narrative, that may have different political and social positions and struggles, but are nevertheless one national culture to which foreigners must assimilate (Olwig & Pærregaard 2011). The didactic concern has been mostly about the relation between Danish history and world history, which has been negotiated by historians and educational policymakers since the eighteenth century and with increasing regulation and focus on educating for national citizenship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

For the past thirty years, the attention paid to analytical skills in dealing with cultural differences and ways of defining culture has also been debated, but mostly with the aim of preparing students (presumed to be white, mono-cultural**,** middle-class students) to interact in a diverse globalized world (Haue 2009; Butters 2009). Inspired by the German historian Karl-Ernst Jeismann, the Danish historian Bernard Eric Jensen has been an active advocate for a didactic that will develop students' "historical consciousness". Providing students with a "historical consciousness" appeared as a learning objective in the ministerial regulations for upper secondary level history education in the 1980s and middle school level in the 1990s (Jensen 2010; 2012a). Jensen is particularly concerned with how students may learn about the past in order to understand themselves in the present and in the future, concerns that are in tune with parts of Guerra's decentered civic education and with the questions raised by the Cultural Encounters students. His concern with theories of identity formation has led him to criticize the national conservative conception of history, launched by the Danish government in 2001 as part of their "culture battle" (*Kulturkamp*), that would orchestrate a shift from a "democratic community of citizenship" (*medborgerskab*) to an ethnic *Volks*community (Jensen 2012a). The battle between a "democratic competence"-position and an ethnos-based position is still ongoing and is currently centered around the notion of "Use of History". In 2014, a new set of guidelines from the Ministry of Education fronted "Use of History" as one of the central competencies for History education. The Use of History is often presented as a confrontation between scientific Use of History versus abuse, manipulation and conspiracy theory.[11]

[11]See the thematic issue on "Use of history" in the Danish journal of History didactics *Radar* from March, 2018 https://historielab.dk/temanummer/historiebrug/

History, education and colonial aphasia

Like many other European nations, Denmark took part in the globalized colonization and mercantilist policies that marked Europe during the early seventeenth century. In 1602, King Christian IV of Denmark and Norway formed the Islandic Company, followed by the East Indian Company in 1616 that soon sought to expand and accumulate wealth from the colony Tranquebar (on the east coast of India), which the Danish-Norwegian Crown purchased in 1620. In 1636, the Greenlandic Company was formed. In 1671, the West Indian-Guinean Company received its royal privilege and began exploiting the Caribbean island St. Thomas that had received its first Danish settlers in 1666. Later the islands St. John and St. Croix also became Danish-Norwegian colonies, and the three Caribbean islands were renamed the Danish West Indies (Bro-Jørgensen 1966).

In writing these lines, we are reproducing the traditional Danish historiographic mode of introducing Danish colonial history as a theme: outlining the geopolitical and economic rationales for colonial expansion. Indeed, in Denmark, it is usually within this framework that students meet the institution of enslavement and the triangular trade.

Denmark was one of the most active slave trading nations during the period of the transatlantic slave trade. In fact, Denmark was the seventh largest slave trading nation during the transatlantic slave trade, *numerically* speaking (Madsen 2012; Dale 2012). The particular characteristic of history in the Caribbean as a locus of trauma, destruction and slave plantation economy is well known for Caribbean historians and most Crucian students (S. Hall 2001; N. A. T. Hall 1992; Bastian 2003). When it comes to Danish historiography, there has not been much interest in the construction of Crucian or Danish West Indian identity formations during or after the colonial period as of relevancy for domestic Danish narratives. According to Astrid Nonbo Andersen, one can detect an itinerary of neglect and of isolated descriptions in Danish academic historiographic work, when it comes to describing slave trade, institutionalized and systemic racism, slavery and emancipation struggles (Andersen 2017).

