Framing *Postcolonial Denmark*

Lars Jensen[1]

Postcolonial Denmark. Nation-narration in a Crisis-Ridden Europe examines Denmark historically and contemporarily in the light of global processes, but also as a distinct participant in global "events". In the book I seek to strike a balance between writing an informed account about Denmark and exploring seminal links to other narratives. The balancing act is especially challenging in terms of what can be assumed about the reader, many of whom are international – some with an interest in Danish (postcolonial) affairs while others may read the book with more attention to its gestures and suggestions about similarities and parallels to other mainly European countries' histories and contemporary challenges.

Images represent a way of crystallising significant insights - a shortcut through discourse - and therefore I have written this pictorial essay to put together a short-hand version of the book's arguments, position and interests – and through the juxtapositioning of images illustrate the interconnectedness of the book's chapters. Placing images related to issues across the whole book also works as a way of interconnecting what is, as I argue in the book, systematically treated in isolation from each other in Danish scholarship. An isolation that prevents cross-fertilising the critique of nationhood. The nation asserts its power through its ability to treat as separate discourses that collectively expose the nation's self-protection. If some images are more familiar to (some) Danish readers then they may serve a different point here – to defamiliarise or recontextualise those images. It is a typical feature of especially national iconography that critique is blinded by overfamiliarity. How many Portuguese think immediately of Salazar and Fascism, or colonial repression and enslavement when they are gazing at the monument to the discoverers at Belem, on the outskirts of Lisbon? The same argument applies to the *naturalization* of absences. It took until 2018 before Denmark had its first temporary installation art masquerading as a monument commemorating the anti-racism rebellions of people in the former Danish West Indies against a repressive Danish regime. The colonial administration first operated as an enslavement regime, and after 1848 when the enslaved took their freedom, continued its racialised mistreatment of the

[1] Lars Jensen is Associate Professor at Cultural Encounters, Roskilde University. The book, *Postcolonial Denmark*, was published by Routledge in 2019.

colonial subjects as underpaid and thus exploited labour. They had not been compensated for their enslavement, whereas plantation owners were compensated for their loss of "property". The installation of the Queen Mary statue commemorating the workers' rebellion, *Fireburn*, in 1878 on St. Croix, and the statue, *Freedom* (gifted from USVI to Denmark in 2017), made by Ghanaian-American sculptor, Bright Bimpong, in 1998 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the end of enslavement – breaks the public space silence on Denmark's past as a slave-nation and coloniser. Thus the essay can best be understood as an invitation to those, who do not know much about Denmark but have an interest in the themes raised in the book - and to those who think they know Denmark - to reflect differently on how representations of nationhood come to be established as dominant.

Chapter 1

The first chapter seeks to place Denmark inside a wider field of postcolonial Europe which as an intellectual, academic and activist field has influenced European discourses for more than a decade. Given the book's focus on crisis narration, it is not surprising the first chapter discusses anxieties about contemporary migration, the long-term fallout of the Global Financial Crisis and Europe's agonistic acceptance of its "colonial past". Yet, the anxiety over the Global Financial Crisis seems to have receded or retrenched from a level of acuteness while the migrant crisis has intensified with a force that has surprised many scholars, and led to a further rise of populism and flirts with authoritarianism. Even as mainstream economists are predicting we are enroute to another global financial meltdown without the state protection of 2008. The readiness with which European countries have inaugurated legislation overriding the rights of specific groups in the national community have forced critical scholars to reconsider, whether in fact democracy can be taken for granted, or whether representative democracy is in fact representative. Other scholars subscribing to the Gods of liberalism and thus more at ease with the managerial regime of the neoliberal state, and the opportunities it affords their own privileged position, take a less dim view of democracies in crisis.

Part of the anti-immigration discourse (none of which questions the right of Europeans to emigrate) is a predictable fallout from the Global Financial Crisis and the so-called "austerity measures" destroying the fabric of the European welfare society (rudimentary as that was/is in many countries)

replacing it with float or sink capitalism. If other crisis solutions have been proposed, it is impossible to find concrete examples of where they have been introduced. Regardless of whether we talk countries placed under neoliberal administration or countries responsible for placing other countries under neoliberal administration – everywhere in Europe pensions, social services, health services, funding for education have been cut. Yet in spite of the administered neoliberal medicine we are according to mainstream economists heading into the next economic disaster zone.

The short outline above of some of the issues haunting Chapter 1, sent me in search of images that cuts across the issues, rather than providing yet another set of images showing migrants crossing the Mediterranean, beggars on the street in Athens or Sarkozy striding around in Francophone Africa as a belated emperor. The disaster image saturation in the media numbs the spectator, renders the urge to activism futile.

The first collage of three images provide illustration of the migrant, financial, and postcolonial crises, while providing ammunition for a counter-narrative. In 2011, the Portuguese Prime Minister, Passos Coelho, went to Angola to ask for Angolan economic assistance to a Portuguese state reeling from the effects of the Global Financial Crisis. His visit built on the continuity of quite literally productive relations between Portugal and Angola. Yet for Passos Coelho going to Angola was paradoxically also a home-coming as he had spent part of his childhood there. The politician's dilemma – having your hair undone by the hard hat against being perceived as someone ready to step in and help workers on a building site/a mine or other blue collar workplaces. And of course the suit already has the right colour. Finally, the visit represented a turning point, as it marked Portugal prioritising relations with its former colonial world over the soured relations with the EU. Portugal had joined the EU only in 1986 and experienced a long period of self-imposed isolation, the colonial relations (once its repressive aspects were buried by the Portuguese and the Angolan regime) represented continuity. The restoration of closer ties with Angola was manifested very concretely in the rapidly increasing Portuguese migration to Angola. More Portuguese live in Angola than Angolans live in Portugal, itself an illustration of the many mirages dominating European self-perceptions as the desired destination of non-Europeans.

