



Our Tropical Home

Danish 'Empire Migrants' in the U.S. Virgin Islands, 1917-1945

Pernille Østergaard Hansen

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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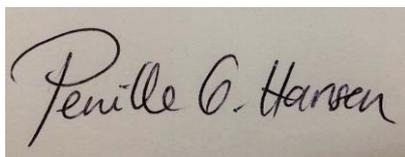
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Our Tropical Home

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Pernille Østergaard Hansen
European University Institute, 2016

Abstract

In 1917 Denmark sold its Caribbean colony to the United States. At a time when other European empires were promoting social and economic reforms in the colonies, the Danish state was withdrawing. However, the transfer of the islands did not break Danish ties to the former colony. An already established group of Danish companies on the islands – Danish sugar factories, plantation companies, a Danish Bank and The Danish West Indian Company - provided the infrastructure for post-transfer migration. This group of migrants was diverse, consisting of settlers practising as old colonials had done, expatriates working for the private companies and practising Danishness in terms of bourgeoisie – and a small group of inbetweeners, priest, deaconesses, doctors and children, who to a larger degree integrated into local community.

Paradoxically, as the Danish state pulled out, a strong narrative of nationality, development and national responsibility had come to underscore the Danish community. As the balance tipped towards a majority of expatriates, the Danish Island community experienced an upheaval in marital practices towards an all-white and all-Danish marriage culture. Although predominantly narrating a tale of Danish homeliness in their cultural and social lives, Island Danes mimicked a global image of tropical whiteness in practise, and repeated practises of the old Danish colonials. The result was a specific Island Danishness, which was a mixture of Danish culture and practises, imperial tropes, bourgeoisie and local elements that increasingly incorporated American culture.

For returnees to Denmark the narrative of national homeliness was often amplified. Through their nostalgia and heavy involvement in memory work, they came to form the national-romantic narrative of the colonial past in public memory. In a small window of history, then, a small group of tropical Danes made the islands into 'home', and thereby brought a global-imperialistic tendency into Danish colonial history.

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Worldatlas 2017.¹



¹ <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/caribb/vi.htm> (15.04.2017)

Introduction

Under breathless silence among the thousand-fold assembly, the red-white cross flag for the last time slid down over St. Thomas. (...) A historical and moving moment where many eyes were shining with tears.

-Danish author, Ernst Mentze, commemorating the day of transfer.²

In 1917 Denmark sold its Caribbean colony - known as the Danish West Indies - to the United States and thus made its final, official break with the islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John. In spite of this, the transfer of the islands to United States involved a combination of both rupture and continuity. In fact, 1917 simultaneously marked a significant break with Danish colonial rule, while imperial ideas and practises continued without interruption on the islands.

At a time when other European imperial powers saw “the empire as bulwark of liberal democratic values” and began to promote economic and social development in the colonies, the Danish state was withdrawing.³ There had been talk of reform, and movements towards development set in place. But, to the great disappointment of Danes eager to reform, an agreement was reached with United States in 1916, and as a result of an election in Denmark, a transfer was made official the year after.⁴

However, the transfer did not break Danish ties to the former colony. Several Danes stayed on and continued their island lives, while other Danes chose to migrate to the islands after 1917.⁵ An already established group of Danish companies on the islands – Danish sugar factories, plantation companies, a Danish Bank and The Danish West Indian Company involved with shipping - provided

² Ernst Mentze, *Danmarks Sidste Tropoland. St. Thomas, St. Croix og St. Jan øerne i det caraibiske hav som blev solgt til U.S.A 1916* (Det Berlingske Trykkeri, 1965), p. 28.

³ Andrew Thompson and Megan Kowalsky, “Social Life and Cultural Representation: Empire in the Public Imagination”, in ed. Andrew Thompson, *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 256.

⁴ See Chapter 1.

⁵ Georg Nørregaard, “Dansk Vestindien 1880-1917”, *Vore gamle tropekolonier* vol. 4, ed. Johannes Brøndsted (Fremad, 1967).

the infrastructure for this post-transfer migration.⁶ In this thesis, I am concerned with the period from when official colonial rule ended in 1917 till the end of the Second World War in 1945, when the vast majority of Danes and Danish private institutions had left the islands. This periodisation has guided my collection of source material from the beginning. Yet, as I read through the sources, my analysis at times reached further backwards and forward in time. Therefore, Chapter 1 also conveys an image of 'the empire at home' that preceded the transfer of the islands and represents the luggage that Danes brought with them. Just as Chapter 6 reaches beyond 1945 to offer a perspective on later effects of the end of empire on the islands, but especially in the Denmark many had returned to.

In these first 38 years after the sale, the infrastructure between the islands and Denmark was not only physical. Among the Island Danes, there was a general feeling of a bond between Denmark and the islands – a sense that they were somehow connected. This was an *affective* bond grounded in developmental ideas, a shared history, a continued institutional connection and in a sort of postcolonial nostalgia.⁷ Yet, while Danish colonial officials had been on the islands for years, the presence of Danish companies was relatively new – as was this idea of an emotional bond. They were all part of a relatively new tendency to incorporate the islands into Danish culture and nationality, which came to play a large, and continued, role in the 'afterness' of empire.⁸

In this thesis, I am exploring this afterness on the islands - but also in the 'Motherland' - and, specifically, the role of the group that I have labelled the *Island Danes* in this. With an off-set in the so-called New Imperial History, inspired by postcolonial theory - and within a framework of the emotional category of 'home' - I focus on the narratives and practises of the Island Danes. I do this to explore

⁶ Chapter 1 will explore these companies and their employees in detail.

⁷ Affect is here understood as emotional and irrational, but not outside the social. Clare Hemmings, "Invoking affect", *Cultural Studies* vol. 19, no. 5 (2005).

⁸ Gerhardt Richter has expanded on the notion of "felt afterness": "The experience of afterness in modernity encompasses not only the notion that something has been outlived or survived by something else, but also the realization that what has been outlived or survived no longer belongs to the structural possibility of experience of that which is to come", Gerhardt Richter, "A Genealogical Note", in: Gerhardt Richter, *Afterness: Figures of following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 31.

Danish discourses of (the demise of) the Caribbean colony in the first half of the Twentieth century, as well as the entanglement of these discourses with the practises and notions of the Island Danes. Accordingly, this is neither a comparative nor a global history, although it relies on the 'global' character of imperialism and cross-cultural encounters.⁹ Rooting this study of a small group of Islands Danes in Imperial History, then, in itself offers a "global view on ostensibly local events, systems, and cultures".¹⁰ Hence, I am explicitly interested in this specific encounter on the U.S. Virgin Islands and its 'dialog' with the metropole, but also in how it was informed by global (post-)imperial ideas.

Thus, to understand the world of the Island Danes, and the changes that occurred to them in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century, we must understand the contemporary *discourse of tropicality* and its development in the same years. Geographer James Duncan and historian Catherine Cocks, among others, have mapped out the elements in a tropical discourse, which they argue was a structural base for Europeans and Americans in their relation to tropical places.¹¹ Grounded in environmental determinism, and increasingly in biological science as we moved into the late Nineteenth/early Twentieth century, the idea that environments produced specific races was widespread.¹² However, by the early Twentieth century, the introduction of germ theory as well as commercial agriculture began to change the image of tropicality.¹³ In European geographical imagination, tropics were now becoming tameable and thereby less dangerous for

⁹ As argued by Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, when they stressed the "need for historical contingency when creating global narratives and the fundamentally transnational operation of colonial power" in "Introduction: Bodies, Empires, and World Histories", in *Bodies in Contact. Rethinking colonial encounter in World History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 8.

¹⁰ Ballantyne and Burton, "Introduction", p.2

¹¹ Catherine Cocks, *Tropical Whites. The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) and James S. Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics. Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (Routledge, 2007). The discourse has also been challenged and (re)produced in the 'tropical' world in the same period, especially in Brazil. In the 1860s, the Brazilian Tropicalista movement opposed imperial tropical medicine and offered a nationalist version, just as Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre developed the notion of Luso-Tropicalism in the 1920-1960s. See Julian Peard, *Race, Place and Medicine. The Idea of the Tropics in Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Medicine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) and Nancy Ley Stepan, *Picturing tropical Nature* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹² Duncan, *In the Shadows*, p. 8.

¹³ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 18.

the White man. Therefore, the idea was, a White man with the right moral strength, was now capable of upholding against the energy-depriving, unhealthy and degrading tropics. Correspondingly, the concept of culture, as opposed to environment alone, grew, and with culture the idea of the nation also entered the scene.¹⁴ For the Island Danes, these changes in the tropical discourse were (re)produced in three occurrences. First, since the islands were no longer considered dangerous environments, men began to take their families 'out there'. Therefore, the group of Island Danes consisted of men, women and children alike, and as we shall see, this also changed the relations between local islanders and Danes. Second, if locals were not fully determined by their environment, but as much by their culture, they were also capable of changing. Hence, the idea of *developing* the islands structured an influx of Danish businesses and cultural projects to the islands. Third, once the tropical sun became understood as a source of health and freedom, instead of illness and moral decay, tourism became the new way to develop the islands, as well as a way for Europeans and Americans to flee civilisation.

This thesis is, therefore, a history of a small group of Danes, who continued their relation to the islands after the sale. Just as it is a history of private companies and initiatives that continued a paternalistic development of the islands, and to some degree upheld an informal - private enterprise - empire.¹⁵ While the situation was no longer officially colonial, the island world as such was nonetheless made possible for the Danes because of its imperial past. As historian Robert Bickers has explained it in relation to Britain in China: "it was part of a world opened up through empire, both formal and informal, offering opportunities for migration, for personal advancement, for employment and even escape in the new communities".¹⁶ Indeed, it was a world built on familial bonds and colonial

¹⁴ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Robert Bickers elaborates on the term private enterprise imperialism in Robert Bickers, "Introduction", *Britain in China. Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900-1949* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 1-21.

¹⁶ Bickers, "Introduction", *Britain in China*, Citation from page 3.

infrastructure in a broad sense, but also concretely on the presence of Danish families and companies. It was also a highly internationalised world, where Danes were, and had always been, a minority even among 'Whites'. When Americans took over the islands in 1917, the number of Danes naturally decreased as officials returned to Denmark, but smaller, new groups also arrived. There were around 300 Danes on the islands at that time, in comparison, the population was around 26.000, and 7,4% of these were Europeans.¹⁷ These 300 Danes were not only a minority, they were *settlers* and *expatriates*, present in a formal state that was not their own, but which they recognised – and as we will see, their identities were multiple.¹⁸ As a group, they embodied processes of the demise of the Danish empire on the islands, and it is precisely in that function that they become particularly interesting.

Departing in postcolonial studies and the general idea of microhistory - and navigating with the tools of studies of home, emotion and materialisations - I want to explore these Danes by recognising the very smallness of the group, and by emphasising their constituting, confirming and obstructing materialisations of tropical and imperial discourses. Specifically, I am interested in the cultural and social identities they produced, and how they created an image of the islands and their peoples. I do this by studying narratives, images and everyday practises, as well as emotional expressions, of the Island Danes. Guiding me is the fact that many Island Danes expressed a felt bond with the islands, what I also refer to as a sense of homeliness. Therefore, I ask why the Island Danes travelled to the islands, how they narrated, practised and challenged the homeliness 'out there' – as well as how they remembered and produced the past when they returned to Denmark.

¹⁷ The numbers from the American Census of the Virgin Islands in November 1917 are not as transparent as we could have hoped for, so the amount is an informed guess based in the census data.

¹⁸ The terms *settler* and *expatriate* in this context are borrowed from John Darwin, "Orphans of Empire", in ed. Robert Bickers, *Settlers and Expatriates. Britons over the Seas* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p.332-333 and Bickers, "Introduction", *Britain in China*, p. 14-15.

The histories of three little islands

When the islands were sold to the United States, the society that Island Danes navigated, underwent a string of political and cultural changes. As we will explore much further in Chapter 1, a change in attitude towards the colony had already occurred in the years leading up to the sale. As a result of a national awakening, and in the name of development, private initiatives and agricultural ventures had been launched on the islands. Starting in the late Nineteenth century, Danes also began to argue for spreading Danish culture on the islands, and for the first time, there was a short period where schools were teaching Danish language and culture.¹⁹ This was contrary to the general tendencies of Danish colonial rule on the islands. Danish West Indian society had always been culturally multiple, with religious and linguistic diversity and with an international elite, into which the Danes had integrated when they came to the islands.²⁰ This elite was a diverse group consisting of many different nationalities: mainly Dutch, French, Irish and German - while the majority were English. Planters were predominantly English, and Danes took up positions as officials or had military functions. On the islands, the common language - and the language of schooling - was English, even though non-English Europeans often spoke their mother tongue in their own social circles.²¹ Even though colonial discourse in the Danish West Indies was definitely one of racial discrimination, there were no direct racial laws, and a middle class of mixed descent had emerged.²² Intercultural exchanges were a part of everyday life: intermarriage was allowed, and there was generally a considerable amount of sexual or romantic relations and mixed children.²³ However, the acceptance of all

¹⁹ Karen Fog Olwig, "Et gyldent minde? Tropiske troper i dansk identitet", in eds. Karen Fog Olwig and John Liep, *Komplekse liv. Kulturel mangfoldighed i Danmark* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1994), p. 170.

²⁰ Olwig, "Et gyldent minde?", p. 170.

²¹ Ove Hornby, *Kolonierne i Vestindien* (Politikens Forlag, 1980), p. 190, 203, and Rune Clausen, "The Better Class. Strategier i den racemæssigt sammensatte middelklasse på St. Croix" (Master's thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2002), p. 4.

²² Clausen, "The Better Class", p. 2.

²³ Hazel M. McFerson, *The Impact of a changed racial tradition: race, Politics and Society in the USVI, 1917-1975* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976), p. 58, 63, and Hornby, *Kolonierne*, p. 193.

this began to change as notions of culture and nationalism gained grounds in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century.

Yet, although cultural interest in the islands had grown, the economic benefits had long been diminishing and talk of selling the islands surfaced several times. In 1916 a sale to the United States became a reality. When the United States administration took over after a transfer in 1917, the new government only had a narrow plan and purpose for their new purchase.²⁴ The islands were basically acquired to ensure that no European power could make use of the them to gain a foothold in the Caribbean. This fact determined American policies – and the general attitude - directed at their new property.²⁵ For the same reasons, the United States government had very little knowledge about the islands at the time of the purchase, and it never managed to inform the hopeful population about the level of their intentions.²⁶ Upon arrival, the federal government installed a naval administration on the islands and launched the general policy that the islanders should experience as little political change as possible during the transition.²⁷ This policy was reflected in the Provisional Act of March 3rd 1917, in which most of the Danish administrative and political system, thus the Colonial Law of 1906, was maintained.²⁸ In practice this meant that the United States Congress appointed a governor who possessed of quite extensive powers – he could for example issue regulations, orders and provisional laws or appoint judges, and he was able to dissolve the colonial councils.²⁹ A location of the administration of the islands within the United States Navy, meant that the central positions as governor, governor secretary etc. were obtained by naval officers.³⁰ As had been the case with other new American territories, the Virgin Islands were assigned the political status

²⁴ Stephanie Hunter McMahon, "You Pay for What You Get. The U.S. Virgin Islands 1917-1936", *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2007), p.129

²⁵ Isaac Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States* (Canoe Press 1974/2005), p. 262.

²⁶ McMahon, "You Pay for What You Get", p. 129

²⁷ Isaac Dookhan, "Changing Patterns of local reactions to the United States Acquisition of the Virgin Islands, 1865-1917", *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1975), p. 72.

²⁸ Dookhan, *A History*, p. 266.

²⁹ William Boyer, 1983/2000, *America's Virgin Islands. A History of Human Rights and Wrongs* (Carolina Academic Press, 1983/2000), p. 123, and McMahon, "You Pay for What You Get", p. 113.

³⁰ Dookhan, *A History*, p. 266.

of unincorporated, self-governing territory, and what was a relatively autocratic naval administration - which was meant to be temporary - ended up lasting 14 years. The first civil governor was finally put in place in 1931.³¹ During these 14 years, the naval administration focused its efforts on the social standards of life on the islands and, contrary to Danish colonial policy, an official policy of 'Americanising' Virgin Islanders. This resulted in several social reforms, a reformation of the educational system and an effort to culturally turn the islands towards the mainland.

While the naval administration displayed great willingness to launch social reforms and so-called Americanising efforts, they lacked the will to improve the stagnating economy on the islands.³² The First World War, and then the Great Depression, did not help the severe economic situation, and a decision to extend the American Prohibition Act on alcohol sales to the islands in 1921 nearly ruined the rum industry.³³ In addition there was a severe drought, a drop in sugar prices and the number of cultivated areas - plus an increasing unemployment followed by extensive emigration to the mainland.³⁴ This fed into the ideology of Danish colonials, companies and national-conservatives, who believed it was the job of Danes - the only ones who cared because of a national/historical bond - to develop 'their' islands.

Even though the Danish element - in terms of both Danish people and culture - was never very strong in the history of the islands, it has played a huge role in narratives about Denmark as an imperial power. Only recently have academics begun to write a different history, but in Denmark, broad discourses have long conveyed a story of a humanistic imperial rule in a - now *lost* - Danish tropical paradise. However, the only time in history when cultural Danishness actually played any significant role in relation to the islands, was in the years leading up to, and just after, the transfer to United States. This was a time of a newly

³¹ McMahon, "You Pay for What You Get", p. 112.

³² McMahon, "You Pay for What You Get", p. 121

³³ McMahon, "You Pay for What You Get", p. 129, and Hornby, *Kolonierne*, p. 385.

³⁴ Boyer, *America's Virgin Islands*, p. 121.

awakened nationalism, and when ideas of the dangerous tropics were changing to a more idyllic version. It is here, in this small historical time/space, we find my analysis. It was also here that Danes began to write about the Caribbean colony.

In Denmark nostalgic literature about the islands began to surface after they were sold. Especially in the 1930s and 1940s, Danes who were still on the islands - or who had now returned to Denmark - published nostalgic memoirs, travel descriptions or amateur histories about the islands.³⁵ Meanwhile Danish scholars began writing the history of the Danish colonies from the 1940s onward. Johannes Brøndsted's *Vore gamle tropekolonier*, still a major work within the field of Danish colonial history, is an example of a quite nostalgic, imperial-center-focused Danish West Indian history in this period.³⁶ Brøndsted attempted to write a complete history of the Danish West Indies, but - as Danish historian Gunvor Simonsen has pointed out - he did not include the Afro-Caribbeans in their own history.³⁷ The same critique applies to Ove Hornby's *Kolonierne i Vestindien*, a more recent example of a traditional, top-down socio-political history of the Danish West Indies that silences the Afro-Caribbean population and ignores the cultural encounter that took place.³⁸ However, even though both Hornby and Brøndsted lack theoretical depth - and are to some extent manifestations of the colonial discourse - they are both detailed studies based on the primary sources of the Danish colonial administration, and they remain central reference points in Danish colonial history.

Outside the Danish borders, slavery became a major theme in Danish West Indian History in the second half of the Twentieth century. Historians - with Waldemar Westergaard in front - began asking whether the treatment of slaves in

³⁵ Examples of this are: Thora Visby-Petersen, *St. Thomas, Tropeminder fra de vestindiske øer* (1917), Eliz Carbel, *Solens børn* (E. Jespersen, 1925), Hakon Mielche, *Tre små øer* (Steen Hasselbachs Forlag, 1939); Sophie Helweg-Larsen, *Sollyse Minder fra Tropeøer, der var danske* (Thanings & Appels Forlag, 1940); Kjeld Helweg-Larsen, *Hvor Dannebrog vøjede* (Kbh, 1943); V. Bay, *Spredte Erindringer fra et 9-årigt ophold på de tidligere dansk-vestindiske øer* (Dansk Toldtidende, 1945); Olaf Linck, *Det tabte land* (Martin, 1947).

³⁶ Johannes Brøndsted (ed.), *Vore gamle tropekolonier* (Fremad, 1952-1966).

³⁷ Gunvor Simonsen, "Nye og gamle perspektiver på dansk kolonihistorie", *1066 Tidsskrift for Historie*, vol. 33, no. 2. 3 (2003), pp. 4-5.

³⁸ Hornby, *Kolonierne*.

the Danish West Indies was the same as in other colonies, while Neville T. Hall in 1992 changed the focus and instead asked to what extent Danish colonial power influenced the degree of severity in the slave system.³⁹

Meanwhile, in North America, scholars tended to focus their studies on the transfer from Denmark to the United States, on the federal policies directed at the islands in the aftermath – and on the American social efforts and political reforms, first under the naval administration and then under the civil administration of the Department of the Interior.⁴⁰ In general, there seems to be an overall narrative of ‘the failed road to independence’ in North American scholarship about the Virgin Islands.⁴¹ As Stephanie M. McMahon argues in an article from 2007, North American historians were – and continue to be – limiting themselves to studying the American slowness in their policy towards protecting and extending civil rights to Virgin Islanders.⁴² Two main studies worth mentioning in this context are William Boyer’s *America’s Virgin Islands* and Isaac Dookhan’s *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*. The latter has its main focus on the Danish times, but also explores the transfer, the first years under naval rule and ‘modern times’ up to the 1970s in three separate chapters. Boyer, on the other hand, describes the history of the islands from the first settlement in 1492 to 2010 – but with an emphasis on the American period after 1917. Both are soundly based in primary (institutional) sources and secondary literature. Boyer’s work is especially detailed and comprehensive, although both are non-theorized,

³⁹ Waldemar Westergaard, *The Danish West Indies under Company Rule, 1671-1754. With a supplementary part, 1855-1917* (Macmillan, 1917), and Neville Hall, *Slave Society in The Danish West Indies: St Thomas, St. John and St. Croix* (Aarhus University Press, 1992).

⁴⁰ See For example: William Boyer, *Civil Liberties in the U.S. Virgin Islands 1917-1949* (Antilles Graphic Arts, 1982); Boyer, *America’s Virgin Islands*; Dookhan, *A History*, Luther H. Evans, *The Virgin Islands from Naval Base to New Deal* (Ann Arbor, 1945); Valdemar A. Hill, *A Golden Jubilee: Virgin Islands on the Go under American Flag* (Carlton Press, 1967); Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of The Caribbean 1492-1969* (Harper & Row, 1970); Harold W.L. Willocks, *The Umbilical Cord: The History of The United States Virgin Islands from Pre-Columbian Era to the Present* (The author, 1995).

⁴¹ This is evident in Boyer, *America’s Virgin Islands*; Evans, *The Virgin Islands* and Gordon K. Lewis, *The Virgin Islands: A Caribbean Lilliput* (Northwestern University Press, 1972).

⁴² McMahon, “You Pay for What You Get”, p.111.

descriptive works, that despite this characteristic, form the basis of my knowledge of the political and social conditions on the islands from 1917-1945.⁴³

From the 1980s onwards there have been attempts to open up the perspective on West Indian and Virgin Islands history to include cultural themes and history from below. Afro-Caribbeans have often been portrayed as silent victims or as a work force without agency in the social and economic histories of the Caribbean. This made Danish anthropologist, Karen Fog Olwig, conduct a history of the Virgin Islands that focused on how the islanders took advantage of the possibilities they had and created a sustainable Afro-Caribbean culture of their own on St. John.⁴⁴ Moreover, Edward Donoghue in 2006 explored gender relations and sexual exploitation in the Danish West Indian Society.⁴⁵ In Denmark, interest in Danish colonial history has also grown within recent years, and the research field has developed considerably. Since the early 2000s, research has applied postcolonial theories to explore colonial and postcolonial history in relation to Danish national identity – or to involve the perspective of the Others and the complexities of the encounter.⁴⁶ In the case of the Danish West Indies, Gunver Simonsen has, for example, explored the interactions of gender and race in her studies of slaves and the legal system, and Niklas Thode Jensen has analysed colonial power relations in connection with medicine and the health of the slaves, while Louise Sebro has investigated ethnic and social identity among Afro-Caribbeans on the islands.⁴⁷ However, the focus on Danish West Indian history

⁴³ Boyer, *America's Virgin Islands; Dookhan, A History*.

⁴⁴ Karen Fog Olwig, *Cultural Adaption & Resistance on St. John. Three Centuries of Afro-Caribbean life* (Florida University Press, 1985).

⁴⁵ Edward Donoghue, *Black Women/White Men: The Sexual Exploitation of Female Slaves in the Danish West Indies* (AuthorHouse, 2006).

⁴⁶ See for example: Michael Bregnsbo & Kurt Villads Jensen, *Det Danske Imperium. Storhed of Fald* (Aschehoug, 2004); Lars Jensen, *Danmark. Rigsfællesskab, tropekolonier og den postkoloniale arv* (Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2012); Karen Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods and Christian Mission. Education and Emotion in South India and Denmark* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Søren Rud, "A correct admixture: the ambiguous project of civilizing in nineteenth-century Greenland", *Itinerario*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2009); Kirsten Thisted, "Where once Dannebrog waved for more than 200 years. Banal nationalism narrative templates and post-colonial melancholia", *Review of Development and Change*, vol. 14, no. 1-2 (2009); Esther Fihl & A. R. Venkatachalapaty (eds.), "Cultural Encounters in Tranquebar. Past and Present", *Review of Development and Change*, vol. 12, no. 1-2 (2009).

⁴⁷ Louise Sebro, "Mellem afrikaner og kreol : etnisk identitet og social navigation i Dansk Vestindien 1730-1770" (PhD Diss., Lund University, 2010); Gunver Simonsen, "Slave Stories: Gender, Representation and the Court in the Danish West Indies, 1780s - 1820s" (PhD Diss., The European University Institute, 2007); Niklas

mainly involves the earlier colonial period, and only few scholars explore the history of Danes on the islands in the Twentieth century. Noteworthy contributions to the latter are for example Rasmus Green and Marianne Rostgaard's article "Race, rang og stand i Dansk Vestindien i begyndelsen af 1900-tallet" which has explored racial attitudes and sexual relations of Danish gendarmes in the beginning of the Twentieth century, and Rune Clausen's master's thesis exploring "The Better Class", the mixed-descent middle class, which had emerged on the islands in the Twentieth century. The private companies have been explored in Jens Begtrup's recent article on the Danish West Indian National Bank 1904-1935, and in Andreas Jørgensen's earlier work on the Danish plantation company from 1953. Both are based in master's theses and map out a Danish history of the intersection of business and colonialism.⁴⁸ Political movements in the early Twentieth century, have been explored by Anna Herbst in her master's thesis on the reform movements in this period, and by Peter Hoxcer Jensen in his book about the aftermath of slavery on the islands, in the form of movements in "black labour" from 1848-1916.⁴⁹

To me, this relatively unexplored late- and post-imperial period, when cultural Danishness began to matter in relation to the colony, is key to understanding Danish colonial history – as well as how the history of the islands is generally narrated. Because, as much of an exception as these years were, I argue that the Danes who travelled to the islands, and the ideas that arose at the time, have largely formed the Danish notion of its colonial past. In fact, I contend that the narratives and practises of these Island Danes and their predecessors in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, had a disproportionately large effect on

Thode Jensen, *For the Health of the Enslaved: Slaves, Medicine and Power in the Danish West Indies, 1803-1848* (Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010).

⁴⁸ Marianne Rostgaard and Rasmus Green, "Race, rang og stand i Dansk Vestindien i begyndelsen af 1900-tallet. Set gennem breve hjem fra danske udstationerede som gendarmere", *Academic Minutes* (2012); Clausen, "The Better Class"; Andreas Jørgensen, "Et dansk imperialistisk eksperiment. Plantageselskabet Dansk Vestindien", *Erhvervshistorisk Årbog*, vol. 5 (1953), pp. 52-99, and Jens Worm Begtrup, "Den Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank, 1904-1935", *Erhvervshistorisk Årbog*, vol. 59 (2010).

⁴⁹ Anna Herbst, "Reformtanker på St. Croix 1902 til 1917" (Master's thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2005), and Peter Hoxcer Jensen, *From Serfdom to Fireburn and Strike. The History of Black Labour in the Danish West Indies, 1848-1916* (Antilles Press, 1998).

the histories of the Danish colony and its aftermath. They have, indeed, contributed to the shaping of the “broader national understanding” of the colonial rule on the islands.⁵⁰

Thus, with this thesis, I want to convey the story of a small, but central, group of Island Danes, who despite their role have been placed in the periphery of Danish history. Conversely, to explore their encounter with Virgin Islands space and peoples, as well as the internal triangulations within their own group, we need analytical tools to navigate and understand the sources of/on them. In the following, therefore, I we dive into relevant theories of postcolonialism, intimacies of empire, the concept of empire migration, notions of home and emotion, and the use of life histories.

Encounters, discourses and the production of difference

It is a basic assumption of this project that colonial discourses, through colonial encounters produced a difference – embodied in stereotypes of Others.⁵¹ This theoretical standpoint has grown out of the multidisciplinary research field of postcolonial theory.⁵² Historian Robert Young has summed the field up as a theory which involves various deconstructing of colonial forms of discursive power and is composed as a “theoretical creole” - a hybrid, whose focus is always on the effects of the encounter between cultures.⁵³ The fundamental notion of discursive power in this theory has its basis in Michel Foucault’s concept of *discourse*. In “The Archaeology of Knowledge” Foucault defined discourse as: “a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation” and continued to unfold his idea that discourses are historical - and that in every discursive formation there

⁵⁰ Citation from Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families, Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 255.

⁵¹ In the lines of Chatterjee’s *Colonial difference: Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Zed Books Ltd., 1986).

⁵² As presented by for example Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Routledge, 1998/2009) and Robert Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Blackwell Publishing, 2001)

⁵³ Young, *Postcolonialism*.

is a set of rules, specific to the context, about what it is possible to say and what is perceived as true or meaningful.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in Foucault's mindset, knowledge is connected to the discourses, because 'truth' and 'true knowledge' is produced discursively, e.g. true knowledge is itself a construction. For Foucault, then, this meant that it is impossible to speak from a place - or position - outside the discourses.⁵⁵

Departing in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (as well as in Foucault's work), questions about the strength of the colonial discourse - and to what extent the subjects can influence it - are central in postcolonial theory.⁵⁶ In an essay from 1988, Indian literary historian and feminist, Gayatri C. Spivak, a part of the so-called Subaltern Studies group, asked the question: Can the subaltern speak? The answer to her own question was 'no': the subalterns, the colonised, cannot position themselves outside the colonial discourse - therefore they cannot represent themselves. Thus, she considered the colonial discourse to be so dominant that it silenced the colonised.⁵⁷ However, when Spivak questioned the agency of the colonised, British-Indian scholar Homi Bhabha on the other hand set the stage for a return to the agency of the subalterns. Bhabha's idea of an agency for the colonised also grew out of his critique of Said. In Bhabha's view, Said's colonial discourse was too oversimplified and focused on binaries between the colonised and the colonisers.⁵⁸ To Bhabha, the Western stereotyping of the Other was not an expression of Western control, but a way in which the West tries to capture the 'dangerous' and confusing Other.⁵⁹ Consequently, Bhabha developed an idea of an insecure, even anxious, colonial discourse that is not at all as dominant and strong as Said (or Spivak) suggest.⁶⁰ Thus, when Said found differences and a binary

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge, 1969/2006), p. 131, 232.

⁵⁵ Marianne Winther Sørensen and Louise Phillips, *Diskursanalyse som teori og metode* (Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1999), p. 14, 22-23.

⁵⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 1978) p. 1-28.

⁵⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 1988) pp. 66-111.

⁵⁸ See for example John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester University Press, 2000) pp. 51-57.

⁵⁹ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, pp. 53-55.

⁶⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994), p. 46.

structure between them and us, Bhabha saw an interchanging encounter that unsettled both parties. He saw a “moment of splitting of the subject”.⁶¹ Thus, Bhabha argued that such a colonial hybridity produced an ambivalence in the colonial power. In Bhabha’s view, then, the hybridity was created in the encounter between cultures – and this was also where new ideas and subjectivities were created.

Underlining this thesis is the idea that discourses are also practised. My view of discourse is in line with Robert Young’s reading of Foucault. In “Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction”, Young argued that Said shifted the focus of Foucault’s theory when he equated discourse and ideological representation.⁶² Because, in Young’s view, Foucault’s concept of discourse entailed discursive practises and not just linguistic representations.⁶³ Thereby, Young argued, Said had ignored material, social practice and ended up granting the encounter between the West and its Other a momentary status. Young has not been alone in taking this road. Among others, literary historian Mary Louise Pratt has incorporated practise and nuanced Said’s ideas of the colonial encounter with her concept of a *contact zone* – which she defines as:

The space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict.⁶⁴

Thus, in these contact zones, the subjects are constituted in relation to each other, and despite often asymmetrical power relations, Pratt describes the relationship as “co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices”.⁶⁵ The elements in this concept of the contact zone, as well as the idea of discursive practises and production of difference are fundamental to the exploration of the encounter between Island Danes and the Virgin Islands in this thesis.

⁶¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 46 .

⁶² Young, *Postcolonialism*, p. 389.

⁶³ Young, *Postcolonialism*, p. 408.

⁶⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, 1992/2008), p. 8.

⁶⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 8.

Tropical Whiteness

A central purpose of postcolonial studies has been to give a voice to the 'voiceless', to the *subalterns* in history, and to thereby tell history from below. This has in most cases - obviously - meant studying the colonised. But, as Linda Colley has argued, we also need to study the colonisers - or in my case the former colonisers - from 'below'.⁶⁶ Studying (post)colonial Whites might seem somewhat old-fashioned⁶⁷, but it is my argument that understanding the complex constructions of Whiteness in colonies and after empire, is key to understanding the dynamics of empires and their afterness. Just as it is central to understanding their connections to the European constructions of self. In the words of Ann Laura Stoler, colonialism was "not only about the importation of middle-class sensibilities to the colonies, but about the *making* of them".⁶⁸ Furthermore, in this specific case, studying the small group of White Danes is also essential to understanding the role of the islands in Danish colonial memory - as well as the role of emotional structures and practises in imperial migration.

When studying the Danes as a group framed by the concept of *Whiteness*, I am recognising the basic idea of Critical Whiteness Studies that Whiteness is a social construction, not unmarked or neutral, but often structurally invisible.⁶⁹ Scholars such as Bill Schwarz and Radika Mohanram have argued for the global character of the production of Whiteness in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, as a result of encounters in colonies and settler societies. In this period a large number of Europeans, around 55 million, moved to these areas, which led to multiple local configurations of Whiteness that, in Mohanram's words,

⁶⁶ Linda Colley, "Going Native, Telling Tales: Captivity, Collaborations and Empire", *Past & Present*, vol. 168, no. 1 (2000) p. 191.

⁶⁷ Spivak even argued that it was dangerous to study "the constitution, as it were, of the colonizer", Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 294.

⁶⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham and London; Duke University Press, 1995), p. 99.

⁶⁹ This notion of Whiteness is based in the interdisciplinary field of critical Whiteness studies, see for example Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters. The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Routledge, 1993); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness. Race and the making of an American Working Class* (Verso, 1991); Vron Ware & Les Back, *Out of Whiteness. Color, Politics and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2002) or Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford University press, 2011).

“paradoxically became interpolated into metropolitan discourses as universal”.⁷⁰ I, therefore, want to explore the ways in which the specific Whiteness of this Danish group was constituted, as well as how they navigated their Whiteness within the group and in relation to their national belonging. Specific studies of the nature and complexities of colonial Whiteness itself are a minority in imperial research, and very much so in studies of Caribbean colonies. As Alfredo J. López has argued - it sometimes seem that the connotation between Whiteness and dominance is so strong that no other characteristic has been deemed necessary.⁷¹ However, since the late 1980s, and with growing strength from the late 1990s, imperial researchers across disciplines have explored cultures, strategies and constitutions of White colonisers.⁷² Out of this field also sprung the turn to study colonial dynamics in a multi-sited perspective, within a framework of both metropole and colony and in the interaction between the two.⁷³ Although not colonisers per se, I am hoping that the exploration of the Island Danes, will contribute to this discovery of the constitution of Whiteness in distant Other places.

Recently, groups of Whites, who are somehow associated with empire, but who are not part of the (formal) empire, have also been included in these studies. Most noteworthy are two 2010 anthologies in the Oxford History of the British Empire series: *Settlers and Expatriates. Britons over the Seas* and *Migration and*

⁷⁰ Radika Mohanram, “Introduction: Postcolonial, Non-Victorian Nonwhite”, *Imperial White. Race, Diaspora and the British Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), citation from page xxvi. See also Bill Schwarz, “Introduction ‘The Thing’”, in *White Man’s World* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷¹ Alfred J. López, “Introduction: Whiteness After Empire”, in *Postcolonial Whiteness. A Critical Reader to Race and Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press), p. 3.

⁷² Helen Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire, European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987); Dane Kennedy, *The Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1890-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families. Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics*; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 2002); Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire. A reader. Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) and Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (eds.), *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

⁷³ The idea to place colony and metropole in one analytic frame was mainly introduced by Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”, in eds. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, *Tensions of Empire. Colonial cultures in a Bourgeois world* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press 1997).

Empire.⁷⁴ This research branch, which is strongly associated with the history of migration, is where this thesis will find part of its footing in imperial history. On the one hand because it - unlike most imperial history - is concerned with the history of Whites in Other places deep into the Twentieth century, but mainly because most of the Island Danes were never formal colonisers. Many of the Danes, who arrived on the islands around and after the transfer, worked for private institutions on the islands, and were not formally tied to the (former) empire, but could rather be understood as *empire migrants*. I am borrowing the term empire migration, from British historian Robert Bickers, who unfolded it in *Settlers and Expatriates*. It covers settlers and expatriates who are “strongly interwoven into the fabric of the imperial experience” even though they are, or were, outside the colonial or military services.⁷⁵ On the U.S. Virgin Islands, settlers were long-time residents on the islands, who often owned a business or plantation, whereas expatriates worked for the Danish private companies on temporary contracts. Important for both camps, historian John Darwin argues, is that even in their position outside of empire, they too shaped the imperial presence with their ideas and attitudes, and as such they constitute an aspect of European expansion which is often forgotten.⁷⁶

Another trend in imperial history, which is indeed underscoring all aspects of this thesis, is the growing body of work on intimacies of empire. Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has been defining for the field by offering several studies that centre on the intertwines of intimacy and power in colonial settings - and the ways in which colonial administration managed sexuality and reproduction. By studying themes such as European colonial sexuality, gender and

⁷⁴ Robert Bickers (ed.), *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), see also Robert Bickers, *Britain in China. Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900-1949* (Manchester University Press, 1999), and Catherine Ladds, *Empire Careers. Working for the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1949* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁷⁵ Robert Bickers, “Introduction: Britains and Britons over the Seas”, in ed. Robert Bickers, *Settlers and Expatriates. Britons over the Seas* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁶ John Darwin, “Orphans of Empire”, in ed. Robert Bickers, *Settlers and Expatriates. Britons over the Seas* (Oxford 2010), pp. 331-333.

child-rearing she has offered a strong argument for looking beyond a simple dichotomy of coloniser and colonised. Her focus has been on cultural and legal attempts to define 'appropriate affect' in mainly Southeast Asia, but also on the "disjuncture between prescription and practice". Throughout her research, a central argument has been that intimacies were not just private matters, but instead highly political – and they were not only pre-determined by a colonial discourse, but also politically constructed to keep colonials in line.⁷⁷ Consequently, intimate worlds of emotional and sexual relations, family bonds and home life were positions in which colonial identities and differences were produced, regulated, navigated and challenged. Such an approach stresses the substantial role of intimacies in the production of colonial discourses. Moreover, as an analytical framework, Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette have argued in their substantial work on intimacy and empire – it is a "reimagining of the relationship between the social life of self and the global life of violence".⁷⁸ In line with Stoler, Ballantyne and Burton's work, other scholars have studied the private European leisures and socialities – most notably the intimate relationships between Europeans and non-Europeans – and how they formed and were formed by colonial ideas of appropriateness and contributed to White anxiousness.⁷⁹ Meanwhile a smaller number of scholars have turned to other scales of intimacy by studying the relations, separations and connections of colonial families and notions of home in imperial contexts. Elizabeth Buettner's *Empire Families* especially set the grounds for understanding specific constitutions of imperial families. This most

⁷⁷ See for example Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, and Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies", *Journal of American History*, vol. 88, no. 3 (2001). Citation from *Carnal Knowledge* p. 2.

⁷⁸ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Moving Subjects. Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁷⁹ James S. Duncan, "Dark Thoughts: Reproducing Whiteness in the Tropics", in *In the Shadows of the Tropics. Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 43-65; Lynn Zastoupil, "Intimacy and Colonial Knowledge", *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2002); Catherine Ladds, "Private lives, public reputations: the off-duty world of the Customs staff", in *Empire Careers Working for the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1949* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2013); Durba Ghosh, *Sex, and the family in Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire. Race, Gender and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (University of Toronto Press, 2001). Specifically on the issue of 'creolisation': Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies. A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500-1920* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).

significantly by arguing that British identities in India were based in family practises which entailed a life circle of mobility between the colony and the metropole.⁸⁰ Recently, Laura Mitsuyo Ishiguro has added to this by showing how family letters between Britons in British Columbia, Britain and India, bound the different sites of empire together in intimate ways.⁸¹ In the same field, geographer Alison Blunt has studied Anglo-Indian women and their notions of home and identity in *Domicile and Diaspora*. The Anglo-India relations to both Britain and India, Blunt has shown, were much more complex than “the imperialist depictions of Anglo-Indians defining Britain as home and feeling out of place in India”.⁸² This focus on intimacy and family is – of course – underscored by a gendered perspective, which introduced women into the studies of empire and defined imperial masculinity. By exploring the late imperial influx of women to the Other areas – and by studying the effects of female imperial migration, the figure of the civilizing White woman, the specificities of female imperial travel writing, or the central role of imperial wives in colonial conduct – this field has ‘domesticated’ imperial studies and laid the grounds for studying intimacies of empire.⁸³ To a lesser extent, colonial childhoods have also surfaced as objects of research. Elizabeth Buettner has compared prescriptions and practise on childrearing and mapped out the practice of sending children home for schooling among Britons in India, while Karen Vallgård has explored practises of upbringing among Danish

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families, Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸¹ Laura Mitsuyo Ishiguro, “Relative Distances. Family and Empire between Britain, British Columbia and India, 1858-1901” (PhD diss., University College London, 2011).

⁸² Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora. Anglo-Indian Women and the spatial politics of home* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005). Citation from p. 21.

⁸³ Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire. European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (London: The Macmillan press, 1987); Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference. An analysis of women’s travel writing and colonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991); Mary Procida, *Married to the Empire. Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester University Press, 2002); Marjory Harper & Stephen Constantine, “A civilizing influence? The female migrant”, Marjory & Harper, *Empire and Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 212-246; Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism. Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992). Two anthologies on gender feature several different contributions to research on women in empires: Angela Wollacott, *Gender and Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Phillippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). On masculinity, see for example John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinity in Nineteenth Century Britain. Essays in Gender, Family, and Empire* (Pearson Education, 2005) and Schwartz, *The White Man’s World*.

missionaries in South India, and how universal and sentimental ideas of childhood constituted missionary identities.⁸⁴ Likewise, Ann Laura Stoler has displayed how a colonial focus on milieu and race meant that both children of 'mixed' descent and European children in colonies were intimately regulated. In late imperialism, she has argued, the spaces in which European children could be brought up, and where they could socialise, were restricted. In the same line, in order for mixed children to be accepted as European, they were taught to distance themselves emotionally from native society as well as encoded with European morals and markers of race.⁸⁵ However, even though this focus on childhood and upbringing is growing, children are still largely ignored in imperial and postcolonial research.⁸⁶

Departing in these studies of intimacies in empires and their afterness, my focus is, indeed, not only on the men who migrated for work – what I call the 'engines of empire migration'. Instead, I am attentive to the gendered nature of the migration, when equally investigating their wives and children, as well as family and home life. By basing the study partly in life histories of especially women and children, whose voice we seldom hear in Danish colonial history, I am exploring the constitution of Danish homes and childhoods on the islands. What was the role of Danish wives who came to the islands, for example, and how did they practise in island community? And – conversely - how were Danish children regulated on the islands, socially and emotionally, and how did they practise?

This thesis explores such tropical White intimacies by also applying a theoretical focus on *home* and *belonging*. It is my argument that Whiteness, as well as Danishness, was a sort of home to the Island Danes, in the sense that homeliness

⁸⁴ Buettner, *Empire Families* (2004), Karen Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods and Christian Mission. Education and Emotion in South India and Denmark* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁸⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia", in eds. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 198-237.

⁸⁶ Other examples are: Satadru Sen, *Colonial Childhoods: The Juvenile Periphery of India, 1850-1945* (Anthem Press, 2005), Fiona Paisley, "Childhood and Race: Growing up in the Empire", in ed. Philippa Levine, *Gender and Empire* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 240-259 and Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine "Children of the poor: Child and Juvenile Migration", in *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 247-276.

represents emotional expressions and practises of national or social bonds and longing. Therefore, the concept of *home* is central to the thesis.

Home and emotion

By choosing to travel across the Atlantic to live on the islands, the Danes left their physical homes as well as their homeland, and moved to a new place in which they had to make new homes, both physically and in terms of belonging and identity. I, therefore, explore home as both a material place, as a process of establishing connections and as feelings of belonging or intimacy. In the words of Robin Dowling and Alison Blunt, I understand home as: “a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two”.⁸⁷ An important element in this concept of home, is that it is both private and politicised. Personal and intimate spaces of home, Blunt and Dowling argue, “are closely bound up with, rather than separated from, wider power relations”.⁸⁸ Homes, then, are created through social and affective relations, they are practised in the everyday, and they create a sense of self or “constructions of class, national and diasporic identities”.⁸⁹

Even though, I would not argue that the group of Island Danes fit into a classical definition of a diaspora, they do share traits with diasporas – and familiarising with the concepts of homeliness and belonging within studies of diasporas, will help us understand the Danes. In *Global Diasporas* Robin Cohen defined diasporas and argued that “(...) all diaspora communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that “the old country” – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions”.⁹⁰ He gathered a set of characteristics for diaspora societies, these being for example “dispersal from an original homeland”,

⁸⁷ Alison Blunt & Robin Dowling, *Home* (Routledge, 2006), p. 2-3.

⁸⁸ Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, pp. 23-24, and Sally Marston, “The Social Construction of Scale”, *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2000), p. 234.

⁹⁰ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction* (University of Washington Press, 1997) p. ix

“a collective memory and myth about the homeland” and an “idealization of the ancestral home” with its inherent (re)production of this home.⁹¹ Furthermore Cohen introduced five interchangeable and sometimes overlapping types of diaspora, among these, the Imperial Diaspora which he argues “(...) is marked by a continuing connection with the homeland, a defence to and imitation of its social and political institutions and a sense of forming part of a grand design (...)”.⁹² Even though these categorizations might seem somewhat narrow and limiting, the idea of an imperial diaspora is in itself a useful tool for understanding the former colonizing Danes who stayed in the Virgin Islands. What we can gather from Cohen’s defining efforts is also the diasporic bond to ‘the old country’ and the following maintaining and construction of a myth of home. Moreover, John McLeod expands and says that even though an essential part of diaspora imagination revolves around the migration from home, not all diaspora ‘members’ are migrants – they have not all actually experienced the act of migrating.⁹³ Nevertheless, they all carry luggage with them – physical belongings, and the more intangible traditions, customs and values.⁹⁴ A diaspora consists of these diasporic migrants and their children, McLeod argues, and they “live inbetween different nations, feeling neither here nor there, unable to indulge in the sentiments of belonging to either place”.⁹⁵ Avtar Brah does not agree entirely with this characterization of the concept of diaspora. She has presented her own concept for understanding the specific situation of such diasporic migrants: the *diaspora space*. In the diaspora space, not just the migrants and their children, but also “those who are constructed and represented as indigenous” take part.⁹⁶ Because the network of power in a diaspora space is relational, the identities of everyone living in a given society are affected and (re)created in a diaspora space. In this sense, Brah argues,

⁹¹ Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, p. 185

⁹² Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, p. 67. The five types of diasporas are: victim diasporas, imperial diasporas, labour diasporas, trading diasporas and cultural diasporas, see p. x.

⁹³ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 207

⁹⁴ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 211

⁹⁵ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 214

⁹⁶ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities* (Routledge, 1996), p. 181.

the 'native' "is as diasporian as the diasporian is native"⁹⁷. Furthermore, Brah adds that the ideology of a return to 'home' is not a part of all diaspora imagination.⁹⁸ What is instead a central part, she argues, is a *multiplaceness* of home - but this does not necessarily make the diasporic identification rootless. To understand this Brah introduces a distinction between feeling at home and "declaring a place as home".⁹⁹ This leads us to Brah's very significant doubling of the notion of home - a theoretical tool that helps us get a grip of the Danes on the islands. One version of home in a diasporic imagination, according to Brah, is the "mythic place of desire",¹⁰⁰ what McLeod, referring to Salman Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands", calls "home as a mental construct".¹⁰¹ This version is understood as a place you cannot return to, even if it is actually physically possible. The other version Brah calls the "lived experience of locality". This home is negotiated by "the historically specific everyday of social relations" - it is physically experienced, sensed and reproduced everyday.¹⁰²

I am inspired by a further development of Brah's notion of the doubling of home in my analysis of the Danish postcolonial diaspora on the islands. In the recent book "Den Fremmede, Nationen og Byen", Danish cultural geographers Kirsten Simonsen and Lasse Kofoed have composed a theory for understanding the connections between migration and feelings of home. First of all, they conceive home - not as a place or an entity - but as a practice, and as an emotional sense of belonging. In this sense, they argue for an understanding of home as an emotional and material work.¹⁰³ If we unfold this idea, it means that home is to be understood as "(...) an emotional practise, where you through inhabiting and unfolding the present terrain (re)create both the past and the

⁹⁷ Brah, *Cartographies*, p. 209.

⁹⁸ Brah, *Cartographies*, p. 182.

⁹⁹ Brah, *Cartographies*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁰ Brah, *Cartographies*, p. 192.

¹⁰¹ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 208.

¹⁰² Brah, *Cartographies*, p. 192.

¹⁰³ Kirsten Simonsen and Lasse Kofoed, "Den fremmede", *nationen og byen - om livet som minoritet* (Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 2010), p. 53-55.

future".¹⁰⁴ Thereby, Simonsen and Kofoed sets off in Brah's doubling of home, and ends up converting it into the notion of feeling at home as a double *movement*.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, I understand home on multiple scales - from physical households over nations and national belonging to the Danish (imperial-national) feeling of being connected to the islands.

This focus on *feeling* is not coincidental. On the contrary, the assumption that emotional structures and practises are valuable objects of analysis underlines this thesis. Inspired by the field of History of Emotions and research on intimacies in empires, it is my contention that emotions and intimacies both create and undermine boundaries and contribute to the constitution of identities. In short, they are central to constructions and changes of power, difference, belonging and sympathy - and they have an effect on social processes. This is very much in line with Ann Laura Stoler's argument that emotional structures were constitutive of colonial social hierarchies.¹⁰⁶ Since the 1980s, the study of emotions has embarked on defining the nature, historicity and ontology of emotions. Moving on a scale from understanding them as natural, unchangeable and universal to seeing them as socio-cultural constructs. Where thinkers like Lucien Febvre and Norbert Elias saw them as natural and historically unchangeable - although somewhat able to be cultivated - anthropologists such as Michelle Rosaldo, Catherine Lutz, Geoffrey White and Lila Abu-Lughod, have argued for the culturally constructed nature of emotions.¹⁰⁷ In the early 1990s, Peter and Carol Stearns offered a middle ground, by arguing that there is a distinction between the *emotionology* of a society and individual feelings. Although the two types of emotions interact, Stearns and Stearns argued, researchers can only study the first.¹⁰⁸ In line with this thought,

¹⁰⁴ Simonsen and Kofoed, "*Den fremmede*", p. 55. The citation is my translation.

¹⁰⁵ Simonsen and Kofoed, "*Den fremmede*", p. 54.

¹⁰⁶ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*. See also a similar argument in Ballantyne and Burton, "Introduction", p. 1: "How 'sentiments of a private nature' (...) serve as the very grounds for the creation and maintenance of imperial power".

¹⁰⁷ See Barbara Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions", in *Passions of Context: International Journal for the History and Theory of Emotions*, 1 (2010) and Karen Vallgård. "Følelshistorie. Teoretiske brudflader og udfordringer", *Kulturstudier* no. 2 (2013) for more about this.

¹⁰⁸ Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Claryfying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 90, no. 4 (1985), pp. 813-836.

William Reddy introduced the concept of *emotives* to capture “a dynamic, a vector of alteration, outside discursive structure and normative practices”.¹⁰⁹ These developments within the history of emotions can be seen as part of a general tendency within cultural studies to focus on practice and performance instead of linguistics and representations. Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* from 1993 put this to the foreground by questioning the bypassing of the physical body within social constructivism (specifically in feminism and gender studies). She argued that the body has a materiality that cannot be theorized away.¹¹⁰ Making a distinction between emotion and affect has been a way to explain a dynamic between discourses and bodies. Brian Massumi has for example argued that although emotions are conscious and constructed, affects are autonomous and unstructured”.¹¹¹ Somewhere in this ‘middle ground, but with less of a focus on the question of the ontology of emotions, is where this thesis is situated. In line with Karen Vallgård’s attempt to find a concept emotions, which can be analytically operationalised, I here understand emotions as “a sort of practice, which springs from a socially structured body, and which affects the social contexts in which they are exercised”¹¹² Thus, I argue that emotional practices are comprising for the affective bond that I am exploring, as well as for example for the expressions of nationalism, paternalism, compassion, belonging and the idea of development, which were so central to the Island Danes. Consequently, emotional structures and practices are very interesting to analyse as entangled elements of the narratives and practices, which constituted the relation between Danes and the islands and underscored the social hierarchies.

¹⁰⁹ William Reddy, “Against Constructivism”, *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1997), p. 327.

¹¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Psychology Press, 1993), p. ix.

¹¹¹ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation (Post-Contemporary Interventions)* (Duke University Press Books, 2002).

¹¹² Vallgård, “Følelseshistorie”, p. 1. Vallgård is inspired by Monique Scheer’s concept of *emotional practices*, which “means understanding them as emerging from bodily dispositions conditioned by a social context, which always has cultural and historical specificity”, see Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion”, *History and Theory*, 51 (2012) pp. 193-220. Citation from p. 193.

Such a constitution is the idea of an affective bond between Denmark and the islands, which began to surface in the Nineteenth century and blossomed early in the Twentieth century. It was an expression of national-paternalistic emotions which put the islands into the framework of “home” on a national level. This way, in line with Sarah Ahmed’s model of emotion as affective economy, the emotional expressions of a bond, were created and moved between both individual and national ‘bodies’.¹¹³ Thus, the affective bond was practised and expressed by individuals as well as institutionalised in groups and private enterprises, and was as such at the heart of migration to the islands in the period of this thesis. Accordingly, the value of emotion as an analytical tool is further realised when studying individual life stories. Such ‘private’ sources provide access to historical dynamics on an intimate level, as well as an opportunity to witness at least expressions of emotion.

Individual materialisations of discourse

Although by no means a history of the lower classes, who are silenced in history writing, this is still the history of a group without an official archive. Thus, if we want to tell their story, we must turn to alternative source material. There are of course archives of the Danish West Indian National Bank, the Danish West Indian Company and other businesses, just as there is an archive of the American administration and a small one of the Danish consulate. However, these convey very little about the regulations, strategies, exclusions and inclusions of the Danes – compared to for example archives of colonial administrations. Thus, even though they were part of a postcolonial/ White elite on the islands, the Island Danes wrote no laws and regulations, they launched no campaigns or letters of intent, they had no judicial power, and we can find no reports of the ideas and practises of an executive power. All we have is their individual texts, objects, photographs,

¹¹³ Sarah Ahmed, “Affective Economies”, *Social Text*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2004), pp. 117-139.

practises and memories. Yet, as Carlo Ginzburg argued in *The Cheese and the Worms*, this does not mean that we cannot tell their story, that there is no analytical value in individual histories. Based on his - quite Foucauldian - notion that culture has a limited space of possibilities, “a flexible and invisible cage in which he can exercise his own conditional liberty”¹¹⁴, Ginzburg argued that when reconstructing individual personalities “it is still possible to trace, as in a microcosm, the characteristics of an entire social stratum in a specific historical period”.¹¹⁵ This idea formed the basis of what became known as *Microhistory*, and its argument that quantitative research cannot do without the “notorious impression of qualitative research”, that even a limited case can be representative and constitute an important piece in the bigger puzzle.¹¹⁶

Thus, this thesis takes its outset in individual histories in the form of writings, photographs and oral memories. In these histories, I have searched for both ideas and practises, because a basic position in the thesis is that identity and discourses of difference are produced, reproduced and challenged in banality and individual practise, as much as through broader knowledge regimes.¹¹⁷ The idea behind such an approach is that discourses are materialised, and that individual lives and structures constantly interact.¹¹⁸ I am here considering materiality in terms of bodies, spaces and socio-material practise - what Tine Damsholt, Dorthe Gert Simonsen and Camilla Mordhorst have conceptualised as *materialisations*. In their anthology, they emphasise that we should understand materialisations “as something processual, relational and performative”, whereby practise and the act of *doing* becomes central.¹¹⁹ This emphasis on doing has its heritage in the works of Michel De Certeau, who famously introduced everyday practise to history writing.

¹¹⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms, The cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) p. xxi.

¹¹⁵ Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. xx.

¹¹⁶ Citation from Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. xxi.

¹¹⁷ K. Simonsen, M. Haldrup & L. Koefoed, “Practical Orientalism - Bodies, everyday life and renegotiation of identity”, *Geografiska Annaler*, vol. 88B, no. 2 (2006), p. 183.

¹¹⁸ In line with for example Tine Damsholt, Dorthe Gert Simonsen & Camilla Mordhorst, *Materialiseringer* (Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2009).

