



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

Aalborg Universitet

Remembering Nordic Colonialism

Danish Cultural Memory in Journalistic Practice

Blaagaard, Bolette

Published in:
KULT. Postkolonial Temaserie

Publication date:
2010

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Blaagaard, B. (2010). Remembering Nordic Colonialism: Danish Cultural Memory in Journalistic Practice. *KULT. Postkolonial Temaserie*, 7, 101-121. <http://www.postkolonial.dk/>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Remembering Nordic Colonialism: Danish Cultural Memory in Journalistic Practice.

*Bolette B. Blaagaard**

Utrecht University

During 2005-6, the national Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, caused a diplomatic and political crisis for Denmark when its editor, Flemming Rose, commissioned and published twelve cartoons depicting the Muslim prophet Mohammed. Commentator, Anders Ellebæk Madsen, in a Danish Christian news and debate online forum,¹ wrote about the national collective mind, implying that the Danish cartoons had been misconstrued as bigoted. Danes, he contended, do not feel collective guilt towards former colonies, because the Danish colonial past seems further away and less bloody, and because it is not a Danish cultural trait to feel collective guilt. So, ‘the Danes do not feel guilty towards Africans because the Danes are white or because they are Europeans simply because other white people or other Europeans abused African slaves’ (Madsen 2006).² According to Madsen, apparently, foreigners who are uninformed about the Danish way of life could construe this lack of guilt as racist, and therefore outsiders misunderstood the cartoon controversy.

Madsen’s comments are blatantly inaccurate: Denmark colonised large parts of the north – including Iceland, Greenland, The Faeroe Islands, and Norway – until after the Second World War, and held colonies in the Caribbean, as well as, in southern Ghana and eastern India. As Said (1979), among others indicated, Europe and the Europeans are

¹ Madsen is the editor of the news websites linked to the Danish newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad*, www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk and www.religion.dk. He has written extensively on religious issues. See <http://www.religion.dk/kategori/503?authorid=3> for more information.

¹ <http://www.religion.dk/religionsdebatten:ktg=kristendom:aid=281303> The role of the Lutheran Protestant religion in the Nordic countries, and its connection to the notion of whiteness in a European context, is touched upon at various points in this article, including in the ‘Research on Danish Journalists and the Other’ section of this article below.

² <http://www.religion.dk/religionsdebatten:ktg=kristendom:aid=281303>. My translation: ‘Danskerne føler sig ikke skyldige som hvide eller europæere over for afrikanere, bare fordi andre hvide mennesker eller andre europæere har mishandlet afrikanske slaver.’.

*Kult 7 - Special Issue
Nordic Colonial Mind*

Spring 2010. Department of Culture and Identity. Roskilde University.

defined through the meeting with the *other*, but Denmark seems to have deferred discussion of this encounter, perhaps because the number of Caribbean freed slaves who came to Denmark was less than can be counted on one hand, or perhaps, because the colonial history has been neglected. That is, the absence of a physical record of and lack of encounters with descendants of slaves – specifically, an embodied experience of slavery history – have privileged and prolonged a cultural amnesia through a silencing of these historical events in the educational system, as well as, in journalistic practices.

This suspension of discourse kept Danes feeling guilt-free, and means, to Danes, that the colonies *seem* further away and *seem* less bloody than they were, or as media and cultural theorist, Randi Marselis, writes of the region, “‘Race’ and ‘racism’ have simply not been seen as relevant in the Nordic countries (2008, 463). This might be due to national self-conceptions of the Nordic countries as not having the ‘burden of guilt’, which is often associated with whiteness in other contexts’. It is not common knowledge that Denmark was the seventh largest slave-trading nation during colonial times; the US being the sixth (Gøbel, 1996). There are, for instance, no monuments commemorating slavery in the country; whereas, Norway and the Virgin Islands have raised such monuments. Danish colonial history was a disregarded part of the nation’s story, concealed in the social imaginary to the extent that Danes have been able to blot out consciousness of those others who helped to accumulate the wealth through colonialism (wealth that allowed Denmark to construct the modern welfare state.) In so doing, the ignored others were defined by negation against the European-ness of the Europeans, including the Danes.

There are, then, two cultural constructions at work here: firstly, the construction of national cultural memory and secondly, the repression, or non-memory, of other historical factors including potential cultural memories. In this article, I argue that journalism’s discourses in Danish mainstream news media, including in documentary film and television, are partly responsible for this production of cultural memories and of cultural amnesia. This article explores the relations between Nordic – in particular Danish

*Kult 7 - Special Issue
Nordic Colonial Mind*

Spring 2010. Department of Culture and Identity. Roskilde University.

