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ARCHIVES THAT MATTER
Infrastructures for Sharing Unshared Histories

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Archives that Matter

Infrastructures for Sharing Unshared Histories. An Introduction

Figure 1: Still from the video installation *Christmas Report and Other Fragments* (Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2017). Textile samples ordered by the Danish-Guinean Company on the Gold Coast in Ghana. The order was sent to Copenhagen and then sent to the Danish colony in Tranquebar, today Tharangambadi, India, where the textiles were produced. The textiles were sent to Ghana where they were traded for enslaved Africans, minerals and other goods. Source: The Danish National Archives, Dansk-Guinesisk Kompagni, Breve fra Direktionen 1705-1722, 390. *"Vestindisk-Guineisik Kompagni, Direktionen Breve og Dokumenter fra Guinea: 390/589"*

I browse through folders of hundreds of scanned copies of handwritten red, brown ink on yellowed paper:
on page 390
I encounter them:

Latkes
Broulis
Chereled
Niconyjser
Chellos …

Red, white, blue,
some darker, some lighter,
Some chequered, some striped,
Sealed to the paper (the red wax shines through)

Ward
Waft
Weaving
Waves
Tharangambadi (meaning singing wave in Tamil)
What would the waves sing?
What would the woven strings sing?
Silenced song
Woken by touch
In the wake[i]
I can no longer touch them

"We were sent by the Danish Colonial Administration, in Christiansborg, Accra, Ghana to Copenhagen Denmark, to order more like us. We were then sent from Copenhagen to Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) India and reproduced in large quantities. Shipped back (maybe passing through Copenhagen) to Accra, where we were traded for enslaved people, minerals and other goods. Together with the enslaved we were stacked and shipped to the Caribbean, to the Danish West Indies, where we became the national fabric Madras.
In Ghana we became part of the national fabric as well. Now produced by Dutch multinational companies and resold as African prints.
In Europe and the colonial center we became the scotch print in Ivy League Uniforms, Colonial overseers' pants, and military uniforms, shipped back to India (to oversee our production).
We are an index of our own passage
Woven between continents,
Of becoming digital
We precipitate the pixel that we would later become
The hand of the laborer
Held the loom that wove us
That loom
Later wove the program
that returned us
to our current pixelated form"[ii]

*

"The work we do requires (...) new ways of entering and leaving the archives of slavery."
(Sharpe, 2016, p. 13)

2017 marked the centennial of Denmark's sale of its former colony The Danish West Indies to The United States, today the United States Virgin Islands. For this occasion, the Danish National Archive, the Royal Danish Library's Photo and Map Collection, as well as other archives and collections in Denmark, undertook a mass digitisation of their archival records from St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, Ghana and the transatlantic enslavement trade. The contested history of these archives is well known in archival studies (Bastian, 2003; Andersen, 2017). After the sale of the Virgin Islands in 1917, most of these archives were relocated to Denmark, leaving the inhabitants of the islands without access to approximately 250 years of written and visual sources of history. Hundred years later, the National Archive alone has scanned more than 1.2 kilometres of shelf space, adding up to more than 5 million digital scans. The records are said to be among the best preserved from the transatlantic enslavement trade and many are included on UNESCO's world heritage list.

While browsing through the digitized archives, the scanned image of the snippets of Indian textiles hit me viscerally, as its very texture comes to carry a direct indexicality of the transatlantic enslavement trade. The Middle Passage. And their own passage becoming digital: being fragments of textiles, they almost seem to predate the pixels that they would later end up becoming.

The garment, ripped apart from the fabric of which it should form part, and sealed onto the ledgers, enfolds in its texture the violent cut to connection that slavery marks, a cut that severs the enslaved from their land, history and kinship. That cut can be said to be re-incised when Denmark took back the archives after selling the Danish West Indies to the United States. The uprooting of the archive marks a double cut, in which people who were forcefully removed from their history and environment, are then cut off again from access to that little trace, that name, that list, or that scrap of cloth which might still exist in the ledgers within the archive. Or perhaps it marks a triple cut – a material cut, a rasterization, a discretization – when what is returned after digitization is not the actual archival records, but rather the scanned copies in 300 dpi.

The cloth samples became our entry points for this special issue, prisms that serve as an analytic to approach the colonial archive as well as to map ongoing practices across continents that work to repair the cuts enforced by colonial experiences.[iii] From their cross-continental journey into the digital format in which they can be found today, these fabrics carry the "forcible encounters, removals, and entanglements" (Lowe, 2015, p. 2) that made up the violent colonial enterprise. At the same time, they also point to the historical and material processes that underwrite digitisation, as the computer and the global webs of data emerge out of the history of weaving, as cyberfeminist Sadie Plant suggested (Plant, 1995). From this layered history, the fabric samples came to function as an impetus to weave new threads connecting communities, histories, and archives into a web that fosters new ways of creating with and through the archive.

This special issue emerges from a seminar entitled *Archives that Matter. Digital Infrastructures for Sharing Unshared Histories*, organized by Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Daniela Agostinho and Nanna Bonde Thylstrup in Copenhagen in 2018.[iv] Building on the many research, artistic and curatorial activities that took place throughout the centennial year of 2017[v], this seminar was the first to address the politics and ethics of mass digitization of colonial archives by bringing together experts in digital heritage with artists, researchers and curators working in the field of colonial histories. Throughout the centennial year, it became clear to many of us that digitization had to be complemented - if not challenged - by other practices and epistemologies. In the Fall of 2016, leading up to the centennial year, the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen organized a series of data sprints on "Representing History through Data", in which students, researchers and professionals were invited to engage

with the archival records in digitized form through digital tools, with the technological expertise from computer scientists from IT University Copenhagen. It became quickly apparent that most of the participants in the room were white Danes, which ended up creating a situation that mirrored the unequal conditions of colonial archival and knowledge production. What could these participants possibly say and do about these materials (photographs, log books, census, among others) that would not further entrench them in the colonial regime that they were already ensnared in? Moreover, the format of the data sprint also raised questions about the epistemologies of quantification inherent to datafication that cannot be separated from the history of colonialism of slavery. As scholars such as Simone Browne (2015), Jessica Marie Johnson (2018) and Jeffrey Moro (2018) have pointed out, the notion of data is deeply embedded in colonial histories of quantification that have a defining moment in the transatlantic enslavement trade. As Jeffrey Moro pointedly notes, "by imagining the Middle Passage as data, as fungible, manipulable, discrete, countable—we are not necessarily doing something new to it. We are participating in a deep time of datafication" (Moro, 2018, n.p.). At the same time, the non-quantifiable, unregistered and uncollected dimensions of the experience of those under slavery and bondage continue to go unnoticed and unattended, rather than being brought to attention (Agostinho, 2019). How then to adequately reconstruct the lives of those who lived under slavery and bondage through data?

These questions prompted us to invite artists and scholars from the US Virgin Islands and Ghana to bring a different context to these archives, to recount other stories beyond those registered by data, and to open up to other dimensions of the archive that were not present in the Danish national history of colonial experience. The seminar thus explored the potentials of intersecting digital humanities with cultural studies as well as artistic and arts-based research. Bringing together participants from Denmark, the United States Virgin Islands, Ghana, Belgium and Croatia, the seminar constituted our first attempt to open up the conversations initiated during the centennial year to a transnational and transdisciplinary reflection in order to map the many connections across regions that digital archives both enable and disable.

The seminar departed from the notion that, while mass digitisation of archival records carries a promise of easier access to the archives, it also gives rise to ethical, political, aesthetic and methodological questions concerning the access, dissemination and reuse of sensitive and contested material. With *Archives that Matter* we thus wished to begin a conversation about emerging digital colonial archives, pointing to the limitations as well as possibilities that digitization of colonial material gives rise to. Echoing recent insights from the fields of postcolonial and black digital humanities (Brown, 2015; Dillon, 2015; Glover and Gil 2017; Johnson, 2018; Parham, 2014; Risam, 2018; Rusert, 2017), we aimed at discussing not only the colonial epistemologies that digital colonial archives run the risk of reinscribing, but also at showcasing and fostering practices that critically engage with and reimagine the colonial legacies that haunt archives under digital conditions. Some of the questions we proposed to explore were: what are the new sites of forgetfulness and silence created by the digitization of the colonial archives? How to do justice to the subjects, histories and experiences registered and unregistered by these archives? What kinds of materialities are lost and potentially newly found in processes of digitization? What are the implications of giving and precluding access through digital means, and how can meaningful and socially just access be envisioned? How to repair the connections broken by colonialism and archival knowledge? And finally, how to create *shared infrastructures* for re-use of the archival material that fosters radical, creative, decolonial and technological collaborations across communities?

The focus on "unshared histories" present in the subtitle is a direct reference to debates that took place during the centennial year, after the former Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen's speech in Christiansted, St. Croix on the US Virgin Islands, on March 31, 2017, during the official Centennial Transfer Day program. Prior to this speech there had been expectations that he would take the opportunity to issue an official apology for Denmark's involvement in enslavement and colonization. Rather than an apology, the Prime-Minister delivered a speech that emphasized how the people of Denmark and the people of the US Virgin Islands share "common historic bonds", "the same view of history" and the "same heroes". The problems and shortcomings of this speech were noted by many (see eg. Danbolt & Wilson, 2018). But one notorious problem resides precisely in the takeover of the archives in 1917, the effects of which cannot be repaired by the provision of access to digital

copies hundred years later. Hundred years of unshared access to these archives have dictated a deeply unequal relation to historical knowledge that needs sustained efforts to be undone. As art historian Temi Odumosu noted on different occasions, this is not a history or archive that is shared, in the equitable sense of the word, but one that is experienced and embodied fundamentally differently, depending on who you are as a person living in the US Virgin Islands or in Denmark. With this special issue we echo Odumosu's suggestion to take the concept of "sharing" in "shared histories" seriously in order to call for ways to actually share the archives, and to use the archives and their digitization as a way of initiating dialogue and creating a path for healing.

Inspired by this plea, this issue includes contributions by authors who participated in the seminar as well as authors we later invited to contribute in order to extend the conversations the seminar initiated. Two years have elapsed since the seminar took place, and the contributions herein do not merely reproduce the presentations delivered at the event. Rather, the issue predominantly features work that came into being over the course of the last two years, thus testifying to the post-centennial attempts at moving forward, attempts spearheaded by artists and researchers invested in creating paths for rethinking and healing colonial legacies. The issue features a blend of articles, essays and artistic contributions that reflect (though not exhaustively) the breadth of questions, practices and collaborations sparked by ongoing engagements with these archives. In many ways, this issue has been an editorial experiment in relationship-building that captures some of the intersecting practices being woven into a growing web of relationships. In the remainder of this introduction, we share our reflections on archival materiality and on infrastructures that inspired this special issue, reflections that are necessarily indebted to the ongoing dialogues that the issue aims to encourage further.

Archives that Matter

Our approach to colonial archives is informed by the many thinkers who examine archives as sites of power, knowledge and violence but also reimagination, redress and healing (Caswell and Cifor, 2016; Fuentes, 2016; Hartman, 2008; Lowe, 2015; Stoler, 2002). Following Foucault (2002), we approach archives as a nexus of practices that are constantly productive of meaning through which we are being constituted in the present. As such, the archive is not something which belongs to the past but something which actively shapes us in the present. This is why the colonial archives matter and keep reverberating the colonial past in the present. It is not a finished chapter, as the former Danish Prime Minister tried to contain it in his centennial speech in the US Virgin Islands – nor is it an "unpretty" past as the Danish Queen tried to tame it in her 2017 visit to Ghana – but rather it is actively structuring and reproducing subjectivities and power relations in the present.

2017 was also the year that Christina Sharpe's book *In the Wake* began to have a profound impact across fields of inquiry and practice. In the book, thinking through the afterlife of slavery, Sharpe makes the powerful point that the "past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (Sharpe, 2017, p. 9). This formulation spoke poignantly to the discussions many of us were having around the centennial, when we were confronted with Danish society's collective inability to perceive the past documented in the archives not as a bygone era, but as having ongoing effects in the colonial present (see Odumosu, 2019). Sharpe's question "[H]ow does one memorialize chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still?" thus resonated profoundly with the context of the centennial commemorations. With the title "Archives that Matter" we thus wanted to draw attention to the material effects of the past upon the present (in the form of continued exploitation, discrimination, racism and unequal power relations) and to situate the archives as a site where the "ongoingness" of the past is materialized and felt. Echoing the Black Lives Matter movement as well as Judith Butler's book *Bodies that Matter,* in which Butler shows how power is exercised upon and through the materiality of gendered and sexualized bodies, our intention was to suggest that the archive distributes materiality unevenly, whereby some lives matter more than others. Browsing through the archival records, from slave ship logbooks to plantation ledgers, this uneven distribution of lives is notorious and largely remains to be acknowledged, honoured and redressed. As Ayana Flewellen remarks in her contribution to this issue, "race as a social construct and racism as an experiential fact mattered in the past and matters in the present". *Archives that Matter* thus gestures towards the unresolved ongoingness of the past and the need to collectively generate

"different ethical registers" (Thomas, 2019) towards the archives, new ways of "making-sensible" (Sharpe, 2018) that more adequately acknowledge their material, affective and sensorial effects.

Matter

Archives that Matter also emphasises that the materiality of the archive matters and continues to matter when the actual physical material is digitized. To think through this we were inspired by another groundbreaking book that came out in 2017, Tina Campt's *Listening to Images,* in which she calls for an affective reorientation towards archives that takes into account their broadly constituted sensoriality. She puts forward an understanding of archival photographs "as deeply affective objects that implicate and leave impressions upon us through multiple forms of contact: visual contact (seeing), physical contact (touching), psychic contact (feeling), and, most counterintuitively of all, the sonic contact" (Campt, 2017, p. 72). Expanding her reflections, we emphasize the need to attend to the sensoriality of the archive, and to the manifold ways the archival material elicits our engagement, even in its digital materialization. Following Campt, it is perhaps by attuning to the "lower frequencies" and the unnoticed materiality of the records that we might be able to hear some of the stories unregistered by the archive. It is our hypothesis that the textural affordances offered by the digitization of the colonial archive constitute a double process. On the one hand, the digital archive seems to disable the immediate sensorial and affective qualities related to the physical records, but at the same time, the affective qualities of archival materiality are enfolded in the very texture of the seemingly flat digital scan.

To further explore this, we draw on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick & Renu Bora's distinction between Texxture (with two xx's) and texture with one x. According to Sedgwick (2003, p.15) an object with texxture is "dense with offered information about how substantively, historically, materially, it came into being". In other words, a texxtured object carries information about its own becoming. As an example, Sedgwick uses the hand molded brick that "still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making" in the very surface of the brick. The history of the material clay becoming a brick is thus enfolded in the very texture of the brick. On the other hand, texture with only one "x" blocks the information about its making in its surface; it "signifies the willed erasure of its history" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 15).

With archival records, we might think that analog archival records carry the history of their own making in their very texture. The violence is embedded and embodied in the very scrap of cloth. In the seal. In the stroke of the pen. Information withheld. We only have a name – a misnaming. With the digitization of that object, some of that information might be lost, flattened, compressed, pixelated.

However, thinking with Hito Steyerl and her notion of the "poor image", might it be possible to think the digital scan not as void of texture, but rather, like the fragments of cloth that carried their lines of flight in their very texture (between India, Ghana, US Virgin Islands and Denmark), might those lines of flight be enfolded into the texture of the digital image? Steyerl (2013, p.1) describes poor images as "the contemporary Wretched of the Screen, the debris of audiovisual production which testify to the violent dislocation, transferals, and displacement of images - their acceleration and circulation within the vicious cycles of audiovisual capitalism". Despite the flatness with which they appear on our computer screens, is it possible to think of these images as entering a digital cycle of dislocation and displacement that evokes the cut to connection that people and objects endured in colonial times? With Laur M. Jackson (2016), might we situate this original experience of displacement of the Middle Passage as "the living tissue" of these digital files?

Rematerialisation

What we suggest is that by entering a digital regime of circulation, these documents and files enter a process of *rematerialisation* which harbours a potential for radical interventions. Central to our thinking on rematerialisation is La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers' groundbreaking public sculpture *I Am Queen Mary.* Unveiled on the harbour of Copenhagen, in front of the West Indian Warehouse, on 31st March 2018 (one year after the centennial of Denmark's sale of the Virgin Islands), this project is the first collaborative monument to

memorialize Denmark's colonial impact in the Caribbean and those who fought against it. Queen Mary was one of the four queens who led the Fireburn uprising against the Danish colonial administration and the slave-like conditions that the workers were still working under, 30 years after the official abolition of slavery.

In the absence of an actual picture or archival image of Queen Mary Thomas, the two artists set out to 3D-scan their own bodies and to merge those two images into a third image – an "avatar" as Nina Cramer (2018) has suggested. In so doing their two bodies come to constitute a new image – a hybrid image, a data body – that cuts across time and space. The full title of the piece is in fact *I Am Queen Mary - a Hybrid of Bodies, Nations and Narratives.* Echoing John Akomfrah's (2010) reflection on "digitopia", we situate this overlap between the diasporic and the digital as a "harbinger of new modes and relations" that carries the history of its making. In this process of merging bodies, nations and narratives, the scan and the pixels that it is comprised of enfold the many layers and histories unregistered by the colonial archive, activating the connections between the two continents, the two artists and the figure of Queen Mary and the Fireburn Queens. The gaps in the archive (the absence of a picture of Queen Mary, the lacuna of its prison record) become an opening, a way of "entering and leaving the archive" (Sharpe, 2017, p. 13) with a new materialisation. By working on the affect, the image is able to tear itself away from the body or totality of which it should form part and becomes a new entity of its own [I AM QUEEN MARY]. But that entity still carries the history of its making in its newfound form. As such it marks a relationality across time, space, and materials, enfolding the historical context, geographies, bodies and the current present. The rematerialisation of *I Am Queen Mary* could thus be situated within an "xroads praxis" as suggested by Jessica Marie Johnson (2019, n.p.) "a black diasporic technology for exploring what digital and analog landscapes hide and reveal", a mode to "create data without losing affect, sensation, and kinship as a framing for black life".

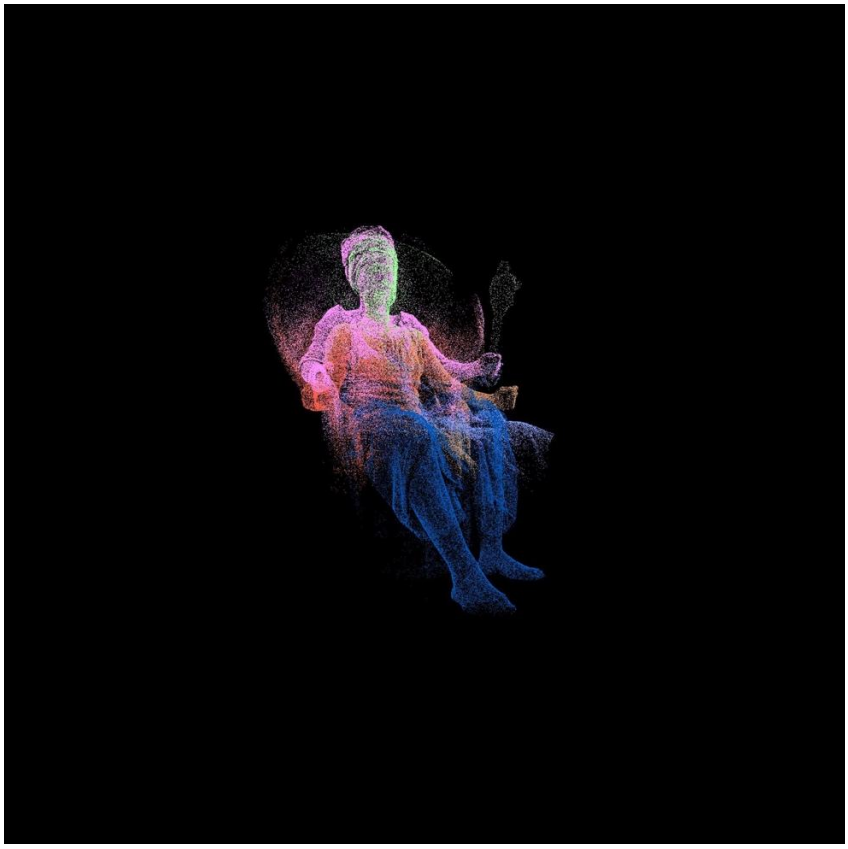

Figure 2: 3D Sketch of *I Am Queen Mary* (La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers, 2018). Photo: 3D Printhuset and Daviid Ranlø. Courtesy of the artists.

Belle and Ehlers' strategy not only becomes interesting to think with in relation to how artists and scholars can engage in "wake work", in "inhabiting and rupturing" the archives (Sharpe 2016), but also to think the whole digitization process of the colonial archive. If we think the digital archive as matter, then the material is composed of zeros and ones stored in electric circuits. Those circuits are no less material than the ledgers that store the archival records (Parks and Starosielski 2015). If we situate the colonial archive as a site of "breakdown and breakthrough" (Morgan, 2016), then those digital circuits also offer pathways for fugitive practices to be materialized.

Another way to look at this process, as La Vaughn Belle suggests in her contribution to this issue, is through the plynth of the monument. While the final sculptural figure of Queen Mary, assembled from the merged bodies of Ehlers and Belle, printed in polystyrene, and coated in black paint, could potentially obscure the way it came into being (that is, if one hasn't seen the body scans), the plynth tells another story. Made from corals that enslaved Africans were sent to harvest from the sea, the texxture of the acropodium carries the violent history of its making in its surface. The texxture of the acropodium thus reinscribes the materiality of colonial history already stored in the data bodies that make up the sculptural figure of Queen Mary. As a harbinger of new, diasporic articulations of colonial history and anti-colonial resistance, *I Am Queen Mary* gestures towards the many possibilities of rematerialisation and lines of flight that the digital opens up to once we attend to its texxtured materialities.

Smuggling

A final example of digital materiality that we would like to offer is one that points to the need to invent new infrastructures for sharing unshared histories, infrastructures that go beyond the digital servers, networks and interfaces that currently hold the digitized archival records. In the summer of 2018, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld together with research librarian Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer (Royal Danish Library) and art historian Mathias Danbolt (University of Copenhagen) participated in the event "Connecting with the Archives: Reclaiming Memory" in St. Croix, organized by Frandelle Gerard within the annual Summer School facilitated by CHANT: Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism, a local organization working to preserve cultural heritage in St. Croix. For this occasion Katrine and photographer Anu Ramdas printed more than 200 photographs from the archives (selected together with David Berg, a photographer from St. Croix, and Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer) into a 7 meters long paper roll, which were then packed and transported to St. Croix, where they were handed over to CHANT and the participants in the event.

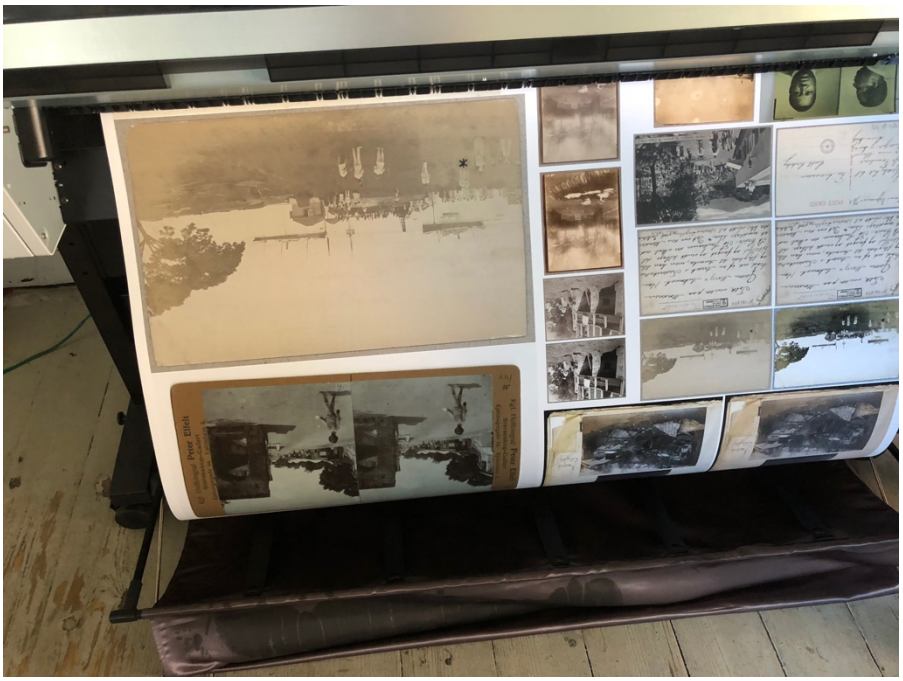

Figure 3: Printing the archives. July 2018. Photo: Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld.

Figure 4: Photographer David Berg looking through the printed archival photographs. CHANT, St. Croix, July 2018. Photo: Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld.

Upon presenting this intervention at a conference on Digital Culture in Germany, we were asked by an audience member why Katrine printed the photographs and carried them to St. Croix if they are online anyway. The question is an important one to address, as it carries the assumptions of accessibility that digitization so often generates. With this intervention, we wanted to point to the unequal conditions of access that digitization can perpetuate rather than mend. Often with digitization, the actual physical records are deaccessioned, which prevents people from physically engaging with the materials even if they have the means to consult them in Copenhagen, where they are still kept. Even though these archives can be consulted online, unequal conditions of connectivity dictate radically different engagements with the digital material. In September 2017, for instance, two category 5 hurricanes struck the USVI territory within a two week period. On St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas, many people lost their roofs and most of their possessions, and much of the islands went for weeks without power. Digital access is not a condition taken for granted at all times. But more than this, we wanted to point to how archives are situated, experienced and interpreted differently in different contexts, as Tami Navarro suggests in VISCO's essay in this issue, where she pushes us to consider the significance of the context within which archives exist: "how different it would be if such images were not just digitized by Danish institutions and *shared* with those in the Virgin Islands, but housed—and, importantly, situated there?". As Navarro argues, "The removal of such objects from their context - the people and places which made them possible - is an act of erasure that continues even after attempts to repair this break with gestures such as the digitization of archival material". And finally, she argues that the way in which these documents are archived and "shared" are currently outside the frame of reference for Virgin Islanders, and that vital context that could be provided by Virgin Islanders is currently missing.

As such, while we argue above that digital files carry in their texxture the history of their making, this texxture, we contend, is not complete without the **contexxt** from which they emanate and in which they belong. This contexxt comes to constitute a form of materiality that needs to be restituted to these records.

In our collaborative, quasi-literal smuggling of the archives we are indebted to Irit Rogoff's conceptualization of smuggling as an "operating methodology", a "potent model through which to track the flights of knowledge, of materials, of visibility and of partiality all of whose dynamic movements are essential for the conceptualisation of new cultural practices" (Rogoff, 2006, p. 3). Our act of smuggling is conceived as a mode of interrupting the circulation of digital files under the colonial regimes of visuality engendered by digitization, and to instead divert them, reroute them and redistribute them towards an alternative infrastructure for archival engagement. This act of flight allows us to imagine what it would be like if the archives could find a new life outside the institutional infrastructures that seized them under the pretense of caretaking. What possibilities for knowledge, reckoning and recognition would such an infrastructure open up to?

Figure 5: Facebook post by photographer David Berg in which he juxtaposes a print of a painting by Frederik van Scholten from the Royal Danish Library against the background of his grandmother's backyard in St. Croix. He was familiar with this painting through a print that he used to see at his grandmother's house. On his first trip to Denmark he saw the original painting by Scholten at the Royal Danish Library. St. Croix, July 2018.

Fugitive infrastructures for sharing unshared histories

The scraps of cloth, and their route or journey from Tharangambadi to Accra, to Copenhagen and Charlotte Amalie or Christiansted, also suggest the way in which the "intimacies of different continents" (Lowe, 2015) sustained the colonial project. These intimacies testify to the vital role of infrastructures for the colonial enterprise, through which routes, journeys, exchanges and encounters were made possible. Such infrastructures live on below and through the digital networks that now store and carry the digital version of these files. In *The Undersea Network*, media scholar Nicole Starosielski (2015, p. 2) points to the historical stability of communications technologies, noting how the undersea internet cables of her study "follow the contours of earlier networks, layered on top of earlier telegraph and telephone cables, power systems, lines of cultural migration, and trade routes". This deep materiality of digital communication infrastructures reminds us that infrastructures are a vehicle that both connects and disconnects. It is our hypothesis that the digital infrastructures that mediate the colonial archive today simultaneously entangle and disentangle communities once connected and disconnected by colonialism – they both connect and disconnect people to the historical past due to various infrastructural challenges such as access, language and radically different colonial experiences.

But infrastructures can also be a means of transformation and inventiveness (Verhoeven, 2016). As Deborah Cowen (2017, n.p.) notes in "Infrastructures of Empire and Resistance", "alternative worlds require alternative infrastructures, systems that allow for sustenance and reproduction". Cowen suggests that perhaps the greatest railroad ever built was the Underground Railroad, an infrastructure built not from railway connections but from safe houses, passageways and people who made escape from bondage imaginable for fugitive enslaved people. The Underground Railroad, Cowen remarks, "is a breathtaking reminder of the power of oppressed peoples to build infrastructures that work to make another world possible" (Cowen, 2017, n.p.).

With this special issue, our hope is to expand the meaning of infrastructure towards imagining different infrastructures - material, imagined, analogue, digital, affective, sensorial, artistic and collective - for sharing unshared histories. To return to the cloth samples, and how they inspired us to weave new threads connecting communities, bodies, and archives, we propose to reimagine infrastructures as "connective matter" to generate new intimacies between continents, histories and narratives.

Conceived as a counter-archive that foregrounds the material, affective, textural, sensorial and embodied knowledge that the colonial archives do not account for, this special issue and the contributions herein offer various pathways and threads for imagining alternative infrastructures that create space, both physical and virtual, for sustained relationships, interventions and practices to emerge[vi].

The Virgin Islands Studies Collective (VISCO) opens the special issue with a collaborative reflection on the prison records of the Fireburn Queens, the leaders of the labor revolt that occurred in 1878 on St. Croix (USVI), and who were sentenced to be imprisoned in Denmark. Their incarceration records became recently accessible due to their digitization and translation from Danish, allowing VISCO to confront the tensions between historical documentation and the islands' collective memory of the four women. Each member of the collective - visual artist La Vaughn Belle, anthropologist Tami Navarro, philosopher Hadiya Sewer and novelist and poet Tiphanie Yanique - responds through their own intellectual and creative practice to one of the prison records of the four women: Axeline Solomon, Mary Thomas, Mathilde McBean, and Susanna Abrahamson. Their reflections combine elements of speculation, fiction, black feminist theory and critique as modes of responding to the gaps and silences in the archive, as well as finding new questions to be asked. Central to each of the interventions is the idea of embodied knowledge and how they position their own lived experiences as women from the Virgin Islands in the archival engagement. VISCO's collective reflection is a much awaited and groundbreaking development in a post-centennial moment, in the way it centers the Virgin Islands as a site of inquiry and theorization, and in how it confronts the incommensurate discrepancies between archival records and collective knowledge as "opportunities towards limitless renewals of knowing". VISCO's article highlights that in the aftermath of the mass digitization of Denmark's colonial archives, there is an urgent need to explore not only

the contents of the archive, but also to expand archival access and to develop new modes to attend to the nuances of archival interpretation and intervention.

In "Lowering the Gaze. The Acropodium in *I Am Queen Mary*", visual artist **La Vaughn Belle** reflects on the transatlantic dialogue behind the first public monument to memorialize Denmark's colonial past in the Caribbean, the sculpture *I Am Queen Mary* (2018), co-created with Jeannette Ehlers, a Copenhagen-based artist of Danish and Trinidadian descent. The essay retraces the origin of the project to the parallel artistic practices of the two artists that later intersected in the monument, bringing together shared and unshared colonial histories. Belle's proposition in this essay is to "lower the gaze" and engage with the sculpture from the viewpoint of its plinth, a coral stone base that goes back to her earlier piece "Trading Post". By entering the work through its acropodium, Belle calls for a sensorial shift that gives access to an embodied knowledge that more clearly attunes to the materiality of colonial history. By lowering the gaze and entering the piece through the stone base, Belle proposes to see the plinth as a quiet monument to the enslaved and to other, often invisible colonial infrastructures that make up colonial *pastpresents*.

The artistic contribution FOR LOVE ALONE by visual artist **Jeannette Ehlers** documents a 6 hour-long performative intervention originally titled *Into the Dark*, created for 'Culture Night', a large annual public cultural event in Copenhagen. The performance at the Royal Cast Collection/West Indian Warehouse on October 12, 2018 was inspired by the four rebel queens of the Fireburn revolt, Queen Mary, Queen Susanna, Queen Agnes and Queen Mathilda, and consisted of two groups of four black women who acted as living sculptures in the West Indian Warehouse, confronting the coloniality of the space. Accompanied by a soundtrack of the monologue *Queen Mary Spirit*, written by novelist and poet Tiphanie Yanique from the US Virgin Islands, the women changed positions and formations throughout the night. The performance further invited a dialogue with the public sculpture *I Am Queen Mary*, co-created by La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers, which is placed just outside the Warehouse. Ehlers' contribution includes Tiphanie Yannique's written monologue *Queen Mary Spirit,* accompanied by photographic and video documentation.

Ayana Flewellen's article "African Diasporic Choices: Locating the Lived Experiences of Afro-Crucians in the Archival and Archeological Record" draws on Black feminist and post-colonial theoretical frameworks to question and explore the historicity of archaeological and archival records. The contribution offers a critical discussion of the implications and challenges of open access to digitized documentary sources, such as the newly digitized archival records regarding Denmark's role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Flewellen reminds us that "open access does not amount to equitable legibility of documents available, nor does it provide transparency regarding the subjective nature inherent in the production of archival collections and within processes of digitization." By engaging with some of the digitized images, Flewellen locates the gaps in both archival and archeological records, while simultaneously illuminating them as as spaces of potentiality and possibility to gain insights into the interior lives of the enslaved and later free African diasporic peoples of the former Danish West Indies. The article draws on preliminary findings from Flewellen's archeological work at the Estate Little Princess, an 18th-century Danish sugar plantation located on the island of St. Croix, USVI. Centered on the past lived experiences of African Diasporic women through the lens of sartorial practices, Flewellen's archeological research illuminates spaces of tension as well as productive encounters between the archeological and archival records.

The next artistic contribution comes from **Dorothy Akpene Amenuke**, artist and lecturer at the Department of Painting and Sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. In the visual essay "Being Content (?). Containment, Habitation and Devotion", Amenuke explores the politics of space and what she calls "the possibly communicative potential of fibres and fabrics". The essay features her work on inhabited spaces in the colonial context and her exploration of "parasitic beings" that take up space in all kinds of environments. Amenuke's work questions who is allowed to inhabit which spaces, and explores the potential of fabrics to create spaces of inhabitation and intimacy. Within Amenuke's practice, inhabiting is the state of being inhabited/occupied and also being or dwelling in, by turning the inside outside and the outside in. Employing

techniques such as stitching, tying, gluing, etc., and exploring themes that reference women and daily life, she creates evocative objects and installations, some of which come into their elements when installed in the natural environment. With the long processes of fiber and fabric manipulation, her sculptures and installations embody the time taken to create them and the laborious nature of daily routines. Amenuke's work on the materiality of fibers and fabrics, and their potential to create new spaces and structures for intimacy, offers a conceptual framework to think about materiality, rematerialisation and historical entanglements.