¹¹⁹ Damsholt, Simonsen and Mordhorst, *Materialiseringer*, p. 9-14, 25-26.

In *The Practise of Everyday Life*, he aimed to provide the grounds for articulating “everyday practices, “ways of operating” or doing things”, so that they would “no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity”.¹²⁰ His argument was that although practises are formed by overall structures and strategies, they are not fully determined by these, but instead reassumed in everyday doing. In the context of walking in the city of New York, Certeau explained it like this:

First, if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walked actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform, or abandon spatial elements.¹²¹

Combining this focus on everyday practise, materialisations and individual histories, then, I seek to accentuate “seemingly insignificant everyday practices” and to stress that they are indeed significant, and not always harmless.¹²² As Derek Gregory has famously argued in a post-imperial context: “the colonial past is routinely and on a banal everyday level reaffirmed and activated in the aftermath of colonialism”.¹²³

When studying the Island Danes, therefore, I specifically explore their everyday practises and notions of identity, nationality and home – as well their everyday sociality and inter-connections as individuals, as families and as a diasporic group.¹²⁴ In doing this, I hope to capture the complex histories of Danish empire migration in the U.S. Virgin Islands, by making room for “an individual life

¹²⁰ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1988) p. xi.

¹²¹ De Certeau, *The Practice of everyday Life*, p. 97-98.

¹²² Damsholt, Simonsen and Mordhorst p. 35.

¹²³ Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present. Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Wiley, 2004) p 7.

¹²⁴ In dealing with concepts of home, diaspora and belonging, I am influenced by for instance Brah, *Cartographies*; Simonsen and Kofoed, “*Den fremmede*”, and Alison Blunt, “‘Land of our Mothers’: Home, Identity, and Nationality for Anglo-Indians in British India, 1919-1947”, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2002), pp. 49-72.

lived in historical time”, as well as for the explorations of more general formations of discourse.¹²⁵

Specifically, many of my sources are personal narratives and memory sources, such as memoirs, (auto)biographies, letters, travel descriptions, photographs and oral histories. In common for all of these types of sources, is their individual character and their interaction with memory. Some were produced for my study specifically, as was the case with interviews, others are private letters written to one specific person. Some are memoirs written for the family, while others were written with the purpose of historical preservation, such as memoirs for the Danish National Museum. Others, again, were written for the public with the specific aim of telling the story of a (dramatic, exotic, masculine, romantic) personal adventure. I, therefore, take different purposes and recipients of the sources - and the timely and spatial distance to the events they are recounting - into account, when conducting my analysis. All texts were produced in specific contexts, which it is essential to be aware of, especially autobiographies are notorious for their unreliability. Consequently, within the postcolonial tradition, travel writing and other colonial literature has mainly been studied as representations of a colonial discourse, and as instruments of colonial expansion and confirmation.¹²⁶ When interpreting my life writing-sources, I am certainly also reading for underlying socio-cultural structures - and for structures of feeling - to capture what literary historian, Rita Felski has called “the cultural sensibility of the past moment”.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, as Ann Laura Stoler has argued, life writing entails both “conscious and unconscious silences” about the themes that the texts are treating, and we therefore also need to read “along the grain” of texts. When conducting my analysis, I am therefore attentive to the complexities of the texts, and I read them not just as representations of a discourse, but instead try to capture

¹²⁵ Citation is from Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape of a Good Woman. A Story of Two Lives* (Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 8.

¹²⁶ Defining examples are for example Said, *Orientalism* and Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

¹²⁷ Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 7.

articulated intentions and relations as well as underlying structures.¹²⁸ Correspondingly, I am also very aware of the challenges that processes of memory and retelling offer. Memory is a fluid, and it is used to give meaning to the past as well as the present, and often to “sustain a positive identity”.¹²⁹ Narrators frequently make use of retrospection, and they construct their past experiences from their current position.¹³⁰ Therefore, a personal retelling of the past often reveals to the historian, what the person perceives as main elements in his or her own history. Important for this project is the fact that, Alistair Thomson argues, especially migration is often “remembered in vivid detail”, has a “disproportionate significance” and “occupies a central place in the (...) migrant’s identity”.¹³¹ Because the migrating experience is something extraordinary - and because it for return migrants is also a relatively short period of time with a beginning and an end - “distinctive events and experiences are often sharply recalled, and they make good stories to tell”.¹³² This has also been my experience when interviewing Danes for this project. Indeed, there was a great difference in the clarity and detail of the memories of for example Jennie Lawaetz, who was born on St Croix and still lives there, and Katrine Svensgaard, who lived on St. Thomas for 10 years and then returned. For Jennie, the everyday experiences of her past on the island were less significant, and many elements, even bigger events, were erased from her memory - whereas Katrine had clearly retold her stories several times, and she could remember banal details of her everyday on St. Thomas. What we, then, can explore when using memory sources, is both the past, but also the present subjectivity and perceptions of the past.¹³³

¹²⁸ Ishiguro, “Relative Distances”, pp. 16-18 and Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 250.

¹²⁹ Alistair Thomson, “I Live My Memories. British Return Migrants and the Possession of the Past”, *Oral History*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2003), p. 63, 62.

¹³⁰ Rosemary Baird, “Constructing Lives. A New Approach to Understanding Migrant’s Oral History Narratives”, *Oral History*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012), p. 59.

¹³¹ Thomson, “I live my memories”, p. 60.

¹³² Thomson, “I live my memories”, p. 62.

¹³³ Alistair Thomson, “Memory and Remembering in Oral History”, *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 91.

Even though there are pitfalls, when it comes to sources, which rely so heavily on personal experiences and memories, I argue that they offer necessary perspectives on past experiences and feelings. Speaking of autobiographies, Jennifer Jensen Wallach, argues that using life histories in historical research is advantageous, because of the fact that the past is perspectival and contains multiple layers of meaning.¹³⁴ By applying individual life histories as source material, she states, historians can capture “the complexities of the cognitive and affective, the factual and the imaginary, perceptions and misperceptions” of the past.¹³⁵ Thus, the essential argument Wallach offers is that the “ambivalence and confusion” in any historical moment is best apprehended through such individual representations.¹³⁶ Moreover, she concludes that, “the thoughts and feelings of historical agents are not responses to a pre-existing social reality. Rather, they are reality”.¹³⁷ Likewise, Italian historian Luisa Passerini argues that oral history offers focus on the process, rather than the ‘entity’, and on the “individual in collective representations”.¹³⁸ Through its focus on individual historical agents, oral testimonies, she contends, give historians “information about the ideas feeding into their everyday experience”, thereby offering an image of cultural identity.¹³⁹

For this project, I conducted several interviews with Danes in Denmark, on the islands and one in England. Since feeling comfortable and relaxed matters a great deal when a person is to tell his or her private story, my interviews were conducted on the terms of interviewees, most often in their homes. If there were other family members, children, wives or husbands present, they often participated in the interview. Some would have their own memories, and thereby their own versions of experiences on the islands others helped spur the memory of the interviewee, by reminding them of names and places, or stories they had

¹³⁴ Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *Closer to the Truth than Any Fact. Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 9, 48.

¹³⁵ Wallach, *Closer to the Truth*, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Wallach, *Closer to the Truth*, p. 22.

¹³⁷ Wallach, *Closer to the Truth*, p. 5.

¹³⁸ Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 2

¹³⁹ Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, p. 1, 8.

previously told. Likewise, we often used objects, such as photographs, pieces of furniture, scrapbooks or the like as mnemonic devices to spur memory.¹⁴⁰ I arrived for the interview with a set of questions, but the interview itself took form as a semi-structured conversation, where I let the interviewee lead, and was open to new directions in the conversations. This, to make it possible for the interviewee to speak of things I did not have any knowledge of beforehand, as well as to “respect memory” and let the organisation of the stories flow inhibited from the migrants’ memory.¹⁴¹

Moreover, the interviews were recorded, so that conversations could flow undisturbed by me stopping and taking notes. However, I brought a small recorder, which was left on the table and kept turned on throughout the whole séance – even if we stopped to eat, make coffee or speak of other things. I did this for two reasons. First, I strived for the recording device to be as physically and mentally invisible as possible, so that the conversation would flow more naturally and unrestrained. Second, I wanted to capture free and unlimited talk outside the framework of the formal interview, where banal information, which the interviewees might have considered insignificant, was given.¹⁴²

Also - linguistic differences and characteristics should be mentioned here and not get lost in translation. It is important to acknowledge that my interviews with Danish migrants or their now grown children were conducted in English as often as they were in Danish. Moreover, specific traditions and sayings from one of the languages would be used in a conversation spoken in the other, and a few people would shift between the two languages when we spoke. When I, for example, met the daughter of a former West Indian Company director, Elizabeth Bang, in her home in Southern England, we spoke mainly English. At times, though, she shifted into Danish and then back again, but when we were driving in traffic, she would complain in Spanish. This linguistic complexity was

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Freund & Alistair Thomson, *Oral History and Photography* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4.

¹⁴¹ Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, p. 8.

¹⁴² Paul Thomson, *The Voice of the Past* (Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 203-212.

drawn from her hybrid childhood. As she explained, the Danish came from her father and from the years she had spent in Denmark, the English from her mother's family, life on St. Thomas and from schooling, and the Spanish from her St. Thomanian grandfather. He had always cursed in Spanish, a language that had become more and more widespread on the islands with increasing immigration from neighbouring islands.¹⁴³ These linguistic practises of the Danes and their children are significant to understanding what oral history can also offer - because they express the many layers of belonging and identity.

Throughout my interviews, as well as in official archives, I have collected photographs from the Danish migrants' lives on the islands. Photographs have a lot in common with the remaining personal and memory sources, in that "both are used as forms of evidence, both require "memory work", and both are forms of storytelling".¹⁴⁴ As Joel Snyder has argued, photographs are as 'coded' as any other gaze, and they are - in Louise Wolthers' words - "both communication and material".¹⁴⁵ I, therefore, consider the photographs as central sources; as remains of contemporary practises, which reproduced hierarchies, categorised people and places, mimicked existing ideas - and as such they offer an insight into the Danish "ways of seeing" on the islands at the time.¹⁴⁶ Throughout this thesis, I read and display photographic sources as both communication and material, and sometimes more as one than the other depending on the context. In some sections of the thesis, most particular in the section *Framing, mimicking, posing*, they are the main focus of the analysis, while in other sections, they form the basis for my arguments along with the written and oral sources and are displayed to offer an image of the world I am describing.

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Bang, *Interview*, Milford on Sea, England, March 19, 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Freund & Thomson, *Oral history and photography*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Joel Snyder, "Picturing Vision", *Critical Inquiry*, no. 6 (1980), pp. 499-526, and Louise Wolthers, "Blik og Begivenhed. En diskussion af fotografiets historiske potentialer med nedslag i krig, koloni og kommerzialisme 1860-1920" (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2005) p. 58-59.

¹⁴⁶ Citation from Paul S. Landau, "Introduction. An Amazing Distance: Pictures and People in Africa", in eds. Paul Stuart Landau and Debora Kaspin, *Images and Empires. Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (University of California Press, 2002) p. 12.

In continual interaction with official source material, censuses, literature and newspaper articles, I, thereby, strive to unite histories of the aftermath of empire and (post)colonial cultures with individual experience. The result, I hope, is a history of the Island Danes on and off the Virgin islands in the early Twentieth century, which offers an overview of the institutional and emotional structures underscoring Danish empire migration to the islands. This, by unfolding imagined, articulated and unarticulated identities and notions of home among the Island Danes, by exploring their intimate relations, as well as their embodied practices of Whiteness and Danishness (and intersections between the two).

Specifically, Chapter 1 describes the Danish version of the entrance of European developmental and national ideas regarding the colonies. By investigating the debates about a workers strike and a possible sale around 1915-1916 - as well as a number of literary works on the Danish West Indies predominantly by women - the chapter illuminates a tendency among especially national-conservatives in Denmark and Island Danes on and off the islands to perceive the islands as a Danish responsibility in need of development. Chapter 2 explores the Danish companies on the islands, and their recruitment of Danish employees. It is described how Danish migration to the islands was based on recruitment circles of the past, and the chapter offers an explanation of why Danes chose to travel the long distance. Moreover, it considers the fact that women began to travel along in great numbers, and how their lives as 'White housewives' took form. Chapter 3 argues that the Whiteness of the Danes played a crucial role in their positioning on the islands. Because, migrating to the islands often entailed a class-move, just as many Danish men quickly climbed the career ladder after arrival. We discover how Island Danes practiced Danishness - and a narrative of homeliness - in different ways and settings, but also that they referred to a global notion of being White in the tropics. This way, the Danes mimicked contemporary Whites in other colonies as well as in their own colonial past on the islands. Chapter 4, then, takes a closer look on the diversity of the group of Island Danes. It explores the movements within the Danish group, and how the Danes negotiated racialised and

class hierarchies as notions of Whiteness and tropicality were changing. Specifically, the group is divided into three sections: Settlers, expatriates and inbetweeners. Settlers are described as anything from wealthy plantation owners to working class, locally married former gendarmes, who all belonged to the old imperial age and its norms. Expatriates, on the other hand, were representatives of a new time, they worked for the Danish companies and often lived upper-class or upper-middle-class lives separate from local society. On the other hand, doctors, priests and deaconesses practised as inbetweeners, as they circled in all levels of island society. As the balance tipped and expatriates became the majority, the chapter argues, the focus on all-White and all-Danish intimate relations also increased. Moreover, the chapter explores how the Danes, and especially expatriates, created spatial boundaries between 'them and us', but also how they often crossed these boundaries in practise. In Chapter 5, we move into the Danish homes, in both a literal and emotional sense, to discover how Island Danes connected with the homeland through visits, letters and a practise of sending children to Denmark for school. It explores how Danish children were actively socialised with children of other Danes, but also how they were moving relatively freely between levels of society. It argues that Danish parents were not as concerned with the Danishness of their children in terms of language and sociality, as was increasingly the tendency in European colonies at the time. The chapter also explores how local circumstances and the physical design of the homes impacted the life styles of Island Danes, as well as how they daily interacted with local servants in their homes and often produced small empires in the homes as a consequence. Lastly, Chapter 6 explores how nostalgia after the sale was 'used in the present' as it manifested itself through Danes contributing to the production of a space for tourism on the islands and through the fact that Island Danes, returnees and West Indian travellers in Denmark articulated a 'narrative of loss' which turned into new modes of expansion. The chapter argues that nostalgia was also behind how the Danish West Indian Association, consisting of Danes with a relation to the islands, and an inventive tourist chief attempted to evoke the past

through exhibitions, anniversaries and the creation of a tourism strategy which put the Danish past at the forefront.

Note on translations:

When texts or interviews are in Danish, I have translated the citations into English myself. In order to maintain the personal voices of Island Danes, I have translated texts and interviews as directly as possible with less concern for language. This is the case for all articles in Atlanten and Danish newspapers, colonial novels and short stories. It is also the case for correspondences between Danes in the private companies and many personal sources, such as interviews, letters, biographies and memoirs. Generally, all personal sources are originally in Danish, except for: Pricilla Watkins' biography of Frits Lawaetz The Bull of Annaly, Knud Knud-Hansen's memoir From Denmark to the Virgin Islands, Rigmor Christoffersen's Childhood Memories of Growing up in St. Croix, my interview with Elizabeth Bang as well as her private memoir. Also, my interviews with Erik Miles, Marleen Boschulte, Modesta Thurland and Jenny Lawaetz, as well as Poul Helweg-Larsen's letters to the Lutheran Church of America, and Anne and Karen Thurland's representations of their family history in Jens Larsen Photo Collection and The Neighborhoods of Christiansted are originally in English.

Note on the use of concepts:

This study is based in the idea that 'Whiteness' as well as the category of 'race' are social constructions. However, to avoid making the expression of the text chaotic, I have chosen to refrain from employing quotation marks, when I make use of words such as 'White', and 'race'. Moreover, because the main population on the Virgin Islands were descendants of slaves from Africa - but also peoples from neighbouring islands, and children of both the two groups, as well as between them and Europeans or North Americans - I refer to them mostly as 'local' or, when this fits, 'Afro-Caribbean'. Again, after explaining the definition here, I put these words into use without using quotation marks.

Chapter 1:

Mother Denmark:

National-Imperial Productions of the Empire

Migrants do not travel empty handed, neither literally, nor metaphorically. When Danish migrants moved to the Virgin Islands, they brought physical luggage as well as notions of the tropics, of racial categories and of West Indian life with them. Temporally, just a few steps behind them was an imperial system with its hierarchies of power based in ideas of race and, increasingly, in nationality. This very recent past - and the overall notion of the Danish West Indies 'at home' - was embedded in them, and it influenced their perceptions of the islands as well as their interactions and practices on the islands.

How the former colony was perceived in the metropole - and how the role of Denmark as a colonial power was articulated there - formed an essential part of their mental baggage as they set out on their journey. But the Danes 'out there' were not just silently absorbing a discourse of the Danish tropics, they were very actively taking part in the continued construction of this image, through contributions to the debates in Danish newspapers, as well as in a (female) colonial literature. And - as we shall see later - they daily reproduced, contested and changed the discourse of the tropics through social, cultural and embodied practice on the islands.

In the last decades of Danish rule on the islands, the conditions changed significantly. Throughout the years, the Danish West Indies had been a great source of income for the Danish state, but they were never considered a part of Denmark in any socio-cultural way. The islands were obtained for the sole purpose of making profit, and as a result, they were generally perceived and

articulated in economic terms. Due to this mind-set, very few local islanders learned to speak Danish, and the Danish officials on the islands were always a minority, even among the White minority.¹⁴⁷ As sugar beets were discovered in Europe, sugar production on the islands, the key source of income, declined. Thus, from the mid-1800s, the islands went from being a colonial goldmine to creating deficits for the Danish state.¹⁴⁸ The decline of the islands coincided with a new imperial discourse, focusing on creating moral and educational progress in the colonies, which generally emerged in European empires.¹⁴⁹

In the early Twentieth century, however, Denmark was going through financial troubles, as well as democratising and modernising efforts. Among the great changes was a shift in the political system to parliamentarism in 1902, reforms of the school system in 1903, and the fact that women and servants gained voting rights in 1915.¹⁵⁰ These changes, however, did not reach the Caribbean colony, where autocracy and aristocracy prevailed.¹⁵¹ There were groups voicing the need for reforms on the islands, and after talks of a sale to United States did not manifest itself, reform debates increased. A commission was gathered in 1902, which resulted in a report suggesting comprehensive reforms, among these reforms of the health and the school systems. This resulted in a new colonial law in 1906, which was disappointing to those who had hoped for reforms, as it did not address most of the issues. Instead its main focus was on making the islands economically independent. The result reflected the attitude of the Danish government at the time – while the rest of Europe were launching immersive colonial policies, Denmark retracted.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Boyer, *America's Virgin Islands*, p. 62, 111.

¹⁴⁸ Hans Chr. Johansen, *Industriens vækst og vilkår*, Dansk Industri efter 1870 vol. 1 (Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 1988), p. 86.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001) p. 40.

¹⁵⁰ Niels Finn Christiansen, *Klassesamfundet organiseres, 1900-1925*, Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie, bd. 12 (Copenhagen: Politikens forlag, 1990), pp. 211.

¹⁵¹ Olwig, "Et gyldent minde?" .

¹⁵² Den Vestindiske Kommission, *Betænkning over Forholdene på de dansk-vestindiske Øer. Afgiven ved den allerhøjeste Resolution af 18. november 1903 anordnede vestindiske Kommission* (1903), and Anna Herbst, "Reformbevægelsen i Dansk Vestindien, 1902-1917" (Master's Thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2005). The schooling system did

Contemporary imperial thought in Europe generally went from focusing on conquering for trade purposes to civilising new territories – and colonising Africa was a crucial part of this. The Danish state was not involved in conquering African lands, but Danish interest was great, and many Danes took part, mainly as mercenaries or seafarers. In fact, 20% of King Leopold’s free corps in the Congo were Danes, while Danes also contributed to German, British and French imperialism in Africa.¹⁵³ From the 1870’s and onwards, Danish interest in ‘the civilising mission’ grew significantly, and translations of British writings by imperial travellers such as Henry Morton Stanley and David Livingstone were very popular.¹⁵⁴ Meanwhile, between 1870 and 1944, a handful of female Danish authors formed a Danish colonial literature of its own. Authors such as Signe Rink, Ingeborg Vollquartz and Lucie Hørlyk portrayed peoples and societies in the colonies of Greenland and the West Indies.¹⁵⁵ Travel literature and colonial novels were popular, and they did not just evoke a feeling of adventure, they also underscored what Mary Louise Pratt calls a “moral fervour of the European domination”.¹⁵⁶ The imperial trope with its heroic discourses of discovery and mastery of the “Other landscape” was widespread in Denmark at the time. And it gave way to newer “anti-conquest narratives” that were directly linked to the former, but instead exercised its domination more passively – as for example seen in female narratives, not of (physical) domination, but of educating and civilising.¹⁵⁷

Chapter one explores the idea of a bond to the colony at home in Denmark in the years leading up to the sale – and thereby when many of the Island Danes were just about to move out there. Specifically, it is concerned with how the new national-imperialistic tendencies took form in Denmark in regards to the islands.

undergo changes from 1912, when a new school director was put in place to issue reforms, but only on St. Croix. This led to new methods of teaching and the opening of the first higher school in St. Croix in 1914.

¹⁵³ Marianne Rostgaard and Lotte Schou, *Kulturmøder – i dansk kolonihistorie* (Gyldendal, 2010), p. 15, 153-54.

¹⁵⁴ Rostgaard and Schou, *Kulturmøder*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁵ Gerd Lütken, Johannes Fibiger and Niels Mølgaard, *Litteraturens tilgange* (Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2008).

¹⁵⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Taylor & Francis, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 9, pp. 205-209.

This by exploring the popular colonial literature, as well as debates about the islands in Denmark with a focus on the discourses that came to form the basis for everyday life of Island Danes 'out there'. These debates had an uprising in the wake of a failed sale's plan in 1902, when a worker's strike occurred on the islands in 1915, and as new plans of a sale were debated. It was highly multi-sited, as Danes in both Denmark and on the islands participated, and local Afro-Caribbeans also had a voice in selected Danish newspapers. As Island Danes were part of a movement that believed in the colony's continuance, and that a development of the islands - led by Danes - was needed, this chapter especially unfolds the debates with a focus on the small groups of Danes, who advocated for a Danish West Indian connection. As such, the chapter forms the basis for understanding the sentiment in a minority of the Danish population at the time - largely constituted by national-conservatives, the shipping industry and Island Danes - who framed the islands as home and believed in a continued connection, when the state did not. It thereby helps us understand the discourses and institutions which the Island Danes encountered, when they decided to travel to the islands, or when living on the islands in the Twentieth century.

Life 'out there'

If you wanted an impression of how life was lived on the islands, popular literature at the time offered a window into the colonial world. Especially female authors moved behind the scenes and into the Danish West Indian homes, to describe tropical lives of girls and women - and explore Whitelifestyles and relationships. Having themselves returned from living on the islands with their parents or husbands, they had an insight into the life of women 'out there', and they wrote classic girls' and women's literature and development novels with an exotic twist. Ingeborg Vollquartz, a widely read author, wrote novels and short stories for women and young girls, about women's place in family and society, and about life as an officer's wife in different places. She had been to St. Thomas for 4 years, and

after returning she published her first book *Glade Barndomsdage i Vestindien* (*Fond Childhood Days in The West Indies*) in 1903, later followed by another entirely West Indian novel *Et eventyr i Vestindien* (*An Adventure in West India*) in 1918. She was also the author of a popular series of girls' books about Lillian and her way through life, from being a young woman to her role as a grandmother. The first book in the series *Lillians forlovelse*, (*Lillian's Engagement*) from 1915 began its story on St. Thomas, where Lillian grew up as a girl who could get anything she wanted. The book portrayed her difficult transfer as she was forced to move to Copenhagen after her father's death. Vollquartz' books depicted female adaptation - and not self-realization - in the bourgeoisie of the West Indies as well as elsewhere.¹⁵⁸

Another popular author nuanced the image of life 'out there' and described issues of race, class and island isolation in her writings. Lucie Hørlyk had been a housewife on both St. Thomas and St. Croix when her husband worked there from 1893 to 1903. She conveyed the story of the Danish West Indies from within in several short stories in newspapers and magazines, starting with *Hun var hvid* (*She was White*) in 1902.¹⁵⁹ From 1907 onwards, she published two novels and two collections of short stories. They were all printed in several editions, and reprinted in memorial editions in 1912-1913.¹⁶⁰ Her writings were stylistically realistic, and they embodied an ambivalent paradox of truly believing in the civilising mission, while also observing racism and social injustice on the islands.¹⁶¹

This ambivalent feature was common for female colonial literature at the time. As Sara Mills argues, White women took up a different position in imperial representation, as they were simultaneously marginalised by, and an integral part

¹⁵⁸ "Ingeborg Vollquartz & pigeromaner", *Denstoredanske.dk*; Ingeborg Vollquartz, *Glade Barndomsdage i Vestindien* (Jens Møllers Forlag, 1903); Ingeborg Vollquartz, *Et Eventyr i Vestindien* (Dansk rejsebibliotek, 1918).

¹⁵⁹ "Lucie Hørlyk", in *Den store danske.dk* (May 23, 2014), "Hun var Hvid" was published in *Tilskueren* in 1902.

¹⁶⁰ Among others: *Fra Generalguvernørens Dage. Fortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1908), *Den Gamle Plantage. Fortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1909). Lucie Hørlyk, *Under Tropesol. Tropefortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Memorial Edition, Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1913). *Under Tropesol* was first published in 1907.

¹⁶¹ Hans Hauge, "Commonwealth og Caribien eller Postkolonialisme og De Dansk Vestindiske Øer", *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek*, vol, 30, no. 2 (2009).

of, the colonial project.¹⁶² This position made room for a more critical reading of the imperial and imperial actors, and for a “depoliticised” narrative of difference through stories of national feelings, individuals and everyday life.¹⁶³

However ambivalent and passively dominant the storytelling was, the group of female authors all articulated issues of ‘race’ and portrayed the Afro-Caribbean Other as something very different – and distant – from their own European reflection in the mirror. The novels and short stories were widely read among Danish girls and women. They paralleled – and indeed embodied – both a bourgeois women’s literature, a contemporary international travel/colonial literature and a growing debate about how to develop and modernize the Danish West Indies and the local Afro-Caribbeans, who were seen to be behind Danes in civilisation and sophistication.

These debaters and writers in Denmark were part of a broader European and North American discourse of tropicality. Seen as an opposite to the “winter-hardened civilisation”, the tropics were understood as “a realm of steamy fertility, scantily clad dark-skinned primitives, leisure and self-indulgence”.¹⁶⁴ Like the concept of Orientalism, the spatial idea of tropicality in its base constructed and confirmed a difference, between temperate and tropical, and between White and non-White – but, as we shall see, it also muddied such dichotomies in practice.¹⁶⁵ As an idea of an environment, however, the discourse of the tropics contained both positive and negative fixed images. In a positive imagining, the tropics were a paradise – nature in its purity – free of responsibility and hardship, while the negative version visioned the tropics as home to peoples, who never learned to be civilised, to work or to control their passions.¹⁶⁶ Ideas of tropicality from travel

¹⁶² Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 3.

¹⁶³ Nina Nørregaard, “Et tabt eventyr? Kolonierne i Vestindien som nationalt spejl”, in *På Sporet af Imperiet: Danske Tropefantastier* (Institut for Sprog og Kultur, Roskilde Universitet, 2005).

¹⁶⁴ Catherine Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 19; Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, “Views and Visions of the Tropical World”, in *Visions of Tropicality in an Age of Empire*, eds. Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 4, Said, *Orientalism*.

¹⁶⁶ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 20.

literature and visual images, soon became institutionalised in tropical medicine, tropical geography etc. in the Nineteenth century.¹⁶⁷ In these fields, the tropics were believed to be dangerous for especially Europeans, and a fear of White degeneration in the tropics was a common feature.¹⁶⁸ From the early Twentieth century onwards, however, ideas of culture and nationality entered the discourse and changed its composition. For the Danes writing about the islands in the beginning of the Twentieth century, this turn in the discourse transformed the distant tropical islands into *our* tropical islands – while local Afro-Caribbeans became capable of progressing.

As a part of this process, the discourse of tropicity was re-modelled and -boosted by ideas of modernity, decolonisation and development in the Twentieth century.¹⁶⁹ Such a discourse of development can be seen as a continuation of a colonial discourse of civilization – or primitivism. Ania Loomba labels it a discourse of primitivism and argues that the entry of scientific racial theories in the West had three main consequences. Firstly, it intensified the contradiction between the universalistic, biblical idea and the ideals of the enlightenment that stressed equality of all human beings – and the biologically constituted idea of racial differences. Secondly, the scientifically founded racial discourse, with its insisting on a correlation between socio-cultural expressions and biological features, made the opposition of *wild* and *civilized* permanent. Thirdly, it contributed to an association between race and nation.¹⁷⁰ Loomba, of course, points out, that representations of the Other were always formed by historical features, and that the degree of interaction between the colonial power and the local population greatly influenced the specific racial discourses.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Driver and Martins, “Views and Visions of the Tropical World”, p. 4 and Stephen Frenkel, “Jungle Stories: North American Representations of Tropical Panama”, *Geographical Review*, vol. 86, No. 3 (1996), p. 320-321.

¹⁶⁸ Duncan, *In the shadows*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁹ Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, “Views and Visions of the Tropical World”, p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Routledge, 2005) p. 93, pp. 100-102.

¹⁷¹ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p. 96.

The specific Danish imperial images in debates about the workers strike, the possible sale and (economic) development of the islands – and as they were reflected in the almost exclusively female, colonial literature at the time – echoed the multifaceted tropical discourse in their own way. The Danish (re)productions of the Caribbean empire *at home* mainly placed themselves within five overarching themes: 1: The developing mission, 2: The labour conflict and a possible sale, 3: The question of colour, 4: The unbearable lightness of tropical life and 5: The empire *as home*.

The developing mission

The growing European interest in ‘civilising’ imperialism left its mark on the Danish relation to its West Indies. There had been debates about selling the islands to the United States since the 1840s – the first negotiations took place in 1867 and then again in 1902 – and as the debate grew in Denmark in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century, ideas about helping and developing the neglected islands began to appear. When the latest attempt to sell the islands failed in 1902, the Danish state sent a commission out to the islands. It returned in 1903 with a long list of possible reforms and amendments, but the state was reluctant to act.¹⁷² Instead, private initiatives set the agenda. A group of prominent Danish predominantly businessmen thought the state had betrayed the islands, and that the Danish people needed to be awoken to interest in the colonies.¹⁷³ Thus, they founded the association *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer* (*The Danish Atlantic Islands*) to “promote the development of Denmark’s distantly placed parts of the country”, improve general knowledge of these areas, and to “strengthen the sense of community among the residents of the kingdom”.¹⁷⁴ From 1904 to 1919, the

¹⁷² Den Vestindiske Kommission, *Betænkning over Forholdene på de dansk-vestindiske Øer. Afgiven ved den allerhøjeste Resolution af 18. november 1903 anordnede vestindiske Kommission* (1903). However, a new Colonial Law was put in place in 1906, incorporating some suggestions from the commission, but mostly cutting back on Danish personal on the islands and setting up a Gendarmerie Corps instead of the military force.

¹⁷³ Frederik Møller, “Foreningens Stiftelse og første Virksomhed”, *Atlanten*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1904), pp. 23-28.

¹⁷⁴ Frederik Møller, “Foreningens Stiftelse”, citations from p. 23, 27.

organisation published the journal *Atlanten* in which they discussed issues of Greenland, the Faeroe Islands, Island and the Danish West Indies. *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer* was involved as initiator of several 'developing efforts' on the islands in the aftermath of 1902. With members of *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer* in front, a plantation company by the name *Plantageselskabet Dansk Vestindien* was set up to re-establish abandoned plantations, create a "better and more rational development of the agriculture"¹⁷⁵ – and to "promote the development of a trustworthy and educated smallholder class".¹⁷⁶ The plantation company bought several overgrown and unused plantations, mostly on St. Croix, built housing for workers and set up a farming school where boys in the age 9-12 were taught practical farming as well as "reliability and order".¹⁷⁷ The plantation company produced sugar, had livestock, and experimented with different crops. A main idea behind the plantation company was to bring "experienced Danish farmers" and "Danish capital" into the islands' agriculture.¹⁷⁸

Correspondingly, Danes sought to develop the sugar industry when in 1903 the management of common sugar production on St. Croix was taken over by The Danish Sugar Factories Ltd., and a sugar factory was built in the vicinity of Christiansted. St. Croix Sugar Factory, as it was named, purchased a group of estates on the island and set out to improve sugar production by building and running sugar mills.¹⁷⁹ The new factory was partly supported by the Danish state, and partly owned by private shareholders.¹⁸⁰ A prominent Dane in the sugar industry, G. A. Hagemann, had bought Estate La Grange by Frederiksted at the end of the Nineteenth century, expanded the plantation area significantly by buying neighbouring estates, and built a modern sugar factory. From 1920 onwards, the La

¹⁷⁵ H.U. Ramsing, "Dansk Vestindien", *Atlanten*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1904), p. 22.

¹⁷⁶ *Meeting of the board members*, March 9, 1903, 1903-1918: Forskellige beretninger, Plantageselskabet Dansk Vestindien (Danish Business Archives).

¹⁷⁷ *Meeting of the board members*, March 9, 1903, 1903-1918: Forskellige beretninger, Plantageselskabet Dansk Vestindien (Danish Business Archives).

¹⁷⁸ H.U. Ramsing, "Dansk Vestindien", p. 22.

¹⁷⁹ Frode Engbæk, *De sidste år med statsstøttet dansk produktion af sukker på St. Croix* (Engbæks Forlag, Århus 2013), pp. 8-9.

¹⁸⁰ *De Danske Sukkerfabrikkers historie 1872-1946* p. 51. 643, 01449: A/S De Danske Sukkerfabrikker (Danish Business Archives).

Grange Sugar Factory was administered under the Danish Sugar Factories as well, sharing managers, but with separate economies.¹⁸¹ In 1923, the Danish state pulled its backing, and parts of St. Croix Sugar Factory was sold to a partnership of planters.¹⁸² However, the director of St. Croix Sugar Factory, Jacob Lachmann, had personally bought Estate Bethlehem in 1903, and built a large central factory with an associated warehouse, laboratory, carpenter shop, pumping plant etc. When he died in 1909, the West Indian Sugar Factory Ltd. was created from the inheritance and it took over the factory and several additional plantations. The West Indian Sugar Factory continued industrialising sugar production by constructing 12 miles of railway for transport of cane between the many plantations and the central factory. But, despite the industrious beginnings, production gradually went downhill, and in 1930 the factory declared bankruptcy and was shut down¹⁸³

In the very beginning of the century, however, there was an optimistic tendency - at least among the contributors to *Atlanten* and others who were involved in the development schemes on the islands. Most of all, belief in the positive effects of the coming Panama Canal, was great. The general rhetoric of the initiators focused on getting up to speed and getting ready for the possible increase of traffic to St. Thomas after a completion of the canal.¹⁸⁴ One of the prominent members of *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer*, the founder of the East Asiatic Company, H. N. Andersen, played a major role in enabling Danish industry on the islands. In 1902 he declared that he would open up a steamship line between St. Thomas and Copenhagen if the sale did not go through. Thus, following the failed sale, the first edition of the West Indian Company was founded in 1902, but closed down in 1905. As a result, the East Asiatic Company had already bought several properties in St. Thomas and set up the shipping passage by 1912 when a new version, the West

¹⁸¹ Engbæk, *De sidste år*, p. 9.

¹⁸² *De danske sukkerfabrikkers historie 1872-1946*, p. 52. 643, 01449: A/S De Danske Sukkerfabrikker (Danish Business Archives).

¹⁸³ George Tyson, *Estate Bethlehem Old Works settlement site* (St. Croix, 2006), p. 15, 21-2 and Nørregaard, "Dansk Vestindien" p. 81.

¹⁸⁴ See for example: H. U. Ramsing, "De sidste Aars Arbejde i Dansk Vestindien", *Atlanten*, vol. 4, no. 41 (1907), pp. 86-87 or H. C. V. Møller, "De dansk-vestindiske øers Havneforhold", *Atlanten*, vol. 7, no. 75 (1910), p. 488.

Indian Company, came to life.¹⁸⁵ This company's mission was to improve and expand the harbour in St. Thomas, but it soon became engaged in both shipping and trading.¹⁸⁶ In 1915 the company acquired a newly constructed power station in Charlotte Amalie, and by 1917 the company was a major employer on the islands.¹⁸⁷ The West Indian Company built a loading dock for coal and established warehouses, a water supply system, and later replaced the coal cranes with oil tanks. It also owned a machine shop on the docks and opened the first tourist shop, Maison Danoise, in 1936.¹⁸⁸ From its beginning until the company left the island in 1993, it owned a great part of the St. Thomas harbour and had immense effect on business life and industrialisation on the islands.

Another initiative in the wake of the failed sale was the Danish West Indian National Bank. In an attempt to revive the economy on the islands, and doubtlessly to profit from what leading Danish businessmen believed to be an upcoming economy, the bank was founded in March 1904. Four Danish shareholder-banks and the Danish National Bank joined forces, and set up a bank that had exclusive rights to issuance of banknotes. This Danish West Indian National Bank became a focal point for the leading businessmen and their companies on the islands. The main office was in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, while two branches were opened in Frederiksted and Christiansted on St. Croix. The bank was run by a bank committee in Denmark, and its concession ran for 30 years.¹⁸⁹

Parallel to the different economic efforts, initiatives were also set up to "improve the conditions for the population".¹⁹⁰ One of these was the Lutheran society, *Den Vestindiske Kirkesag* (*The West Indian Church Committee*), which was set up in 1904. The same year it began publishing a journal about West Indian church

¹⁸⁵ Marius Christoffersen, "Det Østasiatiske Kompagni", *Danmark* vol. 21-22, no. 6 (1947).

¹⁸⁶ Bruce Schoonover, "Caneel Bay Estate before Laurance Rockefeller," *St. John Historical Society*, vol. VII, no. 4 (2005).

¹⁸⁷ Hornby, *Kolonierne i Vestindien*, p. 361, 384.

¹⁸⁸ Povl Westphall, *Aktieselskabet Det Østasiatiske Kompagni* (København, 1972); *The West Indian Company Ltd. 60th Anniversary Brochure* (St. Thomas, 1972). See chapter 6 for more about the company's role in tourism on the islands.

¹⁸⁹ Begtrup, "Den Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank".

¹⁹⁰ H. U. Ramsing, "De sidste Aars Arbejde i Dansk Vestindien", *Atlanten*, vol. 4, no. 41 (1907), p. 91.

issues.¹⁹¹ The Committee generally sought to "provide a connection between parish life in the Motherland and the small, poor churches out there".¹⁹² Within this framework, the Lutheran church on the islands organised voluntary parish councils, educated parish workers and arranged community care, such as a retirement home, from 1904 onwards.¹⁹³ The church committee thereby an effort to socially lift the local population, through education, endeavours to secure 'proper' upbringing and childcare – efforts which the state had largely neglected. At the request of a Danish priest on St. Croix, the Danish Crown Princess Louise set up her own *Committee for Health- and Childcare in West India* in 1903. Midwife services and childcare homes were started, where Danish deaconesses and nurses took care of orphans and taught child care to local mothers.¹⁹⁴ Parallel to this, the Lutheran church and locally based doctors experienced an increasing concern for the lack of childcare and the high child mortality on the islands.¹⁹⁵ Besides the childcare homes, Danish Red Cross nurses were also sent to the islands to organise health care at the hospitals and educate local nurses.¹⁹⁶ These efforts were short-lived, as they slowly faded after the sale, but they were characteristic for a time, when the islands were – shortly – moved into a national socio-cultural framework.

Labour conflict and a possible sale

The public debates about the islands – be that about the development of the islands' economy, moral education and care of the local population, the worker's unrest or

¹⁹¹ 6: Den Vestindiske Kirkesag og andre tryksager, 1907-1918, SB-122: Den Vestindiske Kirkesag (Danish National Archives).

¹⁹² H. U. Ramsing, "De sidste Aars Arbejde i Dansk Vestindien", *Atlanten*, vol. 4, no. 41. (1907), p. 92.

¹⁹³ N. N. Westergaard, "Dansk Vestindien. Den lutherske kirkes stilling og opgave mellem de andre kirkesamfund i Dansk Vestindien", *Den Vestindiske Kirkesag*, no. 11 (1910), p. 197 (first published in *Kristeligt Dagblad*).

¹⁹⁴ Juanita Lawson-Haith and Susan Ellis, *It All began with the Children. The first century of Queen Louise Home and Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands, 1904-2004* (Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands, 2004), pp. 2-17.

¹⁹⁵ See for example: Povl Helweg-Larsen, "Lidt om børnesagen i Dansk Vestindien", *Den Vestindiske Kirkesag*, no. 11 (1910), p. 1-7 or Viggo Christensen, "Børnedødeligheden på St. Thomas", *Atlanten*, vol. no. 152 (1916), pp. 349-369.

¹⁹⁶ Ramsing, "De sidste Aars Arbejde", p. 91.

the possible sale - was not entirely new. Awareness of the colonies and the notion of a Danish empire had earlier been common, though always framed in imperial-economic terms. Here, in the beginning of the Twentieth century, though, nationalistic ideas had entered the discourse of the tropics, and had become a central part of the worldview for many of the Danes involved with the islands. Especially the Danes with a direct connection to the islands were debating the issue greatly, and hereby doing theirs to make the rest of Denmark pay attention to their Caribbean, colonial relation.

Coinciding with the newfound efforts to develop, especially the economy of the islands, an uprising among the local workers, demanding higher wages, took form around 1915. This same year, the thought of selling the islands re-appeared, and Danes who had been to the islands, or who still lived there, started discussing the issue in the Danish newspapers. Public opinion was divided between those who thought Danes had nothing in common with West Indians, and those who considered it wrong to sell of a part of the Danish kingdom.¹⁹⁷ In the metropole right wing newspapers and pamphlets voiced the commentators' wishes to "save West India!"¹⁹⁸, while social liberal and left-wing newspapers were in favour of the sale. Moreover, the Colonial Councils on the islands were split. The American chairman of the planter-dominated council on St. Croix spoke loudly for a sale, while the Danish majority in the council on St. Thomas wrote a resolution protesting the "separation of the islands from Denmark".¹⁹⁹ Moreover social-liberals in Denmark broadcasted the voices of councilmen, who claimed that West Indians wanted to be sold, that a sale was best for the development of trade and for improving economic conditions for the population.²⁰⁰ Most of the men who took part in the debate had some kind of personal connection to the islands, they had either lived there in the past – or they voiced their opinions from the islands. In

¹⁹⁷ Nørregaard, "Dansk Vestindien", pp. 60-69.

¹⁹⁸ Gotfred Hansen, *Red Vestindien. Et forslag i den 11. time* (København, 1916).

¹⁹⁹ Herbst, "Reformtanker", and Mentze, *Danmarks sidste tropeland*, p. 12.

²⁰⁰ Nørregaard, "Dansk Vestindien" p. 68; Helge Sommer (ed.), *Vestindien ønsker salg*, Studentereforeningens Radikale (Politikkens trykkeri, 1916).

common for all debaters was the same presumption that was also evident in all the private initiatives on the islands: The islands needed help from the so-called 'West' to develop, the Danish debaters just disagreed over who would do the better job.

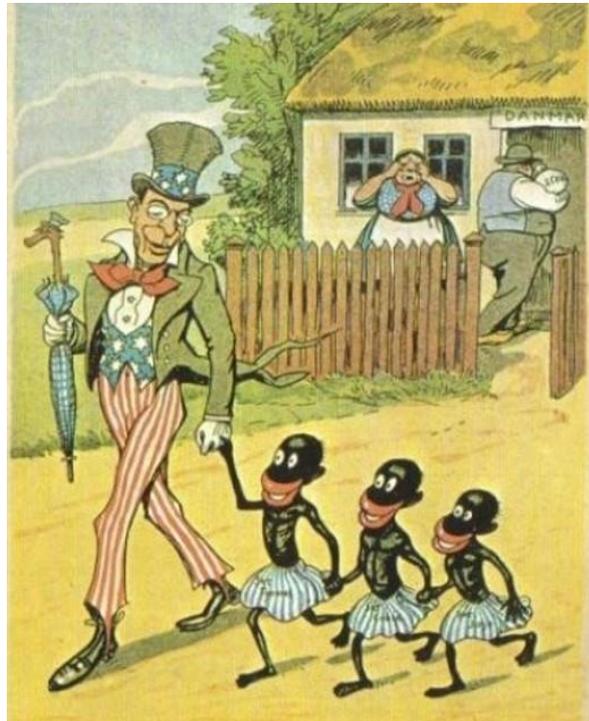


Figure 1.1: A famous illustration in the media narrated the story of how Mother Denmark grievingly gave away her West Indian 'children' to the wealthy United States in the hope that they could live a better life – in return for a large bag of money. Caption: "The rich Mister Wilson: (who has adopted the Children for a tidy sum once and for all) – Come on boys, let's go buy you a new dress and a gold watch with a chain!". Illustration with caption from the Danish magazine, *Klods Hans*, after the sale had become public in 1917.²⁰¹

Around the same time, a labour conflict emerged in 1915-1916. The labour unrest was most of all on St. Croix, but eventually it affected St. Thomas as well. Food prices had gone up as a result of the First World War, and the wage workers were fed up with the situation. Former local schoolteacher, Hamilton Jackson spearheaded a wage struggle through newspaper editorials and public meetings. In May 1915, he went to Denmark to gain support, and here he established connections with the social democratic party and was voiced through left wing

²⁰¹ *Klods Hans* no. 4 (1917)

newspapers. He met politicians in the Social-Liberal government, held public meetings about the social tasks of the Danish government on the islands and met with the Danish king. Nevertheless, despite support and noncommittal statements on the need for reforms, the only improvement he gained from the trip was a permission to publish the first competing newspaper on the islands.²⁰² The planters on St. Croix, Danes as well as other nationalities, feared for their economy - and for the possibility of an uprising against their position. A Danish planter therefore sent for help in Denmark, and even though the threat was exaggerated, the Danish battle cruiser, Valkyrien, arrived in December 1915. A Labour Union was formed on St. Croix, and soon their employers made sure a Planter's Union saw the light of day. In January 1916, a strike among the wage workers broke out, the planters issued a lockout, but the workers withstood, and finally at the end of February a compromise was reached. The result was a qualified victory for the workers. The conflict never played a large role on St. Thomas, but a Labour Union was formed in September 1916, and the coal carriers did strike against their Danish employer, The West Indian Company, until a compromise was agreed upon.²⁰³

In an address to the reform-willing Danish governor on the islands, referring to Hamilton Jackson, the planters on St. Croix spoke out against an "agitation that an irresponsible and nothing-representing member of our society has raised with the sole purpose of weakening the authority of the administration and to create a class distinction that we with good conscience can say did not previously exist on the island" in a Danish newspaper in 1915. The planters were clearly speaking for "a majority of the landowners on St. Croix whose fortune and wellbeing is bound to this island".²⁰⁴ However, most other people on the islands, including the White minority, understood the labourer's demands for higher wages.²⁰⁵ Danish School director Rübner-Pedersen, for example, functioned as a

²⁰² "Hamilton Jackson i Danmark 1915" (Danish National Archives, 2016), <https://www.virgin-islands-history.org/historien/david-hamilton-jackson/david-hamilton-jackson-danmark-1915/>

²⁰³ Peter Hoxcer Jensen, *From Serfdom to Fireburn and Strike. The History of Black Labor in the Danish West Indies, 1848-1916* (Antilles Press, 1998) pp. 152-56.

²⁰⁴ "En adresse til Vestindiens guvernør", *Nationaltidende Aften*, 1 June 1915.

²⁰⁵ Jensen, *From Serfdom*, p. 154

mediator in the conflict and offered the strikers accommodation in Christiansted during the strike, and started a collection to fund them.²⁰⁶ Some, however, did fear that it was a racially based movement, but it soon became clear that Jackson was leading a labour movement against the planters specifically, not the White community as a whole.²⁰⁷

Moreover, the conflict was soon connected to the sale of the islands, when a sale agreement between Denmark and the United States was made public in August 1916. The divisions among the Danes in Denmark in the question of selling the islands were more or less similar to those in the labour conflict, but they were more complex on the islands. The debate was highly connected across the Atlantic, Danish island residents posted in Danish newspapers, Hamilton Jackson travelled to Denmark and the Danish social labour movement got involved. Valkyrien's captain, Henri Konow, observed that for many Whites on St. Croix "the national played a subordinate role in relation to the economic gain one expected from becoming a part of the Northern American free states".²⁰⁸ The national conservative Konow was clearly referring to the planters as the division of the White minority, and of the Danes, who were against the increase in wages - and for a sale. On the last point, they shared opinions with the majority of the farm workers. Pastor Povl Helweg-Larsen also noted that the sentiment was also strongly pro-sale on St. Thomas, a fact that was also evident in the many claims about the beneficial effect on trade a sale would have.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, a majority of the Danish officials, and Danes working for the West Indian Company, the church or the bank, often expressed wishes to keep the islands, and such a resistance to sell was also very evident in the Danish press, among Danes who had returned from the islands, and among Danes who had been on short stays on the islands. The anti-planter view in the two interlinked debates, and its general resistance to the patriarchal system,

²⁰⁶ Tage Kaarsted (ed.), *Admiral Henri Konows erindringer: Guvernør, minister, flådechef*, vol. 2 (Universitetsforlaget, 1967), p. 44.

²⁰⁷ Jensen, *From Serfdom*, p. 154

²⁰⁸ Kaarsted, *Admiral Henri Konow*, p. 53.

²⁰⁹ Povl Helweg-Larsen, "Skal vi sælge?", *Den Vestindiske Kirkesag*, no. 34-35 (1916), and Sommer, *Vestindien ønsker salg*.

was represented in the priests, doctors, the school director and others on the islands.

In Denmark, things were the other way around. Pastor Helweg-Larsen observed this as well, when he in a Danish newspaper debate claimed that – compared to movements in islands society – everything was turned upside down in Denmark, where conservatives wanted to keep the islands, and social democrats and liberals wanted to sell.²¹⁰ An editor of a Copenhagen-based newspaper was angry at what he thought were Danes ‘out there’ gripping on to their power:

But how can one here at home obtain information from over there?
Well, a greater man travels out there; he is received with all honours, with dinners, with rides in the country etc. etc. He only sees, what one wants him to see – and if he sees anything bad, then the lack of rain is blamed – never the administration.²¹¹

To cement the fact that he blamed Danish planters, he went on to speak of St. Croix, “where the autocrat (Plantation director Schmiegelow) rules”.²¹² Danish priest, Johannes Petersen, wrote from the islands in defence of the reforms that the editor was arguing for, but also to plead for Danes who knew nothing about the islands, such as the editor, to stop claiming things about them. Especially, he objected to the common claim that the population was not Danish, that it did not even speak Danish:

The last 7-8 years a great change has occurred in the direction of knowledge about Danish language, history etc, in the municipal schools, there has been a strong emphasis on the Danish education with the result that Danish is really starting to enter the student’s awareness”.²¹³

Labelling the islands and their inhabitants as Danish was common in the national-conservative segments in the debate. In debating the sale, conservative forces – and we should note that many Danes on the islands, most debaters in *Atlanten* as well

²¹⁰ Helweg-Larsen, “Skal vi sælge?”

²¹¹ “Striden om Vestindien”, Hovedstaden, 26 May 1915.

²¹² “Striden om Vestindien”, Hovedstaden 26 May 1915.

²¹³ “Indtryk fra dansk Vestindien”, Nationaltidende, aften, 3 July 1915.

as the businessmen behind the private development schemes all belonged to this group²¹⁴ – were arguing for the existence of a national bond, and for the ‘Danishness’ of the islanders.

What had been an economic venture far away from home, now became part of the national narrative. Bourgeois women in Denmark were particularly engaged in keeping the islands as a part of Denmark, and they portrayed the islands as a national adventure, naturalising the islands as Danish.²¹⁵ They and many male debaters began labelling Afro-Caribbean locals as “countrymen” (*landsmænd*) in their writings.²¹⁶ By inserting a Danishness in the locals, as well as highlighting a higher degree of civilisation for White Danes, they legitimised the Danish rule on the islands and emphasised a natural character of the existing socio-cultural hierarchy.²¹⁷

The Danes who wanted reforms in labour and land policy, and who conceived of the local islanders as Danish, often felt the metropole had failed them. Some Danish islanders responded to this by expressing the need not to abandon the islands – as a Danish island resident and member of the colonial council expressed it in an interview for a Danish paper: “We are going down, and we must inform the Motherland before it is too late”.²¹⁸ Meanwhile some Island Danes had earlier been against a sale, but had now given up on the Danish rule.²¹⁹ Thus, planters and social-liberals in Denmark, and a small part of the paternalistic Danes on the islands, agreed on the necessity of a sale. But they had very different reasons for their positions, and very different journeys to reaching that conclusion. As Pastor Helweg-Larsen expressed it:

²¹⁴ Signe Trolle Gronemann and Rikke Vindberg, *I orkanens øje. Beretninger fra Orlogsskibet Valkyriens togt til Dansk Vestindien 1915-1917* (Poul Kristensens Forlag, 2005), p. 48.

²¹⁵ Nørregaard, “Et tabt eventyr” p. 28, 33.

²¹⁶ Per Nielsen, *Fru Jensen og andre vestindiske danskere. Dansk-vestindiske sømænd, tjenestefolk og arbejdere i Danmark 1880-1920* (Nationalmuseet, 2015).

²¹⁷ Nørregaard, “Et tabt eventyr”, p. 32-33.

²¹⁸ “Dansk Vestindienstyre bedømt i St. Thomas Kolonialråd”, Danish newspaper article, provenance unknown.

²¹⁹ This was for example the case with Lawyer Jørgensen: Jan Tuxen, “Lawyer Jørgensen, del 1: Barn af Kolding, prokurator af St. Thomas”, *Danish West Indian Society*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2011).

If one is of the opinion that it comes down to guarding the interest of the planters, then we should sell, because the value of their properties will rise, and the Jacksonian reign of terror will end. But if one wants to help the local population, we should not sell (...) everyone knows what they would lose if the American view on the question of race will replace the Danish. (...). The main question is: Is the sale necessary based on the messed up situation we are now in? Because it is horribly bad. Not just those who were opposed to Jackson and his movement all along are aware of that. The Danes – and we were not many – who after all had some confidence in Jackson last year, are aware of it as well.²²⁰

In the end, Helweg-Larsen on his own behalf came to the conclusion that, despite years of passivity, Danes were better equipped to secure the welfare of the people than Americans were. However, among all views expressed in the debates on labour issues and sale, the idea that the local population could not take care of itself was never challenged. To such a presumption, a discussion of the degree of Danishness of locals was added. What was challenged by social democrats and social liberals among others, instead, was the planters' dominance. Certainly, the planters tried to cling to this dominance, and they did manage to hold onto their land and resisted subdivision of it – this, due to the fact that a coming sale stopped reforms - but times were against their fight for keeping the wages down. What was, then, at stake in the entangled debates about the labour conflict and the possible sale, were issues of class, race and national responsibility. Especially the labour conflict, being parallel to workers' uprisings in Europe, invoked questions of class that had previously been left out of the discourse. Inevitably, the labour conflict created both relations and ideological linkages between the Danish working class and a West Indian one. This came to the attention of A. Paludan Müller, who expressed a concern in *Atlanten* in 1916:

The European fight between worker and employer has come to St. Croix, but in a slightly caricatured version, as was to be expected among an incapacitated and injudicious population, without the ability

²²⁰ Helweg-Larsen, "Skal vi sælge?"

to organise, that in no moment can be compared with our skilled and intelligent working class. The Strike came, but we cannot look at it with European predisposed eyes; when two races are facing each other, many factors come about (...).²²¹

Paludan Müller was not alone in arguing against a collocation of the Danish and the West Indian working classes. In the Danish public debate and literature, the working class link was never completely acknowledged - there was always that one, irrefutable difference that even social democrats and social liberals could not ignore.

The colour question

In the Danish imperial discourse in the beginning of the Twentieth century, the issue of difference was almost exclusively articulated in terms of race - and concerns about the local population on the islands were continuously labelled either “the colour question” or “the Negro question” (*farvespørgsmålet/Negerspørgsmålet*) in the public debate. This differentiation was increasingly understood as cultural, and was deeply and inextricably intertwined with the civilising - or developing - discourse, where a binary divide between primitivism and modernity was constructed. An extension of this divide, was the idea that the primitive was somewhat wild, and had not yet been tamed or civilised. Correspondingly, Danish narratives of the West Indies in the public debate, as well as in colonial literature, often (re)constructed Afro-Caribbeans as “natural people” - hereby freezing them in the past. However, this image of the natural human being was not one-sided, rather it was a complex stereotype that involved understandings of West Indians as both ancient, wild, childish and ‘authentic’. Generally, Danish narratives (re)produced local Afro-Caribbeans in two interacting versions of this stereotype, which paralleled the two versions of

²²¹ A. Paludan-Müller, “Hvad er Aarsagen til det, der for Tiden foregaar paa vore vestindiske Øer?”, *Atlanten* no. 150 (1916), p. 334.

tropicality: Either as a negative form of wild, unrestrained and lazy or as a positive form of authentically primitive, in deep connection with 'true nature' and unadulterated by modernity.²²²

As we saw in the debates about the sale and the labour conflict, the local Afro-Caribbean was often constructed as lazy. Moreover, he or she was routinely represented as a morally degenerate, dependent and childish character. This was a common image, reproduced in many fora. In the newspaper debates, for example in this article about "Spiritual circumstances in the Danish West Indies", priest P. Kastrup explained the deficiencies that he thought locals suffered from:

This lack of internal consistency also leads to a grave shortage of seriousness and sense of responsibility.²²³

Likewise, in another article about "our black country men" in *Berlingske Tidende* from 1915, locals were described as "lazy by nature" and essentially like children:

The Negroes are big children and they should be treated as such. And you can treat them in any way that you wish - they are and remain children.²²⁴

This same labelling of childishness, was also evident everywhere in the literature, for example in Ingeborg Vollquartz' novel *Et Eventyr i Vestindien* (*An Adventure in West India*). Here the Danish girl Ellen indulgently smiles at her servants' way of reacting: She was "used to the exaggeration of the Negroes, touched by their sorrow, but she could not help but smile at their childish fright".²²⁵

An inherent critique of modernity in the stereotype of natural people was obvious in Lucie Hørlyk's short story, *Nanna Judith*. Here, a young Danish doctor travels to the islands in search of:

²²² Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 4.