– social imaginary (or collective mind) and journalism. The first part of the article theorises the relationship by presenting how I conceptualise the social imaginary and view its relation to news media through cultural memory and specifically, through the journalistically mediated cultural memory. The second part presents an analysis, which further develops the argument that in order to discuss present conditions of journalistically mediated Nordic colonial mind, we need to connect those conditions to the past. Accordingly, this last returns to contemporary debates in Denmark (and other Nordic countries) to connect the colonial discourses and scholarships on ‘whiteness’ to the current debates about the ‘un-Danish’ nature of migrant youth and Islam, in general. Danish public discussion forums over the past ten years have scrutinised these concerns. As I argue it is important to contemplate these debates in light of colonial cultural (non-) memory.

Cultural Memory, Journalistic Cultural Memory

The concept of cultural memory is developing simultaneously via different disciplines, including literary studies, which examines the cultural memories of, for instance, apartheid in South Africa (Buikema, 2006), and how fictional and national narratives represent apartheid. Medical researchers and psychologists explore how the brain functions as it remembers and question the psychological reverberations of past events in the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience. The historian, Eric Hobsbawn, convincingly demonstrates how traditions are invented, and then remembered as being ancient (Hobsbawn, 1983) and sociology is developing a field of social memory studies, or of collective memory (Olick, 2008). It is this last strand of memory studies José van Dijck works with as she develops her theories of mediated memories (van Dijck, 2007) of cultural importance. She writes, ‘a culturally framed autobiographical memory integrates the sociocultural with the personal, and the self that emerges from this process is explicitly and implicitly shaped by its environment’s norms and values’ (van Dijck, 2007, 4). I suggest that journalism, as a part of a larger mediascape, provides that mediating factor, which communicates the norms and values of the surroundings, as well as, being

*Kult 7 - Special Issue
Nordic Colonial Mind*

Spring 2010. Department of Culture and Identity. Roskilde University.

affected by the 'autobiographical' and other personal narratives. This is particularly pertinent in journalism that covers cultural differences. However the construction is present to a varying extent in much news journalism, although it is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on the differences in journalistic genres.

Journalism is a powerful tool for representing the culture and ideology in which we live (Gill, 2007). At times, it is even the most significant source on issues about which the public may not have first-hand knowledge (Andreassen, 2007). The sender-receiver relationship between journalistic discourse and practice, and between personal and social discourses, makes journalism a component of the symbolic 'glue' (Braidotti, 2002), or of the social imaginary, which flows between the social and the subject. The social imaginary functions on two levels. On one level the social imaginary is necessary in that it frames social modes of interaction and production. By extension, this means that the social imaginary is the basis on which change occurs through shifting and changing social representations and cultural memories.

On the second level, it is the social imaginary that constructs (distorted) ideas of common sense; an obscure *taken-for-grantedness*, which limits development and critique by mystifying issues. This is the public sphere; that is, social structures of representation such as libraries, architecture, the press and publishing houses, street names etc. I call on a continuous questioning of the social imaginary, although it is indeed hard to avoid, through awareness or consciousness and by seeing the libraries, architecture, the press and publishing houses, street names etc. as materialised cultural memories. Consequently, one comes to understand cultural memory as a major influence and a structural, though flexible, component of the social imaginary. Moreover, cultural memory is materialised and sustained through journalistic reiterations and repetitions. That the two levels of the social imaginary operate simultaneously makes it a complex, but also a slippery, concept. All cultural acts are 'critical, complicit, [and] a little of both' (Nealon and Giroux, 2003, 91). There is no clear distinction between the two levels. Social imaginaries cannot simply be replaced, but must be challenged and reworked constantly. Journalism is an

*Kult 7 - Special Issue
Nordic Colonial Mind*

Spring 2010. Department of Culture and Identity. Roskilde University.

important player when it comes to challenging social imaginaries; it plays an important part in upholding and potentially transforming the social imaginary, because it functions in the in-between(s) of the public and the private. In practice, it mediates between the public and private, and distributes certain ideas and representations of reality to a large number of recipients.

Memory is often connected entirely to the personal experience, but though personal and collective memory may seem to work via two different mechanisms, both personal memory and collective memory are triggered by external elements (Poole, 2008). Moreover, personal and collective memory cannot be separated from one another but mutually shape each other. José van Dijck (2007) develops the concept of ‘personal cultural memory’ and defines it as: *‘the acts and products of remembering in which individuals engage to make sense of their lives in relation to the lives of others and to their surroundings, situating themselves in time and place’* (van Dijck, 2007, 6. Italics retained). Because of the interdependence of personal and collective memory (van Dijck 2007) I suggest that journalism constitutes the ‘acts and products of remembering’ in which all – journalists and non-journalists alike – ‘engage to make sense of [our] lives in relation to the lives of others...’ The interaction makes the missing rupture between personal and collective memory even more pertinent in the recent developments of civic journalism, blogging, and mini-blogs-sites such as Twitter, which spread the power of disseminating and editing journalism among more journalist and non-journalist actors and allow non-journalists to interact with and produce news media products. Journalists, as social subjects, in turn are always already an interactive and generating part of in the social imaginary. This, in succession, alters the terms of what ‘we’ as receivers of journalistic production have come to expect and demand of professional journalistic ‘objectivity’ – i.e., a kind of overview provided by a detached position of the journalists, which keep them from being implicated in the ‘facts’.³ It makes sense to speak of cultural

³ Unfortunately, it is outside the range of this article to discuss the concept of ‘journalistic objectivity’, although it is deeply embedded in the discussion of ‘whiteness’ and cultural memory, which are the topics of this article. However, it will become clear in the following argument that the relation between cultural memory and journalistic objectivity is key.

or collective memory, because like personal memory, it is a form of recollection common to a given culture.

