

Denmark's Policy of Memory

*Tringa Berisha, Roskilde University*¹

Abstract

This paper analyses two speeches held by Danish prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, on the centenary of the Danish sale of the Virgin Islands to the US. The first speech addresses the Danish population on New Year's Day 2017, while the second is directed at the US Virgin Islanders on Transfer Day (March 31) three months later. The two speeches will be examined, using the concept colonial aphasia. The article argues that detachment from colonial history rests on two pillars. The first is a historical conditioning from record collection to storage and mediation, while the second points to active dissociation in contemporary moments of (de)selecting memory to shape understandings of history, the nation, and politics.

In the lead-up to the centenary sale of the US Virgin Islands, which marked the transition of the islands' status from a Danish colony to United States territory, there has been increased focus on Denmark's colonial history. Danes devoted attention to "updating" the narration of Danish(-colonial) history, leading to a debate over whether Denmark should issue a "full formal apology" to the USVI for Denmark's participation in the Transatlantic Enslavement Trade. Danish historiography, whether due to repression or neglect, has avoided the fusion of colonial history into national history. The commemoration surrounding the centennial thus engendered the surfacing of newfound curiosity of the shared colonial history. While one group of critics emphasized deconstruction of the dominant colonial narrative, other critics have addressed the reproduction of the colonial rationale that occurs during the attempt to deconstruct the

¹ Tringa Berisha is an MA student at Cultural Encounters, Roskilde University. This article has not been peer reviewed, but has been edited by the editors.

narrative, arguing that the white, male gaze upon the world transcends time and space². A nuanced understanding depends on Denmark's willingness to engage with the US Virgin Islanders in a conversation about the shared past. It is in this context the two speeches were held and it is what this article addresses.

Centuries of maintaining the institution of slavery were recorded in Danish by the colonizers. The dependency on the colonizers' deeming of particular relations relevant to document, and others insignificant to note, shape nebulous understandings of what once was. The simultaneous oppression of African peoples' intergenerational oral traditions of remembrance by the written word created gaps in perspective, thus a compressed access to history as a whole, leaving historians with a difficult task to delve into un(der)explored grey zones. The circumscribed perception cemented into consensus was followed by a splitting and shipment of USVI colonial archives to USA and Denmark, respectively, further disabling Virgin Islanders to revisit the colonial past (Bastian 2003). Denmark thus acquired the power to narrate the Danish remembrance of history as History. The erasure of gaps in memory consequently has led to colonial aphasia. The concept of colonial aphasia points to an unwillingness or disregard for nuanced documentation, and consequently an inability to address history beyond colonial reasoning, due to - among other things - a lack of an appropriate frame of semantics, emphasising "loss of access and active dissociation" (Stoler 2011: 125). Thus, a dominant discourse formed trade, instead of violence, as the memorable pillar of colonialism. Aphasia goes beyond "malicious intent, historical illiteracy, [and] bad faith of individual actors" (Stoler 2011: 128), as it is shaped by a way of thinking human dignity, which was firstly established with biological, theological, and philosophical arguments of African inferiority by European scientists and theologians with the first wave of European colonization. Knowledge production supported circa 400 years of European imperialism, and was accompanied by the export of a Eurocentric hegemonic perspective. Danes imagine that no residue of colonialism is left in perceptions of oneself and the Other in present day Denmark, where the rejection of existing blatant racism and moral righteousness coincide

² For instance see Wekker, 2016; Jensen, 2018; Danbolt, 2017; Loftsdóttir, 2014; Stenum, 2017b; and Berisha et al 2018.

in history education³, museum exhibitions⁴, political discourse⁵, and social interactions (Stenum 2017a). In fact, the separation of stories of colonialism from modern Denmark enables the contradictory tendencies, where the former is forgotten, or simply relegated to a different time frame, failing to acknowledge that the past is present and that Danes operate with a normative perception of knowledge and time.