²²³ P. Kastrup, "Aandelige Tilstande i Dansk Vestindien", 1 July 1915.

²²⁴ "Vore Sorte Landsmænd", *Berlingske Tidende*, 9 June 1915.

²²⁵ Vollquartz, *Et Eventyr i Vestindien*, p. 10.

The new, the original – that which has not yet been refined and adorned after a model and smoothened and made into human art and human castigation.²²⁶

He falls in love with a mixed race girl named Marion – “the brown, wild girl!”²²⁷ who is “young and pure in mind”²²⁸ – and he considers her to be the embodiment of a fresh, young force that he can bring into his old family, which he thinks has become unnatural.²²⁹ Marion’s grandmother, Judith, is also portrayed as a positively natural figure, as “the potentiated, unreflected femininity”, for example, and she is repeatedly labelled the “natural human”.²³⁰ But West Indian naturalness was not only a positive force in Hørlyk’s writings. The romanticised version of natural, instinctive humans, always carried an inborn irrationality. Judith and Marion, for example, were both somewhat childish – and had a wildness to them that was often “camouflaged by civilisation”, but could overwhelm them and take them over.²³¹ The same goes for a local Afro-Caribbean friend of another of Hørlyk’s Danish female figures in *Livet “derude”* (*Life “out there”*). Here, the Danish girl Edith tells to her local friend: “you are a natural human being – not influenced by culture – so you only think about following your instincts”.²³² This instinctiveness and lack of culture was generally depicted as obvious to everyone on the islands, also the Afro-Caribbeans, who were portrayed as wanting to become cultured. For instance, what the black skinned Judith wants most of all for her mixed daughter and granddaughters, is for them to *be* White - to act, dress, eat and live like white people – even if it means that she will have to break off with them herself and let them live in white homes.²³³

²²⁶ Lucie Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith”, in *Under Tropesol. Tropefortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Memorial Edition, Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1913), p. 46.

²²⁷ Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith”, p. 47.

²²⁸ Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith” p. 59.

²²⁹ Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith”, p. 57.

²³⁰ Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith” pp. 23-24.

²³¹ Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith” p. 24.

²³² Hørlyk, “Livet “derude””, *Under Tropesol. Tropefortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Memorial Edition, Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1913), p. 80.

²³³ Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith”.

Both the positively primitive and the wild uncontrollable version of the image of 'natural people' were common, and interchangeably connected, in the discourse – a general premise being that a person's nature was decided first and foremost by colour. However, colour – or race – was not the only determinant of a person's nature. The past, socio-cultural stimuli and the climate were all appointed as influential elements. Indeed, there seemed to be a discursive divide between 'character' and 'dispositions' in the Danish perception of local Afro-Caribbeans. Paludan Müller articulated this clearly in *Atlanten* in 1916, when he explained his views on the local man. His character, Paludan Müller wrote, "is essentially the same, because it is a race mark, but the dispositions, as they are born out of slavery, we can change (...). We can lift him culturally, so that he becomes more human (...)"²³⁴ H. Lawaetz, who was a priest on St. Croix at the time, also stressed that Danes should remember that a reason for the Afro-Caribbeans' nature, was the mark that Danes had put onto them through slavery:

And remember that if there is something, which has been seared into the negro memory, then it is our duty to make them forget it; that if the black colour feels like humiliation and shame, then it is our duty to point to equal human worth – yes, who is perhaps worth the most, when all comes to all, he who has been the strongest and has done wrong, or he who is the weakest and who has been wronged.²³⁵

As was the case in the citation above, slavery was often presented as a reason for the negative dispositions that Danes assigned to the local population. This was a very common conjecture in the Danish debate about the islands in the beginning of the Twentieth century, and it was frequently mentioned in *Atlanten*. One of the best examples of this, is a long article entitled *Industriell Negeropdragelse (Industrial Negro Education)* by Johannes Knudsen. Here, he argued for the need to lift the local Afro-Caribbeans to a "higher cultural standpoint" and cites the West Indian Commission's report for saying that "an obstacle for radically improving the

²³⁴ A. Paludan Müller, "Hvad er Aarsagen", p. 335. (*Vestindisk Kommissions betænkning*, p. 93.)

²³⁵ H. Lawaetz, "Dansk Vestindiens indfødte Befolkning, dens Ejendommeligheder og dens Udviklingsmuligheder", *Atlanten*, vol. 7, no. 79 (1910), p. 536.

workers' conditions, lies in the fact that they are usually not inclined to take on efforts to this end, a tendency that is probably due to both the peculiarities of the race and the climate, which only makes a few demands on life".²³⁶ Claiming that some locals "look back at the time of slavery as a good time compared to the present", Knudsen goes on to say that "they are not yet ready for freedom (...) These are natural results of the spirit and mindset of slavery". Knudsen then elaborates on this spirit and mindset of slavery, and explains how slaves were lawless in the eyes of their masters, how they were perceived and treated as animals – and how these facts led to low human worth, and "no sight of personal independence":

Superstition, rawness and bestiality in life and morality, black ignorance and complete lack of moral values, spiritual and bodily degradation, incompetence in almost any kind of work but the dirtiest, and unfamiliarity with using the brain for independent thinking – all this was generally the outcome for the slaves of the systems of slavery.²³⁷

The answer for Knudsen, as the title of his article suggests, lay in industrial education of the local population, and not just in book-learning.²³⁸ He cites American and British thinkers on the issue, and compares the situation on the Danish islands to 'the colour question' in the United States. The purpose of his article is to advocate for an industrial, educational system that had already been put in place at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia. This was a schooling system where young men and women were taught discipline, responsibility and "a sense of the dignity of work", and where they specifically learned to obtain land, make a home, earn their own money and "appreciate skilled work". Thereby, Knudsen points out, to teach them "self-help and intelligent work, but also for the sake of developing character".²³⁹ As we saw in Paludan Müller's

²³⁶ Johannes Knudsen, "Industriell Negeropdragelse", *Atlanten*, vol. 2, no. 18 (1905), p. 241.

²³⁷ Knudsen, "Industriell Negeropdragelse", p. 245.

²³⁸ Knudsen, "Industriell Negeropdragelse", p. 247.

²³⁹ Knudsen, "Industriell Negeropdragelse", p. 249.

statement about character and dispositions, Knudsen considered parts of the Afro-Caribbean qualities as fluent and thereby improvable – or in need of development.

An idea of environmental determinism was also seen in the frequent mentioning of climate as a cause for the negative features, which were attributed to the local population. N. Dalhoff elaborated on this in an article in *Atlanten* in 1907. Here he explained to the readers that:

(...) the heat influences the health of the body as well as the balance of the mind (...) You fail to do your job as you would at home, to maintain your appetite, your good mood, your enthusiasm and ability to think as you would at home (...) You each have more nerves and less willpower.²⁴⁰

Dalhoff referred to W.P. Livingstone's *A Study in Evolution*, when arguing that "man's social progress depends on the temperature".²⁴¹ In this basic thought, Livingstone found the key to "the Negro question" in both Africa and America – and Dalhoff transferred this to the West Indies. The heat, he argued "requires strong nutrition, because it consumes a lot of muscle tissue, and it weakens will and initiative, so that the Negroes in general are malnourished". From this reasoning he explained "their supposed laziness".²⁴² This environmentally deterministic model of explanation was inextricably linked to the discourse of civilisation and a biologicalised concept that put Europe and Northern America on a higher state of civilisation. Progress and development were key words for the islands, and this, the Danes argued, had to come from the outside, from those who were considered to be at a higher civilizational level. But, as Dalhoff also points out, Europeans and Americans were not spared from the downgrading of the tropic climate either:

²⁴⁰ N. Dalhoff, "Det tropiske Klimas Indflydelse på Menneskene", *Atlanten*, vol. 4, no. 45 (1907), p. 155.

²⁴¹ Dalhoff, "Det tropiske Klimas Indflydelse", p. 156.

²⁴² Dalhoff, "Det tropiske Klimas Indflydelse", p. 156-57.

Real progress must come (...) from the white race. But this is just as, if not even more, subjected to the influence of the climate, when it comes to the tropics.²⁴³

This story of tropical life degenerating the Danes, who moved to the islands, was apparent in the public debate, but – as we will see – it was especially evident, and described in depth, in the colonial literature.

The unbearable lightness of tropical life

In the female novels and short stories there was often a narrative of superficiality and decay. This narrative was twofold, both concerning the decay of the islands' economy, and thereby the extravagant lifestyles of the Danes living there – and in terms of cultural and moral decay, when moving to the tropics.

Ingeborg Vollquartz' *Et Eventyr i Vestindien*, for instance, is ultimately about the loss of a golden age for Whites on the islands. Protagonist Rosa Gordon lives at My Fancy, a house that was once highly esteemed, and she used to be one of the island's most courted girls, "happy as only a young and brilliantly beautiful girl from a rich home can be".²⁴⁴ However, the downturn on the islands has created a situation, where Rosa's servants are struggling to provide food for the house every day, and to the great sorrow of her servant Bess, they have to sell the crystal chandelier. Luckily, Rosa and My Fancy are saved by a young, rich man from Denmark, who marries Rosa's niece and finds out that Rosa was once cheated for a great amount of money. This way, order is restored, and despite the downfall, "there is again dancing under the lovely crystal chandelier" at My Fancy.²⁴⁵

The theme of 'White downfall' is also apparent in Lucie Hørlyk's works. In *Tre Søstre (Three Sisters)*, the Lennow sisters are pretending to be as rich as they used to be before the downturn. That they now have to eat herbal soup and pie, and take

²⁴³ Dalhoff, "Det tropiske Klimas Indflydelse", p. 155.

²⁴⁴ Vollquartz, *Et Eventyr i Vestindien*, p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Vollquartz, *Et Eventyr i Vestindien*, p. 46.

turns in going to church, because they do not have enough fine, unworn clothes, should “never be mentioned”.²⁴⁶ When their niece arrives from Denmark, she thinks the house looks like scenery, and she complains that she is not allowed to do any housework. She has been to the United States, where earning money is key, so she would rather teach her aunts how to obtain their own wealth, than to live of “ancient memories and the maintaining of a poshness that reaps before it sows”.²⁴⁷ But – the story teaches us – here “old Europe” prevails, and her aunts prioritise family prestige, etiquette and pretence over anything.²⁴⁸ In another short story by Hørlyk, a girl, from a once grand, White family, is arrested for stealing from a local store. Her family has lost everything, and as in the short stories above, they try to keep up appearances. Local society is in uproar over what has been done, but most of all they become outraged, when they see the police treating the family “just as if they were negroes”. “She was white”, they say, “could they not see how white and innocent she was”.²⁴⁹ In both short stories, Hørlyk displayed a West Indian hypocrisy and pretence when downfall hit the islands – and she portrayed racially based double standards among Danes as well as local Afro-Caribbeans. Ultimately, we learn that Whiteness always meant superiority. We learn of a cemented bourgeoisie that contained their identity and status in historical bonds, property, and (pretending to) keeping up a certain lifestyle.

Generally, racial categorisations were produced as dominant and somewhat ‘black and white’ – but nonetheless complex when it came to actual practise. This nuanced, yet overriding, role of these categorisations was especially evident in portrayals of relationships between White men and ‘coloured’, or mixed-race, women. The figure of the so-called coloured person, who was partly black, partly white, was complex in itself, but literature, as well as the public debate, were

²⁴⁶ Lucie Hørlyk, “Tre Søstre”, in *Under Tropesol. Tropefortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Memorial Edition, Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1913), p. 184.

²⁴⁷ Hørlyk, “Tre Søstre”, p. 199.

²⁴⁸ Hørlyk, “Tre Søstre”, p. 206.

²⁴⁹ Lucie Hørlyk, “Hun var hvid”, in *Under Tropesol. Tropefortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Memorial Edition, Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1913), p. 218.

careful to stress their Otherness – that they were indeed different and carried a racial mark.

Lucie Hørlyk's *Livet "derude"* is the story of two Danish men from different generations, who both marry coloured women and end up regretting it. Because, the men slowly realise that their wives can never be real housewives, and that they "have no soul".²⁵⁰ Police chief Nyholm has been married to Eugene for many years, and he has come to despise her:

This gossiping for hours all hours of the day, always about other people's business, munching fruit, so the juice would flow all over her hands and face, and intimate laughing, was unspeakably disgusting to him.²⁵¹

Nyholm deeply regrets his decision to marry a local woman, and he now looks back at his youthful naivety:

What great thoughts had he not as a young man in love had about his ability to educate and lift the woman, which he in passionate captivation had promised to make his wife.²⁵²

He considers his wife uncivilized and blames himself for not being able to change, and develop her. As time goes by, he has lost his love for her, because – as Hørlyk puts it in another of her short stories – "a white man can love a brown woman, but if he happens to see her in the eyes of the world, his love bursts".²⁵³ Moreover, a young, newly arrived Danish man by the name Valin falls in love with the police chief's daughter, Edith. She has just returned from spending years in Denmark for the sake of her education, and in between the lines, her becoming more civilised. When she returns, she has learned that "there is a difference between undeveloped individuals and the people that I have been amongst", and as a result, she now also despises her mother.²⁵⁴ But, as we learn, the development that Edith has gone through in Denmark is "artificially added, not a seed planted in childhood and

²⁵⁰ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 158.

²⁵¹ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 67.

²⁵² Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"" p. 67.

²⁵³ Hørlyk, "Nanna Judith", p. 21.

²⁵⁴ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 73.

naturally matured".²⁵⁵ Therefore, the police chief is worried about Valin's love for Edith; he is anxious that Valin will make the same mistake he did. But Valin has fallen for her "exotic temperament and exterior"²⁵⁶, and even though he is aware that he needs to make sure she does not "become a toy for his pleasures, she had to have duties, work, not talk and let the day drift away like her mother", he marries her.²⁵⁷ As we already know, Edith turns as 'coloured' as her mother, and as a climax in the story, Valin ends up whipping her into obedience. The once so humanistic Valin reflects on his deed:

He had also called for her soul, but called in vain. Then he had whipped her, like mothers whip their disobedient children, or Negro owners whipped their slaves in the old days, and now – now she called for him, but not with her soul, because she did not have one.²⁵⁸

Edith, now portrayed as the childish, lazy dependent stereotype in the story, happily realises that she was wrongly lazy and defiant until she was humiliated – until she was tamed. Thus, Hørlyk's story is about her adaption to who she *really* is, namely to her 'race' – but it is also about Valin's moral depravation and realisation of his Whiteness. Because, Valin had used to have "socialist sympathies", he had arrived on the islands as a "theoretical humanist, who wanted to put his theories into the world". But, he could not live up to his own principles, and even though he had sympathy for the locals, "it did not occur to him to treat them as 'ethically speaking' equal fellow humans".²⁵⁹ In the end, he is stuck in the same situation as his father in law; married to a woman he does not respect, because he has seen them both in the eyes of the world.

Valin was not the only figure to suffer from the moral and cultural decay that Danes were said to go through when they moved to the tropics. It was a common narrative, reflecting its own version of the fear of tropical degeneration. Already in 1894, journalist Henrik Cavling published a book about his travels to

²⁵⁵ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 115.

²⁵⁶ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 115.

²⁵⁷ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 136.

²⁵⁸ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 158.

²⁵⁹ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 133.

the islands. Here, we met two types of Danish officials, the ineffective, downright lazy, older bachelor, who “eats well, drinks even better, but loses his appetite when he is lacking gossip”, and the young official and his wife, trying to rise through the ranks, who enjoy the prestige of Whiteness out there – a couple “were the man is slowly erased, but the wife is unfolding all her skills”²⁶⁰. Again here, becoming lazy, drinking too much and generally morally decaying was depicted as common for Island Danes, especially men, who did not have the moral strength of their wives. Also in the public debate some of the same factors were given to explain the Danes’ decay, as when explaining Afro-Caribbean acquired dispositions. N. Dalhoff, for example, in the abovementioned article blamed the tropical climate for removing will-power, enthusiasm and the ability to think from the Danes. Meanwhile, Johannes Knudsen assigned negative assets among Whites to the past slave system. In *Atlanten*, he described the negative influences of the slave system on locals, but added that it had a “no less pernicious effect on the Whites in social, moral, political and economic respects (...)”.²⁶¹

Such lazy, superficial lifestyles of Danes on the islands were also projected in Lucie Hørlyk’s short stories. In *Nanna Judith* the newly arrived Danish doctor does not like the “fine portion” of people on the islands, he considers them to be “transferred to a blissful past”, and he observes that among them: “etiquette was tight, but the immorality of the lower layers had crept upwards”.²⁶² He feels that the mixed-race girl, Marion, with whom he falls in love, looks and acts like a natural Afro-Caribbean, but her sisters - whose skin colour is more White and who *act* White - are “embossed by the superficial lightness of tropical life”.²⁶³ It is worth noting that because Marion’s mixed-race sisters were White on the outside, they were able to live as bourgeois women and *act* white. Here, again, racial categorisations and notions of class were continuously, and inextricably, linked.

²⁶⁰ Henrik Cavling, *Det Danske Vestindien* (Det Reitzelske Forlag, 1894), p. 101.

²⁶¹ Knudsen, “Industrielt Negeropdragelse”, p. 245.

²⁶² Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith”, p. 11

²⁶³ Hørlyk, “Nanna Judith”, p. 47.

The complex of living in the tropics is most evident in Hørlyk's *Livet "derude"*. Here, Valin witnesses the Danish island society from the privileged perspective of having just come from Denmark. Of St. Croix, he observes:

Here, from the island's great times, when the chop of the sugar axe through the canes was followed by the tinkle of gold dollars, a demand for pleasure was in the air, an overestimation of own importance, a feeling of obligation to 'act', which now seemed rather meaningless. How did it happen that all who came out here were blinded by this tradition that was as hollow as a bamboo?"²⁶⁴

Valin is disappointed to realize that officials on the islands are only interested in gossip, and generally "uninterested in politics and domestic affairs, and 'grand' in their awareness of their own superiority".²⁶⁵ But he finds his like-minded in police chief Nyholm, who in confidence tells him that "people become narrow here". The police chief thinks that he and the other Danes are all "trapped in a cage (...) in the spiritual respect", and he adds that "it cannot be different in a place which is so isolated, but happiest are those who do not feel it".²⁶⁶ His daughter, Edith, also feels the difference, when she returns from years in Denmark – she has difficulty fitting in again, is bored, and finds that life in the West Indies and at home is so different that "you cannot be the same in both places".²⁶⁷

Just as Edith was bored with the lightness of life on St. Croix, so was Danish Doris, in Hørlyk's *Orkanen (The Hurricane)*. She moved there with her husband, and now has to put up with life as a housewife who cannot actually do housework. Therefore, Doris waits for her husband to come home all day, and she thinks that she can "only be bourgeois", that there is no use for her. But, after a hurricane hits, she realises that she has a purpose; she can help her husband, calm the servants down and make them obey her. She sees that, she "with her iron will can obtain power over animals and underdeveloped people, so that they obey her without

²⁶⁴ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 114.

²⁶⁵ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 96.

²⁶⁶ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 98.

²⁶⁷ Hørlyk, "Livet "derude"", p. 123.

knowing why, but they feel safe doing it".²⁶⁸ Thus, the hurricane had an impact on Doris; the imminent danger surrounding the household, made her realise her role as *mother* of the house. Thus, Edith realised her place in the house as well as in society - and, more importantly, she realised her responsibility.

The empire *as* home

This tale of Edith's revelation during the hurricane, followed the lines of contemporary imperial paternalism and of, especially conservative, thoughts on national responsibility. Articulating the image of family, the colonial power came to be seen as a father figure for its colonial children in the eyes of imperial paternalism. As when Paludan Müller in *Atlanten* looked nostalgically back in time and stated that "The King was the father and the Queen the mother, a relationship that was beautifully expressed, when old negro women dressed in black at the death of Queen Louise, "because our mother is dead"". ²⁶⁹ This paternalistic image was inherent in the civilising - or developing - discourses of the time, and it confirmed both imperial social hierarchies and linear ideas of historical change.²⁷⁰ In the case of the Danish West Indies around the turn of the century, paternalism travelled along two interrelating scales: Firstly, a national scale invoking an 'affective' connection grounded in the shared history and, secondly, a domestic scale reflecting ideas of an 'empire within the home'.²⁷¹

As we have seen above, the idea that Danes needed to be awakened to interest in their colony, and that the islands should be connected to the Motherland began to take off after the failed sale in 1902. Of course, some interpretations of this narrative were more nostalgic than others. In 1911, priest and author Otto Sommer

²⁶⁸ Lucie Hørlyk, "Orkanen", in *Under Tropesol. Tropefortællinger fra Dansk Vestindien* (Memorial Edition, Det Schönbergske Forlag, 1913), p. 177.

²⁶⁹ Müller, "Hvad er Aarsagen", p. 347. The phrasing of the women, "because our mother is dead", was originally written in English.

²⁷⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge 1995), p. 68.

²⁷¹ Rosemary M. George, "Homes in the Empire, Empires in the Home", *Cultural Critique*, no. 26 (University of Minnesota Press, 1993-1994), pp. 96-127.

expressed the romantic version of Denmark's affectionate connection to the islands: "For the Negroes have a lot to thank Denmark for, this is a historical fact that cannot be shaken, and precisely therefore we Danes should do everything in our power to keep the West Indian possessions; our name is written in the wave and the church over there".²⁷² If not always so pompously conveyed, a tale of how the Danish state had abandoned and failed the islands, and how the bond needed to be restored, had an especially strong voice in *Atlanten*. This was not surprising, considering the fact that the declared purpose of the association, *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer*, was to "promote the development of the distant places attached to Denmark".²⁷³ Critique of the lack of will to help and develop the islands from the state was widespread. H. U. Ramsing, for example, wrote in 1907 that it would help if "the Motherland, which has its major share in the economic debacle" would also have taken on its share of the loss.²⁷⁴ Meanwhile, councillor of state Hammerich expressed his regrets on behalf of the state in 1911:

I found it, as you know, unworthy that Denmark, after having exhausted what it could out of these islands for centuries, now wanted to make them into money and let others bring them back on their feet. It was an admission of failure that we could not be proud of, and a sad self-abandonment".²⁷⁵

Dalhoff chimed into this same tune of failed responsibility in his article in *Atlanten*: "No, the Motherland, the Mother-government, the Mother-church – from there, the fresh currents and forces should come, which should lift up the Negroes to a higher culture".²⁷⁶ Paludan Müller agreed, and he blamed the government's lack of will to get to know "the negro character". The "indifference and ignorance", he argued, led to a "negro stock that does not do our administration honour".²⁷⁷ Inherent in all of these exclamations against the failure of the Danish government, was a narrative

²⁷² Otto Sommer, "Minder fra de dansk vestindiske Øers Fortid og Nutid", *Atlanten*, vol. 8, no. 90 (1911), p. 94.

²⁷³ Møller, "Foreningens Stiftelse", p.23

²⁷⁴ H.U. Ramsing, "De sidste års arbejde i Dansk Vestindien", *Atlanten*, vol. 4, no. 41 (1907), p. 85

²⁷⁵ Estatråd Hammerich, "En Rejse til vore vestindiske Øer", *Atlanten*, vol. 8, no. 93 (1911), p. 137

²⁷⁶ Dalhoff, "Det tropiske klima", p. 160.

²⁷⁷ Paludan Müller, "Ethvert Land har de Negere det fortjener", *Atlanten*, no. 156 (1916), p. 448.

of a set of Danish islands, with “Danish negroes” that the Danish state had the responsibility to develop. It could be seen as a sort of imperial nationalism with features of paternalism and the “promotion of national prestige” through commercial enterprise.²⁷⁸ And the need for the job to be done by Danes, and not “the foreign element” - as the British, Americans, Dutch etc. were often called - was commonly expressed.²⁷⁹ This need for Danish men in order to create progress on the islands, coincided with the developments in the tropical discourse of the time. In its early Twentieth century version, imperialism was legitimised through narratives of the need for Europeans to order the tropics - with European ideas, but certainly also with “fresh blood” from Europe.²⁸⁰

In the case of the Danish tropical islands, an emotional discourse of nationality also played a central part. Because, the underlying assumption was that Danes were responsible for the islands and their population, and because of a special connection between the two, Danes were the only ones that really had a true interest in the islands. Speaking of a possible forthcoming sale, Chr. Løfting in 1916 argued that under a Danish rule, the islands could acquire “a white (Danish) farmer’s class” and thereafter a slowly introduced subdivision of land to the locals. This, he argued, was absolutely not an option under American rule, where major agricultural production was in focus, and no national bond prevailed.²⁸¹ Not just the special imperial relation and its inherent responsibility was invoked to argue that Danes were best suited to develop the islands. When it came to arguing the need for Danes on the islands, national self-praise was common as well. Danish men, and the focus was on men, were regularly represented as especially energetic,

²⁷⁸ This kind of ‘new imperialism’ has been characterised and discussed in Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 227-233. The citation is from pp. 230-231.

²⁷⁹ See for example, H. Lawaetz, “Befolkningen”, in *De Danske Atlanterhavsoer. En orienterende Oversigt over forholdene på Islands, Færøerne, Grønland og de Dansk-Vestindiske Øer med særligt henblik på den økonomiske udvikling, Foreningen* (G.E.C. GAD, 1904-1911), p. 714-715.

²⁸⁰ Duncan, *In the Shadows*, p. 12.

²⁸¹ Chr. Løfting, “Træk af Dansk Vestindiens Saga”, *Atlanten*, no. 156 (1916), p. 442.

industrious, naturally gracious, philanthropic, brave, skillful and self-sacrificing.²⁸² H.C.V. Møller articulated this clearly when praising the private initiatives on the islands, which he thought with “energy, skill and self-sacrifice” had “lifted the wealth of the islands and brought them into a more profound connection with the Motherland”.²⁸³ Danes were, indeed, embodying modernity in the debates.²⁸⁴ These Danish envoys of modernity had the right cultural level, the skills and the mind-set, and – more importantly – they had a responsibility to convey modernity to their West Indian brothers. The image of these Danish men, contained a narrative of self-sacrifice, which suggested that they carried the ‘burden’ of being white, that they had to sacrifice themselves for the better of humanity. But, in the narrative, they also carried a burden – and a blessing – of being specifically Danish, because the islands were connected to Motherland Denmark, the population was their children to bring up – the islands therefore their personal responsibility.

What better way to educate and develop the West Indian ‘children’ than to construct little empires within the homes. The idea that Danish homes on the islands should be micro-cosmoses, where the head of the house, most likely a planter, was the father, and his wife the mother, of the workers, was put forward by several debaters. Thus, Danes needed to be on the islands themselves, and they had to set up homes in which locals could learn from their masters, by example and discipline. In *Atlanten* in 1916, Chr. Løfting for instance argued for the need of “the personal influence from owner to farmworker, and the good example that he sets, to be the common thread, which runs through the development of the Negro”.²⁸⁵ This way, the assertion was, through homes, and intimate bonds and practises, Denmark should educate its Other people. Paludan Müller particularly expressed this idea in length and blamed the labour conflict on the lack of personal relations

²⁸² See for example: H. Hoffmeyer, “Dansk-Vestindien”, *Berlingske Tidende*, 9 June 1915; Dalhoff, “Det tropiske klima”, p. 161, H.C.V. Møller, “De dansk-vestindiske øers havneforhold”, *Atlanten*, p. 475; H.U. Ramsing, “Dansk Vestindien”, *Atlanten*, vol. 1. no. 1 (1904), p. 23.

²⁸³ Møller, “De dansk-vestindiske øers havneforhold”, p. 475.

²⁸⁴ Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora. Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 52.

²⁸⁵ Chr. Løfting, “Træk af Dansk Vestindiens Saga”, *Atlanten*, no. 156 (1916), p. 428.

to the local population. The problems on the islands, he wrote, were caused by the fact “that our race’s task in the tropics, by the power of example, through personal influence on the population to direct it further culturally, has slipped into nothing; that the good personal relationship that was earlier between worker and employer has been lost”.²⁸⁶ He was sad that the Danish plantations were no longer “small cultural centres”, where “Massa and Missis were father and mother”, and where the “thoughts and opinions that belonged in the main house spread through the house slaves to the negro houses”.²⁸⁷ He continued to argue that “every plantation needs to be owned by a skilful and intelligent man, preferably a Danish farmer, who feels a warm interest for the dark man (...)”.²⁸⁸ This man should then, in Paludan Müller’s argument, marry an island-born White woman, “who knows a little about the dark race’s many strange thoughts and notions and understands that it has its own way in which to be handled”.²⁸⁹ Thereby, they could re-perform the power structures of empire in the homes, move paternalism to an everyday, intimate scale and establish what geographer Alison Blunt calls an “everyday practise of imperial rule”.²⁹⁰

Through notions of the need for specifically Danish men to travel to the islands to develop them, and through the idea that Danish homes should be small cultural centres; the public debate reproduced an imperial nationalism, and an imagined geography of Denmark as the Motherland.²⁹¹ This reflected a rather general ‘Western’ discourse of the tropics that was incorporating nationalism into its narrative – and it thereby created the idea of the islands *as* home, from a domestic to a national scale.

²⁸⁶ Müller, “Hvad er Aarsagen”, p. 333.

²⁸⁷ Müller, “Hvad er Aarsagen”, p. 341.

²⁸⁸ Müller, “Hvad er Aarsagen”, p. 348.

²⁸⁹ Müller, “Hvad er Aarsagen”, p. 347-348.

²⁹⁰ Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora*, p. 7.

²⁹¹ Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora*, p. 5, 52.

Concluding remarks

The imaginings of the empire at home were very much bound up to a broader *development discourse* that was based in a mixture of ideas of environmental determinism, social-Darwinistic ideas of race and evolution, nationalism, culture and paternalism. Developmentalism was general for imperial discourses at the time, but it developed in national forms. In the case of the Denmark and its West Indies the debate about the colony was framed in different versions of nationalism and was ultimately about the degree of 'Danishness' of the islands. Generally, Social-democrats and Social-liberals sympathised with local workers and articulated the issue of sale in terms of economic development, while conservative debaters offered the national argument that the Danish state could not amputate a part of Denmark and let its 'countrymen' down.²⁹² To an extent, each of the sides were (re)producing a nationalism that inhabited the superiority of Western civilisation – generally asking the question: Who can best save the islands: Denmark, the Motherland, or United States, a new economic force?

This was not uncommon in other empires at the time, and Danish racial debates – or debates about the colour question – were directly linked to other 'Western' debates about the issue. Especially British and American experiences and notions were taken into the Danish narratives. Thus, entangled in new ideas of imperialism, the debate among Danes on and off the islands confirmed the magnificence of Western culture against a negative other: the 'primitive' cultures in need of civilisation.²⁹³

Such an *imperial nationalism* was reflected in an entangled movement of business initiatives and nationalistic-paternalistic ideas which had been set in motion. For the hopeful initiators, the actual sale of the islands in 1917 was undesired, and for many it was considered a great setback. National-conservative

²⁹² Gronemann and Vindberg, *I orkanens øje*, p. 38.

²⁹³ Niels Finn Christiansen, "Klassesamfundet organiseres 1900-1925", *Danmarks Historien* vol. 12. (Gyldendal & Politiken, 1993) pp. 195-196.

writings in for example *Atlanten* concentrated on the national responsibility to educate the population and develop the economy of the islands. The membership's goal was to achieve "practical results to the benefit of both the Motherland and the colony", and they focused on debating different approaches to developing the islands, from schooling systems, hospitals and health care to port expansions and agricultural rationalisation.²⁹⁴.

This imperial nationalism also came to be evident in a growing body of colonial literature, written by women who had themselves lived on the islands. In short stories and novels, the female authors allowed their predominantly female readers into West Indian society, and into the Danish homes 'out there'. Here, romantic stories of the exotic, and of love, were entangled with issues of race, class and development - and the glory, as well as a decay, of White living on the islands came to light. The paternalistic idea of a civilising mission was common, but social concerns entered the stories as well, and the depoliticised nature of the writings gave room for a critique of elite island life.

Interest in the islands in Denmark was growing because of debates about a sale, but official Denmark was pulling out. Few people in Denmark, a group of colonial returnees, businessmen and interest groups really took an interest in the islands. These pro-reform groups were trying to contain - and in turn they constructed - a Danish West Indian identity at a time when the Danish state had given up on this agenda. The result was the launch of private initiatives, articulated in terms of paternalism and development - and an expression of an emotional bond between Denmark and the islands. Paradoxically, as the state loosened its grip, a section of civil society moved the distant empire closer to the Motherland and began to imagine them as *our* tropical islands.

²⁹⁴ Ramsing, "Dansk Vestindien", p. 20-23.

Chapter 2:

Travelling the distance

Chapter 1 has shown us how an affective bond to the islands – expressed in terms of paternalism, nationalism and development – had emerged among specific groups of Danes in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century. This bond was manifested in the fact that, even after the sale, Danes with a relation to the islands argued for the need for Denmark to live up to its role as a “parent” and help the islands onto their feet. Despite the lack of an official colonial tie, they argued, the bond remained, and private efforts were therefore continued. Thus, even though the debate *at home* calmed, Danes involved with the islands continued to believe in a development mission. Shortly after the islands were sold in 1917, the socio-cultural efforts of the mission became less and less clear – when the state pulled out, the projects within childcare services and the local Lutheran church ended. Moreover, to emphasise this development, *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer* was in 1919 turned into *Dansk Samvirke*, an organisation, which did not just focus on the (former) Danish territories, but now embraced all Danes, and all Danish interests, abroad.

The imperial bond had been loosened, but expressions of an emotional connection prevailed. As a consequence, Danish companies stayed on the islands and continued to operate on the lines of imperial nationalism. When the official empire ended, then, the flow of Danish employees, who physically reproduced the connection between the spaces of Denmark and the Virgin Islands, was sustained.

A central contention here is that understanding these Danish employees of the private initiatives as empire migrants will help us recognise their position in a world that was officially decolonised, but still largely framed by imperial

nationalism with all its related notions and institutions.²⁹⁵ Categorising the Danes as empire migrants, then, embraces the fact that they chose to travel to, and at least temporarily reside in, a set of former Danish islands with which Denmark had a connection born out of empire. At this time, the body of migrants consisted of both men, women and children, but men were the vehicles of the movement. They were the engines of empire migration in the sense that they were mainly the ones who were offered employment and made the decision to go.

In this chapter, we will unfold the institutional structure that brought them there, and their motivations for moving. We will also consider, who these empire migrants were, and how the new migration pattern after empire changed the typical constitution of an Island Dane. In other words, this chapter explores how the idea of an affective bond between Denmark and the islands after the transfer, was materialised in a new migration pattern from the former Motherland.

The call of the sun

When moving to the islands the Danes crossed great distances, mentally as well as physically, to arrive in their new life. Thus, the act of migration was something extraordinary, and for this reason Island Danes often remember it as “the time of my life” or as a coming of age.²⁹⁶ Choosing to migrate might have been grounded in civilising and developing ideas - or dreamy images of future possibilities - but the actual practise of migration was very tangible. There was the packing, the parting with friends and family, the new climate, new food, the unfamiliar diseases, and of course there was the actual journey.²⁹⁷ It is an experience in itself, an aesthetic quest, and a space and practice of its own, and for the Danes, the transition

²⁹⁵ See Introduction and Bickers, “Introduction”.

²⁹⁶ Thomson, “I live my memories”, pp. 55-65.

²⁹⁷ Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 227.

was stretched over time.²⁹⁸ The Danes that came to the Virgin Islands in the first decades of the Twentieth century went by steamship, and therefore found themselves on a journey for up to a month. For many it was their first time on such a long journey, and the unfamiliar spatial changes were sensed physically on their bodies. Crossing the Atlantic, they felt the changes in climate, saw “flying fish and dolphins” for the first time new, or had their very first experiences of feeling seasick.²⁹⁹ They, indeed, experienced the distance between northern Europe and the Caribbean as very real and deeply materialised.

When embarking on their journey, there was not only a destination ahead, there was also a period of ship-life with its own activities and founding of friendships. In fact, any piece of Danish travel writing about the islands, will have a section, and often a chapter, dedicated to the journey on the ship.³⁰⁰ Stories of ship life is also common in memoirs and other recollections of the Island Danes. In his memoir, bank manager G. Tornøe, for example, wrote about how, while on the ship, he befriended several Danes, who were on their way back from vacations in Denmark.³⁰¹ Correspondingly, a photo-album belonging to the Danish Thage family reveals the travelling practises that Danes would take up, while they were moving between the two places. The album depicts Svend Thage’s journey to St. Thomas in 1933, and it contains photographs of himself, people he met on board and his brother’s wife and children who were travelling with him. The photographs show how tourism practises had entered the journey that was once a hardship. We see how the Thage family filled the long wait on the ship with for example playing

²⁹⁸ Judith Adler, “Travel as Performed Art”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94, No. 6 (1989), pp. 1366-1391. See also James Clifford, “Travelling Cultures”, in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Grossberg et al. (New York, Routledge, 1992), pp. 96-116.

²⁹⁹ See for example: H. R. Norup, *Apoteker på St. Thomas, 1920-1923* (Danish National Museum, 1955) p. 1 and Christian Frederick Jensen, *Diary*, translated by his daughter Helen Birgit Jensen (St. Croix Landmarks Society, approx. 1926), p. 1.

³⁰⁰ See for example Mielche, *Tre Små Øer, Cavling, Det Danske Vestindien, eller Linck, Vort tabte land*.

³⁰¹ G. Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser på St. Croix og St. Thomas, 1913-1923* (Danish National Museum, 1954), p. 4.

tennis (see figure 2.2), laying on the sun deck, swimming in an on board swimming pool (see figure 2.1) or talking to the other passengers.³⁰²



Figures 2.1 and 2.2: Members of the Thage family swimming in the pool or playing tennis on board M/S Europa, June 1933. (Private property of Elisabeth Thage).

Before embarking on such a journey - to what many felt was a dreamy world, belonging to “an age 30-40 years back”, “where life is lived easier and more enjoyable” - the Danish empire migrants made the decision to travel to these mentally and physically distant islands.³⁰³ Generally, the Danes were part of a greater wave of European, and indeed Danish, emigration in the end of the Nineteenth and beginning of the Twentieth century.³⁰⁴ After 1867, approximately 350.000 Danes emigrated; and for a majority of these, lack of work and opportunity was a motivating force. Property owners in Denmark were merging the farmland and conditions grew worse for both smallholders and servants. Many of them, thus, took part in the general movement from rural settings to the cities - or they moved outside the borders and searched for opportunity elsewhere. This movement of people across the borders lasted some 50 years, and despite social reforms in the beginning of Twentieth century Denmark, emigration did not decrease

³⁰² Svend Thage’s photo album from 1933 was kindly lent to me by Elisabeth Thage.

³⁰³ Citations from Jensen, *Diary*, he is of course referring to the 1890s, and Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 40.

³⁰⁴ Kristian Hvidt, “Er tal bedre end ord?”, in *Landbrug, Lokallhistorie og Langt fra Danmark*, ed. Dan H. Andersen, Claus Bjørn. Thormod Hessel & Jette Mackintosh (Knud Graphic Consult, 2002), p. 206.

significantly until around 1930.³⁰⁵ The Danes that travelled to the Virgin Islands in the Twentieth century, however, were not all farmers fleeing bad conditions. Nevertheless, the great share of emigrants had made a 'migration mind-set' highly present in Denmark, and colonisation had enabled the islands to be a destination for anyone wanting to move.

Behind the personal migration decisions were different motivations, and various degrees of difficulty. For some it was not so much a choice as a consequence of their circumstances, especially when it came to men working for the East Indian Company, which was a branch of the East Asiatic Company (EAC). Katrine Svensgaard was married to Einar Svensgaard, an EAC employee. She remembers how she and her husband "were ordered to go", when her husband's employer offered him a job as engineer on St. Thomas: "That was how it was done back then. There was nothing to discuss", Katrine recalls.³⁰⁶ Meanwhile Hjalmar Bang, according to his daughter, came into the world of shipping through the EAC, and went on to the islands, because he could not be what he wanted to be:

My father was a frustrated farmer. He wanted to be a farmer, but his uncle, who he loved more than anything, said: You might as well give up on it, because those days are over. (...) So he was apprenticed as a shipping man, and then he was sent out to St. Thomas.³⁰⁷

For G. Tornøe, who was offered a position as a manager of the Frederiksted branch of the Danish West Indian National Bank in 1913, the migration decision was a difficult choice, and one he was anxious about:

(...) I had a wife, a couple of 3-year-old twins and a little girl who was a couple of months old – so it was something to consider (...) We were all very excited about the changes to new circumstances, and yet I was

³⁰⁵ Jette Mackintosh, "Hvorfor udvandrede de?", in *Landbrug, Lokallhistorie og Langt fra Danmark*, ed. Dan H. Andersen, Claus Bjørn. Thormod Hessel & Jette Mackintosh (Knud Graphic Consult, 2002), p. 213, 226.

³⁰⁶ Kathrine Svensgaard, *Interview*, Næstved, Denmark, December 17, 2012. Her children Frida and Kai also participated in the interview.

³⁰⁷ Bang, *Interview*.

somewhat uneasy about having committed myself for 5 years - it's a long time³⁰⁸

Being an established family man, Tornøe considered the West Indian job offer carefully. The costs of a career opportunity in a thrilling new environment might be more than he was willing to pay. Meanwhile, when Christian Jensen, bachelor of 25 years, was offered a position as chief chemist on a sugar factory on St. Croix, he was quick to quit his current job and go. The excitement of experiencing the tropics was enough for him to decide.³⁰⁹ But work, adventure and advancement were not alone in motivating Danish men to leave their home country. Returning to Denmark after studying abroad, Knud Knud-Hansen, for example, realised that he had already alienated himself:

Copenhagen had not changed much during my two years of absence, and nobody seemed to have missed me. (...) Then one rainy summer day came an advertisement in a professional paper. There was a vacancy for a municipal physician in St. Thomas. I dropped every chance I had in Denmark and followed the call of the sun.³¹⁰

Knud-Hansen answered the "call of the sun" and so did around 3-400 other Danes in the beginning of the Twentieth century.³¹¹ They all had their own personal motives, but there was a general trend, a common feeling, of exactly this: to follow the "call of the sun" with all its inbuilt tropical excitement and latent possibilities.

As was the case in Knud-Hansen's tale above, there is an inherent narrative of opportunity and adventure in the memoirs of men who chose to travel the distance to the islands. This fundamental narrative tells us that for most the act of migration was a conscious choice that was characterised by excitement, and sometimes anxiety, about the new unknown life. Moreover, the majority of the Danish men were actually in a position to compare their lives in Denmark to a new

³⁰⁸ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 40.

³⁰⁹ Jensen, *Diary*.

³¹⁰ Knud Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark to the Virgin Islands* (Dorrance, 1947), pp. 22-23.

³¹¹ This is a very approximate estimate based in the *Fourteenth Census of the United States* (United States Bureau of Census, 1920), the *Fifteenth Census of the United States* (United States Bureau of Census, 1930), and the *Sixteenth Census of the United States* (United States Bureau of Census, 1940).

life in the distant tropics; they could weigh the possibilities - the dreams of material wealth and self-improvement - against the pitfalls of alienation and loss.³¹²

An essential element in the circulation of empire migrants was the fact that many returned, or kept in touch with each other and shared their experiences at home. Thereby a network was created, and in this way letters from relatives on the islands could stir wanderlust, or familiar connections could enable job offers or make the distance feel shorter.³¹³ On the U.S. Virgin Islands, a migratory network had been functioning for more than 150 years within the framework of official colonialism. Some men were recruited through advertisements, while family ties, or networks of family members, often built a gateway to the islands. For instance, Volmer Taylor received a radiogram offering him a position as plantation administrator on St. Croix, because his father had been a pharmacist on the islands in his youth.³¹⁴ Likewise, Carl Lawaetz decided to move to St. Croix and became a lifetime farmer there, because his brother was the priest in the Lutheran church in Christiansted.³¹⁵ Meanwhile, Christian Jensen received a letter from his father's distant relative saying he needed him to come and work for a sugar factory.³¹⁶ Correspondingly, in the case of Theodor von Scholten, the emotional value and practical effect of personally having a familiar connection to the islands was especially pronounced. Von Scholten had a long family history on the islands, and this familial link was the central motivational force behind him moving there. He was working for the Danish bank, Landmandsbanken, when he was offered a job in a bank in St. Petersburg in 1919, but he was not too keen on this idea. Instead, he discovered that it was also possible for him to move to the Virgin Islands as an alternative. According to his son, Erik, this was an opportunity, which he found

³¹² Harper & Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, p. 5, and A. James Hammerton, "Gender and Migration", in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Phillippa Levine (Oxford University Press 2007), pp. 178-179.

³¹³ Bickers, "Introduction", pp. 1-2; Harper & Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, p. 277, 304, and Mackintosh, "Hvorfor udvandrede de?", p. 220.

³¹⁴ Jørgen O. Bjerregaard, "Fra St. Croix til Ballerup", *Byhornet*, vol. 18, no.4 (1989).

³¹⁵ Pricilla G. Watkins, *Frits E. Lawaetz - The Bull of Annaly* (Annaly Farms Inc., 2000).

³¹⁶ Jensen, *Diary*.

much more appealing, because of “the old relations and family photos from out there”.³¹⁷

Even casual acquaintances or chance meetings could sometimes constitute a connection. The latter was the case for Hein Christensen, who was actually going to Oregon to work for his uncle who had a business there. Weeks before leaving, and with migration on his mind, he met a captain who was on leave in Copenhagen from St. Croix. The captain convinced Christensen to visit the beautiful St. Croix on his way to Oregon, and when he did, he ended up staying for so long that his position in Oregon had been filled in the meantime. Eventually, he ended up living on St. Thomas, working as an accountant for the West Indian Company, among other jobs.³¹⁸

The possibility and choice of travelling the distance could, therefore, be determined by coincidence, but more often than not, it was conceived by business or family networks. However, the practise of migration was not only affected by social networks, but also by the spatial and timely frameworks of the men. The sun might have been calling, but it was not just any sun, it was a specific Virgin Islands sun at a specific time in Danish and European history: These men travelled the distance in a time when desire for opportunity often led to emigration; and they travelled to a place to which (post)colonial structures and a homely connection had facilitated empire migration.

Engines of empire migration

The production of both the empire and its migration was highly gendered, and in many ways empire migration to the islands, was a masculine practice. This does not mean, however, that women did not travel to the islands, or that there was

³¹⁷ Erik von Scholten, *Interview*, Gentofte, Denmark, November 1st, 2013.

³¹⁸ Ruth Nielsen, *Interview*, Copenhagen, Denmark, 27 March, 2013, and *Alien's permit to depart from the United States: Hein Christensen*, 39c: Immigration, departures 1942-43, General Files, Office of the Governor and the Government Secretary 1934-1943, Record Group 55, (National Archives, College Park).

never a woman who chose the experience of migration herself. Nonetheless, the pattern of empire migration in the beginning of the Twentieth century was largely characterised by the employment of men; by their decision to travel across the Atlantic for work. Many brought their families with them, but in most cases men arrived alone, either ahead of a wife, or because he was practicing migration alone.

The majority of the Danish men belonged to the private Danish institutions that had been founded before 1917, but were not a part of the colonial administration. As we have seen, these institutions were created in the metropole, and based in ideas *at home*, but had great influence on – and were also influenced by – the colony. Thus, because of the colonially created ties between Denmark and the islands, I argue, these men and institutions were both informed by, and contributing to a broader European imperial-nationalistic discourse.

In their own way, these Danish men, who travelled to the islands to work, were fulfilling the task that many felt Denmark still had; they *were* the industrious young Danes that had been called for in the Danish debate.³¹⁹ For this reason, the migrants often perceived themselves as a kind of ‘ambassadors of Danishness’ on the islands. In 1918, for example, Pastor Povl Helweg-Larsen complained to the bank committee of the Danish West Indian National Bank, over a postscript to an article written in the *West End News* by bank director Axel Holst. Informing the bank committee that the postscript had caused “general outrage among the Danes out here”, Helweg-Larsen was especially outraged by the fact that it was written by “a man who would seem to be an obvious candidate for pursuing Danish interests”.³²⁰ Even in 1930, many years after the transfer, the idea of the Danes as ambassadors was thriving. Judge Thiele, for instance, wrote a letter to the company director V. Laub about their “mutual friend” Mrs. Caroc who was travelling back to Denmark at no cost to her, because she had claimed to be unable to pay. Thiele had then been astonished to discover that Mrs. Caroc had just cashed in a check of

³¹⁹ See Chapter 1.

³²⁰ *Letter for the board of the bank committee of the Danish West Indian National Bank*, Christiansted, 13 July 1918, Povl Helweg-Larsen’s copybook (Danish West Indian Society).

5000 kroner, and he wrote that: "The story smells worse, the longer it is retold up and down the main street, and does not help the Danes".³²¹ The need for Danes to be decent and industrious men, was also articulated by Doctor Knud Knud-Hansen, when he tried to characterise the group of Danish men, in his memoir:

My Danish countrymen were good men, straight, and hardworking,
with a few more or less slimy lobsters thrown in.³²²

This notion of hard-working Danes, who were on the islands as representatives of the better man, coincided with the fact that they were often part of the newer private development initiatives. Although a small group of the migrants were for example priests or deaconesses, the three dominant organisations behind the Danish migration to the islands between 1917 and 1945, were the Plantation Company, the Danish West Indian Bank and the West Indian Company.³²³ In the beginning, the Plantation Company recruited directly through a Danish cultivation association by the name *Hedeselskabet*, but soon came to acquire employees who were agriculturally educated.³²⁴ Characteristically, they recruited all their, preferably unmarried, managers and assistant managers from Denmark.³²⁵ The Danish branches of the sugar industry had a similar practise. They upheld an ongoing recruitment of Danes to fill the positions as engineers, accountants, machinists, clerks, managers, assistant managers, craftsmen, chemists and administrators. Only unskilled labour, such as workers for the cane fields, was recruited locally. As a result, Danish sugar industry employees and their personal

³²¹ Letter from C. G. Thiele to V. Laub, St. Thomas 16 August 1930, 75: Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance, Forskelligt materiale, 02053: A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (Danish Business Archives).

³²² Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 36.

³²³ This is based on my database of Danes on the Virgin Islands 1917-1945, generated from the 1920 *Fourteenth Census*, 1930 *Fifteenth Census*, and 1940 *Sixteenth Census* of the United States

³²⁴ Gustav Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix, 1903-1924* (Danish National Museum, 1955) p. 2.

³²⁵ Nørregaard, "Dansk Vestindien", pp. 78-80. In a radio communication, the administrator for example informs of having bought 13 plantations and of the need for three new unmarried assistant managers, 24 February, 1903, 1903-1918: Forskellige beretninger, *Plantageselskabet Dansk Vestindien* (Danish Business Archives).

belongings were routinely transported back and forth across the Atlantic, often via steamships of the Danish West Indian Company.³²⁶

The Danish West Indian National Bank also recruited and created a circulation of employees from Denmark to fill positions in the direction as well as administrators and accountants, while some assistants were locally recruited and trained.³²⁷ Unlike the Plantation Company, the bank often recruited married men, who would bring their families along. This recruitment practise continued until the bank closed down in 1935, when its concession to be the sole bank-note issuer on the islands ended.³²⁸ Likewise, the direction of the West Indian Company as well as most craftsmen, accountants, engineers etc. were Danish. The policy of the company seems to have been hiring Danes for these skilled positions, but it also began to train local accountants.³²⁹ Although the company followed the same patterns of recruiting Danes, it was often an exception from the familiar migration networks. This was mainly because they recruited from the company's mother-organisation, the East Asiatic Company. The EAC was a large trade and shipping company, which had always had interests far beyond the Danish colonies. With a narrative of what Historian Hans Kryger Larsen has called 'cosmopolitan nationalism', the ambition was to establish trading networks all over the world.³³⁰ This narrative was a variety of the nationalistic and civilising trends of the time, with a strong focus on expansion. As the founder of the company, H. N. Andersen, himself expressed it in his memoirs *Tilbageblik (Looking Back)* from 1914 and *Udvikling (Development)* from 1929:

³²⁶ *Brevkopibog 1911-1918*, St. Croix Sukkerfabrik and 294: *Brevkopibog vedr. breve til St. Croix*, 01449: A/S De Danske Sukkerfabrikker (Danish Business Archives); 128: *Brevkopibog*, 01534: St. Croix Sukkerfabrik (Danish Business Archives).

³²⁷ 8: *Direktionen*; 25: *Personale 1-12* and 26: *Personale 13-25*, *Gruppeordnede sager*, Den Dansk-Vestindiske Nationalbank (Danish National Archives); Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 6.

³²⁸ Jens Begtrup, *Den Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank*.

³²⁹ Extracted from WICO correspondence: 75: *Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance*, 106: *Korrespondance fra H. Bang*, 203: *Direktør Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance*, *Forskelligt materiale* and 700: *Korrespondance mærket Direktionen*, 02053: A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (Danish Business Archives).

³³⁰ Hans Kryger Larsen, "Det nationale synspunkt på den økonomiske udvikling 1888-1914", *Folkets Danmark 1848-1940*, Dansk Identitetshistorie vol. 3, Ole Feldbæk (ed.) (C. A. Reitzel, 1992), p. 494, pp. 510-11.

The content can maybe contribute to raise awareness about the fact that the ocean, which surrounds the shores of Denmark, is also connecting Denmark to the great catchment area of the world, where the Danish nation under normal circumstances has unhindered access alongside other nations, and where Danish enterprise has ample opportunity to raise and translate community values for the benefit of our country.³³¹

(...) some of the world is drawn to Denmark by producing Danish business in distant areas, which serve the Motherland by being useful to the societies in whose mercantile development they are taking part.³³²

The idea, then, was to open up to the world, revive the underdeveloped parts and establish trade globally - this ultimately for the good of the motherland.³³³

The Caribbean branch of the EAC, the West Indian Company, often hired Danish men who were already within the network of the East Asiatic Company. Many of them had been employed on a Company ship that travelled around the world, or in a branch in either Denmark or elsewhere. And these men were not like every other Dane. Resembling diplomats - or as many of them had indeed been, seafarers - they might perceive themselves first and foremost as Danes, but they were more mobile and internationalised than many of the other empire migrants. As a former EAC employee and later curator at the Danish Maritime Museum, Ole Ventegodt, put it:

Seafarers were (...) in the best meaning of the word, cosmopolitans, who had of course seen far more strange and unfamiliar things than people at home, who had not on a larger scale begun to travel abroad.³³⁴

More importantly, their loyalty lay with the Company before anything else, and they were used to being away from home. H. P. Berg, for example, had been captain on two different West Indian Company ships, sailing between Denmark and the

³³¹ H.N. Andersen, *Tilbageblik* (Johs. Rasmussen, 1914), p. 6.

³³² H.N. Andersen, *Udvikling* (Johs. Rasmussen, 1929), p. 21.

³³³ Kryger Larsen, "Det nationale synspunkt", p. 494, pp. 510-11.

³³⁴ Ole Ventegodt, "Østen t/r med Ø.K.", *Handels- og Søfartsmuseets Årbog*, vol. 62 (2003), p. 73.

islands, before he in 1915 was asked to supervise the Company's port operations in St. Thomas.³³⁵ Also, Hans E. Nielsen worked for East Asiatic Company in Bangkok and Johannes Rasmussen for the office in Copenhagen, before they were both transferred to the West Indian Company. The international nature of the Company was also apparent in the hiring of Danes who had been working abroad for other commercial companies. This was for example the case for George Havn de Moldrup and Svend Erik Carlsen, who had both previously been working in New York.³³⁶

If all Danes were to some extent 'ambassadors of Danishness', the Company men were ambassadors of the EAC/West Indian Company, as well as for Denmark. This double position was evident in the fact that the Danish consul, who was the *actual* representative of Denmark on the islands, was also the director of the West Indian Company. He and his family lived in a large white house on Denmark Hill overlooking the harbour and the Danish flag waving above the city of Charlotte Amalie. Here, he would have representative dinners, invite both visiting and resident Danes for parties and arrange celebrations on the Danish king's birthday etc. In the past, this had been the governor's undertaking, but from 1920 and onwards, the company director took over, thereby performing a dual of role simultaneously representing the company and his home country.³³⁷

The Danish men, who went to the islands to work for either the West Indian Company or the Danish bank, had often belonged to the middle class in Denmark. Many were part of a newer segment, the salaried workers in the trade and transport industry, in banks or in the public sector - a group, which had grown out of

³³⁵ H. P. Berg, *Kritik af de danske embedsmænd og skildring af arbejdsforhold samt arbejdskampen i 1916* (Danish National Museum, 1955), p. 1.

³³⁶ *Alien's permits to depart from the United States: Georg Havn de Moldrup & Svend Erik Carlsen*, 39c: Immigration, departures 1942-43, General Files Office of the Governor and the Government Secretary 1934-43, Record Group 55 (National Archives, College Park).