European media are saturated with images of migrants (understood broadly here as a category covering refugees, asylum seekers, illegalised to immigrants) stuck in border zones across Europe. Often these images, sometimes involuntarily, contribute to reproducing the idea of “tidal waves” of

people decontextualized from the conflicts and "no future" zones they have escaped from – depersonalised in ways reminiscent of the colonial archive. The military or police presence in semi-autocratic regimes like Hungary, for some, underscore their militant nationalism. Yet, the militant nationalist rhetoric – a nation's culture being threatened by accepting refugees even in the hundreds – is not unique to Hungary but commonplace in Europe, including Denmark. So, to what extent is racist discourse directed at migrants caused or propelled by autocratic regimes. Is the Danish discourse more sophisticated because rooted – or perceived as rooted in – democratic sentiment? What struck me when searching for imagery related to the crisis around migrancy was the Hungarian invitation to business migrants that popped up between all the barbed wire images. The migrants barred from access, placed alongside the Hungary-is-open-for-Business invitation put out by the Hungarian government's adoption of a golden visa scheme, reveals the profound hypocrisy surrounding Europe's attitude to migrants and migration – the combination of accepting business migrants (with no screening of the sources of their wealth) and denying access to people in need (with no screening of them to find out if they are asylum-seekers) is not unique to Hungary, nor to autocratic regimes. The Hungarian golden visa has allowed non-Europeans in the thousands to be granted a five-year Hungarian residency, apparently with no perceived threat to Hungarian culture. The two images illustrate how European crises are entangled (migration crisis, monocultural crisis, democracy crisis and economic crisis) rather than separate.

So, what are the overlapping elements between the Portuguese and the Hungarian examples, seen in their wider European context, and Denmark? Or how can Denmark be situated inside the frame of an integrated perspective on crises around migration, neoliberal reform and postcolonial reconciliation and reparations? I will return to this question in my discussion of Chapter 8, which deals with how the crises were interlinked in 2017.

Chapter 2

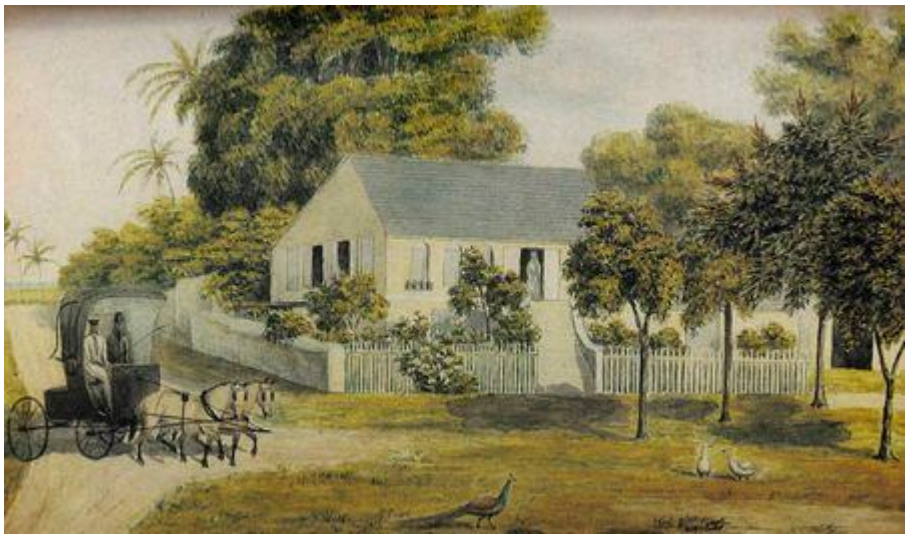
Deals with the history of representation vis-à-vis the Danish colonies in the tropics – the Danish West Indies, coastal Ghana and Tranquebar (Tharangambadi on the Indian east coast). This chapter is thus less concerned with the long overdue reinterpretation of historical events and processes and more with the evolution of a contemporary colonial archive. It is central to the book's conceptualisation of "colonial restaging", which rather than understanding the colonial as residue,

sees the colonial as a process of actively reformulating, reinserting and reasserting a benevolently informed account of Danish colonialism. The chapter is not concerned with the formation of the colonial archive during colonialism, but instead with how the tropical colonies enter the margins of national historiography in the aftermath of the Second World War, and how the 2017 centennial of the sale of the Danish West Indies spurred the production of a new colonial history. This time the colonial history included Greenland (but not Iceland or the Faroe Islands) and Denmark itself as the metropolitan culture of the Danish colonial world. Both the 2017 and the 1952-3 volumes are lavishly produced, the latter by images supporting its colonial nostalgia saturated approach, and restaging the colonial world for a Danish public that had largely forgotten their existence. The street scene below from Tharangambadi in 1948 with its tranquil, depeopled scene allows for unmitigated identification with the street scene in colonial times a century or more before through the trope of the colonial husk.

Colonial remains and ruins have played a significant part in the nostalgia infused reconstruction of Denmark's colonial past, as I discuss in Chapter 6 where I examine the remains as a future oriented project. Safe-guarding remains for the future is justified with reference to their tourist potential, but also operates as a way of bolstering a Danish self-image of the confident global nation in the twenty-first century. This emergent self-representation prevents an actual acknowledgement of atrocities committed in the colonies, because they are incommensurable with the narrative current

function – to underscore Denmark's reputation as a global humanitarian power. The repression of colonial times is also linked to the uncomfortable continuity of power relations in postcolonial times.

The street scene above from 1948 bears a striking similarity to colonial paintings and sketches. Idyllic settler colonialism characterizes the image below of Governor von Scholten visiting one of the plantations, just as many other Danish colonial paintings depict idyllic townscapes and landscapes in the lush tropics where "natives" and/or enslaved quietly go about their business – the whip, slave market and other direct references to the oppressive nature of colonial society cleansed from the scene.



One of the most striking colonial images I came across started as a non-discovery. Here was yet another image of paradisiac existence in the Danish tropics of a plantation in the Danish enslavement colony, the Gold Coast. When slave trade was abolished the Gold Coast languished, while the last Danish governor sought to convert the enslavement economy into a plantation economy based on the exploitation of indentured labour.

The flag is the only part of the image revealing the nationality of the plantation owner – the Danish state. In a few years, the plantation would become part of British colonial Ghana. The ordered European space offers a marked contrast to the "bush" wasteland, the image indirectly justifies European occupation. Outside the tidy plantation place lies vacant space. There are no Africans in the vicinity who might object to the land grab. The image operates as a precursor to Karen Blixen's opening lines to *Out of Africa*, "I had a farm in Africa…", where "her Africans" are also dispossessed through her act of writing them out as legitimate owners. Hence the image is the quintessential European self-image of colonialism as beneficial to local communities, as organizing vacant space into place. The image's tranquillity is conditioned on the scene being stripped of the dispossession and violence that accompanies European colonialism.