In "Landscapes of the African American Diaspora in Denmark. An Imaginary Exhibition", **Ethelene Whitmire,** Professor at the Department of Afro-American Studies, University of Wisconsin – Madison, draws on the method of curatorial dreaming in an exploration of how an imaginary exhibition can offer an alternative infrastructure to engage archival materials and scholarly work in new ways. Whitmire's own archive of items collected to write the book *Searching for Utopia: African Americans in 20th Century Denmark* includes hundreds of primary sources such as personal letters, photographs, films, documentaries, novels, government records, news articles and more. In particular, the contribution focuses on the landscape paintings of the African American painter Walter Williams, an expatriate who lived in Denmark, and the author dreams of reaching broader audiences for scholarly research, noting that "I want visitors of my imaginary exhibition to feel like they are standing inside my archive." Withmire's archival research charts less well-known diasporic pathways that tell richly layered stories about African-Americans in Denmark, while unfolding the method of curatorial dreaming as an affective and sensorial form of engaging with the archives of her scholarly work.

The Copenhagen-based decolonial feminist collective **Marronage**'s contribution "Marronage is Resistance to the Colonizer's Construction of History" offers an intervention into the Danish history book *Kolonierne i Vestindien* [The Colonies in the West Indies] by Danish historian Ove Hornby, which discusses the 1878 Fireburn labor revolt on St. Croix. As Marronage points out, the archives tell us almost nothing of the experiences of the colonized and the enslaved, and "[w]hen accessing the past, we are often forced to make do with the colonizer's archival sources and history books while the task of locating the voices of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the colonial archives is an inordinate challenge." Marronage's intervention employs the practice of redaction and annotation, inspired by the work of Black feminist scholar Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, as a way of "returning to violent documents with the intention of seeing and reading otherwise". Their contribution includes an English translation of the Danish history book, as well as their annotations, to ensure greater accessibility to a non-Danish readership.

In "Colonial media ecologies. Resounding the colonial archive with impressions from a field trip to Ghana", **Lene Asp Frederiksen,** writer and Ph.D fellow at the Department of Culture and Society, University of Linköping, explores how the medium of sound and audio recordings hold "a potential for a multi-perspectival and multi-voiced opening up of colonial archives". In this mixed-media contribution, Asp Frederiksen documents a field trip to Ghana with written and aural impressions in an attempt to trouble the monological genre of the travelogue through the polyphonic register of sound recordings. Asp Frederiksen's contribution offers a reflection on the materiality of colonial archives through a media ecological approach that situates the landscape as a form of material archive, showing how "knowledge of history might be stored in other-than-text narratives". Importantly, Asp Frederiksen's contribution offers both a methodology - documentary audio recordings - and a discussion of how to address layered colonial environments through a media ecological and media archeological approach, as well as the possibilities of digital media to voice *dialogical narratives* about colonialism.

Finally, the special issue concludes with an essay by visual artists Annarosa Krøyer Holm and Miriam Haile, co-runners of the **Hvid[me]Archive**, a collaborative project that has brought together many of the practices featured throughout this special issue. Their contribution, "Hvid[mə] Archive – An artistic research project highlighting critical, intersectional and decolonial practices" recounts how the artistic research project Hvid[mə] Archive started as a critical comment on the Danish Royal Cast Collection's exhibition in the colonial West Indian Warehouse in Copenhagen. The authors establish the project as "a response to the lack of verbalization about the warehouse's colonial past, as well as to the lack of a verbalization about the context and history that the

plaster cast collection is a product of". Tracing and unfolding the use and re-conceptualization of the Danish noun 'hvidme', the essay demonstrates how it created an entry point for a contemporary critical whiteness discourse in a specific Danish art context. The essay reflects on how the project developed from Annarosa Krøyer Holm's critical intervention in the white space of the West Indian Warehouse into the decolonial and intersectional artistic research collaboration that **Hvid[me] Archive** is today. Hvid[me] Archive can thus be seen as a growing collaborative infrastructure that facilitates and sustains exhibitions, artistic workshops, networks and events with visual artists, cultural producers, writers and theorists working within a critical decolonial framework.

The contributions in this issue approach the archives through different engagements, exploring various notions of materiality and offering new sensorial methods through which to enter (and leave) the archival record. In their breadth of creative approaches, these contributions explore and call for different understandings of infrastructure that interrogate, reimagine and share the archives in ways that offer a path (or many paths) forward.

Acknowledgments and moving forward
Many people and voices have shaped this project into being and we would like to take a moment to acknowledge them. We would like to thank the participants of the symposium and workshop *Archives that Matter*, whose input and contributions have been vital for this project: performance artist Oceana James (USVI) and her concepts and work on translocational narratives and storytelling have continued to inspire conversations and thoughts throughout the making of this publication; David Berg, photographer (USVI), and his many findings in the archives during his research stays in Copenhagen; Nana Oforiatta-Ayim, writer, filmmaker, curator and art historian based in Accra, Ghana, who contributed to the symposium with a layered account of the many nations and powers that have reigned the Christiansborg Castle in Accra, asking whether there can be a re-writing of narratives in which modern Ghanaians are not merely victims of a colonial history, but rather co-creators of modernity. Temi Odumosu, art historian, curator and lecturer at the University of Malmö, who shared with us her ideas on how design activism in colonial archives could serve as starting points for thinking about what it means to delink from (or at least unsettle) inherited logics of oversight, taxonomy, and possession.

We also want to thank Kim Jacobsen, Koraljka Šlogar, Marianne Ping Huang, Michael K. Wilson, Yong Sun Gullach, Dalida María Benfield, Marronage, Poul Olson, Mathias Danbolt, Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer, Anders Juhl, Carl Michael Richardt, Astrid Nonbo Andersen, Nina Cramer, Mai Takawira and Lotte Løvholm for their contributions to the symposium and workshop. We would like to thank again Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer for her continued support to research and interventions upon and through the archives of the Royal Danish Library.

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Infrastructure building takes time, patience, labour and persistence. We are now starting to see the fruits of the many post-centennial collaborations across geographical boundaries, and this special issue charts some of the ongoing pathways for moving forward that we hope can be further nurtured by a growing web of critical and imaginative practices.

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[i] With Sharpe, "If (...) we think the metaphor of the wake in the entirety of its meanings (the keeping watch with the dead, the path of a ship, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening, and consciousness) and we join the wake with work in order that we might make the wake and *wake work* our analytic, we might continue to imagine new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery's afterlives, to survive (and more) that afterlife of property." (Sharpe, 2016, p. 17-18)

[ii] This text is loosely woven based on popular articles on the history of the Madras fabric as well as on Sadie Plant (1995).

[iii] Our usage of the term repair throughout the text is informed by Eve Sedgwick's "reparative reading" and David Scott's reflections on repair and reparation. With David Scott, we depart from the premise that New World slavery is not repairable - it's "beyond repair" (Scott, 2018). This means that the notion of repair here, rather than the reconstitution of something to its previous whole, is tied to a psychic and poetic dimension, as the possibility of telling a different story, and the imaginative potential of this retelling for the acknowledgement of unrighted wrongs. Rather than signaling a temporal closure or a finite gesture, repair is a process that speaks to a temporality of ongoingness. With Sedgwick we thus situate repair as a "reparative practice" to emphasize the processual, transformative and quotidian labour of repairing the past. "What we can best learn from such [reparative]practices", Sedgwick wrote, are "the many ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (Sedgwick, 1997, 35). A reparative practice, for Sedgwick, is thus about learning how to build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered.

[iv] The programme can be consulted at https://cemes.ku.dk/activities/2018/archives-that-matter/.

[v] The events and interventions in Denmark during the centennial included, amongst others, the exhibition *Blind spots*, curated by Mathias Danbolt, Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer and Sarah Giersing at the Royal Danish Library, which featured different artefacts from the library's collection (photographs maps and postcards, among others) alongside artworks by contemporary artists such as La Vaughn Belle (USVI), Jeannette Ehlers (Denmark) and Nanna Debois Buhl (Denmark); art historian Temi Odumosu's sound interventions, titled *What lies unspoken*, at both the *Blind spots* exhibition and the National Gallery of Denmark; the conference *Unfinished histories: Art, memory, and the visual politics of coloniality*, organized by Mathias Danbolt and Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer at the University of Copenhagen and the Royal Danish Library; and Jeannette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle's *I am Queen Mary*, an artist-led monumental statue of labour revolt leader Mary Thomas—the first public monument to a black woman in Denmark—situated in front of the former West Indian Warehouse on Copenhagen's harbor front, unveiled in March 2018. Other independent and smaller scale exhibits, such as *Performing Archive: Estate Bethlehem,* an exhibition by visual artist Renée Ridgway at Astrid Noack's Atelier, and interventions organized by artists and activist collectives such as Marronage, Black Lives Matter Denmark and Hvid[mə] Archive, were also crucial in mobilizing communities around Denmark's colonial legacy, and in leading some of the most radically anticolonial conversations and experiments. In the USVI, there were several artistic and curatorial responses to the centennial, including a group exhibition titled '100 years of…: A centennial transfer reflection exhibition' held at the Bajo el Sol Gallery in St John; another group exhibition, titled 'Invisible heritage: transfer 2017', curated by Monica Marin at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in St Croix, which later travelled to the USVI Cultural Embassy in Copenhagen; and the exhibition 'The centennial: my take/my view', shown at the Fort Frederik Museum in St Croix. In general, the centennial commemorations fostered only a few transatlantic initiatives, mostly spearheaded by individual artists, curators and researchers outside the framework of official commemorations.

[vi] Note on peer review: all articles have undergone peer review. Artistic contributions have received editorial feedback but have not undergone peer review.

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Ancestral Queendom

- Reflections on the Prison Records of the Rebel Queens of the 1878 Fireburn in St. Croix, USVI (formerly the Danish West Indies)

Abstract
This article is written in what can be described as the "post-centennial" era, post 2017, the year marked by the 100th anniversary of the sale and transfer of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States. 2017 marked a shift in the conversation around and between Denmark and its former colonies in the Caribbean, most notably the increasing access of Virgin Islanders to the millions of archival records that remain stored in Denmark as they began to emerge in online databases and temporarily in exhibitions. That year the Virgin Islands Studies Collective, a group of four women (La Vaughn Belle, Tami Navarro, Hadiya Sewer and Tiphanie Yanique) from the Virgin Islands and from various disciplinary backgrounds, also emerged with an intention to center not only the archive, but also archival access and the nuances of archival interpretation and intervention. This collaborative essay, Ancestral Queendom: Reflections on the Prison Records of the Rebel Queens of the 1878 Fireburn in St. Croix, USVI (formerly the Danish West Indies), is a direct engagement with the archives and archival production. Each member responds to one of the prison records of the four women taken to Denmark for their participation in the largest labor revolt in Danish colonial history. Their reflections combine elements of speculation, fiction, black feminitist theory and critique as modes of responding to the gaps and silences in the archive, as well as finding new questions to be asked.

Keywords: *Fireburn, Black feminism, Virgin Islands Studies Collective, rebellion, Danish West Indies, prison records*

Introduction
In 1917 when the Danish government sold a group of islands in the Caribbean known as the Danish West Indies to the United States, the now named American Virgin Islands began losing its memory (Bastian, 2001). After the

sale a process of record retrieval began which ultimately splintered the archives placing most in Denmark, some in the United States and an even less sum in the Virgin Islands. As many of the records of the 250 plus years of the Danish colonial period were produced in Danish instead of the English that was most commonly spoken, this has contributed to a compounded lack of access both in language and in distance. The result for Virgin Islanders is a community that has struggled owning its historical memory. Writing about our plight Jeannette Bastian states, "Without recourse to the records, the community can neither counter other interpretations nor consolidate its own; without ownership of its history, it continues to be history's victim" (Bastian, 2003, p. 48). This article is part of our continuing effort at possession.

The 1878 Fireburn is one of the foremost events in our cultural memory. It produced our most beloved heroines, Queen Mary being the most popular, with folk songs, a highway, and a monument in her honor. However, beyond the legend there is not much known about the event, the social, political or economic circumstances leading up to it or the people who participated in what can be said to be the largest labor rebellion in Danish colonial history. The prison records of the four women who were ultimately charged and sentenced to death, then with this sentence commuted sent to be imprisoned in Denmark, has been largely hidden in the historical archive only to emerge during the 2017 centennial anniversary of the transfer in an exhibition at the Workers Museum in Copenhagen. For the few Virgin Islanders who were able to see the exhibit this was a profound moment, a moment where collective memory and historical record collided, challenging both and sparking new questions.

This article is motivated by the need to continue to explore not only the archive, but also archival access and the nuances of archival interpretation and intervention. This text aims to extend our interventions beyond national boundaries in order to complicate engagement with the archives, but also to disseminate the knowledge to and share in conversation with a wider group of interlocutors: actual, potential and imagined.

The four co-authors of this article are (in alphabetical order) La Vaughn Belle, Dr. Tami Navarro, Dr. Hadiya Sewer and Prof. Tiphanie Yanique. Together, we make up the founding body of the Virgin Islands Studies Collective (VISCO). We are a group of academics, artists, and activists who are committed to centering the Virgin Islands as a site of inquiry and theorization. We are centrally concerned with the erasure of the Virgin Islands from larger discourses—the Danish colonial archive and the Danish cultural memory being key sites of erasure. As a collective, VISCO is committed to a practice of collaboration—this article being one such example.

In doing this, we present our article in four parts (excluding this introduction). Each of the four writers uses her own intellectual training and creative practice to make her intervention. As a result, this article moves tonally from scholarly to memoiristic—while also being informed by our collective conversations and contexts. As a methodology collectivity has been central to our work, understanding that our various disciplines provide unique ways of producing knowledge and that together we can challenge and inform one another in new ways. We combine speculation, fiction, anthropology, philosophy and black feminist theory as modalities central to this effort, albeit we employ them with different degrees in our own individual reflections. However, central to each of our interventions is the idea of embodied knowledge and we position our own lived experience as Virgin Islanders in the archival engagement. In doing so we can take up the space that the gaps in the archives have left us to contend with.

In Dr. Navarro's "Through a Glass Darkly: Retracing Black Life in the Danish West Indies" she examines the connection between two young women (herself and Queen Agnes) via lived experience but also seemingly by happenstance—a kind of magic made possible by the facts of both young women being raised in the same place, with similar cultural expectations and determination. Understood in Dr. Navarro's essay is the idea that the happenstance may not be a mistake, but may rather be made possible by spiritual intervention, or made most palatable by gaps in the archives through which a social scientist may fit herself. In this regard, Dr. Navarro takes a historical and anthropological approach in her essay.

Dr. Sewer's essay, "I Too Am the Rebel Queen Mary" responds to the penal record of Queen Mary Thomas. This essay uses Virgin Islands oral tradition, particularly song celebrating Queen Mary, as a source of communal remembering and learning. She notes that Virgin Islands self-awareness is tied to awareness of the Queens of the Fireburn. She posits that this knowing is one informed by blackness, femaleness, activism, and working class identities, thus suggesting that potential liminal identities are actually centered in VI identity. "I Too Am the Rebel Queen Mary" is written with an ethnographic and philosophical approach, but also makes clear that knowledge, power and the arrival of both on the self is situated both inside and outside of the academy.

In "Enslaved to Enthroned" novelist and poet, Prof. Tiphanie Yanique, uses imagination to read into the archives what is unclear, suggested or entirely absent. In doing this Prof. Yanique works within the magical realism tradition, used by colonized writers notably from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa, to make possible what otherwise may seem impossible. Yanique uses her own lived experience to imagine a political and social kinship between herself and Queen Mathilde, in order to ask what makes a queen, what is queenliness, and what is particular to queendom in the Virgin Islands.

La Vaughn Belle, visual artist, approaches the archives as opportunities towards limitless renewals of knowing. In her article, "A Queen by Another Name: Susanna Abrahamson aka Bottom Belly, Or…" she first presents the reader with multiple titles, which suggest the meta-textual knowing made possible by Belle's own Virgin Islands identity, her gender, her blackness and her own queenliness. Notably, however, Belle clarifies that this multiplicity also comes from a scarcity of concrete knowledge, which requires a continuous questioning and re-questioning of the archives.

A hallmark of each essay is the realization that we know very little. The archives are often spare, contradictory or suspiciously repetitive. As we looked at these archives we were forced to ask rather simple questions, such as who wrote these archival notes? Where were they written? The Danes are known for meticulous record-keeping, but would they have applied that same care to recording the lives and experiences of colonized persons? What do we, as women, knowledge producers, and mothers from the Virgin Islands, see in the archives or in the archival absences, that may not have been seen before--due to the gendered, racial and national positionality of previous students and scholars?

We understand that our positionality as four black women from the Virgin Islands puts us in a serendipitous position with which to engage with four black women from the Danish West Indies known as the Queens of the Fireburn. We also recognize that our work would not be possible without the work of numerous other scholars, artists and activists who wrote and created before us. To do this work of engaging with the archives of these four queens in a political, personal and intellectual way, we four, relied heavily on scholars who have studied these, and related archives, and who have made engagement with Virgin Islands history and culture their life's work. We must thank Arnold Highfield and George Tyson for their vital in-person and telephonic communication with us. We also acknowledge our necessary engagement with the work of multiple scholars and archivists: Temi Odumosu, Sylvia Wynter, M. Cynthia Oliver, Mathias Danbolt, Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer, Elizabeth Rezende, Wayne James, Jeannette Bastian and Michel-Rolph Trouillot. We also thank Heidi Bojsen for her critical work in providing us partial English translations of these prison records from the original Gothic Danish. There are many codices in the documents that refer to specific penal texts that are still in the process of being translated or researched. Finally, we also acknowledge that our ability to engage with these persons, archives and secondary materials (via air travel, via the internet, via group video chats and phone calls) clarifies a great privilege that is dependent not only on the fact that we all have degrees which enable us to use institutional funds and technology, but also the happenstance of the time (2019) and place (the United States and its territory, the USVI) where movement and communication across space is possible in ways it has never been before. We note that four black women, all mothers with small children, doing this work together may have been somewhat impossible for past generations—we appreciate that we are the imagined of our mentors and elders.

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I. Through a Glass Darkly: Retracing Black Life in the Danish West Indies
By Tami Navarro

There is something to be said for serendipity. In May of 2019, I was scheduled to participate in a symposium at the University of Copenhagen entitled "Archival Encounters: Colonial Archives, Care and Social Justice." This symposium presented me with an ideal opportunity to introduce the work that my colleagues and I had been doing through our Virgin Islands Studies Collective (VISCO), and marked a moment in which I could engage with the penal records of the Queens of the Fireburn. At the time of this symposium, Heidi Bojsen, who had generously and diligently been working to translate these records into English, had only been able to work with one set of prison records, given the difficulties posed by the flourishes of colonial-era handwriting and outmoded turns of phrase. The record that had been completed was that of Queen Agnes, and I used this record in my lecture as a case study of the history we, as VISCO, are pushing against: The quantitative assessment of colonial subjects found in this prison record is in direct opposition to the more fully-human rendering we hope for—and seek to provide—through our work in the Virgin Islands. On the point of serendipity: As fate would have it, I was randomly assigned a 'queen' to engage with for this article several weeks after the symposium. It was, of course, the Virgin Islands woman whose life I had already begun thinking and writing about, Queen Agnes.

The prison record of Axeline Solomon (also known as Agnes) lists, as her property brought into incarceration, a single pair of earrings. In fact, all four (4) of the queens bring with them a pair of earrings (Mary, the leader of the group, also brings with her a ring). This banal, seemingly everyday, item of adornment—a pair of earrings—becomes significant in context: They each brought this jewelry with them to Denmark where they knew they were to be tried for crimes ranging from arson to murder. For these crimes, they were sentenced to death (sentences that were eventually commuted to hard labor). What did it mean that they each chose to bring an item of adornment, of beauty, with them on this journey that they knew could well end in their death? Why would they bring something so seemingly-frivolous? Perhaps a pair of earrings is all Agnes had in the way of material possessions, and she felt the need to have them with her. Perhaps she had no one she could give them to or entrust to keep them for her—although as the mother of three children, this explanation is unlikely. Perhaps, then, the explanation is a bit further afield, harder to pin down and certainly outside the domain of colonial archives. It may well be that these earrings made the journey from St. Croix to Copenhagen because they made their owner feel beautiful, or powerful, or both.

Like many girls born in the Virgin Islands, I had my ears pierced before I turned one year old: I have seen photos of myself as an infant, golden studs reflecting the glare of the sun. These earrings I have seen, but do not recall. The earrings I remember, the ones I can see clearly in my mind, are a small pair of braided gold hoops. My mother bought them for me from a store in Christiansted that was having a going out of business sale—even then, in the 1980s, gold was a luxury, although not yet as prohibitively expensive as it would become in later years. At any rate, the store was named Ay Ay Gold ("ay ay" after an indigenous, pre-Columbian, name for St. Croix) and stood just a few feet away from Fort Christiansvaern where unruly Africans (slaves and, later, colonial subjects) were whipped and jailed by Danish officials. I knew nothing of this history, nothing of this proximity to torture, punishment, and capture on the afternoon we purchased those earrings. Standing on the harbor and wearing my new earrings I knew only that I felt different, set apart somehow. Was it because the earrings had been expensive? I can't say, but I do know that this bit of adornment made me feel more comfortable taking up space, being seen.

I have entitled this essay "Through a Glass Darkly: Retracing Black Life in the Danish West Indies." This phrasing comes from the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Church in Corinth, where he writes, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians Chapter 13 verse 12). It is this project, of being *known*, that I take up in the remainder of this essay. For Black residents of the Danish West Indies, the islands that have been known as the United States Virgin

Islands since their sale and purchase by that country in 1917, this project has been a long and imperfect one. These subjects have often been *included* in colonial archives, but as backdrops or props that would serve to demonstrate wealth. In these images, Black subjects were seen, partially, but not known. The racist tropes that were the context for Black visibility in the records of the Danish West Indies precluded either any sense of interiority or dialogue (Image 1[i]). In what follows, I present competing representations of Black life in the former-Danish West Indies--one archival source which attempts to quantify the life and actions of a Queen of the Fireburn and another which attempts a more capacious remembrance of this Fireburn and its leaders. While neither of these detail *fully* the lives of these subjects, this exercise points the way—I argue—toward seeing Black life in these islands more clearly.

Denmark's colonial presence in the Caribbean extended from 1733 with the purchase of the islands of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix through their sale to the United States in 1917. During much of this time, as throughout the region, a system of plantation agriculture by enslaved laborers who were primarily cultivating and processing sugarcane was the cornerstone of these islands' wealth. It was not until 1848 that the system of slavery ended in the Danish West Indies. Although, it is of note that while Denmark announced the decision to end their participation in the slave market earlier, in 1792, they allowed what they termed a 10-year 'grace period'—a decade during which the slave population increased upward through what historian Neville Hall has described as "feverish importations" (Hall, 1992, p.3). On July 3, 1848 this unsustainable situation erupted in the form of a major slave rebellion on St. Croix, led by an enslaved worker named Moses Gottlieb—better known locally as General Buddhoe. Frustrated with having the date of their emancipation pushed further and further back, enslaved Africans marched to Fort Frederik, the Danish fort on the western end of the island and the counterpoint to Fort Christiansvaern, and demanded that then-Governor Peter Von Scholten grant them their freedom. This event ultimately forced von Scholten to declare an end to slavery in the Danish West Indies, although there is much scholarly debate over the extent to which his longtime mistress, a free colored woman named Anna Heegaard, influenced this decision to end the barbaric practice of enslavement in these islands.

Following this successful uprising and the abolition of slavery, workers who had been formerly enslaved remained tied by annual contracts to work on plantations for pitiably small sums of money and, as a result, rebelled against the Danish once more in 1878 during the 'Fireburn' (or 'Contract Day') rebellion on October 1, in which workers burned down plantations across the island and demanded fair pay for their labor. Importantly, this uprising was led by four Black women, who are remembered as the "Queens" of the Fireburn. These women were 'Queen' Mary Thomas, 'Queen' Agnes (born Axeline Solomon), 'Queen' Mathilde (Mathilde Mc Bean) and 'Queen' Bottom Belly (Susanna A. Abrahamson).

These women, the leaders of the Fireburn which would ultimately consume half the town of Frederiksted and over 50 plantation estates on St. Croix, would be captured and tried in Denmark for their participation in and leadership of this uprising. It is these prison records, this remembrance, to which I now turn. In the colonial record, the period of Agnes—or Axeline's—presence in Denmark was carefully documented and quantified. Danish prison records list her prisoner's number and the crimes with which she was charged, as well as detail her possessions at the time of capture. In this instance, the documents in the Danish archive attempt to provide a complete rendering of this subject: "One earring, one sprained foot…" This way of knowing is detailed, but far from all-encompassing. For comparison, consider one way in which her co-conspirator, "Queen" Mary Thomas is remembered—is known—in the US Virgin Islands. While a quantitative prison record also exists for "Queen" Mary she is remembered in story and song in the Virgin Islands as both a hero and an *ancestor*—that is, she is included in kin networks as a predecessor in the Virgin Islands. Beyond being known as a quantifiable entity, she is remembered as a foremother. For instance, in the fourth-grade children's textbook of Virgin Islands history entitled "Clear de Road" published in 1983, Queen Mary is situated as a leader of a communal revolt—the lyrics of a song which bear her name include "don't ask me nothing at all. Just pass me the match and oil," a set of commands that posit a situation in which Queen Mary and the hearers of this song engage in a joint enterprise for Black freedom over space and time. This song is sung by schoolchildren and professional musicians alike

across the Virgin Islands. This way of knowing, of engaging with previous generations of Virgin Islanders—figures like Queen Mary and Queen Agnes—is, I argue, a more complete way of situating these figures and engaging with Virgin Islands history.

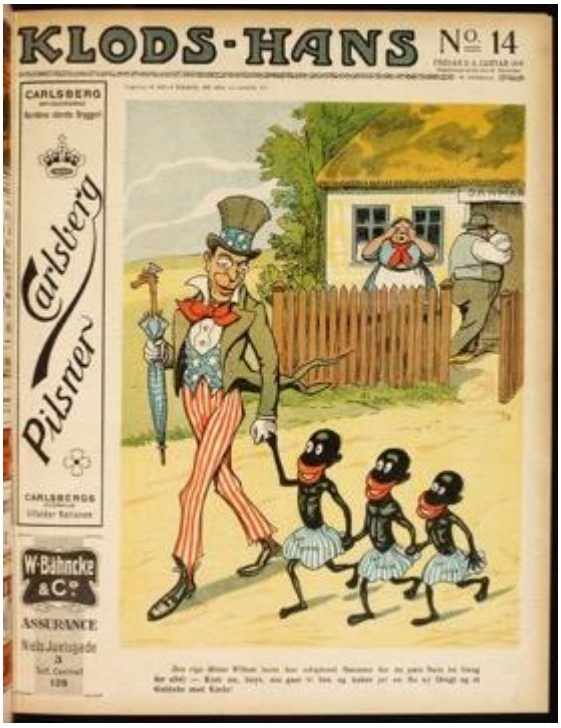

Figure 1. In this caricature from the magazine Klods-Hans, President Woodrow Wilson leaves with the three small islands in the form of three black boys, while the

In engaging with Danish archives we are confronted with racist representations of Black subjects, but also—for many Virgin Islanders—with the *generative* possibility of encountering community members and ancestors. This is the project I am pointing toward—the possibility of situating and experiencing archival material in different contexts. That is, how different it would be if such images were not just digitized by Danish institutions and *shared* with those in the Virgin Islands, but housed—and, importantly, situated there? Would figures like Queen Agnes be recognized as grandmothers, great aunts, crucial parts of their community? The removal of such objects from their context—the people and places which made them possible—is an act of erasure that continues even after attempts to repair this break with gestures such as the digitization of archival material.

This is where the question of social justice becomes central: In 2017, a group of four Black women from the Virgin Islands came together to form the Virgin Islands Studies Collective (VISCO). We formed this collective as a group of Black feminists to create a space in which we could both ask and attend to questions such as the one that has been my preoccupation in this essay: What would it mean to not just include, but center, Black life in the former Danish West Indies? What would it look like if these subjects were more fully known? To this point, one of our central planned interventions is the creation of a virtual museum, where archival material that is held in Danish archives and has recently been digitized can be housed. While having digital access to this material has been—and continues to be—important, we argue both that the way in which these documents are archived are outside of the frame of reference for Virgin Islanders—and that vital context that could be provided by Virgin Islanders is currently missing. Not just, for instance, the names and social locations of photographed subjects, but also larger cultural indicators. Does, for instance, a particular style of hair or pattern of clothing hold larger significance for these Black subjects? This need to contextualize archival material in ways that are accessible to the descendants of Black inhabitants of the Danish West Indies is a central concern of the Virgin Islands Studies Collective—and should be also for those concerned with the Danish colonial presence in the Caribbean and its continuing legacy.

As the Virgin Islands Studies Collective grounds itself in Black feminist theory and practice, it is fitting to turn here to the words of the Combahee River Collective, whose landmark Black feminist statement celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2018. In 1978, the members of this group wrote: “If Black women were free [and here I suggest a nuanced definition of ‘freedom’ that includes the recognition of one’s personhood] it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.” It is in this spirit that the VI Studies Collective seeks to center the lives and contributions of Black subjects in the space now called the US Virgin Islands.

II. I Too Am the Rebel Queen Mary
By Hadiya Sewer

Queen Mary, ah where you gon' go burn?
Queen Mary, ah where you gon' go burn?
Don't ask me nothin' at all. Just give me the match and oil.

If you were to ask me, "when did you first learn about the Rebel Queen Mary?", I would be unable to answer the question. As a young Afro Caribbean woman from St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands (formerly St. Jan, Danish West Indies), I learned about our Queens—Queen Mary, Queen Agnes, Queen Mathilde, and the lesser known Queen Susanna—as I became conscious of my own existence. Therefore, I have no recollection of a time before I was aware of Queen Mary Thomas, one of the primary leaders of the 1878 Labor Riot on St. Croix. The Queens who led this Black working-class uprising, also called "Fireburn", on October 1st, 1878 are enshrined in the collective consciousness of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands—St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix, and Water Island—as symbols of resistance against intersecting systems of oppression. I grew up listening to my mother playfully calling out, "Queen Mary, ah where you gon' go burn?" and in time I learned to respond, "Don't ask me nothin' at all. Just give me the match and oil." These lyrics echoed throughout our lives in both private and public spaces, namely at home, at school, and at public performances. Queen Mary Thomas is arguably one of the most iconic and impactful historical figures of our Danish West Indian past. Truthfully, the person who I am today could not have come into being without Queen Mary's existence, without Fireburn's occurrence. The Rebel Queen Mary is a constitutive figure in my consciousness, perhaps, in the psyche of all Virgin Islanders to varying degrees. She reaches through history and makes indelible marks on us.

Given U.S. Virgin Islanders limited access to our archives and the coloniality of archival production, we should not take our remembrance of Queen Mary Thomas for granted. My reading of the coloniality of archival production is informed by several of the essays in *Refiguring the Archive* (Hamilton, 2002)— namely Achille Mbembe's *The Power of the Archive and Its Limits* and Ann Laura Stoler's *Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance*. Mbembe and Stoler provide a reading of power and history that traces the relationship between archives and the state. Mbembe (2002, p. 23) writes, "On the one hand, there is no state without archives - without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state." For Stoler, archives are not merely repositories of source material. Archives are also monuments of state power, "intricate technologies of rule in themselves (Stoler, 2002, p. 87)." Therefore, it is important to pose a set of critical questions about Queen Mary Thomas, the archive, the history of Fireburn, and our affective relationship to her memory. Namely, how do Virgin Islanders pin our discursive location in history and how is Queen Mary in particular a constitutive figure in our consciousness? How do Virgin Islanders' commemoration of Queen Mary Thomas capitulate to and/or resist the colonial and imperial drives of the state? In short, how do the thoughts and actions of a Black, Antiguan born, Danish West Indian[ii] woman who lived in the 19th century fashion the individual and collective identities and ideologies of U.S. Virgin Islanders to this day? What mythos surrounds Queen Mary and what is the relationship between the symbolic capacity of the Queen Mary icon and the truth of her personhood, which includes, but of course, is not limited to, the facts of her life?

Her prison records indicate that Queen Mary was 40 years old at the time of her imprisonment. She came to St. Croix in 1869, one-year shy of a decade before Fireburn. Mary Thomas was an unwed mother to three children. She had three documented run- ins with the law. Her convictions include: 1) Participation in, plundering and arson during the Rebellion on St Croix in 1878, 2) Theft, and 3) the mistreatment of her child. She had one ring and one pair of earrings on her person at the time of her incarceration. She is hospitalized several times between 1882 and 1884 for fever, menstruation colic, chest pains, catarrh, and pyelitis. Queen Mary, like other prisoners in the Christianhavn women's prison in Copenhagen were graded on their conduct. While in prison, she corresponded with individuals by the name of Mrs. Wilhelmine Petersen and Mr. and Mrs. Larsen. In 1887,

Queen Mary was sent to Christiansted, St. Croix to serve the remainder of her sentence. These records reflect an objectifying, quantifying, colonial gaze. Why and how do we remember Queen Mary given Virgin Islanders' limited access to colonial archives?

My thoughts on our remembrance of Queen Mary are informed, in part, by Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (2012) *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.* Trouillot's arguments, "Remembering is not always a process of summoning representation of what happened," and "Human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators," challenge the notion that history is merely a composite for collective memory. Instead, he calls our attention to a non-linear notion of history that acknowledges the interconnectedness of both past and present. Trouillot's work on knowledge production and power reminds readers that history is produced in and outside of academia, with the history that is produced outside of the academy often being under theorized. The production of knowledge is also about processes of narrative creation, the development of political imaginaries, and the creation of the future. Given this understanding of history, our remembrance of the Rebel Queens reveals a great deal about who we are as U.S. Virgin Islanders—our histories, identities, episteme, and ontologies. Specifically, Queen Mary, both the person and the symbolic meaning attributed to her, represents a site of rupture in colonial ontologies and epistemologies and, therefore, we often invoke her in our challenging of hegemonic worldviews and practices.

Systems and techniques of domination—namely slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and hegemony—are racialized, gendered, sexual, and economic projects that are prefaced on the construction of a dehumanized "other". Sylvia Wynter (1984, 1995) notes that Western civilization articulates and imposes a series of hierarchized dichotomies to describe the social order—civilized/uncivilized, white/black, man/non-human, man/woman, rich/poor, colonizer/ colonized, Christian/non-Christian, and citizen/non-citizen. These epistemological frameworks are constrained by the binary construction of founding and liminal categories (Wynter, 1995). Founding categories are central to the discourse whereas liminal categories refer to the marginal and antithetical. Wynter also argues that the oppressive structures of our prevailing world order are rooted in dehumanizing behavior orienting narratives. Her seminal argument contends that our oppressive world structures are rooted in the overrepresentation of "Man", a specific prototype of being human in the West that attempts to eclipse "the human" (Wynter, 2003).