Importantly, memory – rather than history – evokes morality. That is, one can be held responsible for forgetting certain things that one should have remembered, and similarly cultural memory makes moral claims of accountability possible (Poole 2008). Cultural memories form a coherent representation of a common culture and identity, but they need to be repeated in order to continue having an effect and so a concept, which to paraphrase van Dijck (2007), may be coined and termed ‘journalistic cultural memory’. Following van Dijck (2007) I argue for a privileged position for journalism in the making of cultural memories. I position journalistic productions as *the* acts and products which through repetitions construct personal, as well as, collective memories and thus make a sense of belonging. Journalistic cultural memories inform an ‘us’ which relates to an ‘other’ on personal and collective cultural levels simultaneously.

Before I examine how cultural memories can be seen to work in journalistic representations, I discuss the particular journalist-mediated imaginary that is dominant in Denmark. The studies completed in Denmark on the Danish news media-mediated social imaginary represent a media-analysis, a practical approach to journalistic practice, and its implications. Foregrounding Denmark’s journalist-mediated social imaginary allows me to make the particularities available. Simultaneously, Denmark’s social imaginary is presented as a prototype of a perceived homogeneous society. That is, the studies, which I refer to below, focus on ‘the other’ in Danish journalism and expressly, on how that ‘other’ helps construct a particular Danish mediated social imaginary, in which the individual does not participate.

Research on Danish Journalists and the Other

The theoretical work in the field of Danish journalism, ethnicity, and mediated social imaginaries in Denmark is far from overwhelming in quantity, although new networks

*Kult 7 - Special Issue
Nordic Colonial Mind*

Spring 2010. Department of Culture and Identity. Roskilde University.

are being formed to study this, and new research is being planned. However limited it is, the work, on the relevance and importance of the other in the construction of the socially imagined 'us', may help to understand the political as well as social ramifications of the inflexibility of the social imaginary in Danish journalistic discourse. A report published by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2002) on racism and xenophobia in the mass media in the European Union (EU) member states testifies to the exclusionary and homogeneously 'white' construction of Danish practices of the social imaginary. Moreover, 'minorities [in Denmark] are not only seen as an out-group, but also as a threat to Danish culture and society' (Hussain, 2002, 107).

According to this report at the parliamentary level, Denmark, of all the Scandinavian countries, is the least interested in its minorities. The Danish government's refusal to participate in Nordic initiatives focusing on minorities and racism, emphasises this; underlining, furthermore, that a 'new racism,' that is, a covert racism is the norm rather than the exception to the rule (Hussain, 2002, 113-14). Regarding the press corps, the report also finds that the Danish media excludes minorities as sources of expert knowledge, in addition to excluding as potential receivers of the news stories (Hussain, 2002, 110-12). Some of these journalistic, as well as, political attitudes may have changed since the 2001 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the 2005-6 and 2008 cartoon controversy, though whether it is for the better concerning inclusion of minorities is not a given. Indeed, the latest Danish research shows that Danish journalism has a long, persistent history of excluding, via stereotyping and dichotomising (Andreassen, 2007). Analysing the journalistic news products, Danish media scholar, Rikke Andreassen, finds that the journalistic exclusion from the representation of the Danish collective 'us' has not changed much throughout the thirty-three years of her study (Andreassen, 2005, 2007). Andreassen's historical perspective shows that the stereotypes of migrants used in Danish journalistic production are persistent, implemented and sustained through repetition as well as through sophisticated narrative structures (Andreassen, 2005, 286). Andreassen allows journalists do not sustain racist stereotypes deliberately. Journalistic products help to construct a Danish identity and nationality as different from the identity

of the other, mainly through the marking or ‘bracketing off’ of the other. Whereas ‘visible minorities’ are labelled ‘ethnic’, ‘foreign’, or ‘second-generation-immigrants’, Danes (particularly men) are represented as unmarked and unlabelled. In the media, holding Danish citizenship is not enough for recognition of a subject by the media as Danish; rather, Danish nationality is constructed as ‘closely connected to whiteness, to the white race’ (Andreassen, 2005, 288). ‘Naturalisation’ of Danish nationality means that it persists as white and unmarked in the journalistic products and functions as the norm through which otherness is defined as un-Danish.