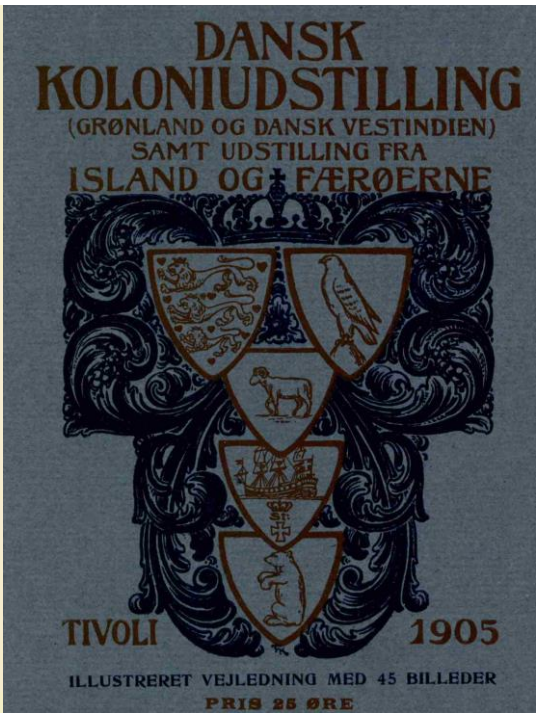
There have been few attempts at a sustained critique of Danish colonialism. Thorkild Hansen's trilogy on the slave trade (1967-70), in which he begins by parodying Blixen's possessive attitude by opening the trilogy with "we had a fort in Africa", stands out as a marked literary success. But it failed to fundamentally shift public discourse and public opinion towards a more critical stance, partly because of limitations in Hansen's project, partly because of the dismissal of Hansen's work by historians. Their ignorance of Hansen's work without replacing his critique with their own sustained critique of colonialism has enabled the displacement of the critique of Danish colonialism.

The 2017 centennial of the sale of the Danish West Indies produced a remarkable series of events. In a remarkable contrast some events addressed the racism of the colonial era, its legacy and its

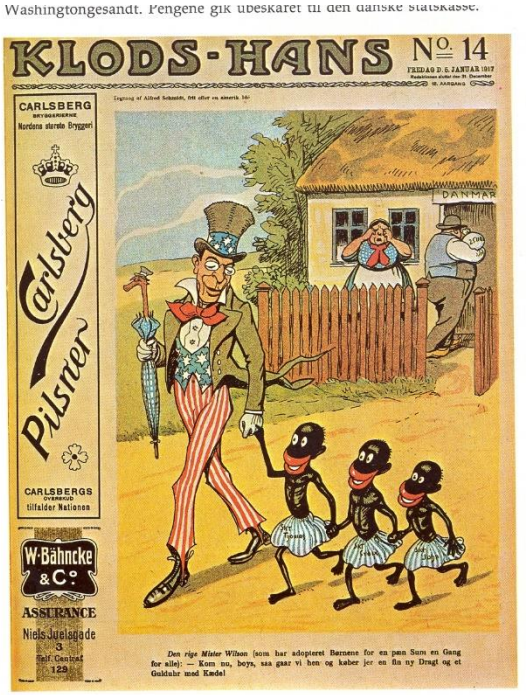
restaging in contemporary Denmark, while others seemed primarily to be premised on rediscovering tropic wonderlands. I will return to the discussion of 2017 in Chapter 8, and instead briefly discuss the film, *The Gold Coast* (2015), which revisited the dying years of Danish colonialism on the Gold Coast. It predates the 2017 discussions of commemoration, but raises very similar questions about the connections between who "we" were and who "we" are. I had originally planned to include *The Gold Coast* in Chapter 7 (focusing on film narratives in the contemporary age of rising militant nationalism), because it is also a narrative about militant adventure going awry (as the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars clearly did – also for the Danish military). The film can also be read as an invitation to critical self-reflection on nationhood and to question the idea that European desires and programs can be superimposed on the Global South. Seen from that perspective the film is more reminiscent of the critiques of development aid, which I examine in Chapter 5. The film received mixed reviews in Denmark, depending on whether the focus was on character development, scene setting, how it dealt with racialization and whether it even produced its own. The film's strength lies in its open exhibition of the brutality of the Danish regime on the Gold Coast, depicted as the dying days of Danish colonialism. The naïve and idealistic protagonist, based loosely on archival material, attempts to replace the denounced and illegal slave trade with settler colonialism. The film remains unable to depict the Ghanaians as people with their own agency, due to its preoccupation with Danish projections, some of them lofty some of them demeaning, but all ultimately blind and deaf. The film takes a step further than Thorkild Hansen's critique that remained trapped by its position that visionary Danish entrepreneurs would transform shameful enslavement into bountiful plantation economy to the implied benefit of all. But the film fails to execute a de-racialised representation in the retrospectively produced colonial encounter between Danish colonisers and non-European colonial subjects. At the same time, I am not convinced that analyses starring themselves blind on the film's shortcomings, while failing to acknowledge its achievement, are doing anyone any postcolonial favours.