Following the brief introduction of the mechanism of oppression via epistemic racism in commemoration and oblivion, I am going to analyse the then Danish Prime Minister's speeches on New Year's Day 2017 and on the centenary of Transfer Day, St. Croix 2017. In particular, I wish to explore the sudden emphasis on rediscovery of a "forgotten" history in 2016, and whether the precipitous "filling out" of Denmark's colonial history has any political agenda.

Danish Prime Minister's New Year's speech: Guidelines for attitude and action

In accordance with tradition, the Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, delivered his speech to the nation on New Year's Day 2017. These speeches are usually devoted to reflections over the year that has passed, and preparation for the year ahead, with emphasis on the latter.

Løkke opens his speech, "in the recent days, many of us have done what we Danes are world famous for - *hygget os* [the Danish notion of cosiness] (VisitDenmark n.d.). When we are cosy in my family, we watch *Matador*" (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). The Danish TV series, *Matador*, is a beloved piece of cultural heritage produced 1978-1982, repeatedly transmitted and watched by more than 3.6 million viewers, marking the highest ratings ever in Denmark (Wojcik 2012). The period drama television series, "best to encapsulate Danishness" (Bas 2016), is mostly inventory in ethnically Danish living rooms, and so Løkke implicitly specifies the type of Dane he addresses with selected

³ Educational videogame 'Historiedysten' (2016) by Danmarks Radio and The Museum of National History.

⁴ Permanent exhibition *Tea Time – The First Globalisation* in the Maritime Museum of Denmark.

⁵ For instance, the criminalization of rejected asylum seekers, or the initiative for increased penalties in areas that are on Denmark's ghetto-list, often occupied by ethnic minorities.

parts of his speech. Migrants and descendants are thus indirectly excluded from Løkke's address. He takes a point of departure in the television series' plot (set in the years 1929-1947) and claims, "those who only see the old world fail (...). Those who 'think new' elevate [and succeed]" (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). Løkke thus guides the Danish population in how one shall relate to the past and the future in general terms. He then mentions the scriptwriter is turning 100 years old, but does not link her birthday to the Virgin Islands Transfer Day Centenary. To reinforce his stance, he underscores "the present is better than the past. And the future? It can become even better!" (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). He lists Denmark's accomplishments spanning over several decades: among other things, accumulation of wealth, free education, and gender equality. The list arguably serves the purpose of drawing clear contrasts between the past and the improved, present nation-state.

Løkke's effort to separate present day Denmark from its (colonial) past is supported by filming techniques and formulations. As Løkke addresses current domestic policies the camera zooms in, intensifying proximity between the Prime Minister and the population. The zoom imaginably functions as a physical signifier of relevance and proximity of issues to Danes' everyday lives. In contrast, when Løkke approaches the topic of the 100th anniversary of Denmark's sale of the Virgin Islands to the US the camera zooms out, as if to establish physical- thus (senti)mental - distance between the viewer and Denmark's colonial history. Løkke remarks, "this year, 100 years ago, Denmark sold the West Indies to the United States. And put an end to a cruel chapter in our history" (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). In an effort to demonstrate a new, modern Denmark leading up to the topic of shared colonial history with USVI, Løkke frames the sale of the islands as a complete termination of the relationship between Denmark and colonialism. Despite Løkke underlining the "end of a cruel chapter", he paradoxically refers to the islands by their former colonial name. On one hand one can argue that Løkke speaks of an event, during which USVI's name was the Danish West Indies. On the other hand, there is an inherent contradiction in the contemporary use of colonial names. The use implies nostalgia, because it refers to the colonial relationship, when Denmark ruled over the islands. Arguably, to invoke the colonial name operates as a linguistic extension of former power relations, because "West Indies" evokes Denmark's sense of ownership

over USVI and the racial hierarchy, which organized not just the peoples but also the land. Lastly, contemporary use of “West Indies” also reproduces the colonial idea that Europe is located in the center of the world between the “West Indies” and the “East Indies”, where civilization begins in Europe, and moves outward.