Danish public and political debates often conflate the notion of ‘migrant’ with the notion of ‘Muslim’ (Andreassen, 2005, 2007; Jensen, 2006). A 2003 study, focused on policies and attitudes towards religion of the editors and journalists from the four largest national newspapers in Denmark, concluded that they ‘show remarkably little interest in the way their notion(s) of religion, and consequently their writing about religion, reflect and perpetuate a historical and partly religious notion of religion’ (Jensen, 2006, 132-3). Interestingly, the journalists and editors’ relationships to religion and especially to their ideas of what constitutes ‘true’ religion are powerfully informed by Lutheran-Protestant Christian classifications. ‘True’ religion, the interviewees assert, ‘belongs to the heart of the individual’ (Jensen, 2006, 133). This definition is ‘naturalised’ by the journalists, and consequently other perceptions of religion – such as collectively or structurally and ritually informing and informed religions – are bound to be the object of journalistic critical interrogation, ridicule or silencing. In other words, religions that are not Lutheran-Protestant Christian are othered in the Danish media, and because ‘to a lot of people [religion] is what the media makes (of) it’ (Jensen, 2006, 134) the Danish social imaginary is constructed as Lutheran-Protestant. In summary, the unthinking transference of structures of omissions, and of ‘naturalisations’ are an integral part of people’s (journalists, editors, and laypersons) lives – that is of the social imaginary.

Both Jensen (2006) and Andreassen (2005, 2007) conclude that journalists do not deliberately perpetuate racism and that it is rather, unthinkingly transfers of

unacknowledged assumptions, which are the reason for the discriminating and dichotomising journalism. I argue it is this inability to question one's own position, or look outside it, that allows for an unacknowledged reproduction of stereotypes and discrimination, that is, the journalistic production of cultural (non-)memories and ignorance. By *ignorance* I mean *not-knowing* and also *ignoring*, i.e. willingly neglecting knowledge production about a certain subject – cultural memories and the cultural non-memories. Below, I explore some of these issues, and argue for a connection between them and the current ideas of *us* and *them* prominent in political, and general mediated debates in the Nordic countries.

Denmark/US Virgin Islands: A Case Study

The (post)colonial relationship between Denmark and United States Virgin Islands (USVI) has been overlooked by scholars and journalists alike for some time. Denmark colonised the three Caribbean islands of St Thomas, St Croix and St John for more than two hundred years, although this common cultural and political history and colonial relationship features neither prominently in Danish schoolbooks, nor in the media. By contrast, in the USVI schools teach the historical relationship. The skewed emphasis on the importance of this common history generates a marked lack of acknowledgement of Danish complicity in colonialism, slavery and slave trade by the Danish public. In addition, this lack of acknowledgement perpetuates ignorance towards covert racialised hierarchies and categorisations based on 19th century and early 20th century biological racial ideology. It is not uncommon to find Danes in their late teens, who do not know that Denmark participated in slavery;⁴ there is little to suggest that the older Danes are better informed. The discourses and terminology of otherness often show traces of what media and cultural theorist Randi Marselis calls ‘national self-conceptions of the Nordic countries as not having the “burden of guilt”’ (Marselis, forthcoming, 463). So, the journalistic cultural memories parallel journalistic cultural ignorance, or non-memory.

⁴ Alex Frank Larsen: *Slavernes Spor (Traces of Slaves)* (Medialex Film & TV 2005), television documentary in four episodes.

The case study of USVI explores how covert racist notions of difference in the public carry through to a journalistic discursive and practice-based lack of acknowledged complicity. These productions of (non-)memories and ignorance also carry into current debates about migrant youth and Islam. In particular, the study demonstrates this through a three minute snippet of political turmoil in St Croix 1998, as shown in the documentary series *Slavernes Slægt* (2005). The documentary itself appears to make visible the white hegemonic power that is now invisible to the populations of the Nordic countries. It ‘uncover’ stories of the Danish colonial past and it emphasises the Danish role in the slave trade and slavery. It does this through the narratives of private lives. However, journalistic productions are always already embedded in the social imaginary and (re)producing cultural memories, and *Slavernes Slægt* also has its moments of questionable cultural ignorance, which are the focus of this short analysis.

Slavernes Slægt

Slavernes Slægt (2005) – produced and directed by Alex Frank Larsen, distributed through his own production company, Medialex Film & TV – was broadcast on national public service television in prime viewing time. The documentary, divided into four episodes, presents a number of protagonists – amateur genealogists – looking for, or simply narrating, their ancestral lines in the Danish National Archives in Copenhagen and elsewhere. Through their personal narratives, a specific cultural memory emerges, which is supported by the editorial choices in; voice-over narration, music and cover-shots etc.. The documentary can be said to be employing what I refer to as journalistic cultural memories.⁵

In this analysis, I focus on one singular event – as mentioned above, a mere three minutes of air-time – during the four hour plus long documentary. It occurs in the first

⁵ For an in-depth analysis of all the significant content of this documentary see Randi Marselis (2008). Frello also has an article, ‘Dark Blood’ on the documentary in this volume of *Kult*.

episode of *Slavernes Slægt* when Larsen films the re-enactment of the emancipation of the Danish slaves in 1848 at the 150th anniversary of the event in 1998. This snippet of documentary stumbles upon several ways in which journalistic practice affects and produces cultural memories. It also opens a space as to how cultural memories and historical events may be discussed within documentary media productions and within journalistic practice. These celebrations included a re-enactment of Governor Peter von Scholten – hard-pressed by a slave rebellion – pronouncing the words, ‘You are now free – you have been emancipated!’. He had done so without first consulting the king of Denmark.. Von Scholten has passed into the Danish history for that speech act, and it was now to be repeated by a Danish actor, Kurt Ravn, on this commemorative occasion. Documentary maker and journalist Larsen and his camera, as stated above, recorded these events.