Queen Mary—a Black, working-class, incarcerated, colonized, unwed mother, and immigrant—is located on the intersection of multiple liminal categories. Sylvia Wynter's work poses the question can the hegemonic structure-maintaining process of juxtaposing founding and liminal categories in our discourses be transcended? Wynter does not answer this question for her interlocutors. However, Wynter (2003, p. 268) does offer the poignant argument, "One cannot 'unsettle' the coloniality of power without a re-description of the human outside of the terms of our own present descriptive statement of the human." Decoloniality requires new conceptions of the human, an epistemic break. In her time, Mary Thomas' willingness to risk her own life and freedom to set Frederiksted ablaze for a step towards racial and gendered economic justice, disrupted the efficacy of the plantation economy and the racist colonial order. Yet, "Fireburn" also shifts the imaginaries of U.S. Virgin Islanders. We are privileged to have counter-hegemonic Black heroines at the crux of our collective identity. Our commitment to the commemoration and representation of these Rebel Queens speaks to a desire for counter hegemonic behavior orienting narratives[iii], new descriptive statements of the human. Wynter (1970) reminds us that the decolonial project is also a humanization project. Queen Mary signifies a new humanism, one that may not even seem readily possible according to the logic of our prevailing world order, one where Black women are central to quests for freedom and humanization.

Commemorations of Queen Mary point to a new humanism in ways that often challenge the colonial order of things. For example, La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers' *I Am Queen Mary* monument in Copenhagen highlights 1) the importance of Black women's artistic and intellectual contributions to this world, which include but cannot be reduced to, disruptions of colonial space and 2) the potency of Queen Mary as a radical symbol.

The 23-foot monument, the first of a Black woman in Denmark, interrupts the silences that mask(ed) Denmark's colonial histories. Queen Mary, sitting on coral harvested by the enslaved people of the Danish West Indies, asks us to grapple with the violent traumas of our past and decide who we will be now and in the future. It seems fitting that a piece of this magnitude would also be the result of Afro Diasporic women's transnational collaboration, between Denmark and the U.S. Virgin Islands. A part of the art's genius lies, in part, in its representation of the malleability and elasticity of Queen Mary's image and legacy.

Figure 2. La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers. Photo Credit: Nick Furbo

The piece was created as a hybrid of the artists bodies and many students of Africana history can quickly recognize the similarities between Queen Mary's seating arrangement and Huey P. Newton of the Black Panther's Party's historic photograph. While some Virgin Islanders critiqued the subtle, or not so subtle, play with Black bodies, genders, histories, and narratives in this monument of our Rebel Queen, there is a truthfulness in it.

Whether it be through songs, paintings, film, re-enactments, history lessons, or the *I Am Queen Mary* statue, we create and recreate Queen Mary Thomas in our image. We opt to embody her. Perhaps, it is through Queen Mary that we learn, or in some cases remember, how to choose our freedom, visibility, and humanity in the face of the "matrix of domination"[iv]. In some ways this is a cautionary history lesson. Her imprisonment, and the death of her comrades, reminds us of the risks and limitations of subversion. They made the sacrifice nonetheless. Her narrative reminds us that epistemic ruptures are never clean breaks, as Sylvia Wynter (1995) writes. Fragments of the old hegemonic ways of being and knowing persist. So, there is also a paradox in our reverence of the Rebel Queens.

She expands our imaginaries and our relations are still fundamentally colonial. In the midst of continuous colonial subjection, Queen Mary Thomas reflects our unrealized desires for freedom against all odds. This is why she is our Queen. We map multiple layers of (im)possibility onto her symbolic person as we try to determine who we are becoming.

III. Enslaved to Enthroned: a personal reflection on the rebel Queen Mathilde McBean

By Tiphanie Yanique

To become a pageant queen, I had to do one thing very well. This thing was the curtsy.

I had learned the curtsy as a debutante months earlier. The VI version wasn't your run of the mill curtsy. The debutante had to keep her back straight, one foot perpendicular in front of the other, her head up, eyes forward, arms out and curved as if holding an extra large beach ball under each arm. Then the young woman performed a meticulously slow bending of the knees until one knee tapped the floor. It was best to wear a hooped princess dress of tulle and crinoline, which would poof around you, as if you were settling elegantly onto a cloud. A male escort held one hand to make sure you didn't topple over and smash your face.
Then back up, which was harder. This is where your young man had to give you a little tug to help you, because it was near impossible to get back up in heels. You had to do the curtsy without shaking, without needing your own hand to catch you. You had to do it slowly. Months later when I was in the beauty pageant, in the same dress I'd worn as a debutante, I was ready to do the curtsy on stage. But I had a problem. Another contestant before me had done the curtsy first. When it was my turn, I couldn't see the people, given the stage lights. But their teeth sucking was loud enough. As far as anyone could say, I was just copying the first girl.

Being in a pageant wasn't just a big deal for me. It was a big deal for a lot of people. In her book, *Queen of the Virgins,* Cynthia Oliver writes that pageants are "rehearsal for intraclass politics, the place where women of middle and upper classes have used their influence to solidify their place in local society" (2009, p. 4). I was the only girl competing to be queen of the school who was on scholarship. I was from Round da Field, a poor and often dangerous neighborhood. My school was Anglican, and I was Catholic. I was repping steel pan, which I performed for my talent, while other girls sang, danced or recited poetry. Pan was considered a carnival instrument, which in our society tended to mean that it was aggressive--masculine even, and certainly not sophisticated or feminine. Only one other girl in my entire school played pan--and she was running against me in the pageant. She'd chosen to sing an American R&B ballad by Mariah Carey or Whitney Houston--something considered ladylike. That she played pan at all was something that never made it to any part of her stage persona. Pan wouldn't have been representative of queenly aesthetics, which, as far as we young contestants could tell, were American and European based ideals of queenliness.

As for my part, I wasn't representative of the elite school I went to at all. Our principal's slogan for each student was: "You are what you are because you are All Saints Cathedral School." Every student had to be crisp and coiffed even on a regular day. Whomever won the queen pageant would be "Miss All Saints" and thus the example to all other students on what All Saints was and could be. In parades, Miss All Saints would wear a sash and crown and the school's name on her chest. At minor events like a sports game, the queen would preside in regalia. At major events in the community, like meetings of the territories actual legislature, Miss All Saints would be there--crown and sash with her school's name on it. Everything the queen did would be in the school newsletter, and very often would also end up in the islands' major newspaper, too.

Vapid as we all know pageants can be, I knew I was more than just me standing up there. Yes, I'd been a debutante, and it was true that I knew (thanks to my grandmother) the difference between a grapefruit spoon and a teaspoon. But I was also the girl without a professional pageant coach; a girl who cursed, and fought in school; the girl the boys with the prestigious last names would never date. I was on a full scholarship, even though the school had no scholarship program---leading me to conclude that I may have been the only one on scholarship in the whole school. I was offering another narrative of what our school was, which made me something of a rebel. And I was on stage now trying to be the school's queen.

Which brings me to our rebel queens. In the Virgin Islands we already had another narrative of queendom—one not squarely about pageantry, but about protest. I was raised, as everyone raised in the Virgin Islands is, on the

story of the queens of the 1878 labor revolt known as the Fireburn. Queens of that time were delegated by the workers on the plantations as people to perform religious and cultural ceremonies, go to with complaints, trust with secrets. Mathilde was the youngest of the rebel queens—not much older than I was when I ran in that pageant. She and her co-queen, Agnes, were both in their early twenties—though Mathilde may have been even younger than that. The elders, Susannah and Mary, were in their 40s. Whereas Mary was born in Antigua, Mathilde and Agnes were born and raised in the Virgin Islands—and when we talk about queendom as representing, we must think about what these women were representing.

Born and raised in St. Croix, Mathilde would have seen much of her family impacted by the meager pay for their hard work. Indeed, the elders of Mathilde's family would have been born into slavery. They would be able to clarify how much this new "free" working situation was actually akin to slavery itself. Mathilde would have been a leader in the Fireburn not just for herself, but for her whole community.

The day of the rebellion was a day off. Usually, it was even a day of revelry. This day in 1878, however, was more quiet than normal—we know now it was because there was a labor revolt afoot. In the image we have of the time, Queen Mary, the leader, looks villainous, worthy of the hard labor she and the other queens are sentenced to for life. Nothing of her personhood is in that image.

Well, nothing except the torch raised in one hand, and a machete in the other. But in reality, this was supposed to be a day of leisure. We can imagine that the four queens may have dressed as they normally would that day—in their good dancing clothes, their elaborate head ties, their rings and, of course their best gold earrings. And wouldn't this have been especially true of Mathilde and her age mate Agnes? Perhaps the machetes and torches would have been hidden away where the women could meet and gather them together. The archive does put at least three of them in the same place, where it was said they together killed two armed soldiers. When the queens picked up the torches to burn, they may have looked, well, beautiful. Mathilde was a young woman in the prime of her life. When things turned ugly, how could she not have looked like any queen leading troops into battle might?

By Mathilde's time, white upper class women on the islands had already codified white femininity as the only beauty allowed expression in polite society. Back in 1786, there had even been an ordinance established in the Virgin Islands which disallowed brown and black women from being adorned, because wearing lace and chintz[v], wearing hoop dresses, wearing jewelry—brought too much aesthetic attention to non-white women. The point of jewels and fancy clothes on a woman was to draw attention to her beauty; and brown-skinned women were catching too much undeserved attention for their beauty--who the hell did these brown-skinned women think they were? How dare they rival for aesthetic attention!

It's true that I wasn't thinking about Mathilde the evening that I was in that pageant. And even in thinking of her now, I have to imagine things, because the archive is spare. But she and I would not have been so different in our positionality. She was one of the black women allowed tulle and lace. She worked in the cane fields--which was a hard labor job--a masculine job. Back on stage, I knew I didn't have a chance if this whole pageant thing was only about beauty. I wasn't considered the prettiest girl, or the most refined. But when it came to that curtsy I had a rebel-girl secret: I could do the curtsy without a man to help me.

After the sucking of teeth that told me I hadn't differentiated myself enough from the previous contestant, I stepped away from my escort and walked to the front edge of the stage. I sank down slowly and carefully. I waited there at the floor, looking to my left and my right, probably appearing dramatic, but also, gathering my strength. One person shouted, "She can't get up!" I remember thinking the same. But I put my arms out for balance, and raised myself back up slowly. People started screaming. And it was the strength that I really think everyone cheered me on for. "She win!" someone shouted out. I had kept myself straight, elegant and strong as a gleaming blade.

And then I did win. Really. Crown and sash and the whole thing. I became a queen.

The nature of pageant queendom would seem to have very little to do with the nature of rebel queendom. But VI oral tradition records in song and story that at least some of the rebel queens appeared in carnival processions—in fancy clothes, with elegant fans. There is no stretch between this image and the image of our modern day pageant queens—who process during our Carnival parades and often with elegant fans. Perhaps pageantry isn't so divorced from revolution. To become a plantation queen also would have meant being raised above other woman. It would have been competitive. Mathilde, called Bottom Belly in our calypsos for generations, wasn't even the original Bottom Belly--that was more likely to have been Susannah. Was there animosity between the eldest, Susannah, and the force-ripe Mathilde? How did Mathilde, so young, and also from Christiansted, become a queen of a town that wasn't her birth town, Frederiksted? The archive gives some evidence, but I still must go to my own experience of being from the wrong town, of being a young woman from the Virgin Islands, trying to represent.

Figure 3. Wrist of a VI woman with typical and traditional VI jewelry. Photo Credit: La Vaughn Belle

I know first-hand how ugly things could get between women who wanted to represent. The girl, in fact, who had curtsied before me, had been one of my best friends, but competing against each other frayed our friendship. Many years later, another girl who had competed for the title that night, confessed that she had pretended to be our school's queen at a formal function I hadn't known about. The queendom, after all, was about representing. And to be sure, not everyone thought I was a fit representative. The women I was on stage with may have been my friends before the pageant, but that didn't mean they thought I was the right class, the right anything. Which brings me back to Mathilde—and her co-queens.

The four queens were queens of different plantations, but the connection of friendship would have been particularly meaningful for Mathilde once she and the other queens were taken from St. Croix and jailed in Denmark. Like me, Mathilde was Catholic and also a single mother to three children; marriage being perhaps too expensive or too unnecessary for her. Being unwed may have been normal, but it may have made Mathilde, the lone Catholic among the queens, an outsider in her own religious community. Still, after the Fireburn, Mathilde was incarcerated in a non-Catholic country. It must have been lonely. Denmark wouldn't have allowed her rosary beads for prayer. The archive says Mathilde had nothing but her earrings. Likely those same gold earrings she wore on the day of the Fireburn.

In the archives, however, we also see that when in jail in Denmark, Mathilde and Agnes each suffer, for the same exact days, of a headache. We readers know that faking sick has often been used as a form of rebellion by incarcerated people. Here the two women seem to be conspiring. Born around the same time on the same island, they would have been contemporaries, and yes, maybe even friends. There are Agnes and Mathilde getting together in the infirmary to talk or conspire. Or maybe just to be with a friend from home for a few days without the burden of hard labor. I am imagining their friendship as an earned thing, and coming from their commonality.

Which brings me to something the rebel queens, and maybe all queens, have in common. We often think that the rebel queens would never have been aesthetic queens. But the archive may give us another possible narrative. In jail, *all* the queens had their earrings. This adornment seems important. These were women who were laborers, but still women who wanted to be treated as something treasured; who wanted to treat themselves. These women took something beautiful to prison with them. Indeed, the rebel queens wore their gold earrings while they burned the plantations down. This was a little bit of beauty even as the queens did the hard work of revolt, and later of prison life. Something akin, if I may be allowed to imagine it, to my curtsy.

We know that when pageant queens rep their schools and their islands, it is a social act. The rebel queens were not dissimilar. Our Fireburn queens remain representative of St. Croix, of the Virgin Islands. They are our royalty, with all the connotations of power, and, yes, of beauty.

IV. A Queen by Another Name: Susanna Abrahamson aka Bottom Belly
Or
I Am My Own Empire: Susanna Abrahamson aka Bottom Belly
Or
Queen Susanna and the Bottomless Imaginary of a Black Queen
Or
Queen Susanna and the Bottomless Imperial Imaginations of a Black Queen
By La Vaughn Belle

My mother named me after a queen. She told me she had seen the name of a carnival queen in a newspaper in Trinidad and had liked it. I had forgotten to ask her if she had seen the name and held on to it, claiming it from then to be mine. Was I in her belly yet? Was I even a thought yet? Were there qualities about this queen she hoped I would embody? Or was it just the name, its look and its sound that drew her to place it upon me? My mother is no longer here for me to ask her these questions and it didn't occur to me until much later in life that these were questions I might have even wanted answered. Hence this compact story of how I got my queen name was something I did not always know. But what I did learn very early on growing up in the Virgin Islands, first on St. Thomas and later on St. Croix, is that our queens were different from the ones in storybooks that lived in castles. Those queens were born. Our queens are made. Whether they be queens of pageants, carnivals, labor revolts or slave rebellions, through your own fashioning, determination, your own work and imagination you could lead yourself into a realm and become the kind of queen that was impossible to dethrone and impervious to invasion. Our queen means: you are your own empire. You rule yourself, your body, your destiny and even when that wasn't entirely true due to history and circumstance, you believed it to be true, you moved as if it were true because you understood that life is the realm of fiction anyway.

Although not identified in the prison records we know through the collective memory that Susanna was the only one of the women known as the Queens of the Fireburn to have had another moniker. Monikers are so common in the Caribbean that even monikers have monikers aka home names, nicknames, dread names and street names. Sometimes they are self-inscribed, but mostly they are given to you by way of your appearance, your demeanor or some idiosyncrasy of either. If you are big-boned they call you Mega, if you have a proclivity to steal, Repo, glamorous and good-looking, Hollywood, vibezie and dreaded, One Loc, and so on. So although I don't know for sure, Susannah aka Bottom Belly quite possibly had a belly that was as big as her bottom, whose girth may likely have been seen as part of her power, part of her ability to claim and take up space. Or maybe it referred to something else. Maybe her belly was a barometer. Maybe it referred to a fearlessness that had no

limit, no bottom, no end. Maybe this bottomlessness is what appears in the records as waywardness[vi] and prone to criminality, but was really her attempt at sovereignty.

Susanna was the oldest of the Queens. She was 48 years old at the time the prison records were created in 1882 which places her at the time of the 1878 Fireburn at approximately 44/45, the age I am now. She is documented to be the mother of 9 children, unmarried and with the longest rap sheet of the group. At 19 she is thieving and 23 fighting, 25 insubordinate and 26 vagrant. By 44 she graduates to plundering and arson aka the Fireburn. And if we understand her plundering and arson as a total rejection of the oppressive system that had been superimposed upon them after the abolition of slavery, what can we then understand vagrancy and theft to be in this same system? Can you thieve what was first stolen from you? Could she have the right to exist outside the plantation labor system? Did she have a right to live an unlabored life?

We see in the records that for their attempts to answer these questions Susanna along with the other Queens were sentenced first to death in 1881. This was not unexpected. There were twelve men who when asked about their role in the revolt of the plantation system boldly and courageously confirmed their participation which resulted in their swift execution. John Adams, John Charles, James de Silva, Augustus George, Thomas Graydon, Joseph Harrison, Samuel Henry, Henry James, Robert James, John Lewis, Joseph Paris and Daniel Phillips were not venerated in song, portrayed in paintings, reenacted in sculpture or the streets. Instead they have been encased in the archives and forgotten. So too have the other men whom in their equivalence could be seen as the Kings of the Fireburn- James Emmanuel Benjamin, Joseph Bowell and Edvard Lewis. Although they, like the women, were also tried and sent to prison in Denmark, their existence in the archives did not guarantee ascendance into the realm of the remembered. To do that one had to graduate into mythology, become a part of the memory of many, the memory of we. There is a distillation that happens in this process however. Dates, names, places and other particulars become rinsed away and what remains are symbols, open and ample for projections and interpretations. So Susanna Abrahamson, Axeline Solomon, Mary Thomas, Mathilde McBean and Rebecca Frederik, noted together as the “Black Amazons”[vii], in this process of mythologizing, five queens become four and four become a trinity, a memory of we. Likewise when the Danish government mints a coin in 1907 to highlight their three island colonies we project our memory of we onto it. This coin that depicts three nearly naked Greek antiquity styled women, each holding an item to symbolize the essence of the colonial value of each island, our mythology and imaginary transformed it. We redirected the current of their currency and superimposed our Fireburn queens because our queens are fashioned from the belly of our own bottomless imaginations.

This would not be the first time that we could transform the meaning of what black women's bodies could be. By the measures of the colonial system black women’s bodies meant two things: laborers and breeders of more laborers. So there is an irony when we look at the prison records and see that their punishment for the Fireburn after their death sentences were commuted is hard labor. These women were cane cutters, their lives spent working in the times of day when the sun burnishes, in labor that is oppressively monotonous and physically compromising. In effect, their lives had already been full of hard labor. And so one wonders what kind of labor was harder than cane cutting? The foundations of the buildings and towns had long since been built by previous hard laborers, the enslaved that were taken from the western coast of Africa who were forced to harvest coral stones from the sea. Their labor involved standing naked in the ocean at low tide, but sometimes dangerously not, and with certain sudden variations between the blistering sun and the biting cold breeze whipping off the sea top. So in effect a sentence of hard labor seems like a redundancy. But the Queens had transformed the meaning of their bodies into something else, their own empire. For this crime, they were not executed, perhaps fearing martyrdom. Instead they among many others were hidden away in prison for years after the Fireburn, signaling that the prison records can also be seen as a forensic record. We can see them as evidence of why the British Consul intervened, worried for their own immigrated subjects, like Queen Mary from the British ruled Antigua (Tyson, 1984). They complained that the Danish crown was violating recognized human rights and that you could not simply hold people indefinitely without a trial. But maybe what they most feared was that the

injustice was too obvious, too open and uncloaked in law. Indeed what they probably most feared is what all colonialists feared - *rebelirium*. From Queen Breffru and the Akwamu people who in 1733 chose a fighting death instead of slavery in St. John to the multi-nationed people in Haiti who waged war on the French for their freedom, what colonialists most feared is not just rebellion, but how it inspires more rebellion, leaping like fire to other islands, consuming its inhabitants like a righteous plague. So the Danes hoped that by quarantining the Queens, first for years in the Fort in Frederiksted and even for some more years across the Atlantic in Copenhagen that they could contain what the Queens inspired. They could not. The transmutation had already begun and the Queens encoded embers into our memory of we.

Figure 4. Danish West Indian coin minted in 1907.

Figure 5. Taken from the Amsterdam News in 1973 of a float in the West Indian Day parade in Brooklyn.

What we can learn from these women who emerge from the unremembered is the possibility and promise in their declaration of sovereignty. Bodies destined for hard labor, yet forced to sit idle in prison demonstrate that their value transcended the service of the colonial system. We see how they stand or perhaps more radically sit, as does the figure in the monument *I Am Queen Mary*, as a symbol in direct opposition to the colonial empire. She is a sitting Queen, a black woman barefoot and in workers clothes, with workers tools but upon her command they become liberatory. She sits unlabored, unfettered announcing I Am Queen Mary, I Am Queen Agnes, I Am Queen Mathilde and I Am Queen Susanna- I am my own empire. This declaration reverberates across time and space and becomes a guidepost to ask new questions of the archives, questions that may not have even occurred to us yet that we want answered.

Virgin Islands Studies Collective (VISCO)

La Vaughn Belle *makes visible the unremembered. She is a visual artist working in a variety of disciplines that include: video, performance, painting, installation and public intervention projects. She explores the material culture of coloniality and her art presents countervisualities and narratives. She has exhibited in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe in institutions such as the Museo del Barrio (NY), Casa de las Americas (Cuba), the Museum of the African Diaspora (CA) and Christiansborg Palace (DK). Her work has been featured in a wide range of media including:* The NY Times*,* Politiken*,* VICE*,* The Guardian*,* Time magazine*,* Caribbean Beat*, the* BBC *and* Le Monde*. She is the co-creator of* I Am Queen Mary*, the artist-led groundbreaking monument that confronted the Danish colonial amnesia while commemorating the legacies of resistance of the African people who were brought to the former Danish West Indies. She holds an MFA from the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, Cuba, an MA and a BA from Columbia University in NY. Her studio is based in the Virgin Islands.*

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[i] This image is not part of the penal records of the Queens of the Fireburn, but instead appears in a print publication held in the Danish National Archives. I include this image in order to demonstrate the troubling representations of Black subjects both in archival records and in Danish print culture more generally.

[ii] I do not know whether or not Queen Mary Thomas would have identified as Danish West Indian.
Here, I use the term Danish West Indian to highlight her positionality as a Black colonized subject who was living and working in the Danish West Indies at the time of the revolt and her subsequent arrest.

[iii] In a 2006 interview with Greg Thomas, Sylvia Wynter spoke at length about Michel Foucault's conception of truth and "behavior orienting schemas". In Wynter's work, narratives, specifically conceptions of the human, condition us towards certain behaviors and (im)possibilities. Decolonization, therefore, requires new ideas of what it means to be human that might orient humans towards liberation rather than operating in the interest of "Man", the descriptive statement of the human that Wynter often theorizes.

[iv] See Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) pivotal text, "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment" for a detailed explanation of the "matrix of domination", a term that describes the interconnected nature of race, gender, class and positions of marginalization and/or privilege.

[v] The reference to the restrictions placed on the dress of the free colored women is from Elizabeth Rezende's unpublished PhD dissertation entitled, *Cultural Identity of the Free Colored In Christiansted*, *St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1800-1848*, 1998.

[vi] I use this word wayward in the same manner in which Saidiya Hartman uses it in her book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019).

[vii] This expression of the women as Black Amazons comes from Issac Dookhan's *History of the Virgin Islands of the United States* (1994, p. 231). He lists all five women in this description. There is no prison record for Rebecca Frederik as she was not sent to Denmark.

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Lowering the Gaze

- The Acropodium in *I Am Queen Mary*

Abstract

This article is written by one of the co-creators of the monumental public sculpture entitled I Am Queen Mary *that was done in collaboration with Jeannette Ehlers. Inaugurated on March 31, 2018 the project is the first collaborative sculpture to memorialize Denmark's colonial impact in the Caribbean and those who fought against it. The essay traces the beginning of the collaboration as a transatlantic conversation that prompted the development of two separate ideas and articulates how the monument represents a point of convergence of the artistic practices of both Belle and Ehlers. Moreover, the essay highlights how the conjoining of the original monument projects created various conversations and tensions around colonial structures and visibility. By entering the work through its coral stone base, it uses the acropodia as a conceptual framework to discuss the hidden infrastructures of coloniality and how - through lowering the gaze and other sensorial shifts - a new kind of embodied knowledge can be gained. The article employs Kevin Quashie's ideas around the aesthetics of quiet as a way to not only think differently about resistance and blackness as only exterior phenomena, but to consider the power and complexity of interiority. By extension, offering up a similar lense to view the inner life of coloniality, the article discusses how through the acropodia in* I Am Queen Mary *the invisible structures and labor of not only colonial systems, but the monument itself, can be made transparent.*

Keywords: *I Am Queen Mary*, monuments, public art, Danish West Indies, acropodia, coral stones, decolonial

On a crisp sunny day in what looks and feels like a park I meet in St. Croix for the first time with Helle Stenum, a Danish researcher and lecturer in migration studies, to discuss some preliminary ideas of a collaborative project around the colonial history between the Virgin Islands and its former and longest colonizer - Denmark. This park, located alongside the harbor of Christiansted, a town named after a Danish king, is currently under the auspices of the United States National Park Service. The expansive perfectly cut lawn and tree-lined walkway flanked with wooden benches sanitize what was once a military complex of Danish colonial buildings that included: a scale house, a customs house, a warehouse, a slave auction block (although flattened now to a parking lot), a Steeple building (although no longer functioning as a chapel) and a fortress replete with cannons and a dungeon and a (now hidden away) whipping post. Helle and I sit on a bench that faces the ocean, faces the dock that for centuries ferried goods and people that were classified as goods all at the behest of Danish industry and expansion. It's a few years before the upcoming 100-year anniversary of the 1917 sale and transfer of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States and in 2014 Helle's ideas have crystallized around how one might commemorate such an occasion. She proposes a transatlantic conversation through exhibitions and other programs to be simultaneously housed inside the West Indian warehouse in Copenhagen and the one in Christiansted that we can see in our view. She is talking to me because I am an artist that has been working and thinking about

coloniality and colonial structures for several years now and have done previous collaborative projects in Denmark.[i] She has also spoken to Jeannette Ehlers, a Danish artist of Trinidadian descent who has also been working in a similar trajectory across the Atlantic producing projects that interrogate Danish amnesia around their colonial history. Helle proposes that Jeannette and I each develop a memorial, one in Denmark and one in St. Croix, a gesture that would later lead to the erection of a collaborative monument - *I Am Queen Mary* - whose first iteration occurs in Copenhagen in March 2018.[ii]

Figure 1. Image of the base and figure during the installation of *I Am Queen Mary* at the former Danish West Indian warehouse in Copenhagen, March 28 2018. Photo Credit: Michael K. Wilson

On a painfully cold morning, days before Easter, days before the centennial year would end, days before *I Am Queen Mary* would be inaugurated, on this snow blanketed morning there were two fully realized sculptures that had not yet become one. The two pieces made in strikingly different ways and from polar opposite materials stood in the fabricator's warehouse on the outskirts of Copenhagen ready to make their journey to the warehouse that stored goods that came from the former Danish West Indies. The large seated female figure had been glued to a peacock chair and recently repainted black. Remnants of the woeful green iteration, the earnest attempt to appear like aged bronze, were visible in the crevices of her skirt folds, arms and feet and looked almost intentional. But there was no more time to debate if a patina bronze effect could be achieved and if it was even desired or necessary. In a final and contested decision, she would be black, painted with paint mixed with plastic that would make her impenetrable to the elements. Although weighing less than 200 pounds, milled out of large chunks of what is known commercially as Styrofoam, she was light for a sculpture of that size, able

to be lifted by less than 10 of us. But despite being relatively lightweight she was too big for the warehouse and the door couldn't open to get her out and a beam prevented her from being placed horizontally. It took manipulating her awkwardly and precisely to a 30-degree angle to be able to open and move her through the large garage doors and place her on a flatbed. Strapped in and driven cautiously it was an amazing sight - a colossal black figure sailing through a sea of white snow. As we got closer to the city, people stopped and stared, took pictures and the excitement grew.

With much less drama the companion piece had been wrapped in plastic sheets and placed inside a large trailer quietly arriving beforehand. A structure made of coral stones that many weeks before had been shipped across the Atlantic. Months before that I, along with my studio assistant, Ralph Motta, had dug them out of the ground from my property in Christiansted and carried them back to my studio to be crated for shipping. And years before that (a couple hundred or so) they had been cut out of the ocean by people originally from the western coast of Africa who were brought to labor in the Danish claimed islands in the Caribbean sea. Haagensen, a Danish planter and slave owner described the harvesting process in his journal:

> Those seastones are collected from the reefs that surround nearly the entire island; this makes things much easier for those plantations located near a beach […] The reefs that grow from out of the sea produce a never-ending, limitless quantities of limestone. Just as fast as it is removed, it grows back again. And it is quite convenient to gather because the reef extends above the surface of the sea, with the result that the slaves can stand on it with the water not rising above their feet, except at high tide when it reaches to their thighs and often to their midsections. For that reason, one waits for the low tide and calm weather to undertake this work. The sea is then calm. On such a day, more stones can be cut and gathered than on two other days. When the weather is good, one need not worry that one's slaves will get drowned or hurt. The slaves are not unaccustomed to standing naked the whole day long in the sea gathering stones, although when it is windy, it becomes very cold (Haagensen, 1758/1995, pp. 9-10).

In addition to describing the process of harvesting the coral stones, Haagensen also describes the process of making the lime, a binding substance of the stones and bricks made by burning the corals. His description of the labor makes visible in the records what is often invisible in the structures, the perilous labor of African bodies that have built these societies, the veritable foundation of great wealth and industry. But as seemingly descriptive as Haagensen's writings are, there is so much that is still unseen. How did the workers decide which corals to use? How did they get the stones out of the ocean and from the ocean to the land? How did they protect their hands and feet? Did one have to be a good swimmer or be able to hold your breath for long periods? How did their god beliefs inform their labor, or trauma, or joy, or fear, or a myriad of other emotions and positions? There is a set of skills and knowledge present in the work that remains undocumented and subaltern, revealing the tacit nature of the master narrative often dominant in the archives. For Haagensen corals are "limitless" resources and he uses words like "convenience" to describe their availability. He describes the enslaved as not being "unaccustomed" to such work further revealing the biases of his circumstance.

As problematic as it is to see human beings as another kind of *natural resource* to be extracted, it is part of the logic embedded inside colonial infrastructures and development. In that way the journey the enslaved Africans made centuries before is mirrored in the journey of their afterlives in the form of the coral stones back across the Atlantic. The stones, however, arrived in Denmark much later than anticipated. The expected one-month journey tripled due to customs delays and storms. We had hoped to align the unveiling with the 2017 anniversary of the day the Fireburn[iii] began- October 1st. However, the late arrival of the corals pushed us to consider showing the sculpture with an empty base, filling them with the corals later. We had to confront the reality of what that would mean, what it would lack, how different the project would be without its other half.

We opened our calendars and looked forward for another meaningful date and landed on March 31st, Transfer Day. This wasn't the kind of day we were looking for. Transfer Day stood in direct opposition to what the Fireburn on Contract Day meant. Yet, we realized that there was a possibility to transform the colonial origination of that

day in the same way that the Fireburn had transformed the unfair and oppressive terms of Contract Day. We also imagined that we could stall, and perhaps permanently halt, the closure of the Danish-described "dark chapter" that the end of the Centennial year foreshadowed. We hoped to transfer the spirit of the Fireburn and burn out some of the pain of being conferred from one colonial power to another without consent or consultation. And besides, it would also be Easter. This happenstance seemed like a meaningful and important sign of renewal and rebirth.

The coral stones created a space for another kind of renewal, a continuation and an access to another kind of knowledge. Shortly after they arrived we had the difficult task of cleaning them. They were full of dirt, cement and mold that had developed in their months crated at sea. We rallied assistance from Nina Cramer and Michael Wilson who both had been working on the project with us in varying capacities of scholarly and logistical support.[iv] Additionally, Roger Matthiesen, a member of parliament who I had met at our presentation of the project at a Black Lives Matter meeting joined us that day. While handling and cleaning the corals he commented with an astute poetics that the coral stones were like the "cotton fields" of the sea. The sharp corals were injurious, leading one to imagine incredulously how those who had originally harvested them managed to do so without the protection of gloves. Roger and Michael also commented on the sensorial whispers of the stones for they spoke not only to the touch, but the smell of the ocean seeped out, and the waves lapping the coral reefs echoed from a distance. The hands of the bodies that had stood naked the whole day long gathering stones were reaching back too- we could feel them.

This communion in the ritual of cleaning the coral reminded me of when I would watch my father, an Anglican priest, enact the ritual of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. During the ceremony Jesus avows to Peter that "unless I wash you, you have no part with me". The washing represents a pedagogy of doing, an access to a kind of knowing and the axis in which the awareness of one's own positionality could be more fully understood. It is embodied knowledge that often fills the gaps and silences of colonial archives. The act of doing and *doing again*, reenacting past events, actions and positionalities activates a space of possibility and becoming.

Reenactment has been a central part of the process in *I Am Queen Mary*. Both Jeannette's and my body were separately scanned as we recast ourselves in Huey P. Newton's iconic image in a peacock chair with a sword and a rifle. Inserting our bodies into the history of the Black Panthers was a transnational connection to other resistance movements while centering a female figure. We later created a digital composite of our bodies signaling a hybridization of not just our bodies, but our nations and narratives. This hybrid was used to create an allegorical portrait of Mary Thomas, one of the leaders of the 1878 *Fireburn* labor revolt in the former Danish West Indies. It is an individual and joint reenactment, additionally invoked through the title *I Am Queen Mary,* as the viewer is invited to situate themselves inside this history.

Although it's most obvious in the figure, reenactment is also a part of the coral stones in which embodiment occurs on multiple levels. The stones embody various types of sensorial reenactments: tactile, kinetic, sonic and structural. Taken from the ruins of colonial buildings they are reenacted as a new kind of foundation in an art historical context and open up possibilities of revealing the invisible colonial infrastructure.