In addition to Løkke’s (failed) attempt to separate past and present, he avoids addressing the content of the “cruel” chapter and its repercussions. Instead, he focuses on a Danocentric experience of colonialism: “Many of Copenhagen’s beautiful old houses and mansions were built for money earned by slaves’ wear and exploitation on the other side of the earth” (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). On the one hand, Løkke acknowledges the source of architectural constructions linked to colonial trade, on the other hand, he first mentions trade as the memorable event relevant to Denmark, and subsequently violence as something done at a great distance from Danish realities both in terms of space and time. Løkke continues, “it is not a proud part of the history of Denmark. It is shameful. And fortunately, it is [in the] past” (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). The word “fortunately” insinuates relief over colonialism’s assumed irrelevance to today’s Denmark, and simultaneously refers to the previously stated claim, “those who only see the old world fail”. Løkke thus expresses that Danes are proudly succeeding as a people by leaving the past to focus on the future. Additionally, he smiles as he utters “it is in the past”, repeatedly exemplifying emotional detachment to a topic concerning crimes against humanity. Løkke’s formulation and smile is an exercise of normative power. He implicitly says that Denmark has advanced, knows better, and thereby also knows that racism and racial hierarchies belong to the past. Only underdeveloped people can say otherwise. It is simultaneously an exercise of epistemic violence (and dehumanization) inasmuch as it presupposes and naturalizes a specific hierarchy of knowledge, reassuring Danes there is no attack on their history that can endanger their self-perception.

Yet again, to split two stories of past and present, Løkke ends the topic by shifting focus on to contemporary self-proclaimed righteousness: “In the present day Danes are fighting against oppression. For freedom. And that we can be proud of” (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). However, this claim can also be challenged. Løkke’s use of passive language conceals his lack of identification of whose oppression and whose freedom Danes fight

for. For instance, rejected asylum seekers in Danish deportation camps certainly have restricted freedom (Suarez-Krabbe et al, 2018), which the government does not seek to change, and the Danes' freedom of speech is exercised to oppress Muslim minorities (Rose, 2005; Stram Kurs, 2018: [00:00—01:13]). The closer examination of Løkke's feel-good statement then points to the Danish government's empty promise of improvement on moral standards, that otherwise was intended to demonstrate progression since the colonial era.

In the outro, Løkke revisits Matador as the storytelling comes full circle: "We still love to be told the good story" (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation). Being preoccupied with dividing past from present, it is worth asking, what defines the good story, and who has the power to choose? Is one story bound to overshadow the other? A nuanced colonial narrative satisfying the once colonized would simultaneously disrupt the former colonizer's self-understanding. It becomes clear, that Løkke privileges flattering self-perception over truth, hence Løkke's constant orientation towards the future, and his attempt to undermine history's relevance. Throughout his speech, the future is given positive connotations, and the past is chained to negativity. In this manner the good story is to be naturally associated with the future through its simultaneous detachment from the past. As Løkke asserts: "Remember the past but seize the future. It is yours!" (Rasmussen 2017a, own translation, own emphasis). The usage of "but" instead of "and" supports the strategic splitting of time into slots. One is encouraged to shelve the past in order to succeed in the future, as if one has to choose between one or the other. This separation reveals an unwillingness to recognize that the past is present in the present – something, which stands in stark contrast to the discourse about Matador, which is precisely about "preserving" the past, and as that which gives meaning to our present.

Out of the speech's 2,075 words, 95 of them were used to directly address Denmark's colonial relationship to the USVI. Considering both the direct and ambiguous remarks about dealing with the past, the speech can arguably be perceived as an attempt to strengthen the Danish argument about a lack of a full formal apology to the USVI three months later. Løkke's New Year's speech oozes of a self-satisfied tone, subtly offering

guidelines for the common ethnically Danish citizen to feel reassured and ethically just concerning the upcoming Transfer Day.