Larsen documents the final rehearsal of the re-enactment in Christiansted and follows Ravn to Frederiksted on the succeeding day, where the actual speech was made. The commemoration event brims with brass band music from Denmark, theatrical scenes of slavery performed by African actors and dancers, and the playing of national anthems. Suddenly the camera turns towards turmoil, which has occurred among the audience. In a flash all the prominent guests, ambassadors and officials, who were attending the ceremony are ushered into their bulletproof cars by their bodyguards. Ravn, the actor portraying von Scholten, seems confused and startled. Both he and African-American gospel singer Etta Cameron, whom – it would seem – just happened to be there, are subsequently briefly interviewed by Larsen and express concern on camera about the Danish role in the slave trade and slavery, as well as, the tensions between black and white still evident in the post-colonial community. (Cameron played Peter von Scholten’s mistress in a film-version of the story (Crone Film 1987), although this is not presented as the reason for her participation in the emancipation event or, indeed in the documentary.) In the documentary Cameron states she is shaken, because there ‘could have been a bomb or a pistol’, and Ravn reflects on being a white man on the islands, knowing the atrocities his ancestors committed there.

*Kult 7 - Special Issue
Nordic Colonial Mind*

Spring 2010. Department of Culture and Identity. Roskilde University.

Initially it was difficult to discover who was responsible for the disruption. I was advised by Erik Gøbel,⁶ of the National Archives in Copenhagen, that the man causing the turmoil had ridden on his motorbike into the town square where the event took place. But this flashy entrance is not filmed, nor is it confirmed in the documentary. When Larsen's camera captures the man, he is already standing on the dais from which the VIP audience have already hurriedly departed. In the television series, his appearance is subtitled 'Adelbert Bryant' and he is possibly a senator – at least that is what Ravn says he was told. However, a Goggle search made under that name revealed nothing and it later becomes obvious that Larsen misspelt the name.⁷ The three minutes of turmoil in the documentary end with Bryant, accompanied by cheers, asserting to the camera that 'the Danish people must understand that no one in Denmark is [his] friend...until the [Danish] head of state apologises'. As no additional explanation of Bryant's agitation and actions is given in the documentary it could easily be assumed that Bryant is member of a reparation movement on the islands. However, as already stated, the documentary never explains the situation further other than to state Ravn's hearsay and Cameron's fears. The turmoil stands within the documentary as an event within the event –hinting at a possible political angle. Bryant appears to be a tall African-Caribbean man dressed in distinctive African-inspired clothes and headgear and large sunglasses.

Re-reading the Re-enactment

The roughness with which this event and the Bryant orchestrated event within the event, is researched and edited in the documentary series leaves the viewer with no tools to decode the sequence of occurrences. The viewer retains an impression of thinly sketched characters and allusions to powerful stereotypes; a big-looking angry black and man, a gospel singer who suggests that the big-looking man could have been violent, and some

⁶ In a personal conversation with the historian and senior researcher.

⁷ Before I knew about the misspelling of the name, I conducted a search on 'Adelbert Bryant's' full name; partial name and St Croix; partial name and reparation etc. but only a record of a long-deceased man appeared.

apologetic stammering from a white actor. The probable connotations provide a caricature of the positions in the racial and political tensions in a postcolonial society. Nonetheless, the sequence of brief comments communicates something of the tensions that are still in place on the islands showing, as it does, anger, fear and remorse, personified in the three people commenting on the turmoil. In short, it is an encounter between hegemonic and resisting counter-history. Because of its disruptive function the incident itself forces the viewer to question the legitimacy of the re-enactment and the terms in which it is performed. Bryant's actions raise questions like: 'Who in effect emancipated the slaves: Governor von Scholten or the slaves themselves?' and 'What are the political implications of the decision to perform the historical event: who speaks, who is heard and who is silenced?'. That is, questions regarding the legitimacy of the cultural memories performed and reproduced journalistically. The event within the event curtailed the entire celebration ceremony and generated an opportunity for the observers and participants to take up new political stances. But the documentary itself does not enable such processes; with its abrupt return to the personal narrative, which forms its very basis. Moreover, the turmoil, its political implications, and the question that evolves from this, is at no point explicitly connected to the Danish government or the Danish people by the journalist.