³³⁷ This was the case for every Danish consul from the appointment of Vilhelm Laub who served from 1920-1932. This double role is evident in the intertwined correspondences of both the West Indian Company: 02053: A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (Danish Business Archives) and the Danish consulate: Journalsager, 1915-1929, Konsulær repræsentation, 2-085: Charlotte Amalie (Danish National Archives). The continuation of this arrangement can be found in an article from 1967: Hakon Mielche, "Det var danske øer - indtil for 50 år siden", *Familie Journalen*, March 1967.

industrialisation. While others were either skilled craftsmen or farmers.³³⁸ As we have seen, they were often recruited from the Danish or international branches of the organisations. Danish West Indian National Bank employees were very often, if not always, recruited from their job in one of the Danish co-owner banks, while Company men came from positions within the EAC. Internal recruitment was the standard, and it set the framework for a body of employees that was often older and more established in life. Meanwhile, the Plantation Company and the sugar industry in general – at least in the beginning – recruited farmworkers and skilled craftsmen, who were often young and unmarried. Moreover, some of the Danes, who ended up working in the sugar industry were former gendarmes, who had stayed on the islands due to a local relationship or just a wish to stay on and work. Thus, the Plantation Company and the Sugar Industry were to some extent reproducing earlier patterns of colonial migration to the plantations. Meanwhile, a newer framework was set for the bank and the Company, who generally can be said to have produced a new type of migrant – the bourgeois married man.³³⁹

Domesticating the islands

As in other empires at the time, the fact that the islands had come to be understood as ‘Danish’ in more than just a territorial sense, led to a gradual domestication, or ‘feminisation’ of the (former) colony.³⁴⁰ Beginning in the late 1800s, and to an increasing extent in the early Twentieth century, the idea and practice of empire as an ultra-masculine frontier space was generally outfaced. Instead, as we have seen in the case of the Danish West Indies, concepts such as development, welfare, racial purity, and above all moral ‘taming of the wild’ became valued in the ‘West’.³⁴¹

³³⁸ Ingrid Henriksen & Svend Aage Hansen, “Sociale brydninger 1914-1939”, *Dansk Socialhistorie*, vol. 6 (Gyldendal, 1980), p. 50.

³³⁹ See Chapter 4 for more on the new bourgeoisie and the intimate movements of race and class.

³⁴⁰ Phillippa Levine, “Introduction”, in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Phillippa Levine (Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 8.

³⁴¹ Barbara Bush, “Gender and empire in the Twentieth Century”, in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Phillippa Levine (Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 80-87.

This domestication of the imperial discourse generally transformed, and was changed by, the gendered framework of empire migration.

Since the islands were now increasingly understood as 'home', they should also resemble home, both morally and in the everyday practice.³⁴² Thus, what can be labelled a domestication of Danish empire migration to the Virgin Islands is palpable if we look at the proportion of women among the Danish migrants. In the Danish censuses of 1890 and 1901, women made up for around 7% of the group of Danes, while there was a tripling of the proportion of women – around 22 percent on average – from the census which was taken in 1911 and onwards to 1940. Thus, the proportion of Danish women increased significantly between 1901 and 1911.³⁴³ Moreover, in the American census of 1920 around 65% of the Danish women were between 18 and 35 years old, and no one was older than 55.³⁴⁴ If we consider that the average migration age for the Danish women was around 29, we can assume that many of the Danish women in the 1920 census had arrived relatively recently.³⁴⁵ Such a considerable change in the gender profile of Danish empire migration to the islands created new roles for the women who travelled there, and it equally formed new family lives for men, women and children belonging to the Island Danes.

The framework of a new, more feminised imperialism affected, and was of course affected by, the marriage practices among the Danish men on the islands. Therefore, studying the social status of the men, when they moved to the islands, and the degree to which they married locals, other White women or Danes, tells us something about the level of this feminisation. In general, studying marital practises in depth can tell us about the cultures in any community; and it can indeed tell us about (post)colonial culture and sociability in a society as highly permeated

³⁴² For more about the idea that home can be understood as a connection, or a feeling of belonging, even across transnational space, see Blunt & Dowling, *Home*, p. 29.

³⁴³ *Folketælling 1890, Vestindien* (Danmarks Statistik, 1890), *Folketælling 1901, Vestindien* (Danmarks Statistik, 1901), *Folketælling 1911, Vestindien* (Danmark Statistik, 1911).

³⁴⁴ *1920 Fourteenth Census of the United States*. Note that this census was taken in 1917-1918.

³⁴⁵ Average migration age is based upon 'year of migration' in the *1930 Fifteenth Census of the United States*.

by notions of race and class, as that of the Virgin Islands. Marital practises on the islands, among Danes, among locals and between Danes and locals, were on the agenda – before as after the sale. In a letter to his cousin in Denmark in 1907, Danish doctor Viggo Christensen sarcastically described the marital practices of Danes on St. Croix at the time:

On St. Croix, it is indecent not to be divorced, at least separated – or at the very least married to a divorced woman. The island demands it. Government Secretary Limpricht is married to Bailiff Zielian's former wife, District Medical Officer Kalmer is divorced from his frivolous wife (...), who I guess is now married to former Customs Officer Frisch. Dr. Heyn is divorced from his first wife (Svitzer's daughter), and Dr. Collin's wife left him before he died. Police Master Olsen in Frederiksted is separated from his Katrine. Administrator, and constituted Police Master in Christiansted, Segelche, is married to Planter Thornberg's former wife, and Planter Hugo Pedersen's wife has just left him (...). Such is the state. The Danes are beautifully in front.³⁴⁶

This, in Christensen's view, ridiculous marital culture amongst Danes on St. Croix in the early Twentieth century, mirrors the portrayals of a superficial and morally decaying Danish minority in the colonial literature of the time. It also reveals a colonial culture of inter-marriage - at least at this specific moment in time and space. There were also concerns about this sort of "moral decay" in for example *Atlanten*, especially when it came to the local population. Moreover, a report from the United States Congress in 1920 had similar observations of "anomalous and shocking" marital conditions, but - also here - only among "the coloured population".³⁴⁷ What Christensen, then, entertained his cousin with, could be an observation of Danes 'going native' in terms of social behaviour, or of the dynamics of a small community that socialised inwards.

³⁴⁶ "Letter from Doctor Viggo Christensen to his cousin in Denmark, St. Thomas 8 May 1907". *Danish West Indian Society*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2010).

³⁴⁷ *Report of Joint Commission appointed under the authority of the concurrent resolution*, The Congress of the United States (January 1920).

His concerns are dated at the very beginning of the century, and at a time of overlap and transition in the mind-set. They enclose part of a social practice that was specific for Danish coloniser life on St. Croix at this time, but tell us only little about the degree of local integration in the marriages, or about the number of single Danish men in general. And, neither the debate at home during colonialism, nor the colonial literature, tell us if marital practises were challenged, reproduced or reconfigured when the new type of empire migrants entered the scene. Thus, in order to understand the possible changes in marital practises, and to draw an image of the socio-cultural demographics among the Danish empire migrants after the sale, I have studied the American censuses from 1920, 1930 and 1940.

Census forms are not in any sense complete sources. When a census was taken, for example, some of the Danes might have been away from the islands, some might have filled out the forms incorrect, and some might have thought that as Danes they did not belong in an American census. Moreover, others might have adjusted the census facts to fit their own self-perception, or a socially acceptable and favoured image of themselves. In addition, there generally seems to have been ambiguity in categorising Puerto Ricans, who were interchangeably labelled 'mulatto' or 'latino'. As for the Danish men, the stringent marital categorisations of a census were inadequate. If, for example, a Danish man was in a relationship with a local woman, but not married, it would not figure. This case was highly likely, as some Danish men could have found such a relationship socially unacceptable, or just not 'worthy' of institutionalisation. At the same time, non-institutionalised relationships with women in Denmark are also invisible from the censuses. Remarrying, as we saw it in the Christensen's letter above, would not show either, just as some men declared in the census that they were married, but did not mention to whom. What, then, can be gathered from the census data is a likely

image of the gender divisions and marital patterns, which I have tried to challenge and fine-tune against the personal narratives and other records.³⁴⁸

At first glance, the marital patterns that emerge from the three censuses are relatively identical. In all three censuses, roughly around 70% of all grown men born in Denmark declared that they were married.³⁴⁹ The census-information does not tell us if these married Danish men were bachelors when migrating, but it does tell us who they married. If we sum up the numbers to an approximate image, around one third of the married Danish men were married to a local woman, while a majority of two-thirds were married to a woman who was declared to be white.³⁵⁰ In addition, around a fourth of all married Danish men in the censuses of 1920, 1930 and 1940 were married to a Danish woman.³⁵¹ At the same time, the percentage of children with two Danish parents peaked at around 35% in the census of 1920, and then stabilised around 14% of all children with a Danish mother and/or father in the following censuses.³⁵² These numbers might be explained by the twofold development of first, the abovementioned tripling in the proportion of Danish women after 1901, and second in an increased awareness of Whiteness among the Danes from the 1920s and onwards. In fact, intertwined notions of Whiteness, Danishness and class played a major part in marriages on the islands. When a Danish man married a Danish woman, for example, it was socially understood as a choice that incorporated the three valued notions - Danishness, Whiteness and higher class - in one; while marrying another White woman for many was increasingly considered to be as highly esteemed. Common for both marital

³⁴⁸ The marriage pattern is drawn from a database of Danes on the Virgin Islands 1917-1945, which I have created on the basis of the *1920 Fourteenth Census*, *1930 Fifteenth Census*, and *1940 Sixteenth Census* of the United States. Additional reflections are partly informed by the patterns I have encountered in my other sources. All numbers are approximate.

³⁴⁹ My categorisation of "grown men born in Denmark" includes the men who were more than 18 years old, and who in the censuses declare to have been born in Denmark. It does not consider men who were born elsewhere, but had Danish citizenship, just as it does not take the declaration of Danish or American (or other) citizenship into account.

³⁵⁰ To avoid the evident problems in the censuses of categorising Afro-Caribbean, 'mixed-race' and Latino peoples, the category 'local woman' here includes all women declared to be 'mulatto', 'black' or 'latino', born in the U. S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic.

³⁵¹ The category "Danish woman" here means a woman born in Denmark.

³⁵² This is based on information about the children living in households of Danish men and women in the three abovementioned censuses.

choices, were the underscoring bourgeois ambitions. In a setting where notions of distinctions of race and class were intensified, moral hygiene and emotional appropriateness had become central.³⁵³

It is also interesting how the marital numbers reconfigure, if we look at the time of arrival of the Danish men on the islands. The census of 1930 offers this opportunity, since 'year of migration' was a part of the questionnaire. When applying this new set of glasses, a clearer image emerges. Of the married Danish men that arrived on the islands before 1900, around two-thirds were married to a local woman, while only approximately 6% had a Danish wife and 13% had married another White woman.³⁵⁴ If we then look at the married Danish men who migrated after the transfer in 1917, it turns out that a little under half of the married Danish men were married to a Dane, one fifth of the men were married to another woman declared to be White while and only around 7% were married to a local woman. Even though I am here working with relatively small numbers, I would argue that an upheaval in marital practices among the Danes is apparent. Ultimately, this means that between migrating before 1900 and migrating after 1917, there was an increase of roughly 40% in Danish married men who had a Danish wife, and about the same increase when it came to those who married another White wife. This increase in domestic marriages can also be partly explained by the fact that women were considered the materialisation of both domesticity and moral. At the same time the modernisation on the islands, the private business ventures and improvements in transport and communication, had opened up a space of possibility for more women to travel to the empires.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Duncan, *In the Shadows*, pp.44-49 and Stoler, "Tense and Tender" p. 832.

³⁵⁴ Around a tenth of all married Danish men in all censuses, do not declare who they are married to.

³⁵⁵ Bush, "Gender and Empire. The Twentieth Century", p. 79, and Hammerton, "Gender and Migration", pp. 156-157.



Figure 2.3: A family affair. Photos from the early 1900s also bear witness to the growing tendency to bring along Danish women to the islands. Here we see Sugar Factory Director Adamsen and his Danish wife posing in their car in front of their home at Estate Bethlehem, around 1916. On the ground next to the White, Danish couple is their well-dressed local servant. (Danish National Archives).³⁵⁶

These census numbers confirm the sense that correspondences within the different business ventures, as well as the personal narratives, gave us of a new empire migrant man, who relatively often brought his wife along, or soon after migration married a woman from a prestigious family in the White community. Thus, it seems that from 1900 onwards, a recognisable home-life became a cherished value for many Danes on the distant islands. The gendered element in the process of empire migration is an important one: It shaped not just the marriage patterns of the Danish men who travelled to the islands, but – as we will see in Chapter 4, it also reconfigured island community itself. Echoing a general Western European and North American discourse of nationalism, the Danish empire migrants had gradually developed a stronger national identification.³⁵⁷ This was, as we saw above, evident in the debates about the empire in Denmark. And on the islands, it

³⁵⁶ *Fotografier og postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-1962*, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

³⁵⁷ Hammerton, "Gender and Migration", p. 175.

was apparent in the high proportion of all-Danish marriages after 1900, and especially after 1917. Thus, even if an ideal of White endogamy was not fulfilled in reality, by the time of transfer, empire migration had, in Historian Elizabeth Buettner's words, "become a family affair".³⁵⁸

White housewives

The gradual domestication of Virgin Islands space, was enabled and produced by the physical arrival of Danish wives on the islands. Although their husbands were often the engines behind the act of migration, and although the occupations of men influenced the position of their wives, these women were far from peripheral in the Danish and White community. As a crucial part of an Island Danish community, they participated equally in the daily (re)production and practise of paternalistic and differentiating discourses on race, class and power. Moreover, their increased presence did not just produce a new ideal for the White man, it also introduced the ideal of the White housewife as a positive and elevated figure of status, and created new norms for White family life on the islands. This section is predominantly concerned with the Danish wives, and to some extent the 'other white' wives of Danish men; as these two groups were the great female majority in Danish migrant group on the Virgin Islands. Some Danish single women also migrated to St. Croix and St. Thomas, but these were very few. Before 1945, single female migration to the islands was very scarce, and only a limited number of nurses, deaconesses, private babysitters or home teachers - and one or two independent merchant women in the 1930s, travelled to the islands.³⁵⁹

For the Danes in general, it was common practice that men arrived prior to their wives and set everything up, thereby hoping to spare them of the initial chaos of arrival. The wives would then travel the distance to the islands alone, maybe bringing children, and sometimes paired up with another Danish wife or an

³⁵⁸ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 5.

³⁵⁹ 1920 *Fourteenth Census*, 1930 *Fifteenth Census*, and 1940 *Sixteenth Census*.

acquaintance of the husband for the trip.³⁶⁰ Some of the men, however, were not married when they came, but went back to Denmark to find a wife or found one on the islands. This was, for example, how it happened for Carl Lawaetz who had arrived on St. Croix on his own, and after setting up a decent life for himself went on vacation in Denmark. Here he proposed to his future wife, Marie, and once they were engaged, he went back to the island alone. Marie followed soon after, alone with only her suitcases and money for a return trip from her father, in case she changed her mind (see figure 2.5).³⁶¹

If the men did not go back to find a wife once they were settled, as Carl Lawaetz did, many entered into marriage just before they left for the islands. Therefore, it was important to choose the right kind of woman who could embody the “restful, contented and dutiful” image of a White lady, and who knew how to handle servants and adjust to local conditions.³⁶² Not only, should she be able to practise this White bourgeoisie - it was also crucial that she was the right fit for a marriage that would entail separation from family and home country. This was problematic for Knud Knud-Hansen, who had first married a Danish woman, who as it turned out, could not cope with life ‘out there’ on St. Thomas. As he explained in his memoir, she was different from most Danish women on the islands, who “were not the kind that always bore in mind the thousands of miles that separated them from their old homes in Denmark and the many years they had been away”. She had trouble adjusting to life as a Danish wife on the islands, and even though she got along well with some of the Dutch and English families on St. Thomas, she - as Knud-Hansen expressed it - “never felt at home out here where good little women from home spread out as high society blues”.³⁶³ The permanent move to the islands led to the end of their marriage, but their daughter, Vilma, was already integrated and indeed Americanised. She married an American man and had two

³⁶⁰ For example, Katrine Svensgaard shared a room on the ship with the wife of a carpenter who had just travelled to St. Thomas as well: Svensgaard, *Interview*.

³⁶¹ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 20.

³⁶² Procida, *Married to the Empire*, pp. 39-43, and Bush, “Gender and Empire”, p. 92, The citation is from Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, pp. 36-37.

³⁶³ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 37

sons, who entered the U.S. Navy.³⁶⁴ After his misfortune in the first marriage, Knud-Hansen instead went on to find himself a St. Thomas-born White wife named Ruby, who was locally grounded and did not need to adapt.³⁶⁵

Hence, adjusting to life on the islands could be difficult for the women. In contrast to most men, who had an established function and network based in their employment, Danish women arrived to no working place, no colleagues and no fixed responsibilities. For Danish wives, the resident Danes, and especially other Danish wives, constituted a safety net and a helping hand in the transition. Katrine Svensgaard, for example, remembers how Danes would “stick together as soon as they are out of Denmark”, and therefore the Jensens, a Danish couple, moved her and her husband into a room in their house while they were waiting for their house to be ready in 1936.³⁶⁶ The couple did not want Katrine to be alone while her husband was working, so the wife, Musse, spent time with Katrine. In her memoir, Katrine recounts this arrangement:

It was a great help to live with them, because Musse would take me to all the stores and to the market. She educated me in every way.³⁶⁷

This way, Musse helped Katrine adjust, and prepared her for being a housewife on St. Thomas. Likewise, Marie Lawaetz, who lived on St. Croix from 1902 to her death in 1966, found support in the Lutheran church in Frederiksted when she first arrived in her new life. Danish pastor Nyegaard and his wife helped her adjust to island life, and the Danish deaconesses became her close friends and source of comfort.

³⁶⁴ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 37.

³⁶⁵ 1940 Sixteenth Census.

³⁶⁶ Svensgaard, *Interview*, and Katrine Svensgaard, *Private Memoir*, Property of the Svensgaard family (1989). The citation is from the interview.

³⁶⁷ Svensgaard, *Memoir*.



Images of Danish women and White families were very common in the early Twentieth century. Figure 2.4 (Left): Pastor Axel Bergh with his Danish wife, Kristine, St. Thomas 1911. (Danish National Archives).³⁶⁸ Figure 2.5 (Right): Marie Lawaetz with one of her island-born children, around 1917. We have many photographs of Carl and Marie's life on St. Croix as she enjoyed documenting their family and maintained several family albums (Lawaetz Museum).³⁶⁹

The roles in Danish family life on the islands followed the lines of bourgeois ideals and practises in Denmark. The male head of the family was defined by his occupation, and his work was often his and the family's first priority. His relation to his wife and children was loving, but defined within a framework of patriarchy. The woman was a housewife whose identity and social status was determined by that of her husband. She would be responsible for the state and atmosphere of the household and represent her husband by elegantly moving around behind the scenes. Although Marie, for example, had formal training in tailoring, painting and sketching and had taught art in Denmark, she, as most Danish women, became a fulltime housewife on the islands.³⁷⁰ Since she was now a part of the White elite, Marie had to adjust to a new, more bourgeois lifestyle than what she came from.

³⁶⁸ *Fotografier of postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-1962*, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

³⁶⁹ Marie Lawaetz' private family album, Lawaetz Museum, St. Croix.

³⁷⁰ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*. p. 23.

Although White family life on the islands resembled its bourgeois parallel in Denmark, a fundamental difference for Danish wives was the fact that their privilege was not just based in their husband's title and the family's wealth; it was also founded in racial categorisation. Regardless of their social and cultural background, as Margaret Jones has explained it in relation to the English in Ceylon, "they all participated to a greater or lesser extent in the benefits of being white in a racially unequal society".³⁷¹ This inherent privilege, and the fact that their husbands often ascended fast into high positions in society, was reflected in an often unfamiliar class move for many Danish women.³⁷² Migrating to the islands, then, did not just provide a whole new environment and a very tangible distance to the homeland; for the often upper-working-class or middle-class Danes who travelled there, it also meant social elevation.

A role as managing housewife gave many Danish women, and White wives of Danish men, a great amount of time to socialise, pursue hobbies or become involved in charity or church work.³⁷³ Apart from overseeing the household, the White housewife, for example, went on numeral social calls, to cocktail parties, or helped prepare dishes for social gatherings with her cook.³⁷⁴ Likewise, Marie Lawaetz, for example, began painting china and sewing linen and took up photography, while also doing work for the Lutheran church. Meanwhile, Henrietta Berg played the piano, went horse riding and spent most of her time on social calls, while Ruby Knud-Hansen became a board member of the American Red Cross. Similarly, Katrine Svensgaard remembers the many social gatherings, and how she and other Danish wives, along with Norwegians and Americans, would make clothes for American Red Cross during the Second World War.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ Margaret Jones, "Permanent Boarders. The English in Ceylon", in *Settlers and Expatriates. Britons over the Seas*, ed. Robert Bickers (University of Oxford Press, 2010), p. 225.

³⁷² See more about this ascending in Chapter 3.

³⁷³ See chapter 5 for more about this role as managing housewife.

³⁷⁴ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 32.

³⁷⁵ Lucas Alexander, *Oldemor – 102 år*, private interview with Helene Berg Rasmussen, conducted by her great grandson, uploaded to Youtube.com 25.01.2007: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n54224R8nWw> (last visited 02.06.2012); Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 9, and *List of officers and members*, St. Thomas chapter, American Red

But the role of the wife was not limited to socialising, social work and hobbies; many of the wives were to a great extent involved in their husband's work. From her position on his side, the figure of the White housewife would supplement and represent her husband at all times and often prepare for, and participate in, his entangled social calls and business visits. Moreover, her main sphere, the home, was often anything but private, and largely involved in the flow of work and representation.³⁷⁶ Thus, through her own interest in social and philanthropic practises, and because of her role as an extension of her husband, the White housewife was deeply involved in the sociality, business life and politics of the Danish and White community on the islands. Arguably, she was only on the sidelines in a matter of speech, while in reality she was an integral part of this society.

Concluding remarks:

When the islands were sold in 1917, for some Danes, the islands continued to be understood in a framework of home. Even though the imperial nationalistic development mission on the islands grew smaller, Danes still travelled to the islands as employees of the private initiatives such as the Danish West Indian National Bank, the West Indian Company and the Plantation Company. The decision to move to the now American islands, was often fuelled by the notion that Denmark and the islands were somehow connected. Friendships and familiar bonds, and familiar patterns of migration dating back to colonial migration to the islands, ensured a sense of recognisability and even 'home'. Personal motivations behind the decision were different, of course, but most Danes came to understand themselves as a sort of ambassadors of Denmark on the islands. They were there to develop the islands, and they were there precisely because of their Danishness.

Cross, 1928-29, 60: Red Cross 1929, General files 1927-1932, Office of the Governor and Governor Secretary, Record Group 55 (National Archives, College Park).

³⁷⁶ See Chapter 5, or Jones, "Permanent Boarders", p. 222, and Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p. 11, 43.

There was a great difference, however, between those who were recruited to work for the Plantation Company or the sugar industry in general, and those who worked for the bank or the West Indian Company. Especially the West Indian Company had its own framework of understanding, the employees saw themselves as Company men and cosmopolites, and they were used to travelling around the world. Therefore, they were also more than just employees, they embodied the whole organisation and represented The East Asiatic Company itself as much as they represented Denmark. This was reflected in the fact that most employees of the two organisations were expected to be married before they moved to the islands, and to bring their wife along. This, in turn, meant that more Danish women moved to the islands, went through adjustment processes, experienced and reproduced discourses of Whiteness – and generally became a central part of the Danish and White community. Thus, an imperial nationalistic mind-set, including the demand for employees to be married, led to a feminisation of the Danish presence on the islands. Despite the lack of an articulated colonial strategy and legal system promoting such a feminisation, the migration practises of the Danes, resonated with a contemporary ‘Western’ trend of domesticating the imperial discourse.

Chapter 3:

Tropical Dane-men

The imperial-nationalistic discourse and its domestication of the islands, was not just seen in linguistic representations, grand development schemes and migrating patterns. It was also daily reproduced - and challenged - in practise by Danes on the islands. Through their position in island society, their inter-socialisation and practise of traditions, they took part in creating a sense of home and belonging in the Danish community. Especially with the entrance of a new type of empire migrant, practise changed significantly in the Twentieth century, and the Danish community on the islands was domesticated and transformed. The new migrants entered into a society that had been framed by Danish colonial rule - and as the official imperial bond dissolved, the new group of Danes interspersed with the old 'colonial' ones, who had stayed on. They now had to find their place, and create a sense of home, in this Caribbean world, with its own power structures and opportunities. Thus, as they entered islands society, they became aware of their Whiteness and eager to stress their Danishness This chapter investigates their narratives and practises of this 'Island Danishness', and the very literal embodiment of Whiteness in their posing and mimicking in photographs.

Becoming White

Newly arrived or staying on after the transfer, the Danish men became part of a White minority elite on the islands. This minority consisted of mainly Europeans, and an increasing number of North Americans, who in the space of the Virgin Islands perceived themselves first and foremost as white. It was a multicultural

community - as contemporary Danes described it - a world “characterised by Spanish grandiosa, English comfort and Danish hospitality”³⁷⁷, where “it is buzzing of English, German and Danish and Swedish along the promenade”.³⁷⁸ The socio-economic hierarchy on the islands was construed along racial lines, although not exclusively divided into ‘black and white’. In the early Twentieth century, until the arrival of company men and bank employees, the upper-class had consisted of mainly White plantation owners and traders, while a smaller group of Whites, but mostly so-called ‘mixed-race’ and Afro-Caribbean craftsmen, public servants, merchants, teachers, hotel owners etc. constituted a middle-class. Hierarchically below them, were Afro-Caribbeans from the islands and immigrants from neighbouring islands, who comprised a working class.³⁷⁹ An inherent privilege in being white, echoed a global colonial discourse of White endogamy, where cultural racism was articulated in terms of skin colour.³⁸⁰ On the islands, official colonial dominance might have been over, but White norms and privileges were still embedded in the community and as such constituted a colonial legacy.³⁸¹ During late imperialism, journalist Henrik Cavling painted a literary picture of the typical arrival of a young Danish wife to the islands. Anecdotally, and not without humour, he described how this “loveable” and “inexperienced little Copenhagener”, who was just as keen to enter into the official world as was her husband, would experience the newfound Whiteness:

Imperceptibly, but quickly, she feels like nobility, not just in relation to the blacks, but also in relation to the mulattos, and to such merchant families, wherein there is coloured blood. What pleasure do you get from being white at home! Here *that* is a preference.³⁸²

As the comment suggests, the crucial role of Whiteness was new to the Danish migrants, who were not used to identifying themselves in terms of race in everyday

³⁷⁷ Helweg-Larsen, *Sollyse minder*, p. 52.

³⁷⁸ Mielche, *Tre Smaa Øer*, p. 111-112.

³⁷⁹ Clausen, *The Better Class*.

³⁸⁰ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, p. 76.

³⁸¹ Lopez, *Postcolonial white*, p. 4.

³⁸² Cavling, *Det Danske Vestindien*, p. 97-98.

practise. In Denmark imperial immigration was almost non-existent, and therefore, as racial issues were invisible at home, the idea of Whiteness was inherent in the notion of Danishness.³⁸³ Meanwhile on the islands, colonial differentiation had ascribed Whiteness with a sense, and often social reality, of being of higher class, and practises to some extent reflected this.³⁸⁴

That racial categorisation played a crucial role in social ordering on the islands, was seen in the fact that many Danes easily and without ado engaged with the White elite community. For instance - referring to the connections between Danish officials and the general White minority in the years surrounding the transfer, H.P Berg, who was director of the West Indian Company, ironized over this relation in his memoir:

There was a great mutual sociability between the officials, and between the officials and the rest of the white population – pleasures seemingly played a greater role than work³⁸⁵

This inter-sociability continued after the transfer as well. Bank director G. Tornøe, who lived 5 years on each island, remembered how he and other Danes used to go to dinner parties at Irish planters' homes, where they "always sang old Irish songs" or at "old Creole families" on St. Croix, and how different it was, when he moved to St. Thomas:

It was old merchant families of English, French, Dutch and Danish heritage – and some wealthy Jew merchants. They, from old times, considered St. Thomas to be the centre of the world – they were accustomed to the arrival of ships of all kinds of nationalities and most merchants were consuls³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Per Nielsen, *Fru Jensen og de andre dansk vestindere* (Nationalmuseets Forlag, 2016), and Lars Jensen, "Danishness as Whiteness in Crisis. Emerging Post-Imperial and Development Aid Anxieties", in *Postcolonialism and Whiteness in the Nordic Region*, eds. Kristin Loftsdóttir & Lars Jensen (Ashgate Publishing, 2012).

³⁸⁴ Rostgaard and Green, "Race, rang og stand".

³⁸⁵ Berg, *Kritik af de danske embedsmænd*, p. 3.

³⁸⁶ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 26.

As the combination of Berg's and Tornøe's remarks hint, the Danish empire migrants also (re)produced an idea of Whiteness in their discourse and practise. For example, they would routinely speak of "the Whites", "White families", "White women", "a White man's child" or "the White population".³⁸⁷ And they would continuously link high class to Whiteness in their narrations. This was for example evident in the photograph below (figure 3.1) of a group of White girls, taken by Danish Captain Zeilau. The caption tellingly says: "All society girls (i.e. white girls)". In the photograph, the White girls are gathered without any visual interference of locals or local society, and they are all dressed in white and playfully, seemingly effortlessly, placed on the floor like little girls. This virtually paraphrasing the image of the lightness of tropical life. Most importantly, however, is the fact that their social identity as "society girls" was not only decided by their White clothes and a possible social position - but it was equalled to their Whiteness.



Figure 3.1.: Photograph with the caption "All society girls (i.e. white girls)". We do not know much about the context of the photograph, and it is not dated, but was taken by Captain Zeilau, who lived on the islands between 1913-17, (Danish National Archives).³⁸⁸

The Danes, then, were generally a part of, and contributing to, the (re)production of a White elite on the islands; and as such, a Danish empire migrant would practise multiple White identities. First of all, was the domestic identity in

³⁸⁷ See for example: Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 3, 38; Erik Schäffer, *Dansk embedsmand i Frederiksted, 1913-1916* (Danish National Museum, 1955), p. 53; Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix*, p. 8, 13 and Berg, *Kritik af de danske embedsmænd*, p. 2, 3.

³⁸⁸ *Forsvarets Billedarkiv vedr. Dansk Vestindien, 1830-1957*, 39B: Forsvarets Billedarkiv vedr. Dansk Vestindien, 1830-1957, Arkivfunktionen Billedmateriale, 1064-001: Forsvarets Arkiver (Danish National Archives).

which the notion of being Danish, as well as a social categorisation in terms of class, was highly significant. Secondly, there was a locally based identity, one of being a Virgin Islander, and for example a Cruzian or St. Thomanian. In the local identity, Whiteness became visible and was the main signifier as well as a metaphor for class mobility.³⁸⁹ In the reciprocal encounter between the Danes and Virgin Island's space, the notion of Danishness in many instances transcended the notion of Whiteness. Thus, Danes and the rest of the White minority were often socially categorised as 'the same'.³⁹⁰

Working for and partly constituting the shipping and the sugar industry - the two main sectors on the islands - many of the Danish men were at the very heart of Virgin Islands society. This was not just an international society, but also a society where Americanisation had begun to make its mark. Already at the turn of the century, local middle-classes went to United States for schooling, or emigrated there, and the American consul was also chairman of the colonial council on St. Croix as well as director of the American plantation company Bartram Brothers. Likewise, American families were becoming part of the 'old elite', and by 1902 the United States was the primary trade partner.³⁹¹ By the time of the transfer, this development accelerated as more Americans moved to the islands and official Americanisation set off. However, due to the establishment of the Danish West Indian National Bank, Danish men were literally very central in Island economy. The bank was cooperating closely with the West Indian Company, The West Indian Sugar Factory and St. Croix Sugar Factory, and it had ongoing loan deals and exchange of information with both the sugar industry and the Company.³⁹² Moreover, the bank was offering its opinions on how the companies should place themselves in different situations, who they should sell to and so on; and it often made an effort to influence business decisions based on its strong sense of both

³⁸⁹ Radhika Mohanram, *Imperial white. Race, Diaspora and the British Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. xx, xvii.

³⁹⁰ Bickers, *Britain in China*, p. 14.

³⁹¹ Herbst, "Reformtanker".

³⁹² See for example Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, and Begtrup, *Den Dansk Vestindiske Nationabank*.

working for Danish interests, but also of being the national bank on the islands.³⁹³ The bank's influence on all the islands was paralleled by the West Indian Company's ownership of the majority of the harbour on St. Thomas, while a summary of estates on St. Croix in 1929, showed that more than one-third of all estates on St. Croix were owned by either the West Indian Sugar Factory or individual Danes.³⁹⁴ We must, therefore, assume that the Danes were central actors within, at least, the White minority.

Big ducks

An exalted presence in local society as also in common for many Danish men. Many were socially, commercially and politically active, and they often held prestigious posts. If we consider that the Danes and their children constituted around 1% of the entire population on the islands, and one-sixth of the White population, their presence was highly visible in Virgin Islands space.³⁹⁵ This was paralleled by the fact that many Danes climbed quickly to positions they could have never dreamed of in Denmark. H. P. Berg, for example, came to the islands to supervise harbour expansion in 1912, and soon became director of the West Indian Company, with all its privileges, including living on 'Denmark Hill' in the most prestigious house on St. Thomas.³⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Hjalmar Bang years later went through a similar process of both career climbing and social advancement. In the beginning of his stay, as his daughter Elizabeth recalls it, he would ride a horse to work, and the vendors in the streets would yell "Mr. Bangalang, the poorest white man on the island!", when he rode past them. From being called the poorest White man, Hjalmar Bang was then

³⁹³ This was for example the case, when the Bethlehem Sugar Factory was to be sold in 1930: *Letters to the Committee of the Danish West Indian National Bank*, 5: Gruppeordnede sager: Bethlehem I, 2429: Den Dansk-Vestindiske Nationalbank (Danish National Archives).

³⁹⁴ *Summary of principal owners of estates on St. Croix*, 71: Industries 1929-30, General Files, Office of the Governor and the Government Secretary 1932-34, Record Group 55 (National Archives, College Park).

³⁹⁵ The percentage is an estimate calculated on the grounds of the three American censuses of 1920, 1930 and 1940. The population was 26.051 in 1917/1918, when the 1920 census was taken, while it had decreased to 22.012 in 1930. By 1940 it had gone up to 24.889. *Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Census of the United States*.

³⁹⁶ Berg, *Kritik af de danske embedsmænd*, and Helene Berg Rasmussen, *Min barndom i paradiset* (Danmarks Radio, 18.12.2005).

promoted to director of the Company in 1932. Accordingly, he soon got a car “like all the white Danes”, became Danish consul and moved his family up to Denmark Hill.³⁹⁷ He, in turn, went from being a middle-class salaried employee in the West Indian Company to becoming Danish consul and Company director. The position that both Berg and Bang took as director of the Company did not just involve a prestigious house and title. Connected to the title were many cocktail parties, many representative dinners and official appearances, and most of all, great influence on trade and shipping on the islands.

Berg and Bang were not the only ones to experience such ascension. The islands offered many success stories of Danes climbing careers while living on the islands, or becoming something by the act of moving to this other environment with different opportunities and social structures than in Denmark. Being a farmer might have been something in Denmark, but becoming farm administrator, plantation manager or employee at a sugar factory on St. Croix was a class above. Christian Jensen, for example, experienced this fast-track social mobility, when he came to St. Croix, and to his surprise discovered that he alone had two servants and a house with “two bedrooms, a bathroom, a dining room, living room and a kitchen”.³⁹⁸ Just as working in a bank in Denmark was relatively prestigious, but never at the level of being a white Danish bank employee on the islands, and becoming a bank manager, or even director of the bank, was definitely more attainable on the islands. G. Tornøe, for example, was recruited directly from his job in a bank in Denmark to become the manager of the department in Frederiksted, and after 5 years he became director of the bank and moved to St. Thomas. Meanwhile, both Axel Thage and Axel Holst, once they were working on the islands, quickly moved up the chains of the bank and stepped into the prestigious position of bank director.³⁹⁹ Many Danes were probably aware of this mechanism and took it into the consideration, when moving to the islands. As Hjalmar Bang’s

³⁹⁷ Elizabeth Bang, *Private memoir* (Danish West Indian Society).

³⁹⁸ Jensen, *Diary*.

³⁹⁹ Elisabeth Thage, *Interview*, *Trekroner*, Denmark, 25 March, 2013; Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, and Begtrup, *Den Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank*.

daughter, for example, put it in an interview: “My father always said: It’s better to be a big duck in a small pond, than a small duck in a big pond”.⁴⁰⁰



Figure 3.2: Hjalmar Bang (left) in his role as Danish consul walking with the Danish crown princess, when she and the crown prince visited the Virgin Islands in 1939.⁴⁰¹

The Virgin Islands ‘pond’ was indeed small, and the size of actual selection for high positions in the Danish companies – the group of Danes – was even smaller. Many of these Danish men were therefore new-rich, or new-upper class, and they tried to fit in, and place themselves into their new social position, by for example fixating on image and self-representation.⁴⁰² A way of doing this was by political involvement or entering into different organisations, clubs and associations that could reproduce and cement their position. As we have seen, many Danes were members of the colonial councils on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Farmer and plantation owner, Carl Lawaetz, was one of them. He served the farmers’ interests in his seat in the council on St. Croix, both before as well as after the transfer. Likewise, sugar factory director, Folmer Andersen was in St. Croix

⁴⁰⁰ Bang, *Interview*.

⁴⁰¹ “Kronprins Frederik og Kronprinsesse Ingrid’s besøg på St. Thomas den 23. marts 1939”, *Vore Damer*, 01 May 1939.

⁴⁰² Kumari Jayawardena, *From Nobodies to Somebodies. The rise of the colonial bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (Zed Books, 2000), p. xxiii.

colonial council around 1929, and plantation manager Gustav Nordby had a seat from 1912 to 1918. Meanwhile judge C. G. Thiele sat in the council on St. Thomas from 1918-1926, as did bank director Axel Holst and doctor Knud Knud-Hansen from 1928-1932.⁴⁰³ Additionally, some Danish men maintained their influence and position, also in the Danish community, by being members of the church councils in one of the Lutheran churches on the islands.⁴⁰⁴

Furthermore, on St. Thomas, one-third of the directors in the Chamber of Commerce were Danes in 1931.⁴⁰⁵ Also, many of the Danes were members of the St. Thomas Businessmen's Association, or joined the country club, the deep sea fishing club, the tennis club or the Danish club on either St. Croix or St. Thomas.⁴⁰⁶ Some of these clubs were all-male associations where "no women or children shall be visitors" and with the purpose of "creating a place for gentlemen to gather".⁴⁰⁷ This way also the case for another gathering point for elite men, the Masonic lodge, and Danes had a significant place in the local Masonic lodge, the 'Harmonic Lodge no. 356'. In 1924, for example, almost one-third of 48 members were Danes. Among these were bank director Axel Thage, judge C. G. Thiele, policeman Christian Espersen, merchant J. Tanggard and West Indian Company employees Christian Ettrup, Einar Hansen, Svend Aage Mylner and Hans Nielsen. In addition the Master of the Lodge was Danish Municipal Doctor Knud Knud-Hansen, while the

⁴⁰³ Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix*, p. 1; Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 85, and *Letter from the Governor*, 15 October 1922, 54: Naturalization, citizenship, census, 1917, General Files, 1917-27, Office of the governor and the government secretary, Record Group 55 (National Archives, College Park).

⁴⁰⁴ Among others, Carl Lawaetz was a member of the Lutheran church council in Frederiksted: Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 32, and Axel Thage was in the church council in the Lutheran church on St. Thomas: *Minutes of the church and congregational meetings, 1907-1939 & 1908-1941*, Frederick Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Thomas (Caribbean Genealogy Library).

⁴⁰⁵ *Report of the 4th annual meeting*, St. Thomas Chamber of Commerce, 4 September 1931, General files 1927-1932, Office of the Governor and Governor Secretary, Record Group 55 (National Archives, College Park).

⁴⁰⁶ 39c: *Immigration, departures 1942-43*, General Files, 1934-1943, Office of the Governor and the Government Secretary, Record Group 55 (National Archives, College Park); Jennie Lawaetz, *Interview*, St. Croix, January 23 2013, and 75: *Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance*, 02053: A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (Danish Business Archives).

⁴⁰⁷ *By-laws of St. Thomas Deep Sea Fishing Club*, 75: *Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance*, 02053: A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (Danish Business Archives), and *St. Croix Club*, Tryksager, 5: Optegnelser m.v., 06236: O. Rübner-Petersen (Danish National Archives).

three only honorary members were all Danes who had now left the islands.⁴⁰⁸ This large presence of Danes was not unusual; as member Einar Hansen, put it in an interview for a Danish newspaper in 1971:

The number of Danish lodge brothers has thinned out, but even way into the 1940s, we could have our meetings in Danish.⁴⁰⁹

As in many of the other associations, this Masonic fraternisation, with a relatively strong Danish presence, helped the Danes and their lodge brothers extend and consolidate their power, shape a common identity and in general manoeuvre their careers.⁴¹⁰

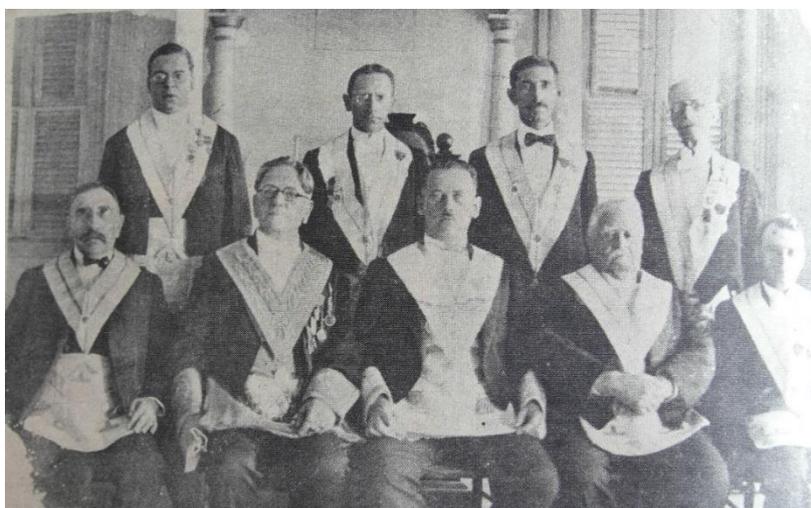


Figure 3.3: A caption of the “Members of the Masonic Lodge of Yesteryear” from a local newspaper in 1967. Dr. Knud Knud-Hansen and Axel Hansen are in the middle of the front row.⁴¹¹

The fact that the Danish men somehow stood out in Virgin Islands society, was also signalled by the existence of a common name for them. Danish men living on the islands were often referred to as ‘Dane-men’, a label incorporating two essential elements in their identities: their nationality and their gender. Hence, they were largely perceived in Virgin Islands community as men from Denmark, with

⁴⁰⁸ *Invitation to meeting in the Harmonic Lodge April 23, 1924*, Scrapbook of Mrs. Eckert, wife of the manager of the Naval Hospital, Private property of Ronnie Lockhardt. The occupations of some of the Danish members were found in the *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, 1930.

⁴⁰⁹ “Mylner, Nielsen og havnen”, *Berlingske Tidende*, 30 April 1971.

⁴¹⁰ Jessica Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of empire. Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1727-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 283-284.

⁴¹¹ “Virgin Islands, Golden Jubilee”, *The Daily News*, 3 April, 1967.

all that this encompassed of ideas and connotations about nationality, the colonial past, masculinity and race.⁴¹² Generally, the Island Danes both claimed and practised a common Danish identity, and they paralleled this with routinely differentiating themselves as White and elite, in opposition to their common other: The general local society. As we have seen, many Dane-men perceived themselves as ‘ambassadors of Danishness’, and most were successful in obtaining and maintaining central positions within businesses and associations. It had always been easier for a Dane to ascend socially on the islands, and this continued to be the case after the sale. Through their political involvements and social connections, the Danish men were active agents in their own positioning as elite members of Virgin Island Society. Many were, indeed, big ducks in a small pond.

Homely connections

Danish migrants came to identify themselves as white, but there was especially a relatively strong narrative of ‘White Danishness’ among the Danish men and their families. In many ways, this was a construction and reaffirmation of ‘home’ and belonging in a place so far from Denmark. Katrine Svensgaard, for example, explained this homely connection quite clearly in her interview:

Danes keep together as soon as they are outside of Denmark. There was no discussion.⁴¹³

She, then, continued to confirm that Danes primarily socialised with Danes, then with other Whites - but only with these two familiar groups - when saying: “whatever foreigners came, we of course met with them (...). But we did not really see the locals”.⁴¹⁴ Hakon Mielche also described how he had experienced extensive Danish socialising, when visiting the islands:

⁴¹² This label has survived and still exists in the common discourse on the islands when talk comes to the men who arrived from Denmark.

⁴¹³ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁴¹⁴ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

You cannot move very far without meeting a countryman. And WICO
(*West Indian Company ed.*) is their focus point.

This idea, and it was to some extent more an idea than an actual practise, of living a segregated life was widespread. In fact, I would argue that, what could be labelled a 'narrative of homeliness' among the Danish migrants upheld an idea and partial practise of distance between Danes and local society.

Underscoring such an assumption is the idea that the nation can be understood and felt as home, and that such a national sense of home is performed in banal practises. In other words, that social and cultural practices can be seen as 'homely connections' that mobilise a sense of belonging in a group of migrants.⁴¹⁵ This way, Alison Blunt and Robin Dowling argues, a "collective memory and identity" is produced and maintained.⁴¹⁶ In the words of Katie Walsh, in studying British expatriates in Dubai, 'home' to those living abroad "is a central concept through which belonging is grounded, understood and negotiated in everyday life."⁴¹⁷ In the case of Island Danes on St. Croix and St. Thomas, the narrative of homeliness was primarily created in the inter-socialisations between Danes, and in their practises of national or nationally framed customs and celebrations.

As we have seen, new Danish migrants were always welcomed by Island Danes, when arriving on one of the islands, and they often lived with other Danes for a shorter period - or took over their houses, furniture or servants. Their Whiteness played a crucial role in how they ended up socialising on the islands, but for most, their primary identification was through Danishness. For example, when asked if his parents, bank employee Theodor von Scholten and his wife, met with other Danes, Erik von Scholten replied:

⁴¹⁵ For more on the nation as home, which in material and imagined form is reproduced in everyday practice, see: Blunt & Dowling, *Home*, pp. 140-144, p. 212; A. Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 1, pp. 26-27 or Katie Walsh, *British Expatriate Belonging in Dubai: Foreignness, Domesticity, Intimacy* (Royal Holloway University, 2005).

⁴¹⁶ Blunt & Dowling, *Home*, p. 212.

⁴¹⁷ Walsh, *British Expatriate Belonging*, p. 249.

Yes, of course they did. They were a clan, after all.⁴¹⁸

On St. Croix there was even a Danish club, which most probably turned into the Country Club later on. Jennie Lawaetz remembers that her parents - bookkeeper at Bethlehem Sugar Factory, Frederik Christensen, and his local wife Lauretta - were members of this club:

Well, it [they] had the Danish club (...). Where the, eh, the planters and the Danes that were around, they used to go for different events.⁴¹⁹

This Danish Club was situated above the Danish West Indian Bank on Strand Street in Frederiksted, but this was not the only place Danes met.⁴²⁰ Jennie remembers how her parents had many Danish friends, “because most of the managers at the different estates were Danish”, and how they would come to her family’s house with their wives and children.⁴²¹ Interesting here, is that the mixed marriage between Jenny’s parents - as well as that of Frederik Christensen and his wife - did not seem to affect the understanding of them as Danish in the group. On St. Thomas, the Danish identification was also evident. A relatively everyday situation from 1944, when Katrine Svensgaard found bedbugs in her daughter’s bed, for example, illustrates this. Katrine was embarrassed at first - but as she tells us in her memoir - Mrs. Thiele, wife of Danish judge Thiele, comforted her, while Danish carpenter Nielsen collected the bed and mattress and fumigated them.⁴²² The same identification was the case for Erik von Scholten, who was born on St. Croix in 1929. He remembers knowing bank director Axel Thage and his family, when they lived in Christiansted on St. Croix, and visiting the pharmacist Bøje and his wife very often in their home, because “Mrs. Bøje was my Godmother”. This close relation to Gerda Bøje is also evident in the many photographs of Erik and her in his photo album (see for example figure 3.4). His photo album from St. Croix also reveals the family visiting Danish Oda and Viggo Wulff (figure 3.6), attending

⁴¹⁸ Scholten, *Interview*.

⁴¹⁹ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁴²⁰ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 45.

⁴²¹ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁴²² Svensgaard, *Interview*.

Danish Kirsten Esmann's birthday (figure 3.5), or socialising with the West Indian Company employee Svend Mylner's family.⁴²³ Likewise, when Erik's mother had returned to Denmark and became a pensioner, she even continued to visit her many friends on St. Croix every year – including the Danish Lawaetz family.⁴²⁴ It is noteworthy that Danish bonds were strong, but divided between St. Croix and St. Thomas in everyday life. However, even across islands, Danes would know other Danes and have dinner or stay with them if they visited another island.⁴²⁵

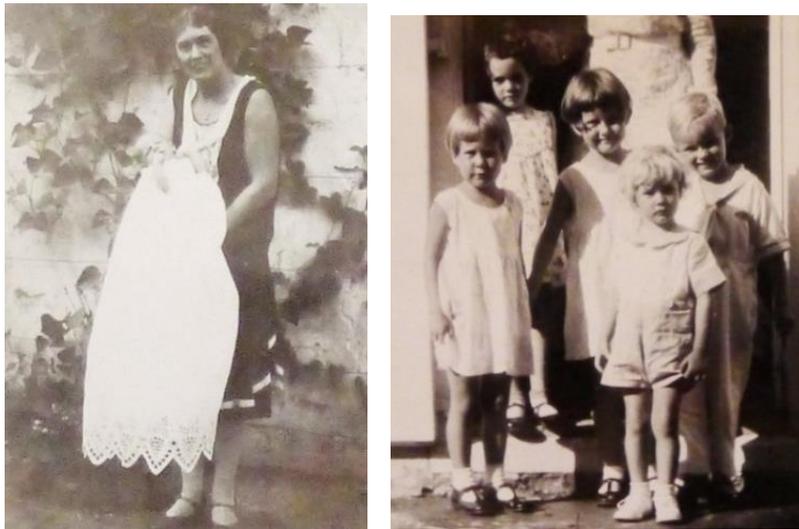


Figure 3.4 (left): Godmother Gerda Bøje with Erik von Scholten at his baptism in 1929. Figure 3.5 (right): Erik von Scholten (standing to the right) at Kirsten Esmann's birthday in April 1933 (Erik von Scholten's private photo album).

⁴²³ Erik von Scholten's private photo album, see photos below.

⁴²⁴ Scholten, *Interview*.

⁴²⁵ Katrine Svendsgaard, for example remembers that she was "shortly and only a few times on St. Croix", but when she went, she had dinner with the Danish Abels, Svendsgaard, *Interview*. When Elizabeth Bang, who grew up on St. Thomas, went to St. Croix after living in Denmark, she was taken care of by Bodil Lawaetz, Bang, *Interview*. Carl and Marie Lawaetz from St. Croix were friends with the Tornøes, who had moved to St. Thomas, they visited them there and even sent their children there on vacation, Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 59. When doctor Knud Knud-Hansen would travel to St. John from St. Thomas on home visits, he would have a cocktail and dinner with Danish Judge Zeilan and his family, Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 28-29.



Figure 3.6: Erik and his siblings visiting Oda and Viggo Wulff on 30 May, 1930, (Erik von Scholten's private photo album).

The Danish migrants also reproduced homely connections by speaking the Danish language with each other. English (and increasingly American), or its local versions St. Thomanian and Crucian, was generally spoken on the islands, and the Danes spoke this as the main language every day in several settings. However, when Danes met alone, the Danish language came into use, a practise which in its own way cemented a mutual, national connection.⁴²⁶

On the other hand, the Danish language was not always practised in its original form among the Danish migrants. Several English or local words appeared in their language, bearing witness of a socialisation into another linguistic and cultural world. In the Danish written sources, expressions such as "common sense", representations of what locals would say, local labels for the cook, the babysitter and the washing woman ("cooky", "nana" and "the washer") or social practises around food or drinks – for example having "pot luck" or a "cocktail party"- were

⁴²⁶ This is – among others – mentioned in for example the Svensgaard, *Interview* and in Marleen Boschulte *Interview*, St. Thomas, 4 February 2013.

widely applied.⁴²⁷ These linguistic complexities undeniably matter. Because language is not just communication; it is an integral part of culture and highly embedded in the identity of the speaker or writer. Language is a means of constructing realities, it materialises ideas, perceptions and worldviews, in other words, language is a constant (re)production of discourses.⁴²⁸ Thus, the linguistic mixing among Island Danes reflects the fact that the Danes spoke English daily. But, more importantly, it also reveals that Island culture was integrated into their social and linguistic practise, even when they were seemingly practising homeliness in all-Danish settings. This way, by speaking the Danish language with a touch of the Virgin Islands, the Island Danes practised a specific connection and identity – they were simultaneously different from others on the islands, but also from Danes *at home*.

Language connected the Island Danes, but so did religious traditions. We saw how Erik von Scholten's godmother was a Danish friend of the family, and this was not a single case in the Danish community on the islands. A glance at the church books of the Lutheran churches on St. Croix and St. Thomas reveals that Danes, who acted as godparents for each other's children was a common practise.⁴²⁹ Generally, many Danish children were baptised by Danish priests, who knew the families personally, and Danish friends stood as godparents. Again, the Svensgaard family serves as a good example. Peter Svensgaard was born in 1937 and baptised

⁴²⁷ As examples: In Danish, H. R. Norup writes: "but a white man with *common sense* will always have great opportunity to find decent employment in the tropics", H. R. Norup, *Apoteker på St. Thomas, 1920-1923* (Danish National Museum, 1955), p. 6. Tornøe explains how Danes would join for *potluck*, Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 32. Katrine Svensgaard remembers having a *cocktail party* for Kai's baptism, and she refers to the woman picking up the laundry as *the washer*, Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 3 and 6. In his Danish article, Povl Helweg-Larsen referred how locals would speak of his wife in the streets: "Look the Danish parson's wife, how lovely she is", sometimes adding, "and how fat she is", he also routinely referred to the family's cook as *cooky*, Povl Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem. Fra det gamle Dansk Vestindien", *Danske hjem ved århundredeskiftet*, ed. Poul Bagge (H. Hirschsprungs Forlag, 1949), p. 215, 218.

⁴²⁸ The idea of language as a practise of 'discourse' is based in Michel Foucault's notion of discourse, See for example: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge, 1969/2006) p. 131, 232, or Marianne Winther Jørgensen & Louise Phillips, *Diskursanalyse som teori og metode* (Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1999/2008) p. 14, 22-23.

⁴²⁹ *Parish registers, 1923-1941*, Frederick Lutheran Church, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, EBL014 (Caribbean Genealogy Library); 1792 – March 1974, Holy Trinity Church, Frederiksted, St. Croix, EBL035 (Caribbean Genealogy Library); and *Hovedministerial bog 1910-1924, Record 1925-1935 and Parish Record 1933-1945* (Lord God of Sabaoth Lutheran Church, Christiansted, St. Croix).

on Christmas Eve in the Frederick Lutheran Church in Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas by “old pastor J. Chr. Pedersen”:

After the service, the godparents joined us at home for a glass of champagne, and to sniff at our fir tree. They were all given a sprig of the tree to take home. We had gotten the tree from mom and dad. None of the others in the Danish colony had one that year, so it was something special.⁴³⁰

The homely connections are quite obvious in this case, with a combination of celebrating a Danish Christmas on Christmas Eve, going to Lutheran church, where a Danish priest baptised the child, and then bringing the Danish godparents home to smell the fir tree sent from Denmark. And when it came to the baptisms of the other Svensgaard children, the Danish identification was still evident. Peter’s younger brother Kai, was baptised in the same church at Easter in 1940 by another Danish priest, Pastor Petersen. According to Katrine Svensgaard “it was the last thing he did before he died. He so wanted to baptise him. Yes, he could only just manage to stand up, while he was baptising the boy”.⁴³¹ Moreover, their sister, Frida, who was born in 1944 was baptised in the same church, and her godfather was West Indian Company employee, Hein Christensen.⁴³²

Not only baptisms had this element of national identification in them. When Frits Lawaetz was confirmed in 1921, for example, his parents Marie and Carl held a luncheon for the Danish Nordby and Kofoed families and Danish deaconess Maren Knudsen. This was followed by an afternoon tea for the Danish Andreassen, Pedersen, Olsen and Jensen families and Danish Mr. Thornberg. As Frits’ biography states about the confirmation: “throughout the entire territory only about 400 people were left who spoke Danish and Carl and Marie surely knew all.”⁴³³

⁴³⁰ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 11.

⁴³¹ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁴³² Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁴³³ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 62.