Danish Prime Minister's Transfer Day Centennial speech: An improved Denmark

On March 31, 2017, Lars Løkke Rasmussen stood in front of hundreds of Virgin Islanders who had gathered to hear his speech at the Transfer Day Centennial Ceremony in Christiansted, St. Croix. He addressed the locals knowing international attention would be directed at this encounter. The hundred years that had passed invited reflection over colonialism, the sale, and the repercussions. Significant to the speech's circumstances, is firstly that some of the other former colonial nations have issued either formal apologies or statements of regret, indirectly prompting Denmark to follow their example. Secondly, Denmark post-1945 became a signatory to globally endorsed conventions on human rights and democratic standards (Anker 2014). The broader context of the speech then can be understood as a test for the moral righteousness that the nation advocates for.

Following the introduction, Løkke turns to consider the history and its legacy: "A hundred years. It is a long time ago. But the preceding years under the Danish flag are not forgotten. Neither in Denmark nor in the Virgin Islands" (Rasmussen 2017b). Similar to his New Year address to the Danish population, Løkke establishes distance with use of time despite its intrinsic value of relativity: "I'm pleased, that thousands of my fellow countrymen visit your beautiful island every year (...). They feel a special bond of friendship with you and your home." Løkke firstly draws attention to the "Danish favour" to the USVI - Danes providing the islands with income through tourism. A statement that indicates Denmark already helps improve the USVI's economy. Subsequently, he reapplies the effect of distance, as well-meaning Danish tourists have repressed the past blood-spilling hostilities and consider the former colonizer-colonized relation as friendship, without taking into account the possible lack of reciprocity regarding kind thoughts and feelings towards a former abuser. Løkke uses a peaceful tone to address the USVI locals as he invites them to bury the hatchet in favour of companionship:

Although we share a common past – we have not always shared the same story about that past. When I was a child – the popular Danish story about the West Indies was a romantic one. Exotic islands. Peaceful coexistence. I even remember the tales of the Danish king, who was the first in the world to ban slave trade. A pioneer of humanity, we were told. A hero (Rasmussen 2017b).

He acknowledges the gaps in memory within Denmark’s dominant colonial narrative that have accumulated through selective record collection and cultural institution’s mediation of them, trickling down to history education absorbed and accepted by young students. The romanticized story about trade in exotic landscapes, however, is not limited to the Prime Minister’s childhood, but in fact still operated as the dominant perception of colonial history leading up to the centennial Transfer Day. The marking of distance in time makes the speech fall into the standardized vocabulary of reconciliation, also seen in other former colonizers’ efforts to address their respective colonial pasts (Anker 2014).

Løkke acknowledges the insufficiency of nuances in Danish colonial history education, or more specifically, the avoided mediation of Danish imperialism’s impact on human lives beyond the nation. His acknowledgement is followed by his optimistic statement concerning the digitalization and sharing of colonial records, as an attempt to indirectly partly fulfil CARICOM’s⁶ fourth point concerning cultural institutions in its ten point plan for reparatory justice⁷. The digitalization of the archive is meant to enable USVI’s establishment of cultural institutions, as requested by CARICOM, despite USVI’s non-membership of the union. The effort, however, does not include economic support for the practicalities of constructing cultural institutions nor the translation of the archive that is mainly in Danish⁸. Ultimately, the history held by the records remains linguistically

⁶ CARICOM (abbreviation for Caribbean Community) is a grouping of twenty countries, that deal with economic integration; foreign policy coordination; human and social development; and security (Caricom.org). In working towards international reconciliation, CARICOM has formulated a ten point reparations plan, for reparatory justice between former colonies and their colonizers.

⁷ “European nations have invested in the development of community institutions such as museums and research centers in order to prepare their citizens for an understanding of these [crimes against humanity]. These facilities serve to reinforce within the consciousness of their citizens an understanding of their role in history as rulers and change agents. There are no such institutions in the Caribbean where the CAH were committed” (CARICOM Reparations Commission, n.d.)

⁸ As of 2019, the records related to the Fireburn Labor Riot in 1878 on St. Croix are currently being translated by a group of activists, “The Fireburn Files Network”, which I was briefly a part of. The

inaccessible for Virgin Islanders, making the CARICOM-inspired initiative inadequate and only symbolic. Løkke continues:

I suggest we ask ourselves: Is there any justification for suppression? (...) The answer is no! There is no justification – whatsoever – for the exploitation of men, women and children that took place in these islands under Danish flag. There is no justification for slavery. It is unforgivable (Rasmussen 2017b).