There has been scholarly attention in Denmark for some time directed at the pitfalls of imperial regret and nostalgia. However, the critical questions raised regarding historiographic normative perspectives have come from anthropological or postcolonial

scholars with background in literature other rather than by trained historians (Poddar and Mealor 2008; Thisted 2009; Jensen 2012b, 2018; Jørgensen 2011). Olwig's study of the rebellion by the enslaved on St. John (Olwig 1985), narratives of migration among West Indian women (2010), her work on Caribbean diaspora in Denmark (2014) and on issues of migration, integration and the welfare state in Denmark (2011) offer an opportunity to understand and interrogate an Atlantic history, wherein intersecting socio-economic, racialized and gendered hierarchies can be studied and understood locally and internationally.

Methodology

Our empirical data is based on qualitative data and quantitative data collected by all of the authors. The quantitative data was harvested via surveys whereby students in Denmark and St. Croix could respond anonymously to a series of questions that sought to bring out what they could remember about their syllabus and also their overall understanding of colonial history and its relevancy for their societies today. The first section asked students to assess the relevance of different historical topics where colonial history, slavery and triangular trade were juxtaposed with the two world wars, migration and globalization and other themes. The next gave students possibilities to select different words that they might associate with "globalization", "colonial power", motivations/reasons for colonization, and others. The last section asked a variety of specific questions about Danish colonial history in USVI.

The survey in Denmark had about 1,000 respondents from high schools all over the country and can be considered representative. In addition, fifteen focus group interviews were carried out in the two settings. Four of the Danish students were part of the pilot project class signed up for the UNESCO TST mentioned above, but were not part of the students going to St. Croix. Teachers in both regions were interviewed in person or via mail. Fifty-seven students in the ninth and eleventh grades from a private school and a public school on St. Croix participated in focus group interviews and 180 students responded to the surveys.

The colonial period as a golden age - or a tragedy?

In the first section of the survey, 75 percent of the Danish students ranked learning about the Second World War as highly relevant. The following subjects of interest were "Globalization" (67 percent), "Terror" (66 percent) and "The Cold War" (61 percent). "Greenland" and "Danish West Indies" scored the lowest points with only 17 percent. The perception of relevance increases when questions framed a theme rather than a geographical region. "Danish colonies" is ranked of clear relevance by 28 percent, "Denmark's partaking in slave trade" 33 percent and "the triangular trade" is ranked clearly relevant by 27 percent.

The answers from both Crucian and Danish students are to some extent a reflection of what is given priority in syllabi by teachers and local media discourses. For the Danish students, it is interesting to see the lack of correlation in their high interest in themes of globalization and terror, on the one hand and, on the other, the low interest in the geographical regions of Greenland and West Indies or even "partaking in slave trade." Even the students from the UNESCO pilot project did not spontaneously name colonial history as one of the most important themes.

When we asked a Crucian English teacher what topics they cover in relation to the colonial period, she answers that they "talk about Denmark as a colonial power and talk about the impact, how it impacted people and how it created social imbalances amongst people".[12] A Crucian student explains his interest colonial history like this: "It also helps to like clear yourself, like why I do the things I do, where my identity comes from, the identities of the people who came before me. History is still very prevalent in the things you do." This student sees the past as something that has shaped his personal identity and thereby influences the choices he makes. This understanding conveys the structures of identity politics that are prevalent in the U.S. They are a consequence of the particular colonial history of the Americas. Yet, the Crucian students appear to be weary of an identity politics that would entail potentially essentialist and determining categories of themselves and others. This becomes apparent when they discuss how they are often

[12] The teacher is referring to students' learning outcome from the school manuals listed above and learning from cultural bearers. We found that both teachers and culture bearers would be acquainted with scholarship on the "Danish period", such as Olasee Davis, Arnold Highfield and Georg Tyson via Museums and the media as well as cooperation with different scholars.

perceived as foreigners in the U.S. (by all racial and social groups), how local white people can also be nice and how some local people of color in power are corrupt.

In several recorded and observed conversations, the Crucian students expressed a feeling of living under a continuation of the colonial period with the U.S. replacing Denmark as an outright repressive or highly ambiguous power. On the one hand, some students knew of and appreciated the assistance provided by the federal government after the 2017 hurricanes. On the other hand, they also expressed frustration with the fact that help had been slow and uneven.