The Danes found each other and grouped together for other traditional venues and celebrations as well. Generally, there was a Danish sermon on all Sundays, at least for first years after the transfer. The Lawaetz and Kofoed families on St. Croix always attended this, likewise Helene Berg and her family on St. Thomas went to the Danish service every week.⁴³⁴ Especially Christmas was important, and many a Dane went to the Danish sermon in one of the Lutheran churches for this occasion.⁴³⁵ Pastor Povl Helweg-Larsen remembered how the public Danish version of Christmas was celebrated on St. Croix:

When we had decorated the tree, we would sit still for half an hour, when from the church tower sounded Danish Christmas Carols played by a small gendarme orchestra. Then came the Danish service, which about half of the Danes attended.⁴³⁶

Moreover, on St. Thomas, Katrine Svensgaard remembers, all Danes were invited to a dinner with the Danish consul for Christmas Day.⁴³⁷ The Danes, “and some blacks”, were also invited to Denmark Hill for the Danish King’s Birthday, which was celebrated on the islands every year.⁴³⁸ Her memory of it being an event mostly for the Danes speaks volumes, as the celebration was in fact open to a far larger group. Which was also the case on St. Croix, where “prominent men, White and coloured, met in the Government House” for the King’s Birthday.⁴³⁹ It is noteworthy how the fact that some locals took part in this Danish celebration does not affect the narrative of homeliness ascribed to it by the Danes.

Less joyful national events also brought a sense of mutual identification, as well as emotions of longing or nostalgia. When Denmark was occupied by Germany during the Second World War, it became very hard to be so far away from home for some of the Danish migrants. Katrine Svensgaard, for example, felt left

⁴³⁴ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 48; Alexander, *Oldemor*.

⁴³⁵ See for example, Svensgaard, *Memoir* p. 11, and “Fra St. Croix. Gennem øen III”, *Aalborg Amtstidende*, 25. marts, 1931, p. 10.

⁴³⁶ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 222.

⁴³⁷ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 12.

⁴³⁸ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁴³⁹ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 221.

out of a community, she felt she had belonged to all along, when she returned to Denmark after the war:

People said: "You are lucky, there was no war where you were. You didn't have food stamps". "No", I then said, "because there was nothing to get, so you might as well not have food stamps."⁴⁴⁰

In fact, while living on St. Thomas, Katrine felt great grief that Denmark became occupied, and "the greatest grief", when others on the islands did not consider Denmark allies, because they did not understand "how small a country Denmark was, and how easily Germany's war machine could drive from the border up to Skagen".⁴⁴¹ Through grief and long-distance compassion, Island Danes, such as Katrine Svensgaard, experienced such a nostalgia as a longing for home. Even though she had not experienced the occupation physically, when Denmark was liberated on May 5th 1945, Katrine was as excited as Danes in Denmark:

When I had heard about the liberation, I ran down to Power Station, ran through the workshops to find Einar, while I was continuously yelling "Denmark is free".⁴⁴²

Conversely, Katrine was not alone in celebrating the Danish liberation on the islands. Once again the Lutheran church was the common arena for Danes practicing homely connections. The day after the liberation, Danes got together for a Danish service in the Lutheran church and shared their collective relief:

In my inner ear I can still hear the organ roar and everyone singing: The Kings' King! Alone, you can guard our beloved fatherland.

Despite national mourning over President Roosevelt's death –all public buildings flagged at half mast - we were that day allowed to hoist Dannebrog on Denmark Hill, where the Danish consul Jensen lived, and at the headquarters at the harbour. It was a solemn day, when we stood there and watched Dannebrog against a blue sky."⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁴⁴¹ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 6.

⁴⁴² Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 12.

⁴⁴³ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 12.

The national home was indeed important to Katrine, as she stood there on St. Thomas in 1945, far away from Denmark. And this was not the only time, when Denmark as a homeland played a role for the Danes 'out there'. Certainly, when it came to general socialising as well as the feeling around specific Danish celebrations, Danish migrants connected and reproduced a national and collective sense of home - or a narrative of homeliness - through their social, cultural and emotional practises.

Practising Island Danishness

The Danish Caribbean home was also a "distinctive site reflecting 'double belonging' and a 'plural identity'".⁴⁴⁴ Here, Danish migrants were daily adjusting to island life, but they were also constantly making efforts to reproduce a Danishness through their homemaking practises. In their island homes, Danes did not have as much to attach their Danishness to. Elia Petridou has studied "the process of self-creation through interaction with objects associated with home", specifically how Greek migrants have used food as a material for "the evocation of home".⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, in speaking of a "world of home", she argues that "food serve as a vehicle for the recreation of this world" for migrants.⁴⁴⁶ For the Danes on the islands, the production and consumption of food was also one of the main ways in which they tried to create a little piece of Denmark. For example, something as essential to Danish cooking as butter was hard to come by on the islands - but Gotfred Larsen made sure that Danes would not be in vain. He set up a dairy store and ordered the ingredients for the cheese and butter from Denmark.⁴⁴⁷ The same went for bread and pastry. On St. Croix, for example, a Danish baker opened a

⁴⁴⁴ Ruba Salih, "Shifting meanings of "home": Consumption and identity in Moroccan women's transnational practices between Italy and Morocco", in N. Al-Ali and K. Koser *Transnationalism, International Migration and Home, in New Approaches to migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home* (Routledge, 2002), p. 56.

⁴⁴⁵ Elia Petridou, "The Taste of Home", *Home Possessions. Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*, ed. Daniel Miller (Berg Publishers, 2001), p. 88.

⁴⁴⁶ Petridou, "The Taste of Home", p. 89.

⁴⁴⁷ Thurland, *Jens Larsen*, p. 9; Karen C. Thurland, *The Neighborhoods of Christiansted* (Authorhouse, 2009), p. 77-78.

bakery producing and selling these, “which became a great success”.⁴⁴⁸ Also Danish beer was sold on the islands.⁴⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Katrine Svensgaard remembers how it was difficult to make Danish food on the islands, since it was difficult to find potatoes, butter or many vegetables. However, she noted, they did strive for cooking the Danish food:

We tried as far as possible for it to be the Danish. But you cannot make pork roast out there (...). You could make something stewed or roast it in the pan or so (...) But you learned to find your own ways.⁴⁵⁰

In fact, the difficulties of being able to cook Danish food, is a large part of her memory and narrative of life on St. Thomas. Her memoir contains a long description of the butcher shop with its “smell and dirt”, which she had been warned about, and about how the pork meat was “not very good” and “completely without fat”. Instead, she tried to buy turtle meat, or the servants bought fresh fish at the harbour. She also describes how they had to shift to powdered milk, because the milk they could buy at the butcher had insects in it.⁴⁵¹ Katrine Svensgaard’s great focus on buying and consuming food, her striving for Danish food-making, and eventually her adjustment to local commodities and standards, reflects how food was an essential part of home-making, and how the making out food, reflects “the mixing and reworking of traditions and cultures.”⁴⁵² For Danes on the islands, cooking Danish was an ideal, but eating for example fresh fish, rice and all sorts of local fruits, such as bell-apples, pineapple and mango, became a central part of Danish islands consumption.⁴⁵³ Noteworthy is though, that the Danish children, as was the case in many other instances, were less bound to their parents’ notions of Danishness and food. H. Taylor, for example, remembers how he and his siblings

⁴⁴⁸ Travel description from Danish gendarme (name unreadable), delivered to The Danish West Indian Association in 1967, Kulturhistorisk Arkiv, Dansk Vestindisk Samfund (Danish National Archives), p. 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Travel description from Danish gendarme (name unreadable), delivered to The Danish West Indian Association in 1967, Kulturhistorisk Arkiv, Dansk Vestindisk Samfund (Danish National Archives), p. 6.

⁴⁵⁰ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁴⁵¹ Svensgaard, *Memoir*.

⁴⁵² Blunt & Dowling, *Home*, p. 216.

⁴⁵³ This use of local produces is mentioned by for example Jennie Lawaetz and Katrine Svensgaard in their interviews and Povl Helweg-Larsen in his article “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”.

had to eat the local dishes they loved - such as “kallelu funchi with fried fish, very strongly seasoned” - in the kitchen because his father did not like it.⁴⁵⁴

Also rum and other spirits became part of Island Danish consumption culture. A Danish gendarme, for instance, remembered how the drinking water “had a lazy taste”, and that “coffee, tea or lemonade is not very thirst-quenching, why some used to prime the water with rum in an increasingly stronger mix”.⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, the Caribbean cocktail entered Island Danish culture. Povl Helweg-Larsen, for example, remembers how the cocktail was something special on the islands:

It is undeniable that nothing tastes like a cocktail - what in Denmark goes by the same name is only a caricature of what it was out there. It was a standing drink, when people met.⁴⁵⁶

Generally, there was a “cocktail culture” among the Danes, who took on the drinking of cocktails as a social event to a great extent.⁴⁵⁷ They met for afternoon cocktails, went to cocktail parties or invited for cocktails at different celebrations. Bank director G. Tornøe, for example, describes how this could go about:

After riding and bathing trips, we would gather in one of the homes for a refreshing cocktail.⁴⁵⁸

And Erik Schäffer adds to Tornøes story with his memory of such a cocktail culture among Danes:

Then you would gather for dinner in someone’s home, and it was without exception that we started with a cocktail. Here the cocktail belongs, because the thirst tore and bit. (...) the host would personally prepare it for lunch, often from gin, angostura, sugar and water, and in the cities, where there were ice factories, always ice.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁴ Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix*, p. 5. See more about childhoods on the islands in Chapter 5.

⁴⁵⁵ Travel description from Danish gendarme (name unreadable), delivered to The Danish West Indian Association in 1967, Kulturhistorisk Arkiv, Dansk Vestindisk Samfund (Danish National Archives), p. 6.

⁴⁵⁶ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 220.

⁴⁵⁷ The citation is from Schäffer, *Dansk embedsmand*, p. 53-54.

⁴⁵⁸ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 32.

⁴⁵⁹ Schäffer, *Dansk embedsmand*, p. 53-54.

Likewise, when on his visits to Judge Thiele's house on St. John, doctor Knud Knud-Hansen was always served a cocktail, while Katrine Svensgaard remembered that the family had a cocktail party for Kai's birthday, and for his baptism they "of course finished with a cocktail party"⁴⁶⁰

However, when it came to emphasising Danishness through food and beverage, company director Hjalmar Bang went all the way to make sure he could create a Danish home. For his wife, Bertha, who was born on St. Thomas to British parents, marrying a Dane also meant assimilation into Danishness. Around 1924 Bertha met Hjalmar Bang, who was not yet company director, and she had to transform her life because of it. After their engagement, Hjalmar took her to Denmark to meet his family, and when his leave was over he returned to St. Thomas, and left her in Denmark for 6 months.⁴⁶¹ Here he hired a lady too teach Bertha the Danish language as well as how to cook Danish food from the traditional Danish cooking book "Frøken Suhrs Kogebog". In our interview, Elizabeth commented on the gender-specific and generational character of this arrangement:

Now no young lady would do that today, you know. People would think you're nuts. My father tried to do it with me (...), but it didn't work. In my mother's generation, you know, women were seen not heard.⁴⁶²

In the end, as Elizabeth recognised, the 'training camp' in Denmark turned out to be an essential preparation for Bertha's new life as wife of the company director and general consul:

(...) he was very wise, because he became the Danish consul, he had to entertain, and Mother would have felt like a fish out of water if she hadn't learned Danish.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 28; Katrine Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 6, 12.

⁴⁶¹ Bang, *Memoir*.

⁴⁶² Bang, *Interview*.

⁴⁶³ Bang, *Interview*.

However, Bertha did not just learn Danish language and cooking; she, who had grown up with the St. Thomanians, and who used to dance to calypso, had to give up her friends and stop dancing to the local music. Being a Danish housewife was a full package and a complete role: Her private interests and friends, her every practise, was now subjected to her bourgeois Danish image. Elizabeth expressed it in her memoir: her mother had become “another fricadelle-cooking Danish wife”.⁴⁶⁴ As we can see in figure 3.7 below, Bertha Bang would maintain this image of Danish housewife – now with a twist of prestigious internationalism – in the 1960s, when she lived in Denmark and shared her recipes from the islands (among others) in a Danish newspaper.



Figure 3.7: Mrs. General Consul Bang sharing her recipes from the Virgin Islands, among others, in a Danish magazine in the 1960s. Collection of the Danish West Indian Society.⁴⁶⁵

Just as Bertha Bang had to learn Danish to become a real Danish wife, language played a role in maintaining a public Danishness. As we have seen, Danish was spoken in all-Danish settings across the islands. However, this role was surprisingly absent in everyday practise in the homes. Most Danish couples would, between the two of them, speak their mother tongue in the home, but Danish children spoke Virgin Island American. Thus, even in their private homes all-Danish families would converse in a ‘foreign’ language. This goes to show how

⁴⁶⁴ Bang, *Memoir*.

⁴⁶⁵ Living in Gentofte, the “consul’s wife” Bertha Bang shared her recipes from the “Danish West Indies” among others in the article “Opskrifter fra Dansk Vestindien, USA, Italien og Sverige” from around 1965. The origin of the article is unknown, Property of The Danish West Indian Society.

small a role the Danish language played in everyday life of the White elite - and, as we will see, it also reflects the fact that homes were not all that private.⁴⁶⁶

An event in the Danish homes, where language as well as food and cultural practises were joined and linked to homeliness - and sometimes homesickness - was Christmas. Virgin Islands Christmas was both foreign and homely, and it was indeed an arena, where Danishness and connections to the homeland were produced. For this special celebration, Danes often received objects from Denmark to enable a traditional Danish Christmas. Povl Helweg-Larsen, for example, remembered how "the preparations were partly as in Denmark, only the excitement of the packages and boxes, which arrived from Denmark, was even bigger".⁴⁶⁷ For the Helweg-Larsen family's first Christmas on St. Croix, a Danish visiting friend had even brought along a Christmas tree. After that, though, the family tried to recreate a fir tree from "a mountain laurel tree which is vaguely reminiscent of the fir tree."⁴⁶⁸ The tree was also an important instrument in the ritual for Katrine Svensgaard and her husband. For their first Christmas on St. Thomas, Katrine's parents had sent them a fir tree, while they later years either imported one from Canada or made one out of "a bush with the very telling name "catch and keep". The "tree" looked nice, when it was cut into shape, and we had put Christmas decorations and candles on it."⁴⁶⁹ Her parents had also sent them the Christmas decorations, candles and Danish flags, which they reused every year.⁴⁷⁰ In the Lawaetz family traditional Danish Christmas items such as the tree and the Danish flags were also part of the tradition:

The family had a small inkberry tree set up by the dining room. It was decorated with little Danish flags, cornucopias of sweets and tiny thin candles.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁶ See more about this in Chapter 5.

⁴⁶⁷ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 221-222.

⁴⁶⁸ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 221-222.

⁴⁶⁹ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 11-12.

⁴⁷⁰ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 11-12.

⁴⁷¹ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 36.

The preparation of traditional Danish Christmas food was also an important part. Katrine Svensgaard, for instance, remembers having the traditional dishes, roast duck and rice pudding for Christmas.⁴⁷² However, the multi-placedness of the Island Danes was manifested in the fact that Christmas food, just as everyday food, became a mixed meal. This was clear in Povl Helweg-Larsen's description of island Christmas:

Among the traditional gifts were a Christmas pig, which on Christmas day was put on the table roasted with a lemon in the mouth, and palm cabbage, a special delicacy (...) - it came from administrator Schmigelow at the Plantation Company.

Sunday before Christmas some good friends came and helped us make Christmas finery, and we made marzipan and liver pate. Then dinner with turkey and Christmas pie - West Indian geese were such that you only tried once."⁴⁷³

In island homes, Christmas was both the most homely event of the year, as well as a reminder of how different everything was on the islands. Thus, it marked both homely connections and "a homesickness for people and places and ways of life."⁴⁷⁴ Povl Helweg-Larsen expressed this doubleness:

Christmas was also the great party of the year out there, simultaneously homely and very foreign.⁴⁷⁵

It had contained many elements of home, but contrary to the cold wintery Denmark "the sun was shining, it was the usual 28-30 degrees, and even on Christmas Eve the shops were open."⁴⁷⁶ In Danish homes, other Danes in need of a homely Christmas often participated in the Christmas Dinner. H. Taylor, for example, remembers how "many young countrymen spend Christmas at our place",⁴⁷⁷ while the Svensgaard family had three homesick American soldiers with Danish parents

⁴⁷² Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 11-12.

⁴⁷³ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 222.

⁴⁷⁴ John Hammerton & Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms. Australia's invisible migrants* (Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 188.

⁴⁷⁵ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 221.

⁴⁷⁶ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁷ H. Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix*.

over for Christmas dinner during the Second World War.⁴⁷⁸ But the guests were not alone in desire for Denmark on Christmas. After the first Christmas on St. Thomas, Katrine Svensgaard felt the longing as well:

When the guests had left I cried of homesickness.⁴⁷⁹

Danish migrants practiced Danishness the best they could in their homes, especially for traditional events. But sometimes, celebrating a traditional, Danish Christmas in the tropical heat, could serve as a reminder of how great the distance to the national home actually was.

Framing, mimicking, posing

Danishness was not the only notion connecting the Danish migrants on the islands, and it was definitely not alone in shaping their identification. In chapter 1, I have argued that Danes in debates and literature *at home* were framing the islands within a broader tropical and imperial narrative. I contended that a European heroic discourse of discovery and mastery - as well as an image of the White coloniser descending from Henry Morton Stanley's travels - were widespread in Denmark. My argument is that Danes, especially Island Danes and returnees, through debates about development of the islands, and through specifically female colonial literature, resounded broader imperial ideas at the time. This is in line with Pratt's contention that travel books were "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".⁴⁸⁰ Actual practise on the islands was of course more complex. However, it is clear that the specific Danish imagining and practise of the islands was also to a large degree influenced by broader European

⁴⁷⁸ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁹ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 11.

⁴⁸⁰ Pratt, *Imperial eyes*, p. 3.

ideas of imperialism. In practise, Danes embodied the idea of tropical Whiteness in several ways.

I am here interested in here are crossings with, and connections to, broader imperial tropes in the framings and posings of the Danish migrants. I explore this specifically in their photographs from the islands, to see how the Danes reproduced colonial images and mimicked colonial practices.

Arjun Appadurai has argued that photographs display both a set of visible and invisible backdrops. The visible ones, he explains, are what is “actually represented in the photograph”, while the invisible backdrops are “the discourses and images that inform the eye of the photographer”.⁴⁸¹ In the case of Danish photographs from the islands, it is apparent how the Danish dress stands out as a central visible marker, making a significant connection to a broader imperial trope. I argue here that clothing is, in the words of Laura Fair, “one of the most important and visually immediate markers of class, status and ethnicity”, and it therefore becomes vital for understanding position and self-image of Danish migrants on the islands.⁴⁸² In colonial settings specifically, Helen Callaway has argued that Europeans - in this case Britons - dressed more formally in the colonies to mark racial and social hierarchies.⁴⁸³ This could also be said for the Danish migrants on the islands. In many photographs, the Danes are wearing “white, stiffened clothes”, long white dresses for the women and white suits for the men.⁴⁸⁴ While darker colours dominated middle class as well as bourgeois dress in Denmark, Island Danes were widely dressed in white – especially for social gatherings (see figures 3.8-3-10) .⁴⁸⁵ This, I argue, reflected notions of “imperial tropical medicine and

⁴⁸¹ Arjun Appadurai, “The Colonial Backdrop”, *Afterimage*, vol. 24, no. 5 (1997), p. 9.

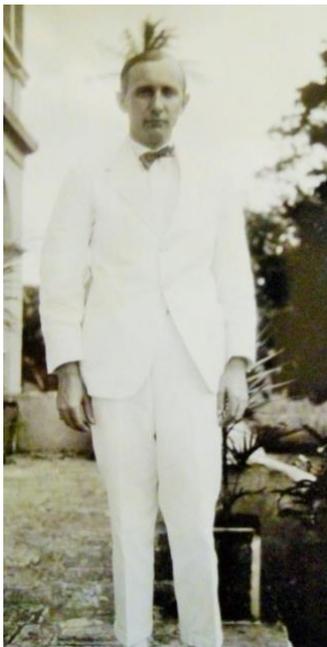
⁴⁸² Laura Fair, “Dressing up: Clothing, class and gender in post-abolition Zanzibar”, *Journal of African History*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1998), p. 63.

⁴⁸³ Helen Callaway, “Dressing for dinner in the bush: rituals of self-definition and British imperial authority”, *Dress and Gender: Making Meaning of Cultural Contexts*, eds. Ruth Barnes & Joanne B. Eicher (Berg, 1992), pp. 243-244.

⁴⁸⁴ The “white population” wearing “white stiffened clothes” is for example mentioned in Schäffer, *Dansk embedsmand*, p. 53.

⁴⁸⁵ [http://www.denstoredanske.dk/Livsstil_sport_og_fritid/Bekl%C3%A6dning_og_stil/Mode/kl%C3%A6dedragt/kl%C3%A6dedragt_\(1800-t._og_moderne_tid\)](http://www.denstoredanske.dk/Livsstil_sport_og_fritid/Bekl%C3%A6dning_og_stil/Mode/kl%C3%A6dedragt/kl%C3%A6dedragt_(1800-t._og_moderne_tid))

racialised ideas of health and hygiene” in tropical colonies.⁴⁸⁶ In other words, white clothing was a shield against the tropical sun itself, as well as against the moral contamination of the tropics – and it marked the White privilege. What you wore, was a representation of your status, in the words of Catherine Cocks “Whites wore white in the tropics in a defensive doubling of their pale-skinned privilege”.⁴⁸⁷ This way, wearing white dresses and suits separated the Island Danes from homeland Danes and gave them a specific tropical, or colonial look. But not only this - even though locals would also wear white for celebrations, going to church or in the White homes, the very formal white dress of the Danes also set them apart from local society in general. It was indeed a marker of status, and it “helped articulate a distinctive colonial identity”.⁴⁸⁸



Photographs also depict the practise of wearing white. Figure 3.8 (left) shows bank employee Theodor von Scholten wearing his white dress in his garden, St. Croix, around 1930. (Erik von Scholten’s private photo album). Figure 3.9 (Right): Carl and Marie Lawaetz with their children and Marie’s sister, all dressed in white, St. Croix. Early 1900s. Marie Lawaetz’ photo album (Lawaetz Museum).

⁴⁸⁶ Ryan Johnson, “European cloth and “tropical” skin. Clothing Material and British Ideas of Health and Hygiene in Tropical Climates”, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 83, no.3 (2009), p. 530.

⁴⁸⁷ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 97. Citation from p. 1.

⁴⁸⁸ Johnson, “European cloth and “tropical” skin”, p. 530.

In figure 3.10 below, Danes are gathered at the occasion of the arrival of the ship “Danmark” on St. Thomas around 1930. The sailors are wearing their uniforms, while Island Danes are dressed in white formal wear. Even more noteworthy, however, is how some of the men are dressed. In photographs, Danish men often wore a tropical hat, resembling a pith helmet, or a full ‘tropical uniform’ consisting of a white stiffened shirt, a cane and version of the pith helmet.

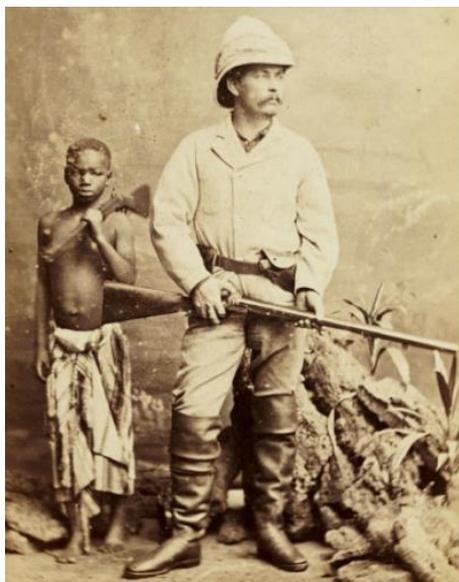


Figure 3.10: Excursion at the arrival of trainee ship *Danmark's*, St. Thomas around 1930. (Danish West Indian Society).

As was the case for Britons at the time, tropical clothing was “modelled after the colonial soldier and explorer (...) reinforcing the identity of British men as masculine adventurers and explorers”.⁴⁸⁹ However, to fully understand the connections expressed in the tropical uniform, we must take a closer look at the tropical hat, or the pith helmet. The pith helmet was first made in India and worn by Indian soldiers in the 1850s. It was then brought to England by British colonials, copied and used by Britons, as well as French, Dutch and many other Europeans,

⁴⁸⁹ Johnson, “European cloth and “tropical” skin” p. 557-558.

in tropical climates. In the Nineteenth century colonization of Africa, for example, most European troops were wearing the pith helmet. In fact, the helmet became so popular that it was worn by everything from colonial officials to explorers and missionaries. In the words of Beverly Chico, “the pith helmet came to visually epitomize the Nineteenth century age of imperialism in world history”.⁴⁹⁰ Thus, although its purpose was initially to protect from strong sunlight, it soon became connected strongly to White mastery of the tropics. Indeed, probably the most famous man to wear this hat - and to contribute to it becoming such strong symbol of imperial expansion and exploration - was Henry Morton Stanley. As can be seen in figure 3.11, he wore it on his travels in the Congo. The helmet was not for women, in fact, European women generally wore clothes that resembled what they would wear at home, except for the difference in fabric. This, Alison Blunt argues, was because women were supposed to represent and create home in the colonies.⁴⁹¹ Likewise, on the islands, even though Danish women and children seemed to be coping fine without tropical hats or uniforms in the heat, Danish men took on the symbol of the masculine, colonial adventurer at least in photographs (see figures 3.12-3.15).



Photographs from the period display the trend of dressing up in ‘tropical uniform’, which was inspired by tropical dress of the likes of Henry Morton Stanley’s in Nineteenth Century. Figure 3.11 (left): Henry Morton Stanley in his tropical gear. Historic Royal Palaces, UK.

⁴⁹⁰ Beverly Chico, *Hats and Headgear around the World: A Cultural Encyclopaedia* (ABC-CLIO, 2013), p. 380.

⁴⁹¹ Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (Guildford Press, 1994), p. 68.



Figure 3.12 (right): Planter Carl Lawaetz posing in his tropical uniform, with his two daughters. Marie Lawaetz' private photo album. Around 1916. (Lawaetz Museum).



Figure 3.13: Dressing for the tropics. Plantation manager Gustav Nordby wearing a tropical hat in front of his house, Estate Bonne Esperance, around 1916. (Danish National Archives).⁴⁹²



Figure 3.14: The tropical uniform was common in photographs way into the 1930s. Here Bank director Axel Thage (middle) and his brother Svend are posing in tropical uniforms with their brother and Axel's wife and children, St. Thomas 1933. (Property of Elisabeth Thage).

⁴⁹² *Fotografier of postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-1962*, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

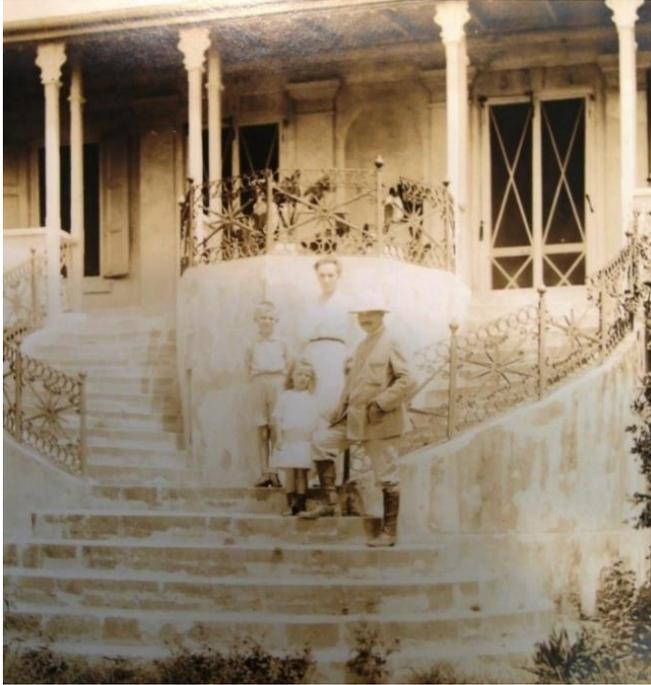


Figure 3.15: E. Gedde in tropical uniform – notice how the high boots match Stanley’s as well - with his family in front of their mansion, St. Croix around 1916. (Danish National Archives).⁴⁹³

Not only did the Danish migrants connect to imperial imagining when wearing their tropical uniforms. As we can see in figure 3.15, they also staged pictures, where the family would pose in front of their large house. Having mansion-like houses as backdrops suggested high class or, as Elizabeth Buettner calls it “high rank”.⁴⁹⁴ The mansion photo was very common among Island Danes, and often, they included servants as well. If this was the case, servants were most often placed at a distance from the family, or literally below the master of the house. This way the asymmetrical power relation between the two was quite clearly expressed through their positioning. The servants, then, served as backdrops in the family photographs, underscoring a tale of mastery. But their presence and position also constituted an invisible backdrop, conveying the story of a broader discourse behind the photographic setting.

The photographs, I argue, framed a (post)colonial difference – or distance - between Danes and their servants.⁴⁹⁵ This is in line with Appadurai’s study of

⁴⁹³ *Fotografier of postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-1962*, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

⁴⁹⁴ Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 11.

⁴⁹⁵ In the lines of Chatterjee’s “Colonial difference”, Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

colonial photographic practises in which he states that it is “easy to read the language of social hierarchy in the visual composition of the photograph”.⁴⁹⁶ The pictures below are examples of this. In figure 3.16, R. Thrige was posed on his porch with a servant and a horse below him and at a distance. Meanwhile, plantation manager Goldbeck had literally placed himself standing above his servants sitting on the steps of his house in figure 3.17. This way of posing with servants, which offered testimony to such a social hierarchy, was a recurring theme in Danish photographs.



Figure 3.16: R. Thrige displaying his status in front of his house. Below him, and at a distance, is a servant with Thrige's horse. (Danish National Archives).⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Appadurai, "The colonial backdrop", p. 5.

⁴⁹⁷ *Fotografier of postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-1962*, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).



Figure 3.17: Exposing difference: Plantation manager Goldbeck, stating the social hierarchy with his servants literally beneath him, on the steps of his house at Estate Jealousy, St. Croix around 1917, (Danish National Archives).⁴⁹⁸

This distance was also expressed in an ‘ethnographication’, of the locals in narratives as well as photographs. As we have seen, a great deal of effort was put into characterising the locals in an ethnographical manner in the Danish debates around the turn of the century.⁴⁹⁹ This was also the case, when Danish migrants sent letters home, wrote articles in Danish magazines and newspapers or wrote memoirs, about their island lives. Such ethnographical descriptions of the locals, conveyed to the Danish public, as well as privately to Danish families and friends, had elements in common with tourist practises and travel writing. As Derek Gregory and James Duncan argue, travel writing is a translation of “one place into another”, and in the course of such a translation, the descriptions of people or a place circulate in what they call a “space-in-between”.⁵⁰⁰ This space of translation, they state, “is not a neutral surface and it is never innocent: It is shot through with relations of power and desire”.⁵⁰¹

Moreover, in line with Gregory and Duncan’s reading of the travel writing practise, sociologist John Urry has delivered the concept of the tourist gaze, as an

⁴⁹⁸ *Fotografier of postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-1962*, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

⁴⁹⁹ See Chapter 1.

⁵⁰⁰ Derek Gregory & James Duncan, “Introduction”, *Writes of Travel* (Routledge, 1999), p. 4.

⁵⁰¹ Gregory & Duncan, “Introduction”, p. 5.

expansion of Foucault's 'panopticism', to explain how the tourist through his (powerful) gaze objectifies – and often exoticises – the local.⁵⁰² Urry's concept can be, and has been, criticised for not taking the dual nature of such an encounter into consideration, but the essence of an objectifying gaze remains useful. The idea of the gaze helps us see, how Danish migrants were translating the distant islands to Denmark, and how they in doing so were inevitably subjectifying the locals.

The written sources contain several ethnographical representations of local nature and local people. H. Taylor, for instance, presented a common notion in the narratives of how "the Negroes were superficial".⁵⁰³ Moreover, in bank director G. Tornøe's memoir from 1955, he for example painted a characterising image of local life and drew lines to an exotic Africa:

The Negro parties, which we sometimes observed, consisted mostly of dancing, as you can imagine it in the jungle in Africa.⁵⁰⁴

Likewise, a travel description from a Danish gendarme displayed a connection to literary language and the exotifying, *Africanistic*⁵⁰⁵ tendencies:

In a house by the road "bambula" – Negro ball – was held. The strange monotone bright drums and rattling calabashes in the silent moonlit night gave one an impression of life in the black homeland, "the mystical Africa".⁵⁰⁶

For the Danish migrants, there was indeed a practise of a spatial translation, but in the cases of returnees writing articles or memoirs, it was also simultaneously a temporal translation. They were, in fact, categorising a distant

⁵⁰² John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London, Sage Publications, 1990). Foucault's idea of a "panopticism" was a metaphor for explaining how hierarchical structures discipline by observing and normalising. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage series 1977/1995) pp. 195-210.

⁵⁰³ H. Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix* (Danish National Museum, 1955), p. 5.

⁵⁰⁴ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 37.

⁵⁰⁵ See Pernille Østergaard Hansen, "Fjernt fra Danmark. En praktisk-afrikanistisk analyse af danske FN-udsendtes fortælling om – og praktisering af – Congo, 1960-64" (Master's Thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2010).

⁵⁰⁶ *Travel description from 1912-1917*, author name unreadable, delivered to the Danish West Indian Association in 1967, Kulturhistorisk Arkiv, Dansk Vestindisk Samfund (Danish National Archives).

place in a distant time. Knud Knud-Hansen, for example, explained how a past St. Croix looked, when he first arrived:

St. Croix looked poor with numerous ruins of former splendid plantations. The roads were bad, many of the Negroes were in rags and bare-footed.⁵⁰⁷

Writing an article about his life on St. Croix around 30 years after his return, Povl Helweg-Larsen also displayed a past St. Croix, but maintained a fixed image of the local character. Referring to how “we all know that the Negroes are children”, Povl Helweg-Larsen, explained to a Danish audience in 1949, how “a main characteristic of them is their self-esteem. They will not humiliate themselves for a White, not even for money, and they despise the Whites who do it.”⁵⁰⁸

In the private photographs of the Danes, however, these power structures became particularly clear. In Danish photo albums, there are several images of local settings or local people, being referred to with a definite noun, thus expressing a framing of them as types rather than specific places or people. Appadurai has explored such practices in colonial photo albums. He argues that the colonial images often “effectively ‘typicalize’ the subject”.⁵⁰⁹ This by “ethnographical contextualization of “natives””, where the point of view is “decidedly classificatory, taxonomic, penal and somatic”.⁵¹⁰ Moreover, Ann Laura Stoler has also noticed these “familiar colonial stories of racial hierarchy” in photographs. She investigates how family photographs often tell these stories by displaying the “ease of colonial life made possible by servants who labor off stage”, or by leaving servants unremarked in captions.⁵¹¹ In figures 3.18-3.21 below, we can observe how Danish migrants also framed locals as subjects by displaying the lightness of tropical life made possible by servants, as is the case of Mr. and Mrs. Bay (figure 3.18), by leaving locals out of captions or typicalising them as for example “negro

⁵⁰⁷ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 18.

⁵⁰⁸ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk vestindisk hjem”, p. 226.

⁵⁰⁹ Appadurai, “The colonial backdrop”, p. 2.

⁵¹⁰ Appadurai, “The colonial backdrop”, p. 2.

⁵¹¹ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, p. 188.

child”(figure 3.19 and 3.20) – or by expressing ‘ethnografication’ through photography (figure 3.22).



Figure 3.18: Displaying the lightness of tropical life, made possible by servants: Mr. and Mrs. Bay relaxing in their home, with their maid Mary featuring at a distance. Around 1917 (Danish National Museum).⁵¹²



Figure 3.19: Telling familiar colonial stories about racial hierarchy: In this photograph of a Danish child and her ‘nana’, the carer – although very central in the photograph – is left out of the caption. She is literally put in the background as unimportant scenery. The caption is: “A child of the Lachmann family”. Around 1917 (Danish National Museum).⁵¹³

⁵¹² *Dansk Vestindien*, A.1-I.4.i, Nyere tids samling (Danish National Museum).

⁵¹³ *Dansk Vestindien*, A.1-I.4.i, Nyere tids samling (Danish National Museum).

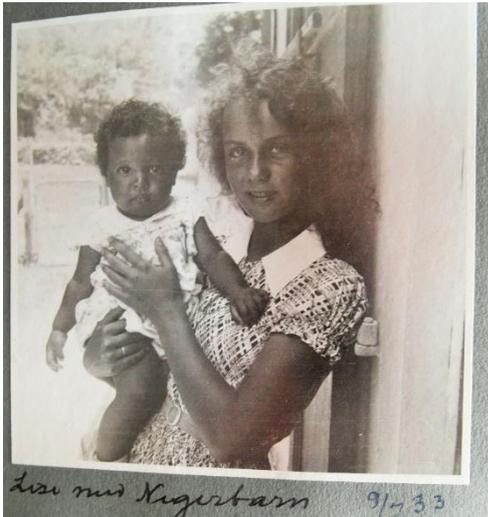


Figure 3.20: 'Typicalising' the subject: In the Thage family album, the caption of this photograph is: "Lise with Negro child". 1933. (Private property of Elisabeth Thage).



Figure 3.21: Ethnographical contextualisation: For this photograph of a group of local islanders - clearly posing for the camera - the caption is merely: "Negro houses", St. Croix, Carl Emil Zwergius' album (Danish National Museum).⁵¹⁴

In taking on colonial symbols and reproducing colonial difference, then, the Danes were mimicking an imperial past on the islands – as well as a contemporary European imperial idea. Homi Bhabha introduced the idea of mimicry in a colonial setting. Mimicking, in Bhabha's conceptual world is to be understood as an unconscious practice of the colonised, a mimicking of meanings or identities produced by the colonial discourse.⁵¹⁵ What we see in the case of the Island Danes, however, is instead Danes mimicking European colonisers. Even though most of these Danes were not former colonials, their practises mirrored those of their fellow White colonial contemporaries in for example British Ceylon, Dutch Indonesia and

⁵¹⁴ *Fotografier of postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-62, 10609*: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

⁵¹⁵ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* (Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 149.

British India.⁵¹⁶ In other words, Danes were dressing up as colonials and posing as colonials - and through their framings and posings, they were reproducing a colonial distance on the islands. Hereby, they were embodying a notion of 'Whiteness in the tropics', which had been produced in European, colonial settings and brought to them through the immediate colonial past, colonial imaging and the international White community on the islands.⁵¹⁷

Concluding remarks

Arriving on the islands, the Danes entered into a multicultural community, which was characterised by especially racial, but also national ideas. Whiteness played a crucial role in the positioning of the Danes in island society, since the colonial legacy meant that being White carried an inherent social coding of privilege. This also meant that Danes often experienced a class-move, when they came to the islands - just as they, in many cases, ascended quickly to positions they could not have dreamed of in Denmark. The colonial past also seems to have given the Danes a head start on the islands, as a relatively large percentage (compared to the small number of Danes) of 'elite Whites' were from Denmark. While Whiteness was a signifier in the elite, the national narrative of the time had also entered into the community, and articulations of being Danish were even stronger. Danes participated in the common construction of a 'narrative of homeliness' as soon as they arrived on the islands. Through inter-socialising, common traditions and the use of the Danish language, Danes cemented a homeliness among themselves. In an attempt to feel at home in the new environment, many a Danish migrant also practised and re-created home through production and consumption of food, or through celebrations such as Christmas. But, as Danish as they strived for these re-

⁵¹⁶ See for example: Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*; Buettner, *Empire Families*; Jones "Permanent Borders", Bush, "Gender and Empire in the Twentieth Century", Duncan, *In the Shadows*, and Blunt, "Land of our Mothers", pp. 49-72.

⁵¹⁷ See more on the importance of travel literature in creating a "planetary consciousness", Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 3.

creations to be, a Caribbean Island Danishness, which was entangled in local traditions and products, appeared from their efforts.

Not only did they create an identification based in Danishness on the islands, they also connected to and (re)produced a broader idea of being White in the tropics, which was inspired by European colonial literature and imaging. Danes marked their difference and specific status by wearing white formal clothes, and many Danish men posed for the camera in 'tropical uniforms', signalling masculine colonial adventure. Moreover, local life was exoticised and subjectified in narratives and photographs, and the (post)colonial difference was expressed in the setups and captions of these photographs. Thus, through their framing, posing and mimicking practises, the Danes mimicked a colonial past as well as a broader imperial connection.

Chapter 4:

Divisions and movements

Island Danes had various motives for their migration, they worked in different sectors, had different socio-economic statuses and had different time frames for their stay on the islands. Therefore, their interests and practises both in the White community and in local society were often different. Being for example a planter, a Company man or a Lutheran priest involved very different ideas, meanings and positions. Moving around in Virgin Islands space, the Danes (re)produced connections and belongings for themselves, and as a group, they offered different interpretations of being an Island Dane. The narrative of homeliness and the reference to tropical Whiteness had multiple meanings for different people, and the boundaries they created between 'them and us' were not always maintained. Therefore, we need to explore the ways in which Danes practised and articulated imagined geographies of the islands, through their positions within the group of Danes, and through their movements. Despite the strength of the narrative of homeliness, it was complicated in everyday practise, and Danes were not one big closely-knit group in all instances. They lived and worked differently, they had different social codes, and they interacted differently with local society. Yet, the sources available often give voice to middle-class and upper-class Danes and thereby leave out the alternative stories of working class Danes.

This chapter embraces the diverse group of Island Danes to trace the multiple divisions and connections within the group. These differences were generally shaped by employment status or landownership, and therefore affiliations were also partly affected by island of residence, and at any rate by occupational sector. The group of Danish men worked in different sectors and led their lives on the

islands in various ways. There were office clerks, bankers, craft workers, engineers, directors, planters, farm managers, priests, policemen, stock farmers, doctors, fishermen, customs officers, merchants, lawyers, pensioners etc. – and they were living rurally or in one of the cities, in rental housing or on their own estates, on St. Croix or St. Thomas, or, in the case of very few, on St. John.⁵¹⁸

As we have seen, after the transfer and the phasing out of Danish colonial institutions, a majority of the Danish men were working in one of the two predominant industries on the islands: Shipping and the sugar industry.⁵¹⁹ On St. Thomas, the port with its possibilities of shipping, passenger transport and refuelling of visiting ships was the main asset, and many Virgin Islanders in general worked on the waterfront. On St. Croix, the sugar cane industry was the main source of income and occupation. Both before and after the transfer, the industry was suffering, and many sugar mills and plantations had been abandoned. In line with this divide between the sectors, I argue that there were generally three types of Danish migrants on the islands in the period. First, the planters and other settlers, second, the new empire migrants - or expatriates - and lastly, the 'inbetweeners'. In general, there was a majority of planters and settlers just after the sale, but the group of expatriate empire migrants soon grew and became the largest group within the Danish community throughout the period.⁵²⁰ This development, as will shall see, was both shaped by and had consequences for the outlook of the Danish community on the islands.

⁵¹⁸ 1920 *Fourteenth Census*, 1930 *Fifteenth Census*, and 1940 *Sixteenth Census*.

⁵¹⁹ An analysis of the places of occupation as registered in the American censuses of 1930 and 1940 show that a little under half of the entire group of grown men born in Denmark were working in the two industries. Among these, the affiliation with the two industries is almost divided equally between the two.

⁵²⁰ 1920 *Fourteenth Census*, 1930 *Fifteenth Census*, and 1940 *Sixteenth Census*.

Ways of moving: Settlers and expatriates

When categorising the Danes, I use the terms settlers and expatriates in line with Robert Bickers' division of British imperial migrants into these two overall categories. Settlers, Bickers argues, were permanent migrants who travelled overseas with the purpose of staying. Meanwhile, an increasing amount of Island Danes were functioning as expatriates, which in Bickers' view means someone who lives overseas for a term, often for employment reasons.⁵²¹ To some extent, the division between Danish men who came to stay for a limited period - the expatriates - and those who came to live on the islands - the settlers - could be transferred to the two main islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix. On St. Thomas, the West Indian Company hired Danish men with the premise that the stay was temporary.⁵²² There was an institutionalised internationalism and a general practise of sending people from within the mother company, East Asiatic Company, to the islands for a period of five years, with possible extension. This international and career-focused character of the Danish West Indian Company affected who came to work for them, how long they stayed for, and how they practised on the islands. The same was the case with the bank, which had its headquarters on St. Thomas, but functioned on both islands, although the culture in the bank was not internationalised as in the Company. The employees in the two companies, of course, did not always end up going home as planned, but their general outset was different than for those who initially came to stay.

The sugar industry and the plantation company on St. Croix also hired Danes and brought them to the islands, but many of the plantation managers and landowners had arrived years earlier as settlers and stayed after the transfer; or they travelled to the islands in the hope of creating a new life.

⁵²¹ Bickers, "Introduction", p. 2.

⁵²² In the correspondences of the West Indian Company, time-limited contracts of the new employees are often mentioned. 75: Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance, 106: Korrespondance fra H. Bang, 203: Direktør Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance, Forskelligt materiale and 700: Korrespondance mærket Direktionen, 02053: A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (Danish Business Archives).

The representatives of a newer imperialism were generally the expatriates, who based in their outset, experienced and practised a higher degree of cultural exclusion. This resonated with a general tendency in European empires at the time to pose an ideal of White endogamy and more stringent racial borders as a way to “maintain an aura of cultural exclusivity” among Whites.⁵²³ Such developments were a response to the growing opposition to colonial rule, national sentiments and a new focus on culture and socio-economic milieu as opposed to environmental determinism. As the discourse of White prestige grew more anxious, empires became more attentive to divisions of race and class – and the disciplining gaze on the colonial Other, was increasingly turned inwards onto the colonisers themselves.⁵²⁴ In short, as Ann Laura Stoler has argued, these new sentiments led to late imperial projects where “the management of sexuality, parenting and morality was at the heart”, and where it was essential to attend to how and with whom White colonisers lived.⁵²⁵ Behaving civilised and representing civilisation became essential for Europeans to confirm their dominance. Basing his argument in Stoler’s work, James S. Duncan, has put notion of such a Europeanness in the colonies at the turn of the century into words:

‘civilization’ was something that was performative and embodied, in gestures, words, actions, and dress. The notion of European civilization was explicitly bourgeois.⁵²⁶

Embodying civilisation, or rather Whiteness, was also a growing concern on the islands. Here, especially the expatriates saw themselves as the primary representatives of ‘respectability’ and ‘character’ in their focus on civility – which in most senses meant being able to control your impulses.⁵²⁷ For the sake of the integrity of their employer, all Company men, for example, served an informal code

⁵²³ Ladds, “Private Lives”, p. 147.

⁵²⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies”, *Journal of American History*, vol. 88, no. 3 (2001), p. 832.

⁵²⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial frontiers. European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia”, in Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (eds.) *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (University of California Press, 1997), p. 226.

⁵²⁶ Duncan, *In the Shadows*, p. 49.

⁵²⁷ Duncan, *In the Shadows*, p. 49.

of appropriateness, they were meant to behave and desire in respectable ways. In short, they were expected to practice bourgeois propriety, correctness and restraint. As Ventegodt explains in his article, when referring to the difference between the large Danish shipping companies:

It was not just an office flag, chimney brand and a colour scheme, which made the difference, but a more or less consciously developed 'style' that of course throughout the years had been naturally strengthened by attracting temperaments, who found precisely this type of identity appealing. (...) people in the EAC ships did not doubt that there was a little more prestige to life under the councillor's [H. N. Andersen] burgee.⁵²⁸

Elizabeth Bang, daughter of West Indian Company employee and later director and consul, Hjalmar Bang, remembers how it was for him to be working for the West Indian Company (and ultimately the East Asiatic Company): "he should behave properly, because the EAC was strong stuff, so you couldn't... you represented EAC". This idea of representation, and in the end bourgeoisie, was confirmed when she added a story of how her mother had met her father at a dance: "That Dane-man over there looking so grumpy and gloomy" was "sitting as he had been told (...) he was brought up to be very, very correct".⁵²⁹

The fact that representing bourgeoisie was so important in the Company, was grounded in the ambition of the EAC as a business to uphold a respectable reputation, as well as in the hardening of class distinctions at the time.⁵³⁰ This growing significance of class could especially be seen in the multiple layers of those who were not working for the Company or the bank. The group of Danish settlers consisted mostly of planters, general farmers, merchants and former public service employees - as well as former gendarmes, who had stayed on and become for example farmers, shopkeepers, dockers, employees in the sugar industry, or took on odd jobs as photographers, watchmakers, lighthouse keepers or guest house

⁵²⁸ Ventegodt, "Østen t/r med Ø.K.", p. 61.

⁵²⁹ Bang, *Interview*.

⁵³⁰ Duncan, *In the Shadows*, p. 54.

managers.⁵³¹ Due to the timeframe of their stay, this group of settlers was highly connected to islands life and perceived the islands as a home for good. They might have looked to Denmark and felt Danish, but they were strongly rooted in the Virgin Islands. This was – although in very different ways - reflected in their living arrangements and ways of socialising and building intimate bonds. As a group they were very diverse, when it came to social status. If we look at the high-ranking planters, farm managers and plantation administrators, they lived on plantations in rural areas and were often married to a White woman, either Danish - or as was often the case, from a White island-family.⁵³² Meanwhile, lower-ranking settlers, such as the former gendarmes, practised their island life differently. These privates from the former gendarmerie were both categorized as lower class, and as white, and their place in Virgin Islands society was therefore very paradoxical. They were not allowed to date the daughters of the White island elite, and many had sexual relations and children with local women. Some relations between these working class Danes and local women ended in formal marriages, while in other instances economic compensation was offered instead of marriage. In fact, a fair share of these Danes did marry into local society and ended up staying on the islands after the gendarmerie was dissolved in 1917.⁵³³ As Marianne Rostgaard and Rasmus Green have argued in their article about race and class seen through letters written by the Danish gendarmes, Danes who married a local woman “were talked about, but disappeared from the white community on the islands”.⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ Axel Ovesen, Hans Christian Rasmussen, Karl Joachim Jensen (Håkon Mielche, “Det var danske øer engang, 4: St. Croix Blå Bog”, *Familiejournalen*, 1967); Hans P. Kristensen (Kulturhistorisk Arkiv, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives)); Gotfred, Larsen (Modesta Thurland, *Interview*, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, 23 January, 2013); and Richard Kragh (1922-1977, Korrespondance, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives)) are all examples of gendarmes who stayed on and took on other occupations. G. Tornøe as well as Katrine Svendsgaard also refer to some of the Danish gendarmes, who stayed on in Svendsgaard, *Interview* and Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p 22.

⁵³² Folmer Andersen, Carl Lawaetz, A.E. Stakemann, Otto H. Schmiegelow, Holger Estmann are all examples of this, *1920 Fourteenth Census, 1930 Fifteenth Census, and 1940 Sixteenth Census*.

⁵³³ G. Tornøe for example remembers “some gendarmes, who were married to blacks”, Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 22; and Katrine Svendsgaard likewise refers to the Danish gendarmes who “stayed out there, because they lived with blacks”, Svendsgaard, *Interview*.

⁵³⁴ Rostgaard and Green, “Race, rang og stand”, p. 46.

One such man was Axel Ovesen. He came to St. Croix as a gendarme and ended up marrying first one, then, after her death, another local woman. He had many children and became a locally well-known photographer and storekeeper in Frederiksted on St. Croix.⁵³⁵ Another was one of these men was Godfred Larsen, who had been a gendarme on St. Croix and married a “black Puerto Rican and Scottish descended local” in 1913. He had three children with her and became a farmer, owner of a grocery and a dairy store, and he also at some point worked at Bethlehem sugar factory as a bookkeeper and as a supervisor when the railways were constructed.⁵³⁶ He did not, however, disappear entirely from Danish sociability - his daughter remembers him having friends with whom he spoke Danish - but probably from any interference with the Danish elite and higher middle-class.⁵³⁷ Godfred Larsen exemplified the intersections of race and class on the islands. A central marker and distancing-device within the White community was of course the categorisation of race, but this differentiation was made in close association with the idea of class - and anyone who was not performing bourgeoisie, created insecurities in the discourse of Whiteness.⁵³⁸ Thus, because Godfred and men like him contributed to anxiety in White elite identification, he was generally left out of the White discourse, and definitely out of the elite. There were many examples of these ‘domesticated’ or ‘poor Whites’ among the Danes, who could have a peripheral role in the Danish community, but “shared culture and career opportunities and economic standings” with the local population.⁵³⁹

Correspondingly, an increasing importance of maintaining White prestige and a good reputation was evident in the intersections of race and class when it

⁵³⁵ *Photographs and documents: Axel Ovesen (1885-1972) and his early photographic history of St. Croix* (St. Croix Landmarks Society). Author and year unknown.

⁵³⁶ Anne L. Thurland, *Jens Larsen Photo Collection. St. Croix 1935-37* (AuthorHouse, 2008), p. 3, 9, 11.

⁵³⁷ Modesta Thurland, *Interview*.

⁵³⁸ This in line with Homi Bhabha’s notion of a colonial discourse that is anxious and never gets what it wants, which is a stable division between colonisers and colonised. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 45, and John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 53-55.

⁵³⁹ This notion of domesticated or poor Whites is borrowed from Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families*, citation from p. 4.

came to relationships and marriages. In the Danish contemporary travel literature, the view on intermarriage on the islands was served to a home audience:

If a white man married a coloured woman, although light coloured, he was immediately expelled from the good company. You would not greet him in the street and after death he was referred to the indigenous part of the cemetery.⁵⁴⁰

However, marriage was one thing, but having a short and private relation with a local woman was something very different.⁵⁴¹ A relative norm of temporary interracial relations, as well as the crucial role of class in how it was dealt with, was also observed in Olaf Linck's travel memoir. When visiting the Danish Club, he noticed how the men mocked each other with their sons, who "were of course the brood of more or less loose connections with indigenous beauties", and who would take turns as servants at the club. If you had a higher status, he noted, this was more embarrassing and not really something to laugh about, which was probably why he claimed that "the Company people broke with diversity".⁵⁴² From Linck's humoristic tale of a visit to the Danish club, springs an image of how important it was for those in higher positions to uphold dominance by displaying a large degree of self-control.

⁵⁴⁰ Mentze, *Danmarks sidste tropeland*, p. 80.

⁵⁴¹ Ladds, "Private Lives", p. 147.

⁵⁴² Linck, *Det tabte land*, p. 118.



Plenty of children were the result of mixed relations, and for working class settlers this was nothing to be ashamed of. The existence of photographs of Danish working class men posing with their 'mixed' children confirms this assumption. Figure 4.1 (left) displays Danish father Gotfred Larsen with his 'mixed' children (Property of Modesta Thurland), while figure 4.2 (right) shows former gendarme, Axel Ovesen with his second set of 'mixed' children. 1920s. (Danish National Archives).⁵⁴³

Children, such as the sons of Danish men and their brief relations with local women, materialised the challenges to, and anxieties within, the discourse of White prestige. In Satadru Sen's words, childhoods in colonies - and I would argue that this goes for postcolonial positions as well - "are sites of savagery and sexual/emotional indiscipline".⁵⁴⁴ At all times during the years between 1917 and 1940, there were many children who had a Danish father, but a non-Danish mother. In the census of 1920, for example, around 65% of all 'Danish' children had a Danish father only. Of these children, about half were labelled as White in the censuses, whereas the rest were either categorized as "black", "negro", "mixed" or "mulatto".⁵⁴⁵ We can assume that the categorisation in most instances reflected their socio-economic status and whether they were recognised by their Danish father. As we have seen when it came to marriage patterns, there was a lack of

⁵⁴³ 39B: Forsvarets Billedarkiv vedr. Dansk Vestindien, 1830-1957, Arkivfunktionen Billedmateriale, 1064-001: Forsvarets Arkiver (Danish National Archives).

⁵⁴⁴ Sen, *Colonial Childhoods*, p. 7.

⁵⁴⁵ 1920 *Fourteenth Census*, 1930 *Fifteenth Census*, and 1940 *Sixteenth Census*.

prestige, and often a decrease in class, related to these 'mixed' families. Moreover, the children in themselves were walking markers of boundary breaches, and as such, by their very existence, embodied the grey zones of the White community. The census data tells us that non-marital relations between the Danish men and local women continued, but it does not tell us if the scale of such relations continued to be the same. However, it hints at a change in how these relations were perceived. As we have seen, inter-racial sex did occur, both illegitimate and legitimate children with Danish fathers and local mothers were still conceived, but it had slowly become a taboo, an enemy from within, and a sign of lower class.⁵⁴⁶ It became something that the new rational and controlled, White Danish man was supposed to abstain from.⁵⁴⁷

The story of intimate relations was similar in other European colonies at the turn of the century and into the early 1900s. Here, anxiety over mixed relations grew, and it fed into an increase in regulation with different local expressions. In some places prescriptions and rules were tightened, in other places inter-marriage was banned altogether.⁵⁴⁸ Being as it was no longer a Danish colony, however, there were set no official prescriptions for the Danes on the islands, just as the Danish state had made no effort to do so earlier. Moreover, discussions over 'concubinage' and the status of mixed children, which was widespread in other metropolises at the time, was only seen in for example Lucie Hørlyk's fictional books for women, but it did not really surface to any great extent in Danish debates. In fact, the Danish community on the islands was so small, the desire to rule the islands had ceased, and the amount of dealings with mixed children in Denmark was almost non-existent - so the issue was probably deemed rather insignificant 'at home'. Instead, stories of the Island Danes represented nothing but an exotic adventure in Danish history, and social control from above was therefore minimal. The private

⁵⁴⁶ In the censuses from 1920, 1930 and 1940, there were many children with Danish fathers and a non-Danish mother, and of these the proportion of children labelled as 'mixed' was always around half.

⁵⁴⁷ Bickers, *Britain in China*, p. 50; Bush, "Gender and Empire", p. 80, 94, and Hammerton, "Gender and Migration", p. 172.