An apology contains acknowledgement of the wrongdoing of one party, as well as a promise to avoid repetition of the same action, in order to earn the victim's trust. While Løkke clearly acknowledges Denmark's wrongdoing, he excludes a guarantee of future repeated endeavours. Løkke turns to the innate capacity for human empathy and contemporary consensus of right and wrong, but excludes present-day Denmark from the equation of past wrongdoing. Admitting to full responsibility for committing crimes against humanity - without the felt necessity to draw contrasts between ignorant past Denmark, and empathetic, modern Denmark - would make the blemish on the Danish nation's history very visible as well as entail compensation as reparatory justice. Ultimately, the formulation is a careful, strategic circumvention of an apology, reminiscent of a statement of regret, which avoids the recognition of past acts as crimes committed. Furthermore, the recipients of Løkke's speech are not given the power of agency to accept, decline, nor respond to his statement in a fair dialogue. Løkke proceeds to name the local USVI heroes, who fought oppression as a contrast to the dominant Danish narrative, which romanticizes the intervention by the Governor General, Peter von Scholten. Løkke summarizes: "We cannot undo the past. What we can do is to improve the future. Only by freeing ourselves from the nightmares of the past can we make our dreams of the future come true" (Rasmussen 2017b).

With the use of the word "our" Løkke implies that there once was a shared past, and now a shared progression towards the future, failing to differentiate between the most

initiative is led by Helle Stenum, PhD, who describes the "transatlantic project [as] dedicated to make documents accessible, produce historical knowledge, newsletters, workshops, books, exhibitions on Fireburn and bridge between institutions and civil society; written and oral history, languages and across the Atlantic. Partners in Denmark, USVI and the US are on board to develop the project [...] with a long term plan of 5 maybe 10 years." (Stenum, 2018: 4).

chronically poverty-ridden part of the US and one of the most affluent welfare-societies in the world. Another noteworthy aspect is the use of the metaphor of the past equating to a nightmare that usually consists of extreme fear and anxiety. While the intention may rest upon drawing a comparison between a nightmare's resulting fear and anxiety, and the infliction of pain through the institution of slavery, a nightmare is interrupted as the subject wakes up from distress to reality, safe from imagination. Does Løkke, then, insinuate that delving into the past is to be detached from the reality of the present, similar to the act of dreaming? That colonialism is over, and can be reduced to an almost forgotten bad memory of the subconscious? And whose nightmare does he speak of? Certainly not that of the Danish population. This statement in reality then points to an oppressor ordering his victim to "just let go". Lastly, the various interpretations of the metaphor set aside, how does one in practice "free oneself from a nightmare" when the nightmare represents a historical reality affecting contemporary conditions? Løkke does not offer guidelines to his advice, but emphasizes present day enlightened Denmark as having moved beyond the nightmare: "Today we share the same view of history. And today, we share the same heroes." Both of these statements are clearly rhetorical devices, for it is unclear what Løkke bases his claim on. His own knowledge of the USVI is limited. Furthermore, he does not know, if the Danish population is enlightened nor in what way. As I exemplified earlier, the current dominant colonial narrative is a replicate of Løkke's childhood history education. Thus, he solely aims to satisfy a USVI audience, that has no access to fact-check his claims.

Spanning from museum exhibitions to curriculum material, the dominant colonial narrative that is continuously reproduced matches perfectly with Løkke's account of his own childhood history education. The failure to offer nuanced learning is assigned to past ignorance, while the few years prior to this speech, publications of various insensitive video games for educational purposes proves the contrary. The reproduction of the dominant colonial narrative still centres on the white, male protagonist and his adventurous journey for "white sugar" (to colonize), however, this time updated through interactive learning, challenging children to e.g. strategically arrange enslaved peoples

into a ship's hold as a replicate of Tetris' game design⁹. Thus, there is a continuity of colonial imagery enforced through a racial grammar and reproduced via a hegemonic discourse of white innocence (Wekker 2016).