On other occasions, this ambivalence toward the U.S. was caused by questions about different concepts. As an example, students were asked to spontaneously respond to the words “colonialism” and “colonial power”. In this group, the first responses were single words such as “buildings”, “world history” moving on to “bad vibes” and then to this salient response:

> Student 1 “[…] they come to the Americas, the new world, and they basically just tell Indians, well you were here first, but we don’t care”
>
> Student 2 “I just see people like come into your house.”
>
> Student 3: “and take everything”
>
> Student 2: “Burn everything down. And then building it over.”
>
> Student 3: “And even if people come and say you can't do this anymore, do that, do that, do that, like...”
>
> Student 1: “Like Americanism, they Americanize it. That's what I feel.”

While most of the Crucian students in the interviews had some difficulty finding the words to name the economic and geopolitical structure and interest of a “colonial power”, this particular group managed to explain “colonial power” by moving from the emotional imagining to the thinking of concrete practices. Following the above cited exchange, they then spontaneously moved on to specifying current structural inequity. They explained how some people, who lose their jobs, have to sell their land, at times to mainland

Americans, or how, in the rituals of the Federal National Guard, the Crucian flag is explicitly treated as less dignified and prestigious than the flag of the U.S.

With regards to the Danish students, 17 percent had declared knowledge about former Danish colonies as relevant in the first section of the survey. However, once students had answered more questions pertaining to colonialism in the first and second section, the pattern changed. In the second section, 44 percent of the students acknowledged that colonial history was highly relevant in order to understand the world and globalization today and at the end of the last section, 59 percent stated that they would like to know more about Danish colonial history (22 percent answered no, 19 percent were indecisive).

158 students had added optional comments on this concluding question in the survey. Several of the comments showed that students felt a lack of knowledge about their own history and 61 percent of the commenting students would like to learn more about colonial history.

Their comments on the relevancy fell into two main themes. One was concerned with human consequences. These arguments connected colonialism in general and slavery in particular with "understanding other peoples' histories", "avoid repeating mistakes", knowing "the dark side of Danish history" and the need to understand contemporary issues such as "racism" and "our perception of human beings [*menneskesyn*] today". It could be argued that this perspective may be supported by a civic education pedagogy that would train students to be interested in the debate and a variety of voices that could be affiliated with what we have called the "democratic competence" position in a strictly Danish national context. While some students may be said to stay within the national centering, others explicitly argued in favor of a transnational perspective. Their contributions suggested a potential decentering of the national focal point and challenged the perception that the national point of departure be a neutral historiography.

The other group of arguments is concerned with the economic and geopolitical side of colonialism. These arguments are interesting as they vary from nostalgia about a period from "the great period of *Danevang*" (nationalist romantic lyrical name for Denmark) to the relevance of learning about a "period which is a founding part of globalization and has influenced how power and resources are distributed today". It could be argued that while the nostalgic arguments would easily fit into a civic education pedagogy that will train students to identify people, events and practices of importance to the Danish ethnos,

the last proposition is perhaps the most salient proponent for students' curiosity about a decentered historiographic pedagogy.

Both perspectives, "the human consequences" and "the geopolitical and economic concerns" appear in the answers given in the first section, when students are asked what they associate with a colonial power. The three highest scoring categories were "slavery" (83 percent of all respondents) "European countries" (79 percent) and "trade" (77 percent). The following three are "oppression" (72 percent) "racism" (56 percent) and "war and violence" (53 percent).

Economy (trade) and the geographical pinpointing (European countries) are deemed more central than oppression, racism and violence by most students, a pattern that appears even more clearly in the qualitative interviews. "Slavery", of course, speaks to both themes. This finding mirrors arguments that flourished in the last half of the eighteenth century as intellectuals, businessmen, administrators and politicians with stakes in the Danish colonial activities debated arguments in favor of and against the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

The Eurocentric perspective of colonial history, self and the "Other" resurfaces in the Danish student statements replying to questions about the transatlantic slave trade. Several Danish students naturalize the colonizers' actions in this part of the colonial history as well as the Europeans' occupation of the colonized countries. When we ask the Danish students in interviews what they associate with "colonial power", one student says "golden age", another student says, "When Denmark was great". A third student explains, "It was a good thing that we tried, I mean, that we weren't just those who never did anything, we tried to be a part of it all and to influence the world around us".