⁵⁴⁸ This was the case in for example German South Africa and East Africa, See Ladds, "Private Lives", p. 152.

companies had no official policy against marrying a local either, although the Danish West Indian Company did make an effort to send married men to the islands, just as social pressure was ever present. Thus, what did control the Island Danes, and especially the expatriates, was gossip and the need for a good reputation of the group or the company.⁵⁴⁹

Marleen Boschulte, who was born to a Danish father and a local mother, experienced the power of reputation first hand. She lived in the same house as both her parents, but her father lived upstairs with his daughter from a previous marriage, while she, her mother and siblings lived downstairs. Her Danish father, she remembers, would come home from work, and go upstairs to have dinner with his first daughter. Meanwhile, he did his best to stay away from Marleen and her other siblings. Her father, Christian Petersen, was a second-generation Dane on St. Thomas, who had inherited his father's butcher shop.⁵⁵⁰



Figure 4.3: Marleen to the far right with her mother and siblings, (Private property of Marleen Boschulte).

In figure 4.3 above, we also see a blond girl who looks different from Marleen and her other siblings. This is due to the fact that Marleen's mother had a child with another Danish man before marrying Marleen's father. This man worked for the

⁵⁴⁹ See Ladds, "Private Lives", p. 142 on the role of gossip and reputation in colonial settings.

⁵⁵⁰ Boschulte, *Interview*.

West Indian Company, and would not acknowledge the child, because, as Marleen put it, having children with local women was “not prestigious enough for Danes”. The Company man needed to keep his ‘mishap’ secret, and ultimately, Marleen’s half-sister was adopted by Marleen’s father and came to live with her family downstairs.⁵⁵¹ It is noteworthy that this Danish butcher, Christian Petersen, was more likely to take a mixed child into his household than a Company man. He might have separated the household in terms of status, but his own standing in the White community did not restrict him from being locally married with ‘mixed’ children. He might have been partly ashamed by his life choice, but in terms of social acceptance, less kept him from being intimate with local women. Social judgement was kinder on him as a second-generation, working class Dane.

This complex image, and a practical situation of having strict social prescriptions for White endogamy, and multiple evidences of the opposite, was not unique to the islands. In the case of British Ceylon, James S. Duncan has for example argued that the European norms of respectability were “relaxed” in practise⁵⁵², just as Ann Laura Stoler has emphasised that “white-on-white domesticity was framed in opposition to more prevalent sorts of unions”, in this specific citation referring to the French colonial policy of 1929.⁵⁵³ In line with this, Ulbe Bosma and Rembo Raben have also documented how the old colonial world of the Dutch Indies “culminated in a scene of contradictory extremes”. As racial regulations increased, they argue, so did the ‘mixing’ - in fact, the amount of inter-marriages peaked in the first half of the Twentieth century.⁵⁵⁴ Here, however, the similarities with the Danish community on the Virgin Islands end. Contrary to the ‘scene of extremes’, there was actually a significant change in marital practise among the Island Danes, and the number of all-White or all-Danish marriages escalated after 1920.⁵⁵⁵ This can, at least partly, be explained by the increasing majority of new expatriate

⁵⁵¹ Boschulte, *Interview* and Thage, *Interview*. I know of the identities of both the Company man and his illegitimate daughter, but I have chosen not to disclose them here in respect for them and their families.

⁵⁵² Duncan, *In the Shadows*, p. 44.

⁵⁵³ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, p. 2.

⁵⁵⁴ Bosma and Raben, *Being Dutch in the Indies*, p. 343.

⁵⁵⁵ See Chapter 2.

migrants, who were often married, were on the islands for career reasons, and who planned to go home again. These empire migrants were often of national sentiments, they strived for bourgeoisie, and they were taught to care about the reputation of their work place. Guarded less by prescriptions than by gossip, these expatriate Danes reconfigured the Danish community 'out there'. This was also reflected in the censuses from 1920, 1930 and 1940, where only one of these new migrant men, a bookkeeper in the Danish West Indian National Bank, declared himself to be married to a local woman.⁵⁵⁶

Thus, we can assume that expatriate Island Danes felt heavily socially restricted from being open about relationships with local women. In this sense, the case of the Islands Danes resembles the expats in for example the Chinese Customs Service more than the stories of other European colonisers above. As Catherine Ladds has shown, the multi-national employees of the Customs Service were "policed through rumour and scandal", and were expected not to cross the racial divisions in public. The focus on White wives as a domesticating influence, now overshadowing earlier concerns that they would be too much of an extra cost, dominated the policies of the service from 1930 onwards. Social restraint was especially prevalent among indoor staff and men of high positions, while the working class outdoor staff enjoyed much less social restriction. Thus, the concern for "a spotless collective reputation" of the customs service was great, and it was reflected along the lines of especially class, but also degree of power in their position.⁵⁵⁷ However, the more international atmosphere of these port cities, and the degree of national or racial segregation that it could lead to, was not unique for China. Stoler has, for example, hinted at a difference between colonial farmland and urban centres in Dutch Indonesia, which were seen as "cozy and segregated environments" at "healthy distance from things Javanese"⁵⁵⁸, just as Bosma and

⁵⁵⁶ 1920 *Fourteenth Census*, 1930 *Fifteenth Census*, and 1940 *Sixteenth Census*.

⁵⁵⁷ Ladds, "Private Lives", pp. 127-165. Citations from p. 142.

⁵⁵⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, "A Sentimental Education. Native Servants and the Cultivation of European Children in the Netherlands Indies", in Laurie J. Sears (ed.), *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 86.

Raben have argued that there were differences between European communities in port cities and in plantation areas in the Dutch Indies. The port of Batavia, they declare, “was the only place that could boast a substantial proportion of newcomers; here the expatriate culture developed most strongly”.⁵⁵⁹ This resemblance of the Danish island community with European communities in such port cities is not a coincidence, rather it reflects the tip in the balance of settlers and expatriates, towards a majority of expatriates, on the islands after the transfer.

In the 18th and Nineteenth century, the island elite had been a Euro-Caribbean bourgeoisie, consisting of not just merchants and officials, but also of those who owned plantations. For many Danes the islands, and especially St. Croix, offered an opportunity of becoming an economic upper-class, and bypassing the nobility at home, by acquiring land and growing sugar cane. Because of this, an upper-class basing its wealth in farming and acting more or less as nobility had emerged.⁵⁶⁰ In many ways, the planters who were still living on the islands around the transfer, or who had recently joined into the tradition, were practising this same set of landowner culture and ideas. Although the two groups of old settlers and new expatriates did overlap - there were expatriates in the sugar industry, and many a bank director or company man would buy a plantation on the side⁵⁶¹ - the result was a broad division between farmland St. Croix and what could be called a ‘cosmopolitan’ St. Thomas. Thus, St. Croix was most firmly rooted in the old colonial practises and ideas of landownership, while St. Thomas to a greater extent represented the newer imperial mind-set, and a newer elite culture. As doctor Knud Knud-Hansen reminisces about the St. Thomanian city, Charlotte Amalie in his memoir:

⁵⁵⁹ Bosma and Raben, *Being Dutch*, p. xvi.

⁵⁶⁰ Louise Sebro, “Mellem Afrikaner og kreol”.

⁵⁶¹ See for example bank directors Axel Thage and Axel Holst, Doctor Viggo Christensen, Judge Thiele and others buying land on St. Croix: *Letter to Captain Laub from Judge Thiele*, 31 October, 1931, 75: Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance, 02053: A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (Danish Business Archives), or the mentioning of St. Thomas residents Svend Mylner and Lawyer Jørgensen drifting a plantation on St. Croix, in Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 84.

Those were the days for the young girls, the harbour ablaze at nights with lights from warships of all kind of nationalities, and the various consuls giving dinner parties and dances.⁵⁶²

Therefore, the island division was also evident, but never conclusive, when it came to the movements within the general White minority. In line with the developments in the public debate in Denmark, I would argue that there were two main (re)productions of discourses: either of an 'old-fashioned', archaic imperialism based in agriculture and landownership, or of a 'new imperialism' with features of paternalism and the "promotion of national prestige" through commercial enterprise.⁵⁶³ This new discourse reflected the role of colonialism as a bourgeois project, which was also highly informed by nationalism and ideas of race.⁵⁶⁴ As the old colonial world was slowly shrinking on the islands, the ideas and movements of a new - more exclusive - imperialism entered the scene.

Dealing with Americanisation

The different movements among the Island Danes, and the development towards a new configuration of the group, were also evident in relation to the new American naval administration. In his memoir, Knud Knud-Hansen expressed how Danes were "bitter against the buyer". Some Americans, he explained, "galled us by never losing a chance to speak about the twenty-five million dollars that God's own country payed for this damned bunch of rocks. Some Danes retaliated by criticizing the way Americans spoke (...), the way they dressed, and danced and what not".⁵⁶⁵ The archaic side of this challenge to the Americans came from the sugar industry and the planters who were now fighting an American naval governor, who had

⁵⁶² Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 38.

⁵⁶³ This kind of 'new imperialism' has been characterised and discussed by C.A. Bayly in *The Birth of the Modern World* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 227-233. The citation is from pp. 230-231.

⁵⁶⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves", in ed. Catherine Hall, *Cultures of empire. A reader. Colonizers in Britain and the empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000) p. 111.

⁵⁶⁵ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 50.

even less sympathy for foreign interests. When the West Indian Sugar Factory with the Bethlehem central factory was on the verge of its downfall in 1929-1930, director Folmer Andersen pleaded with the American Navy in Washington for economic support. As a part of this, he lobbied for lowering the sugar taxes and permitting foreign field workers.⁵⁶⁶ Virgin Islands Governor Pearson described Folmer Andersen and his workings on St. Croix in a letter to Naval Captain Furlong in Washington:

He is, as you know, a clever politician, and he has won an enviable position in St. Croix since he was able to have the sugar tax reduced two years ago. By his own admission he is one-half of the Government in St. Croix, and he has boastfully said that he will, sooner or later, increase his prestige.⁵⁶⁷

When Andersen in October 1915 had first held meetings with the municipal council about the issues, and then travelled to the states to present his case there, Governor Pearson claimed that the federal government should not help a “foreign interest”, and that he believed the Bethlehem Sugar Factory was mismanaged. Revealing the high incomes of Bethlehem director Andersen and West Indian Sugar Factory director Lachmann in Denmark, the governor spoke of the company’s high mortgage, and parallel shady bonus program, concluding that:

Mr. Andersen would like to have the Federal Government reduce the sugar tax in order to help him make more money.⁵⁶⁸

At times, an underlying resistance to the planters, and specifically Folmer Andersen, could be detected within the group of Danish expatriates. Danish West

⁵⁶⁶ *Letter to Captain N. R. Furlong*, US Navy, from Folmer Andersen, 7 June 1929, 38.3.2: Records of the Central Division and its Predecessors, Records relating to the Virgin Islands, Record Group 38 (National Archives, Washington D.C.).

⁵⁶⁷ *Letter to Captain Furlong*, U.S. Navy, from Governor Pearson, 26 September 1929, 38.3.2: Records of the Central Division and its Predecessors, Records relating to the Virgin Islands, Record Group 38 (National Archives, Washington D.C.).

⁵⁶⁸ *Letter to Captain Furlong*, U.S. Navy, from Governor Pearson, 15 October 1929, 38.3.2: Records of the Central Division and its Predecessors, Records relating to the Virgin Islands, Record Group 38 (National Archives, Washington D.C.).

Indian National Bank director, Axel Holst, had privately told the governor that he thought the factory was mismanaged, and that the bank was not going to support it anymore after 1929.⁵⁶⁹ Both Axel Holst and his co-director, Axel Thage, claimed in a letter to the bank committee in Denmark that they felt the West Indian Sugar Factory should be sold to Americans, so American subsidizing of a future irrigation system would come back to the taxpayers.⁵⁷⁰ In the end, the Danish factory was declared bankrupt in 1930, and an American Sugar Factory took over, but Folmer Andersen had in the meantime gathered the landowners and planters on St. Croix to help argue his case. Disclosing the same group of especially Cruzian settler-planters within the White minority, as was the case in the years around the transfer, Governor Pearson complained about the colonial council on St. Croix:

The anti-American attitude of a majority of the council members has been a source of trouble to the Governors since the transfer. (...) The same was true during the Danish administration. (...) They are continually stirring up trouble, whereas the council and the people on St. Thomas are most loyal to the government and we have no trouble with them.⁵⁷¹

The comment hints to the abovementioned division between farmland St. Croix with its many settlers and 'cosmopolitan' St. Thomas with its domination of expatriates. This was explained by the fact that settlers focused on long-term landownership and the accorded idea of having a legitimate right to an almost noble role in society. Whereas capitalism and ideas of development played a larger role for newer migrants.

The presence of Americans on the islands was not new, and a gradual Americanisation had already been underway before US marines entered the scene

⁵⁶⁹ *Letter to Captain Furlong*, U.S. Navy, from Governor Pearson, 15 October 1929.

⁵⁷⁰ *Letter to the Committee of the Danish West Indian National Bank from Bank Directors Axel Holst and Axel Thage*, 15 April 1930, 5: Gruppeordnede sager: Bethlehem I, 2429: Den Dansk-Vestindiske Nationalbank (Danish National Archives).

⁵⁷¹ *Letter to Captain Furlong*, U.S. Navy, from Governor Pearson, 15 October 1929.

as the new administrators. But there was a significant difference in the wake of the transfer: The number of Americans now multiplied, and - more importantly - Danes lost their role as rulers with everything that it entailed:

There were many things a Dane couldn't do. He could not enter a party with an unfinished cigar in his hand. He could not, when visiting, pull out his own cigarettes and even offer his host one of them. And, oh the horror, he couldn't as a guest at a cocktail party raise his glass and say "Skaal", the Danish way of saying: "Here is to you", before the host had a chance to say the Skaal of welcome. Surely small things grew big in those first difficult years.⁵⁷²

The above citation is an illustration of how Doctor Knud Knud-Hansen recalled the crucial years after transfer. Danes felt they had lost their islands and prestige to Americans. But to him the result was straightforward: "Denmark had sold me. I had got a new fatherland".⁵⁷³ Accordingly, to prove themselves as "good progressive Americans", some Danes ended up choosing an American citizenship over the years, even though most still thought of themselves as Danes.⁵⁷⁴ In general, most Island Danes might have been critical of American political rule in the first place, but their position was less strong when it came to everyday life on the islands. When the new American Naval administration took over, bank director G. Tornøe remembered how life on St. Thomas became "characterized by the American officials and officers who tried to live life as in the warm states of the US".⁵⁷⁵ In his memoir, he wrote about how "many strange American officials" arrived, but also how he met nice people among the Americans and that the American governor helped the Danish consul stop Hamilton Jackson from writing "contemptuous articles about the Danish rule".⁵⁷⁶ At the same time, West Indian Company director, H. P. Berg, put emphasis on the "tough, but firm way" in which the Americans treated the local workers when threatening to strike, compared to

⁵⁷² Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 50.

⁵⁷³ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 50.

⁵⁷⁴ Citation from Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 50.

⁵⁷⁵ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 38.

⁵⁷⁶ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, pp. 23-24, 40.

the “soft way of handling the Negroes that Danes have practised”⁵⁷⁷. In the end, the Danes both mingled with and contested the new American rule in various ways, while they tried to hold on to, and reconfirm, a past dominance. They did this, whether it was a dominance of landownership, capitalism or a cultural claim.

This was also seen, when the newly arrived Americans, who were “so easy to be around”, became a part of the international White elite, in which the Danes were taking part.⁵⁷⁸ Some American military men dated Danish girls, and a number of Danes married into American families.⁵⁷⁹ Especially on St. Thomas, Danes and Americans entered the same societies and associations and generally interacted socially. Nonetheless, the Danes and Americans also cooperated on St. Croix. This was, for example, the case with Lawyer Jørgensen, St. Thomanian Company man, Svend Mylner, and American federal judge Noll, who owned a plantation on St. Croix together, where they raised cattle and grew sugar cane.⁵⁸⁰ Another example was when American business tycoon Ward Canaday arrived in the 1930s, became the biggest landowner in 1936, and began his quest to be the private enterprise-side of the newly invoked New Deal on the islands. He started cooperating with farmer and businessman Frits Lawaetz, son of the Danish couple Carl and Marie Lawaetz. In 1940 Frits became the manager of Canaday’s estate Annaly, and together they raised cattle and started the prominent business Annaly Farms. This way, Frits and his family entered the circles of a well-connected man, who knew President Hoover as well as Laurence Rockefeller and ended up bringing them both to the islands.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁷ Berg, *Kritik af de danske embedsmænd*, p. 9.

⁵⁷⁸ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁵⁷⁹ This was for example the case for Rigmor Christoffersen, born to Danish parents on St. Croix in 1923, and her sisters, who as she recalled it “started dating the army guys”. Rigmor’s sister met her American husband this way, and Rigmor herself was engaged to one of the American military men.: Rigmor Christoffersen, *Childhood Memories of Growing Up in St. Croix, Virgin Islands* (St. Croix Landmarks Society, after 1991), pp. 11-12.

⁵⁸⁰ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 84.

⁵⁸¹ Arnold Highfield, *Sea Grapes and Kennips, The story of Christiansted town and its people* (Antilles Press, 2012), pp. 85-91; Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 96.

The new U.S. rule also manifested itself very tangibly in the Danish (and other) children's schooling. Island schools were now re-named after American presidents, and American history became a main subject for the children to engage in.⁵⁸² Every morning, the children were now pledging their allegiance to the American flag.⁵⁸³ When Katrine Svensgaard's son went to school in the early 1940s, he had trouble relating to this new nation:

Peter began school when he was 5, and he, as all American children, gave the pledge of allegiance to United States and the Stars and Stripes. I was wondering what it was, he was saying: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States - to the nation, and to the public works (to the Republic). It was quickly corrected, but it was no surprise that public works was more present for a small boy than a country, he hardly knew what was."⁵⁸⁴

However new it seemed at first, though, Americanisation had come to stay, and it increasingly took a hold on Islands Danes as well. Not only, as we will see in the following chapter, were more and more White elite children sent to the United States to study, American culture was also introduced in especially children's everyday life.

Invisible boundaries

The increased distance to local society practised by the new empire migrants, was not just reflected in intimate relations. Expatriate Danes produced invisible borders on the islands through their working and living arrangements. For instance, employees of the West Indian Company were often assigned a company house, when they arrived. These were in a compound of wooden houses placed east of the city of Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas grouped around the same hill. Here,

⁵⁸² Ruth Moolenaar, *Brief Historical Notes on Schools in the Virgin Islands* (American Education Week, 1982), p. 8, 11, and Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 51.

⁵⁸³ Svensgaard, *Interview*; Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 51, and Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁵⁸⁴ Svensgaard, *Memoir*.

employees and their families lived amongst each other, and they often took over furniture and servants from former employees. The houses had their own pieces of land, and the employees were each given a cow. Milk was difficult to come about, so the cow was a company privilege.⁵⁸⁵ Many company employees lived here at one point. In 1915, for example, the Berg family was first accommodated in Villa Occident, one of eight dwelling houses owned by the company at the time.⁵⁸⁶ Villa Occident was located in a palm avenue on the way to the shipyard, close to the harbour and the famous Grand Hotel. Helene remembers how locals would stare in through the window frames - the house had no windows, just shutters. It was a relatively fancy house, situated among other West Indian Company employees, but because of its proximity to the harbour, it was not isolated from local life. She would wake up to the sound of chickens from the surrounding houses, and during the day she could see the coal women pass by on their way to the yard.⁵⁸⁷ Soon, though, the family moved to a house that was very separated from local life, both in its physical distance from the city of Charlotte Amalie, its obvious grandeur, and its literally superior position on top of a hill. Overlooking the harbour of St. Thomas, situated next to the old governor's building, was the West Indian Company's headquarter and subsequently the director's house (see figure 4.4). The company had recently bought the mansion *Cathrineberg* from the Catholic Church, who had again bought it from a former Danish governor, and it now installed its director in the house. The Berg family was the first of several West Indian Company-families to move into the house. Up until as late as 1993, when the building was sold off and transformed into the home of the American governor, it had this function as the director's house.⁵⁸⁸ Symptomatic of the great importance of the company on the islands, but also of the imperial-nationalistic discourse of the Danes behind it, Helene's father

⁵⁸⁵ Erik Miles, *Interview*, St. Thomas, February 1st, 2013.

⁵⁸⁶ According to an inventory of property from 1924, the Company owned the houses Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Jotha, Occident, Orient and Denmark Hill. *192 list of properties*, DVK, 02053: ØK-547 (Danish Business Archives).

⁵⁸⁷ Berg, *Min Barndom*.

⁵⁸⁸ Helweg, Larsen, *Sollyse minder*, p. 40 for example describes the placement of the governor's house on the hill on St. Thomas.

named the property Denmark Hill.⁵⁸⁹ The distance from locals was physically expressed everyday when Helene would look down on the slope, “where black people had their small wooden cottages”.⁵⁹⁰ This positioning was not a coincidence. In his book Ernst Mentze explained, how social hierarchies were already ingrained in the planning of the city of Charlotte Amalie:

They simply sorted the residents of the city (..). The wealthy, non-acclimatised population were granted housing in the large, airy villas, which were constructed on the hillsides, the grandest at the very top with stairways down towards south, east and west.⁵⁹¹

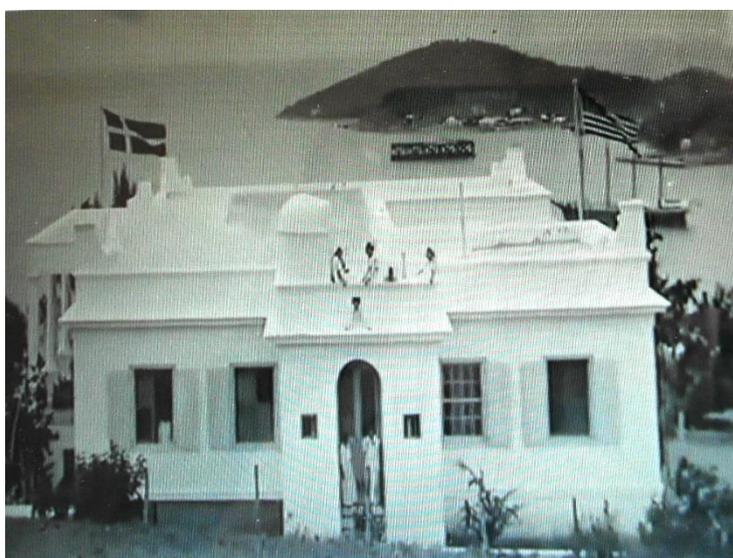


Figure 4.4: The Berg family posing on top of Denmark Hill. Around 1917. (Helene Berg, *Min Barndom*).

Company employee, and later director, Hjalmar Bang and his family were also assigned housing. They at first moved into one of the company houses called Villa Delta, and later they moved to Villa Occident. Bang’s daughter, Elizabeth remembers that the house was situated among all her friends, “Mrs. Carpenter Nielsen, who baked cookies, the happy Norwegian Mrs. Hammer and little

⁵⁸⁹ Berg, *Min Barndom*.

⁵⁹⁰ Berg, *Min Barndom*.

⁵⁹¹ Mentze, *Danmarks sidste tropeland*, p. 78.

Palle".⁵⁹² The Nielsens were Danes, Mr. Nielsen was an employee of the Company, and Palle was their son.⁵⁹³ When Bang was appointed consul in 1932, the family also moved into the big house on Denmark Hill. Meanwhile, Einar Svensgaard and his wife Katrine experienced the same, when they first lived in one, then another, company house from 1936 to 1946. According to Katrine, the houses were built by the abovementioned Nielsen, who had been on St. Thomas since 1911, and they were situated on the hill behind the West Indian Company headquarters east of the city.⁵⁹⁴

At least some bank employees were also assigned housing. Bank director Axel Holst, for example, lived in a large apartment above the bank on the main square in Charlotte Amalie. Due to stench from the gutter, which "came floating from the higher elevated Negro quarter and ran along the square", Holst was moved up to St. Anna, a house on a hill overlooking the city.⁵⁹⁵ Equally, bank director Axel Thage was assigned a large, prestigious house on Government Hill in Charlotte Amalie, next to the government house (the positioning of Government Hill is depicted in figure 4.5).⁵⁹⁶



4.5: Postcard of Government House on Government Hill, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. (Ronnie Lockhardt's private collection).

⁵⁹² Bang, *Memoir*.

⁵⁹³ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁵⁹⁴ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁵⁹⁵ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 6

⁵⁹⁶ Thage family photo album (Private Property of Elisabeth Thage).

Generally, the islands – and especially St. Thomas – were articulated, and to some extent practised, in divisions with invisible borders between locals and foreigners. On St. Thomas there was the West Indian Company compound and the hills above the city centre, where many Danes and other foreigners lived. West of the city was ‘Cha Cha Town’, a small community of poor fishermen, descendant from France. They were said to intermarry and to never interfere with anyone else on the island, although the Americans’ introduced a law that forced them to go to authorised schools.⁵⁹⁷ The Danes often came by the place where the ‘cha chas’ lived, when going other places, and it made an impression on especially the children:

I only remember that it was exiting, when we drove out to the beach (...) that the Cha Cha Town was in there and was a closed area. It was mysterious. You were not allowed in there”.⁵⁹⁸

Moreover, Danes articulated different places outside the city as “Negro villages”, “Negro huts” or “Negro houses”. These were mostly gatherings of small wooden huts, and often spoken of as the places where servants lived, or where the smell from the gutters came from.⁵⁹⁹ As can be seen in figures 4.7 and 4.8 below, they were also labelled “Negro huts”, when architect Tyge Hvass in 1919 travelled to the islands to document their architecture – or when Danes documented life on the islands by taking photos and adding the caption “Negro houses”.⁶⁰⁰ Through their narratives about the islands, then, and partially through their practise, the Danes on St. Thomas created what geographer Kirsten Simonsen calls “spatial constructions of otherness”.⁶⁰¹ They, thus, created a distance, or as Simonsen puts it, “boundaries and divisions of the city into enclaves where you speak of *our* space or *their* space, and where daily practise shields one from the other”.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁷ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 36.

⁵⁹⁸ Kai Svendsgaard for example remembers it vividly as a place that scared and fascinated him, when they drove past it on their way to the beach. Svendsgaard, *Interview*.

⁵⁹⁹ See for example Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 214.

⁶⁰⁰ There are several examples of such photos in the collections of the Danish National Museum. See photographs below.

⁶⁰¹ Kirsten Simonsen, *Byens mange ansigter* (Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 2005), p. 76.

⁶⁰² Simonsen, *Byens mange ansigter*, p. 154.



Figure 4.6: Boundaries in the city. Here Cha Cha Town, St. Thomas, postcard, (Ronnie Lockhardt's private collection).



Spatial constructions of Otherness. Figure 4.7 (left): Photo taken by Tyge Hvass in 1919, the caption says: ““Petronella”, Negro houses”, St. Croix. (Danish National Museum).⁶⁰³ Figure 4.8 (right): Photo with the caption: “Negro huts covered with shingles”, Frederiksted, St. Croix. (Danish National Museum).⁶⁰⁴

Another way in which Danes (re)created these boundaries, was when they physically and concretely took up the positions of the former empire. On St. Thomas, living in the big colonial houses on Denmark Hill and Government Hill were examples of this. Moreover, planters on especially St. Croix, recreated the boundaries by physically living on, and continuing growing sugar with local workers in the fields on the old plantations.

However – as was the case with intimate relations, these boundaries were daily (re)produced, but also daily contested. Through their work, for example, planters regularly interacted with the local workers on their plantations. Likewise,

⁶⁰³ Tyge Hvass fotografier 1919, Antikvarisk-Topografisk arkiv (Danish National Museum).

⁶⁰⁴ Fotografier og postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-62, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

employees in the Danish companies daily dealt with local, mostly unskilled, workers. The West Indian Company had local coal-carrying women, dockworkers and some bookkeepers employed, while the bank also had some local employees in their offices (see figures 4.9 and 4.10).⁶⁰⁵ Moreover, as is evident in figures 4.11-4.14 below from the Danish West Indian Sugar Factory, Danes were working closely with locals in the workshops of the Sugar factories. Reflecting a general notion in the discourse of tropicality, Danes played the role of supervisors or other superiors in each their field of the sugar production as master carpenter, blacksmith, painter etc. The White man in the tropics, it was believed, had to be strong enough to withstand the laziness that the tropical sun induced, but also prestigious enough not to work along with the working class. Thus, it was contended that a supervisory role was the most appropriate for a White man in the tropics.⁶⁰⁶ However, even in their superior position as supervisors, for the part of the majority, it did not change the fact that in practise, these Danes daily worked side by side with their local workers.

⁶⁰⁵ See for example the photo below.

⁶⁰⁶ Duncan, *In the Shadows*, p. 55.



Figure 4.9 (above): Local and Danish employees dealing with local customers in the main office of the Danish West Indian National Bank, around 1919. (Danish National Archive).⁶⁰⁷ Figure 4.10 (below): The Danish West Indian Company had local women hired to carry the coal from the coaling ships, St. Thomas harbor. 1920s. (Ronnie Lockhardt's private collection).

⁶⁰⁷ *First National City Bank 1-4*, Gruppeordnede sager, 9, 2429: Den Dansk-Vestindiske Nationalbank (Danish National Museum).



The Sugar Factory, St. Croix. Figure 4.11: Painter master E. Nielsen and his workers. Figure 4.12: H. Rasmussen with workers at the weight house. Figure 4.13 (below left): H. Christensen and workers at the blacksmiths workshop. Figure 4.14 (below right): C.E. Lang, C.F. Hodge, F. Christensen at the office. (Danish National Archives).⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁸ Herr Ingenør Torben Rist: *Erindringer fra Funktionærerne ved A/S Den Vestindiske Sukkerfabrik, St. Croix, Fotografier/postkort vedr. Vestindien, 1917-1962*, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab (Danish National Archives).

Moreover, Danes did not just encounter the local population through their work. Their living arrangements might have been separated from local society to different degrees, but they still encountered local life just outside their windows, or when shopping, or strolling through the island spaces. When going to church on Sundays, for example, they shared the sermon with a majority of local Lutherans, who had dressed up for the occasion.⁶⁰⁹ And when they regularly went past the market, or sometimes went in to shop, they were literally dealing with the local population.⁶¹⁰ Likewise, the shops on the main street in Charlotte Amalie were a part of the centre of the city, frequented by Danes, but they also, in the words of a Dane, “bear an imprint of the fact that they are serving a poor population”.⁶¹¹ On St. Croix, Pastor Helweg-Larsen, also noted how the market place was a focal point in the city, “where street life stirred vigorously” – and how life in the streets that Danes walked everyday was generally “an exceedingly pleasant sight, not least thanks to the old negro women with tethered skirts baskets or buckets on their heads”.⁶¹² Reflecting especially an ‘old’ colonial world on St. Croix, Sophie Helweg-Larsen’s memoir also recalls going to the racecourse on Boxing Day as a large event on the island, which everyone participated in, locals as well as the White elite.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁹ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 225.

⁶¹⁰ As we have seen, Katrine Svengaard, for example, remembered how Musse showed her how to shop at the market.

⁶¹¹ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 215.

⁶¹² Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 215.

⁶¹³ Helweg-Larsen, *Sollyse Minder*, p. 64.



Encountering local society. Figure 4.15 (above): The Thage family's private photo of the market square they walked by daily in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. Figure 4.16 (below): The Danish West Indian Nation Bank, in the centre of Charlotte Amalie next to the market place (right). (Private property of Elisabeth Thage).



Figure 4.17 (left): A Dane could not walk down the Main Street without encountering local life, as we can also see when a regular day on Main Street in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, is depicted in a postcard. (Ronnie Lockhardt's private collection). Figure 4.18 (right): A mixture of people leaving Christiansted Lutheran Church after a sermon, St. Croix. (Danish National Museum).⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁴ *Dansk Vestindien*, A.1-I.4.i, Nyere tids samling, Danish National Museum.

Thus, despite the fact that public spaces of the Virgin Islands were continuously articulated, and in many cases practised, in terms of invisible boundaries, they were also literally the places where Danes and locals constantly dealt with each other. This was not only the case when it came to public spaces. As we will see in Chapter 5, private homes carried the same inherent paradox. However, the paradox of producing invisible boundaries and encountering local society simultaneously, was not expressed in a single manner. Boundaries were created and breached in different ways among both the settlers and expatriates – but it seems that expatriates and their social restrictions, compound living and marital practices gradually extended the levels of distance in Virgin Islands space. Furthermore, Chapter 5 will argue, there was also a generational difference, as children crossed the boundaries in their own way.

Inbetweeners

Between the two groups of Danes – and indeed between local society and Danes as a whole – was a third group consisting of priests, doctors, nurses and deaconesses. They had travelled to the islands with a much more clear-cut ambition of developing and helping the islands and their population. Because of their job, they lived among locals to a larger extent, and they were daily interacting deeply with local society. Doctor Knud Knud-Hansen was one of these inbetweeners. Prior to moving to the island of St. Thomas in 1908, he had studied medicine and been two years abroad in London and Paris. Thus, unlike most Danes, he was highly educated, used to living outside Denmark, and he spoke – or at least understood – several foreign languages. He himself explained this high level of language use in his memoir:

Danish medicals were bound to understand quite a number of languages, for there was hardly any medical book printed in Danish. We read English books in anatomy, French on surgery, German on

pathology, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian on more special subjects.⁶¹⁵

Parts of this profile, he shared with the expatriates from the East Asiatic Company, who also saw themselves as 'world citizens'. But he was not an expatriate, he had travelled more independently, and he was far more educated. Carrying such an outlook, and a sense of rootlessness and lack of belonging in Denmark, he decided to take a job as municipal physician in St. Thomas. When he arrived there, he was put to work at the municipal hospital alongside the Danish doctor, Viggo Christensen, who had arrived two years earlier.⁶¹⁶ Through their job, the two doctors were daily in quite intimate contact with all of island society. They went on house visits all over St. Thomas, and when necessary, they also travelled to St. John for such visits. In the beginning, they even performed operations in people's private homes, bringing an operating table with them.⁶¹⁷ These working conditions improved over the years, though, and the contact with patients became more structured as the transfer slowly gave way to improvements:

After years of life with overcrowded consulting rooms, with numerous sick calls in town and country and to St. Jan [St. John], with the strain of operating under very unfavourable conditions, with the burden of post-operative nursing with its enemas and what not - I say, after years of all this, any work in the post Danish time has seemed easy to me.⁶¹⁸

But, better working conditions and the means to operate at the hospital instead of in private homes, did not change the fact that Knud-Hansen and his colleagues came closer to the local population and integrated themselves more into society than most other island newcomers. In fact, Knud-Hansen stayed on St. Thomas for the greater part of his life until his death in 1951 - and at this point, he had become such an integral part of the island that the new hospital was (and is) named after

⁶¹⁵ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 22.

⁶¹⁶ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 27.

⁶¹⁷ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 31.

⁶¹⁸ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 31.

him.⁶¹⁹ He was well-known among locals as well as in White society, and he was able to move seamlessly in both circles. Because, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, he was also highly involved in White society. He was a member of the colonial council, master of the Masonic lodge, and he went to many of the parties at the Government House, or at different consulates around the island.⁶²⁰ Nevertheless, Katrine Svensgaard, for instance, remembers him as a man, who was not interested in being part of the group of Danes specifically. In this context, she explained, he kept to himself.⁶²¹

It is worth noting that Knud-Hansen wrote his memoirs in English, the language with which he had become most familiar throughout the years. Also, it is evident how his own disregard of this Danish island lifestyle, sometimes shines through in comments, when he for example referred to “good little women from home” spreading out “as high society blues”.⁶²² In some ways, he as a figure resembled characters such as Lucie Hørlyk’s Danish doctor in *Nanna Judith*. Because he simultaneously viewed the group of Danes with the eyes of a Dane and of an outsider, and he could not help but notice how ‘tropical life’ transformed them. Moreover, he was a critic of the lack of state involvement on the islands. He saw good intentions, but when all came to all, he thought Americans were the ones to really launch development:

I have already hinted that intelligence, quite willpower, and an almost fanatic love for hard work have carried Denmark to the top in education, sanitation, farming, ship-building, and far-reaching trade etc. Now, did the Danes out here measure up to the glorious standards of the homeland? Or possibly rather, did Denmark apply her vast knowledge to her West Indian possessions? I am sure of the efforts, but I am also sure of the lack of means to carry on with.⁶²³

⁶¹⁹ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, and “Doctor Knud Knud-Hansen dies of age 77”, *Virgin Islands Daily News*, 07 July 1951.

⁶²⁰ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 38. See also Chapter 2.

⁶²¹ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁶²² Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 37

⁶²³ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 29.

As the citation clearly shows, he was proud of his homeland and what he understood to be Danishness, but he was not necessarily proud of what the Danish state was doing for the local population on the islands.

Likewise, another group of inbetweeners, the priests in the Lutheran churches on St. Croix and St. Thomas, often took up a position which functioned on many levels of society. Pastor Povl Helweg-Larsen in particular became a well-known personage on the islands as well as in the Danish debates about the sale. As we have seen in earlier chapters, he often voiced his opinion in Danish newspapers, speaking against a sale, and for better conditions for the local population. This was also reflected in the fact that he did not choose to move to the islands simply because of an employment opportunity, but instead travelled to St. Croix in 1910 “out of love for the deed to be done on the islands”. This, he himself explained, was a direct consequence of the failed sale in 1902 and the following development initiatives.⁶²⁴ He had first become travel secretary for the West Indian Church Committee in 1906, when he saw that Danes finally “started to do something for the islands, also from the church’s side”.⁶²⁵ And four years later, he left for St. Croix to become a priest there, along with his wife and two sons. The family lived in the vicarage on King Street in the very centre of Christiansted, across from the Lutheran church and next to the governor’s Crucian house (see figure 4.19).⁶²⁶ Here they became a central part of an elite group of Danes, while they simultaneously built a close relationship with the local congregation.

⁶²⁴ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 211.

⁶²⁵ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 227.

⁶²⁶ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 213.



Figure 4.19: Pastor Povl Helweg-Larsen with tropical 'uniform' standing in the middle of the diverse street life on King Street, Christiansted, St. Croix. Around 1917. His house is the large building in the middle to the right.⁶²⁷

Povl Helweg-Larsen explained how Danes all inter-socialised, but also how “social peers” found each other. The gendarmes, he claimed were the most isolated among the Danes.⁶²⁸ His own position in the Danish elite was cemented by the fact that he was a pastor, and that his brother was a government secretary on the islands and became governor, during their stay. Hence, the Helweg-Larsens held many renowned friends. Danish Count Moltke, Bank manager Thaulow and Pastor Faber from Frederiksted were examples of such, while also two deaconesses and a congregation nurse counted among their close friends.⁶²⁹ However, Helweg-Larsen was never isolated in these circles. Every week he held both a Danish and an English sermon in the church for a congregation, which consisted of people “who were virtually all black or one of the middle colours that are assembled in the word

⁶²⁷ Helweg-Larsen, “Et danskvestindisk hjem”, p. 213.

⁶²⁸ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 221

⁶²⁹ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 221.

coloured".⁶³⁰ In the beginning, when he in his own words "was foreign to the natives", he tried to help the Danish gendarmes by inviting them to his house once a month.⁶³¹ Soon, though, he and his wife came into a "loving relationship with many in the congregation", and instead focused on working with the local population. Once a month, for example, he held a sermon at the leprosy hospital, while his wife held Sunday school for the youngest children, or took special care of the older girls.⁶³²

This position as a friend of the locals was also seen in Helweg-Larsen's strong commitment to speaking their case. He had been an opponent of the sale for the sake of the local population, and he also tried to engage with the locals as the worker's revolt took form. When Hamilton Jackson held a speech pleading for a sale, Helweg-Larsen approached the mass that most Danes hid from, and came up to speak after him. He then tried to reach out, by opening with the phrase of a popular American anti-racial magazine: "Read the Crisis".⁶³³ He might have been against the sale that Hamilton Jackson spoke for, but contrary to most of the Island Danes, he thought there "was a need for a voice like Hamilton Jackson's".⁶³⁴ Thus, from his unique position between locals and Danes, he could see the use of someone like Hamilton Jackson – and meanwhile, he had an eye for 'the White decay'. Just as his fellow inbetweener, Knud-Hansen, Helweg-Larsen also made allusions about how he saw a "sedative effect" of living in the tropics among the Danes, and he referred to the double feelings that Danes carried on the islands:

One could appreciate the sunlit life out there, but at the same time carry a silent longing for home, which certainly contributed to the fact that so many lost their heads.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁰ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 225.

⁶³¹ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 225.

⁶³² Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 226.

⁶³³ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 228.

⁶³⁴ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 228.

⁶³⁵ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 228.

Thus, he was able to see Danes from the outside, but was also intricately intertwined with the White elite. Such a position, Helweg-Larsen used mostly to promote better conditions for locals on the islands. As we know, the sale went through, and under these new circumstances, Helweg-Larsen now spoke out against what he believed to be racism and an unfair justice system of the American naval rule. In a letter to the Board for the case of the Lutheran Churches in the Virgin islands of the United States in august 1918, he gathered his criticisms and wrote how “stoning of people in the street was in the beginning one of the favourite games of the marines”, how a man was killed by marines, but “nothing was done, nothing has been done”, criticising the new Judge Noll, who “is in his own person the supreme court”. He summed up the critique by stating:

To put it short: We have not a naval government, but a government of marines. We live in [on] an island where we have no justice.⁶³⁶

Helweg-Larsen, then went on to argue that “it is not only a colour question – not that this would be any real excuse – but that the authorities are arbitrary towards anybody, and that White people as well as coloured people are filled with indignation”.⁶³⁷

Correspondingly, Danish deaconesses took a similar position between the Danish groups and the local population. As we know, Princess Louise of Denmark had established child care homes in Frederiksted and Christiansted, on the island of St. Croix in the beginning of the Twentieth century. This was set up in cooperation with the Female Mission Workers of the Danish Lutheran Church and directed by Danish deaconesses. The deaconesses held the double role of being both missionaries, while they were also trained as nurses and teachers. When the islands were sold, the homes, which had been administered by the Danish Lutheran church, now came under the United Lutheran church, and the use of Danish

⁶³⁶ P. Helweg-Larsen, *Letter to the board for the case of the Lutheran Churches in the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 15 August 1918, P. Helweg-Larsen’s copybook (Danish West Indian Society). (Written in English)

⁶³⁷ Helweg-Larsen, *Letter to the board*.

deaconesses was gradually faced out.⁶³⁸ Few deaconesses stayed for a while, however, while one chose to stay for the next 30 years. Sister Caroline Jensen, for example, had arrived on St. Croix in 1909, where she lived at the home in Christiansted. When the islands were sold, she stayed for three years after the sale working for the Americans and overseeing the transfer.⁶³⁹ Meanwhile, Sister Maren Knudsen, who had moved to the island in 1906, had become so dedicated to the work on St. Croix that she ended up staying until 1946.⁶⁴⁰

The deaconesses travelled to the islands alone, and because of their religious status, they were not allowed to be married. It is difficult to say clearly, if it was generally a need to help the local population that led the women 'out there' - as was the case for Caroline Jensen, who went to the islands to address the very high child mortality - or if their travel was mostly motivated by a religious calling or simply an expression of female desire for adventure.⁶⁴¹ Nevertheless, they were a small group of female philanthropists as well as missionaries, and their specific arrangement gave them a unique opportunity to explore the tropics as independent women.⁶⁴² In this position, they were nothing like the other Danish women on the islands, even though they could share interests or philanthropic desires.

Because, even though the deaconesses indeed made close friendships with Danes - mostly with Danish women, such as wives of pastors or planters⁶⁴³ - they moved all over the island and were well-known in all levels of society. Not only did they cross borders of the islands, such as when Maren Knudsen routinely moved physically across the island of St. Croix. She was in overall charge of both homes, and therefore drove her car between Christiansted and Frederiksted to

⁶³⁸ Lawson-Haith and Ellis, *It All began With The Children*, p. 5-25.

⁶³⁹ Caroline Jensen, *Fra de vestindiske øer til Hvidovre*, Radio interview (Danmarks Radio, P4, 14.04.1972).

⁶⁴⁰ Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix*, p. 16.

⁶⁴¹ Jensen, *Fra de vestindiske øer*.

⁶⁴² Sara Holm-Meier, *Danske filantropiske og missionske kvinder i Dansk Vestindien, 1904-1917* (Master's Thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2010).

⁶⁴³ For instance, Povl Helweg-Larsen's wife, Astrid, was friends with the deaconesses, while Marie Lawaetz had friendships with several deaconesses, among these Maren Knudsen. Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 226; Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 23.

inspect and manage the two children's homes.⁶⁴⁴ They also crossed several invisible boundaries, when they lived among local children and nurses in the children's homes, ate all their meals there and daily interacted with all parts of the local population. Because of the many years of work she did there, Sister Maren was especially known everywhere on St. Croix. Among Danes as well as locals, she was "one of the most popular persons".⁶⁴⁵



Figure 4.20: The deaconesses appear in several private photographs of Island Danes, adding to the image, we also get from the written sources, of a close relationship between them and the White Danes. Here Sister Maren (left) and Sister Caroline are posing with – among others – the Lawaetz children at Little La Grange, St. Croix around 1918. Marie Lawaetz' private photo album. (Lawaetz Museum).

The deaconesses were few in numbers, and they were not politically outspoken, as was the case with the male inbetweeners, but they certainly moved between all layers of society more than any other Dane on the islands could.

⁶⁴⁴ E. Th. Malling, "Indtryk fra Sr. Croix, Frederiksted", Aalborg Amtstidende, 8. marts 1931, p. 10.

⁶⁴⁵ E. Th. Malling, "Indtryk fra Sr. Croix, Frederiksted", Aalborg Amtstidende, 8. marts 1931, p. 10.

Concluding remarks

Danish everyday lives on the islands were diverse, and the public spaces of the islands were imagined and practised differently among the Danes, dependent on employment and social standing. Generally, there were three types of Danish migrants: the settlers, the expatriates and the inbetweeners. Settlers had moved to the islands to stay there for good, and they were often planters, merchants or former gendarmes. Meanwhile, expatriates were the new type of migrants, the employees in the private Danish companies, who came to work on the islands only for a period of time. The divide between the two groups partly coincided with a division between 'cosmopolitan' St. Thomas and sugar growing St. Croix. The two groups, respectively, represented an old-fashioned imperialism based in landownership and the newer imperial-nationalistic trends, which was also behind the developing mission on the islands.

The group of settlers was very diverse, and contained several social classes - from 'poor Whites', who had a peripheral role in the Danish community and had often become 'domesticated' and married a local woman - to high class planters, who filled the footsteps of former colonials and often married a White woman, local or Danish. Bourgeois standards underscored the Danish community and, thus, not just employment, but also behaviour and degree of association with locals decided your position in the community. For the planters and upper-middle-class settlers, some degree of integration into society was expected, and short term relationships with local women were broadly accepted, while the long-term relations were increasingly expected to be White-on-White as we moved further into the Twentieth century. On the other hand, the expatriates generally had a set of social codes, which on the surface separated them from local society. They lived apart, inter-socialised, and it was not socially accepted for them to have relations with local women. Of course, even the expatriates did not always live up to this cultural exclusion in practise, but they practised a much larger degree of class and race exclusion. Policed by rumour and reputation, rather than official regulations, they

almost exclusively entered into White-on-White relationships, and contributed greatly to the increase in all-Danish marriages. A small group exempted from this image were the, inbetweeners, such as priests, doctors and deaconesses, who moved between groups of Danes as well as between the Danish community and the local population. As a group, they were both a part of a Danish community and highly involved with the local community and therefore often came to speak their case.

The fact that the number of expatriates grew, also in relation to the number of settlers, meant that the Danish community became increasingly preoccupied with regulation of desire, informed by national, racial and bourgeois notions. In turn, as we have seen, more and more Danes entered into all-Danish marriages and socialised in Danish, and other white, circles.

Generally, though, the Danish migrants daily (re)produced invisible boundaries in the public space of the islands. Many lived separated from locals – the expatriates sometimes in their own compounds – while they articulated the places where locals lived as for example “Negro villages”. But they also daily encountered the local population when moving around the streets, working, shopping or going to church. Paradoxically, then, they were creating an imagined, and partly practised, public space full of invisible boundaries, while they also daily breached these boundaries, and literally dealt with the local community. This was not only the case in the public spaces of the islands. As we will see when we now move into the Danish island homes, distance and intimacy - here too - went hand in hand.

Chapter 5:

Intimate Belongings

In this chapter, we enter into the homes of the Island Danes, where they unfolded their daily, intimate lives. In this context, the concept of home is twofold. It is understood as both process and place – as feelings as well as materiality. Firstly, homes are understood as physical places, where Danes exercised a set of practises and set up material households. Here the physical ‘design’ of the home, the agency of the home, as well as material practises in the home, become central. Secondly, homes are understood as socio-emotional processes of belonging and power. In this sense, the concept of home becomes a process of belonging or feeling homesick, of reproducing identity, of confirming hierarchies and practising family lives. Thus, the chapter explores which material circumstances the Danes were offered in their homes, how they connected to the distant homeland, as well as how they raised their children and negotiated the presence of servants the homes.⁶⁴⁶

As we unfold the homes, we move into the most intimate spaces of the Island Danes, into the spaces in which they slept, ate, laughed, cried and built their families. However, just as the homes were intimate and spaces for privacy, they were also highly public in the sense that ‘outsiders’ – servants – either lived in or were present in the houses every day. Moreover, homes themselves were often a means of representation, and not at all private and secluded. By exploring material and emotional homes, then, this chapter aims at uncovering how social positions and identities of the Danes were produced and reflected in/through the homes, as well as how the physical homes transformed the Danes and their lifestyles.

⁶⁴⁶ For more on the nation as homeland, see for example, Blunt & Dowling, *Home*, p. 159-162.

Home agencies

Homes are constantly reflecting and producing the social positions of their inhabitants. For a Dane coming to the islands, the home had an agency of its own, the design of the home demanded new concepts and practises.⁶⁴⁷ In this subchapter, I argue that houses and their décor mattered because they were part of the materiality that formed the lives of the Danes, just as they were reproductions of discourses on a larger scale. In the words of Daniel Miller, it is “the material culture within our home that appear as both our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of that world within our private domain”.⁶⁴⁸ As we can see in figure 5.1 and 5.2, photographs of the homes of Axel Thage and Erik von Scholten, Danish island homes were often very large wooden houses with galleries and beautiful gardens. In fact, they were in many cases large enough for servants to live there as well, even though not all Danish families shared their houses with servants. In Erik von Scholten’s case, though, the family lived on the top floors of Victoria House (see figure 5.1), while servants were accommodated on the ground floor of the house.⁶⁴⁹



Figure 5.1: Victoria House, where Erik von Scholten, son of a bank employee, lived in Frederiksted, (Private property of Erik von Scholten).

⁶⁴⁷ For more on home agency see Daniel Miller, “Behind closed doors”, *Home Possessions. Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*, ed. Daniel Miller (Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), p. 4.

⁶⁴⁸ Miller, “Behind closed doors”, p. 1.

⁶⁴⁹ Scholten, *Interview*.



Figure 5.2: Bank director Axel Thage's house, 1933. (Private property of Elisabeth Thage)

Deborah Cohen, who has studied British middle-class “house-pride” from the 1830s to the 1930s, argues that during this period, things became attached with moral value, and that, therefore, people came to be “closely identified with their belongings”. Indeed, she argues, this was how homes became “flexible indicators of status”.⁶⁵⁰ This connection between moral, status and the appearance of homes was also evident in the Danish debate in *Atlanten*. In an article from 1911, among other things discussing the need to develop locals and make them feel responsibility, Councillor of State Hammerich, for example, described how local homes on the islands were “only barely cosy”. Therefore, he explained, the Plantation Company had started “building cosier homes” for the workers.⁶⁵¹ In another article, H. Lawaetz described the classes of locals on the islands – the workers, the middle-class and the few upper-class coloured working for the government or the trade, who “lived in greater outer comfort than people in equivalent positions at home”.⁶⁵² To provide an image of the middle-class, he tellingly described their households. In middle-class homes, he explained, you

⁶⁵⁰ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods. The British and their Possessions* (Yale University Press, 2009), p. x-xi.

⁶⁵¹ Etatraad Hammerich, “En rejse til vore vestindiske øer”, *Atlanten*, vol. 8, no. 92, 1911, p. 153.

⁶⁵² H. Lawaetz, “Befolkningen”, *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer. En orienterende oversigt, Foreningen “De Danske Atlanterhavsøer”*, G.E.C. Gad, København, 1904-1911, p. 729.

would enter the house through “a not very reliable set of wooden stairs”, then you would be shown into the hall and be seated in the “two mahogany rocking chairs, which belong to any “decent” home”.⁶⁵³ However, along with the mahogany bed, these chairs would “literally constitute the *pièce de résistance* [sic] of the furnishings, because wooden worms to an apprehensive degree have ravaged the few other furniture of soft and cheap wood”.⁶⁵⁴ Emphasising the role of performance and display of status in this scene, H. Lawaetz, then, exposed how the family members “in a careful and kind of familiar way” walk over to the other furniture and “seat themselves on either the right or the left side of the chair”.⁶⁵⁵

In the Danish island homes, such a link between home belongings and status was the case. As was suggested above, the most dominant and prestigious objects in their homes were the furniture made of mahogany. This was partly due to the great insect resistance of this wood, but also because of the historic significance of mahogany. Mahogany was introduced to Europeans in the early 18th century, and was at its most popular until mid-Nineteenth century. The wood came from Caribbean rainforests, and it was first used by Europeans in their Caribbean colonies. Soon, it became a marker of luxury in both Europe and the colonies.⁶⁵⁶ This was, according to Jennifer L. Anderson, because it was an “extraordinarily durable, versatile, and attractive wood”⁶⁵⁷, but also because “its aesthetic qualities coincided with eighteenth century Anglo concepts of beauty, gentility, refinement and modernity”.⁶⁵⁸ However, in specific historical contexts, Anderson argues, mahogany has been constructed as everything from luxurious, over respectable to nostalgic. When the Island Danes lived on the islands in the early Twentieth century, mahogany had generally become associated with its colonial history in a

⁶⁵³ Lawaetz, “Befolkningen”, p. 729.

⁶⁵⁴ Lawaetz, “Befolkningen”, p. 729.

⁶⁵⁵ Lawaetz, “Befolkningen”, p. 729-730.

⁶⁵⁶ Jennifer L. Anderson, *Mahogany. The cost of luxury in early America* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 3-4, p. 17.

⁶⁵⁷ Anderson, *Mahogany*, p. 9.

⁶⁵⁸ Anderson, *Mahogany*, p. 13

fetishised way, and was again “connoting sumptuousness and luxury for many” in Europe.⁶⁵⁹

For the Island Danes, the choice of mahogany furniture was not their own. Many had brought some furniture from home - but they always supplemented with mahogany furniture on the islands - and they soon learned that their home-brought furniture could neither tolerate the heat nor the insects.⁶⁶⁰ Often, houses and their décor were handed over from other Danes leaving the islands, or furniture was bought from Danes going home. G. Tornøe and his family, for example, took over “a house complete with maid through Mrs. Lawyer Helweg-Larsen”, when they came to the islands.⁶⁶¹ Nonetheless, Danes valued the furniture greatly, and proudly displayed it as a signal of status in their living rooms. Moreover, as we can see in figures 5.3-5.7 below, it was often displayed in photographs, presenting the specific, classy Caribbean homes to a Danish audience.



Figure 5.3: One of bank director Axel Thage’s living rooms on St. Thomas, from a Danish article entitled “From bank director A. Thages home on Sct. Thomas”, 1930s. (Private property of Elisabeth Thage).

⁶⁵⁹ Anderson, *Mahogany*, pp. 15-16, citation, p. 16.

⁶⁶⁰ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”.

⁶⁶¹ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 10.



Figure 5.4: Director Adamsen of Bethlehem Sugar Factory in his home in Upper Bethlehem, St. Croix. Before 1920. (Danish National Museum).⁶⁶²



Figure 5.5: Furniture belonging to bank director Theodor von Scholten, Frederiksted, St. Croix, 1919 (Danish National Museum).⁶⁶³

Furthermore, Povl Helweg-Larsen described how Danes bought “old, very beautiful mahogany furniture” from home-bound Danes at a cheap price. These furniture, he remembers, were often produced in Flensburg, Germany.⁶⁶⁴ The mahogany furniture pieces in Danish island homes, then, was literally a product of the islands as well as of European manufacturers. It was specifically ‘tropical’, but dense with European notions of colony and class.

⁶⁶² *Dansk Vestindien*, A.1-I.4.i, Nyere tids samling (Danish National Museum).

⁶⁶³ *Tyge Hvass fotografier 1919*, Antikvarisk-Topografisk arkiv (Danish National Museum).

⁶⁶⁴ Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 217.

Likewise, the mahogany furniture in Danish homes was referring to a European imperial material culture, which had been in its prime in the previous centuries. The beautifully carved mahogany furniture was indeed still considered luxurious, but it now enclosed a nostalgia as well. To the Island Danes, though, it signalled a sort of tropical bourgeoisie, but they did not articulate the fact that it was also the material of a past imperial culture. Thus, Danes did not just automatically move into a Danish White community when they arrived at the islands, they also moved into bourgeois home life settings, with imperial connotations, that were already arranged for them.



Figure 5.6 and 5.7 (left): Mahogany bed and other furniture belonging to Doctor Knud Knud-Hansen, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, 1919, (Danish National Museum).⁶⁶⁵

Figure 5.8 (right): A reproduction of the central living room in planter Carl Lawaetz' house, on the Little La Grange Plantation on St. Croix. The room and set up, as well as the furniture itself, is the original Lawaetz home, now Lawaetz Museum. (my own photo, 2012).

⁶⁶⁵ *Tyge Hvass fotografier 1919*, Antikvarisk-Topografisk arkiv (Danish National Museum).