Initiatives for sparking debates about remembrance of colonial history have largely been taken by USVI scholars, artists, writers and activists, such as La Vaughn Belle, Tami Navarro and Tiphonie Yanique. In the year leading up to the centennial, the USVI gifted three statues to Denmark. One statue, named "Freedom", depicts a man calling for rebellion through a conch, with his machete-like tool from sugar plantations held high above his head. The two others are of John "Buddhoe" Gottlieb, and D. Hamilton Jackson - two central figures to the process of emancipating and improving the situation of the Virgin Island population. The attempt to shift attention to a counter hegemonic understanding of history was successfully achieved, resulting in Denmark's "sudden rediscovery" of a "forgotten" history. The gifts simultaneously did the Prime Minister a "last minute" favour before his speech, and enabled him to present himself as informed, and ascribe his - and Denmark's - ignorance to his own distant childhood. The critique of the dominant Danish colonial narrative has clearly shaped Løkke's speech in the sense, that he portrays Denmark as enlightened, self-reflective, morally righteous, and progressed - a Denmark that cannot be compared to colonial Denmark, and therefore should not deal with colonial Denmark's consequences. In his effort to enlarge time passed and lessen state responsibility, he finishes his speech by joyfully revealing the launch of a five-year scholarship program for ten local students per year, explaining that the youth is the future, and investment is appropriate for future developments - not reparations for past deprivation of USVI.

An apology costs money and challenges Denmark's self-righteous image

Denmark decided not to issue a full formal apology at the centennial sale of the Virgin Islands. The rationale rested upon the following arguments: distance in time, class,

⁹ *Playing History 2 - Slave Trade*, 2013; *Historiedysten – Tag til Vestindien*, 2016; *Tea Time – The First Globalisation*, 2013.

confusion concerning who deserves reparations, and the islands being US territory. The first point is “why pay for it now? It is a long time ago.” An example of this logic is expressed by Søren Espersen, member of the right-wing populist Danish People’s Party as well as then Chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee:

None of the island’s present residents have been slaves, none of us have been slave owners. If we must apologize to the West Indies, we should also say sorry for the Stockholm bloodbath [in 1520] (Almbjerg 2017, own translation).

The root of the concern is in reality about the deconstruction of a carefully fabricated national self-understanding as a peaceful nation as expressed by Astrid Nonbo, a researcher in memory and history policy:

The whole notion of being a peaceful nation on the outskirts of Europe will be askew. At the same time, it can be said that it would also trigger a moral requirement that we do something about our presence in Greenland, which is still in an unclear situation in relation to Denmark (Almbjerg 2017, own translation).

The event of the centennial Transfer Day in reality sheds light upon the process of colonial aphasia, the (de)selection of memory throughout centuries, for Denmark. The nation faces a confrontation with the deselected material brought to the surface by the colonial counterpart, leading up to an ambivalent evaluation of the past balancing between accepting or brushing off responsibility. The careful navigation through an eerie topic for the nation appears to be an attempt to leave the past in the past, perhaps due to the fear about what other unjust relations Denmark has been or still is involved in. Ignorant bliss seems to be prioritized over enlightened responsibility, and the centennial proves the everlasting reluctance to take full responsibility, as this would shake the foundations of national-to-individual innocent self-understanding.

The second argument points to the immense gap between social classes in Denmark during the colonial era. If the government were to pay reparations for descendants of enslaved peoples on USVI, then it would also be obliged to pay reparations for descendants of Danish people who lived in “slave-like conditions” within the nation, which would be unmanageable (Hoffmann-Hansen 2017).

The third argument draws on the uncertainty of the recipients of reparations. Due to the movement within the Caribbean, namely the relocating to and from the Virgin Islands, financial compensation should not be paid to the descendants of non-Danish owned enslaved peoples.