The re-enactment in 1998 was a cultural memory reproduced and changed within that repetition of the act of emancipation. As outlined in the previous section, cultural memories are not merely historical and political events making up current society; rather, cultural memories are narrated, experienced. They create a sensory and productive consciousness of belonging, an awareness of an 'us' as opposed to a 'them'. In doing so, they draw on cultural myths and legends as, for instance, the role of the rebel 'General Buddhoe' in the case of the re-enactment. Librarian archivist and researcher Jeanette Bastian (2003) argues for two kinds of historical memory: an archival knowledge, which is documenting and descriptive, and a cultural productive knowledge, which is experiential. Communities like the USVI emphasises experienced memory over descriptive memory, because of their lack of access to archival possessions and

knowledge (Bastian 2003). Bastian contends that sort of cultural knowledge, which holds myths and legends, oral and performative (re)production(s) as foundational for the existence of the culture's history, has to be continuously defended against the archival and written knowledge figuring in Danish official documents, which only Danish-speaking people – the former colonisers – have access to.

The journalistic representation of the re-enactment, and of Bryant's disruptions, can be read as an integral part of the cultural memories generated by the re-enactment. However, it is obvious that the few minutes, presented to the Danes seven years after the event, are without political and cultural contextualisation. They produce ignorance – if not confusion – rather than establishing memories and collective cultural cohesion. An article by Larsen from 1998 provides key information the documentary lacks; the man who interrupted the re-enactment was a local senator with a controversial political agenda, well-known to the Crucians. The article also spells his name correctly (Bryan, not Bryant). Senator Bryan is a politician who works toward introducing 'the original African values' to the Virgin Islands and to 'reserve the islands for people who can trace their roots to before the year 1927' (Larsen, 1998, my translation).⁸ Bryan moreover explains: 'You [the Danes] have nothing to celebrate. It was not von Scholten who emancipated the slaves. It was my ancestors – following General Buddhoe – who took their freedom' (Larsen, 1998, my translation). However, because the article was published in 1998, it is of no use to the 2005 plus viewer of the documentary, who despite any desire to be more fully informed about Bryan and his motivations, probably is without knowledge of the article's existence. Additionally, the information lacks connections and direct relevance for Danish lives and therefore remains a curiosity that has more to do with Crucian local politics than it does with Danish personal politics.

Remembering Danish Colonialism

⁸ This particular year corresponds to the time in history when the USVI population were granted US citizenship, but this is not explained in the documentary.

When I presented part of this article at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Virgin Islands Historians,⁹ the audience engaged intensely with the material and had their experiences and theories about the re-enactment event at hand. It became clear that the cultural memory produced in St Croix, through the Crucian media, and through participation in the event, as well as, that produced by the political life and the history of the island, informed the meeting's participants in ways which the Danish public, given their cultural amnesia, would not be able to access. The distortion of the experience, which the three minutes represent, is grounded in the lack of explanations of the political relations, the historical importance of the end of slavery and the Danish role in these events.. It is curious that Kurt Ravn reflects on his presence as a 'white man' in the former colonies, without explicitly referring to the role he, as a performing actor, and Denmark, as a political actor, plays. Denmark seems to be written out of a narrative of colonialism, slave trade and slavery; what remains is the 'happy ending' of emancipation. Moreover, the lack of explanations allows for a reiteration of the angry black man accompanied by fear and fantasies.

In the Crucian and Danish media exemplified, Adelbert Bryan was described as aggressive, as ridiculous and as a criminal, on top of which the quotes – developed in newspaper articles also – underlined the irrationality of his account. Senator Bryan is 'the madman' contrasted to the civilisation standing appalled over the wildness of his behaviour. This portrayal of Bryan sets up an opposition between him and the viewer in which this element of disorder needs to be suppressed in order to develop 'reason' (Foucault, 1989). Bryan unsettles order with the ambivalence he produces (Baumann, 1991); Bryan being black and speaking for the cause of the African descendants in St Croix. The governor of the USVI, Roy Schneider, is also black – as is more than 80% of the USVI population – however, within the journalistic narrative the governor is placed on the side of the 'establishment' and order and thus placed on the side of the Danish crown's white governor, von Scholten.

⁹ Annual Meeting of the Society of Virgin Islands Historians, 17. January 2009
(<http://www.virginislandspubliclibraries.org/usvi/vihistorians.asp>)

Senator Bryan's disruption of the re-enactment event exposed the dominant representation of the historical relations between Denmark and the USVI on two levels. Firstly, it brought about a critique of the arrangement of the event, and secondly, it questioned the very historical assumptions on which the event was established. Bryan's interruption elucidated that the re-enactment of the emancipation of the Crucian slaves by Danish Governor von Scholten is re-enactment of the archival knowledge – that is, hegemonic and Euro-centric history-writing. Also, *Slavernes Slægt* was primarily constructed through records drawn from Danish archives, as was the re-enactment until Bryan's intervention. It is fair to say that Senator Bryan's view as it is presented in *Slavernes Slægt* is biased, in the sense that he argues for political priority to be given to people of Crucian, to those Crucians of African descent, and because he claims a kind of Crucian authenticity. However, his position, as pointed out in the section above, raises the questions: What are the political implications of the decision to perform the historical event in the way it was done? In short, who got to speak, who was heard and who was silenced? Put in journalistic terms the question concerns the 'objectivity' of the representation of this particular historical event, and also if there are degrees of 'freedom of speech' involved in a less than 'objective' representation? These are concepts that proved essential to Danish self-conception and social imaginary during the cartoon controversy.