Moreover, for sanitation reasons, kitchens were most often separated from the rest of the house. In their house on Few Acres on St. Thomas, Katrine and Einar Svensgaard, for example, had a kitchen placed “across the courtyard” and it contained “a larger kitchen, store room and ironing room”.⁶⁶⁶ Such an arrangement was common, and it created a specific atmosphere, where the working spaces of the house were physically separated from the living spaces. Therefore, the remaining rooms, apart from bedrooms, could be used for visits and representation, and in fact this was one of their main purposes. Helene Berg remembered this character of the house as a very public space of representation. Her family both attended and hosted a lot of parties, and they would house many different guests. For instance, as she remembers, “when the Danish ship Valkyrien was in the harbor, we would often have guests from the ship, and they would dance in the living room.”⁶⁶⁷ The family’s role in the community as well as the physical décor of the house often demanded this specific bourgeois lifestyle.

Certainly, the most pronounced example of the ideal and practise of this bourgeois lifestyle was seen in the family of the Danish consul and West Indian Company director. The company director should represent Danes and Denmark on the islands as well as the West Indian Company. His wife was supposed to be the manifestation of a Danish bourgeois wife, who with her ease, representative skills and elegance was a part of the consulate and the company directory in her own way. She worked with her husband to maintain an image, and together they were indeed ambassadors of Danishness on the islands. Their life, home and family as an entity was not a private matter, but inherent components in the enterprise of consulate and Company. Helene Berg, who was the daughter of the Company director at the time of transfer, describes the changes her mother Henrietta experienced when moving to the mansion on Denmark Hill on St. Thomas:

It was so formal out there, you would always go on formal visits. When we arrived, people we did not know at all would visit. Mother had

⁶⁶⁶ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 2, 3.

⁶⁶⁷ Alexander, *Oldemor*.

problems with the heat, and she thought that it was really idiotic that you had to wear gloves and a hat when you went on a visit.⁶⁶⁸

Similarly, Elizabeth Bang, whose father was Company director and consul in the 1930s, has a related recollection of life in a public home:

I basically grew up in a home which was a sort of embassy, it wasn't a home. People were coming and going all the time. Because, if somebody was coming on a boat, "Alright, go do something else", and the servant would take the children, and they would disappear, you know. And, we could come back when people had left. It was work first, you know, that was the first thing.⁶⁶⁹

Thus, living in the White house on Denmark Hill entailed significant changes for all of the family, but it also set the tone and confirmed a narrative among the rest of the Danish community. Their lifestyles as ambassadors of Danishness confirmed an island culture - Danishness and bourgeoisie were entangled notions 'out there', both in public practise and in the framings of the homes.

However, the physical structures of Danish island homes were not only agents in creating bourgeois culture through décor and arrangement of the rooms. Paradoxically, a less convenient framework for everyday chores in the houses, led to a larger degree of upper class living among Danes. As Jennie Lawaetz frased it:

You know everything was not like now with electricity and so. Everything was done by hand. Even when you were washing, you know, you gotta wash your clothes by hand. Now we have washing machines, they did not have it in those days. So you needed help.⁶⁷⁰

In her home, when she was a child in the 1930s, her mother had help from a cook, a nanny and a washing woman. Especially the construction of the kitchen required help, Jennie noted: "You had a what'a'called coal pot. So you had to put coal in there in order to cook your food. It took time."⁶⁷¹ Helene Berg had the same perception:

⁶⁶⁸ Berg, *Min Barndom*.

⁶⁶⁹ Bang, *Interview*.

⁶⁷⁰ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁶⁷¹ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

You had to have a lot of servants in the tropics, because you have to wash clothes everyday and iron it.⁶⁷²

Likewise, Katrine Svensgaard experienced the same, when she arrived on St. Thomas in 1936:

Because of the heat, we used a lot of clothes, so we had to wash everyday. In Few Acres, only children's clothes and my dresses were washed at home. Boiling of diapers took place in a gas can on a couple of rocks. The rest of the clothes was picked up every Monday by "the washer". I had the same washerwoman almost all the years.⁶⁷³

The family did not just have to do a lot of washing under difficult circumstances, also the kitchen was very simple for a woman who had just arrived from Denmark. Katrine remembers how the stove was a bricked fireplace with iron grates. You had to go find suitable wood to fire up the coals, and all this took time and effort. Everything in the fridge was packed in fly net, and the fridge itself was standing in small bowls with water and petrol in them to keep ants and mosquitos away:

So was the kitchen all up until we left. St. Thomas was pretty primitive, when we were there.⁶⁷⁴

This standard of the houses, and especially everything connected to housekeeping and cooking, played a central role in the fact that having house servants became standard for Danes on the islands. While the share of servants in Europe decreased and their fellow middle-class and bourgeois women in Denmark began educating themselves and working as teachers, nurses and other occupations, the women on the islands adhered to earlier bourgeois lifestyles.⁶⁷⁵ For a White housewife on the Virgin Islands, having help for cooking, cleaning, babysitting, gardening and washing was the norm.

⁶⁷² Alexander, *Oldemor*.

⁶⁷³ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁴ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁵ Anette Faye Jacobsen and Anne Løkke, *Familieliv i Danmark. 1600 til 1980'erne* (Aarhus: Systime, 1986), pp. 48-49, and Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p. 16.



Figure 5.9: The 'primitive' kitchen at Little La Grange, where Planter Carl Lawaetz and his wife Marie lived. Here Mrs. Clark is cooking over the fire using a "swizzlestick", while Bent Lawaetz observes. The photograph is undated, but probably from Marie's funeral in 1966. (Danish National Museum).⁶⁷⁶

Along with housing standards, the bourgeois ideals prescribed that women should not to do physical house work. This meant that they were no longer homemakers in a practical sense, instead they had to reinvent their role in the household. In another context, Mary A. Procida argues that the role of British women in Indian households became one of an "authoritative presence". As was the case in British aristocratic settings, housekeeping became constructed as a "supervisory and symbolic practice, rather than hands on".⁶⁷⁷ The Danish wives on the islands experienced this same pattern as their fellow White housewives in India. In their new homes, they would not scrub the floors or chop the vegetables, but instead make shopping lists and supervise the cleaning, cooking and babysitting. Their primary task was now to supervise the staff; to guide and correct them, and exhibit an ability to "handle them" the right way.⁶⁷⁸ This way, the homes, in the words of Blunt and Dowling, when speaking of diasporic households, became "sites of both containment and potential liberation for the women".⁶⁷⁹ As we have seen, having servants gave way for the Danish wives to work alongside their husbands and enter into associations with other women. However, it also

⁶⁷⁶ *Dansk Vestindien*, A.1-I.4.i, Nyere tids samling (Danish National Museum).

⁶⁷⁷ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, pp. 81-83.

⁶⁷⁸ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 22; Berg, *Kritik af de danske embedsmænd*; Bang, *Memoir: Svensgaard, Memoir: Lawaetz, Interview*, Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, and Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix*.

⁶⁷⁹ Blunt & Dowling, *Home*, p. 214.

reproduced the Danish wife - as the woman entertaining herself with needlework, and other ladylike pursuits - within a traditional bourgeois ideal.⁶⁸⁰ Such an ideal of the bourgeois family is materialised in the very posed photograph in figure 5.10 below, taken in customs officer Bay's home on St. Thomas just before the transfer. Mr. Bay is reading a book to his children, while they are attentively watching over his shoulder, and his wife - whose role is first and foremost that of a wife - is doing needlework.



Figure 5.10: The Bay family in their living room, St. Thomas around 1917. (Danish National Museum).⁶⁸¹

Indeed, women were the ones to experience the effects of homemaking in a new and different setting most explicitly. They daily dealt with the tensions of belonging and feeling out of place in their homes. Therefore, their homemaking on the islands was not just a reproduction of a traditional Danishness brought along from the homeland. Instead, they practised a double role as liberated housewife and bourgeois woman, and they participated in the production of an Island

⁶⁸⁰ Jacobsen and Løkke, *Familieliv i Danmark*, p. 44-49.

⁶⁸¹ *Dansk Vestindien*, A1-I.4.i, Nyere Tids Samling (Danish National Museum).

Danishness, which was at its core a “mixing and reworking of traditions and cultures”.⁶⁸²

Vehicles of emotion: Connections and separations

The Danish women were also main characters in connecting with Denmark. The relation between transnational homes and the homeland, is often practised through maintaining important links of friendship or familial bonds, and through making return journeys, and this was also the case for Island homes.⁶⁸³ The Danish migrants kept in touch with family and friends in Denmark through letter-writing and occasional visits. Visiting the home was, however, limited because of the great distances. Some, such as the West Indian Company employee Einar Svensgaard and his wife never went to Denmark while they lived on St. Thomas⁶⁸⁴, while others, such as another fellow Company employee, Rasmus Johansen and his wife spent three months every summer travelling to Denmark and staying with family for a month.⁶⁸⁵ For most employees in the West Indian Company, though, the norm was a vacation in Denmark every now and then, but not every year.⁶⁸⁶ Indeed, most common for the Island Danes in general was something in-between the two scenarios of the Svensgaard and the Johansen families. Jennie Lawaetz, for example, whose father worked in the sugar industry, remembers how her father “every so many years (...) would be able to get a trip”.⁶⁸⁷ Nonetheless, women seem to have travelled back to Denmark more often than their husbands - either for shorter periods of time or for good - often because they could not handle the climate, got ill or because they were homesick. We have already seen how doctor Knud Knud-Hansen’s first wife left him and travelled back to Denmark, because

⁶⁸² Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 215.

⁶⁸³ See for example N. Al-Ali & K. Koser, *Transnationalism, International Migration and Home, in New Approaches to migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home* (Routledge, 2002) or Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 199-202.

⁶⁸⁴ This was due to the outbreak of the Second World War.

⁶⁸⁵ Svensgaard, *Interview*; Miles, *Interview*.

⁶⁸⁶ : 75: *Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance*, 106: *Korrespondance fra H. Bang*, 203: *Direktør Kaptajn Laubs private korrespondance*, *Forskelligt materiale* and 700: *Korrespondance mærket Direktionen*, 02053: *A/S Det Østasiatiske Kompagni* (Danish Business Archives).

⁶⁸⁷ Jennie Lawaetz, *Interview*.

she did not feel at home on the islands.⁶⁸⁸ The same was the case for Erik von Scholten's mother, who in 1933 got divorced from her husband and in the end gave up on trying to belong and went back to Denmark after 14 years on St. Croix. This coincided with the fact that Erik's two older sisters were leaving for school in Denmark. Even though all the girls left, Erik and his father stayed on for another two years until his father's employment in the Danish West Indian National Bank came to an end, when the concession ran out.⁶⁸⁹ Meanwhile, women sometimes travelled to Denmark on convalescence and returned to the islands again, when they felt better. This was for example the case for H. Taylor's mother, who after giving birth to his brother got ill, and "had to spend several years in Denmark".⁶⁹⁰ At other times, the women just went to Denmark on vacations because they missed their family and had more spare time to take the long journey than their husbands. Bank director Axel Thage's wife, Roma, for example travelled to Denmark on a visit in 1933 with the couple's children (see figure 5.11 and 5.12).⁶⁹¹



Roma Thage and her children, Flemming and Lise Flemming and Lise on a visit to Denmark in 1932.

Figure 5.11 (left): Flemming and Lise ice-skating in Denmark, Figure 5.12 (right): Roma, Flemming and Lise with their Danish family. (Private property of Elisabeth Thage).

Overall, most Danes kept some sort of connection to their homeland, while they lived – for a period of years or for good – on the islands. Visits from Denmark could occur, although they were relatively rare. But parents, friends or siblings did

⁶⁸⁸ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 37

⁶⁸⁹ Scholten, *Interview*.

⁶⁹⁰ Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix*, p. 1.

⁶⁹¹ Elisabeth Thage, *Interview*.

occasionally take the long trip to the islands. Especially grandparents of young children on the islands took the trip, sometimes to see their grandchild for the first time. This was the case for Erik von Scholten, whose mother's parents visited St. Croix in 1931, a visit which is also documented in his photo album (figure 5.13). Povl Helweg-Larsen also remembers how his family visited the island, and that good friends came to St. Croix for their first and second Christmas on St. Croix.⁶⁹²



Figure 5.13: Erik von Scholten with his grandparents, who visited the family on St. Croix in 1931. (Private property of Erik von Scholten).

Letter-writing was, unsurprisingly, the most common means of connecting with loved ones in the homeland. The practise of writing letters upheld close relationships, familiar bonds and friendships for years without any physical contact. Jennie Lawaetz remembers how her father connected to Denmark all his life through correspondence:

He got some newspapers now and then, but you know everything at the time was by boat. It took a month to get from Denmark. But he used to correspond with his family, you know, write letters. (...). He was very good with it. Corresponding with his friends and family in Denmark.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹² The grandparents of Erik von Scholten visited in 1931, Erik von Scholten's Photo Album, and Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 221.

⁶⁹³ Jennie Lawaetz, *Interview*.

And letters, or even telegrams, became the vehicles of emotions, voicing, confirming and maintaining intimate bonds across the Atlantic. In the words of Historian Laura Ishiguro, imperial letters “worked as a kind of discursive and material performance of, among other things, family relationships and imperial identities”, and as such, they “constituted familiar relationships”.⁶⁹⁴ In Katrine Svensgaard’s case, for instance, the emotional news of the birth of her first son was announced to her parents through a telegram:

When Peter was born on November 12 1937, we telegraphed to my mom and dad: “Well arrived in St. Thomas, Peter”. From Tølløse station, they called to ask, if they should read the telegram out loud, since it would not arrive with the post until the next day. When mother heard the telegram, she started to cry. The man on the phone said: Don’t cry, Mrs. Mølgaard, he arrived safely. Yes, mother then said, but it is my first grandchild, who has been born.⁶⁹⁵

Likewise, the lack of truly personal and honest correspondence during the Second World War, due to censorship in occupied Denmark, created a great sense of loss in Katrine Svensgaard:

After the occupation, you opened the letters with a strange feeling. They had been read by others, and with a brush or so, they had deleted what they did not think we should know.

Once during the war, we received a “real” letter from home. Completely unprepared, I had arrived at the post office to pick up our post from the postbox, and there was a letter with father’s handwriting. On my way to the car, I started to cry. Outside I met Jessen, who wanted to comfort me, but when he discovered why I cried, he laughed at me. I had to tell him, that he would cry too, if he suddenly got a letter from Denmark, and this he admitted to.⁶⁹⁶

The importance of letters was even more evident, when Island families were separated from each other. This was very often the case in Danish Island families,

⁶⁹⁴ Ishiguro, *Relative Distances*, p. 16-17.

⁶⁹⁵ Katrine Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 4.

⁶⁹⁶ Svensgaard, *Memoir*, p. 8.

since another way of connecting to the homeland, was sending children home to school in Denmark.⁶⁹⁷ Such a practice of circles of movement and separation, Elizabeth Buettner has argued in relation to the British families in late imperial India, “created specific forms of racial, class and geographical identity that enabled them to remain separate from not only Indians, but also from members of European-descended communities domiciled in India”.⁶⁹⁸ This could also be argued for Island Danes, and especially the expatriates, who were entitled to Danish furloughs as part of their job. Their travelling practises served as a differentiation between Danish expatriates and settlers, who often waited many years between going to Denmark. It also, of course, manifested the distance between Danes and local society, since Island Danes always had one foot elsewhere, in the homeland. Moreover, it separated Danes from local White families, who had lived on the islands for years or centuries and had become domiciled. They shared a Whiteness, but Danish expatriates, were less rooted. In other words, many Danes were separating from island communities through connecting to the homeland. However, their practices were still very different, from those *at home*, as they constituted an Island identity with strong elements of Danishness, as well as White Island culture. And their children, indeed, felt the difference and distance the most.

Island childhoods

In the late Nineteenth century, North American and Western European views on children and childhoods underwent a significant change. From first and foremost being viewed as a source of labour, children became subjects of social policy, and their upbringing and welfare came onto the agenda.⁶⁹⁹ In Denmark, this development was seen in a new set of norms for responsible upbringing of children,

⁶⁹⁷ See “Island Childhoods” below.

⁶⁹⁸ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 2.

⁶⁹⁹ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, p. 120.

focus on neglect and maltreatment and rules for schooling and health.⁷⁰⁰ Moreover, in 1905 an age of criminal responsibility was set, and a law on children's welfare was adopted.⁷⁰¹ In other words, children became something in themselves, and they obtained rights. In European colonies in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century, attention also shifted to the new generations. As the process of growing up was equalled with becoming civilised, managing childhood also became "a way of managing the race".⁷⁰²

When it came to the Caribbean colony, Danes began to take an interest in the welfare of the Afro-Caribbean children, and as we have seen, concern arose over the high rate in infant mortality, and children's homes were established.⁷⁰³ However, Danish children on the islands, were very seldom included in such a concern, with the exception of, for example, journalist Cavling's statement - served as a truism - that "the Negroes exercise undue influence on White children".⁷⁰⁴ There were also some examples of situations where Island Danish families problematised Virgin Islands' climate, hygiene or meaning in relation to their children. For example, when sending them to school in Denmark, as we explore further below, or when some Danish families chose to have their children born outside the islands. The Bang family, for example, travelled to Denmark in 1931, in order for Elizabeth's younger brother, Thomas, to be born on Danish soil and thereby definitely gain the prestige of being born Danish. It was likewise made sure that he was baptised in Frederiksberg Church in Copenhagen.⁷⁰⁵ Most of the I Danish children born outside the islands, though, first saw the world in the United States or in Puerto Rico, and not in distant Denmark.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁰ Frank Ebsen, "Vejen til nutidens børneopfattelse", *Tidskrift for Socialpolitisk Forening*, no. 6 (2010).

⁷⁰¹ Jacobsen and Løkke, *Familieliv i Danmark*, p. 58.

⁷⁰² Paisley, "Childhood and Race", p. 240.

⁷⁰³ See Chapter 1.

⁷⁰⁴ Cavling, *Det danske Vestindien*, p. 100.

⁷⁰⁵ According to the memory of Elizabeth Bang, the family stayed for around three months: Bang, *Memoir*.

⁷⁰⁶ In the 1930 *Fifteenth Census*, for example, around 10% of the children with a Danish father and/or mother were born outside the islands, most in Puerto Rico or United States.

As with adults, Danish children and childhoods on the islands were part of the narrative of homeliness, but they more often crossed the invisible boundaries. They were practising in what Satadru Sen has labelled the 'juvenile periphery'. Although understood as insignificant, the periphery, he contends, matters and is politically significant, because a periphery "invites intervention, experimentation, colonization and reclamation".⁷⁰⁷ However, as colonial thought generally shifted to heavy management of White children at the turn of the century, no such shift occurred on the islands. In Dutch Indonesia, Stoler reminds us, "the very presence and proximity of so many servants compromised what White children needed to ingest: what it meant to be Dutch and to know they belonged".⁷⁰⁸ As a result, in the Dutch and French cases, for example, it was no longer accepted that European children were raised by servants.⁷⁰⁹ On the islands, however, close relationships between local Afro-Caribbeans, children as well as adults, and Danish children were widely practised and acknowledged way into the 1930s and 1940s. As we will see, children and servants were often close. Many a child considered the help to be their friends and spent hours with them every day. Elizabeth Bang, for example, who was bored living on Denmark Hill, would spend the day alone waiting for the opportunity to help the cook Sarah feed the dogs, or to sing songs with the gardener.⁷¹⁰ The gardener in the Lawaetz household was Frits' "best friend", and Helene Berg also remembers that she and her siblings played with a boy the family had hired to help around the house.⁷¹¹ These intimate encounters, thus, even if they were practised in a 'juvenile periphery', were deeply significant to the feelings and thoughts of Danishness, of belonging and of modes of power among the young Danes.

The Danish children experienced racial difference close up every day, and thereby learned to differentiate; but they also came closer to local life and local

⁷⁰⁷ Satadru Sen, *Colonial Childhoods, The Juvenile Periphery of India 1850-1945* (Anthem Press, 2005) p. 8.

⁷⁰⁸ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, p. 139.

⁷⁰⁹ Stoler, "A Sentimental Education", p. 88.

⁷¹⁰ Bang, *Memoir*.

⁷¹¹ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 27, and Berg, *Min Barndom*.

people than their parents ever did. This could result in complex affinities. From being a small boy on St. Croix, H. Taylor for example remembers that: “There was a conflict between the marines from Valkyrien and the police master and the protesters. My sympathy was then on the side of the Negroes”.⁷¹² Although we could question the degree of post-rationalisation in such a quote, Taylor’s statement echoes many other child attitudes, and it was written in the 1950s, when racial differentiation was neither unfamiliar nor frowned upon. Helene Berg, for example, remembers how she thought it was strange how her parents and other Danish adults spoke of the locals:

I heard the grown-ups talking, they said: “Oh, but they are just children”. That was pretty normal then, they didn’t think the negroes were capable of anything. I went to school with all kinds of people, and I thought it was fine.⁷¹³

Just as H. Taylor, felt sympathy for the workers in the labour conflict on St. Croix, many Danish children would often have “mistaken” affinities, and their everyday was full of diversity and contradiction. This was partly because the children also engaged with local children when playing in the nearby streets or by the sea. This was especially evident among settlers. The Lawaetz children, for example, lived next to the La Grange Village, where all the local workers were housed, and Frits would go fishing for shrimps or eels, or go swimming, with the “village boys”.⁷¹⁴ Jens Larsen, son of former gendarme Gotfred Larsen and his local wife, would play all sorts of ball games and have swimming races from Gallows Bay on St. Croix with his mixed group of friends as well.⁷¹⁵ It seems that the pronounced racial categorisation of the adult world was merely a distant backdrop in the minds of children. Thus, the constitution of White child identities was often caught in-between worlds, and although Danish parents sometimes had objections – many,

⁷¹² Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix*, p 7.

⁷¹³ Berg, *Min Barndom*.

⁷¹⁴ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 33.

⁷¹⁵ Thurland, *Jens Larsen*, p. 5-6.

for instance, thought the babysitter was spoiling the children - these very intimate and forming encounters were never seriously challenged.

Also, the Danish language, was not pushed upon island Danish children, who generally spoke a local version of American in the years after the transfer.⁷¹⁶ Instead, the children would not learn Danish unless their parents chose to prepare them for school in Denmark. In the Lawaetz family, for example, Danish lessons were given to the children, so they would be able to speak their mother tongue at school. Every Sunday Marie taught her children Danish, and one year a friend of the family, Louise Andreasen, joined the lessons as well. Later on, the children's cousin arrived from Denmark to live with the family and improve the children's Danish skills by teaching them.⁷¹⁷ It is also worth noting that even though the first language of the children was Crucian American, Marie was called "Mor", the Danish word for mother.⁷¹⁸ Thus, when it came to a role as intimate and homely as that of motherhood, Marie and her children related through her mother tongue. On the contrary, Frida and Kai Svensgaard called their mother "Mommy", even as adults back in Denmark. Using the term "Mommy" would in Denmark either be a very old-fashioned bourgeois practise from the 1930s and 1940s or just downright American. Although we do not know which of the two socio-cultural premises were behind their use of the phrase, it could just as likely be a combination of both, as they did live in a bourgeois, semi-American milieu during their early childhood in the 1930s and 1940s.⁷¹⁹

The fact that the Svensgaard children were living local lives, without being thoroughly introduced to Danish culture, food and language was also evident,

⁷¹⁶ For example: Jennie Lawaetz spoke English to her children, Jennie Lawaetz, *Interview*; None of the Svensgaard children spoke any Danish when they returned to Denmark, Svensgaard, *Interview*; Frits Lawaetz and his siblings were taught a bit of Danish by their mother and their cousin, but in everyday home life, they spoke English, Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*; and Ruth Nielsen did not know any Danish until she moved to Denmark in her adulthood, Nielsen, *Interview*.

⁷¹⁷ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 52, 61.

⁷¹⁸ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*. p. 62-63.

⁷¹⁹ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

when Katrine Svensgaard recalled how strange it was for her children to return to a Denmark, they had never known:

There were many experiences and things that was a first for them – busses, trams, trains, rye bread, buttermilk, etc. My mother thought they were picky eaters, but they didn't know the Danish food.⁷²⁰

And not only were food, language and transportation new to the Svensgaard children, they were also meeting their Danish family for the first time. As Katrine expressed it:

Every time Peter saw someone coming up the gangway, he asked: Are you my family? If they were, they got a big hug. The children had never experienced having a family.⁷²¹

Thus, apart from practising an everyday life on the islands that was arguably more culturally complex than that of their parents, many Danish children also experienced this linguistic and geographic exile. What Avtar Brah, when speaking of diasporas, calls a “double, triple or multi-placedness of ‘home’ in the imaginary of the people” was evident in the children of Danish migrants on the islands.⁷²² Indeed, the Danish children lived with an ambivalence of belonging.⁷²³ As Elizabeth Bang expressed it in our interview: “I always say, my brothers and I were born in a taxi”⁷²⁴. Likewise, Ruth Nielsen, echoed the same sense of being out of place:

I don't feel like I belong anywhere. I would rather say that I was born in no man's land.⁷²⁵

As Ruth articulates above, the Danish children were certainly experiencing and embodying the distance, connections and separations, and they, if any, were practising complex affinities, and hybrid identities. Consequently, they felt the

⁷²⁰ Svensgaard, *Memoir*.

⁷²¹ Svensgaard, *Memoir*.

⁷²² Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 194.

⁷²³ For more on ambivalence, hybrid identities and being in-between, see for example: Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 13.

⁷²⁴ Bang, *Interview*.

⁷²⁵ Nielsen, *Interview*.

layered identities of simultaneously being American, Danish and Crucian or St. Thomanian.

However, when it came to socialisation, the world of their parents did spill over into children's lives. This way, although not articulated as such, a framework to move within had been set in place for many young Danish girls and boys. Parents kept them in the social circles of the White community, by bringing the children together at all-Danish or all-White gatherings, or having them go on vacation at other Danish family homes. Jennie Lawaetz was born a Christensen on St. Croix in 1919 to a local mother and a Danish father, Frederik Christensen, who worked as an accountant for the Bethlehem Sugar Factory. She remembers how her parents engaged the family with their Danish friends:

Most of the managers at the different estates were Danish. They and their wives and children would come⁷²⁶

This was also the case for her future husband's family, the Lawaetz' at Little La Grange. The Danish families that the Lawaetz children came together with are enumerated in Frits Lawaetz' biography:

Carl and Marie were close friends with the Nordbys of Estate Mt. Pleasant, their sons Rudolf and Jeffrey were playmates of Frits and Kai. Frits was close friends with Frants Madsen, whose father ran the lighthouse at Ham's Bluff. The Andreasens and Jensens of Estate La Grange, the Nyholms fra Estate Envy, and the Lindeborgs and Tornøes of Frederiksted added to the pleasure of their days.⁷²⁷

Likewise, when her brother Thomas was born, and her parents travelled to Denmark, Elizabeth Bang was left on St. Thomas for a couple of months with bank director Axel Thage's family. Here she played with the four Thage children, especially their daughter Vivi who would teach her to ride turtles in the back yard.⁷²⁸ Bank director Tornøe's twin daughters, Bodil and Annette, often

⁷²⁶ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁷²⁷ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*. p. 32-33.

⁷²⁸ Bang, *Memoir*.

vacationed with the Lawaetz' on St. Croix, and Frits Lawaetz spent vacations with Danish lighthouse inspector, Hans Christensen and his two daughters, with Gustav Nordby's two sons at Estate Mount Pleasant or with the Tornøes, both while they were living on St. Croix and on St. Thomas.⁷²⁹

As with everyday playing, school was also a site of both intermingling and parental control for the Danish children. The choice of school in itself partly set the framework for the children's world view and sociality; for which culture they experienced, and who they encountered. It was in the school, as much as in the homes, in the streets or at family gatherings, that they encountered other children, and (re)produced their own identities. Parents seemed to realise this, and many of the Danish parents belonging to the middle class and upwards therefore chose prestigious on-island schools for their children in the early schooling years. Often, then, they sent the children away for school elsewhere when they got older. This was an expression of status among the White elite, but also somewhat due to the lack of higher schooling on the islands. Even in pre-transfer, however, there was never an entirely Danish school. Instead, schools were influenced by a mix of Lancastrian ideas, the Moravian church and Catholicism. From 1839 onwards, the teaching language of English replaced that of Dutch Creole, and although there was no formal segregation, a report from 1982 on the history of Virgin Islands' schools stated that "white and light skinned children were enrolled in one of the private schools, while dark skinned children (...) attended communal or public school".⁷³⁰ This practise was for the most part continued after the transfer. Among the White community in general, the private catholic schools were often popular. This was also the case for many Danish families, even though most Danes were Lutherans. Jennie Lawaetz herself, and later all her children, went to St. Patricks School in Frederiksted. It was run by Belgian nuns, and Jennie remembers that it was "considered one of the best schools on the island".⁷³¹ The children of Gotfred Larsen

⁷²⁹ Watkins. *Bull of Annaly*, p. 47, 52, 57.

⁷³⁰ Moolenaar, *Brief Historical Notes*, p. 3-4. Citation p. 4.

⁷³¹ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

went to St. Mary's catholic school in Christiansted, where Mother O'Dille, a Belgian nun, taught the children. A class mate of his son, Jens Larsen, remembers that "everyone who came out of Mother O'Dille's class was a "big shot" or ended up with the best jobs that the islands had".⁷³² This statement is noteworthy, and to some extent displays the relative, inherent status in Whiteness and Danishness, despite class predicates. The Larsens could be considered working class, or 'poor Whites', as Gotfred Larsen was a former gendarme married to a local woman, but they still sent their children to the same catholic school as middle and upper class Whites did. On St. Thomas, Helene Berg also went to the catholic school for almost 2 years before her family went back to Denmark. To her memory the pupils of the catholic school were "all kinds of colours and nationalities", and the nuns were of different nationalities as well.⁷³³ On the other hand, Katrine Svensgaard confirmed the predominant tendency of Whites to send their children to catholic school, but she chose for her children to attend a small private school on St. Thomas instead. As she said: "The only school there could be talk of was the catholic school. And I did not like it".⁷³⁴ This dislike was mostly based in stories of the school's demand for extra money that she had heard from another Danish family, the Martinsens. The private school where Kai and Peter Svensgaard went as an alternative was small and run by Jess Andersen, the daughter of a Danish carpenter.⁷³⁵

However, whether they attended catholic school or not, most Danish children went to a private school, where they would be educated side by side with many of the White elite children. This was also the case for Frits Lawaetz, who went to two different schools, first a Danish one, then an American. In 1917, he was registered at St. Croix High School in Frederiksted along with his brother and sisters, the Tornøe twins and other Danish children, as well as children from for

⁷³² Thurland, *Jens Larsen*, p. 10.

⁷³³ Berg, *Min Barndom*.

⁷³⁴ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁷³⁵ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

example the British Skeoch and Coulter families.⁷³⁶ This impression is confirmed in photographs of the children (see for example figure 5.14), and when Frits Lawaetz' mother referred to his school friends as being the Danish Harvey and Volmer Larsen, Frants Madsen and the Scottish-descended Ralph Skeoch.⁷³⁷ Throughout the years between the transfer and 1945, though, the availability of schools and grade levels on the islands for the Danish parents to choose from, gradually increased. Catholic schools began offering a commercial class for children to attend after graduation. Jennie Lawaetz, as well as Rigmor Christoffersen's two sisters, for example, took part in such a "Catholic Commercial Course".⁷³⁸ Meanwhile, during the naval rule from 1917 to 1931, Junior High School was established so that all children could obtain a ninth grade education instead of only seven grades. Moreover, in 1931 the first class of twelfth graders graduated on St. Thomas.⁷³⁹



Figure 5.14: Lawaetz children with friends at the confirmation of Anna and Else, around 1918. Marie Lawaetz' private photo album. (Lawaetz Museum).

⁷³⁶ *List of pupils*, St. Croix Højere Skole, Frederiksted, 1917, Tryksager, 5: Optegnelser m.v., 06236: O. Rübner-Petersen (Danish National Archives). In addition, Frits' father and bank director Tornøe were on the board of directors.

⁷³⁷ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 36.

⁷³⁸ Lawaetz, *Interview*, and Christoffersen, *Childhood Memories*, p. 3.

⁷³⁹ Moolenaar, *Brief Historical Notes*, p. 4.

When they reached a certain age, Danish children of the White elite were very often sent to school in Denmark or elsewhere, while their parents stayed on the islands. Halvor Taylor and his younger brother were, for example, sent to a boarding school in Birkerød outside of Copenhagen in 1916. His older brother, Ejner, had been sent there four years earlier, and he remembers how it was to arrive in Denmark and thereby to end the life he had known on the islands:

At the boarding school in Birkerød, where my brother was staying, we were awaited with great excitement, because he had told his friends that we were negroes. I was 13 years old, and the adventure was over.⁷⁴⁰

Likewise, around 1927 Jennie Lawaetz was sent to a public school in Køge south of Copenhagen, when she was about 8 years old. Here she stayed with her grandparents for 5 years without seeing St. Croix, her siblings or her parents. It was also during her 5 years in Køge that Jennie learned to speak Danish, and got some Danish friends with whom she would correspond in the years after she went back to St. Croix.⁷⁴¹ West Indian Company employee Rasmus Johansen and his wife also sent their daughter to school in Denmark, and when she herself had children, the practise was continued with them.⁷⁴² Meanwhile, Erik von Scholten returned to Denmark before he could be sent there for schooling, but his older sisters both moved to Denmark ahead of him to go to school there in the early 1930s.⁷⁴³ Frits Lawaetz and all his brothers and sisters were sent to Denmark for schooling as well. The schooling practise in the Lawaetz family was gendered; the boys went to a Danish boarding school, while the girls were sent to Denmark at a later age to educate themselves within nursing and housekeeping. Therefore, in 1922 Frits, Anna and Else travelled to Denmark, where Anna went to nursing school, Else began apprenticeship in housekeeping, and 14-year-old Frits was sent to Stenhus Boarding School. Later on, his younger brothers would follow him to this same school. Frits stayed at Stenhus Boarding School for three years, spending summers

⁷⁴⁰ Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix*, p. 12.

⁷⁴¹ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁷⁴² Miles, *Interview*.

⁷⁴³ Scholten, *Interview*.

working on his father's cousin's farm. In 1925, when he was 17, he took an apprenticeship in farming for two years in Jutland, before he decided to go home to St. Croix and see his parents again.⁷⁴⁴

The practice, among Islands Danes of the middle class and up, of schooling in Denmark in many ways paralleled the "life cycle" pattern of the British in late colonial India, which Elizabeth Buettner has described. Here colonials went home on vacations, for schooling and retirement, partly because it was a way of confirming their Whiteness.⁷⁴⁵ Buettner argues that British empire families saw India as a risky environment for raising their children. They feared for the mental, physical and moral health - and for the racial and cultural identity of their children, even when they grew up in very protected settings. Those who could afford it, sent their children to school in Britain, and "found the notion of voluntarily keeping them in India unthinkable".⁷⁴⁶ Based in these ideas of the culturally dangerous India, and in the actual practises of going 'home', it became a symbol of high class, to send your children away for school.⁷⁴⁷ Danish parents on the islands were less fearful of the environment out there, but they did establish a resembling elite practise of schooling in Denmark or elsewhere.

⁷⁴⁴ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 60-75.

⁷⁴⁵ Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 10. As Buettner states, Whiteness was "construed along gendered lines and as much by culture, education, class, occupation, and geography as by biology".

⁷⁴⁶ Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 28-29.

⁷⁴⁷ Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 9.



Figure 5.15: Postcards from Børge Johansen, who was staying with his grandparents in Copenhagen, to his parents on St. Thomas. 1937. His dual culture is suggested by the fact that he is writing in two different languages in the postcards addressed less than a month apart. One card is written in Danish (right), the other in English (left). (Property of Eric Miles).

Being away from family or home could be difficult, both in terms of cultural differences, language problems and the agony of distance. For some, just the prospect of this separation was enough to find other ways. Danish Gustav Nordby, for example, explains in his memoir how schooling was crucial to his family's departure from St. Croix in 1924: "when the children were about to start proper school, we had to pack up".⁷⁴⁸ Katrine Svensgaard remembered making a similar choice in 1946:

Contributing to us deciding to go home, was the thought of letting Peter stay in Denmark at a boarding school (...) and then a few years later sending Kai there. We had seen what it was like for others who had sent their children off when they were 11 years old and gotten them back as 17 or 18 year olds. The thought was unbearable.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁸ Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix*, p. 17.

⁷⁴⁹ Svensgaard, *Memoir*.

The agony and alienation of sending children away for years, was also something her son Kai remembered. He had observed, when other Danish families sent children to boarding school in Denmark, and when they returned, he explained, they would be formal when speaking to their parents, because now they were as strangers.⁷⁵⁰ In her book about British Second World War evacuee children, Julie Summers fittingly calls a chapter on similar relations between returned children and their parents “Relative strangers”. She explores both the departure and return of the children, and delivers the point that they were both significant experiences that had an impact on the feelings of belonging and affections of the children:

The return home was at times more traumatic than the departure had been. Settling down after months or years away, with adjustments needed on both sides (...) Home in an emotional sense had disappeared for many children.⁷⁵¹

And the thought of sending children away, not knowing what would happen to them afterwards, could indeed be almost unbearable to some parents. Marie Lawaetz, for example, began grieving the future separation a year before sending her three eldest children to Denmark.⁷⁵² On the day of their departure, she wrote the following in Frits’ baby book:

This may very well be the last time we all gather together in our dearly beloved home where all you dear children were born. We don’t know if you, my dear boy, after you get through with schooling in Denmark will return to help your dear father. (...) as you now have left your home, I must now take leave with this book, that has been a great pleasure for me to write, telling about all your many achievements from date of birth October 7 1905, to the day you left your beloved family and home on June 18, 1922. We will miss you, our dear big boy, our

⁷⁵⁰ Svensgaard, *Interview*. In Danish there is both a formal and an informal version of ‘you’. What Kai explained was that the Danish returned children would use the formal ‘you’ when speaking to their parents.

⁷⁵¹ Julie Summers, *When the Children Came Home. Stories from Wartime Evacuees* (Simon & Shuster, 2011), p. 37, 43.

⁷⁵² Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 60.

little manager. May God bless you and be with you always. Your own
Mor.⁷⁵³

Just as separation was difficult for Marie, so it was for many children. Even though they were sent to their apparent homeland, many children did not feel at home there. Instead, they were homesick for the islands.⁷⁵⁴ Not only was Marie's son Frits away from his family, he also had to adjust to a different climate, language and culture altogether. In his biography, he recalled how he had to replace his shorts with unfamiliar woollen trousers, he was afraid of falling behind in school because he was just learning to speak Danish properly, and he felt lost in the very big school. He also missed St. Croix and what he knew to be home: "the humid air night, creaks of carts and horses working, people of color, Hispanic voices and the *quelbe* music".⁷⁵⁵ For Frits, as for many Danish children, then, island childhood had made separation a customary part of his life.

Not all Danish children were sent to Denmark, though, Bodil and Anette Tornøe, daughters of the bank director, attended school in Antigua for a couple of years before the family went home to Denmark. Meanwhile Elizabeth Bang, whose mother's family had English roots, was sent to Surrey, England in 1935, when she was 8 years old. Here she lived with her mother's aunt and only saw her parents and brothers once a year, until the war broke out in 1939, and her summer vacation on St. Thomas was extended to a whole year.⁷⁵⁶ Thus, although a majority of Danish children were sent for schooling in Denmark, some went elsewhere. The spread of Americanisation gradually increased, and the later in the century it was, the more pronounced was the tendency to send the children to Puerto Rico or, in many cases, up north to the United States, or sometimes Canada. Jennie Lawaetz, who was born in 1919, was the last and only of the Christensen children to go to Denmark, for

⁷⁵³ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 62-63. Note that the text is originally written in English, while the Danish word for mother "Mor" was written in Danish.

⁷⁵⁴ See for example Georgina Gowans, "Imperial Geographies of Home: Mensahibs and miss-sahibs in Indian and Britain, 1915-47", *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 10 (2003), for more on how home and homeland could be recast for many imperial children.

⁷⁵⁵ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 65.

⁷⁵⁶ Bang, *Memoir*.

example. Her younger siblings instead went to school in the United States.⁷⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Ruth Nielsen, daughter of West Indian Company employee, Hein Christensen, who was born in 1944, went to Puerto Rico for schooling and Canada to attend university.⁷⁵⁸ Likewise, when he had returned to St. Croix and himself become an adult, Frits Lawaetz married the former bank director Tornøe's daughter, Bodil, who re-migrated to the island to live with him. Their children first went to St. Patrick's catholic school, as Frits had done it himself, and then went onto boarding school in the United States. Their son Bent, for example, went to a boarding school in Pennsylvania when he was 14, and later on to Stanford University and University of Florida.⁷⁵⁹

In general Americanisation of Virgin Islands society increasingly began to establish itself in childhood lives. Not only in their schooling, where they were taught an American curriculum, but also in their leisure time. Frits Lawaetz and his brother Kai, for example, became a part of the Boy Scouts of America on St. Croix and played with American boys in the country club – just as American baseball was becoming the favourite sport of the Crucian boys.⁷⁶⁰ Rigmor Christoffersen, as well, remembered how she and her siblings would all gather around American radio broadcastings in the 1930s and listen to the popular radio sitcom *Amos 'n' Andy*, displaying African-American culture, or the famous boxing fights between African-American hero Joe Luis and German Max Schmelig in 1936 and 1938.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁷ Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁷⁵⁸ Nielsen, *Interview*.

⁷⁵⁹ Bent Lawaetz, *Interview*.

⁷⁶⁰ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, p. 51; Thurland, *Jens Larsen*, pp. 5-6, and Bent Lawaetz, *Interview*, St. Croix, January 2013, Benedict, *Cruzan Child*, pp. 45-47.

⁷⁶¹ The *Amos 'n' Andy* show was very popular show among Americans in the late 1920s and 1930s. It was first aired in 1928, and continued up into the 1950s. Christoffersen, *Childhood Memories*, p. 8-9, and Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices. American Broadcasting, 1922-52* (University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 85-87.

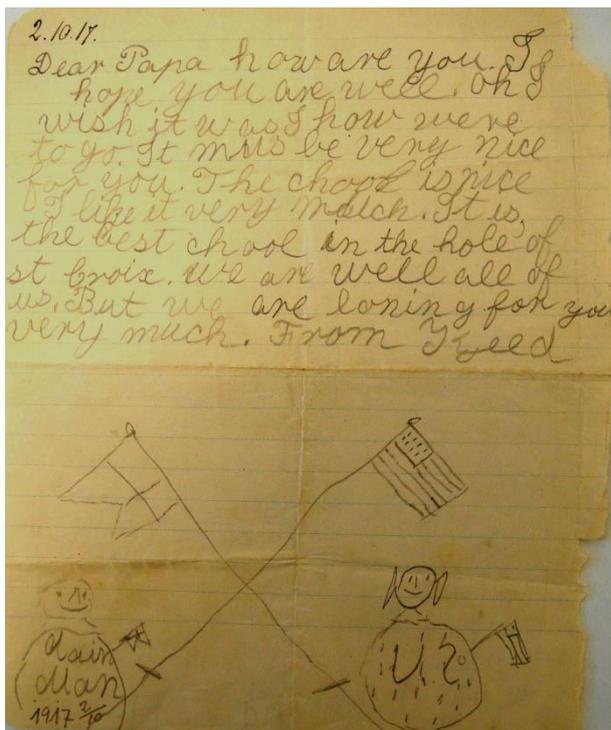


Figure 5.16: Letter, in English, to Povl Helweg-Larsen from his son, Kjeld, who missed his father while he was away in 1917. Notice how he has drawn a “dain Man” (e.g. Daneman) and an American man below each their flags. The flags cross each other, almost as a symbol of doubleness in Kjeld’s identity. (Danish National Archives).⁷⁶²

Thus, the Danish children were daily moving around in, and often transcending, the many (idea) worlds on the islands. Their sociality and affinities were both shaped by everyday encounters with local life, with American ideas, local neighbouring children, spending time with servants, with schoolmates and family friends - and by the influences and choices of their parents. Thus, to return to the words of Satadru Sen, the juvenile periphery of the White children did invite involvement, and childhoods were by no means left out of the bourgeois world of ideas. But, the focus was mainly on the children’s education and thereby prestige and future opportunities. Who they spent time with in the homes, and who they played with in their everyday on the streets, mattered less. As the language, food, dress and play of White children was regulated in many colonies - as well as in settler colonies such as New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Canada - the movements of Danish children on the islands remained largely unproblematised.⁷⁶³ Here it becomes evident that no state was involved. There were no prescriptions,

⁷⁶² Letter from Kjeld to his father, 2 October 1917, 1: Breve til P. Helweg-Larsen fra institutioner og offentlige myndigheder, 05605: P. Helweg Larsen (Danish National Archives).

⁷⁶³ Paisley, “Childhood and Race”, p. 248-249.

no Danish curriculum in schools, no public concerns over the Danishness or Whiteness of island children - and thereby, there was also less concern among the parents. Especially settler children integrated into local child life with ease, and all children of Island Danes were allowed to spend a vast amount of time with their local servants. Even though nationalism was stressed in every other sphere, there were no articulations of concern for the national culture and character of the children. Increasing Americanisation of childhood, along with a larger degree of integration into local society, was largely uncontested.

The empire within the homes

The local people that Danish children - as well as adults - arguably spent the very most time with, was their servants. Servants were common in White homes; in some homes they were residents, while in others, they lived apart, but came to work in the house every day.⁷⁶⁴ The amount of help in a household differed, but many households had a cook, a washing woman, a maid, a gardener, and if there were children, a babysitter connected to the house. Often, servants would move from Danish family to Danish family, as 'inherited goods' when one family left and another arrived.⁷⁶⁵

These daily encounters of servants and the Danish families in the private homes, were a main contact point between local society and the White community. Without being aware of it himself, H. P. Berg, expressed this between the lines in his memoir: "The officials and the remaining White population had the best relations with the coloured population, namely the black servants, of which there was abundance".⁷⁶⁶ In fact, Berg was spot on, when he indirectly pointed to servants as the face of local society in the eyes of the Danes. Discourse pointed to keeping the two worlds separate, and even though there was some contact on other

⁷⁶⁴ One fourth of all households of Danish grown men - and a third of the all-Danish households - were registered to have resident servants in the *1920 Fourteenth Census*. In the following censuses, this number decreased to respectively one sixth and one tenth: *1930 Fifteenth Census and 1940 Sixteenth Census*.

⁷⁶⁵ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 10, 32.

⁷⁶⁶ Berg. *Memoir*, p. 3.

levels in practise, it was in the homes that Danes encountered Virgin Islanders on “the most regular and intimate basis”.⁷⁶⁷ For this same reason Ann Laura Stoler has referred to empire servants, in the case of Dutch Indonesia, as “subaltern gatekeepers of gender, class and racial distinctions that by their very presence they transgressed”.⁷⁶⁸

When August Neumann, after returning to Denmark from a stay on the islands, in 1941 spoke to the Leisure Association of Housewives⁷⁶⁹, he revisited the roles of housewives and their servants on the islands. “Over there”, he explained to the Danish housewives, “one ought to have many servants” and a Danish housewife “could not easily interfere in any work herself”. When his wife had one day herself gone to the fish market, for example, it had been looked upon as “inappropriate”. Moreover, he explained how the servants were “easy to deal with” and that “once you understood and had gained their trust, they were very devoted and loyal”.⁷⁷⁰ Neumann’s focus on the relationship between wives and servants was not uncommon. How a wife dealt with her help, and how they behaved, was a central issue and even a way to measure the suitability of the housewife. G. Tornøe made this clear in his memoir:

It plays a major role that the Danish ladies know how to take the blacks and to adjust to the new situation, and I was lucky to have a wife who always understood this.⁷⁷¹

A central role of the Danish housewife, then, became managing the servants, not just as employees, but as were they children of the household. Thereby the relation between her and her help was always narrated in maternalistic terms.

Furthermore, a double narrative about the servants is evident in many of the memoirs. The narrative contained first a distancing, and often racially loaded, characterisation of the servants. Secondly, it articulated servants as being devoted,

⁷⁶⁷ Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 28.

⁷⁶⁸ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, p. 133.

⁷⁶⁹ The original Danish name was: Husmødrenes Fritidsforening.

⁷⁷⁰ *Foredrag om vestindiske forhold for husmødrenes fritidsforening i Danmarkshjemmet 24. marts, 1941, 1: Breve til August Neumann mm., 07064: August Neumann (Danish National Archives).*

⁷⁷¹ Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, p. 9.

loving and loyal, such as in Neumann's speech. Elizabeth Bang, for instance, in her memoir explained how "their blacks" Henrik and Angie "loved them like a family", while Katrine Svensgaard has an affectionate memory of leaving the gardener on St. Thomas:

The tears were running down his cheeks, when he said goodbye.
"Goodbye, don't take all the luck with you"⁷⁷².

In his article for a book about Danish homes in the beginning of the century, Pastor Povl Helweg-Larsen confirmed the same narrative, when explaining the relationship between the house servants and his wife:

Our view of the Negroes can differ according to the side one sees it from. But, if you don't ask how they are, but how they are with us, the answer is simple: It depends on how we are with them. If their 'Missis' is unfair, there are no limits to how much they can tease her, but if she cares about them and knows how to take them, there are no limits to their devotion and loyalty. (...) My wife had the ability to both put herself in respect and to be loved by them - first of all, of course, because she, as we all did, thought of them as our friends.⁷⁷³

Helweg-Larsen, then, goes on to characterize each of their servants, underscored by a private photograph of the servants reluctantly posing in line, all dressed in white (figure 5.17). There was the "small, fat, eternally happy Cooky", Helweg-Larsen writes, the "gentle" and "quiet" maid Mary, the "warm-hearted, fervent 'nanna'" Jane and the "faithful, always reliable hard-worker" Bernadine. Summing up the group and their connection with the family, he then wrote:

They expressed their loyalty with a willingness to work so strong that my wife sometimes had to put a damper on them, when she saw the sweat bead up, and the black skin turn grey from effort (...) I have no doubt that they were willing to die for us.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷² Svensgaard, *Memoir*.

⁷⁷³ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 226.

⁷⁷⁴ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 226.

Helweg-Larsen's portrayal exemplifies a general tendency to, above all, emphasize the loyalty of the servants – and to thereby establish a dichotomy of master and servant, of matriarch and subordinate. The stories of being able to 'handle' the help, and of putting oneself in respect, also corresponded with these narratives of, often one-sided or uneven, devotion and faithfulness. At the end of the day, these narratives reconfirmed the power relations and racial discourses inherent in a prevailing imperial nationalism. Hence, through their everyday arrangements in the homes, the Island Danes reproduced this paternalistic – or maternalistic – development discourse on a domestic scale. In fact, they re-enacted an empire within the homes just as some of the Danish commentators in *Atlanten* had called for in the years leading up to the sale.⁷⁷⁵ Nevertheless, there was a doubleness to this practise of having servants. Because, indeed, distance was reproduced on a domestic scale, when Danish women daily managed their servants. But, when locals entered the homes, took care of the children – and in every way were part of an intimate sphere – the distance between Mother Denmark and the former colony was also truly transcended.⁷⁷⁶



Figure 5.17: Bernadine, Jane, Cooky and Mary, the servants in Pastor Helweg-Larsen's home, St. Croix, 1914.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁵ See for example George, "Homes in the Empire", pp. 96-127 or Chapter 1 for more on micro empires in the home.

⁷⁷⁶ See for example Blunt & Dowling, *Home*, p. 152 for more on the paradox of empires within the homes.

⁷⁷⁷ Helweg-Larsen, "Et dansk-vestindisk hjem", p. 225.

There was also sincere affection involved, at least from the side of the Danes. Many Danes explain how “lovely”, “loveable”, “sweet and nice” their servants were, and how they inevitably “came to love” them.⁷⁷⁸ These expressions of real fondness were as common as the tales of servant loyalty and respect, and the relation was sometimes strong enough for the Danes to put their photograph, or a painting of them, up on their walls, when they returned to Denmark – or they would try to get in contact years later.⁷⁷⁹ Helene Berg, for example remembered having very good relations with one of the maids named Adela. She found her very funny, and she remembers how Adela would dance around with a towel, just outside the windows, when guests were dancing in the living room. The relation between Adela and the family was close enough for Helene and her mother to look Adela up when they visited St. Thomas years later in 1948.⁷⁸⁰



Figure 5.18: Servants were often photographed by Island Danes, and in many cases they were pictured and described in a homey way that suggested a relatively closeness. Photograph with the caption: “Our old cook Lizzie outside the kitchen”, Charlotte Amalie, 1930s. From bank director Axel Thage’s photo album. (Danish National Museum).⁷⁸¹

The affectionate bond was particularly pronounced when it came to the children. This was especially true for the ‘nana’ of the house, who was often portrayed as a loving mother figure, whose “pedagogy (...) was somewhat questionable”, but good intentions never doubted.⁷⁸² Gustav Nordby, for example,

⁷⁷⁸ Svensgaard, *Memoir*; Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”; Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix*, p. 1, Berg, *Min Barndom*; Neumann, *Foredrag om vestindiske forhold*, and Tornøe, *En bankmands oplevelser*, pp. 32-34.

⁷⁷⁹ Thage, *Interview*, and Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix*.

⁷⁸⁰ Alexander, *Oldemor*.

⁷⁸¹ *Dansk Vestindien*, A1-I.4.i, Nyere Tids Samling (Danish National Museum).

⁷⁸² Helweg-Larsen, “Et dansk-vestindisk hjem”, p. 226.

explained how “a white man’s child (...) was embraced with great love”, while August Neumann in his speech noted that “the babysitter was very proud to be carrying around a white child” and made an effort to protect the child.⁷⁸³ Most often, this (probable) affection of the ‘nana’ was also reciprocated. Frits Lawaetz, for instance, became so fond of his nana, who lived with the family the first 11 years of his life, that she and his sister were the only ones who could really understand him, when he had difficulties speaking.⁷⁸⁴ H. Taylor, who grew up on the islands, also remembers his “loveable nana Doritha”, and how the children were “very affected” by the local Afro-Caribbeans.⁷⁸⁵ Rigmor Christoffersen had a similar memory of how she and her siblings “loved to hear from the servants about zombies”. And she recalled how they would, “sit on the steps in the dark with the servants, listening to stories”.⁷⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the central position of the servant in the lives of the Danish children emerges from the fact that Frida Svensgaard’s lone memory of living on S. Thomas is of her ‘nana’:

I can only remember one thing. I think. It was that one of our girls helped me up once when I had fallen. And she was very soft and round. She comforted me.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸³ Nordby, *Plantageforvalter på St. Croix*, pp. 8-9, and Neumann, *Foredrag om vestindiske forhold*, p. 36.

⁷⁸⁴ Watkins, *Bull of Annaly*, pp. 25-27.

⁷⁸⁵ Taylor, *Barndom på St. Croix*, p. 1, 5.

⁷⁸⁶ Christoffersen, *Childhood Memories*, p. 14.

⁷⁸⁷ Svensgaard, *Interview*.



An abundance of photographs picturing everyday relations between local servants and Danish children bear witness to an intimate relation. the Figure 5.19 (above left): Nana Dorothea with four of the Lawaetz children, St. Croix, before 1918 (Lawaetz Museum). Figure 5.20 (above right): Two children of Axel Thage with their nana, 1920s.⁷⁸⁸ Figure 5.21 (below): Erik von Scholten and his sisters with their nana on the beach, 1930 (Private property of Erik von Scholten).

As we have seen, close relationships between local Afro-Caribbeans and Danish children were widely practised and acknowledged in the Danish community on the Virgin Islands. Not only did the servants encounter the most private, physical everyday of the Danish families, they also entered what Satadru Sen has labelled the 'juvenile periphery'. More than anything else, the bond between Danes and their servants in the homes, was thought of as affectionate and not consciously perceived of in terms of power and distance. Nonetheless, the

⁷⁸⁸ *Dansk Vestindien*, A1-I.4.i, Nyere Tids Samling (Danish National Museum).

connection between a Danish family - especially the housewife - and the servants daily confirmed a continuing imperial hierarchy on an intimate scale.⁷⁸⁹

Concluding remarks

While living on the islands, Danes connected with their homeland through correspondence and visits from friends and family, as well as visits to Denmark for vacation or when feeling ill or homesick. Because, Danes experienced the grief of separation, both in the form of homesickness or nostalgic longing for people and places in Denmark - but also in the form of separating from their children, when many of them were sent to school in the homeland. For the Danish children separation was felt as much as a longing for their parents as for - what they in fact experienced as home - the islands. The absence of laws or prescriptions inserted by a colonial state to ensure the White or Danish identity of children, meant that Danish children could move relatively freely around on the islands, culturally as well as socially. Although they did participate in the vast amount of all-Danish socialisation set in motion by their parents, Island Danish children experienced a relatively large degree of integration into local society, compared to their parents, and increasingly became Americanised. When it came to schooling, though, Danish parents did take measures to make sure their offspring were in the right circles. A practise of sending children to private school and thereafter to school in Denmark, was common among the middle classes and up. But working class Danes were not included in this life cycle, and as the years went on Danish schools were gradually exchanged for American, or for example Puerto Rican or Canadian, ones. Moreover, even when the children were sent to the homeland, they often felt out of place, since they did not know the language, food, climate or culture. They could, thus, also be characterised as a sort of inbetweeners - between Crucian/S. Thomanian and American identities.

⁷⁸⁹ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p. 87.