I Am Queen Mary represents an intersection of the trajectory of two parallel artistic practices occurring on different sides of the Atlantic. Our positionality and relationship to power along those axis points was complicated by our shared and unshared colonial histories. This is evidenced in the different ways we engage with violence through Jeannette's *Whip It Good* performance and my *Cuts and Burns* series, her whipping black charcoal onto a white canvas and me cutting and burning into white paper. Further evidence is our previous performance video works of our bodies in colonial spaces: my S*omebody's Been Sitting in My Chair, Somebody's Been Sleeping in My Bed* (2011) in which I reenact the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* in a plantation great house (today functioning as the Whim Plantation Museum) and her video performance *Black Magic in the White House* (2009) simulated inside the Danish colonial mansion Marienborg (today functioning as the home of

the Danish prime minister). Other points of connection are the ways we have both used our family histories in our works to challenge the supposed objectivity of colonial histories and the different ways we have tried to deal with displacement, loss and fragmentation. Jeannette's attraction to Huey P. Newton and other icons of Blackness was often mediated in her video and photo work. It comes very much out of her Afro-Danish experience and the need to connect to Blackness both as a response to the lack of a physical black community in Denmark, and as a tool of resistance to living in a country where Danishness was defined by whiteness. That erasure of self and the violence implicit is matched in the violence of *Whip It Good*. Differently, on my side of the Atlantic, living in both the real and symbolic violence of colonial structures with towns named after Danish monarchs, the colonial forts masking as parks and the sugar mills scattered across the landscape like aged tombstones, I was compelled to look for the hidden narratives inscribed in these spaces and subvert their colonial power.

Figure 2. *Trading Post,* La Vaughn Belle 2015. Reclaimed coral stones cut by enslaved Africans, encased in plexiglass, 36"x18"x18" Photo Credit: Tamia Williams

Our different positionalities are also evident in how we originally responded to Helle's invitation to develop a monument. I envisioned a monument around an idea of a column (or columns) of the coral stones I found outside my studio. I marveled how their flat edges signaled that someone's hand had marked them, and wanted to work with both the beauty and the tragedy of how they got there. In some ways they looked like readymades, but unlike Duchamp's readymades in which the artistic gesture was the significant act, suppressing or even canceling out the history of how the object came to be, I was starting with the narrative of the object coupling it with the artistic gesture of assemblage. Entitled *Trading Post*, I assembled the stones in a structure made of plexiglass, exposing the hands of the enslaved Africans that labored them out of the ocean to form the foundations of the colonial era buildings. It was a plinth, but what stood on top would be the discourse created, an acropodium. In Greece acropodia were often used to add monumentality to temple settings and mausoleums. In this case I

wanted it to add monumentality to the people whose labor was forced, whose survival miraculous and whose non-survival noteworthy. *Trading Post* was a place where value was declared, both in the economic framework of a colonial trading zone and as a plinth in an art historical context.

Jeannette had also been thinking about value and monumentality when she first envisaged placing a statue of a large black woman to counter Michelangelo's *David* on the outside of the Danish West Indian warehouse in Copenhagen. Her proposal aimed at counteracting the dominance of Eurocentrism in both the historical Danish narrative and the larger art historical one represented in what is called the Royal Cast collection, currently housed inside the colonial warehouse. It encompasses over 2000 replicas of sculptures from Greek antiquity to the Renaissance. The figure would be an interpretation of a promotional image she created for her solo exhibition in which she recast the character of her performance, *Whip It Good*, using the iconic Huey P. Newton image of him seated in a peacock chair with a rifle and spear in either hand. The counter-narrative significance of this gesture created inside the Royal Cast collection would be extended into the public realm. Helle later suggested that Queen Mary would be an ideal figure to pay homage to as it would utilize another mythic and historical figure in a similar way that *David* engendered both qualities. Queen Mary would also be a more direct link to the resistance movements in the Caribbean.

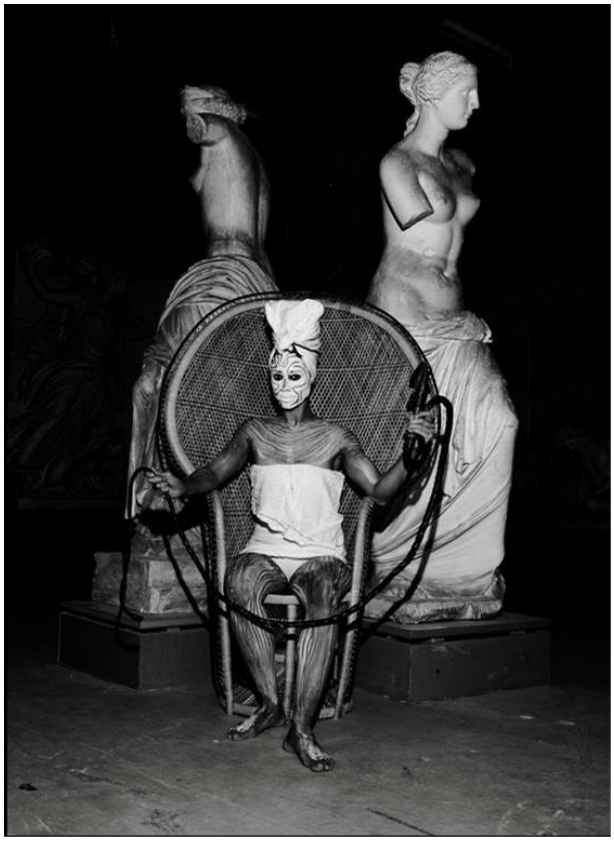

Figure 3. Jeannette Ehlers, c-print from recordings of the performance *Whip It Good* in the Royal Cast Collection, Copenhagen, 2014. Photo Credit: Casper Maare. Courtesy of the artist.

However, when the two projects became one a new set of tensions arose around visibility and infrastructure. The design of *Trading Post* was influenced by the desire for the monument to function as a site-specific counter to the *David* sculpture that was already positioned outside the colonial warehouse in Copenhagen. It's the reason *I Am Queen Mary* is the colossal size of 24 ft as she matches and slightly surpasses him in height. However, the aims of the coral stones, designed to showcase the invisible structures of colonialism, were challenged by its dual function as the plinth in *I Am Queen Mary*. Cultural and literary arts scholar Kevin Quashie describes this tension as a contrast to the normative ways that blackness, black culture and history are represented in public. Framed through the lens of resistance, violence or struggle, responses to colonialism and racism are often imaged as expressiveness, loudness, publicness. This same expectation is what undergirded the critique of the sculpture in the Virgin Islands because contrary to how Queen Mary and the other Fireburn queens had previously been imaged, as standing, charging or in another dynamic posture, in *I Am Queen Mary* she is seated. This challenged the collective imaginary to envision this cultural icon in another way, in the aesthetics of what Kevin Quashie calls the *quiet*. He argues that, "An aesthetic of quiet is not incompatible within black culture, but to notice and understand it requires a shift in how we read, what we look for, and what we expect, even what we remain open to. It requires paying attention in a different way" (Quashie, 2012, p. 6). In this way one could also see Queen Mary in a seated position, in contemplation, as an expression of an interiority, representative of the fuller and more complex world of one's inner life.

Figure 4. La Vaughn Belle & Jeannette Ehlers, *I Am Queen Mary* (NY version). Installation view from the *Radical Love* exhibit at the Ford Foundation Gallery in NY, June 2019. High Density Foam and reclaimed coral stones cut by enslaved Africans, encased in plexiglass, 84"(h) 47 (w) and 60" (depth). Photo Credit: Powerhouse Arts. Courtesy of the artists.

When applying these concepts to the coral stones the aesthetics of quiet serves to highlight in a similar way the "inner life", the quiet infrastructure of coloniality. The activities, the structure, the labor and the inequities that often undergird the more overt expressions of racism and colonialism. As Quashie asserts, to see this requires a shift in how we read, what we look for and what we expect. As evidenced by the numerous photographs that image the monument with the figure alone, this shift is often not realized. By lowering the gaze and entering the piece first through the acropodium one begins to see the plinth as a quiet signal to the foundational labor of the enslaved and the other often invisible colonial infrastructures. The second iteration of *I Am Queen Mary* which was realized in June 2019 in New York as in indoor sculpture for an exhibition at the Ford Foundation represents a closer approximation to the original intention. Without the David sculpture, the piece differs not just in size, but also in the design of the coral stone base. Instead of being bound in cement, in this version the stones were encased in plexiglass which placed the infrastructure of coloniality centerstage as the plinth becomes transparent.

However, akin to the way that the foundational labor of slave societies is often subsumed by the outputs of that labor, there exists a foundational labor in this project as well, the invisible infrastructure of a public art project that is artist-led by two Black women artists positioned at different sides of the Atlantic and operating in different colonial realities. One of those realities is that the first iteration of the project occurs in Denmark primarily because Jeannette was able to raise funds appropriated for the centennial year from Danish agencies and institutions. However, a non-commissioned artwork means that it still lacks a certain kind of institutional support, that permissions must be sought out, funds raised, insurance purchased and the responsibility of maintenance assumed by the artists until a fuller institutional support is garnered. The ability to navigate all of these issues and bureaucratic entanglements must be met with a certain level of creativity, resolve and labor. It also means that the artists must undertake the work to take up the space to create the dialogues that decoloniality requires. This dialogue did not only happen externally with the project, and with the numerous artist talks and engagements with the press that occurred before the piece was constructed and subsequent to its inauguration. There were also internal dialogues about collaboration and positionality, about African diasporic nuances and disparities, differing access to power and privilege, differing ways to think about Blackness and different needs to respond to because of that positioning, with narrative construction being but one of them.

As a decolonial project, *I Am Queen Mary* reminds us that it is not only an ocular shift that is required when thinking through colonial *pastpresents* and trying to find ways to make transparent what stands masking as parks and plinths and shared history. Indeed, a broader sensorial shift is required, for there are parts of the memory that is not collective and part of the quiet that is not silence. The pedagogy of the somatic, of reenactment, provide a methodology to shift the gaze to the quiet of coloniality by allowing access to other sensorial capacities, intimacies and knowledge. In *lowering the gaze*, similar to an act of bowing one's head in prayer or introspection, there is a process of looking inward that occurs. It is this process that holds the promise of countering the colonial endowment from commandeering our futures- our ability to transform the opacity of the fundaments and see what possibilities exist inside.

La Vaughn Belle *makes visible the unremembered. She is a visual artist working in a variety of disciplines that include: video, performance, painting, installation and public intervention projects. She explores the material culture of coloniality and her art presents countervisualities and narratives. Borrowing from elements of architecture, history and archeology Belle creates narratives that challenge colonial hierarchies and invisibility. She has exhibited in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe in institutions such as the Museo del Barrio (NY), Casa de las Americas (Cuba), the Museum of the African Diaspora (CA) and Christiansborg Palace (DK). Her work has been featured in a wide range of media including: the NY Times, Politiken, VICE, The Guardian, Time magazine, Caribbean Beat, the BBC and Le Monde. She is the co-creator of* I Am Queen Mary*, the artist-led groundbreaking monument that confronted the Danish colonial amnesia while commemorating the legacies of resistance of the African people who were brought to the former Danish West Indies. She holds an MFA from the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, Cuba, an MA and a BA from Columbia University in NY. Currently she is a fellow at the Social*

Justice Institute at the Barnard Center for Research on Women. Her essay is part of a larger manuscript she is writing entitled "Ledgers From a Lost Kingdom". Her studio is based in the Virgin Islands. Her work can be found at www.lavaughnbelle.com and at I Am Queen Mary *project's website: www.iamqueenmary.com.*

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[i] From 2006-2008 Belle worked on a transnational project with Danish curator Jacob Fabricius that culminated in an exhibition called *Overdragelse* (Danish for transfer). Five artists from Denmark were brought to St. Croix to create work and the intention was also to bring artists from the Virgin Islands to Denmark to do the same. Lack of funding on the Virgin Islands side stunted this aspect of the project. However, artists from both locations participated in the group exhibition at the Overgaden Institute for Contemporary Art in Copenhagen in 2008.

[ii] The Warehouse to Warehouse project did not transpire due to lack of funding and institutional changes in leadership at the warehouse in St. Croix and closure of public access to the museum at the warehouse in Denmark.

[iii] The Fireburn is the name of a labor revolt that occurred on St. Croix in 1878 in which Mary Thomas emerges as one of the leaders. It began on October 1st (Contract Day) when the new contracts that bound laborers to plantations for a year went into effect. The Fireburn was a protest against the living and working conditions instituted after the abolition of slavery in 1848 and lasted for several days. The name is derived from the burning of sugar plantations and large parts of the town of Frederiksted which occurred during the rebellion.

[iv] See Cramer, N. (2018) I Am Queen Mary: An Avatar in the Making, and Wilson, M.K., & Danbolt, M. (2018). A Monumental Challenge.

FOR LOVE ALONE

Jeannette Ehlers

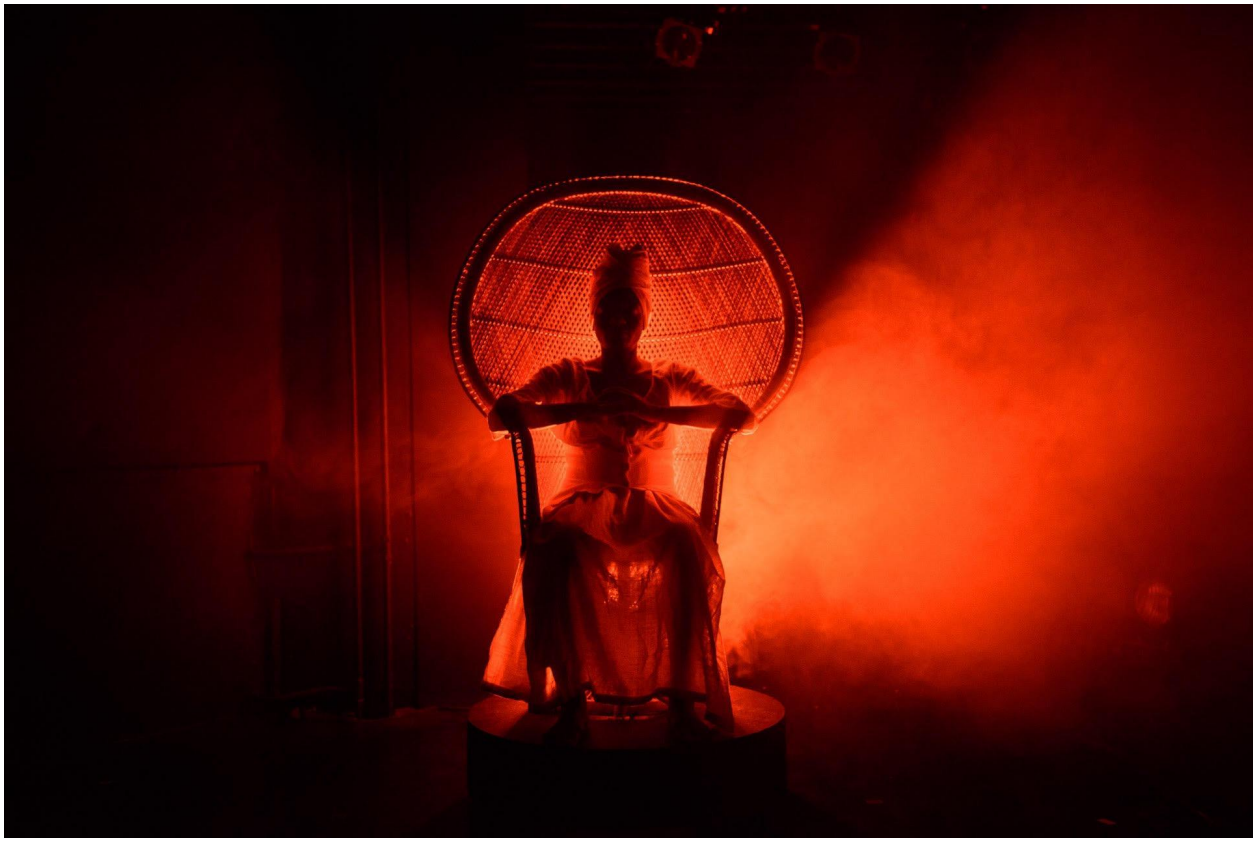
FOR LOVE ALONE is a 6 hours performative intervention, originally titled *Into the Dark,* created for Culture Night at the Royal Cast Collection/West Indian Warehouse in Copenhagen, 12 October 2018.

Accompanied by a soundtrack of the monologue *Queen Mary Spirit*, written by novelist and poet Tiphanie Yanique from the US Virgin Islands, two groups of four black women occupy the space of the old Warehouse and act as living sculptures, confronting our colonial history and coloniality with their mere presence. The number four is a tribute to the four rebel Queens who led the Fireburn: Queen Mary, Queen Susanna, Queen Agnes and Queen Mathilda.

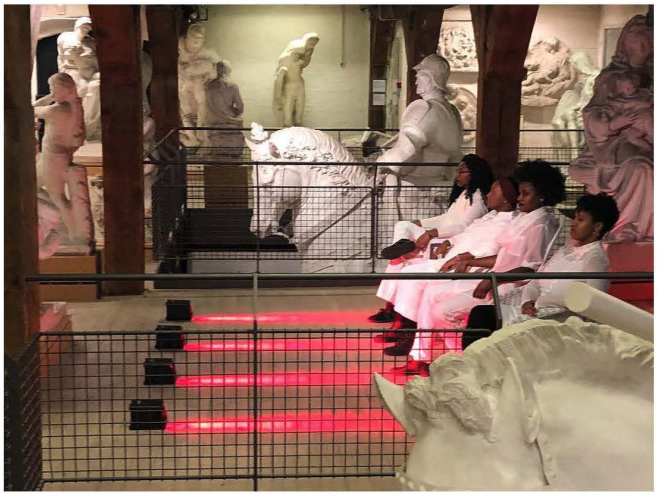
The monologue looks into Queen Mary's motivations for the Fireburn labour revolt on St. Croix in 1878, blending reflections on motherhood, queendom and resistance against coloniality. The eight women change position as well as formations of the chairs each time the monologue is completed.*

The performance invites a dialogue with the public sculpture *I Am Queen Mary*, co-created by La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers, which is placed just outside the Warehouse.

*Performed by Nina Cramer, Aiyun Nin, Elsie Siyum, Mary Tesfay, Natalia Medina, Winnie Seifert-Nketia, Zozo Mposula and Sara Toure.



Into the Dark (2018), Jeannette Ehlers. Photograph by Søren Meisner.
Click here to watch an excerpt of the performance.



(This is Tiphanie Yanique. I am reading my monologue, *Queen Mary Spirit*, written for Jeanette Ehlers' *Into the Dark*.)

Tiphanie Yanique
Queen Mary Spirit)

I is Mary of Frederiksted St. Croix, in the Danish Virgin Islands. Is 1878, and people still believe in God. We in the West Indies been free from slavery some thirty years. So they say. But it don't feel so. We work like slaves. We hated like slaves. I don't lie. People still believe in God, but not many of we believe in love. But I is Mary of Frederiksted. I believe in God and I still believe in love.

Is love, I love my sons. I love the skin on Palé's arms. He the darker one, black like pitch, and smooth as the sea. I love the rough skin tips of Horay's fingers, for he my worrying child and he always biting. But I know that worrying is loving, so I love them finger of Horay's. I love the way my boys say "yes, mama" to me in private, even though now they is big man, each with a woman or two of they own. I love how if I just give them the eye, they stop their stupidness and come to my side. That is a mama's earned justice.

I loved them boys from when they broke out of me. One by one. Not a year a part. Each of them, their big heads opening me, stretching my tun tun, beyond its limits. I loved my boys the most then. How they could stretch skin to make way for their own skin. God make mothers to bare just so. And love just so. To the breaking.

Which is how come is we woman, we mothers, must be the ones to bare and break this boy-land we love. Saint Croix. Is we-self we breaking. But is Saint Croix-self we borning. We do so by burning. We burn it all down, so it go. We do it for we. The Danish man-them ain paying we enough. They ain respecting the work it is we doing. I seeing them with their nice shoe and I seeing my Pale and Horay with no shoes at all. I know God, which means I know what is just and right and good and love. And I know this ain love these plantation owners showing we with their pittle pay. I know this ain just and right and good—so it can't be love. Love is what I know. To the breaking and the burning, I know it.

The Fireburn. That is what it getting call now. What we West Indians calling it. You, maybe, calling it a rebellion. You, maybe, calling it a riot. I suppose that depend on how you understand love, and who it is you choosing to shine that love-light on. Because I here with you. In Denmark. I here in the jail for being a queen. Not like what you have. Our island queens don't sit in court yard castle. Our queen does cut cane. Our queens ain born to queendom. They chosen. And not by God, but by the bodies God make. I chose by the people. The people chose me and the others. Choose me to lead them. And so it go. We women, we lead. We lead the Fireburn. We lead.

I only accept being a queen because of Palé and Horay. Understand, my boys ain babies no more. They can't move skin, they can't re adjust muscle to their own music. Nobody going to open for them, bare down for them. Not even the women that loving them. No woman but me. That's mother-love.

And is so bad I love my boy's skin. I loved that skin even when I used to take the whip to it. When I took a cane to it. When I took my own hard hands to it. I loved their skin even when they was young boys and I had to bruise their bums with the force of my own body. I loved the skin on the back of their

legs. Even when I scorched it open. Had to. Because I loved them like I loved them when they was born.

I will, I will, I will beat them to save them. Because what is skin? It's their mother scunting lives I saving. I would slice their skin open. I would beat them beyond blackness. And is just so I doing God's work. A queen's work, you hear? Is me beat them so that the jumbie white man who have we cutting cane don't beat them. When he beat them is hate for their skin and want for the money their labor bring. Is that same hate and greed that going kill my boys if I don't guard and guide. When I beat them is love, is warning, is to keep them alive.

See, I can't let Palé and Horay carry those bodies I love, their bodies that come from my body, into no foolish danger. Because in 1878, in the Danish West Indians, if you a black boy, any danger means death. My boys sick with fever and can't cut cane enough? The greed jumbie white man going to beat them. They eat too much rations? The greed jumbie going to beat them. They want court a pretty woman who pale in color? The hate jumbie white man going to flay their skin. They want to put a way a little money for their children-them they going to make? The hate jumbie going to call them thief. Get them beat and burned to jail. Jumbie white man. I don't know if they have another kind. Some say they have nice white people up here in Denmark. Like they must be send the jumbie hate ones, the greed ones, alone down to we? But I here in Denmark now…and they all seeming the same. We up here. Me and the other queens of the fireburn, the queens of Frederiksted. Our brown skinned bodies up here in this pale place, even the Queen up here so pale. I can't see what work she ever do in she life. How the people could follow she? I suppose her body don't need to work, I suppose her boys's bodies don't need no protection.

That is why I need Palé and Horay skin sweet with fear. Fear keeps their blood inside their bodies. So I take a little blood. A toonchy thing. I take a little blood from my boys for my boys. So they won't have to chuck all the blood for the white man. Their blood is on my knuckles, so their blood ain in the street. That is love. Beat the boy's body, to save the boy's body. That's how much I love my boys. Any fool could see God on my side here.

I gave Palé and Horay each a knife. Because they have to know to protect they selves, now that they is man. How to protect they women and the children they going to make. This is a corporal life we here living on earth. And just as my boys learn from me how to take a beating, how to be afraid--they must learn themselves how to give a lashing, how to make another body 'fraid. They going learn that like any man does learn or not learn—by living or dying. But they also gonna learn from me.

Now the Danish men say I here in this jail for burning the land. But the mothers here in this Denmark? They say I hear for beating my boys. I confess to both. But what kind of ting it is, what kind of ignorance it take for these men and these mothers to not see me as they own? I labour hard as any Danish man. I love my children as hard as any Danish mother. But is a different world they in. Is which land and which bodies—that is the difference. These Danes, you Danes, you have a land here where your man body could work and receive a decent pay. A land where the mothers can love their children bodies gentle-like and trust that gentle love alone will protect their children. Their queen make sure they have that here. She my queen, too, I gather. But my body back in St. Croix ain receiving the same pay, and my boy's bodies ain receiving the same protection.

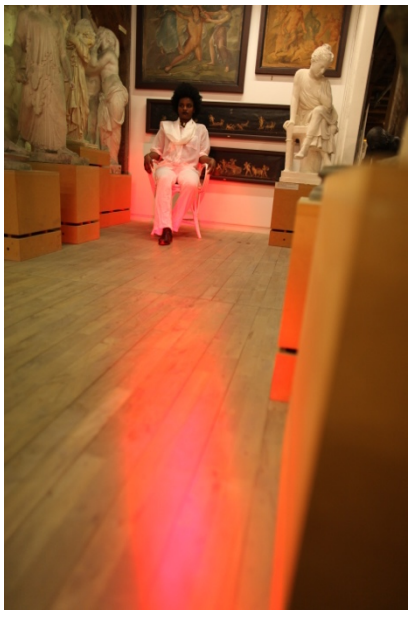
Is so, I suppose, we come to be our own Queens.

Yes, we burn. We scorch it. Make the skin-land go red and then ash. Strip it to save it. Now how can it be that that is what these man and mothers have me now lock up in Copenhagen for? Saving my boys. Saving my islands. Any parent knows what I'm saying. Any parent knows. Father God knows and understands.

When fire burn Frederiksted is not that we was only lashing the white jumbie man produce. I ain no fool. We licking we, too. We sacrificing by destroying. Because this St. Croix, this Danish West Indies, is we. My land is my skin, the cane my own hands cut *is* my hands. I know I stripping my own skin when I set the flame. Just like I strip Horay skin when I catch him kissing that white girl. Have to teach him. Have to make sure he have the appropriate fear, a good healthy dosing of fraid. Maybe too much, with them worry fingers of his. But is okay. Because he have Palé and Palé won't leave Horay stupid.

Thank God I make two boys and not one alone. They can love each other even if I gone and dead up in this white jumbie place beyond God back.

I here in Denmark. But I am Mary of Frederiksted. I am Queen Mary. Queen Mary of the Fireburn. I know God and I know God is love. Is love I love these boys—so I beat them. Is love I love these islands so I burn them. That is self-sacrifice. That is parent love. Father God, who done send his most beloved son, in the path of nail and thorns, he know about that. He know why we Queen lead the burning down of every last plantation on St. Croix. Is for love. Is for love. Is for love alone.



Jeannette Ehlers is a Copenhagen-based artist of Danish and Trinidadian descent whose practice takes shape experimentally across photography, video, installation, sculpture and performance. She graduated from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2006. Ehlers' work often makes use of self-representation and image manipulation to bring about decolonial hauntings and disruptions. These manifestations attend to the material and affective afterlives of Denmark's colonial impact in the Caribbean and participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade—realities that have all too often been rendered forgettable by dominant history-writing. In the words of author Lesley-Ann Brown, "Ehlers reminds all who participate in or gaze at her work that history is not in the past." Ehlers insists on the possibility for empowerment and healing in her art, honoring legacies of resistance in the African diaspora. She merges the historical, the collective and the rebellious with the familial, the bodily and the poetic.

On 31 March 2018 she unveiled I Am Queen Mary, a public sculpture project in collaboration with La Vaughn Belle, at the Royal Cast Collection/West Indian Warehouse in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Selected Exhibitions:
Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin, DE * Ford Foundation Gallery, NYC,US * LACE, LA,US * SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, DE * The Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki, FI * Canton Gallery, Guangzhou, CN *, CareOf, Milan IT *, Frost Art Museum, Miami, US * CAMP, Copenhagen, DK * Chez Eva@Galleri Futura, Stockholm,S * Wallach Art Gallery, NYC,USA * AROS, Aarhus, DK * MOLAA, Los Angeles, USA * The Black Diamond, Copenhagen, Denmark * International Slavery Museum, Liverpool, UK * 21c Museum Hotels, Louisville, Kentucky, US * Reykjavik Art Museum, IS * Autograph ABP, Rivington Place, London,UK * UVP on Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, USA * Brundyn+ gallery, Cape Town SA * Nikolaj Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen, DK * LMAKprojects, NYC, USA * Dak'Art, Dakar, Senegal * Pérez Art Museum Miami, USA * Parisian Laundry, Montreal, Canada * Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, Berlin, Germany * Museo Del Barrio, New York, USA * https://www.jeannetteehlers.dk/

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African Diasporic Choices

- Locating the Lived Experiences of Afro-Crucians in the Archival and Archaeological Record

Abstract
The year 2017 marked the centennial transfer of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States. In light of this commemoration, topics related to representations of the past, and the preservation of heritage in the present -- entangled with the residuum of Danish colonialism and the lasting impact of U.S. neo-imperial rule -- are at the forefront of public dialogue on both sides of the Atlantic. Archaeological and archival research adds historical depth to these conversations, providing new insights into the lived experiences of Afro-Crucians from enslavement through post-emancipation. However, these two sources of primary historical data (i.e., material culture and documentary evidence) are not without their limitations. This article draws on Black feminist and post-colonial theoretical frameworks to interrogate the historicity of archaeological and archival records. Preliminary archaeological and archival work ongoing at the Estate Little Princess, an 18th-century former Danish sugar plantation on the island of St. Croix, provides the backdrop through which the potentiality of archaeological and documentary data are explored. Research questions centered on exploring sartorial practices of self-making engaged by Afro-Crucians from slavery through freedom are used to illuminate spaces of tension as well as productive encounters between the archaeological and archival records.

Keywords: Danish West Indies, Historical Archaeology, Digital Humanities, African Diaspora, Sartorial Practices, Adornment

Introduction

The year 2017 marked the centennial transfer of, the now, U.S. Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States. Though entangled with the residuum of Danish colonialism, and the lasting impact of U.S. neo-imperial rule, topics related to representations of the past, the preservation of heritage in the present, and the contemporary politics of remembrance are at the forefront of public dialogue on both sides of the Atlantic in light of this commemoration. Archaeological and archival research adds historical depth to these conversations, providing new insights into the lived experiences of African descendant people in the Caribbean from enslavement through post-emancipation. Moreover, this archipelago specific line of research addresses a gap in the literature, as very little archaeological work has explicitly focused on the experiences of enslaved and later free Afro-Caribbean people in the former Danish West Indies (e.g., Blouet, 2013; Lenik, 2004; Odewale, 2016).

Historical archaeological work throughout the Circum-Caribbean tends to favor Anglo-American, British, French, and Spanish occupied sites. This favoritism may partly be due to more widely accessible archival collections on these colonial sites. However, the Danish National Archive, the Photo and Map Collection at The Royal Danish Library, as well as other archives and collections in Denmark, undertook multi-year initiatives to digitize archival records regarding Denmark's role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The National Archive alone has uploaded more than 5 million digital scans of documents, making possible new avenues of inquiry from scholars across the world. However, open access to newly digitized documentary sources is not without challenge. As will be explored in depth below, open access does not equate to equitable legibility of documents available, nor does it provide transparency regarding the subjective nature inherent in the production of archival collections and within processes of digitization. Scholars need to interrogate the genesis of data sources (i.e., the archaeological record and archival record) used, as these tensions within their creation are liable to be reified in interpretative frameworks that shape the historical narratives.

Through an examination of preliminary archaeological work taking place at the Estate Little Princess, an 18th-century Danish sugar plantation located on the island of St. Croix, USVI, this article explores the potentiality of archival and archaeological sources to examine past lifeways of Afro-Crucians from slavery to freedom through the lens of dress practices. This paper directly addresses the power that recovered historical material culture and documentary sources wields in the construction and dissemination of history by focusing on the history of Danish colonial spaces and the people that occupied those spaces. The archival and archaeological records on the Transatlantic Slave Trade are spaces of confinement and liberation within the production and dissemination of historical narratives about the lives of enslaved, free, and later emancipated African Diasporic people in the former Danish West Indies.

The work taking place at the Estate Little Princess is a Black Feminist archaeological gesture towards redress, reckoning with permutations of epistemic violence within the archaeological and archival record. Epistemic violence, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993) reminds us, is a colonial production that works to enact violence on subjugated people by legitimating certain knowledge forms and disavowing others. The result of epistemic violence is the proliferation of silences that truncate and conceal the experiences of African Diasporic people within the archival and archaeological records of enslavement in the former Danish West Indies. Silences are not innocuous. In this article, I suggest that silences are indicative of operations of power and oppression inherent in the creation and dissemination of a nationalist narrative of “innocence,” as it pertains to Denmark’s involvement, subsequent divestment, later denial and now neo-liberal engagement with the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its afterlives.

Nordic countries in the last decade have begun a process of reckoning with their involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, most notably in the scholarship on Afro-Swedish experiences (Adeniji, 2014; Cuesta & Mulinari, 2018; McEachrane, 2012, 2014; Miller, 2017; Osei-Kofi et. al., 2018; Sawyer & Habel 2014). In her work *Figuring Blackness in Sweden,* Monica Miller notes Sweden's investment in a narrative that positions the nation as “morally superior and advanced, having avoided the most direct political, social, and cultural consequences of twentieth-century Europe’s most significant upheaval” (Miller, 2017). Miller goes on to state that the result of this narrative is the ideology that “racial problems happen elsewhere” (Miller, 2017). *Afro-Nordic Experiences*, an anthology edited by Michael McEachrane (2014), is part of the new wave of interdisciplinary scholarship exploring the present-day experiences of people of African descent in Nordic countries. Within the anthology, scholars explicitly tie the experiences of Afro-Nordic people to Nordic countries' involvement in the enslavement of millions of Africans throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

Though not to the extent of their Swedish counterparts, Denmark has followed this wave, acknowledging that the agricultural prosperity of its colonies during the 18th and 19th centuries -- conscripted by enslaved labor and the decimation of native populations -- made it one of the wealthiest nations in Europe. Part of Denmark’s

reckoning with its past has included public programming, state-funded exhibitions, and a public acknowledgment of its role in enslaving Africans in the former Danish West Indies. These actions are not without complications.

It is through these very actions that Denmark continues to position itself as “morally superior and advanced,” having possessed the ability to move forward as a country not troubled and defined in terms of race, but unified through an ideology of “nation.” As Miller stated in regards to Sweden’s national narrative, Denmark has produced a narrative invested in an understanding that “racial problems happen elsewhere.” This understanding that “racial problems happen elsewhere” upholds a notion of colonial “innocence.” Lill-Ann Körber (2018) explores a notion of "innocent colonialism" as it relates to Denmark's recent engagement with its colonial past. "Innocence" for Körber is seen through Denmark’s “reluctance…to acknowledge accountability, guilt, or debt” for its involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the subsequent aftermath of such wrongdoing, experienced by marginalized peoples in Denmark and in their former colonies (Körber, 2018, p. 27).

This propagation of innocence undergirds Denmark's hegemonic national narrative and acts as a form of epistemic violence that invalidates and erases the outcries of Afro-Danish people who vocalize the myriad of ways in which processes of racialization and institutional forms of racism structure their everyday lives (Danbolt & Wilson, 2018). The rise in academic scholarship (Danbolt, 2017; Jensen, 2018; Körber, 2018; Simonsen, 2007) and visual and performing arts (see works by La Vaughn Belle & Jeanette Ehlers, 2018) concerning the 2017 commemoration, along with the rise of the Movement for Black Lives in Denmark (Danbolt & Wilson, 2018) peels back the veneer of Danish society, exposing linkages between past and present African Diasporic experiences.