The fourth and last argument is the Virgin Islands are US territory and a non-member of CARICOM. The United States apologized for slavery and the subsequent segregation in 2009 without paying reparations, so if Denmark were to issue a full formal apology, it would be considered “untimely meddling in US affairs”.

Prime Minister Løkke hints towards CARICOM with initiatives that refer to three out of ten points set out by the union. A full formal apology was replaced with a statement of regret; digitalization of the archive points to the fourth point concerning constructions of cultural institutions; and a five-year scholarship program may be a reference to the sixth point about illiteracy eradication¹⁰. In effect, the act of offering forms of aid without obligation by law supports a satisfactory sense of self, and the restoration of important trust between Danish citizens and the government. In the cases of Australia and Canada that carried out settler colonialism, their political interest of reconciliation lies in the continuous co-existence and sharing of space, whereas Denmark and USVI are separated by the Atlantic Ocean. Being spared from contemporary political tensions from facing descendants of past injustices, Denmark has the opportunity to confirm its fabricated ethically just image by offering initiatives that are more symbolic than effectual help. Furthermore, the fact that Virgin Islanders are divided between wishing for “long overdue reparations from the Danish government” (Callahan 2017), and focusing on acquiring voting rights for US elections, gives Denmark an easier exit out of the tensions. In many other contexts, apologies start chapters of reparations, whereas it is apparent that Løkke attempts to close one and therefore abstains from issuing an apology.

¹⁰ “Widespread illiteracy has subverted the development efforts of these nation states and represents a drag upon social and economic advancement. Caribbean governments allocate more than 70 percent of public expenditure to health and education in an effort to uproot the legacies of slavery and colonization. European governments have a responsibility to participate in this effort within the context of the CRJP” (CARICOM Reparations Commission, n.d).

Conclusion

The sudden expansion of Danish history through 2016 and the addressing of colonial history in the Prime Minister's New Year's speech 2017 seem to strengthen a consensus of innocence within the nation, before the centennial Transfer Day speech three months later. The clear effort to split past from present is arguably an attempt to direct the nation towards an attitude of lack of responsibility in reaffirming the fabricated national self-understanding as ethically just and peaceful. Furthermore, Løkke positions Denmark in a superior position with surplus energy and overview to discuss history with respect for nuances, to reflect a contemporary enlightened Denmark, as a contrast to the ignorant, but well-meaning, nation of the past. With international eyes resting upon Løkke, his great effort to peacefully seek common ground with the nation's former victim is done in the spirit of understanding and paternalism. However, a nuanced understanding of the past injustices would arguably engender a full formal apology and reparations, even if the national self-understanding were to subsequently crumble from it. The centennial Transfer Day invited a breaking away from the nation's colonial aphasia, but was instead navigated through carefully, possibly due to the conditioning aphasia has caused in the nation's mentality through centuries, operating through educational and cultural institutions. However, as long as reluctance in honestly assessing the past prevails, and thus hinders reparatory justice for crimes against humanity, a link to the perpetrators of the past is continued, which maintains the paradox of contemporary Denmark that is of laying claim to high moral standards while acting blatantly racist.

References

- Almbjerg, Sarah Iben (2017) "Hvis Danmark undskylder for slaveriet, kan det ødelægge vores selvbillede." Berlingske, March 25. <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/hvis-danmark-undskylder-for-slaveriet-kan-det-oedelaegge-vores-selvbillede>
- Anker, Kirsten (2014) "Symptoms of Sovereignty? Apologies, Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation in Australia and Canada." In *Law in Transition: Human Rights*,

Development and Transitional Justice, edited by Ruth Buchanan and Peer Zumbansen, 245-67. Oxford: Hart.

Bas, Mette Bærbach (2016) "TV-serien, der indfanger danskheden." Kristeligt Dagblad, July 14. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/debat/matador-tv-serien-der-indfanger-danskheden>

Bastian, Jeannette Allis (2003) *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost Its Archives and Found Its History*. Libraries Unlimited: Westport, Connecticut.

Berisha, Tringa, Noella Birisawa and Gabriella Muasya (2018) "Denmark's Innocent Colonial Narrative." *Kult 15: Racism in Denmark*: 56-69.