Chapters 3 and 4

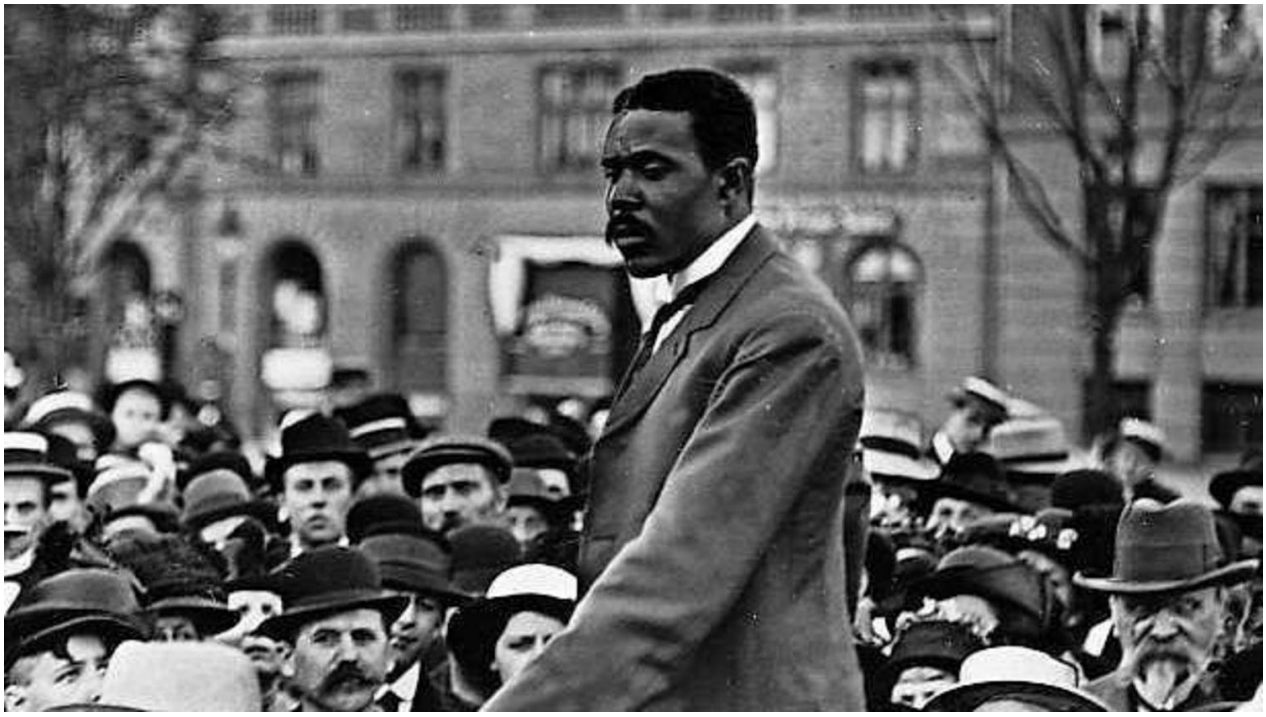
These two chapters have been brought together here as they collectively portray the long political transition from colonies to independence for Iceland, self-government for the Faroe Islands and Greenland – and the protracted sale of the Danish West Indies to the US (1846-1917). I begin Chapter 3 by discussing the introduction of limited democracy in Denmark itself when the 1849 constitution put an end to absolutist rule. In Denmark, Constitution Day is a public holiday, but it took until 1915 to reach universal suffrage – and for various reasons democratic colonial representation was not included in the constitution. There were fears Iceland might use political representation to seek pursue its desire for political autonomy and the Faroese might question the autocratic Danish rule. Then there was the unthinkable thought of having "coloured" political representation in the Danish West Indies by a non-Danish speaking colonial elite – and the long-term prospect of extending suffrage to formerly enslaved. Greenland remained beyond the political pale. Yet within a few years, a Greenlandic newspaper (see image below on the commemorative edition) had been established indicating the existence of a local public discourse. The shortage of Danish desire for political representation in the North Atlantic, was nourished by a continuity of stereotypes about "backwards" colonial subjects. One example of these was the colonial exhibitions, where "colonial exhibition" featured Greenlanders and Danish West Indians. Faroese and Icelandic protests ensured their exhibition was referred to as Iceland and the Faroe Islands - without the "colonial".



The Danish West Indies vanished from the public screen, after their sale to the US during the First World War. The referendum on the sale was the first time Danish women were allowed to vote. No one asked the US Virgin Islanders, even if the "workers' voice" from the islands, Hamilton Jackson visited Denmark, where he was granted a public platform. A third of eligible voters voted, two thirds in favour of the sale, suggesting a case with limited public appeal. Propaganda around the referendum was dominated by racist imagery such as the perpetually immature colonial child, and the naïve child being enticed by Uncle Sam.



Simultaneously with these racialized depictions, however we find the amazing photo of Hamilton Jackson giving a speech in downtown Copenhagen. Hamilton Jackson was the last in a series of anticolonial voices during Danish colonialism in the later USVI. General Buddhoe, attributed by USVI historians with the leadership role during the uprising which led to the abolition of slavery in the Danish West Indies in 1848, is another local hero. There are no known portraits of any of the three Queens of the Fireburn rebellion in 1878. Yet, a statue of Queen Mary was commissioned for the 2017 centennial and placed outside the Danish West Indian Warehouse on the Copenhagen harbourfront in 2018. See Chapter 8 for more on this.



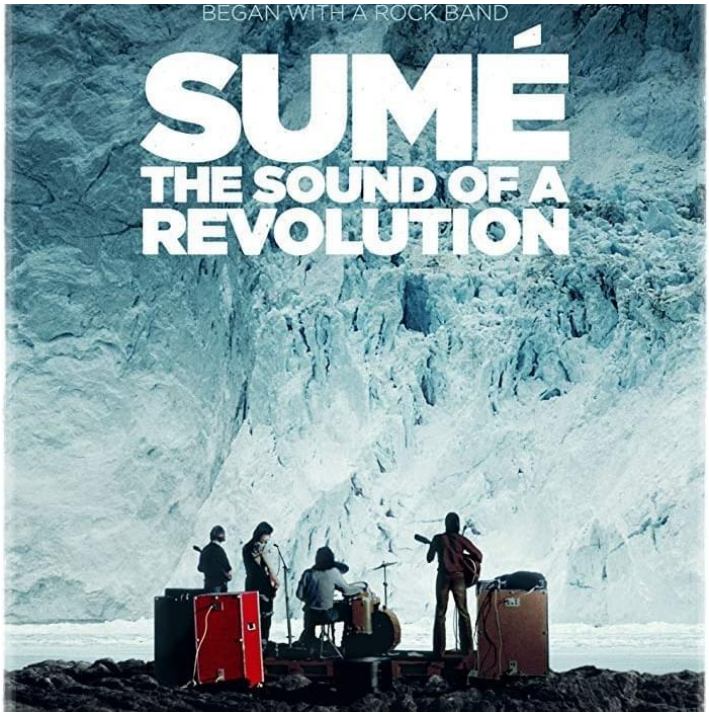
Hamilton Jackson is also one of a series of anticolonial/pro-autonomy/pro-independence political leaders throughout the Danish colonial realm. I have looked in vain for images of others giving public speeches in Copenhagen, but they all came here; Augo Lynge and Frederik Lynge (in the 1950s), and leaders of later formed Greenlandic parties in the 1970s; the Icelandic nationalist leader, Jón Sigurðsson, who lived in Copenhagen from 1833 until he died in 1879; The Faroese nationalist, Jóannes Patursson, who sat in various periods in the Danish parliamentary chambers. The presence of anticolonial leaders in the metropolitan space is one aspect of Danish colonialism that resembles experiences elsewhere. France, Great Britain and Portugal - or Paris, London and Lisbon – all operated as centres of imperial power and as spaces for organising anticolonial resistance.