True North – Secular and 'White'

In this conclusion I examine the significance of cultural memory as I tie the ignorance of the Danish colonial past to the Danish white and secular self-conception and so return to this article's beginning. At the time of the publication of the cartoons, the Danish government was in the process of waging a 'cultural battle' against Muslim norms and thinking.¹⁰ In the words of the then Minister of Cultural Affairs, Brian Mikkelsen, 'the Danish cultural heritage' was up against 'Muslim norms and ways of thought' (Klausen,

¹⁰ Denmark was also engaged in military action in Iraq next to the US.

2006). As this political idea is on the rise across Europe – most recently noted in the popularity of right-winged parties at the EU parliamentary election, 2009 – it is perhaps not surprising that newspapers in several European countries followed the Danish example, and printed the cartoons. The countries that did not follow suit immediately were the UK¹¹ and the US. Although the US and the UK have utterly different colonial histories and their political dealings with others are also markedly different, both countries have painful histories of acknowledging their heterogeneousness, and their violent pasts based, for instance, in widespread colonialism and slavery. In stark contrast, we find Madsen (2006), represented in the introduction to this article, thinking that Denmark has no colonial history at all and therefore no guilt to speak of.

Denmark is reluctant to see itself as part of the Europe that colonised and enslaved, though eager to be part of the Europe that is secular and enlightened. Norway shares this self-deceit as journalist and self-proclaimed feminist, Hege Storhaug (Fekete, 2006), notes when she further denounces the need for what I define as ‘white’ and secular only literacy on the topic of Nordic colonial history. Storhaug, a well-known voice in the Norwegian debate on Islam, attributes the lack of historical guilt to the Norwegian talent for ‘shak[ing] off false multiculturalism’ (Fekete 2006). Storhaug represents multiculturalism as a misguided understanding of cultures other than the ‘western’. Freedom of religion is thereby placed in a hierarchical, and consequently less important, role, in relation to the concept of freedom of expression, and the latter is presented as a foundational ‘western’ European secular value. (Religion, as detailed above, is often conflated with culture.) Storhaug even views the ability to forget (that is, the existence of a non-memory) as a strength, which helps the Nordic countries reject multiculturalism. Guilt makes such countries as France and the UK accept everything uncritically. Storhaug contends. I argue, that the quest for a cultural canon by the editor, Rose, who commissioned the cartoons for *Jyllands-Posten*, and the Danish Minister of Cultural Affairs at the time (as referred to above) shares her theory. In this sense, (by both

¹¹ The British network Channel 4 did, however, show a partial representation of the cartoons in its news coverage of the case.

rejecting and internalising Europeanisation) Denmark – and perhaps the entire Nordic region – succeeds in appearing ‘white’ and religiously homogeneous to itself. Thereby Denmark makes the unsaid, and the power of the commonly held values, even stronger than in European such countries as France and the UK, as well as Germany, which because of its Second World War experience, rather than its colonialism, questions its relations with others.

The potential political and colonial discussion shown for three minutes of and then, in effect, erased by *Slavernes Slægt* demonstrates the ignorance and non-memory of Danish complicity in Nordic colonial exploitation. It also underlines the cultural memory of national self-conceptions as secular and rational. This Nordic position is one I term secular illiteracy. It points to the omission of another potential narrative, and to subjectivities generating cracks in the discourse about Nordic history and culture (Gullestad, 2005). The dominant narratives of the national identity, founded on innocence, humanism, tolerance and anti-racism, are not only based on selective facts (Gullestad, 2005), but also on the disregarding of other factors of colonial oppression, for example, slavery and Protestant supremacy. Gilroy (2006) calls it agno-politics or agnotology, which is a form of structural blindness that produces ‘new racism’, (rather than a more easily condemnable overt racism). It constitutes not only a lack of guilt, but also, certainly, a lack of acknowledgement regarding the colonial slave owning past. In this article I call it a cultural non-memory and ignorance – in its double understanding. Gullestad (2005) points out that the Norwegian perception of racism is not of a structural kind, but a racism that is rather seen as an individual act by bigoted people. This particular perception has implications for the public debates around both the term *neger*,¹² which when it was debated in Norway was deemed a benign term despite its racist etymology, and the effects of cartoon controversy within and upon the Nordic region. As Gullestad states, aptly, and with a touch of irony: ‘In this [Norwegian] debate

¹² *Neger* means ‘negro’ in Norwegian. The debate started when a black Norwegian contested the use of the term when the media referred to or described him. Although the Norwegian debate was local it still calls on similar structures and attitudes, as demonstrated in this article.