Callahan, Yesha (2017) "100 Years a US Territory: Danish Government Attempts to Atone for Slavery as US Virgin Islands Celebrate Transfer Day." *The Root*, April 6. <https://www.theroot.com/100-years-a-us-territory-danish-government-attempts-to-1794041118>

CARICOM (nd) Who are we. <https://caricom.org/about-caricom/who-we-are>.

CARICOM Reparations Commission (nd) 10-Point Reparation Plan. <http://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricoms-10-point-reparation-plan/>.

Danbolt, Mathias (2017) "Retro Racism: Colonial Ignorance and Racialized Affective Consumption in Danish Public Culture." *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 7 (2): 105-13.

DR (2016) *Historiedysten – Tag til Vestindien*. Danmarks Radio. Video game. <https://www.dr.dk/skole/historie/tag-til-vestindien>.

Hoffmann-Hansen, Henrik (2017) "Derfor kommer Løkke ikke til at undskylde slaveriet." *Kristeligt Dagblad*, March 23. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/derfor-kommer-loekke-ikke-til-undskylde-slaveriet>

- Jensen, Lars (2018) "Tourism, Restoration and the Restaging of Colonialism." In Postcolonial Denmark. Nation-Narration in a Crisis Ridden Europe, 128-52. London: Routledge.
- Loftsdóttir, Kristín. 2014. "Going to Eden: Nordic Exceptionalism and the Image of Blackness in Iceland." *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 7 (1): 27–41.
- Maritime Museum of Denmark (2013) Tea Time – The First Globalisation. Permanent Exhibition. Elsinore.
- Rasmussen, Lars Løkke (2017a) Statsminister Lars Løkke Rasmussens nytårstale den 1. januar 2017. Statsministeriet. January 1. http://www.stm.dk/p_14467.html.
- Rasmussen, Lars Løkke (2017b) *Statsminister Lars Løkke Rasmussens tale ved Transfer Day, St. Croix, den 31. marts 2017*. Statsministeriet. March 31. http://www.stm.dk/p_14497.html.
- Rose, Flemming (2005) "Muhammeds ansigt." *JyllandsPosten*, September 30. http://multimedia.jp.dk/archive/00080/Avisside_Muhammed-te_80003a.pdf
- Serious Games Interactive (2013) *Playing History 2 - Slave Trade*. September 13, Denmark.
- Stenum, Helle (2017a) *Afro-danskeres oplevelse af discrimination i Danmark*. Institut for Menneskerettigheder. https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/afrodanskerere_web.pdf.
- Stenum, Helle (2017b) We Carry It Within Us – Fragments of a Shared Colonial Past. Documentary. House of Memory. April 1.
- Stenum, Helle (2018) I Am Queen Mary Inaguration. Speech. 31 March. Copenhagen, Denmark. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6de65b268b96417e613e29/t/5ac69bc1562fa7e9614dc908/1522965442356/Helle+Stenums+speech+at+I+Am+Queen+Mary+Inaguration.pdf>

Stoler, Ann Laura. (2011) "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France." *Public Culture* 23 (1): 121–56.

Stram Kurs (2018) Dokumentation: Stram Kurs' demonstration på Heimdalsvej i Frederikssund (26.8.2018). Video. August 30.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQp7O--4XIs>.

Suarez-Krabbe, Julia, Annika Lindberg and José Arce-Bayona (2018) Stop Killing Us Slowly: A Research Report on the Motivation Enhancement Measures and the Criminalisation of Rejected Asylum Seekers in Denmark. The Freedom of Movements Research Collective. http://refugees.dk/media/1757/stop-killing-us_uk.pdf.

VisitDenmark (n.d.) "Hygge: The Danish Art of Cosiness."

<https://www.visitdenmark.co.uk/en-gb/denmark-hygge>.

Wekker, Gloria (2016) *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Wojcik, Jeppe (2012) "Derfor er Matador så god." *Videnskab.dk*. September 8.

<https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/derfor-er-matador-sa-god>.