Chapter 5

This chapter abandons the correlation between political autonomy and Danish procrastination in the North Atlantic to examine how Danish representation of non-European others in the Danish welfare society epoch continues to reproduce the colonial archive. The chapter discusses the rise of Denmark as a development aid global power and the transformation of Greenland from colonial

"Indigenous tableau" to "modern society", paradoxically with no Danish urge to recognise the need to consult the Greenlanders who were to become modernised. Development aid reinstates the civilizing mission albeit in a new variant. Greenland began its colonial life as a recipient of the civilising mission in its three Danish main variations – religion, colonial bureaucracy and trade administration. The modernization process of the 1950s and 1960s was thus also here a reinstated civilising mission. It was both welcomed by Greenlanders – as at least a token recognition they were seen as embryonic citizens - and criticized as it became apparent the Danish new administration apparatus was mainly geared to maintain Danish control – Gramsci would say hegemony – over the Greenlandic population. The international critique of development aid and its liberalist underpinnings and the Greenlandic (and a limited number of Danish scholars and typically ex-administration staff) critique of their relegation to second-class citizens under a Danish postcolonial administrative elite has gathered momentum, even if it can be traced throughout the "modern" period of the Danish administration. In Greenland, and through their alliances with the Danish anti-imperialist circles in Denmark, the two most important phenomena are probably the Greenlandic rockband, Sumé, and the coalmine town, Qullissat.

Sumé was a relatively short-lived band in the 1970s, which became synonymous with the Greenlandic protest against Danish rule and the referendum that brought Greenland into the EC with Denmark – in spite of a massive Greenlandic rejection of the proposal. Sumé sang in Greenlandic and became an instant success in Greenland with their first album in 1973, whose cover featured a colonial image of an Inuit hunter standing over the prostrate body of the Danish merchant he has killed.



Qullissat is an intriguing narrative of Danish opacity in the post-1945 administration policy. The coal mine town was opened in 1924 and its inhabitants were brought here to this unsettled place. The town began its life as a modern or industrial town, decades before the modernisation plans had been put into operation. Qullissat's workers were strongly organized in unions, who practically ran the town. This has since been put forward by some as evidence of the Danish administration's anxieties about the place as a potential hotspot for Greenlandic rebellion against Danish rule that eventually convinced them to close what was one of the biggest towns in Greenland. In a paradoxical turn, when the modernization plans were developed after 1945 – with an emphasis on the industrialization of the Greenlandic economy including larger-scale fishing – plans to close the coal mine in Qullissat were also afoot. They took a long time to come into effect as the coalmine was only closed in 1972. As evidence of the continued importance of Qullissat, former residents and their descendants go to the ghost town each summer to camp. The inhabitants were in effect forced to relocate (all services closed including electricity) and seek alternative accommodation and jobs in other Greenlandic towns. The town has become a monument over misguided and arrogant Danish administration policies in Greenland (Andersen, Jensen and Hvenegård-Lassen 2016),[2] and

[2] http://arctic.au.dk/news-and-events/news/show/artikel/historical-experiences-and-contemporary-lessons-from-qullissat/.

become associated with the alienation caused by the modernisation process. The close connection between Qullissat and Sumé, both historically and as legacy, was brought home in connection with the fortieth anniversary of the closure of the town in 2012, when Sumé reunited for the concert.

Danish development aid also has its history of misguidedness and defence of it as benevolently intended. The critique from the agencies connected with development has always been circumscribed by the need to preserve their association with the foreign ministry, and particularly the government agency, Danida. International critique of development aid, which I detail in the book, has not been broadly endorsed in Denmark, nor is it clear where the critique has led to a different development aid practice. As is generally the case, critique of Danish post-imperial anxieties is routinely dismissed (if not outright ignored), as over-determined criticism from the left.

In relation to development aid the critique of its managerialism, its ready subscription to neoliberalism, its implicit authoritarianism and its often token inclusion of the recipient through a discourse of partnership is less coming from the agencies and definitely not from the foreign ministry or Danida. The scholarship is typically internationally oriented, hence development discourse in Danish is primarily a closed circuit. This leaves the critique to the unlikely corners of authors of fiction and television. Here there are a limited number of references (and even fewer available in English translation) but the recent Danish televised drama-documentary, *Liberty*, built over Danish author, Jakob Ejersbo's, autofictional trilogy on development aid worker families in East Africa and the Africans they form relationships with, is an interesting example. Ejersbo's critique, particularly through the voice of the Tanzanian protagonist, Marcus, is merciless. It leaves an impression of development aid workers primarily using Tanzania as their own entrepreneurial backyard and a space for self-aggrandisement, leaving a trail of disaster both among the Tanzanians and the Scandinavians. The television series is loyal to Ejersbo's novel *Liberty*, although it makes the mother of the young Danish boy, Christian, more central. She works as a nurse and lives with another expat after her relationship with Christian's father breaks down. The centrality of her suggests the television series seeks to rescue from the debris of development aid emergency aid as the only defensible form of aid. The long-term build-up of any industry inevitably drowns in corruption and alcohol abuse on all sides. Both novel and television series are set in the 1980s prompting contemporary NGOs to acknowledge the problems detailed, but inserting the caveat that much has been learned from the mistakes of the earlier decades. Maybe, maybe not, yet if this is the case where is the Danish critique, or the Danish recognition of the critique, that led to this change?

Even if, both novel and television series shift in important ways the balance in representation once again the framing, in this case, the photo of the cast, betrays continuity. This is one area where it could be really productive to explore the various kinds of critique, both as they could be located in the recipient countries, but also across the Nordic countries all of which have projected themselves as major powers on the global development scene.