These statements suggest how the geopolitical logic induces a feeling of pride in belonging to Denmark *because of* the colonial history, rather than *in spite of* this history. Proactive agents in the geopolitical historiography are conquerors - they colonize. Other positions and options are implicitly deemed less noteworthy. Another student states: "It wasn't just all the major countries, it was also 'little Denmark', who knew how to be a colonial power and execute slave trade and those kinds of things". Even though these students know that slave trade was morally wrong, they still feel a sense of pride that Denmark participated in the global colonial economy in the past. How may we explain this? For one, the remarks from the Danish students are not different from what you would

hear directly or indirectly in various discourses in Denmark (Andersen 2017). Secondly, the colonial enterprise is taught as if it were an uncontested norm until it suddenly stopped. Students are not being taught about the numerous early voices against slavery, from the *The Mande Charter* (1222) issued by Soundiata Keïta in contemporary Mali, to voices from within the colonial empires such as the interventions by the Spanish colonist and later bishop Bartolomé de las Casas (1474–1566), the Germantown Quakers' petition (1688) in the US, the writings of a founding father of European law, Montesquieu (1689-1755), the British conservative writer Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), a Nigerian prince who is enslaved at the age of eleven and later manages to buy his freedom and becomes a prominent voice in the abolitionist struggle, or the French intellectual profile during the French revolution and after Henri Grégoire (1750-1831). The revolution in Haiti (1797-1801) by which the enslaved conquered their freedom is one battle that most Danish students do not learn about despite its ties with the French revolution, American colonial struggle for independence and the general military and intellectual struggles over practices of freedom, rights and governance in Europe and the Americas in the period.

The majority of Crucian students found knowledge about colonial history relevant and could formulate contemporary socioeconomic structures that originate in colonial history as well as the status of USVI as Non-Self-Governing-Territory. They were also all aware of the complex intersections between socioeconomic and racialized hierarchies in USVI and U.S. mainland. Most students and teachers regretted that educational policies do not permit much time to teach USVI history and their concern was sustained by contributions from voices in local media and a variety of cultural activities. Guerra's call for a revised decentered and action-based education policy seems timely and pertinent in this context.

For Danish students, it appeared much more difficult to formulate the ties between contemporary issues of migration and globalization with Danish colonial history. Some of their remarks suggest that the turn towards an ethnocommunity discourse rather than a democratic citizenship discourse underpins a perspective that centers on ethnic Danes and continues the mode of colonial nostalgia detected by other scholars of the field (Jensen 2012b; Poddar and Mealor 2008; Thisted 2009). The absence of Danish colonial history in syllabi, or of non-Danish protagonists if such history is taught, intersects with another sort of structural dehumanization, in which the economic and geopolitical arguments

outweigh the concern for fellow human beings. This produces a tangible manifestation of what Santos calls the abyssal line (Santos 2011).

If this may stand as a first conclusion of our analysis, we would like to end the article with examples from both contexts that could suggest ways to overturn Danish systemic colonial aphasia.

Could Danish systemic colonial aphasia be overturned?

Around the Transfer Centennial, new manuals and books on Danish colonial history and slavery have appeared. It is still too soon to know how they may be used and affect students' learning, and whether they problematize or enhance teaching that conveys a Danish-centered reading of colonial histories and contemporary issues. A decentered civic education does not entail dismantling the nation as an imagined community (Anderson 1991) or as a political reality. It provides competencies in maneuvering in globalized contexts with, as Guerra reminds us, an incentive for action – "use of history" without the capitalized letters. One way forward could be to combine knowledge and perspectives on colonial histories with the need to dismantle the myth of the cultural homogeneity of Denmark (Olwig and Pærregaard 2011) and to unpack the pitfalls of colonial nostalgia and its ties to contemporary "little" Denmark. These two lines of questions shed light on contemporary understandings and debates about migration and globalization (Loftsdottir and Jensen 2012; Jensen 2012b; Poddar and Mealor 2008).