Recent historic archaeological investigations taking place on the islands of St. Croix (Blouet 2013; Dunnavant et al., 2018; Lenik, 2004; Odewale, 2016), and St. John (Armstrong, 2003), also cannot be divorced from the 2017 commemoration of the centennial transfer. Both the archaeological and archival records are part of the ever-growing tool kits from which scholars and artists are pulling to explore the era of enslavement and its afterlives on both sides of the Atlantic. This article is part of the afterlife of slavery, and a form of "wake work," pulling from Christina Sharpe (2016), that tends to the dead by grappling with the myriad of ways slavery ruptures the present. Sharpe states that "in the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (2016, p. 35). Dilapidated coral-constructed windmills, "great houses," factories, and enslaved village domestic structures are omnipresent and hyper-visible throughout the island of St. Croix, making Sharpe's words even more pertinent. The 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century architectural reminders of the plantocracy, that rest as the foundation of the post-oil refinery derelict economy of the present, ruptures the façade of "innocent colonialism," rendering the present illegible without daily confrontations with the past.

Historical documentation coupled with material culture allows scholars an avenue of redress in the wake, as we attempt to provide more flesh to the historical narratives of African Diasporic and European peoples who lived and labored during the era of Transatlantic Enslavement. The more than 5 million documents disseminated through The National Archive digital repository help make this wake work possible, as scholars explore the historical impacts of racism, classism, and sexism on present-day Afro-Virgin Islanders and Afro-Danish people as symptomatic of the afterlife of slavery. However, digitization efforts should not go uninterrogated, as they too contain within them vestiges of colonial guilt, making it impossible to untangle the processes of their creation from the social context in which they were produced.

In the following paragraphs, I offer a critique of the archaeological and archival records while simultaneously illumining them as spaces of potentiality and possibility to gain insights into the “interior lives,” to pull from Toni Morrison (1990), of the enslaved and later free African diasporic peoples of the former Danish West Indies. This article works to blur disciplinary boundaries intentionally. While I acknowledge that the physicality, processes of creation, and methodology of retrieval for the two data sources are very different, I call into question the seemingly unquestioned historicity of the archaeological and archival records. Within this interrogation, I examine my confrontation with the digital archive, question the seemingly objective nature of digitization

processes, and illuminate the messiness of material culture recovered from the Estate Little Princess in an attempt to locate the past lived experiences of African Diasporic women in the former Danish West Indies.

Locating Voices of African Diaspora Matter Within the Archives

Within my research at the Estate Little Princess, I am interested in generating a gendered history of the former Danish West Indies, asking specifically about the past lived experiences of African Diasporic women at the site. As a scholar of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, attempting to locate the historical narratives of African Diasporic women necessitates an engagement with the historiography of the Americas. Work from Black Feminist social historians (Berry, 2007, 2017; Finch, 2010; Fuentes, 2016; Lindsey & Johnson, 2014; Stevenson, 2007) illuminates how the historiography of the Americas is produced through the creation and reification of epistemic violence within the archive. I would add to this significant work that the archaeological record, along with historical narratives derived from its interpretation, also produces a reification of epistemic violence.

The ongoing wave of post-processualism within the field of archaeology, primarily feminist archeological studies (Claassen, 1992; Conkey & Spector, 1984; Gero & Conkey, 1991) and studies on race, racism and racial politics (Epperson, 1999, 2004; Franklin & Paynter, 2010; Mullins, 1999, 2001, 2012; Orser, 1998, 2004), attempts to address formations of epistemic violence within the archaeological record. The archival and archaeological records are often spoken of as intrinsically different, produced, and studied through different methodologies. However, for a moment, I want to posit that one of the connecting threads between them is the pervasive ways in which epistemic violence structures all levels of their production and subsequent study. While there is seminal scholarship that interrogates the production of the archaeological record (Conkey & Gero, 1997; Conkey, 2007, 2003; Engelstad, 2007; Voss, 2006; Wylie, 2007), I have found that the work of social scientists, social historians, and digital humanities scholars who study Transatlantic Enslavement offers archaeologists intersectional tools to aid in the location and positionality of past African Diasporic lives in the archaeological record.

Saidiya Hartman's (1997, 2007, 2008, 2019) work provides a methodology for the study of the archives through a discussion regarding how scholars encounter African Diasporic experiences in the archive. Hartman's (1997) work on archival production illustrates how African Diasporic women occupy spaces of silence and have been subject to erasure within archives on the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Processes of erasure in the past and silences that pervade the archive in the present are symptomatic of ongoing iterations of epistemic violence. For Hartman, the historiography of the Transatlantic Slave Trade is grounded in epistemologies of the "fort or barracoon," that focus on the quantitative. This focus on the "fort or barracoon" renders Black bodies as commodities within the historiography of the Americas and reflects inequalities that thrive within the present.

Jessica Marie Johnson expands on Hartman's notion of fort and barracoon epistemologies rooted in the quantifiable by examining studies of enslavement at the "digital crossroads." Johnson warns that the term data gestures "to the rise of the independent and objective statistical fact as an explanatory ideal party to the devastating thingification of black women, children, and men" (2018, p. 58). The notion of "thingification" that Johnson articulates, pulling from Marxism, is the result of fort and barracoon epistemologies. I argue this "thingification" is a point of slippage for archaeologists who come to study people through the materiality of their lived experiences. The space between studying things and the "thingification" of the people we study is a space of moral and intellectual tribulation for archaeologists that study the African Diaspora (Battle-Baptiste, 2012). Data science has long ingrained itself within archaeological methodology; however, new waves in digital humanities, the drive for open-source data, and large data sets for intra- and cross-site comparative analysis brings the warning of "thingification" to full view within the field. Hartman and Johnson act as reminders for archaeologists that we must make sure that data science, as a tool, is not utilized to reify silence and erasure by replacing the flesh, voice, and lived experience of those we examine with statistically significant artifact variations and distributions.

Vestiges of epistemic violence also occur in the archival record, especially as archival collections undergo large-scale digitization projects. Hartman's and Johnson's call to interrogate the seemingly objective nature of archives and the production of quantitative datasets resonate within digitization efforts that result in open-access e-catalogs comprised of reference numbers that numerically link physical objects (i.e., diary, plantation ledger, photograph, painting) to their digital surrogates. As mentioned above, open-access and equitable accessibility to knowledge do not always equate. Accessibility to open-access e-catalogs, such as the 5 million documents disseminated through The National Archive digital repository, still requires specific hardware, such as a desktop computer with high-speed internet, that can access and download digital files. What this means is that those who do not have access to this hardware - for example, due to geographic location or social-economic status - do not have access to open-access e-catalogs.

Additionally, processes of digitization that allow copies or digital surrogates of a physical object to be available online are made possible through a process of social meditation. The result of this social meditation is the production of a digital surrogate that is propagated as an objective facsimile of the original physical object. However, the process of social meditation, which is shaped by the social context in which a digital surrogate is produced, questions the notion of objectivity. The result of social mediation is the creation of a digital surrogate that is laced with subjectivity, steeped in the decision making processes of collection managers that are often reflections of institutional values. As I have outlined above, government-funded institutions uphold the values of the Nation. In the case of Denmark's National Archive, the result is a production of digital surrogates laced with notions of "colonial guilt" and "innocence" that reproduce silences and erasures in the archival record. In the example that follows, a digital surrogate is examined, and the affordances (searchability, annotations, metadata) of the surrogate are interrogated to illuminate slippages in the historicity of digital collections.

Locating erasures within processes of historical production in the archaeological and archival records matters. This article seeks to illuminate fundamental ambiguities within the historiography of the Atlantic World. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2012, p. 02) stated that the production of history is an ongoing process where actors and narrators create "both 'what happened' and 'that which is said to have happened." Trouillot (2012, p. 26) interrogates the production of history, stating that: "Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)."

Examining Denmark's state-funded archival collections, explicitly accounting for national interest, requires scholars to take up Trouillot's call to critically interrogate the production of archival collections. Trouillot positions the creation and dissemination of history as always already subjective. For example, in the winter of 2018, I was sifting through the Danish Royal Library's digital photography collection online. I queried their collection for images of the Danish West Indies and came across postcards of African diasporic people from the 19th and 20th centuries. One image of particular interest, given my research pursuits, was an early 20th-century postcard that featured a young woman of African descent from the Danish West Indies (Figure 1). The postcard was cataloged under the title "Ung Pige" (*Young Girl)*. The digital object I viewed had limited affordances, not containing any searchable keywords that would denote the race (i.e., Black, Negro, Slave, Enslaved, Creole) of the person in the image. It quickly came to my attention that none of the digitized postcards in the collection contained searchable keywords affiliated with racial designations. As a result, I would have to view each image to subjectively determine who could have been interpolated as being of African descent. Upon viewing the back of the postcard titled "Ung Pige," I could see that before the postcard's digitization, someone wrote on the card in pencil "Ung Neger Pige" (Figure 2). While the Danish term "Neger" could be regarded now as a derogatory descriptor for someone of African descent, I found it interesting that rather than catalog the postcard with a 21st century politically correct racial signifier, all racial signification was erased. This cataloging practice is found throughout the collection.

Figure 1. The front of an early 20th-century postcard of an Afro-Caribbean Woman in the former Danish West Indies. Courtesy of the Danish Royal Library Digital Collections.

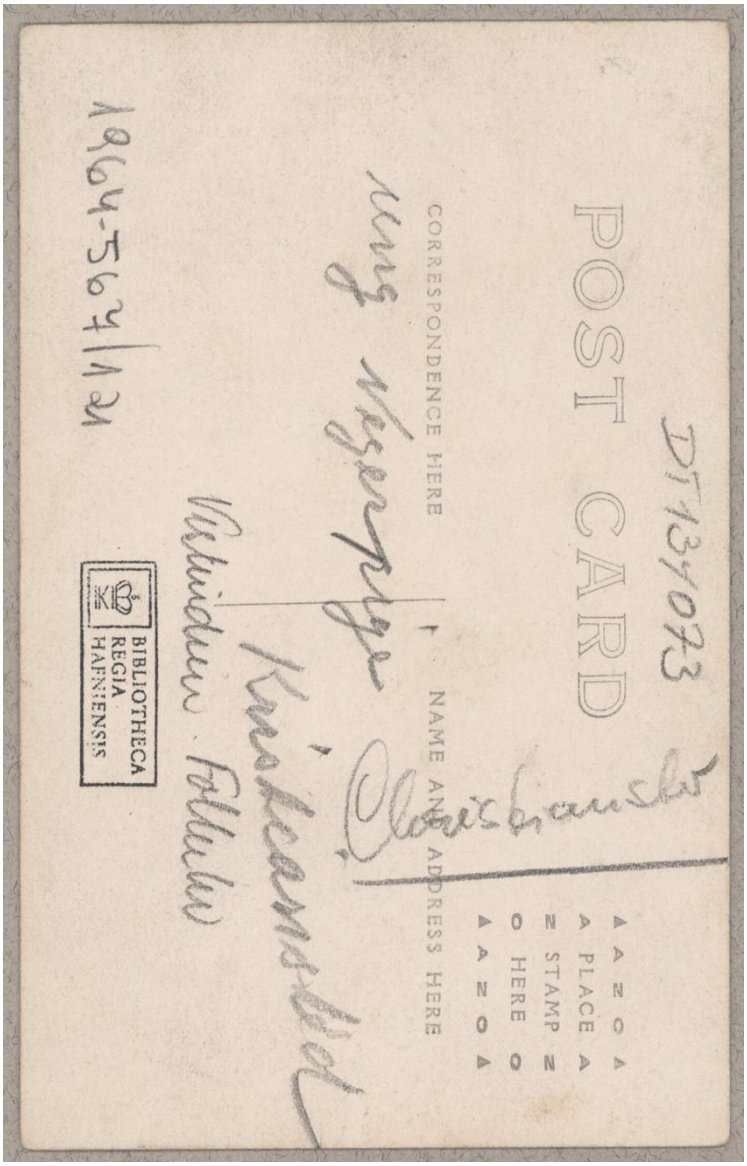


Figure 2. The back of an early 20th-century postcard of an Afro-Caribbean Woman in the former Danish West Indies. Courtesy of the Danish Royal Library Digital Collections.

My mind raced with questions. How can an archival collection of 19th- and 20th-century postcards of the Danish West Indies, a society imbued in contentious processes of racialization, come to be cataloged in the 21st century without any mention of racialized identifiers? What mattered in the process of "fact assembly" when it came to how images and documents are cataloged? Historical figures, those who were of European and African descent, had no cataloged racial signifiers. I highlight this example of racial erasure in an attempt to demonstrate how Denmark's investment in a narrative of post-racial innocence produced an archive on the Transatlantic Slave Trade that stripped historical actors of their racial identifiers. However, race as a social construct and racism as an experiential fact mattered in the past and matters in the present. Not acknowledging racial distinctions does not change that fact; instead, it blurs, conceals, and confines the different lived experiences of peoples of African descent on the island.

Expanding on these challenges, specifically as it relates to uncovering the experiences of women in the archive, Hartman (2008, p. 3) states that researchers come to the Black feminine body in the archive through "little more than a register of her encounters with power" and that these encounters provide "a meager sketch of her existence." The digitization of millions of new historical documents from repositories in Denmark provides more avenues for these encounters within historical photography, probate records, runaway slave advertisements, and lists of Afro-Crucian female property owners in "Free Gut," a section of St. Croix located in Frederiksted, to name a few. However, practices of erasure make it much more challenging for scholars querying online databases for documents. These newly accessible digital repositories make available formally uncharted spaces of inquiry. It is within the uncharted that Black women emerge, albeit obscurely. Through an examination and critique of Denmark's digital archival repositories in the following section, I chart a course through documentary sources illuminating fleeting encounters with African Diasporic people in order to illuminate spaces of challenges within spaces of possibility.

Unlikely Entryways: Textiles, Ship Logs, and Modes Of Sartorial Surveillance

My interest in sartorial practices as a lens through which one can examine the complex interplay between agency and structure lead me to archival documents in the hopes of uncovering information regarding every-day dress practices engaged by Afro-Crucians during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Below, I discuss my entryway into Danish archival repositories and historical documents that demonstrate shifts in sartorial practices over time and the unexpected social impact they had in the Transatlantic World.

During my archaeological field season at the Estate Little Princess in the summer of 2018, I was fortunate to meet Dr. Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, a scholar and artist whose work blurs the boundaries of archive, memory, imagination and the digital sphere. Our meeting was facilitated through a program hosted by the Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism organization (CHANT), which brought several Danish scholars to the island of St. Croix. CHANT hosted several public programming events that highlighted research on Danish colonialism conducted by scholars on the other side of the Atlantic. After an artist lecture, Dirckinck-Holmfeld and I began talking more about interesting finds we came across while sifting through The Danish National Archives digital repository. It was during this conversation that she pulled out her cell phone and showed me an image she had saved of an archival document found among newly digitized ship logs (Figure 3). The document had 17 patterned textile fragments adhered to it.

Dirckinck-Holmfeld explained to me how the ship log document was used to record which patterned bolts of cotton cloth would be traded by the Danes in Ghana for enslaved Africans that would then be transported to their colonies in the Caribbean. Initially, I was amazed because a cell phone had delivered a 300-year-old document, demonstrating the ways the digital sphere bridges oceans and traverses time. Secondly, I was enthralled because, as an archaeologist that focuses on adornment working in the Caribbean, I rarely get the chance to come across textiles used in the production of clothing. Instead, we often recover the clothing fasteners that would have held textiles, cut, and sewn into clothing garments together. Overall, I was curious about the ways the document overlapped with my research regarding Danish colonial sumptuary laws that demarcated what enslaved and legally free Africans could and could not wear in the Danish West Indies. I found it interesting that the types of textiles traded in Ghana for enslaved Africans were the same textiles that, through Danish sumptuary laws, were demarcated for people of African descent in their colonies to wear. I believe these codified racial distinctions through a technology of seeing, where certain patterned textiles signaled racial, class, and status differences on both sides on the Atlantic.

Figure 3. An image of an 18th-century ship log document. Courtesy of the Danish National Archive "The West Indies" Collection.

The types of textiles the Danes were trading; specifically, the variety of patterns, are seen in several examples of colonial sumptuary laws that were implemented throughout the Americas. These laws included restrictions on 3D supplements added to the body (i.e., clothing, jewelry, hair adornments) along with restrictions on bodily modifications, specifically how one can style their hair. Laws like these were used to demarcate social differences by regulating appropriate types of dress based on the race, gender, class, and status of the colonial subject (Stoler, 2001, p. 836; Wiecek, 1977, p. 268). These laws worked to produce a technology of seeing and interpolating others through dress.

Specific to the Danish West Indies is Governor-General Schimmelmann's 1786 sumptuary ordinance. Historian Neville T. Hall has translated Schimmelmann's ordinance, stating that the law dictated that "Plantation field slaves were allowed coarse cotton or linen for daily use and, as a concession for Sundays and public holidays, cast-offs of little value" (Hall, 1992, p. 94). Hall goes on to translate the ordinance stating that the law forbid enslaved Africans from wearing "jewelry of precious stones, gold or silver, material of silk, brocade, chintz, lawn, linen, lace, or velvet; gold or silver braid; silk stockings; elaborate up-raised hairstyles, with or without decoration; or any form of expensive clothing whatsoever" (Hall, 1992, p. 94). Enslaved and free Africans were permitted to wear wool, cotton, coarser varieties of lace, and silk ribbon of Danish manufacture. The ordinance also outlined how violators of the sartorial pronouncements would receive 50 lashes.

The practice of legally attempting to demarcate difference through appearance has a long history, with sumptuary laws implemented in colonial-era New York (Bianco et al., 2006), South Carolina, and Spanish Florida (Stoler, 2001, p. 836). These sumptuary laws were a means through which the Danish government attempted to regulate dress, and demonstrate how sartorial practices act as mechanisms through which methods of racialized surveillance were used in the past. Pulling from the work of Simone Browne (2015) in *Dark Matters,* racialized surveillance "is a technology of social control where surveillance practices, policies, and performances concern

the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a power to define what is in or out of place" (Browne, 2015, p.16). By legislating sartorial practices, sumptuary laws codified who was "in or out of place." While there is no strong evidence that these laws were heavily enforced (Hunt, 1996, p. x), their existence stands as evidence for colonial attempts to maintain social control in the Danish West Indies. Browne also outlines how tactics of racialized surveillance necessitate avenues for the production of "dark sousveillance." Dark sousveillance is theorized as practices engaged in by free, enslaved and later emancipated Africans, that push against tactics of racialized surveillance that are inherently anti-Black and can "appropriate, co-opt, repurpose, and challenge in order to facilitate survival and escape" (Browne, 2015, p. 16). I posit that quotidian sartorial practices offer an avenue through which scholars can examine everyday engagements in dark sousveillance.

The archive offers several entryways to explore the implantation of sumptuary laws as a method of racialized surveillance, as well as possible tactics of dark sousveillance engaged in by African Diasporic people from slavery through freedom in former Danish West Indies. A space of possible inquiry in the archive to assess the extent to which sumptuary laws were enforced would be exploring the now thousands of digitized pages of police records from the Danish West Indies found through the Danish National Archive online repository. These records may illustrate to what extent colonial-era sumptuary laws were enacted over time, and if enforced, who were often the culprits of such "crimes." The emphases on exploring the life cycles of such legislation derive from examples of colonial-era sumptuary laws experiencing a resurgence in the southern United States at the turn of the 20th century (Flewellen, 2018; Sitton & Conrad, 2005). Police records may act as an entryway for scholars to explore sumptuary laws over time and test whether the implantation and enforcement of such laws follow social trends or movements.

The Materiality of African Diasporic Sartorial Practices: A Case Study at the Estate Little Princess.

My work at the Estate Little Princess (ELP) adds to the growing historiography on the former Danish West Indies, adding material culture data to the history of Afro-Caribbean past lifeways. St. Croix, the largest of the three islands that once comprised the former Danish West Indies, has a long colonial history beginning with Spanish colonists in 1493. Since then, it has been ruled by seven different colonial flags, with its most prolonged occupation under Danish rule from 1713 to 1801 and from 1815 to 1917 (Hall, 1992; Odewale, 2016; Tyson, 1992). ELP is located approximately 1.75 miles west of Christiansted Harbor on the north coast of St. Croix (Figure 4). A former Danish sugar plantation, the estate was established in 1749 by Frederik Moth, the first Danish governor of St. Croix (Tyson, 1992, 2010; Tyson & Highfield, 1994). The plantation was purchased and sold by several European descendant planters throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. After the estate was no longer actively producing sugar, it was acquired by Clayton and Opal Shoemaker as a summer home in 1949 (Wright et al., 1980). After the deaths of the Shoemakers, the plantation was willed to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in 1991, and the site is now the TNC's Virgin Islands and Eastern Caribbean programs headquarters (The Nature Conservancy, 2017). The purpose of this article is not to provide a detailed history of the European descendant estate owners, but to discuss the lived experiences of African descendant people at the site. As a result, a brief history is provided here; however, limited archival (Tyson, 1992; Wright et al., 1980) research has been done about the former owners of the estate.

Figure 4. Map of Project Location (Dunnavant et al., 2018).

The buildings constructed at the Estate Little Princess cover a history that spans over 200 years (Wright et al., 1980). The architectural remains at the estate include three houses, a sugar factory/distillery building, a sugar mill, a well tower, and several outbuildings including the remains of an enslaved village, later known as a free laborer village (Dunnavant et al., 2018). Archival research indicates that by 1786, 127 enslaved Africans labored at the site and lived in 53 houses that comprised the enslaved village area. Of the 53 domestic structures, 25 of these were masonry made, while the remaining 28 were "wattle village houses," making the enslaved village area architecturally diverse. A watchhouse noted as 'slavevagterbusene' in estate inventories was also originally constructed at the estate but was removed and reconstructed at the Whim Museum, a public heritage site owned and operated by the St. Croix Landmarks Society. The architectural remains of the ELP were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 (Dunnavant et al., 2018).

The estate is a rural coastal plantation that, at its height in 1772, harvested 130 acres of sugarcane with the 141 enslaved Africans who labored in the agricultural fields and the rum distillery. Sugar production was arduous and dangerous work for the coerced enslaved labor force in the Caribbean. Enslaved and later free Afro-Caribbean at the Estate likely worked from sunup to sundown, only to then return to their own homes to complete the labors of housekeeping as well as maintenance of their own subsistence farm. The plantation was dedicated predominantly to the production of cane sugar, which was continuously cultivated and processed on-site until the early 1920s, making the estate one of the last operating sugar plantations on the island of St. Croix (Wright et al., 1980). The site remained continuously occupied from 1749 through the 1960s (Tyson 1985; Wright et al., 1980).

Decades of soil derogation along with devastating hurricanes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries results in the decline of sugar production at the ELP in the early 1900s. The last recorded sugar cane harvest was a mere 50 acres in 1942 versus 155 acres of harvested sugar cane 128 years prior. In addition to nutrient-deficient soils, increased production costs after the abolishment of slavery in 1848, and the ever-pervasive threat of natural disaster, the demand for cane sugar began to wane in favor of beet-based sugar. By the 1950s, the buildings--which had long been in disrepair--started to collapse and succumb to storm damage that occurred as a result of a hurricane that struck the island in 1928. Ongoing archaeological work at the estate included a reassessment of

the site after the landfall of both Hurricanes Maria and Irma in 2017 (Dunnavant et al., 2018). There are ongoing efforts to rehabilitate the historic structures identified at the Estate Little Princess conducted by TNC.

Ongoing archaeological work at the Estate Little Princess is part of an award-winning project built in collaboration with the Society of Black Archaeologists (SBA) and the Slave Wrecks Project (SWP), an international collaboration between the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Park Service (NPS), and the George Washington University Capitol Archaeological Institute. Founded in 2011, the SBA is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for proper treatment of African and African diaspora material culture through the promotion of academic excellence and social responsibility (Odewale et al., 2018).

Examining Sartorial Practices

During the enslavement and post-emancipation eras in the Danish West Indies (1733-1917)-- periods marked by racialized servitude, sexual exploitation, and economic disenfranchisement-- Afro-Crucians were styling their hair with combs, lacing glass beads around their necks, dyeing coarse-cotton fabric with indigo-berry and vine sorrel, and fastening buttons to adorn their bodies and dress their social lives. Through my work, at the ELP, I posit that quotidian sartorial practices, how people dressed their bodies for their everyday lives, are practices of self-making that, through their repetitive daily engagement, constitute the body and form identities. Building off the work of Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher (1992), I define sartorial practices as social-cultural practices, shaped by many intersecting operations of power and oppression, including racism, sexism, and classism, that involve modifications of the corporal form (e.g., scarification, body piercings, and hair alteration), and all three-dimensional supplements added to the body (e.g., clothing, hair combs, jewelry). While much of the archaeological work on adornment practices among Afro-Americans (African and African-descendant people in the Americas) focuses on the era of enslavement, little archaeological work examines sartorial practices as an avenue for identity formations from slavery through freedom. The ELP, with an occupation that spans over 200 years, makes an excellent case site to explore this change over time.

This research builds on three bodies of interdisciplinary scholarship: archaeological analyses of adornment, Black feminist theory, and historical archaeology of enslavement and post-emancipation. Within historic archaeological scholarship on adornment, the multivalent meanings behind artifacts recovered in the archaeological record that relate to dress practices are tools for the formation of identity (Beaudry, 2006; Fisher & Loren, 2003; Galle, 2004; Heath, 1999, 2004; Loren, 2001, 2010; Thomas & Thomas, 2004; White & Beaudry, 2009). I argue that beads, buttons, rivets, suspenders, bodices, hairpins, and hook-and-eye closures are some of the material culture data that, alongside documentary data, serves as evidence of sartorial practices of self-making that form identity and constitute the body through daily iterative practice. Within this project, my conceptualization of processes of identity formation draws from Meskell's (2002) theorization of "iterative practices" where she states that "identities are multiply constructed and revolve around a set of iterative practices that are always in process, despite their material and symbolic substrata" (2002, p. 281). Pulling from Meskell, I argue that beads, buttons, rivets, suspenders, bodices, hairpins, and hook-and-eye fasteners are some of the "small things" that, along with documentary data, serve as evidence of "iterative practices" that comprise sartorial "practices of self-making" engaged in by individuals.

The emphasis on intersecting operations of power and oppression, including racism, sexism, and classism within my definition of dress draws from Black feminist theory. Black feminist theory--specifically the usefulness of intersectionality as an analytical tool--comes from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) theorization of intersectionality, which locates the positionality of Black women in particular at the intersections of gender, race, and class operations of power and oppression. Black feminist archaeology aids in the interpretation of African Americans' past lived experiences as wholly complex rather than compartmentalizing multiple facets of Black experiences (Agbe-Davies, 2001, 2007; Battle-Baptiste, 2012; Franklin, 2001; see also Wilkie, 2003, 2004).

From its inception, historical archaeology of African diasporic past lifeways concerned itself with identity politics (Davidson, 2004; Fairbanks, 1974; Ferguson, 1980; Franklin, 2001; Otto, 1980; Singleton, 1998). Archaeological investigations of the African diaspora have expanded beyond the U.S. to include the West African coast (Decorse, 2001; Kelly, 1997), South Africa (Hall, 1987, 1993), Brazil (Funari, 1999; Orser & Funari, 2001), and the Caribbean (Armstrong & Kelly, 2000; Armstrong & Mark, 2003; Bates et. al., 2016; Singleton, 2015). However, while the Caribbean has become the site of more archaeological excavation, work tends to center Anglo-American, British, French, and Spanish sites of enslavement and post-emancipation. My research at the Estate Little Princess brings a site of enslavement and post-emancipation from a Danish West Indian lens into conversation with scholarship on the Circum-Caribbean, providing data sets that can be placed in comparison with other sites for further analysis of African diasporic experiences. By integrating documentary and archaeological data, my current research at the Estate provides a framework for testing inferences about the relationship the matrix of domination has to the formation of identity through the lens of dress, across space and time in the former Danish West Indies and the broader Atlantic world.

Archaeological excavations at the site during the summer of 2017 and 2018 resulted in the recovery of over 16,000 artifacts with shovel probes unearthing material culture (e.g., ceramics, glass, metal) pertaining specifically to the era of enslavement and post-emancipation. This work is preliminary with plans to continuing excavating at the enslaved and later free laborer area for another 3-4 years.

Conclusions: The Potentiality of the Archaeological and Archival Record: The Syntheses of Material Culture and Documentary Data

I am opening this conclusion with a circa 1890 image of two-house servants who labored at the Estate Little Princess (Figure 5). The man wears a top hat, trousers, and a buttoned froc. The woman has her hair pulled back and covered with a scarf. She wears a short gown, a long petticoat that falls to her ankles with an apron. Their hands are intertwined as they stare back at the camera. The back of the photograph reads, "Nanna Hetta about 1890." Less than 50 years after the abolition of slavery in the Danish West Indies, I wonder how Nanna Hetta, her ancestors and her descendants, who labored and lived at the Estate Little Princess, constituted their existence through everyday, quotidian practices of self-making.

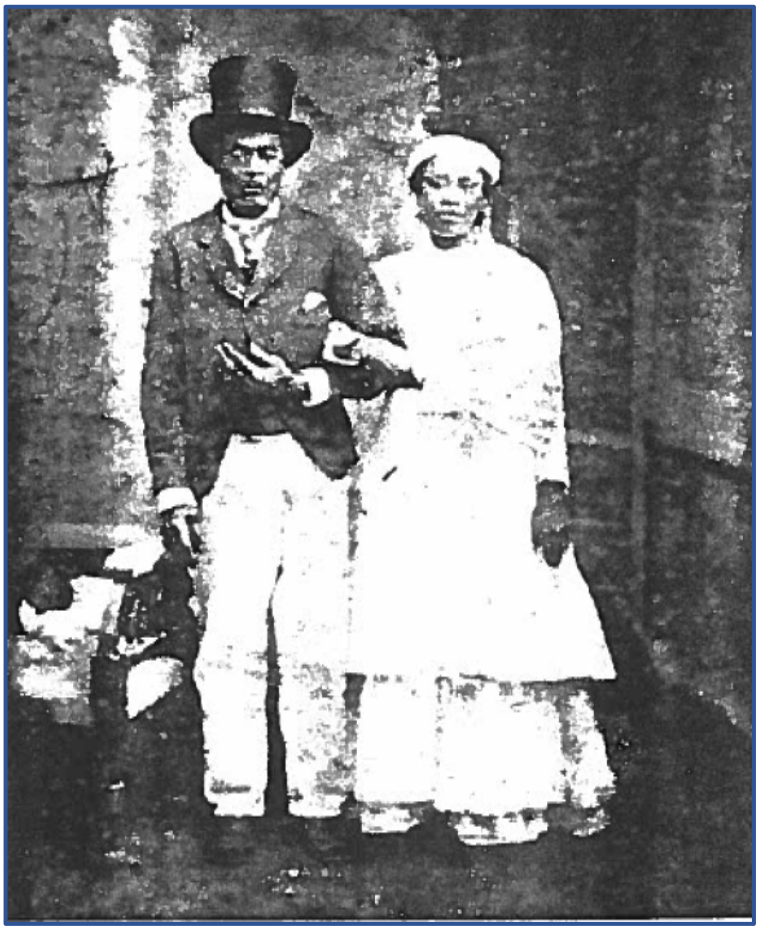
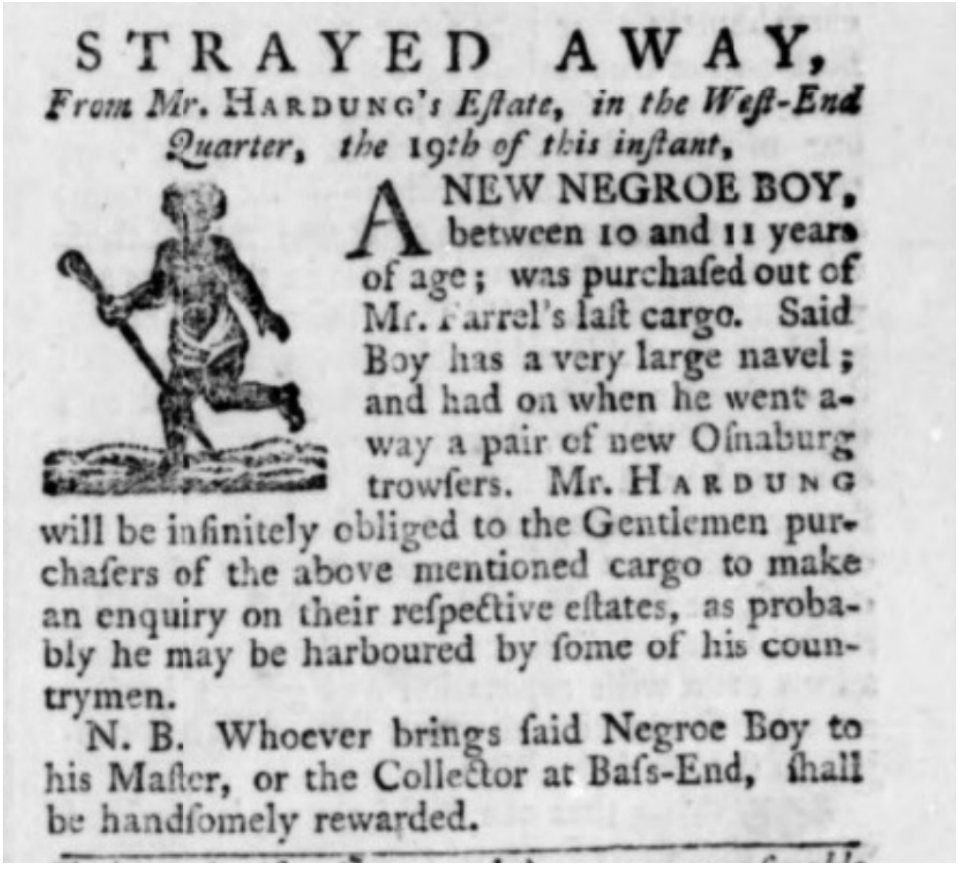


Figure 5. A 19th-century image of two-house servants that labored at the Estate Little Princess. Courtesy of Mr. and Ms. Dawson.

My interest in examining sartorial practices of self-making among Afro-Caribbean people on the island of St. Croix lead me to explore avenues of inquiry in the archaeological and archival record. With the Estate Little Princess as a case study, through a synthesis of material culture and documentary data, I will explore sartorial practices over time as an avenue through which to explore the complex entanglements of structure, agency, and the enduring legacy of enslavement. Analysis of material culture data for my research will consist of me cataloging and analyzing material culture recovered from the ELP to the standards of the Digital Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS). DAACS host a digital, relational (SQL) database of excavation and artifact information that can be queried online, making archaeological data on the African diaspora widely accessible. Using the DAACS database guarantees that material culture recovered from the ELP is cataloged and analyzed systematically to allow intra-site and cross-site comparison. Through the use of SQL, I will analyze clothing and adornment artifacts at the ELP by querying the assemblage for patterns of archaeological variation to assess frequencies in the distribution of artifacts as a means of inferring the acquisition and disposal of clothing and adornment goods and potential shifts in dress practices. Material culture data recovered will be analyzed to determine what effect, if any, operations of power and oppression had on patterns of discard, the cost of goods, market accessibility, and aesthetic valuation. Discard patterns within the archaeological record may provide inferences regarding the aesthetic choices people at the ELP were making in regards to dress over time.