Chapter 7

The war effort is a customary reference to the implicit point that a nation at war expects unconditional support – the war effort is a propaganda tool for the nation. Denmark represents an exceptional test case since it spent nearly 140 years without seeing active service. Although the argument for such a long period requires eliminating a few examples of Danish participation in wars to be left out. Sønderjylland, South Jutland, which became part of Germany after the Danish military disaster of 1864, saw its young men sent off to fight for Germany during the First World War. Danish soldiers and policemen sent on peace keeping missions after the Second World War also saw military action, but never on behalf of the Danish military, but typically as peacekeepers for the UN. This changed in 2001 when Denmark embarked on a militant interventionist foreign policy that embroiled the nation in international conflicts in Western Asia and North Africa.

In the book I argue that it cannot be claimed the wave of retrospective films about the Second World War and the few films about the new theatres of war are directly linked. Yet, it is equally clear that a new wave of retrospective films are inevitably also a response to contemporary preoccupations. The uncertain political terrain the soldiers in the different wars have to navigate - as well as the resistance fighters during the Second World War - is one example of overlapping themes. This ambiguity stands in stark contrast to the unwavering political backing of war campaigns in Western Asia, as if such doubts were simply irrelevant. Once the military adventures had been embarked upon leading the nation into inevitable grey zones – what are "we" doing there, does "our" presence help or hinder peaceful development, is the invasion of Iraq at all defensible, are "we" just there to put us in the good books of the Americans – it turned out to be impossible for any critique to penetrate the political armour. Where Britain had its soul-searching through the Chilcot Inquiry and its damning findings, which completed Tony Blair's dramatic slide from an asset of the Labour Party to a liability, Denmark has embarrassingly little to offer. Small scale anti-war demonstrations, no proper inquiry into military conduct whether on the ground or in connection with internationally illegal transport of prisoners through Danish (-Greenlandic) airspace to Guantanamo. After the Danish troops were largely withdrawn from Afghanistan and Iraq the ongoing civilian unrest and war became another conflict in a remote country. But on the home front it was easy to see a changed perception of the military. A national flag day commemorating all who have lost their lives as official representatives of Denmark since 1948 was inaugurated a decade ago. This can understandably be seen as the desire by official Denmark to recognise the sacrifice of those people, their families and their friends, and an opportunity to thank those who took the risk and returned. But it also raises a series of uncomfortable questions. How do those who have lost a lost one, or returned traumatised, or simply returned from a war zone where the reasons they were there are seen as either blurry, pointless or even to serve the interests of leading Danish politicians, demarcate this day. Who does the flag day belong to and who determines its significance?

The juxtaposition of the two images is mine here. Yet it is clear, the new flag day operates as a re-enactment of a flag day in an era recognised broadly as characterised by belligerent nationalism. Flags, which are used profusely in any conceivable and inconceivable personal, commercial, national and nationalist context, makes it difficult to isolate the usage of the flag on flag day from its nationalistic underpinnings –if this is an objective.

[own pictures here of the wall with the names of the fallen + flag day]

The recent wars involving Danish soldiers, with their still raw sacrifices and taboos around a proper debate over the reasons for going to war and the possibility of liability to having contributed to war crimes, makes the debate over Denmark's involvement in the Second World War appear less contentious. Since the 1990s, critical accounts about Danish resistance, passive resistance, non-resistance and collaboration have opened the debate away from the previous ideological position of only describing different forms of resistance, the high points typically the rescue of the Danish Jews by sailing them to Sweden, and the Danish resistance fighters entering the public space alongside the victorious British troops in May 1945. In the book I argue the revisiting of the Second World War has less to do with setting the record straight, and more to do with mirroring the contemporary nation at war through its previous war experience. What I discuss in particular is the re-staging of the Danish soldier as an active soldier fighting the German invasion, the continuity of stoic resistance in other films and the rehabilitation of the German soldier, who is no longer portrayed as a screaming Nazi.

Chapter 8

Contemporary Denmark can be discussed in an infinite range of different ways. Here is a CNN inspired way of looking at contemporary Denmark – the land of cyclists combined with the anti-anti-immigration discourse that happy cyclist tales of international media outlets never seem to be particularly interested in. The neoliberal order finds Danish "hygge" a ready-made package for exports – their view of the win-win situation of the competition state as marketable. Nation-branding finds counter-narrative of racism encountered disturbing, rather than disruptive – the new buzzword of marketing language.

Gifts wanted or unwarranted. While 2017 marked an attention to the Danish slave-holding colonies in the Caribbean on an unprecedented scale, it remained the preoccupation of a minority – primarily through events held in and around Copenhagen. What narratives do the up to 20,000 Danes who travel to the US Virgin Islands return with from the "tropical paradise" they have been "sold" by the travel agencies? Remarkably, we don't know as no in-depth study has yet been undertaken – what we do know is that the 20,000 may represent 15 to 20 times the number of Danes attending the events of commemoration in Denmark that year, dedicated to direct a critique at the lack of reparations, and the non-apology. Perhaps what had the more lasting effect on post-2017 could end up being the gifts offered by the US Virgin Islands to Denmark – two busts of Hamilton Jackson, and General Buddhoe – and the statue Freedom made for the 1998 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. None of these artefacts were the result of a Danish intervention or desire for reconciliation. Yet, inevitably in Danish public discourse, and widespread in academic circles is the up-front celebration of "how far we have come". As if this is "our" work, "our" reflection, "our" insistence. The statue and the busts force us to confront Denmark's colonial past in ways we do not control. If we wanted a controlled commemoration, we could have begun by putting up our own statues, inserting our own plaques on prominent buildings around central Copenhagen that are the result of profiteering from "our" colonialism. This would be include a considerable number of buildings. Yet, the few times this has been proposed, it has fallen on deaf ears.

The other “statuesque” intervention was actually funded by Denmark. The Queen Mary statue – or temporary installation – has a prominent position along the Copenhagen harbourfront. It greets the many tourists walking between the Little Mermaid and Nyhavn, the picturesque canal street featuring prominently on tourist websites. She is the first statue of a black woman in Denmark and only the second of a black person – and incidentally of a Danish colonial subject. Erected on Transfer Day, she is the result of an artist collaboration between Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers (whose father is from the Caribbean) and USVI/Caribbean artist LaVaughn Belle. The profile of the Queen – of whom no pictures exist – is the joining of the two artists’ profile, a choice that explains the inscription on the base: “I am Queen Mary. A hybrid of bodies, nations and narratives”. The base is decorated with corals which signal the relationship with the USVI in a number of ways – corals were building materials used by slaves and their descendants for cottage construction. Corals signal the sea as a route connecting the islands to Africa, to Europe – and more particularly to the West Indian warehouse behind the statue.