[about the use of the term *neger*] common decency was obviously opposed to other important concerns' (Gullestad, 2005, 40). 'Other important concerns' in the case of the cartoons (as in the case of the use of the term *neger* in Norway) were to uphold the normative position of what was considered unchallengeable within Danish culture. Challenging the normative knowledge claim by accepting another embodiment of experiencing the interpolating power of the word *neger* or, of the religious embodiment of faith, was too painful for the Danish, as well as, the Norwegian production of social imaginary. The individualisation of racist behaviour is mirrored in the individualisation of religiousness in Denmark. Both render invisible the cultural, societal, economic and political structures of racial relations and thus, also the exclusions, which are actively present in most European societies, including in Norway and Denmark.

To conclude, I assert that as long as journalism is uncritically allowed to (re)produce cultural memories of Denmark as a secular, freedom-loving nation that is completely unrelated to colonial history and slavery, debates that question the covert racism and Islamophobia, in current political and culturally defined discussions, will never take place. Although questioning these connections is timely, if not overdue. Journalism has an important role to play, if we want to challenge and change our cultural memories and ignorance of the present, as well as, of the past.

References:

- Andreassen, Rikke (2005). 'The Mass Media's Construction of Gender, Race, Sexuality and Nationality. An Analysis of the Danish News Media's Communication about Visible Minorities from 1971 to 2004'. Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto.
<http://www.rikkeandreassen.dk/>
- _____ (2007). *Der er et Yndigt Land*. Copenhagen: Tiderne Skifter
- Bastian, Jeanette (2003). *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost its Archives and Found its History*. Westport, CT and London: Libraries Unlimited
- Baumann, Zygmunt (1991). *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers
- Braidotti, Rosi (2002). *Metamorphoses*. Cambridge, UK: Polity
- Buikema, Rosemarie (2006). 'Literature and the production of ambiguous memory'. In *European Journal of English Studies* 10: 2. 187-199
- Dijck, José van (2007). *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fekete, Liz (2006). 'Enlightened fundamentalism?' In *Race and Class* 48: 2. 1-22
- Foucault, Michel (1989). *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard. London and New York: Routledge
- Gill, Rosalind (2007). *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge and Malden MA: Polity Press
- Gilroy, Paul (2006). 'Colonial Crimes and Convivial Cultures'. In *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Project in Five Acts*. Coordinated by Kuratorisk Aktion. Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art: www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org.
 (Accessed 1. Nov. 2008)
- Gullestad, Marianne (2005). 'Normalising racial boundaries. The Norwegian dispute about the term *neger*'. *Social Anthropology* 13: 1, 27-46
- Gøbel, Erik (2001). 'De danske mennesketransporter over Atlanten'. In Per Nielsen (ed.) *Fra slaveri til frihed. Det dansk-vestindiske slavesamfund 1672-1848*. Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet. Approximate translation (mine): "The Danish transportations of human beings across the Atlantic"

- Hobsbawm, Eric (1983). 'Inventing Tradition' in *The Invention of Tradition*. In Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hussain, Mustafa (2002). '4.2 Denmark' in ter Jessika Wal (ed.). *Racism and cultural diversity in the mass media. An overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU Member States, 1995-2000*. Vienna, European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.
- Jensen, Tim (2006). 'Religion in the Newsrooms'. In Johanna Sumiala-Seppänen, Knut Lundby, and Raimo Salokangas (eds). *Implications of the Sacred in (Post)Modern Media*. Gothenberg: Nordicom
- Kitch, Carolyn (2008). 'Placing journalism inside memory and memory studies' *Memory Studies* 1, 311.
- Klausen, Jytte (2006). 'Rotten judgement in the state of Denmark', in <http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2006/02/08/denmark/index.html>. (Accessed 1. Nov. 2008)
- Larsen, Alex Frank (1998). 'Tumult på vestindiske øer'. In *Politiken* 5 July 1998. Approximate translation (mine): "Turmoil on the West Indian islands".
- Madsen, Anders Ellebæk (2006). 'En Karikatur af Danskerne'. <http://www.religion.dk/religionsdebatten:ktg=kristendom:aid=281303>. (Accessed 1. Nov. 2008)
- Marselis, Randi (2008). 'Descendants of Slaves: the articulation of "mixed racial ancestry" in a Danish television documentary series'. In *European Journal of Cultural studies*
- Nealon, Jeffrey, and Susan Seals Giroux, (2003). *The Theory Toolbox*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers
- Olick, Jeffrey K. (2008). "'Collective memory": A memoir and prospect'. In *Memory Studies* 1, 23
- Poole, Ross (2008). 'Memory, history and the claims of the past' *Memory Studies* 1:2. 149-66
- Said, Edward W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.