In addition to material culture recovered, I will create a database that includes all references to adornment and clothing, including clothing type, decoration, and the rate of appearance over time from documentary sources. I will collect and analyze historical photographs and postcards held in the Danish Royal Library as well as the Danish National Archives that provide documentary data regarding late 19th and early 20th centuries dress practices. Additionally, I will utilize the Royal Danish Library digital newspaper collection to analyze runaway slave advertisements in six volumes of *The Royal Danish American Gazette* (1770-1801), five volumes of *The Royal Saint Croix Gazette* (1813-1815), 5,824 volumes of the *St. Croix Avis* (1844-1917), and 296 volumes of the *Dansk Vestindisk Regierings Avis* (1815-1843). These advertisements will provide data regarding Afro-Crucian's appearance when they absconded during enslavement (Figure 6). I am currently in the process of creating a database that records attributes based on the advertisements, including whether clothing is mentioned and to what extent. This database will be used to assess clothing practices engaged in by enslaved Africans when they absconded while allowing for a comparison to what enslaved Africans were wearing to the criminalization of sartorial practices outlined in sumptuary laws.



STRAYED AWAY,

From Mr. HARDUNG'S *Eſtate, in the Weſt-End Quarter, the 19th of this inſtant,*

A NEW NEGROE BOY, between 10 and 11 years of age; was purchaſed out of Mr. Farrel's laſt cargo. Said Boy has a very large navel; and had on when he went away a pair of new Oſnaburg trowſers. Mr. HARDUNG will be infinitely obliged to the Gentlemen purchaſers of the above mentioned cargo to make an enquiry on their reſpective eſtates, as probably he may be harboured by ſome of his countrymen.

N. B. Whoever brings ſaid Negroe Boy to his Maſter, or the Collector at Baſs-End, ſhall be handſomely rewarded.

Figure 6. An advertisement for an absconded enslaved person, placed in *The Royal Danish American Gazette* July 25th, 1770. Courtesy of the Royal Danish Library digital newspaper collection.

This database will create a baseline from which to draw comparisons to material culture recovered from the ELP and provide contextual data regarding quotidian dress practices among Afro-Crucians across time, ideologies of race, gender, and class, as well as legal practices of control and surveillance through dress. Through the use of material culture and documentary evidence, my research will shed light on hegemonic ideologies of gender, race, and class, as well as the pragmatic realities of the social and economic conditions of slavery and freedom through the lens of sartorial choice. Archaeological work, coupled with archival research, provides additional strands of data from which to test hypotheses about the methods of surveillance and practices of sousveillance. Together, documentary and material culture allow for a rich exploration into the materiality of sartorial practices at the interstices of structure and agency.

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BEING CONTENT (?): CONTAINMENT, HABITATION AND DEVOTION

Dorothy Akpene Amenuke

Inhabited spaces could be friendly or hostile depending on many factors. In times prior to our current experiences of nation-states that excessively surveilled, many non-western geographical boundaries were presumably considered to be so to speak, only 'virgin' and could be raped at the whim of intruding sailors, missionaries and enslavers from Northern and Western Europe. These acts of 'rape' were actual in bodily terms, as well as psychological and more pervasively cultural, thus material. Some of those raped and defiled were jettisoned with the tatters of fabrics; some exchanged for kegs of liquor and worst still, even probably nothing at all, whence they were shipped off as chattel cargo to the so-called 'New World'. When we contemplate the world's current over-reliance on technologies that lead to the enhancement of security within the nation state, most especially, fortress Europe, we wonder if it is a quest to rid these states of so called "parasitic" beings. This obsession with surveillance, border control and the prevention of access, also permeates so called 'developed' societies to the extent that we literally cannot simply trust our neighbour(s), whosoever they may be now. But to what or to whom do we refer as "parasitic" beings? Is it the ever-growing hordes of refugees who desperately seek for asylum at the gates of fortress Europe, or is it the current inhabitants of former colonies who seek "greener" pastures in places other than their 'native' lands? How fair is it to see humans as such? Is it because they are not of our kind? Not of our own? Different from or "Other" than us? In the daily experience of inhabiting spaces, we witness these sorts of complexities of existence. The manner in which space is produced and consumed and the accompanying emotional registers of security, confinement, resignation, intimacy, boredom, and contentment define the spatial politics which eventually manifest as boundaries and borders. Over time, even these abstract ideas become embodied, often by those that wield power and perpetuated. By exploring the possibly communicative potential of fibres and fabrics, I seek through my research and practice, to investigate the dynamics of the individual in the larger picture of the world, thus questioning the individual in today's transnational global society.

Dorothy Amenuke, *Coded.* Installation view from *Twists, Turns and Broken Doors*, Nubuke Foundation, Accra, Ghana, June 17 – September 30, 2017. Photo by Dorothy Amenuke

Dorothy Amenuke, *Habitation-Inhabitation*. Installation view from *Twists, Turns and Broken Doors*, Nubuke Foundation, Accra, Ghana, June 17 – September 30, 2017. Photo by Dorothy Amenuke

Dorothy Amenuke, *Scroll*. Installation view from *The Gown Must Go to Town*. Museum of Science and Technology, Accra, Ghana, June 19 – July 31, 2015. Photo by Amenyo Dzikunu Bansah

Dorothy Amenuke, *Marks on the sheet*. Installation view from *if you love me*, Kumasi Locomotive Shed, Kumasi Ghana, April 15- May 5, 2016. Photo by Amenyo Dzikunu Bansah

Dorothy Amenuke, *In the Nest* variation, 2013 Photo by Dorothy Amenuke

Dorothy Amenuke, *The Scroll 2*. Installation view from *Twists Turns and Broken Doors*, Nubuke Fondation, Accra, Ghana, June 17- September 30, 2017. Photo by Mary Hark

Dorothy Amenuke, *The Scroll*. Installation view from *Silence Between the Lines*, New Ghanaian Contemporary Art, Kumasi, Ghana, February 19 - 23, 2015. Photo credit: Jean Rivel Fondjo.

Dorothy Amenuke, *The Scroll.* Installation view from *Silence Between the Lines*, New Ghanaian Contemporary Art, Kumasi, Ghana, February 19 - 23, 2015. Photo credit: Jean Rivel Fondjo.

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Landscapes of the African American Diaspora in Denmark

- An Imaginary Exhibition

Abstract
This imaginary exhibition is based on the archive of items collected to write the book manuscript for Searching for Utopia: African Americans in 20th Century Denmark. *Professor Ethelene Whitmire used the method of curatorial dreaming to design this exhibition and was influenced by African American expatriate Walter Williams's landscape paintings that reflect the themes in the book.*

Keywords: African American, diaspora, Denmark, archives, exhibition

Landscapes of the African American Diaspora in Denmark: An Imaginary Exhibition
I am writing a book about African Americans who lived, studied, visited, and performed in 20thcentury Denmark. In the beginning of the 20th century educators, civil rights activists, scholars, social workers and union organizers went to Denmark to study the adult folk schools and cooperative movements for farmers. They hoped to create similar programs to help African American sharecroppers, tenant farmers and members of the Great Migration. Although their primary reason for going to Denmark was to uplift the race, many also had a secondary motive—a sense of adventure and a respite from racism and segregation in the United States. In the second half of the century, African Americans went to Denmark for more individual reasons and began permanently living there. Artists and performers like jazz saxophonist Dexter Gordon and singer Ella Fitzgerald found financial and creative support for their work in Denmark as well as romance. Many married Danes and started families—often second families for the frequently middle-aged jazz musicians. The artists, writers and musicians also felt that the lack of state-sanctioned, racial segregation created an atmosphere in Denmark that increased their productivity.

My book project includes famous and unknown African American scholars, musicians, writers, diplomats, and activists, among many others. Many viewed Denmark as a racial utopia. Several men including baseball player Curt Flood said they felt like a "human being" while in Denmark (Vecsey, 1970). Others thrived in their creative professions, finding renewed passion in Denmark where they could live more freely. Jazz musician Sahib Shihab,

describing his experiences in the United States, said, "I don't have time for this racial bit. It depletes my energies" (Lind, 1963, p. 38).

Figure 1. Walter Williams *Roots, Southern Landscape* (1978). Oil, sand, enamel, collage. 121.3 x 149.3 cm (47 3/4 x 58 3/4 in.) Collection of Camille O. and William H. Cosby Jr. Courtesy of Walter Williams' Estate.

Data Sources for *Searching for Utopia: African Americans in 20th Century Denmark*

While writing and researching my book I collected hundreds of primary sources including: personal letters, Danish government records (for example, the Udlændingesager records, nicknamed the Foreigner Files, in the Danish National Archives), Danish and African American newspaper articles and columns, scrapbooks, photographs, images of paintings and prints, a film, documentaries, novels, a short story, music, interviews and many other documents. During this time, I was thinking about how to represent the story I was writing in a different medium as a multimedia presentation. I wanted to reach new audiences who would not necessarily read *Searching for Utopia*. I came across a book that proposed an alternative method of presenting scholarly research as an exhibition.

Curatorial Dreaming and Imaginary Exhibits

The book, *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*, described the method of curatorial dreaming. It is an alternative means of knowledge production—a technique to help academics translate their scholarly work into an exhibition that reaches a broader audience. The creators, scholars Shelley Ruth Butler and Erica Lehrer,

encourage academics to use creative titles, venues, and to select "evocative descriptions of key exhibitionary moments" (Butler and Lehrer, 2016, p. 4). They see exhibitions as arguments that curators are trying to make to show visitors a way of seeing. They urge scholars to "set aside linear models of knowledge dissemination" and consider other ways of exhibiting their work (Butler and Lehrer, 2016, p. 10). Butler described the process of conducting a curatorial dreaming workshop to create an exhibition or intervention (Butler, 2018).

One example of creating a real exhibition from a curatorial dream is "Visual Footnotes: Counter Memories and Art from a Fractured Past in Post-Conflict Peru" exhibition. The exhibition was designed as "an immersive strategy to present and encourage reflections about research journeys." One visitor said, "I feel like I'm standing inside the book!" (Angarita, 2016). I want visitors of my imaginary exhibition to feel like they are standing inside my archive.

One inspiration for my curatorial dream is the art of Walter Williams (1920-1998), an African American expatriate in Denmark. Artist and art historian David C. Driskell described *Roots, Southern Landscapes* (see Figure 1), by Williams as:

> an oil painting with bits of paper collaged throughout its roughly painted surface, is one of many variations on the theme of *Southern Landscape*. It was a subject Williams began creating in the early 1960s. Repetitive symbols that appear often in Williams's work—blackbirds, butterflies, sunflowers, children collecting bouquets of flowers, and a bright red sun—tell us that a warm and colorful romance between the viewer and the southern landscape is about to take place. But central to all these symbols is an upturned tree trunk with its bare black roots exposed to the heat of the southern sun. The trunk of the tree is partly entwined by barbed wire.
>
> As handsome as this romance of nature may seem, as shown in the curious gaze of black children playing innocently in the surrounding countryside, *Roots, Southern Landscape* is a tour de force in cultural subversion. It is an accomplished form of social commentary art under the guise of a well-planned painterly statement. The upturned tree trunk and its barbed wire represent African Americans in the flowering fields of wealth in America, uprooted from their home in Africa and partly hemmed in by the inhumane rules of slavery, then segregation. The sunflower echoes the warmth of the sun and represents faith and hope for the future. The birds and butterflies symbolize the flight to full freedom and first-class citizenship desired by all oppressed people. The shacks in the background reaffirm the poverty of the rural south, a visual reoccurrence often noted in William's paintings (Driskell, 2001, p. 138).

In the fall 2014, the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in the United States had an exhibition, *Conversations: African and African American Artworks in Dialogue*. The exhibition was organized by Williams' friend David C. Driskell along with independent scholar Adrienne L. Childs, and curator Bryna Freyer. The exhibit's chief curator and the museum's deputy director Christine Mullen Kreamer, said of the 50 pieces on loan from the Camille O. and William H. Cosby Jr. Collection, that this piece by Walter Williams, *Roots, Southern Landscape*, was "one of our favorite pieces.[i] It's so powerful this notion of African American History" (Andrews-Dryer, 2014). This piece was included under the theme, Nature as Metaphor, and the text that accompanied this work describes it as:

> A fairly overt political approach to the landscape is found in *Roots, Southern Landscape*, by the expatriate African American artist Walter Williams. In this dreamy, almost fantastic landscape, children play and butterflies drift around a large, dark, upturned tree root that is entangled in barbed wire. This ominous dead tree seems like an incongruous element in a field full of sunflowers and other colorful foliage. However, upon closer examination, we find that the field of flowers turns into a cotton field. Small figures, perhaps children, pick cotton among several shacks. Williams has fashioned a landscape in which the roots of American slavery and tenant farming are sites of memory wherein the severed roots of the first Africans in America are recalled. However, his depictions of young children, flowers, and butterflies, along with his use of warm, energetic yellow, orange, and pink hues, evoke the promise of renewal (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, 2014).

This promise of renewal, a hope for a brighter day, echoed the themes of the African Americans in my book manuscript, *Searching for Utopia: African Americans in 20th Century Denmark*. Artist Walter Henry Williams, Jr. was born on August 11, 1920 in Brooklyn. His mother Dorothy supported his interests in the arts but she died when he was five years old shortly after separating from his father. His father and stepmother raised Walter and his sister Dorothy and he put aside his dreams of being an artist. After high school, Williams served in WWII, married, and had two sons while he worked various blue-collar jobs to support the family. In 1948, shortly after the birth of his second son, Williams decided to pursue his passion for art and sacrificed his family in the process. He became part of a group of artists and musicians in the Greenwich Village including poet Alan Polite and his roommate, noted jazz musician Charlie "Bird" Parker. He shared studio space with artists Sam Middleton, Harvey Cropper, and Clifford Jackson—all would eventually live abroad too. They encouraged him to use his GI Bill to attend the Brooklyn Museum School of Art from 1951-1955 where he was taught by Ben Shahn and Reuben Tam. But, it was his instructor Gregorio Prestopino who had the greatest impact on his early art by influencing his choice of subjects, style, and the colors he used to capture children in urban settings.

In 1953, he attended the summer school of Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture where David Driskell, the only other African American student, was his roommate. Their friendship would span nearly half a century. Williams won first place for painting at Skowhegan. In 1955, he received the John Hay Whitney Foundation fellowship and used the funds to travel to Denmark. His trip "had a profound effect on him and changed the direction of his art." (Hanks, 2007, p. 24). Biographer Eric Hanks said, "Many black artists escaped to France but Williams chose Denmark because his maternal grandfather, who was from the Danish West Indies, always spoke so highly of the country and he was determined to see it for himself." (Hanks, 2007, pp. 24-25). During his time in Denmark, Williams frequently traveled to the Danish island of Bornholm. Williams' widow Marlena said that as a life-long city dweller he was "awestruck" noting,

> it was the first time he really saw landscapes. His exposure to untouched nature was life-changing. He freed his subjects from an urban environment and placed them in the countryside. Children became principal themes. Birds, butterflies, sunflowers, watermelons and the sun became key imagery—symbolic of rebirth and resurrection, flight and freedom. He had discovered what he wanted to say in his work (Hanks, 2007, p. 25).

Williams returned briefly to the United States and then spent several years living and painting in Mexico before returning to the United States. He won $1,000 from the Silvermine Guild Award for Oil Painting and used the funds to return to Denmark in 1964. He married Marlena Jacobsen later that year and they would eventually have a son, Darius, in 1973. Williams became a Danish citizen in 1979. During his years in Denmark Williams continued to paint, print, and sculpt and participated in shows in Denmark, the United States and around the world. He also taught in his studio in Frederiksberg. Williams died in 1998 at the age of seventy-seven years old and is buried in the grave of the unknowns in Bispebjerg Cemetery.

The Exhibition

The Venue

Ideally the exhibition would be in a field recreating the landscapes in Bornholm that inspired Walter Williams's *Roots, Southern Landscapes* and *Southern Landscape* paintings (see Figures 1 and 2). But, realistically it could be in a traditional museum or gallery space that has at least two rooms. For my imaginary exhibit, I want visitors to feel as if they are walking through Walter Williams's landscapes. The first room would recreate the settings of *Roots, Southern Landscape* and *Southern Landscapes* leading to the rest of the exhibit. Visitors would enter through the back of the paintings and make their way towards the front and the rest of the exhibit. The visitors would enter through the door of a shanty. The room would be quiet and quite dark, filled with cotton fields. As they exit the shack they hear blackbirds and start to see walls awash with vivid shades of orange, pink, and yellow and they see images of butterflies and sunflowers or preferably real sunflowers. The sounds of jazz music from expatriates Thad Jones, Ed Thigpen, Kenny Drew, Oscar Pettiford, Richard Boone, Ray Pitts, Ernie Wilkins, and Duke Jordan, among others begins to fill the space. In the middle of the exhibit there would be an upturned tree trunk striking a discordant note.

Once the visitors walk through the sunflower fields, they can take a variety of paths. Although I am writing my book in a chronological, linear format, the visitors do not have to follow a straight path. *Narrative Spaces: On the Art of Exhibiting* suggests several ways of creating paths for visitors to experience exhibitions—what the authors call "The Walk." Two walks that would work with this exhibition are (1) "a labyrinthine environment conducive to encounters" where visitors do not have to follow a fixed route in order to understand the experiences of African Americans in Denmark, and (2) "a walk through different environments with different narrative perspectives," so that a visitor might form a positive impression of African American experiences in Denmark in one section and then see or hear something that makes them question their previously held assumptions (Kossmann, Mulder, & den Oudsten, 2012).

Figure 2. Walter Williams *Southern Landscape* (1977-1978) Mixed media on board, 48" x 48". David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park. Courtesy of Walter Williams' Estate

Description of evocative key exhibitionary moments

Visitors could watch clips from the Danish documentary *Cool Cats* (2015) by Janus Køster-Rasmussen, about jazz musicians Dexter Gordon and Ben Webster's experiences in Denmark. Or, they could view the many videos of their performances like Stuff Smith playing his violin with another African American expatriate, pianist Kenny Drew, and two Danish musicians who regularly performed with the expatriates—bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen and drummer Alex Riel. A clip from Ken Burns' documentary *Jazz* about Louis Armstrong arrival in

Copenhagen in the 1930s depicted when "10,000 fans turned out to meet him at the railroad station. He filled the Tivoli concert hall eight evenings in a row" (Burns, 2004).

Marian Anderson singing "Ave Maria" fills the space as she sings the song she sang for prisoners in Horsens Prison in 1935 and visitors could read the local newspaper coverage about her visit or excerpts from the memoir of her Finnish accompanist Kosti Vehanen. The prisoners wrote letters home about the concert, one wrote, "I never heard anything like it, it was an experience we were all grateful for" and these could be part of the exhibit too.

While listening to Alberta Hunter singing for Danish Radio in the 1930s visitors can read her poignant letter written to the United States' Department of State asking to return to Denmark after the Nazi occupation to fulfill her contract to perform. She could not get work in the United States and wanted to be in a place where her "color was not a curse."

Visitors might be surprised to hear classical music performed by Eugene Haynes who fought stereotypes about the kind of music African Americans could play and perform in Denmark. His friendship with *Out of Africa* author Isak Dinesen a.k.a. Karen Blixen—captured in photographs—could also be displayed. In 2012, the local Amager Museum exhibited items found in Haynes' suitcase including a 1957 Danish magazine article in *Billed Bladet*, translated to "There's a Negro in Dragør," that documented Haynes life in the town where he rented a cottage and these items could form part of an exhibit.

Visitors could watch scenes from the Danish film *Oh Happy Day* (2004) by Hella Joof about an African American choir director from Harlem who teaches a choir in a small Danish village to sing gospel. They could also read a quote from the African American lead actor Malik Yoba stating, "I absolutely loved living and working in Denmark for a few months. It was one of the highlights of my career being able to be immersed in the Danish culture and experiencing how they treat filmmaking."

As I researched *Searching for Utopia* I constantly searched for photographs of African Americans in Denmark. I would share some of the discovered images including Booker T. Washington in Ringsted in 1910 and his quote, "Perhaps, the happiest country in the world is Denmark." Or, images from the scrapbook Professor Giles Hubert assembled from his year studying in Denmark from 1938 – 1939. There are photographs from the early 1930s of the first two African American students, Wenonah Bond and Floria Pinkney, to attend the still-existing International People's College in Helsingør. Visitors can see the exquisite black & white photographs of journalist Roy De Coverley taken of him walking around Copenhagen in the 1950s. They can read quotes from his article, "Race Question Not in Existence in Denmark" written in 1935 for the African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender* and from his travel narrative "Beauty, Beer and Beechwoods," where he declared Denmark was a "Utopia" and an "Arcadia."

Disturbing images of performers in blackface are juxtaposed against the film *Green Pastures* (1936) directed by William Keighley and the playwright Marc Connelly based on his 1930 Pulitzer-prize winning play about African Americans recreating scenes from the Old Testament. The play was performed at the Betty Nansen Theatre in Denmark in the 1930s with Swedish and Danish actors in blackface. The Royal Danish Library has a scrapbook of Danish newspaper coverage in their archives.
Visitors will be entranced by a short video, *Dancing Prophet*, of dancer Doug Crutchfield in Denmark teaching physically disabled children and senior citizens how to dance while reading the 1971 African American magazine *Ebony* article about Crutchfield titled, "Thanks to Doug Crutchfield Fru Nilsen Can Dance."

A 1963 *Down Beat* magazine interview, "Sahib Shihab's Expatriate Life," noted:

> Recently, a Danish television producer, Annett Wolf, picked Shihab to portray a guide for a filmed tour of the less-frequented areas of Copenhagen. Trailed by a camera, the baritonist made a fascinating tour of the city, ending up at the Montmartre playing with a trio. The TV vignette, for which Shihab composed and played the soundtrack, won critical applause… (Lind, 1963, p. 38).

Visitors could view this beautiful black & white vignette.

The aforementioned David Driskell recorded a casual conversation he had with artist Walter Williams discussing what Black art is and what it means to be a Black artist in November 1972 during Driskell's visit to Copenhagen.

African American expatriate Bernie Moore hosted a two-part cinéma vérité show, *Anden Mands Land*, on Danish television in September and October 1970. Moore talked to African American expatriates about their experiences in Denmark including with racial discrimination.

In 2018, Pulitzer-prize winning poet Gregory Pardlo published his autobiography, *Air Traffic: A Memoir of Ambition and Manhood in America*, which includes a vignette about his short time in Denmark in the early 1990s. He loved the idea of Denmark and not being another African American making a pilgrimage to Paris, France, which he called a "cliché." He said, "Copenhagen was my calling, and a hipper Promised Land than Paris for black intellectuals escaping the stifling air pollution of American racism" (p. 121). He admitted that "weeks earlier he couldn't have located" Denmark on a map. But, he said he "did my homework." And, he knew that "Copenhagen had attracted black artists, musicians, and writers like Walter Henry Williams, Don Cherry, William H. Johnson, and Nella Larsen" (p. 121). Visitors can read his poem *Copenhagen, 1995* that begins,

> As adversaries we made good
> lovers, made heat where there was little else
> to hold in common but youth and wanderlust
> until I found her with a former valentine reclining
> under skyrockets of wilted mistletoes,
> where the yuletide ebbed and "Auld Lang Syne"
> wheezed away on chariots of snow.

Finally, they can listen to a podcast, about the last of the great jazz musicians, "A portrait of Horace Parlan" on KCRW's Unfictional series from April 8, 2016.

These are just a few of the possible snapshots of items that could be included in my curatorial dream. My archive contains hundreds of items that I am using to assemble a narrative about the experiences of African Americans in Denmark during the 20th century. Not everyone found their utopia in Denmark, but many found great joy living in an environment where they were not considered second-class citizens. Many still missed family, friends, and specific food from the United States but were content to live and die in Denmark. The exit of the exhibition could be a hallway filled with images from the Black Lives Matter movement in Denmark, images of events surrounding the one hundredth anniversary of the transfer of the Danish West Indies to the United States in 1917 (now the US Virgin Islands) and the acknowledgment of Denmark's role in the slave trade along with images of the recently installed *Freedom* and *I Am Queen Mary* statues disrupting the utopian narrative for people of African descent born in Denmark or refugees or immigrants not from the United States. The hallway could end with the vibrant shades of pink, orange, and yellow from Williams' landscape paintings and the sounds of jazz filling the air as visitors walk through another field of sunflowers that they could take with them as a souvenir.

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[i] The museum was criticized for having an exhibition mainly consisting of works from Cosby's collection and receiving a substantial amount of funds from Cosby to mount the exhibition while he was under allegations of sexual assault in 2015. He was later convicted and sentenced in 2018. (see: Bufferstein, A. Smithsonian Conveniently Concealed $716,000 Bill Cosby Donation Amid Rape Allegations. Available at https://news.artnet.com/art-world/smithsonian-concealed-bill-cosby-donation-316275

Marronage is Resistance Against the Colonizer's Construction of History

Abstract

The contribution is an intervention into the book Kolonierne i Vestindien *[The Colonies in the West Indies] (1980) by Danish historian Ove Hornby. Pointing to the limitations and biases of Hornby's account of the St. Croix Fireburn labor revolt of 1878, the contribution is an implicit critique of the way archival sources have been put to use within the discipline of history writing in attempts to delegitimise anti-colonial resistance. It is with some ambivalence that we have chosen to also include an English translation of the Hornby text as well as our annotations, and thereby reproduce the very language we are critiquing. However, these translations have been important in order to ensure greater accessibility to a USVI readership.*

Keywords: resistance, Fireburn, history-writing, colonial bias, Black redaction and annotation

»All these words from the seller, but not one word from the sold. The Kings and Captains whose words moved ships. But not one word from the cargo.«
- Zora Neale Hurston

When accessing the past, we are often forced to make do with the colonizer's archival sources and history books while the task of locating the voices of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the colonial archives is an inordinate challenge. About the approximately 13 million enslaved people who were transported on the Middle Passage between 1450 and 1900, the archives tell us almost nothing. Their history is subsumed in the innumerable financial accounts, ledgers and protocols made by slave traders, merchants or plantation owners.

The silencing continues throughout history. What follows is an excerpt from a Danish history book that discusses the 1878 Fireburn labor revolt on St. Croix.[i] The past is seen exclusively through the colonizer's white gaze. Through acts of redaction and annotation, we have exposed the colonial bias inherent in this account that attempts to pass itself off as neutral.

Black feminist scholar Christina Sharpe notes that what she calls *Black redaction and annotation* can function as "a counter to the force of the state"—a way of returning to violent documents with the intention of seeing and reading otherwise. For Sharpe, Black redaction and annotation are tools with which to expose "the failure of words and concepts to hold in and on Black flesh" in order to "disrupt the dysgraphia that wrote a version of events that was riven with antiblackness".[ii] Similarly, in our case, we use these tactics as a mode of editorial revision and resistance. By striking through colonial and demeaning language, by adding the names of people involved in the Fireburn, by marking out the euphemisms used to justify Danish colonial rule, by pencilling in some of the nuances that have been lost, we are taking history writing to task. Marronage is resistance against the colonizer's construction of history.[iii]

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[i] Ove Hornby. 1980. *Kolonierne i Vestindien*. Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag.
[ii] Christina Sharpe. 2016. *In the Wake*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016, 113-130.
[iii] You can read Marronage's take on writing about the Fireburn on St. Croix and the Fireburn Queens in *Marronage #1*.

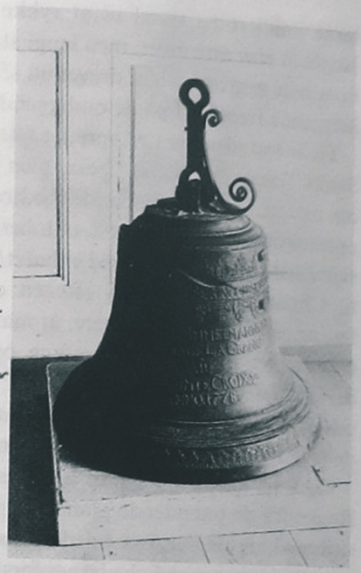
pagne satte sig ud over arbejdsreglementets lønbestemmelser og betalte sine sæsonarbejdere to til tre gange mere, end der normalt kunne opnås på plantagerne. Sankt Croix blev at ligne ved en krudttønde – der behøvedes blot en gnist for at få øen til at eksplodere.

Sankt Croix i flammer

På skiftedagen den 1. oktober søgte ~~landnegrene~~ på Sankt Croix i stort tal ind til byerne – for at søge en ny plads, finde skibslejlighed bort fra øen eller blot for at få sig en glad dag. Således også i 1878: I Frederiksted, der havde det store sukkerdistrikt som opland, var der livlig omsætning i romboderne, og stemningen blandt landarbejderne blev hurtigt oprømt og aggressiv. Hen på eftermiddagen begyndte der at spredes rygter om ~~negre~~, der var blevet stoppet på vej væk fra øen, og rundt omkring diskuteredes lønforholdene i højlydte toner. Der var uro i luften, da politiet samlede en "stærkt beruset" landarbejder op og bragte ham på hospitalet, fordi han havde skåret sin fod. Da betjentene søgte at splitte mængden, blev de mødt med stenkast og måtte trække sig tilbage til fortet.

Situationen var på vippen, og nogle kendte og alment respekterede hvide borgere søgte at få ~~negrene~~ til at forlade byen. På dette kritiske tidspunkt kom en kvinde løbende og råbte, at den ~~neger~~ der var blevet bragt på hospitalet, nu var død som følge af politiets mishandling. Følelserne kom i kog, og det nyttede ikke, at man hurtigt kunne "konstatere", at den meget omtalte landarbejder sov rusen fredeligt ud i sin hospitalsseng. Nu ville ~~negrene~~ have »retfærdighed«, og de samledes i en "truende" skare på pladsen foran fortet.

Stenene fløj gennem luften, og skønt de få soldater affyrede varselsskud, blev yderporten revet op, og besætningen måtte skyndsomt søge tilflugt i den indre fortgård. Da bombardementet med forhåndenværende kasteskyts fortsatte, og den sidste port begyndte at give efter, gik de indespærrede over til



Malmklokke fra Schimmelmann-plantagen La Grange nær Frederiksted. Klokken er støbt i København 1778 og blev hundrede år senere sønderslået under Oktober-oprøret. Handels- og Søfartsmuseet.

at fyre direkte mod mængden. ~~Negrene~~ trak sig modvilligt tilbage til byen, og en upopulær planter på vej til fortet blev ilde tilredt. De indesluttede soldater var for få og for slet bevæbnede til, at "man" turde risikere et udfald, og først på aftenen begyndte butiksplyndringen, og enkelte bygninger blev antændt. En stor del af byens borgere søgte tilflugt i kirkerne eller roede ud til skibene på reden.

Der var sendt bud til Christiansted med bøn om undsætning, men rytterne havde vanskeligt ved at undslippe de "krigeriske" landarbejdere, og de stedlige autoriteter modtog først "ulykkesbudskabet" på den anden side midnat. I Christiansted mente man at kunne afse en snes soldater, men undsætningen nåede først frem til Westenden ved halv-fem tiden om morgenen. Frederiksteds forretningskvarter var i mellemtiden forvandlet til et flammehav, og oprørerne havde også foretaget ihærdige, men fejlslagne forsøg på at sætte ild til fortet. Efter at have modtaget forstærkningen var solda-

paign disregarded the wage regulations in the Labor Act and paid his seasonal workers two to three times more than what could normally be earned on the plantations. Sct. Croix began to resemble a powder keg—a spark was all it would take to make the island explode.

Sct. Croix in Flames

Every year on transfer day, October 1st, Sct. Croix's country negroes would travel to the towns in large numbers—in order to find a new position, seeking opportunities to leave the Island by sea or simply to have a cheerful day. Such was also the case in 1878: In Frederiksted, where the big sugarcane district was located, the rum shops were bustling and the mood among the workers quickly turned excited and aggressive. During the afternoon, rumors began to spread about negroes who had been detained while trying to leave the Island, and wide and about wage conditions were discussed vociferously. There was unrest in the air as the police picked up a heavily drunken field worker and brought him to the hospital because he had cut his foot. When the police tried to dissolve the crowd, they were met with stone-throwing and were compelled to withdraw to the fort.

The situation was poised to escalate, and well-known and widely respected white citizens tried to convince the negroes to leave town. At this critical moment, a woman ran into the crowd shouting that the negro who had been brought to the hospital was now dead as a result of his mistreatment by the police. Tensions had reached a boiling point, and it was to no avail that one could quickly determine that the much-talked-about field worker was peacefully sleeping off his intoxication in his hospital bed. Now the negroes wanted “justice”, and they gathered in a threatening mob in the square in front of the fort.

Stones were flying through the air and although the few soldiers present fired warning shots, the outer gate was torn open and the soldiery had to hurriedly seek refuge in the fort’s inner courtyard. When the bombardment with whatever missiles were at the crowd’s disposal continued and the last gate started to give in, the trapped began to

(Caption:) Bronze bell from the Schimmelmann plantation La Grange near Frederiksted. The bell was cast in Copenhagen in 1778 and a hundred years later it was smashed to pieces under the October rebellion. Maritime Museum of Denmark.

shoot directly at the crowd. The negroes reluctantly withdrew to the town and a widely disliked planter was badly hurt on his way to the fort. The trapped soldiers were too few in numbers and too poorly armed for one to dare to risk a fall out, and in the early evening the ransacking of stores began and a few buildings were set on fire. A large part of the town's citizens sought refuge in the churches or rowed out to the ships at the roadstead. A plea for reinforcement was sent to Christiansted, but the dispatch riders had some difficulty escaping the belligerent field workers, and the local authorities did not receive the tragic news until past midnight. In Christiansted, one decided that a few soldiers could be spared, but reinforcements did not arrive at the West End before 4.30 in the morning. In the meantime, Frederiksted’s business district had been transformed into a sea of flames and the rebels had made persistent yet unsuccessful attempts to set fire to the fort. After receiving reinforcement, the soldiers were....

Excerpt from Ove Hornby. 1980. *Kolonierne i Vestindien*. Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, pp. 312-313.
Translation by Marronage

ANNOTATIONS AND REDACTED WORDS AND PHRASES
TRANSLATED IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

salg: sale

ophævelse af slaveri: abolition of slavery

Arbejdsreglementet: the Labor Act

Fællessukkerkogeriet: the Central Sugar Factory

to til tre gange mere: two to three times more

Bygger på politimesteren i Frederikssteds beretning "R. Petersen": Based on the chief police officer in Frederiksted's account "R. Petersen"

Slaveriet "ophørte" i 1848 men arbejderne var bundet til plantagerne gennem et midlertidigt arbejdsreglement. Kun en dag om året kunne man ophæve sin kontrakt.: Slavery was "abolished" in 1848 but the workers were tied to plantations through a temporary labour regulation. Only one day a year were you allowed to terminate your contract.

skiftedagen: Transfer Day

Udrejsevisum blev typisk udstedt i dagene omkring d.1.oktober: Travel visas were typically issued in the days around October 1st

rygter: rumors

Plantagearbejdere: plantation workers

negre: negroes

politiet: the police

Stærkt beruset: heavily drunken

landarbejder: field worker

Henry Trotman fra plantagen Mt. Pleasant & Plessen: Henry Trotman from the plantations Mt. Pleasant & Plessen

Felicia James: Felicia James

kvinde: woman

neger: negro

man: one

konstatere: determine

sov rusen fredeligt ud: peacefully sleeping off his intoxication

retfærdighed: justice

truende: threatening

Stenene fløj gennem luften (...) de inspærrede gik over til..:
Stones were flying through the air (…) the trapped began to...