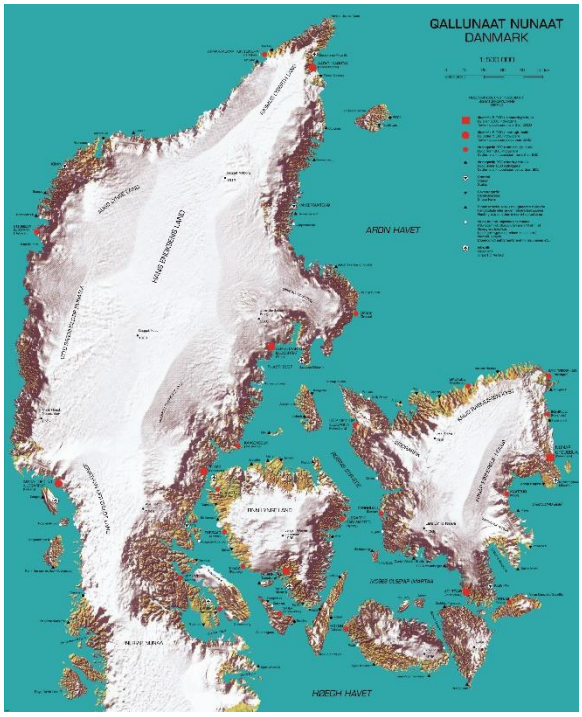
Author's photo.

Not too distant from the statue a more official Danish site – the National Museum – decided to install a new permanent colonial exhibition in one corner of its maze of corridors and rooms. Its major achievement consists in its installation inside the history of Denmark a section on the colonies. Yet in another section of the museum there already *is* a colonial exhibition even claiming Denmark had an empire. The inscription at the entrance to this section of the museum reads:

> The Danish Empire.
>
> In the 1600s the Danish Empire included
>
> Denmark and Scania, the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein,
>
> Norway and the dependencies
>
> Iceland, Greenland and the Faeroe Islands

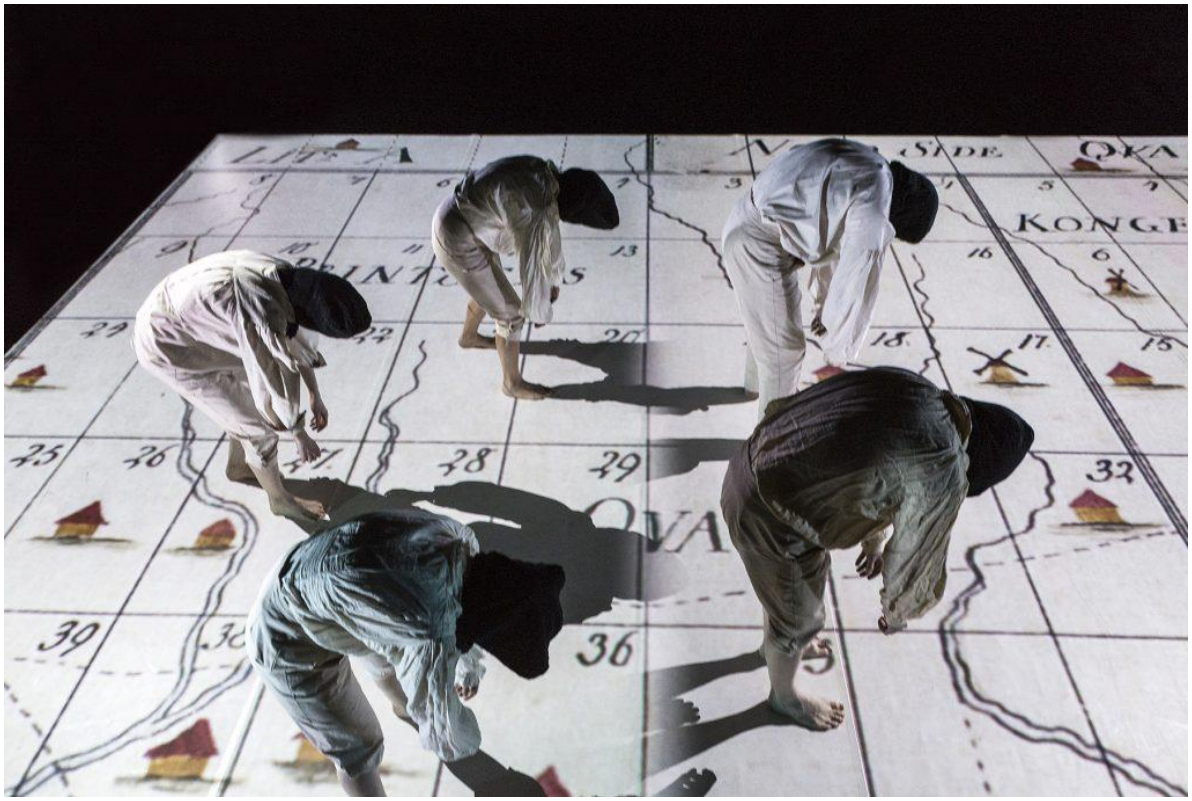
This inscription is interesting because it includes Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands – while only Greenland has been recognised recently as a colony. It is also interesting because it completely ignores the colonies in the tropics. It would seem colonies are unrelated to empire, while

dependencies can be related to empire – albeit not as colonies. What constitutes a colony and what constitutes colonial imaginary is what is at the centre of a provocative map that produces a counter-narrative to settler colonial imaginary – or colonial imagery in reverse. The map also operates as a reminder of the need to better connect the different colonial-imperial trajectories across the former Danish empire. What were and are the forms of dominance and racialisations for example informing Danish perceptions of their colonies? How may the various forms of anticolonial agency, and postcolonial counter-strategies be understood as a broader pattern?



Another pertinent question is how the colonial reemerges at times overtly as strategies of renewed containment of the postcolonial subject, and covertly as a loose set of references to the colonial realm – indirectly in this case possibly via rum advertising. The athletes depicted always with the same caption are national icons – even if in this case with an easily detected migrant background – her surname is Wozniacki.