Our study of the Danish students' responses suggests a lack of vocabulary and of analytical practices that can provide meaningful language for how this part of their colonial pasts signify in their present**;** so yes, perhaps we are talking about a certain aphasia. At other times, it also appears to be a matter of ignorance - produced by systemic links between available manuals, public debates, historiographic negotiations, ministerial regulations and institutional regulations of time and funding in the education sector. When we asked Crucian students what they knew about the emancipation of the enslaved on the islands, they consistently named General Buddhoe (Moses or John Gottlieb) who was the leader of the uprising in 1848 that pressured the Danish governor to declare the emancipation of enslaved people. However, when we asked Danish students, Governor, Peter von Scholten, and not General Buddhoe, is the heroic figure. Danish students learn

about *abolition* of slavery, not *emancipation*, in the Danish West Indies – *if* they learn about the U.S. Virgin Islands at all.

The information about how Danish students are being taught was very upsetting to the teachers in St. Croix. The U.S. Virgin Islands is still structurally and legally contained in a position of inferiority.[13] Consequently, narratives of resistance, of proactive agency are central to Virgin Islanders. By contrast, the agency of the free or enslaved population of color during the Danish colonial period is only sporadically mentioned by Danish students. They did not appear to learn much about it despite the available work by Hall, Tyson and Highfield and Danish scholars such as Olwig, Sebro, Nielsen and others. Perhaps, more importantly, no Danish student seemed to know that von Scholten was in fact degraded by his peers and tried before the court in Copenhagen because he gave in to the pressure of the insurrection (Andersen 2017, 42).

In 2017, the historian Rune Christiansen made a number of interviews with Danish history teachers about their teaching "use of history" in practice. He found that many teachers found the task very difficult and would mostly address propaganda from the Soviet period or Nazi Germany as case material as they felt that students needed "content knowledge" before they could analyze "choices of perspectives". But, as Christiansen points out, the selection of content knowledge is inevitably already informed by perspective. "In practice, history as a school subject is still very much about communicating society's prevalent narratives" (Christiansen 2018). Celebrating von Scholten as a hero while ignoring his punishment by the Danish state and ignoring General Buddhoe and his followers borders on a misuse of history. "Systemic colonial aphasia" may be a euphemism as soon as one decenters the selection of knowledge and perspective from the dominant discourses of Danish civic education.

Many of the Danish students in our focus group interviews constructed a narrative that remained trapped by colonial logics inasmuch as they prioritized concern about Denmark's profiteering from the transatlantic slave trade over the consequences it had for the enslaved. The Danish students' statements were most often unknowingly one-

[13] https://www.un.org/en/events/nonselfgoverning/index.shtml; https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/AC.109/2016/L.19

sided and reflected a traditional historiography's emphasis on nation-building via economic and territorial gains or losses.

It was in this context, that the TST project got teachers and students involved in the question of decentering. Andersen returns to the project on more than one occasion. In one instance, she describes how some Virgin Islander students were startled by the lack of knowledge revealed by the Danish students as they visited historical sites together in St. Croix and in Denmark. Referring to a visit of the Christiansted Fort, a Virgin Islander student describes the reaction of the Danish students:

> While the park officer showed us around [the Christiansted National Historic Site] and told us – as a group – about the role of the Danes in plantation slavery, the Danish students were skeptical about some of the cruelties that were described. Their pride in their country meant that they did not want to believe the horrible things they were told. You could see that some felt uncomfortable and there was even a bit of nervous laughter. We got some odd vibes. But when we then got to Denmark, they opened up to us (Brown quoted in Andersen 2017, 251).

The account reveals a discomfort of being confronted with a history that challenges the nostalgic national self and the lack of adequate intellectual and emotional tools to understand and deal with this discomfort. It suggests that some of the Danish students learned to understand and deal with this part of the past of their national history with more respect and dignity as they spent more time with the Virgin Islander youths. It also indicates that the Virgin Islander youths were able to use their knowledge to deal with a traumatic history that is also a history of resistance, resilience and struggle for social justice and equality. Their knowledge also enabled them to stay curious and patient enough to experience the Danish students opening up.

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