Helt ned i sproget er det klart at synsvinklen er hos de hvide, selvom de "sorte" arbejdere pga. arbejdsreglementet drives til kamp: Right down to the level of language it is clear that the point of view is that of the whites, even though the "black" workers are driven to action because of the Labor Act

Danmark distancerer sig: Danmark distances itself

oprøret: the rebellion

400 arbejdere arresteres, 12 henrettes. Danske myndigheder påstod at kun 60 arbejdere døde under opstanden, men det Amerikanske konsulat mener det var op mod 250 arbejdere der blev dræbt.: 400 workers are arrested. 12 executed. The Danish authorities claimed that only 60 workers died during the uprising, but the American Consulate are convinced it was more than 250 workers who were killed.

Hvorfor er "man" ikke oprører?: How come "one" is not a rebel?

Mange plantere deltog i det frivilligkorps der dræbte mange plantagearbejdere i dagene efter den 1. oktober: Many planters participated in the volunteer militia that murdered many plantation workers in the days following October 1st

upopulær: disliked

man: one

byens borgere: The town's citizens

krigeriske: belligerent

ulykkesbudskabet: tragic news

forretningskvarter: business district

Marronage *is a Copenhagen-based decolonial feminist collective that emerged in 2016 to politicise the centennial of the sale of the former Danish West Indies to the United States. Together with other likeminded collectives and comrades, we organise discursive events, workshops, demonstrations, actions, interventions, texts, video, audio, imagery, financial support with the aim of working towards the abolition of a still colonizing world.* Marronage, redaktion@marronage.dk.

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Colonial media ecologies

- Resounding the colonial archive with impressions from a field trip to Ghana

Abstract
In this mixed-media essay I document a field trip to Ghana where I, so to say, travel in the footsteps of the Danish colonizers to the Gold Coast in a bid to dialogically challenge the genre of the monologizing colonial travelogue[i]*. My methodological retracing of the slave route is inspired by Danish author Thorkild Hansen's book trilogy* Coast of Slaves*,* Ships of Slaves *and* Islands of Slaves *from the 1960s in which he visits the former Danish West Indies and the Gold Coast (in the, at the time of his visit, still very young Ghanaian nation, which had gained its independence from Great Britain in 1957). Hansen was one of the first Danish authors to voice a strong critique of the Danish colonial past and of a neglectful historiography through his docu-fiction. I was curious to explore in a parallel movement to Hansen's the landscape as prism and archive today. Hence, the 'reenactment' of the travelogue in this essay functions as an attempt to recast and refracture colonial narratives of past and present. My own documentary audio recordings from the field trip are presented here along with methodological reflections on how to voice dialogical narratives about colonialism in new digital media.*

Keywords: Transatlantic history, colonial archives, media ecologies, media archaeology, travelogue, contact zone, multi-modal knowledge

To travel is to move into new spaces with eyes already written over …
Ina Ferris (1999, p. 468)

From footprints to soundtracks
In February 2019 – according to the Gregorian calendar – I was in Ghana for the first time, on a field trip traveling along the old Guinean gold coast where the Europeans placed their 'feitorias' or factories and slave forts[ii] in the early days of the global seafaring trade that eventually turned into Western imperialism (this proto-capitalist and in part still ongoing civilizational project with its inherent exploitative use of resources, human and material, for the benefit of people in places far-removed from primary production). I also went further inland, all the way up north to Bolgatanga where I visited a present-day gold mining community still run by locals but under pressure by a strong Chinese interest in mining the land. My aim was to trace the impact of Danish coloniality and in addition to get an impression of what life is like in Ghana today. I was curious to see and experience firsthand the country I had been reading so much about as part of my research on Danish colonial history.

Juxtaposing theory, history and personal travel reflections, this essay is situated within the larger context of my practice-led research. It is the aim of my research to establish a framework for understanding colonial histories on the basis of their media-specific conditionings, as well as to develop an audio archive which re-visits and complements Thorkild Hansen's critical retracing and representation of Danish Transatlantic colonial history in his literary docu-fiction.

In the first part of the essay I introduce useful theoretical terms – *media ecology, contact zone, dialogical space* – which I later employ in my own travel documentation. Then I reflect on cultural heritage sites as media archives while also considering the difference between analog and digital terms of *dialogicality* when engaging with historical material. In the last part of the essay I concretely document my trip to Ghana with a particular emphasis on a visit to the former Danish plantation Frederiksgave in an attempt to open up one dialogical site where multiple stories of past and present intersect. I suggest that Frederiksgave might serve as a possible *material* colonial archive promising other starting points and points of views for trans-national shared and fragmented histories. This last, more open-ended part of the essay combines theoretical reflections with travel notes and audio recordings which serve the speculative purpose of investigating a concrete site as a potentially, with respect to stories and temporalities, multi-layered archive.

By integrating audio into my scholarly work, I aim to establish sensory ways of relating to the places and (his)stories of colonial ecologies. As listeners we are presented with sonic details often glossed over in written travelogues. Distances and proximities can be relayed and felt differently. These contingent and unfiltered details in combination with the idiosyncrasies of where I choose to point the microphone will perhaps reflect the complexity of a history comprised of "multiple protagonists, narrators and material agencies."[iii]

As will become clear, I am interested in investigating potentials for multi-directional perspectives and complex histories that do not easily add up or try to smooth out historical or contemporary conflicting views. Put differently, I wish to move beyond the narrative dominance of perspectives based on strong collective identities and coherent grand narratives in the formation of colonial history. Yet, I am obviously implicated in the documented stories by being a Danish citizen, a Danish speaker, and when I present myself, I am immediately cast in a specific role by the people I meet as a Dane and am as such considered a representative, owner and caretaker of Danish national history in particular. A role which I also by implication actively take upon me, even if I wish to trouble it, when I explore the genre of the travelogue by new medial means in this way.

I draw inspiration from Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever, who call for a media-sensitive approach to history, to emphasize exactly the multi-sensorial and media-specific modalities of knowledge formation. In "Experimental media archaeology: A plea for new directions" they write:

> In engaging with the historical artifacts, we aim at stimulating our sensorial appropriation of the past and thereby critically reflecting the (hidden or non-verbalized) tacit knowledge that informs our engagement with media technologies. In doing experimental media archaeology, we want to plead for a hands-on, ears-on, or an integral sensual approach towards media technologies (Fickers & Oever, 2013, p. 273).

My research takes a *media ecological* approach by addressing colonial environments (in this context in particular cultural heritage sites) as historical archives and as what the media theorist John Durham Peters calls 'elemental media'. Peters defines media as nature-culture environments that speak to our current historical moment "in which we cannot think of computation without thinking about carbon, or of the cloud without thinking about data. Today natural facts are media, and cultural facts have elemental imprint" (Peters, 2015, p. 49). Through such an ecological framework I intend to read landscapes (plantation ruins, landscaped allées) as inscribed and (re-)readable in various also new materialist ways (for instance by reading colonial history from the perspective of distributed agency).

Furthermore, I do this within the context of a current ambition in academia and cultural institutions alike to decolonize colonial archives (Stoler, 2009; Osthoff, 2009; Fuentes, 2016). However, instead of reading archives 'along' or 'against the grain', I suggest an expansive view of what a colonial archive might be. In the search for narrative paths leading to overheard or perhaps even as yet unheard voices.

Stoler, Osthoff and Fuentes all show how colonial archives are producers of affective knowledge at the core of bureaucratic rationalities. Such reading strategies require going beyond the surface-level of archival information to regard the archive not as a mere storage facility but as a continually active producer of history. The decolonial gesture here, then, is to unfold other narratives than what the archivalia were intended to relate in their original use and to counter the inherent 'colonial aphasia' according to Stoler. Hence, I also regard landscapes (nature-culturally scaped land) as material articulations composed of intersecting and sometimes even contradictory narratives and potential new narratives in wait of proper reading strategies.

Now, in order to begin the journey, let us first establish a useful terminology for the terms on which we can encounter cultural heritage sites as media ecologies.

Travel writing and meetings in the contact zone

In Mary Louise Pratt's seminal work *Imperial Eyes – Travel Writing and Transculturation* she introduces the term 'contact zone', which she defines as follows:

> 'Contact zone' in my discussion is often synonymous with 'colonial frontier.' But while the latter term is grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe), 'contact zone' shifts the center of gravity and the point of view. It invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect. The term 'contact' foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other (Pratt, 2008, p. 8).

Indeed, the first steps of colonialism in Africa took place in the coastal contact zones, and some of these places still exist to this day, some as ruins, others as cultural heritage sites or museums. Early Danish colonizers who documented their travels to these outposts and who are included as *voices from the archives* in Thorkild Hansen's fiction are, among others, Ludewig Ferdinand Römer (mid-eighteenth century) and Paul Erdmann Isert (late eighteenth century). Later, colonial critics arrived, such as Thorkild Hansen himself who wrote the book *Slavernes kyst* (En. *Coast of Slaves)* after his visit to Ghana in the mid 1960s.[iv]

Coast of Slaves is the first volume in a trilogy on 'the Danish triangular trade', an often-used euphemism for Danish Transatlantic slave trade in history books, and one of the first head-on critiques of the Danish national historiography about the country's role under colonialism. I was curious to explore in a parallel movement to Hansen's the landscape as prism and archive. In fact, my urge to visit the culturally composite places marked by the early Transatlantic proto-globalization[v] had taken a hold of me in the wake of reading his work. I wanted to see *and not least hear* for myself what was still left of the historical imprint, and find out how it is possible – or perhaps not – to relate to the remnants today, physically as well as by imagination.

Hansen visits places such as the slave fort ruins on the African coast and plantations in the Caribbean like an archaeologist in search of historical deposits as part of his research, and in *Coast of Slaves* these places are used as anchors and conveyors of the traumatic history. As readers we go back to them, with him, to commemorate events but also to search for some palpable remnants that will aid our relation to history and memory going forward.

Like Hansen's travels, my retracing of the places of colonial history is not a story of personal guilt and repentance, but of finding ways of caring by exploring how we are all implicated together, yet differently. Hansen reinvigorates an – at the time of publication – almost absent discussion of Denmark's Transatlantic slavery in the heyday of the welfare state. In Denmark and the other Nordic countries, the decades after the Second World War saw the rise of a welfare state model characterized by a high level of redistribution of wealth and a drive towards egalitarianism, albeit within the narrow frame of a predominantly white national community, concomitant with a widespread economic upturn (Esping-Andersen, 1990). A political atmosphere which might have encouraged Hansen's focus on past injustices and inequality. Whereas people of Denmark today live in an invigorated moment of attention to colonialism, in part due to the many recent centennial initiatives marking the sale of the Danish West Indies (US Virgin Islands) to the US in 1917. Our times are also marked by the culturally influential identity movements from the US and elsewhere challenging the concept of universal man, and a global cultural angst with regard to the environmental sustainability of the capitalist, cosmopolitan way of life with colonial roots, while, to complicate matters even further, neo-nationalism is flourishing internationally.

Cultural heritage sites as dialogical space

Let us now turn to one of the primary components of the travelogue, namely the (heritage) sites where meetings between cultural others have been and continue to be established. As such they are places of translation and exchange of goods and information (on often unequal terms).

Anthropologist Karen Fog Olwig (2003) argues that the dominant Danish narratives about colonialism have not been confronted with the perception of history in the former Danish tropical colonies (the Danish overseas colonies also included a trading post in tropical Tranquebar, India), as the colonies were sold before the process of decolonization in the late twentieth century. One of the ambitions of my work is in turn to fill these gaps by documenting dialogical negotiations of shared history.

Similarly, Astrid Nonbo Andersen identifies a lack of reflection, particularly in relation to sites of memory, and the consequences hereof, for the conception of a certain national innocence, in her recent and seminal book *Ingen undskyldning* (2017, En. *No Apology*) as well as in the article "Vore gamle tropekolonier ..? Tropekolonierne som danske erindringssteder" (En. "Our Old Tropical Colonies..? The Tropical Colonies as Danish Sites of Memory") from which I quote the following[vi]:

> However, it is not without difficulty to lift the site of memory [she explicitly refers to Pierre Nora's term 'lieu de mémoire'] out of the nation state context in which it is born and into the hybrid context of the former colonies. Partly because the sites of memory are not only historical places but also homes for the locals. Partly because the surrounding context does not ascribe meaning to it unambiguously. And finally, because a willingness to identify with the places has been absent in Denmark for a long time. Another image of Denmark has pushed colonial history into the shadows. (Nonbo Andersen, 2010, p. 5[vii])

These are all important issues at stake in the process of recalibrating national and transnational histories in a dialogical process. However, following the idea of anthropologist Helle Jørgensen (2008, p. 13), historical places can be regarded as palimpsests, composed of layers of narratives. There is in fact not a singular all-encompassing grand narrative to adhere to.

In Jørgensen's article "Heritage Tourism in Tranquebar: Colonial Nostalgia or Postcolonial Encounter" she describes how guest books at cultural heritage sites and hotels in another former Danish colony, Tranquebar, in India, are currently being used to discuss the transnational negotiations of history. Jørgensen documents how both tourism and the wider Danish engagement in the development of Tranquebar as a heritage town make it emerge as a location of change and contestation.

In her readings she finds examples of a considerable Danish nostalgia but also of a reflexive engagement with colonial history and the question of how to relate to it. She reads the guest books as part of a dialogical discourse, an invitation to reflect on the shared history:

> Tourism becomes an occasion both to contemplate historic identities associated with what "we" did during the colonial period and how "they" in the former colony might think of "us" in the present. Thus, through tourism national narratives are reconnected with the notion that colonial history constitutes encounters which have had effects for both colonisers and colonised – and that these colonial encounters also have implications in present relations and identities (Jørgensen, 2013, p. 77).

The positions "we" and "they" in the above quote are obviously specific negotiations in their own right, as not all Danish citizens (non-white Danes, for instance) are able to or would even wish to claim this discursive role.

According to Pratt (2008, p. 3) much of the travel literature produced by the colonizers in the days of empire "gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized." In fact, she considers travel books "one of the key instruments that made people 'at home' in Europe feel part of a planetary project; a key instrument, in other words, in creating the 'domestic subject' of empire" (Pratt, 2008, p. 3).

As such, travelogues can be considered a genre foundational to upholding colonial divisions which makes it interesting to investigate further – and to counter – the media specific circumstances around the production of empire and cultural hierarchies through travel writing, past and present. In the following I explore aspects of this media ecology in which we are all still culturally brought together across distances in the vast global afterlife of slavery and colonialization.

A sound documentary anno 2019

By turning to sound and the different sensory information it provides, I shift the specific medial circumstances and traits that pertain to for instance Thorkild Hansen's travel books. They condition the reception of history by the book medium with its tactile qualities which invites a special type of calm, immersed interaction with the reader at a distance in space and time, differing from the more simultaneous sharing of knowledge on the web, more similar to speech (Emerson, 2014; Hayles, 2012).

Although Hansen's book trilogy could be said to harbor dialogical ambitions in relation to center-periphery issues of colonialism, and although it is written within a mass media horizon in the 1960s, the fact that the books were written in the Danish language at least defines a delimited audience and immediate ecology for the work. In fact, most likely Hansen's main concern has been a corrective and direct address to his contemporary Danish public's national self-perception with a then, and still, subdued understanding of its imperialist past.[viii]

An important effect of the style in Hansen's documentary is that the reader is invited into the process of historical inquiry. The Danish literary scholar Thomas Bredsdorff has suggested that twentieth-century media-technology created the foundation for the documentary method (cited in Stecher-Hansen, 1997, p. 23), and according to literary scholar Stecher-Hansen:

> The emphasis on epistemological concerns went hand in hand with new narrative strategies. The creation of an illusion of authenticity, the interjection of an interpretative narrator, the focus on the difficulties involved in a factual inquiry, and the invitation to the reader to take a critical look at the research process itself, these are all characteristics of the documentary method and of Thorkild Hansen's historical works in particular (Stecher-Hansen, 1997, p. 22).

Another aspect to consider which has undoubtedly influenced the approach to history we find in Hansen's work is the media climate and larger political circumstances of the late 60s. The trilogy is written in the cold war era,

charged with a cultural angst perhaps not so dissimilar to the ecological threat marking our present time, thus according to Thorkild Hansen: "If our times unexpectedly were hit by the other misfortune, to be remembered 200 years later, it would be for its odd, almost historical eagerness to be forgotten" (cited in Stecher-Hansen, 1997, p. 49).

By the same token political discourses influence our involvement in cultural heritage today, including our perception of what it means to be part of a community with which we either self-identify or become associated with[ix], – what do 'we' need to remember, why and how? If our view of the colonial era is under direct influence of the changed terms of access to historical sources and our adjusted response to the archives, what then happens to historical narratives and political discourses when cultural heritage archives become digitized and the accessibility is fundamentally changed? Or when new archives and reading strategies emerge?

In what sense, if any, has colonial heritage changed in light of a new media-horizon, with modern means of communication at our disposal, where for instance the possibility for dialogue between inhabitants of former colonies' centers and peripheries are seemingly enhanced. Is it true, as Marshall McLuhan said in 1964, when he coined the term "the global village", that the world has become more interconnected by means of modern technology?

Digital archives and new collectivities

Regarding Hansen's travelogues and my own as a media-historical cross-section, with approximately 50 years between them, inspires me to ask: What affordances in terms of relationality can certain types of archives provide when we compare written travelogues to acousmatic ones[x], and when we relate to history through a textual document versus a material manifestation, such as a plantation ruin or, as we shall see, a tamarind allée?

What kind of voice or meaning-overflow is generated when we focus on these media ecological measures? The fact that we – as researchers or tourists – return to a physical source, a real or imagined *imprinted landscape*, I believe allows us to think of history as materially layered and not strictly linear.

At least the transition from analog to digital archives creates new conditions for accessing and making use of cultural heritage artifacts and collections. In the process of digitization, it is likely that parts of analog archives that have previously been difficult for publics to access, parts that have been hidden away or even forgotten, will be exposed anew, and that stakeholders in other parts of the world will gain easier access to archivalia of interest to them.[xi] As can easily be imagined, this could pave the way for new historic accounts from a widened cultural and geographical scope.

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes in "Archive and Aspiration":

> Through personal websites, digital archives for all sorts of collectivities (both paid and free), storage sites in cyberspace for large data sets, and the possibility of sending pictures, sounds and text to multiple users with high speed and large amounts of high-quality information, the archive is gradually freed of the orbit of the state and its official networks. And instead of presenting itself as the accidental repository of default communities (like the nation), the archive returns to its more general status of being a deliberate site for the production of anticipated memories by intentional communities (Appadurai, 2003, p. 17).

There is, however, good reason to caution against an over-optimistic belief in the digital media realm's ability to bypass state control, when the alternative seems to be private tech giants' ownership of online archives. Tech giants represent a modern-day power-concentration with strong capitalist interests in selling and manipulating data (Zuboff, 2019). What goes to show, however, is the shifting dynamics of archiving and identification with the archives.

A promising line of inquiry in this respect is the budding field of postcolonial digital humanities which has been doing important critique as well as pushing the boundaries of media creative work.[xii] In Roopika Risam's book

New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis and Pedagogy (2018), she combines postcolonial studies with digital humanities and questions knowledge formation in the digital age. Digital humanities have been praised for its commitment to openness and shared knowledge. Risam challenges this by pointing to the role of colonial violence in the development of digital archives and how algorithms and natural language processing software used in digital humanities projects may (re-)produce universalist notions of the human.

Prior to my field trip to Ghana, I visited the US Virgin Islands (in 2015 and 2016), which led me to create the collaborative digital humanities prototype mapping project *Mapping a Colony*, as an intervention into the conditions under which Danish colonial archives are made available through digital platforms. The history of these archives is of course shaped by Danish colonial presence. When the Danish West Indies were sold to the US in 1917, without a referendum in the Virgin Islands, the Danish administration left the islands and most official archives, including images, photographs and maps, went to Copenhagen. *Mapping a Colony* sets out to show how places on the three continents – Africa, the Americas and Europe – were inherently entangled through colonial encounters while providing direct access, on a bilingual platform, to the recently digitized archival collections from the Danish National Archives, the National Museum of Denmark, the Royal Danish Library, Europeana, and the US Library of Congress.[xiii] *Mapping a Colony* created a new infrastructure for these digitized collections in order to disseminate the material to a wider public, while extending the collaborative contributions to include other voices than the ones already included in the archives. Our aim was also to show how land- and cityscapes have changed as a consequence of colonial history.

The common endeavor of the *Mapping a Colony* project and the field trip I am documenting here is thus to investigate the counter-narrative (to monologizing historiography) and dialogical potential of ways of accessing and narrating history through various types of archives: digital, analog and even environmental.

Landscape as prism and archive: Frederiksgave

In this last section of the essay I transition into a more reflective mode interweaving photographs, readings and impressions from my trip to Ghana. It is, however, beyond the scope of the present essay to present an integrating analysis. I include the diverse material rather as impressions that generate new questions to explore further in the future, given how they challenge existing knowledge.

All recordings are available as a playlist on SoundCloud, while the individual recordings will be accessible as hyperlinks in the text where they relate to the written content.[xiv]

My main interlocutors are: William Nsuiban, head of public relations at the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, who works for the National Museum of Ghana, and who is also a PhD student at the University of Ghana; the chief of Sesemi, Nii Anum Mumli II of Sesemi; Anita Adjetey, the Cultural Officer at the Ga East Municipal Assembly (GEMA), and the now retired professor of archaeology, Henry Nii-Adziri Wellington.

When Thorkild Hansen came to see the former Danish plantation Frederiksgave, it was a ruin. However, recently it has been renovated with support from the Danish National Museum,[xv] and today – since 2007 – it stands completely rebuilt following historical drawings, on a steep hill with a view on a clear day to Legon Hill on the outskirts of Accra about 25 km away. I visited the cultural heritage site with William Nsuiban who works for the National Museum of Ghana.

In the article "Slavery and Resistance on Nineteenth Century Danish Plantations in Southeastern Gold Coast, Ghana" Yaw Bredwa-Mensah[xvi] describes the power-relations of plantation life (*in the recording I discuss the layout of space with William Nsuiban)* as they can be read through archaeological findings. The power dynamics of a place like Frederiksgave are visible in and through various control mechanisms, such as the physical layout

of the plantation, but also in the archaeological traces of how the enslaved reacted both in compliance with and against the impositions of the plantation owners.

Bredwa-Mensah reads the archaeological site as a source of information to fill in the gaps of the colonial ledgers:

> Despite the fact that tangible traces of slavery are often difficult to interpret without written and oral sources, the artifacts from sites associated with slavery serve as a compelling testimony to the human socio-cultural consequences emanating from enslavement (Bredwa-Mensah, 2008, p. 134).

A central point of his argument is that the site was constructed after the model of the Danish manor house and its manorial relations of production, but imposed on a Gold Coast terrain. The rigid geometric configurations of the plantation signified elegance, superiority, and power "manipulable from above and from the centre," as he states borrowing the quote from anthropologist James Scott.

At the same time the archaeological excavations bear witness to how the enslaved were familiar with and made use of the natural and cultural environment of the plantation complex and were able to carve out domains of their own for both domestic use and religious practices. As such the nature-culture landscape helps us quite literally to reconstruct an understanding of the dynamically born interdependent narratives of colonial relations as they took shape in the contact zone.[xvii]

Colonial narratives as layered and entangled encounters

When visiting the restored plantation of Frederiksgave I had to present myself and describe my errand to the local chief. I was quite surprised to be greeted by a local authority, but as it turns out his palace, as they called the office-like abode, was right next door. Before leaving we concluded the visit by offering the chief a small donation for the continued maintenance of the historical site.

William Nsuiban shows me remnants of a tamarind allée that used to stretch all the way from Christiansborg by the coast to Frederiksgave. The enslaved would carry the colonizers in hammocks in the shadow up to the plantation. Today there are 17 trees left at this particular spot. The sign has been put up by the National Museum in order to help preserve the allée. The attempt to preserve the allée is carried out in dialogue with neighboring villagers who do not necessarily share the ambition to consider the trees primarily as important historical agents when they can also serve as rather useful firewood, or, indeed, as a source of shade. In this environmental archive entangled narratives of past and present are caught in a power struggle for a possible future.

As I journeyed through the changing landscapes, I had brought along other contemporary literary travel companions. Among them African-American literature and history scholar Saidiya Hartman who has written a capturing book about her process of finding ways to relate to the afterlife of slavery within a North American context in *Lose Your Mother – A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007).

I also carried a copy of *Stones Tell Stories at Osu – Memories of a Host Community of the Danish Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* by Henry Nii-Adziri Wellington, a now retired professor of archaeology from the University of Ghana, who had likewise been inspired to write about shared history after reading Thorkild Hansen. I was fortunate enough to meet Wellington at his home on the outskirts of Accra where I interviewed him about his own docu-fiction writing. In his book about the Danish influence in Osu stories are told from a local perspective and with an emphasis on oral history as he remembers it from his childhood and through the stories he was able to collect as part of his research.

Professor Wellington shares anecdotes from Osu in the courtyard of the Christiansborg slavefort, also known as Osu Castle.

In Ghana scenes of daily life combine with impressions from visits to historical sites, all of this I access in two ways simultaneously: Mentally, informing my imagination by reading how others have previously related to the places I go, and with my body – sensuously overloaded the first couple of days with unfamiliar sounds and smells, foods and views. All the while I am constantly engaged in a struggle to determine a proper solemnity at sites of mass murder. In other words, I experience the places I go in two rather distinct, and what you might even think of as mutually exclusive ways, as both a revisit and a very first encounter.

As part of my fieldwork I interviewed pundits and recorded interactions with travel companions (who in my case were a combination of Swedish and Danish NGO professionals and tourists) and people I met along the way while I also collected ambient recordings which might be included on the *Mapping a Colony* website at a later stage. My main focus has been the perception and creation of history in the different narratives I read and hear. How are they media- as well as site-dependent, and to what extent? And how does the erosion of the landscape tell stories in its own right?

A village of landless farmers in Koforidua, Ghana. We were all, visitors and villagers alike, equipped with mobile phones which we used to digitally document our meeting.

Where we speak from, and who we speak to

I came to Ghana with a – at least sort of – clear concept of history, an interest in exploring what a multi-perspectival approach to a shared colonial heritage would do, but as I progressed the concept of history itself – that had cut out my path – seemed to slowly erode under my feet. I became acutely aware of the context of modernity in which this travelogue is wrapped up and made possible.[xviii] Aside from being a researcher I was also an affluent tourist together with NGO professionals who were there to help landless farmers improve livestock farming skills in order to optimize their living conditions in the continued civilization building with a Western standard as the implicit norm.

Could I ask landless farmers struggling to live off the land about colonial history? Why did I hesitate? One important reason was my intuitive understanding of the culture of the villagers, hinged upon my preconceived notions of our different concepts of identity as well as types and levels of education. My immediate impression was that the villagers were primarily oriented toward belonging to a people around a shared language and its mythological history and not by a strong identification with for instance Ghana as a nation. Of course they had knowledge of modern cosmopolitan life via their phones, but not necessarily a comparable group- or self-identification to Westerners so attuned to the history of nations and the global world order. Perhaps unsurprisingly so, considering the fact that Ghana has only existed as an independent nation since 1957 with its borders laid down by the colonizing European nations in 1885 at the Berlin Conference.

The national perspective on history, as an integral part of the long humanist tradition that is the science of history in the Western world, is itself a construct deriving from an era of nation and civilization building, inseparable from the imperial drive. How did it resonate in these areas communicatively difficult to access (both in terms of transportation time, but also in terms of digital infrastructures), as such even *remote* in today's global village?

Contemporary Ghana is a country consisting of multiple peoples, speaking up to 96 different languages (with English as the official language) with their own histories of exploitation and slavery surrounded by an air of taboo. In modern day Ghana the relative wealth of the coastal regions compared to the Northern parts of the country are in part due to the coastal peoples' lucrative slave trade with the Europeans. According to Saidiya Hartman families of former enslaved people are still to this day stigmatized in Ghana. Indeed, Hartman's personal story

that I read at night in different hotel rooms is about coming to terms with this particular aspect of negotiating rather diverging views on the history of slavery from each side of the Atlantic.

In conclusion: Resonating uneasy reasonings

In an empty national museum currently under reconstruction due to asbestos found in the ceiling from 1957, I interviewed William Nsuiban from the National Museum of Ghana. Here a new exhibition is on the way, the first curated by Ghanaians and not the British. It served as a particularly well-suited backdrop for some of the fundamental questions that govern my research:

How do we negotiate and bridge the histories we have inherited, and how should some of the above factors play into discussions of for instance repatriation and restitution of cultural heritage and national responsibility? Where do artifacts of shared culture belong when the sharing was never one of mutual agreement, and when identities of various peoples today are no longer comparable to those of yesterday?[xix]

In this essay I have shown how we can address colonial environments through a *media ecological* and *media archeological* approach. This framework has enabled me to read landscapes as archives that can be inscribed and (re)read in various ways from multiple perspectives and, concordantly, how knowledge of history might be stored in other-than-text narratives. I have used the sound medium as a dialogical tool to shed light on often overlooked dimensions in the formation of historiography, through the often default perspective of the nation state, and I have demonstrated what a focus on other embodied imprints might allow in terms of knowledge formation and potentials for relationality.

In contrast to Hansen I explored the affordances of a polyphony of living voices (and not primarily voices from archival textual documents), and what sorts of tensions might present themselves by and through the specific roles we are ascribed in the Transatlantic narrative today. I suggested that the sound medium harbors a potential for a multi-perspectival and multi-voiced opening up of colonial archives, and I argued that the focus on physical sources, for instance various loci of contested history, in combination with digital media, prompts us to opt out of the usually modernity-informed and Western way of understanding history as a linear progression. This enables us to investigate further the multi-layered, non-linear fractions of narratives embedded in contemporary nature-culture environments.

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[i] I use the term monologizing throughout the article in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense. For Bakhtin, monological language is a corruption of an underlying dialogism. All signifying practices have an ultimate dialogical aim. Nevertheless, language use can maximize this dialogical nature or seek to minimize it.

[ii] Denmark-Norway had several trading posts and slave forts in Guinea (contemporary Ghana) but it was never a Dano-Norwegian colony. The presence on the Gold Coast lasted from mid-seventeenth century and until 1850 and was a prerequisite for the combined Transatlantic enterprise.

[iii] This is something the sound medium is particularly well-suited for, as Sanne Krogh Groth and Kristine Samson (2016) argue in their "Audio Paper Manifesto".

[iv] I wonder what it must have been like to experience the country in the early 1960s when Ghana's GDP was on the same level as that of South Korea and under the influence of the first president Kwame Nkrumah's advocacy for pan-Africanism, see here: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?locations=GH-KR

[v] A globalization that accelerated from that point in time and which has had an all-pervasive impact on the formations of present-day collective identities that negotiate the legacy of slavery, the ownership of archives, and who formulates the (not always so) coherent grand narratives of nations.

[vi] In 2017, the Danish-West Indian archives were made more widely available after a mass digitization to mark the occasion of the centennial of the sale of the Danish West Indies to the US in 1917. This has spurred a whole array of new research around the Danish role under colonialism with a Transatlantic focus. Prior to that, research with an emphasis on the perspectives of the enslaved and colonizers has been relatively sparse in Denmark or instead simply focused on the administration, the navy or on other parts of the Danish colonial domain. For a thorough account of the historiography I refer to Nonbo Andersen, but will here briefly mention some of the recent research carried out in Denmark with an emphasis on the Caribbean connection: Louise Sebro (2009), Gunvor Simonsen (2007), Niklas Thode Jensen (2012), and with a focus on the Gold Coast: Pernille Ipsen (2016), Lill-Ann Körber (2015), and Frits Andersen (2018). Let me also point to the newly established Centre for the Study of the Literatures and Cultures of Slavery, and the collaborative research project The Legacy of Caribbean Colonialism both established in 2019 at the University of Aarhus.

[vii] My English translation from Danish in text: "Det er dog ikke uden problemer at løfte erindringsstedet ud af den nationalstatslige kontekst, det er født ud af, og over i den hybride kontekst, de tidligere kolonier udgør. Dels fordi erindringsstederne ikke blot er historiske steder men også hjem for de lokale. Dels fordi den omgivende kontekst ikke er

entydigt betydningsgivende. Og endelig fordi der i Danmark længe ikke har været en vilje til identifikation med stederne. Et andet Danmarksbillede har skygget for kolonihistorien" (Nonbo Andersen, 2010, p. 5).

[viii] As Nonbo Andersen observes in *Ingen undskyldning* (my translation into English): "The Danish colonial rule in the Danish West Indies *was* challenged by the locals throughout the history of the Danish West Indies. The most well-known examples are the slave insurrection on St. John in 1733, the emancipation of the enslaved in 1848, the *Fireburn* on St. Croix in 1878, and the union leader D. Hamilton Jackson. On the other hand, it is not until 1998 that West Indian voices actively begin to interfere with the Danish narratives about the shared colonial era. With a few exceptions, people in the Virgin Islands do not speak Danish and have therefore not been able to participate in the public debate" (Nonbo Andersen, 2017, p. 57).

[ix] I want to emphasize here that we risk neglecting an important dimension of the *world system* of the time in question when Europeans first traveled to the Gold Coast, if our main or sole perspective on history is through the narrow lens of the modern nation state which is a later construct. The colonial era was marked by a global scale trade-network composed of international companies and financially mobile elites, so that even small-scale players in imperialistic terms, such as Sweden, could in fact be the home of major actors in the colonial enterprise, as indeed was the case with the Swedish iron industry (Schnakenbourg, 2013).

[x] Acousmatic sound understood in the original Greek sense, when the source of sound remains veiled or unseen, as was the case for the pupils of Pythagoras who only had access to his voice. The term has later been theorized by French composer Pierre Schaeffer in *Traité des objets musicaux* from 1966.

[xi] Obviously, digital archives also privilege certain visitors over others, for one those with access to the internet. You might not need to travel far to gain access, yet many of the recently digitized Danish archives require a working knowledge of Danish, as much of the archival metadata has not been translated. In addition, many search functions are complicated and require some degree of training.

[xii] See for instance the annual Caribbean Digital conference and sx archipelagos: a small axe platform for digital practice.