"Sugar" finally connects to one of the most profoundly challenging examinations of Denmark's colonial past the play, *Sugar*, which was staged over a short period in early 2018. Author's photo.

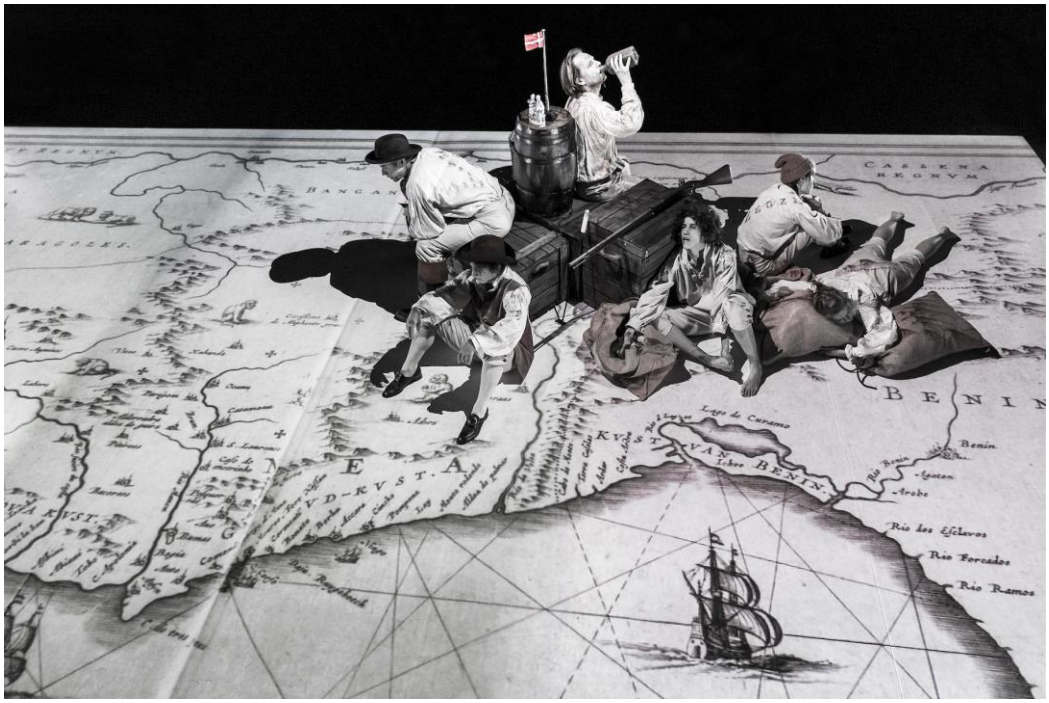


The slaves, performed by the same actors who play the Danish characters, are silent, blackhooded figures in a clear reference to contemporary forms of "white" Global North incarcerations of Global South others. Reproduced with kind permission from Det Olske Orkester.

The theatre performance *Sugar* played at a small inner Copenhagen theatre over a 10 day period in February-March 2018. Similarly to the other two interventions it represents a moment of colonial return, but it also invites contemplation as an intervention into a contemporary debate on legacy and colonial continuity, without as happened in other instances overstating the links between now and then. The performance traces the journey of a young boy, first compromised, then corrupted by the slave trade and finally disillusioned and stripped as he returns to Copenhagen, as penniless as he left. The striking aspects of the performance are less in the dialogue which is limited and works primarily as the plot that conveys the story. None of the characters are developed beyond stock, even if there are moments where the characters work as limited comic relief – a balance as the aim cannot be to restage slave trade as comedy, parody or satire. The strength of the play lies in its conceptualisation in relation to props, lights, scenography and choreography. The play was performed in a theatre where the stage was the floor in the middle and the audience perched on elevated rows of chairs in a square surrounding the centre stage. The lack of a screen behind the

stage, particularly important both in terms of a play set predominantly outdoors and an eighteenth century ‘costume drama’ was compensated for by turning the floor itself into the screen. This was utilised in interesting ways as the ‘screen’ was first the floor of the Schimmelmann house (the largest plantation owner in the West Indies and initiator behind the ban on slave trade in 1792, but also the moratorium which led to a dramatic ten year rise in slave trade until 1803), then the ship’s deck as they sail to the Gold Coast, then sea as they are wrecked ashore more than sailing ashore and then the slave deck with the outlines of the slaves on the deck. Most interesting is the dilemma of how a small scale theatre deals with the requirement of both whites and blacks where black-facing is an obvious no-go-zone (also because this is an interventionist performance). The problem is solved by having the same actors playing captors, sailors, captain and slaves, but the slaves are hooded with a clear reference to contemporary forms of invisibilising those that are considered if not questionable humans, then the practice surrounding the treatment of migrants and refugees renders them beyond the horizon of human selfness. The hooded enslaved subsequently emerge as robotic Fordism humans worn completely out by the endless reenactment of their ritualised lives as enslaved plantation workers. They return as the play concludes as white ghosts (part of USVI folklore) hovering across the floor as names of slaves materialise in the wake of their ghostly crossing.

Reproduced with kind permission from Det Olske Orkester.



Reproduced with kind permission from Det Olske Orkester.

Conclusion

2017 (and 2018) operates as a way of situating a contemporary moment of coming to terms with the colonial past in the shape of the many performances, discussion panels, documentary films and more that characterised activist and limited academic and public discourse responses to the centennial of the sale of the Danish West Indies and the colonialism and enslavement history that came before it. But it also demonstrated the limited range – or horizon of appeal –of such critical dialogues. The vast majority of Danes could not care less. Perhaps this is inevitably so. After all, even prominent national agenda discourses do not necessarily engage the public as much as it makes them respond. As 2021 and the tricentennial of Danish colonialism in Greenland approaches there is no doubt that it will feature more prominently in Denmark. The Danish-Greenlandic relationship is ongoing, even if a long shot from earning any label as postcolonial. The naked self-interest of Danish governments, the state and its formidable civil servant apparatus, will coordinate their efforts to ensure Greenland does not slip away. Yet, Greenland will also mobilise its forms of

political agencies to point to a continued Danish school master attitude whose arrogance has remained relatively unabated since the beginning of the modernisation process. Clearly, there are lessons to be drawn from the 2017 centennial that could be used to expose the continuity of Danish self-congratulatory attitudes and restaging of the colonial archive.

Reproduced with kind permission from Det Olske Orkester.