[xiii] The project received seed money from Europeana (a website portal for European digital cultural heritage, integrating digitized material from national libraries throughout Europe), and in November 2017 we launched phase one in the shape of a prototype website with the aim to disseminate information about colonial history by way of a digital map which connects the colonial past to our present.

[xiv]Track 1: I read an excerpt about Frederiksgave in Danish from Thorkild Hansen's book *Slavernes kyst*.
Tracks 2, 3, 4: In conversation with William Nsuiban who took me to Frederiksgave.
Tracks 5, 6, 7: In conversation with the chief of Sesemi, translated by Anita Adjetey.
Track 8: Counting trees with William Nsuiban and Anita Anita Adjetey.
Tracks 9, 10: From interview with professor Wellington
Track 11: Professor Wellington in the Christiansborg courtyard.
Track 12: Excerpt from guided tour of Elmina Castle.
Track 13: Recording of talking drums from NGO durbar in the Bolgatanga area.
Track 14: En route to Accra, in conversation with William Nsuiban.
Track 15: In conversation with the chief of Sesemi, translated by Anita Adjetey.
Tracks 16, 17: From interview with William Nsuiban at the National Museum of Ghana.
(Thanks to Mikkel Meyer for help with post-production.)

[xv] The restoration project is documented on the Danish National Museum's website: https://natmus.dk/historisk-viden/forskning/forskningsprojekter/ghana-initiativet/frederiksgave-projektet/

[xvi] The late Yaw Bredwa-Mensah was head of the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at the University of Ghana and one of the initiators of the excavation and reconstruction of Frederiksgave where he lies buried today.

[xvii] Another interesting study investigating colonial power-relations and the different roles afforded to colonial subjects in specific areas, both center and periphery, within the Danish colonial domain is Gísli Pálsson's *The Man Who Stole Himself* about the enslaved Hans Jonathan who was born on St. Croix in the Danish West Indies yet grew up and lived as an adult in Copenhagen where he famously went to trial to claim his freedom but lost the case and managed to escape to another Danish, yet Nordic, colony, Iceland.

[xviii] For an interesting perspective on epistemological questions on modernity and coloniality I recommend Rolando Vazquez' article "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing design". He claims that: "The geopolitics of knowledge reproduce the modern/colonial divide in terms of knowledge, imposing modernity as the only valid epistemic territory and erasing other worlds of meaning." (2017, p. 89).

[xix] Louise Sebro (2013) shows in her study of the St. John slave revolt in 1733 how the Transatlantic entanglement created new creole identities in the Caribbean.

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Hvid[mə] Archive – An artistic research project highlighting critical, intersectional and decolonial practices.

Abstract
This essay describes how the artistic research project Hvid[mə] Archive started as a critical comment on the Danish Royal Cast Collection's exhibition in the colonial West Indian Warehouse at the harbour front in Copenhagen. The essay situates the project as a response to the lack of verbalization about the warehouse's colonial past, as well as to the lack of a verbalization about the context and history that the plaster cast collection is a product of. Furthermore, the essay clarifies the use and re-conceptualization of the Danish noun hvidme, and how it created an entry point for a contemporary critical whiteness discourse in a specific Danish art context. The essay also describes how the project developed into the artistic research project and collaboration that it is today. A decolonial and intersectional artist collaboration, that seeks to facilitate exhibitions, encourage artistic workshops and networks, host events with visual artists, cultural producers, writers and theorists working within a decolonial and critical frame. The essay showcases some of our defining activities, as well as aspects of our working methods, practices, reflections, doubts and questions for further discussions.

Keywords: artistic research, collaboration, critical whiteness, Danish coloniality, intersectional and decolonial practices, artists archiving

[ˈviðmə] *Hvidme* (older Modern Danish (roughly 1500-1700) similar in meaning to *hwitnæ* (whiten, roughly 1350-1500); a derivative of *hvid* (white); comparable to *blødme*, *fedme*, *rødme*, *sødme* (softness, fatness/rich, blush, sweetness); now rare), white colour; whiteness

– Dictionary of Danish Language 1700-1950

Hvidme is an outdated abstract noun formed by the Danish adjective *hvid* (white) and the suffix *-me*. The word ending is closely related to the more common Danish suffix *-hed* (best translated to *-ness, -ship* or *-dom*), but significantly different.
Where the suffix *–hed* originates from the German term *heit* 'mode, kind, condition' and from ancient English *had* 'rank, position', which refers to a specific character or certain quality already gained, the suffix *–me* indicates an incipient transition to/from a state or condition.
The seldom suffix *–me* is only used in connection to creating five abstract nouns: *hvidme, blødme, fedme, rødme, sødme (whiteness, softness, fatness/rich, blush, sweetness)*, where *hvidme* and *blødme* have proven unproductive and are no longer used in the Danish language.
For all the nouns, otherwise unrelated, the commonality of the sensuous and bodily qualities is striking. By way of the suffix, these adjectives are bound to substance, material or body in a transition of becoming more or less red/fat/soft/sweet/white. This points to a processual and graduated phrase, that doesn't restrain its meaning to a clear-cut condition, and furthermore places the body engaging with substance as the centre of perception.

The Hvid[mə] Archive Project

The Hvid[mə] Archive Project started as a critical comment on the Danish Royal Cast Collection's exhibition (or storage, to be more accurate) in the colonial Westindian Warehouse on Toldbodgade in Copenhagen. The project was initiated in 2014 by visual artist Annarosa Krøyer Holm(I/eye*), while being a student at the Sculpture Department at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. As part of the practical teaching at the department, a few students started a collaboration with the Royal Plaster Cast Collection and the curator of the collection, Henrik Holm. The collaboration sought to showcase contemporary ways of working with the historical plaster cast collection as young artists working with plaster, and in the context of the traditional use of the collection and its sculptures as objects of learning, learning by copying the great masters of classical art.

Upon entering the collection in the warehouse, eye was overwhelmed by the physical presence of colonial traces, clearly visible in the building's architecture and preserved remains from the colonial use of the building. The warehouse was built during the Danish flourishing trading period, in 1780-81, by the Danish West India and Guinea Company to store colonial goods produced in the Danish colonies. It was primarily sugar, rum and coffee from the former Danish West Indies, the islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, now US Virgin Islands.

Miming the historical way of storing colonial goods, the warehouse is now packed with plaster cast sculptures in the first three floors of the building. Around 2500 sculptures, moulds and casts are on display, leaving narrow alleys for the visitors to get lost in - a perfect place to study form, contour, gaps. The warehouse atmosphere is unspoiled, and eye'm left with a feeling of a paradoxical collapse that uncannily ties the past to the present.

**(I love Kathy Acker)*

You see, neoclassical thinkers, artists and art historians
with their fixation on the purity of white marble
constructed an idealised pure white concept of the aesthetics of the Ancient Greece and Rome

Here, the veracity of form, line, contour
were the true and noble concerns of the mind

Colour was seen as a threat, a contamination
barbarian
vulgar, primitive, female
something that had to be contained and subordinated
Unthinkable to corrupt the true intention of the form

In the whitewashed image of the cultivated and refined Greek democracy
with its "classical" virtues, values and aesthetics
a supremacy based on the white ideal took form

see sea seeing white
and the virulent racism that was built into the construction of the classical ideal

(Excerpt from the ongoing performative video work *Seeing White*, 2019. Annarosa Krøyer Holm)

What was now stored here, was in fact the very idea of European colonialism, the supremacy of the white man and his art.

(Still from the video *Seeing White*, 2019. A. Holm)

The Royal Cast Collection

The presumed whiteness of the statuary and architecture of Ancient Greece and Rome was a common assumption that persisted well into the nineteenth century.
This presumed whiteness was a significant cornerstone in the establishment of the Royal Danish Academy in 1754, where a plaster cast study collection was embedded in the newly inaugurated institution. The study collection was an important element of the Academy's curriculum until the mid-1900s, where contemporary art and art education sought new paths. The collection grew substantially until 1895. From 1895 onwards large parts of the collection were handed over to the newly established Royal Cast Collection in the Danish National Gallery (SMK). The study collection was on display in the great halls of the museum until 1966, where it was put into storage in an old barn outside of Copenhagen and slowly forgotten for almost 20 years. In 1984 the partly shattered collection was moved into the Westindian Warehouse on Toldbodgade. The collection was restored over the next decade and opened to the public again in 1995.
Facing the sea of the inner harbour of Copenhagen, the Westindian Warehouse is surrounded by prominent power institutions. Between Amalienborg Palace - the residence of the Danish royal family, the Copenhagen Opera House - a most expensive construction donated by the foundation of the maritime multinational company A. P. Møller, the logistics company Mærsk, which furthermore has their head office at the waterfront next to the warehouse, and the military area around the naval station of the Royal Danish Navy with the battery of Sixtus, the fortress Kastellet and Trekroner visible at the mouth of the harbour. In front of the warehouse stands a 1:1 bronze replica of Michelangelo's David overlooking the water.*

With the reappearance of the collection in the old colonial warehouse, the link between the collection and the history of the building became highly visible, and pointed to the fact that there is a lack of critical and historical consciousness about the neoclassical interweaving with European colonialism and the significance it had for the construction of the Western art canon.

As curator of the Royal Cast Collection Henrik Holm describes in the article "Whip it good" (2016): *"* … I can hardly imagine a more Eurocentric, colonially thought museum than the Royal Cast Collection. Here we are dealing with a highly choreographed museum, after Winkelmann's ideals of copying the greatest works from the Antiquity and the Renaissance" (translation mine).

The construction of both white art and the white body as norm, put forward during the European Renaissance and Neoclassicism's resuscitation of Antiquity, was the aesthetic paradigm of beauty, but it also came to symbolize ideals of civilization and the sovereignty and freedom of man (Bukdahl, 2004). A conception that is clearly expressed in the Royal Cast Collection, and continues to impact present day racial stereotyping, notions of national identities and the claim of heterogeneous societies.
The practice of sculpture became intimately connected to the production of race as a biological category, providing concrete representational validation of racial stereotyping (Nelson, 2007), that further provided philosophical and spiritual justification for the atrocities of European colonialism.

"It may have taken just one classical statue to influence the false construction of race, but it will take many of us to tear it down. We have the power to return color to the ancient world, but it has to start with us."
Sarah E. Bond, 2017 (assistant professor of Classics)

*(today, Michelangelo's David has company from the sculpture *I Am Queen Mary* by the two artists La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers)

(Still from the video *Seeing White*, 2019. A. Holm)

In 2014 there was little (public, cultural) attention to the Danish role in European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, nor was there much attention paid to the emerging field of critical whiteness studies. With the Hvid[mə] Archive project I/eye wanted to introduce a critical consciousness that raised awareness about the interweaving of coloniality and classical art history, tying the plaster cast collection to its physical location in the colonial warehouse, and by doing so contributing to creating a critical whiteness discourse in a specific Danish context.

With the re-actualization of the Danish word *hvidme* and the suffix *–me* as entry level, the Hvid[mə] Archive project was a linguistic manoeuvre that represented a new vocabulary for a contemporary political, societal and ethical discussion, suggesting that societal and political discourses must have material and aesthetic consequences and vice versa, and that the aesthetical, material and bodily investigations contribute to advance and nuance the theoretical discourse.

By March 2015 the Hvid[mə] Archive Project opened in the small library in the Lounge of the Royal Cast Collection. It consisted of a multidisciplinary collection of texts, research and artworks, unfolding critical perspectives on whiteness. Relevant artists, thinkers and scholars were invited to contribute, by giving a copy of their work or excerpts of scholarly research within the field. In accordance with the premise of the cast collection, original pieces are not part of the archive; only copied and reproduced material on whitish sheets of paper were included. The archive was placed in the existing bookshelves, but clearly presented an alternative knowledge to the literature on classical art history in the library.

(Installation view: *Hvid[mə] Archive,* 2015. Lounge of the Royal Cast Collection, Westindian Warehouse.)

A tent

In contrast to the fragility of the paper that the archive is made of, and to physically mark the opening of the archive, a massive plaster sculpture was created in-situ in the foyer of the warehouse. A geometrical form, miming a triangular tent, with a cut in the middle. An un-moveable solid mass of 150 x 180 x 240 cm with the weight of around 2 tons. A tomb-like heaviness, that could not be dismissed, insisted on bringing forward a new order and a critical discourse in the collection.

A material way of highlighting this was to challenge the actual plaster cast process. To make a solid form, that goes against the nature of the material, as the form would not hold the pressure of the entire liquid mass. The tent is made by pouring thin plaster into a wooden construction. A process that stretched over 12 hours for a group of 5-15 people. The pace and speed of the plaster going into the form is visible as horizontal layers. The size and interconnectedness of the layers bear witness to the process and the many bodies that created the sculpture.

It is a tent, but it is also a massive cunt (as Vestergaard Jørgensen elaborated on in the article: “Stik, skær, brænd. Sprækken som (kunst)historisk berørings- punkt i værker af Carla Zaccagnini, Annarosa Krøyer Holm og La Vaughn Belle” from 2017) in disguise of a massive minimal (read: phallic) sculpture. The cu(n)t/split of the sculpture is what makes the tent recognizable as a tent, as it mimes the tent pole’s position and function in supporting an upright position. But the cu(n)t of the sculpture also indicates a possible break of the sculpture, a break from within, a destruction built into the sculpture. The cu(n)t/split/break opens up the strictly geometrical form of a classical triangle. The sculpture is in dialogue with the aesthetics of neoclassical art, but the cu(n)t opens up to other ways of seeing and sensing.

(*Telt,* 2015. A.Holm)

(Bronislaw Malinowski 1918)

With the archival photo of Malinowski's *"the ethnographer in his tent"* from 1918 placed alongside the sculpture, eye wanted to point to a post-colonial reading of the sculpture.

The tent was a physical manifestation of the new order that I/eye wanted to bring(break) in the collection. But as the project opened for the public and I/eye further collected and researched for material for the archive, I quickly became aware that the project and interest reached my own limits and it became vital for me to collaborate with other artists and scholars that shared overlapping interests. To share thoughts and discuss how to address the colonial past and the modern/colonial structures that still exists today, without reproducing the same structures that one wants to criticize, especially in an institution like the Royal Cast Collection that is part of the Danish National Museum, that partakes in producing and upholding certain historiographies, privileges and national narrations, both in art history and national storytelling.

Sadly, the collection and with it the newly established critical discourse closed for the public in the spring of 2016, due to financial cuts at the National Gallery.

Hvid[mə] Archive as a collaborative project

The closing of the Royal Cast Collection to the public in 2016 did not stop critical discourse. With Sine Frejstrup and Lea Kim Kramhøft joining the project in 2015/16, the project developed into a dialogue-based space, focusing on expanding the discourse to other cultural platforms. But with the loss of the material and sculptural context of the Royal Cast Collection and the ambiguousness and multi-layered-ness that the artworks contained, it became crucial for us to elaborate and further clarify the conceptualization and the use of the word *hvidme*. As a result of our newly funded collaboration we wrote a manifesto:

M A N I F E S T O

Hvid[mə] Archive *will question whiteness as the default. The archive will highlight the ubiquitous structures that maintain and cultivate hierarchies that suppress.*

Hvid[mə] Archive *addresses the colonial aftermath and seeks to expose the collective amnesia in historiography of Denmark as a Nordic colonial power.*

Hvid[mə] Archive *has an activistic approach to language. As an entry level, we will re-actualize the old Danish word hvidme, that became obsolete in the early nineteen-hundreds.*

By re-introducing hvidme to our contemporary vocabulary we wish to open a critical discussion on whiteness where the common word hvidhed is inadequate and too categorical.

Hvid[mə] Archive *works toward an anti-sublime-demonstration of the white colour. By means of the suffix -me the archive seeks to tie white to substance (the material, the body) and the actual experienced reality.*

The suffix -me is linked to a sentient body that stores memory and trauma.

Hvid[mə] Archive *is not a proposal to use the word hvidme as an aesthetic approach to the white colour, it is not a celebration. The hvidme-concept must problematize whiteness.*

Hvid[mə] Archive *will showcase the white violence, the European imperialism, the institutional power structures, the construction of race, as well as body and territories as capital.*

Hvid[mə] Archive *is a space for dialogue and learning.*

(Hvid[mə] Archive manifesto 2016)

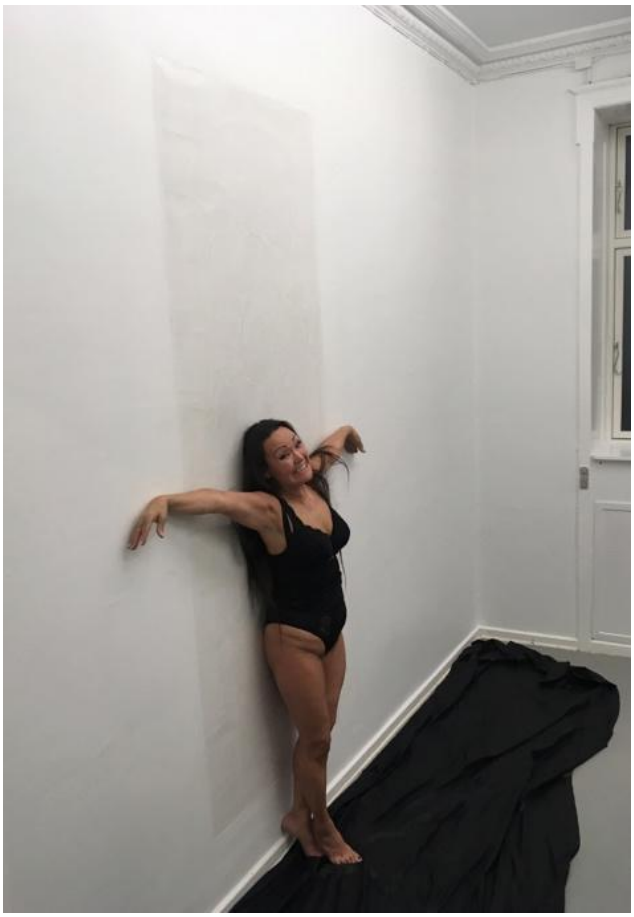
The manifesto and an updated and expanded version of the archive was shown in connection to the play WINGS (VINGER) - *A story about living in a white society* by the playwright and poet Joan Rang Christensen. The play centred around the questions: *How do you find a foothold with a mixed background in a white country? How do you define an identity that is not either-or, but both-and?* With the Hvid[mə] Archive Project exhibited in the foyer, we hoped to open up and broaden the discourse and questions posed in the play.

(Flyer *Wings*, Teater Grob)

Installation view: *Hvid[mə] Archive*, 2016. The foyer at Teater Grob, Nørrebrogade 37, Copenhagen)

With the approaching of the 2017 centennial of the sale of the former colony "The Danish West Indies" to the USA, I/eye was invited to join the curatorial team of the newly established art-space *meter* in creating their first exhibition *Unravelings*. The exhibition aimed at showcasing contemporary ways of addressing the Danish colonial past and how it affects present day society. Eye contributed to the curatorial process by setting a material and physical context and frame for the exhibition. Eye made the mural work *Chromophobia fig.1* directly into the wall of the exhibition space. The work served as backdrop, almost invisible, miming the invisible structures connected to whiteness (and the white cube as a capitalist site, but that's another story).

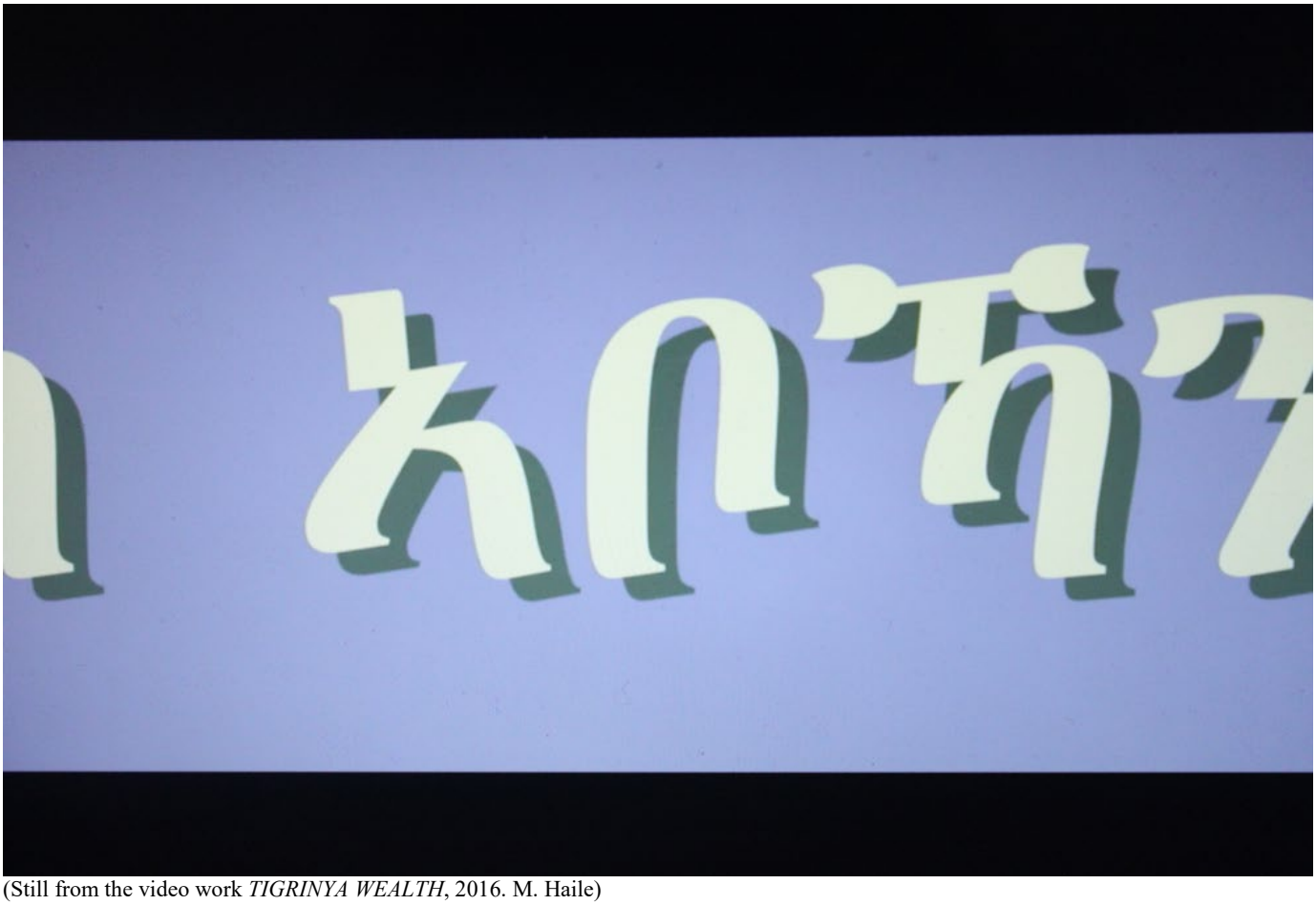
The term *chromophobia* is coined by the artist and writer David Batchelor, and refers to the angst or fear of corruption or contamination through colour within Western culture. With the title *Chromophobia fig. 1* eye wanted the work to be perceived as a sculpture. A white sculpture that points towards its own whiteness and speaks to the classical sculpture, which has been whitewashed by 18th century art historians.



L: Jessie Kleemann in the performance: *"I tråd med tiden"* in front of *Chromophobia fig.1* (Decoliss marmorino, 90x240x0,3cm), 2017. Meter exhibition space, Copenhagen). Photo @A.Holm

R: La Vaughn Belle: *Cuts and Burns* (ledger series 002) in front of *Chromophobia fig.1* (Decoliss marmorino, 90x240x0,3cm), 2017. Meter exhibition space, Copenhagen). Photo @I Do Art Agency

Towards new artistic language and research



(Still from the video work *TIGRINYA WEALTH*, 2016. M. Haile)

To create a theoretical and discursive frame for the exhibition at *meter*, the Hvid[mə] Archive project was invited to take over a room in the exhibition space. Artist Miriam Haile (I/eye) had recently joined the archive, and with her an increased focus on diasporic narratives. With Miriam's extensive practice of addressing power relations between the diasporic and migratory voices close relation to nations, archives and borders, we(eye/eye) re-formulated the project into the artistic research project that it is today. A decolonial and intersectional artist collective, that seeks to facilitate exhibitions, encourage artistic workshops and networks, host events with visual artists, cultural producers, writers and theorists working within a decolonial and critical practice.

(Hvid[mə] Archive manifesto 2017)

By questioning collective European memory, its borders and language, as it is more multi-layered than multi-cultural, we(eye/eye) wish to re-introduce and revisit what a critical artistic research project may contain, by focusing on decolonial practices and aesthetics, with relevant updated narratives as the artistic signifiers.
Focusing on different working methods within critical theory and decolonial practices, we(eye/eye) work to create a more conscious space where one may share different perspectives and experiences, sharing knowledge within a flat structure. But at the same time taking the responsibility to create a safer space (if such exists) within the art world, to host dialogues and show artistic work.

With the exhibition at *meter* we(eye/eye) returned our focus towards the art world, updating the archive with mainly new artistic contributions. To accomplish but also to push and challenge the already curated program at *meter*, we(eye/eye) created our own program *Hvid[mə] Archive Presents* inside the exhibition space, where we(eye/eye) invited artists and scholars Yong Sun Gullach, Teju Adisa-Farrar, Lesley-Ann Brown and Ethelene Whitmire to present and show their work and research.

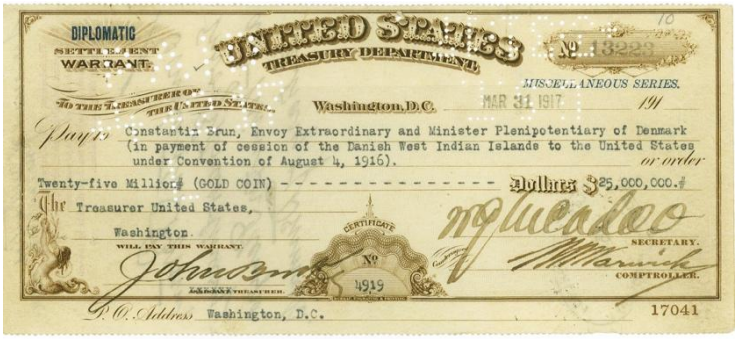
(Installation view: *Hvid[mə] Archive,* 2017. Meter exhibition space, Copenhagen)

2017 was a busy year, as many institutions took part in commemorating the centennial of the sale of the Danish West Indies to The United States of America. Transfer Day 31 March 1917 marks the transaction, when Denmark sold its former colony to the USA for 25 million Danish kroners in Gold. A transfer between Colonial Powers without consulting the opinion or taking into account the rights of the people on St. Croix, St. Thomas & St. John. Together with visual artist and scholar Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld we invited fellow colleagues and friends to an intimate Transfer Day Memorial Ceremony March 31th 2017 in the back of Christiansborg [The Danish Parliament] in Copenhagen.

We wanted to make a more spiritual, healing ceremony, creating solidarity and recognizing emancipation & legacies through art. With the ceremony, we wished to dislocate the word "transfer" from its stifling historical context, and approach it as a conceptual window for thinking about how culture, spirit and memory, both travels and also adapts.

We met at sundown at the back of the parliament, projecting a video directly onto the walls of the historical building, that until 1794 was the home of the Danish royal family. We facilitated a sound system and the microphone was open for people to share their thoughts.

The event was inspired by the many talks, artworks, projects and collaborations leading up to this day, particularly by the work of Temi Odumosu, La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers, and the project Artlantic.



Hvid[mə] Archive in collaboration with Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld.
Unity in Fiah - Transfer Day Memorial Ceremony. March 31th 2017 at 7.45 pm (sundown) – 9 pm.
Live video projection and performance at Christiansborg / Berthel Thorvaldsens Plads, Copenhagen.

We(eye/eye) are still in the process of discussing, and somehow evaluating, the roadblocks we have encountered, and also what was highly effective within our past activities and discussions. With an interest in taking a closer look at archives, in order to re-create and activate artistic encyclopaedias, but also using the archive as an activist approach.

What does an archive entail? How does it look like? What shape can it take? What is the potential of using an archive as format? Whose impact/methods and timeline are we speaking and operating on? How is it possible to create a methodology that challenges Eurocentric archives and their knowledge?

We(eye/eye) are interested in what role archives play for national collective memory. In what perspective is visual, theoretical and artistic research told and archived? How may different independence struggles manifest and affect our societies today? Who is entitled to speak? Whose voices and experiences are included in the national storytelling and national archiving? And if excluded, how do the silenced voice and body speak/perform/operate? With the Hvid[mə] Archive project, eye/eye want to develop an artistic language and database, while expanding on already enrolled collectives, researchers and further curate an artistic dialogue of decolonial and intersectional practices.

Annarosa Krøyer Holm 2019

Contributions from:
Teju N. Adisa-Farrar, Rikke Andreassen, Zoltan Ará, Bolette Blaagaard, Lesley-Ann Brown, Nanna Debois Buhl, Else Marie Bukdahl, Joan Rang Christensen, Lene Bull Christiansen, Mette Clausen, Mathias Danbolt, Christian Danielewitz, Suada Ada Demirovic, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Jeannette Ehlers, Athena Farrokzhad, Sine Frejstrup, Trine Mee Sook Gleerup, Yong Sun Gullach, Christina Hagen, Julie Edel Hardenberg, Karen Harsbo, Anne Folke Henningsen, Henrik Holm, Christina Marie Jespersen, Jane Jin Kaisen, Camilla Juul Kjærgaard, Jessie Kleemann, Mathias Kryger, Maja Lee Langvad, Alanna Lockward, Mette Moestrup, Lene Myong, Flemming Chr. Nielsen, Bjørn Nørgaard, Ana Pavlovic, Anu Ramdas, Anna Ravn, Angela Rawlings, Lulu Refn, Gunhild Riske, Simon Sheikh, Amalie Smith, Julie Sten-Knudsen, Javier Tapia, Vladimir Tomić, Ethelene Whitmire, Mette Woller, Jan Stubbe Østergaard.

Excerpts from:
Sara Ahmed, Pia Arke, James Baldwin, David Batchelor, Jean Baudrillard, Karen Blixen, Bruce Chatwin, Inger Christensen, Angela Yvonne Davis, Mary Douglas, Richard Dyer, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, Frantz Fanon, Ruth Frankenberg, Walter Grasskamp, John Hartigan, bell hooks, Charlotte Klonk, Haney Ian López, Audre Lorde, Achille Mbembe, Peggy McIntosh, Herman Melville, Chandra T. Mohanty, Robert B. Moore, Toni Morrison, Fred Moten, Brian O'Doherty, Ovid, Edward W. Said, W. G. Sebald, Micheal Taussig.

Portfolio, an excerpt:

Hvid[mə] Archive, printed archive, 2017

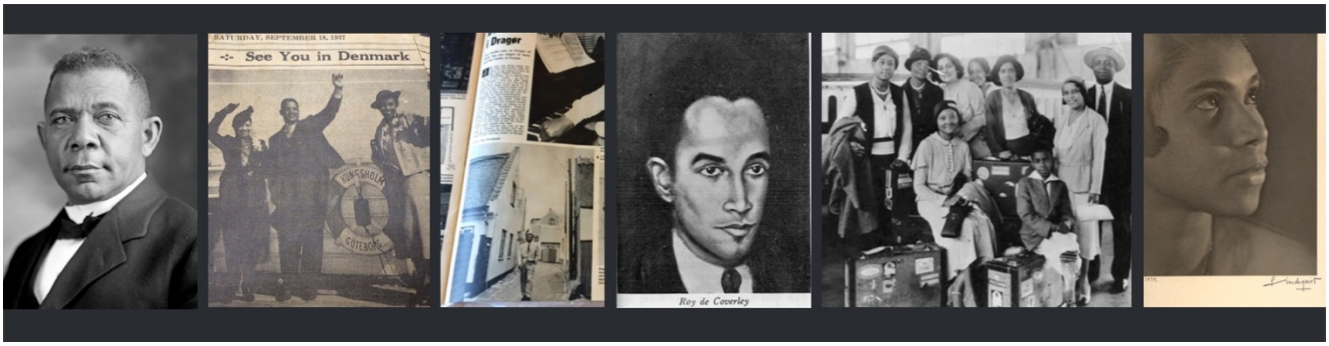

Hvid[mə] Archive Presents:

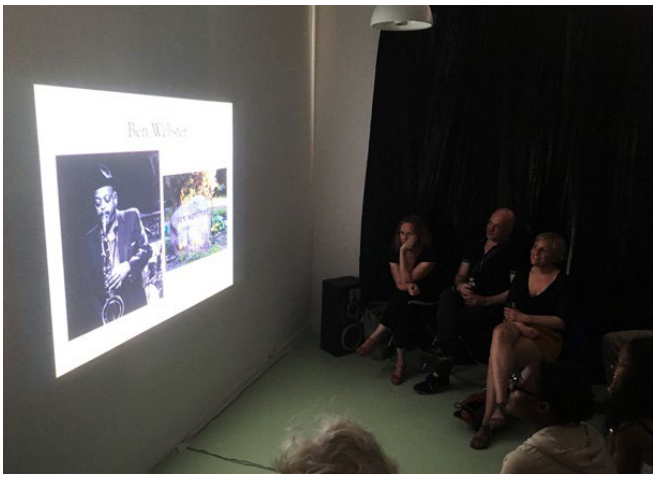
Decolonial Daughter. A reading by Lesley-Ann Brown.
Opening event for Hvid[mə] Archive at meter Exhibition Space, January 5th 2017



Dear White Europe. A film by Teju Adisa-Farrar in collaboration with Hanna MiKoch, 2017.
10 March- 17 June 2017, meter Exhibition space


Searching for Utopia. The African American/Danish Archives by Ethelene Whitmire.
A visual presentation of Whitmire's research in connection to her upcoming book
May 27th 2017, meter Exhibition Space





The Star Child Project - A Performative Experiment by Yong Sun Gullach.
June 10th Performance, followed by crit-session. June 10th - 17th 2017 @ meter Exhibition Space

Photo: Courtesy of Mayra Navarette

Annarosa Krøyer Holm *(DK)*
Visual artist, MFA from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Initiator and co-runner of Hvid[mə] Archive.
Holm's artistic practice is centred on the notion that political and societal considerations have material and aesthetic consequences. Working with experimental video, performance, text, sculpture and installation, Holm address themes of classical art history, national historiography vs. personal memory, and how it is infused in artistic materiality, mapping and archiving. Her recent works explore the interlocking of Danish colonialism and the ideals emerging in European Renaissance and Neoclassicism.

Miriam Haile *(ER/NO)*
Visual artist, MFA from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Co-runner, editor and co-curator of Mondo Books, an artist run bookshop and platform, and Hvid[mə] Archive.
Haile's artistic practice focuses on critical questions around national identities, migration-history, and border politics. Her recent work revisits different methods of entering war-archives and problematizing national-archives, by questioning the colonial gaze vs deep memory, in relation to racialized bodies and diaspora identities. Often presented within multimedia installations, she instigates an interdisciplinary dialogue with a political landscape, investigating how photography, text, audio and moving images produce meaning in relation to archives.

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