For adults as well, the practise of travelling to and from Denmark for vacations - along with the different climate and distance from Danish foods and objects - contributed to the creation of a sort of Island Danishness, but not only this. The physical design and décor of the often pre-prepared homes, also signalled and demanded a specific lifestyle. Large representative living rooms, luxurious and colonial-nostalgic mahogany furniture, the separation of working spaces from the living spaces and - paradoxically - less convenient housekeeping implements contributed to this. Moreover, Danish island homes were not actually as private or segregated from local life as the narrative of homeliness would imply. Homes were representational spaces, the central arenas of dinner parties as well as intimate encounters with locals. Social structures of Whiteness on the islands and the need for extra help with difficult housekeeping, led to servants being the norm. Having local servants in the house every day, many Danish women became upper-class managing housewives, daily performing an empire within the homes. Ultimately, as close as families and servants might have been, and as much as boundaries were transgressed and discourses of race, class and gender regularly rattled; a distance between the two was always framing the relation. Paradoxically, everyday encounters between Danish families and their servants routinely reproduced the imperial nationalistic discourse and kept racial differentiation in place, while at the same time embodying actual physical and intimate contact. Through material conditions in the homes, representative practises and through the daily dealings with servants - as well as through a practise of travelling for vacation and schooling - bourgeoisie to some extent became inextricably linked to Island Danishness.

Chapter 6:

Nostalgia

When the colony was sold, many Danes with an affective connection to the islands expressed postcolonial longings. In the aftermath of empire, they began to long for what they understood as a simple and natural pre-civilisational, tropical world – a world of the past, which represented freedom of body and mind, as well as security in self and position. This chapter is concerned with ways in which structural changes in the early Twentieth century – such as the transfer of the islands and scientific discoveries about tropical climates – interplayed with (collective) emotions and practises of Danes with a personal relation to the islands. In other words, it explores the cultural, but especially the emotional, “manifestations of the demise of empire” in Denmark and on the islands in the first 30-40 years after the sale.⁷⁹⁰

In the years after the sale, Western tendencies towards “exoticism and demands for authenticity”⁷⁹¹ led to an expression of nostalgia as a flight from civilisation to an unspoiled past. For White westerners, travelling to the tropics became “exotised time-travel”⁷⁹², or as Antoinette Burton has termed it, a way to “see the empire one last time”.⁷⁹³ In times of decolonization, Western civilisation was homesick for its past grandeur and imagined simplicity. Following Roberta Rubenstein’s definition of nostalgia as a desire for home in a temporal sense and a sort of homesickness that refers to a temporal separation, I argue that especially

⁷⁹⁰ Stuart Ward, “Introduction”, p. 2.

⁷⁹¹ Louise Wolthers, “Blik og Begivenhed” (PhD. diss., University of Copenhagen, 2008), p. 209.

⁷⁹² Frenkel, “Jungle Stories”, p. 324.

⁷⁹³ Antoinette Burton, “India Inc.? Nostalgia, memory and the empire of things”, in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British culture and the end of empire* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 27.

returned Danes felt a collective nostalgia.⁷⁹⁴ However, I do not understand nostalgia as solely a longing for the past, temporal or spatial. In this chapter, I am searching for “the function of the past in the present”, for how the history of the colony and the end of it was used and constructed – collectively and emotionally – in the years after the sale.⁷⁹⁵ In the following, we will see that for Island Danes, nostalgia was “embodied and enacted” – what Alison Blunt has labelled ‘productive nostalgia’. She describes productive nostalgia as a longing for home, which unlike the traditional understanding of nostalgia was not just a desire for a past home, but also “oriented towards the present and the future”.⁷⁹⁶ In this chapter, I argue that for Danish islanders and returnees such a productive nostalgia manifested itself in at least three ways from 1917 and onwards. 1: Nostalgia as a “longing for a simple, sensuous, corporeal life” and its inherent ‘idyllisation’ of the tropical, 2: Nostalgia as a melancholia over the lost empire turned into new modes of expansion, and 3: Nostalgia as a quest not just remember, but to actively evoke and sometimes utilise the past.

Tropical playground

Travelling to the islands had always filled the role of an adventure or a flight from life at home, be that in the form of wanderlust or lack of occupation. However, in the years after the transfer, the nostalgic longing for a time and/or place ‘before’ civilisation gained a stronger ground. As the idea of the tropics changed, travelling to the islands was often framed as another type of flight – the flight from civilisation. This was induced by new ideas which unravelled climate determinism and changed impressions and practices of Virgin Islands’ space. What had in earlier centuries been described as a problem of environment – the tropics as a place where

⁷⁹⁴ Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters. Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Publishing, 2001), p. 4.

⁷⁹⁵ Citation from Anette Warring, “Erindringsfællesskab og erindringspolitik som magtvilkår og magtmiddel” in *På sporet af magten*, eds. Peter Munk Christiansen and Lise Togeby (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2003).

⁷⁹⁶ Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 213.

Whites were in imminent danger of being physically and morally degenerated by the climate – was now increasingly understood in cultural terms.⁷⁹⁷ As both a scientific discourse and the concept of culture emerged, nature became less of a threat and more of an “ally” to Western civilization”.⁷⁹⁸ In the late Nineteenth century, then, North Americans and Europeans were beginning to view the tropical climate as a means to a better health. And by the Twentieth century, the Western image of the tropics had changed significantly as the tropics came to be appreciated as a space for fun and pleasure.⁷⁹⁹ As Catherine Cocks has described it:

Nature ceased to be the inescapable source of human difference and thus social strife and became the privileged source of relief from it, the imagined past in which people knew their place and happily stayed in it”.⁸⁰⁰

As a result, the islands gradually became an obvious travel destination, and this mainly because of - in the words of a then famous Danish geographer and author Sophie Petersen - “the pleasant climate with many sunny days”.⁸⁰¹

Such a reframing of colonial exploration tales, and the inherent optimistic image of the tropical climate, was evident in Danish literature at the time. Danish author Olaf Linck, for example, wrote about this change of view in his book “Det tabte land” (*The Lost Land*) from 1947. Travelling to St. Thomas in 1910, he had met then government secretary Christian Helweg-Larsen and made a note of Helweg-Larsen’s view of the tropical climate: “In my papers from 1910, I have noted that he was excited about the climate and spoke of St. Thomas as one of the healthiest places in the world”.⁸⁰² Linck continued to describe how he had met a Count Mogens Frijs’ daughter in London, were she had “entrusted me that for she who had travelled so much of the globe in such a young age, St. John was the most idyllic

⁷⁹⁷ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 42

⁷⁹⁸ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 9.

⁷⁹⁹ Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday. A History of Vacationing* (University of California Press, 2002) p. 120-121.

⁸⁰⁰ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 9.

⁸⁰¹ Sophie Petersen, *Vore gamle tropekolonier* (Copenhagen: H. Hagerups Boghandel, 1946) p. 372.

⁸⁰² Olaf Linck, *Det tabte land* (Martin, 1947), p. 24.

place in the world”.⁸⁰³ When he then later on found himself in a bungalow in Cruz Bay St. John, taking in the smell of flowers after a meal, he “for the first time really felt the magic of tropical existence”.⁸⁰⁴ Such a positivity surrounding the tropicality of the islands could also be found in another popular book at the time. Journalist Hakon Mielche’s “Tre små øer” (*Three little islands*) from 1939 dwelled in exotic romanticism when painting a picture of history: “(...) a romantic and colorful piece of Danish History, which has now ended, a stripe of golden sunshine, mixed with the smell of exotic flowers (...)”.⁸⁰⁵ His stressing of the “golden sunshine” was not a coincidence, for sunlight itself had come to be viewed as healthy and rejuvenating, especially after the discovery of vitamin D.⁸⁰⁶ But the poetic Mielche, in this broadly read book, went on to proclaim a belief in tropical authenticity over the meaningless industriousness of modernity:

Maybe there will come a day when the white man gets tired of his eternal hunt for the gold that is only a lifeless mimicking of what the tropical night spreads out with both hands at the feet of a Negro, who is playing guitar, and a lone tourist standing in the moonlight on a chalk-white beach.⁸⁰⁷

But not only visitors writing to a Danish audience had begun to appreciate the Edenic white beaches and warm sun of the islands. Also resident Danes, such as Knud Knud-Hansen, embraced tropicality as a positive when he for example described the town of Charlotte Amalie as “charmingly sunlit under a bowl of eternity blue and at night a sparkling garland of fairy-tale beauty” in his memoir published in the United States in 1946.⁸⁰⁸ The same view was present in returnee Sophie Helweg-Larsen’s memoir from 1940, which already in its title, “Sollyse minder” (*Sunlit memories*), signaled a tale of a chore-free paradise with eternal sun.⁸⁰⁹ Just as Thora Visby-Petersen in her memoir filled with romanticized

⁸⁰³ Linck, *Det tabte land*, p. 67.

⁸⁰⁴ Linck, *Det tabte land*, p. 68.

⁸⁰⁵ Mielche, *Tre små Øer*, p. 11.

⁸⁰⁶ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 120

⁸⁰⁷ Mielche, *Tre Smaa Øer*, p. 221.

⁸⁰⁸ Knud-Hansen, *From Denmark*, p. 35

⁸⁰⁹ Helweg-Larsen, *Sollyse Minder*.

descriptions of tropical nature, wrote about her childhood on the islands as a “sun-filled dream” and never misses a chance to stress the tropicality of the islands by attaching the adjective “tropical” to everything from the word *sea*, to *home*, *adventure*, *sun*, *vegetation*, *idyll*, *memories* - and even *spider webs*.⁸¹⁰

Such an aestheticizing of the exotic tropics was, of course, not new in European imperialism, but the reframing of the adventurous tropical travel into positive tales of the tropical heat and sun was. And this was partly due to Americanisation. The islands were now ruled by Americans, they were incorporated into an American system, and to some extent American culture moved to the islands. Following Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, I am aware that the tropical space of the islands was not just a projection of imagined geographies of tropicality, but instead was “shaped by interactions with peoples and places”.⁸¹¹ As much as the islands were portrayed as the sunlit history of a Danish empire, they were now part of the “American Southland”, and from the 1920s onwards, the islands could be said to have entered into the framework of modern American tropicality. By the Twentieth century, the idea that the tropics could be tamed by civilised peoples was common, and in the United States, this was constituted in “the construction of the Panama Canal, images of United Fruit Company, U.S. Marine Corps activities - and books about agricultural enterprises”.⁸¹² But not just that, in modern American tropicality tourism was becoming the newest version of the developing mission and a way to consume exotic areas. The idea was that Whites would bring money and “temperate business sense” in exchange for the joy of experiencing tropical idyll.⁸¹³ If American Whites were longing for a natural world, without the strains of civilisation at the time, the islands offered just that kind of resort. For elites in the United States it became common to travel to the warmer southern parts of the states on vacation, and the tourism industry produced Whites in the tropical regions as “civilised, pale-skinned people with

⁸¹⁰ Thora Visby-Petersen, *St. Thomas. Tropeminder fra de vestindiske øer* (Erik H. Jung, 1917). Citation from p. 37.

⁸¹¹ Driver and Martins, “Views and Visions of the Tropical World”, p. 8.

⁸¹² Frenkel, “Jungle Stories” p. 321.

⁸¹³ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 10.

the youthful, sensuous joy of dark-skinned primitives".⁸¹⁴ In the new discourse of culture, tropical spaces such as the islands became a place of freedom from social restrictions. Island residing Danes actively contributed to such a production of a tourist space on the islands, and they did so in two entangled fashions. First, by themselves embodying tourism practices, such as sea-bathing and tanning, and secondly by taking active part in the emergent tourism industry.

Danish memoirs and family photo albums from the years after the sale, and especially from the 1930s-1950s, bear witness to a beach culture in tune with the developments in White American (and Australian) tropicality at the time. Whites were enjoying beach life, swimming in the sea and sunbathing, and the size of their swimsuits decreased remarkably as the discourse on tropicality changed. Such a modern beach culture was based in a new intimacy between Whites and tropical nature, and it was reproducing ideas of coastal idyll as the opposite of the industrial city.⁸¹⁵ The American travel industry contributed greatly to the changes by reframing ideas about tropical peoples as emotionally uncontrolled and without sense of duty and as symbols of White freedom and healthy relaxation.⁸¹⁶ Undressing in the warm climate, which had been a sign of racial degeneration, became figurative for informality and youth. In the words of Catherine Cocks, modern interaction with the tropics was "racial degeneration remade as white rejuvenation".⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁴ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 2.

⁸¹⁵ Christine Metusela and Gordon Waitt, *Tourism and Australian Beach culture: Revealing Bodies* (Bristol, Buffalo and Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2012), p. 48.

⁸¹⁶ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 123

⁸¹⁷ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 109.

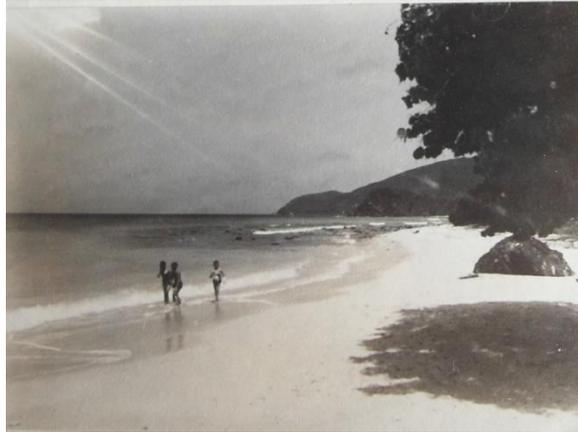


Figure 6.1: "After a swim" and Figure 6.2: Untitled photo – both of the Thage Family at the beach in Brewers Bay, 1933. Private property of Elisabeth Thage.



Erik von Scholten's childhood photo album from St. Croix in the 1930s is full of beach stories.

Figure 6.3 (above): The von Scholten Family at the beach in 1932.

Figure 6.4 (below left): Erik swimming with his father in 1931.

Figure 6.5 (below right): Erik and his mother in modern swim suits, 1933.

Private property of Erik von Scholten.

As figures 6.1-6.5 above suggest, Danes on the islands were certainly reproducing these discursive changes. From the 1920s and onwards, going to the beach to swim in the sea or relax in the sand, had become a regular recreational activity for Danish men, women and children alike. At least those who belonged to the group of expatriates embraced the modern tropical beach culture on the islands, and they often performed their beach visits as tourists, by for example posing for many photos, although beach-going was a recurring activity. Because, it seems, they recognised the luxurious otherness of trips to the tropical beach. Katrine Svensgaard, for example, remembers going to the “ice cream shops” on the family’s regular trips to a beach close to the airport on St. Thomas, and she also recalls getting so used to the wonders of tropical beach life that she refused to visit the cold Danish beaches after her return.⁸¹⁸

However, this type of sea-swimming and sun-bathing was not solely an Island practice, new beach cultures were also developing in Europe in early Twentieth century. In Scandinavia, specifically, uninhibited beach-life with mixed-gender sea-bathing and shrinking swimsuits had been going on since around 1900.⁸¹⁹ When seaside boardinghouses and a new summer cottage culture became popular in Scandinavia, beach culture gradually began to also embrace the middle classes from the 1920s and 1930s. However, beach-going was an urban culture, and there were differences between working-class locals, who did not understand the need to swim in the sea, and visitors in coastal areas. The tensions of beach culture in Denmark at the time could also be seen, when new generations of beach-goers made fun of the bourgeoisie and their ‘Victorian’ beach practices.⁸²⁰ The Danish caricature below (figure 6.6), showing high class Danes reluctantly taking off their shoes at the beach in 1950 is an example of such differences.

⁸¹⁸ Svensgaard, *Interview*.

⁸¹⁹ Löfgren, *On Holiday*, p. 131.

⁸²⁰ Löfgren, *On Holiday*, p. 123-124.

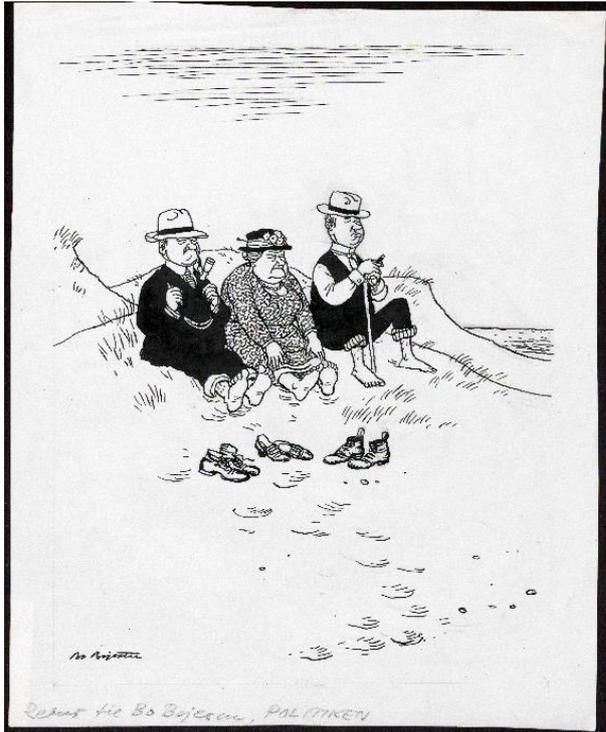


Figure 6.6: Danish satire with the text: "Sun, sea and the beach. The effects of beach-life is gradually dawning on all parts of the population". Caricature from 1950.⁸²¹

Yet, living in an American Southland, the Danes on the islands practiced a beach culture which was entangled with ideas of tropicality, American resort tourism and a different set of tensions in the form of an underlying racial issue. While Whites were practicing their variation of tropical vacation on the beach, the local Afro-Caribbean population were not allowed into their world. Generally, American beaches and pools opened in this era were segregated – and this was the case for, for example, the Country Club on St. Croix (see figure 6.7). The culture among the White elite was quite clear, you do not see one single photo of locals and Whites on any beach together, unless it is White children and their nanny. Of course, it is important to remember that the images often display the cultures of White elites, White middle classes and indeed White adults. Stories of White children playing and swimming by the sea with their local friends appear in the sources, which reminds us that there was a parallel and different beach culture among children, and possibly also the lower classes.⁸²²

⁸²¹ "Sol, Hav og Strand" in *Dagligt Liv i Danmark – How to be a Dane*, Bo Bojesen (Copenhagen, Hans Reitzels Forlag, 1950), p. 15. The caption is my translation.

⁸²² See for example, Thurland, *Jens Larsen*, p. 5-6.



Figure 6.7: Group of Whites mingling at the beach at the Country Club. "St. Croix Country Club, Frederiksted, around 1925". From the memoir of Crucian-American, Robert L. Benedict.⁸²³

The photo above, displaying the St. Croix Country Club in 1925, reveals a snap shot of modern tropical beach culture as it was practiced by the White elite and middle classes on the islands at the time. What we see is a group of exclusively White men and women socially enjoying time in the sun and sand, wearing either tropical uniforms or typical 1920s sleeveless swimsuits with short legs. As much as modern beach culture was seen to be liberating, Whites simply could not see themselves practicing as tropical peoples – by undressing, darkening their skin in the sun and jumping into the wild, natural sea – among actual tropical peoples.⁸²⁴ On the islands, just as in Scandinavia, gender had quickly become less of an issue when going to the beach, but racial distance remained important for adults to maintain hierarchies.

⁸²³ Gail Benedict (ed.), *Cruzan Child. Short stories about a boy growing up on St. Croix in the 1930s. As told by Robert L. Benedict* (Frederiksted: Harris + Connor Inc., 2002).

⁸²⁴ Cocks, *Tropical Whites*, p. 104.

Island Danes were not only part of the production of a space for tourism by their recreational practices, Danish private businesses, as well as individual Island Danes, became initiators in developing a tourism industry on the islands. On a structural level, the Danish West Indian Company took part in creating the grounds for tourism on the islands. The Virgin Islands Tourist Company was started as a subsidiary company “for the development of the Tourist Trade of the Virgin Islands” in 1936. The Tourist Company operated The Grand Hotel in Charlotte Amalie, Caneel Bay Plantation Resort, an inter-land service between St. Thomas and St. John as well as an Information Travel Bureau office.⁸²⁵ A West Indian Company employee, Johannes Rasmussen, was appointed as the manager of The Grand Hotel, and the tourist company had secured the sole right for the hotel over the nearby beach, Morning Star Beach. Here guests could sea-bathe and “in happy idleness (...) let themselves be tanned by the golden sunshine of the West Indies”.⁸²⁶ Advertising it as the perfect opportunity for “a lovely vacation in unspoiled tropical surroundings with all the comforts of today” in their brochure, the company had also laid the grounds for the Caneel Bay Plantation Resort with seven cottages on seven beaches.⁸²⁷ In 1939, Danish journalist, Hakon Mielche, praised the Company for making St. John and its calm, natural setting central to Virgin Islands tourism – thereby attracting American tourists who were looking for something different than “luxurious hotels, indoor pools, refined casinos and world-famous jazz bands in golden dancehalls”.⁸²⁸ In other words, for trying to create a tourism space, which did not resemble the American version of a tropical vacation. This appraisal resembled the way in which British post-colonial travellers identified themselves

⁸²⁵ Bruce Schoonover, “Caneel Bay Estate before Laurance Rockefeller”, *St. John Historical Society*, no. VII (2005).

⁸²⁶ Mielche, *Tre smaa Øer*, p. 210.

⁸²⁷ West India Company Ltd. 60th Annivesary Brochure. 1912-1972. (not paginated). The resort was later sold to American rich man and entrepreneur, Laurance Rockefeller, in 1956, who made it into the luxurious Caneel Bay Resort. “Estate Fountain River - A tale of rich men and a rich property”, *Virgin Islands Daily News*, Nov. 5, 1979.

⁸²⁸ Mielche, *Tre smaa Øer*, 1939, p. 208

as people, who had “seen a world that no longer existed”, in opposition to Americans and their “promotion of the touristic experience”.⁸²⁹

Nonetheless, both Danes and certainly also Americans contributed to the production of a tourist space on the islands. As part of Roosevelt’s New Deal, for example, the American government set up relief operations, and built a luxurious hotel by the name Bluebeard Castle to create jobs.⁸³⁰ Tourism had, indeed, become the new way to economically develop the islands, and a new form of “legitimate imperialist intervention”.⁸³¹ The efforts of the evolving tourist industry resulted in an increase in the influx of tourist cruise ships to the islands, from 11 cruise ships a year in 1937 to 59 in 1940.⁸³² On St. Thomas especially, a modern tropical tourist destination had been created, and it was filled with what Danish author, Ernst Mentze, called “the Miami-romantic mood of the mainland”.⁸³³ In his book - typical for its time, partly a travel description, partly a history book - Mentze described a place made up of “American tourism, luxurious hotels, the freedom from customs within the borders, tourist ships, bathing, snorkeling in the Caribbean sea, nightclubs”⁸³⁴, where taxis were provided with a sign saying “Tropical Playground - Virgin Islands”.⁸³⁵ It was with this Americanised tourism, as with Americanisation in general, many Danes had troubles in the beginning - but this was especially the case for visiting Danes like Mentze. Meanwhile, Danes living on the islands were aiding the construction of an American tropical playground where one could flee civilisation, and in their own way accommodating tropical culture and space for “leisurely western consumption” through a nostalgic prism.⁸³⁶ Danish farmer-son, Erik Lawaetz, was an example of this from an individual perspective. He made it his job to stimulate early tourism on the islands. He

⁸²⁹ Hsu-Ming Teo, “Wandering in the wake of empire: British travel and tourism in the post-imperial world” in *British culture and the end of empire*, ed. Stuart Ward (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 177.

⁸³⁰ Petersen, *Vore gamle tropekolonier*, p. 370.

⁸³¹ Frenkel, “Jungle Stories”, p. 318.

⁸³² Petersen, *Vore gamle tropekolonier*.

⁸³³ Mentze, *Danmarks sidste tropeland*, p. 74

⁸³⁴ Mentze, *Danmarks sidste tropeland*, p. 30.

⁸³⁵ Mentze, *Danmarks sidste tropeland*, p. 73

⁸³⁶ Teo, “Wandering in the wake”, p. 167.

travelled back and forth to the United States and had brochures and articles printed for the purpose of attracting tourists, just as he made an effort to attract Danish tourism to the islands because of his ancestry. As a part of this, he built St. Croix by the Sea Hotel in 1952 and managed it until 1995.⁸³⁷ On the islands, the Danish history and architecture was promoted as an attraction, and as a part of this, the West Indian Company opened the first tourist shop on St. Thomas in 1936.⁸³⁸ *Maison Danoise*, as it was called, sold Danish design items, especially porcelain and silverware, to the new group of mainly American tourists. Thus, practises on the islands were resounding the situation in other former European colonies, where tourist economies depended on both the infrastructure and “cultural phantasies” of imperialism.⁸³⁹

More than anyone, though, the Danish returnees were having such nostalgic phantasies, as they were literally dreaming of the past empire and mourning the sale.

The loss of an empire

At home in Denmark, imagined geographies of the islands also changed as a group of returned Danes, as well as Danish West Indian-travellers, began to form a narrative of a *paradise lost*. When the sale was finally a reality, there was a great sense of loss among national-conservative Danes, but especially Danes who had lived ‘out there’. What had never really been thought of as Danish in any cultural sense, was now articulated as *ours*. At this point, the group of Danes who felt their past life on the islands should embrace all of the nation, began to formulate a collective, nostalgic narrative. This process displayed the tension between the personal and collective inherent in nostalgia - as Svetlana Boym argues:

⁸³⁷ Roy Lawaetz, “Lawaetz Legacy. STX-born entrepreneur remembered”, St. Croix Avis, USVI, 166th Year, Sunday-Monday, April 11-12, 2010, no. 82. p. 1-2.

⁸³⁸ Povl Westphall, *Aktieselskabet Det Østasiatiske Kompagni* (København, 1972); *The West Indian Company Ltd. 60th Anniversary Brochure* (St. Thomas, 1972).

⁸³⁹ Teo, “Wandering in the wake”, p. 166.

(...) nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.⁸⁴⁰

However, it was not just a longing for a lost empire, but also a nostalgia for “the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that have become obsolete”.⁸⁴¹ Danish businessmen in Denmark and on the islands as well as especially expatriates ‘out there’, who had not wanted a sale, felt they had lost a Danish grandeur, which entailed being responsible for developing a people under their own civilisational state.

Elizabeth Buettner has argued that repatriates from India played a disproportionate role in forming public knowledge of the Indian past in Britain.⁸⁴² If we explore how and by whom the end of empire was remembered in Denmark, we discover a similarly dominant role of returnees in constituting imperial memory in popular culture. Returned Danes and travel writers began to publish nostalgic memoirs, travel descriptions or amateur histories about the islands from 1917 onwards. Eliz Carbel, who had lived on the islands with her husband, offered a representation of the terrible loss of empire in her collection of short stories and diary entries from 1925.⁸⁴³ In 1939, journalist Hakon Mielche served his version of the narrative by expressing his distress at the fact that Denmark sold the islands “in the very moment when H.N. Andersen’s visions were about to bear fruit”.⁸⁴⁴ For Mielche, a small-state mentality had ruined Denmark’s possibilities to remain an imperial power:

The spirit of ‘What is the use’ and the small faint-hearted man without confidence had won another victory over the few who dared to make a difference in the race of the nations.⁸⁴⁵

⁸⁴⁰ Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents”, *The Hedgehog Review* (2007), p. 9

⁸⁴¹ Boym, “Nostalgia”, p. 10

⁸⁴² Elizabeth Buettner, “Remembering the Raj in Post-Colonial Britain”, in *Empire Families. Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 255.

⁸⁴³ Eliz Carbel, *Solens børn* (E. Jespersen, 1925).

⁸⁴⁴ Mielche, *Tre smaa Øer* p. 97.

⁸⁴⁵ Mielche, *Tre smaa Øer*, p. 98.

Likewise, returnee Thora Visby-Petersen, opened her memoir from 1917 with a gloomy song about how “the festive adventurous introduction is turned into the sad fact: “Once upon a time were three splendid islands where Dannebrog waved”.⁸⁴⁶ What Burton has termed the rhetorics of “nostalgia and mourning, memory and loss” were also evident in Ernst Mentze’s “Danmarks sidste Tropeland” (Denmark’s last tropical land), which in its very title stressed the belonging and ‘lastness’ of the islands⁸⁴⁷. While another writer at the time, Olaf Linck, made the nostalgic narrative self-evident by titling his book about the islands from 1947 “Det tabte land” (The lost land).⁸⁴⁸ In the book, he writes about the positive impacts and memories of Denmark the islands, in for example the chapter “a Negro who loved Denmark”, just as he places his narrative into the myth of loss, when describing how he travelled to the islands in 1931 “when the Danish adventure was sadly over a long time ago”.⁸⁴⁹ The same nostalgic narrative of “desire for an empire destined to be history” is evident, when Linck in his foreword writes about conversations he has had with so-called Danish West Indians over the years:⁸⁵⁰

Such discussions about a lost land with the main subject: Was it really imperative to sell? will never cease...⁸⁵¹

Within a similar genre, partly travel writing, partly a geography of the islands, Geographer and traveller, Sophie Petersen’s very popular book “Vore gamle tropekolonier” (Our old tropical colonies) set the tone for the narrative of loss for many years to come. Published in 1946, it was a geography of the islands with a twist of personal experience, and it was sold out in just a month. Its general tone was scientific, underscored by a sense of lost pride, and it was indeed making use of the term “tab” (loss) when referring to selling the islands. It was also the basis for Johannes Brøndsted’s history of the islands, also titled “Vore gamle

⁸⁴⁶ Visby-Petersen, *St. Thomas*, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁷ Burton, “India Inc.?”, p. 230.

⁸⁴⁸ Olaf Linck, *Det tabte land* (Martins, 1947).

⁸⁴⁹ Linck, *Det tabte land*, p. 115 and 9.

⁸⁵⁰ Citation from Burton, “India Inc.”, p. 230.

⁸⁵¹ Linck, *Det tabte land*, p. 9.

tropekolonier”, which was published in 1952-53 - and which is used as a textbook in Danish colonial history to this day.⁸⁵²

However the narrative of loss was served, though, the terminology was continuously ignoring the fact that a large majority of locals wanted a sale, just as the majority of the Danish population voted for a sale. Contrary to the case of for example Britain, the empire was no longer “a major component” in Danish identification.⁸⁵³ Throughout the Nineteenth century Danish historical identity had been reframed into that of a small and homogeneous state as a result of territorial shrinking and a national awakening.⁸⁵⁴ Generally, the Danish public was preoccupied with the First World War at the time of the transfer of the islands, and this event seemed quite insignificant in a general public consciousness.⁸⁵⁵ Nonetheless, among the Danes who had a personal connection to the islands - empire migrants, island travelers or returnees - the experience of empire was far more current, and they indeed expressed a sort of postcolonial nostalgia which stressed Denmark’s “world role”.⁸⁵⁶ Especially after the sale, Danes with a relation to the islands stressed the Danish history on the islands and made a point out of labelling local Afro-Caribbeans “our countrymen”. The fact that the narrative of loss largely belonged to a relatively small group of national conservatives, West Indian travellers and returnees can be seen in for example Hakon Mielche’s introduction to “Three little islands”, where he claimed that he was hoping to stir some interest among the parts of the Danish population who have not had direct contact with the islands.⁸⁵⁷ It was also evident in Thora Visby-Petersen’s introduction to her memoir, which included drawings of the islands:

May these drawings become a dear memory of our tropical islands; not just to us Danes who have had a home out there under the glow of the

⁸⁵² Kirsten Thisted, “Hvor Dannebrog engang har vajet”, *Trankebarinitiativets skriftserie*, no. 2 (2008), p. 11.

⁸⁵³ See Ward, “Introduction” p. 4 on how the imperial past was a major component in British identification.

⁸⁵⁴ Astrid Nonbo Andersen, “Vore gamle tropekolonier..? Tropekolonierne som danske erindringssteder”, *Slagmark* no. 57 (2010), pp. 81-90.

⁸⁵⁵ Gronemann and Vindberg, *I orkanens øje*, p. 190.

⁸⁵⁶ The expression “world role” is John Darwin’s. Cited in Stuart Ward, “Introduction”, p. 4.

⁸⁵⁷ Mielche, *Tre smaa Øer*, p. 11.

tropical sun and who therefore to a larger extent feel the grief over losing the scenic, lush islands, but also for all of those who through the depictions of others have learned to know and love the fair areas.⁸⁵⁸

That Danes with a personal connection to the islands played a very large part in Danish post-imperial positioning was also evident in Olaf Linck's book. "We who got to know the islands by personal experience", he writes, "all agree to regret the loss, because it was lovely out there, as long as it went well"⁸⁵⁹. In fact, "Danish West Indians", as they were sometimes referred to in the press, almost solely formed the national coverage and narratives about the islands in the Twentieth century. This could also be seen in the fact that a very popular literary format for writing about the islands was a combination of travel writing and historical description.

These books were all in their own ways (re)producing a nostalgic sense of mourning the loss of empire - and the former Danish West Indies had become a symbol of this mourning, because their sale was the last piece in a de-globalising process which had been underway for a decade.⁸⁶⁰ Denmark's territory had decreased greatly after 'losing' Norway, Slesvig-Holstein and now the West Indies, and this development gave way to a national awakening - and a patriotic narrative about Denmark's heyday was born.⁸⁶¹ The process among Danish West Indians resembled the sort of nostalgia that Paul Gilroy has called postcolonial melancholia, a feeling of a void after empire and a longing for owning the status of colonial power, because of the element of meaning that this status gave.⁸⁶²

This postcolonial melancholia was articulated in, for example, the writings of returned women in the years after the sale. They had often been living on the islands long before the transfer, but now published works that in the form of

⁸⁵⁸ Visby-Petersen, *St. Thomas*, Foreword, unpaginated.

⁸⁵⁹ Linck, *Det tabte land*, p. 168.

⁸⁶⁰ Johannes Haugen-Kossmann, "Den ambivalente fortid. Forsoningsdilemmaet mellem Danmark og De Amerikanske Jomfruøer" (Master's thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2015), p. 28.

⁸⁶¹ Karen Fog Olwig, "Narrating deglobalization. Danish perceptions of a lost empire", *Global Networks*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Oxford 2003), p. 207-222.

⁸⁶² Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Postcolonial melancholia or multiculturalism* (Routledge, 2004). p. xvi.

halfway memoir, halfway fairy-tale nostalgically looked back at life on the islands. Embodying this tendency of White women serving as the “keepers of imperial memory”⁸⁶³, wife of former governor to the Danish West Indies, Sophie Helweg-Larsen, focused on the glamorous life - with a servant for every household task, afternoon-cocktails, officer’s balls and dinner-parties - that the White elite led on the islands in her writings. In 1940, she published her romanticising memories of life as a governess on St. Croix and St. Thomas in *Sollyse minder fra Tropeegne, der var danske* (*Sunlit Memories from Tropics that were Danish*). Soon after, she also wrote a series of short stories about the islands, many of these portraying young White daughters and their days of playing tennis, riding horses, attending balls and falling in love with handsome naval officers or officials.⁸⁶⁴ These memoirs can be seen just as much as a longing for a time when social hierarchies *at home* were secure. The decision to sell the islands was determined in a public election in 1916, indeed the first election in Denmark after women and servants had gained voting rights in 1915. Although this fact gave the female writers a democratic voice, Nina Nørgaard has argued, it also stirred up the social hierarchies by granting their house workers the same right.⁸⁶⁵ What it meant to be Danish had indeed changed, and these conservative Danes projected their longing for the past onto a set of Caribbean islands. But it was not just a matter of gender. Many men, who had been ‘big ducks’ on the islands, had troubles with the change of scenery from an autocratic rule on the islands, to the democratic situation with a large labor movement in Denmark. Generally, among male and female writers, the interest in publishing memoirs from colonial life on the islands in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth century grew in the 1940s.⁸⁶⁶ This development coincided with the changes in the discourse of tropicality. In the process of ‘losing’ the islands, the

⁸⁶³ Burton, “India Inc.?” , p. 224.

⁸⁶⁴ Helweg-Larsen, *Sollyse Minder*; Sophie Helweg-Larsen, *Og så rejser vi ud verden* (V. Thaning og Appels Forlag, 1941).

⁸⁶⁵ Nina Nørgaard, “Et tabt eventyr? Kolonierne i Vestindien som nationalt spejl” , in *På sporet af imperiet: Danske tropefantasier* (Institut for sprog og Kultur, Roskilde Universitet 2005), p. 32-33.

⁸⁶⁶ See for example: Kjeld Helweg-Larsen, *Hvor Dannebrog vajede* (Kbh, 1943); V. Bay, *Sprede Erindringer fra et 9-årigt ophold på de tidligere dansk-vestindiske øer* (Dansk Toldtidende, 1945);

islands moved into the new positive framework of tropicality and became *our lost paradise*.⁸⁶⁷

What reproduces postcolonial melancholia, Gilroy argues, is the lack of self-examination in Britain, and for a refusal to recognise that Britain is no longer Great.⁸⁶⁸ However, in the case of Denmark, the process of decolonisation was a different one, now that the realization that Denmark had lost its greatness had been widely articulated since the mid-1900s. A national identity crisis, which had produced a new discourse of the small state, was set in play by losing large parts of its territory and political influence as a result of Napoleonic wars and wars with Germany. Especially a great defeat to Germany in 1864 made Danes question the country's place among the great nations and produced an introvert small-state.⁸⁶⁹ That, the islands had only very briefly been incorporated into a cultural narrative of 'Danishness' and the fact that only a small number of Danes had ever lived in the colony, contributed to a relatively small-sized imperial awareness. An almost complete lack of colonial immigration to Denmark as well as a lack of public symbols of imperialism – and, of course, the lack of an actual decolonising process, not just a sale – added to that.⁸⁷⁰ This meant that an actual colonial criticism did not see the light in Denmark until author Thorkild Hansen from 1967 to 1970 published his so-called *Slave Trilogy*, three documentary novels about the Danish slave trade, transportation of slaves across the Atlantic and colonisation of the islands from 1600 to 1917.⁸⁷¹ The trilogy was popular and won the literary prize of the Nordic Council, but never really integrated into a broader discourse of Danish colonialism.⁸⁷² In the Danish public debates, decolonisation itself was such an unarticulated, gradual and un-conflicted process that an obvious historical moment

⁸⁶⁷ This phrasing – in Danish “Vort tabte paradis” – has been widely used since the islands were sold. In fact, it remains one of the most common phrases in current Danish journalism or tourism marketing about the islands.

⁸⁶⁸ Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 119.

⁸⁶⁹ Uffe Østergaard, “Danish national identity: between multinational heritage and small-state nationalism” in ed. H. Branner & M. Kelstrup, in *Denmark's policy towards Europe after 1945: History, theory and options* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2000), p. 139-184.

⁸⁷⁰ Haugen-Kossman, “Den ambivalente fortid”, p. 30 and Nielsen, *Fru Jensen*, p. 212.

⁸⁷¹ Thorkild Hansen, *Slavernes kyst* (1967), *Slavernes Skibe* (1967) and *Slavernes øer* (1970) (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1967, 1970).

⁸⁷² <http://www.forfatterweb.dk/oversigt/hansen-thorkild/hele-portraettet-om-thorkild-hansen> (22.09.2016)

- a space for self-examination - never arose. Undisturbed, then, the 'Danish West Indians' could begin to reconstruct a new narrative of national expansion, which won larger grounds in the 1940s and 1950.

This specific experience of decolonisation gave way to a new national narrative about a progressive and modern small-state which proudly stood on the shoulders of colonial history and networks.⁸⁷³ After 1917, the loss of an imperial narrative left a void to fill among Islands Danes, Danish returnees, West Indian travellers and the cosmopolitan-nationalistic shipping industry. If postcolonial melancholia was an expression of despair over globalisation, this group of Danes turned it around to produce an idea that Denmark should be expanded in a new way - not through colonialism, but through science, trade, shipping and 'honorable migrants'. Olaf Linck proclaimed that this was the way forward - despite the dreams of a new colony among the Danish returnees - in his postscript to *Vort tabte land*. Denmark had to seek influence through new channels, he claimed, and especially the role of the reasonable emigrant with character was emphasised by Linck:

An emigrant of this sort does Denmark honour and increases our reputation among foreigners, which should be the end goal for anyone who travels abroad.⁸⁷⁴

In the first edition of the successor for *Atlanten* - a new journal for Danes living abroad by the name *Danmarksposten* - a proclamation of the importance of Danish emigrants was also made:

This is the pride of the Motherland, and herein it justifies its expectation that all men and women of Danish birth will join the idea of a worldwide Danish cooperation and support the practical implementation of this thought.⁸⁷⁵

A year after, the same idea was praised in an article celebrating the 25th anniversary of a very central player on the islands, as well as in the idea and practise of

⁸⁷³ Olwig, "Narrating deglobalization".

⁸⁷⁴ Linck, *Det tabte land*, efterskrift, unpaginated.

⁸⁷⁵ *Danmarksposten*, no. 1 (1921), p. 5.

'Denmark abroad' in general: The East Asiatic Company. Notably, the article states that the idea behind the company was "expansion of Denmark". This was meant as:

An expansion through world trade and world shipping and through colonisation. A colonisation by timely sound principles in cooperation with foreign nations by opening new land and creating new producing companies in the foreign.⁸⁷⁶

In the 1920s this was a tale raised by these limited groups, but a re-boosting of a global image for Denmark, became more prevalent after the Second World War, when the country expressed "deep feelings of guilt and shame" over the Nazi-German occupation, and Danish political and economic co-operation.⁸⁷⁷ From 1945 onwards, Denmark constructed a new internationalist identity, and thereby became a member of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – and aimed for close cooperation with European and the Nordic countries.⁸⁷⁸

That a discourse of a once great Denmark in need of an international profile, had gained a broader footing was evident in the growth in production of, and interest in, literature about the colonies. But former imperial power was also instrumentalised to restore Danish confidence and reputation in, for example, a Danish Deep Sea Expedition in the early 1950s.⁸⁷⁹ This large-scale national scientific expedition by ship around the world, which Kristian Hvidtfelt Nielsen has framed as 'postcolonial', because it included "sentimental" narratives about Danish colonialism and had an inherent "awareness of Denmark's history as a colonial power", was widely covered in the Danish media.⁸⁸⁰ It also had its own press section on board the expedition, which was meant to "distribute stories of Denmark

⁸⁷⁶ *Danmarksposten*, no. 1 (1921) p. 5.

⁸⁷⁷ Thisted, "Hvor Dannebrog engang har vajet", p. 4 and Kristian Hvidtfelt Nielsen, "Postcolonial Partnerships: Deep sea research, media coverage and (inter)national narratives from Galathea Deep Sea Expedition from 1950 to 1952", *British Society for the History of Science*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2010), p. 80.

⁸⁷⁸ T. B. Olesen and P. Villaume, *I blokpedelingens tegn, Dansk Udenrigspolitisk historie, vol 5.* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2006).

⁸⁷⁹ Kirsten Thisted, "Hvor Dannebrog engang har vajet", p. 4.

⁸⁸⁰ Nielsen, "Postcolonial Partnerships", p. 78.

as widely as possible”.⁸⁸¹ The self-proclaimed aim of the expedition was, among others, to set out on a national campaign, referring to the county’s bad reputation and self-worth and to “spread knowledge of Danish culture and industry”.⁸⁸² Hakon Mielche was a travelling journalist on the expedition, and in his writings in the popular magazine, *Illustreret Familie-Journal*, contributed to a production of continuity between Danish colonialism and the Danish scientific expedition.⁸⁸³



Figure 6.8: Hakon Mielche’s drawing of how he saw a distribution of the Danish flag across the globe made possible by the campaign of the Danish Expedition Foundation, 1948, (Danish National Archives).⁸⁸⁴

As the expedition’s main hope for economic support, and as emigrants, Island Danes became tools in a grand national strategy to expand Denmark.⁸⁸⁵ Just as Dansk Samvirke had done it earlier, the expedition assumed that Danish emigrants were a source for expansion and influence in foreign parts of the world. And former

⁸⁸¹ Nielsen, “Postcolonial Partnerships”, p. 87.

⁸⁸² Nielsen, “Postcolonial Partnerships”, p. 85.

⁸⁸³ See for example Hakon Mielche, “Galathea besøger Danmarks gamle besiddelser paa Guldkysten”, *Illustreret Familie-Journal* February 20 1951 or Hakon Mielche, “Fra neger-slaver til kakao”, *Illustreret Familie-Journal*, March 6 1951. Nielsen, *Postcolonial Partnerships*, p. 89-90.

⁸⁸⁴ Printed in Kristian Hvidtfelt Nielsen, “Forskning, Formidling og forestillede fællesskaber”, *Den Jyske Historiker*, no. 119 (2008).

⁸⁸⁵ In 1948 a fund was set up to collect money for the expedition. A brochure was sent to all Danes abroad to make them contribute. Hakon Mielche and Leif B. Hendil, *Dansk Ekpeditionsfond 1948*, in Nielsen, “Forskning, Formidling og forestillede fællesskaber”.

colonies were seen as an obvious starting point, as places where Denmark would have an advantage. This way, the discourse of nostalgia and melancholia over a lost pride, was gradually turned into a new narrative of Danish expansion, and an eagerness to make sure that all Danes knew and remembered the imperial past. This was narrated from the stance of a small state with a global outlook, reconfiguring the imperial ideas of liberal humanitarianism and civilisation as development, and reframing imperial conquest of land into expansion of ideas, science and trade.⁸⁸⁶

Evoking the past

On Valdemar's Day 1917 – the day of the Danish flag *Dannebrog* – a group of former gendarmes and officials from the islands formed *The Danish West Indian Club* in Copenhagen with former gendarme, August Neumann, as its chairman. In the first many years of this club's existence, it functioned as a space of postcolonial melancholia and a continued social network for island returnees. Club members met for a yearly bus trip north of Copenhagen which ended in "open sandwiches and dancing" as well as on Valdemar's Day "to reminiscence over the years of adventurous youth on the 3 West Indian Islands".⁸⁸⁷ When they met, they sang their own 'West Indian' tribute to Dannebrog ending in the following – quite national-nostalgic - verse:

Far the Danish flag was stricken- It is flying today
Although racked by bitter memories - We welcome our flag
It was worn and it was frayed - It has fought and it has defied
Still we follow your path - Denmark's free flag.⁸⁸⁸

As reflected in the song, the idea of having lost an empire was a central theme in the club, and dreams of reviving the empire were not all too distant, at least in the beginning. However, in 1938, membership numbers had declined so much that the

⁸⁸⁶ Ward, "Introduction", p. 12 on reconfiguration of colonial ideas.

⁸⁸⁷ Gunner Thorval, *Dansk Vestindisk Selskab 1917-1992*, Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, vol. 27, no. 3 (1992) p. 8.

⁸⁸⁸ Thorval, *Dansk Vestindisk Selskab*, p. 9.

remaining members met to reshape the club as *The Danish West Indian Association*. The declared purpose of the reformed association was:

(...) to strengthen ties between old Danish West Indians by organising meetings with lectures and by discussion of memories from out there, and by correspondence to maintain the connection with former Danish West Indian subjects (...).⁸⁸⁹

Accordingly, the new association was now focusing on the present as much as the past, and it opened up to a broader audience, on and off the islands. To that end, a membership call was advertised in Danish and Virgin Islands newspapers in 1938 and many new members joined.⁸⁹⁰ In the following decades, the dealings of the reformed association circled around care for, and knowledge about, the local population on the islands, spreading Danish culture and business, and making sure that new generations of Danes would remember the colonial past.⁸⁹¹ Thus, the nostalgia expressed in the Association slowly moved from being a backward-gazing melancholia to a very productive, forward-looking nostalgia.

This productiveness was practised in several ways. In the 1940s and 1950s, for example, a recurring theme in the correspondence between members and the chairman, was that of making an exhibition about the Danish rule on the islands - as well as producing a "culture film about the life of the Danish Negro population before it is extinct".⁸⁹² In 1948, chairman Neumann sent a Christmas letter to all members, ensuring that:

Next time a summary of Danish colonial history sees the light (...) our last colonies (and thereby our Association) will also be part of the story. It will probably be of no historical insignificance that a small faithful flock - The Association of the Danish West Indies - has protected the

⁸⁸⁹ Udskrift af Forhandlingsprotokollen, afholdt møde den 22/2 1938 i Neumanns hjem kl. 20.00. Til stede var medlemmerne: A. Neumann, Aage bang, F. Markhøj og A. Sebak, Rigsarkivet, 10609: *Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, Korrespondance, 1922-1977, pk. 1.*

⁸⁹⁰ See for example: "Danish Club Extends Invitation To Membership In The Virgin Islands", *St. Croix Avis*, vol. 94, 2. June 1938 and "Ungdomsminder fra de gamle danske tropeøer. Overassistent Aage Bang fortæller om den nystiftede dansk-vestindiske Forening", *Børsen*, 20. juni 1938.

⁸⁹¹ 10609: *Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, Korrespondance, 1922-1977, pk. 1.*

⁸⁹² Letter from Zeilau: (7.8.1953), 10609: *Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, Korrespondance, 1922-1977, pk. 2.*

memory of our last colonies, an importance which will further be amplified if our efforts to obtain a culture film about our past islands will succeed.⁸⁹³

Neumann, then, continued to stress the need to evoke this history in the Danish population: “if we can find one, it will cover a void not only in the Association, but it could serve to inform the Danish people whose knowledge - outside initiated circles - about colonial history seems to be very poor”.⁸⁹⁴ Indeed, in 1952 the East Asiatic Company agreed to fund a “culture film in colours”, and after a bit of a debacle over who should take the journey to the islands, architect Einar Kirk, professor Brøndsted and chief inspector at the Danish National Museum, Dr. Roussel, travelled there in 1953 to shoot the movie, and take measurements and photographs of old Danish buildings for the museum.⁸⁹⁵

This the cooperation between the Association and the National Museum was not new. Already in 1925, an idea was put forward by two members to gather furniture and photographs for the National Museum to “give the posterity an idea of under which conditions Danes lived daily life in these our last tropical colonies”.⁸⁹⁶ The National Museum director went along with the plan shortly after, a committee of returnees and an architect who had travelled to the islands in 1919 was selected - and donations started to arrive. Among others a large collection of furniture was bequeathed by former governor, L.C. Helweg-Larsen, and in 1932 the Ny Carlberg Foundation decided to support the purchase of more goods from the islands. In 1967, the result could be seen in the exhibition *Three West Indian Living Rooms*, which was set up at the National Museum to mark the 50th anniversary of the sale.⁸⁹⁷ Generally, the day of transfer became a celebratory event, a day to remember the Danish times on the islands - and there was a sense of pride

⁸⁹³ Christmas Letter to members from Neumann, 20.12.1948, reprint 20.12.1951, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, 1922-1977: Korrespondance (1950-1977, 2)

⁸⁹⁴ Christmas Letter to members from Neumann, 20.12.1948, reprint 20.12.1951, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, 1922-1977: Korrespondance (1950-1977, 2).

⁸⁹⁵ Letter to Henriksen from Kirk Nielsen, 26.6.1953, 10609: *Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, Korrespondance, 1922-1977, pk. 2.*

⁸⁹⁶ Inge Mejer Antonsen, *Tre vestindiske stuer* (Nationalmuseet, 1967).

⁸⁹⁷ Antonsen, *Tre vestindiske stuer.*

and loss in this festivity, reflecting a sort of “unashamed and unapologetic imperialist history”.⁸⁹⁸ Thus, in Association circles, the afterness of empire was often expressed through celebration and re-staging of the colonial past. This was for example also the case in March 1957, when the Association initiated a parade of old gendarmes in Copenhagen to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the sale.⁸⁹⁹

An even more active production of the Danish West Indian past, however, involved an entanglement of Association members and upcoming tourism on the islands - specifically in the shape of the Danish tourist chief in New York, Axel Dessau. After visiting the islands in 1952, Dessau realised that all the Caribbean islands had the same sunny weather and lovely beaches, but that when it came to touristic possibilities the “national characteristics give each island a personality of great importance in the competition with other islands”.⁹⁰⁰ By national characteristics, it must be said, he meant the national traits of their (former) colonial powers, like the “French atmosphere of Haiti, and Martinique, the British traditions in Jamaica”⁹⁰¹. Yet, while on the islands, he saw for himself that there was almost no sign of Danish culture, and he therefore started developing a tourism strategy which would “cultivate and advertise the Danish past”.⁹⁰² He began this campaign to construct a Danish cultural heritage on the islands by offering Laurence Rockefeller to find exporters of Danish furniture for the Caneel Bay resort, and by suggesting to the Commission of Trade and Tourism of Virgin Islands that they should “make their Danish heritage into their main attraction”.⁹⁰³ In 1962 he sent a letter offering his strategy, “Let’s put the Background to the Foreground!”, to the commissioner “as one tourist man speaking to another”.⁹⁰⁴ In the letter, he explained that the Danish brand had become popular, and that the islands therefore

⁸⁹⁸ Teo, “Wandering in the wake”, p. 169.

⁸⁹⁹ Letter 1957, 10609: Dansk Vestindisk Selskab, 1922-1977: Korrespondance (1950-1977, 2).

⁹⁰⁰ Letter from Axel Dessau to the Commissioner of Trade and Tourism of the Virgin Islands, 1962: “Let’s put the Background to the Foreground! Virgin Islands – Denmark”, Axel Dessau’s private archives, 1950-78: Danish National Tourist Office: Diverse propagandamateriale (Danish National Archives) p. 1.

⁹⁰¹ Letter from Axel Dessau 1962, p. 1.

⁹⁰² Thorval, “Dansk Vestindisk Selskab”, p. 9.

⁹⁰³ Axel Dessau, “Den danske turistkampagne på de tidligere dansk vestindiske øer”, *Dansk Vestindisk Selskab*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1992), p. 20.

⁹⁰⁴ Letter from Axel Dessau 1962, p. 1.

should make use of their background – for the benefit of them both. This way his strategy effectively manifested the fact that tourism was built on the cultural and material infrastructure of colonialism. Dessau highlighted three fields, which he thought could be of importance to Virgin Islands tourism: Danish food, Danish design, and Danish attractions on the islands. He knew of people in Denmark and on the islands, he added, “who are willing to make an effort not only to preserve already existing buildings of this period, but also to continue the preservation of a Danish atmosphere of what is built today” - and he asked that the commissioner would put Danish products in use in hotels and public places, in addition to having already placed Danish products in the shops.⁹⁰⁵ The Commissioner was interested in the strategy, and a plan was presented at a press reception in the Government House on St. Thomas, attended by governor Ralph Paiwonsky. This led to a restoration of Danish buildings during the 1960s, just as Dessau sent two Danish chefs to the islands to teach all prominent hotels and restaurants how to cook Danish specialties.⁹⁰⁶ As a part of his strategy, he also contacted leading businessmen and remaining Danes on the islands to set up the two friendship associations Friends of Denmark St. Croix and Friends of Denmark St. Thomas. For these associations to have a Danish collaborator, he, along with architect Einar Kirk and St. Thomanian-born Dane Holger Phillipsen, reformed the Danish West Indian Association, now as The Danish West Indian Society, which had again experienced decline in membership. Among others, the result of these efforts was a common festival on the islands in 1967 to mark the anniversary of the sale.⁹⁰⁷ Marking the same 50th anniversary of the sale, the Danish Tourist office in New York also initiated the campaign “Put your Background to the Foreground”, which entailed sending letters with best wishes for the future from Denmark to all homes on the islands.⁹⁰⁸ Another, and quite effective, way in which the islands were constructed

⁹⁰⁵ Letter from Axel Dessau 1962. Citation from page 2.

⁹⁰⁶ Letter from Axel Dessau to the Commission of Trade and Tourism of the Virgin Islands, 1967, Axel Dessau’s private archives, 1950-78: Danish National Tourist Office: Diverse propagandamateriale (Danish National Archives) p. 1.

⁹⁰⁷ Thorval, “Dansk Vestindisk Selskab”, p. 10.

⁹⁰⁸ Dessau, “Den danske turistkampagne”, p. 21.

as Danish, so an attractive mix of tropicality and homeliness was produced, was by setting up Danish street signs in the cities on St. Thomas and St. Croix. This practice was started in the 1940s, continued in the 1970s by Dessau and repeated in 2000 and 2001, when new signs were put up by a new Danish organisation.⁹⁰⁹

Tourism theory has dealt with such a staging of the past - what Tim Edensor has called staging Otherness - in the recreation of, sometimes, dying local cultures for the tourist to experience.⁹¹⁰ However, I will argue that the concept of staging also applies to this (re)construction of a colonial-national culture, which was never really that articulated in the past. When searching for “the colonial present” in tourism performances, Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen have made it a central point to explore whether tourists challenge or reproduce oriental place-myths in their performances.⁹¹¹ In the case of the Virgin Islands, tourists were served a construction of the past that made it even more difficult to challenge the dominant narrative. For this reason, many ended up reproducing the imagined geography of a set of Danish idyllic islands that were sold off for almost nothing to the United States - with the inbuilt logic that they should have still belonged to Denmark. Indeed, on the islands postcolonial travel was highly articulated and formed by imperialism, just as Hsu-Ming Teo has argued was the case of British travel in the former empire. But in contrast to the British experience - where travel guides would express distancing from imperialism, while simultaneously making use of imperial images and refraining from questioning the possible role of tourism as a new form of said imperialism - there was no distancing in the Danish case.⁹¹²

⁹⁰⁹ Axel Dessau, “street signs as a reminder of Danish Days”, Unknown newspaper, 1972 (Found in Dessau’s private archive). In 2000 and 2001 new and restored Danish street signs were put up by the organisation Friends of Danish West India, an organisation from the 1990s created to “promote interest for and knowledge about the Danish cultural heritage on the former Danish West Indian Islands”, www.danksvestindiensvenner.dk (Sept. 23, 2016)

⁹¹⁰ Tim Edensor, “Performing Tourism, Staging Tourism. (Re)producing tourist space and practice”, *Tourist Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2001) p. 70.

⁹¹¹ Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen, “Performing tourism, performing the Orient” in *Tourism Performance and the Everyday Consuming of the Orient* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁹¹² Teo, “Wandering in the wake”, p. 167.

Through his tourism strategy, then, Axel Dessau set a successful production of a Danish cultural heritage in motion. In Jane Desmond's words, the strategy ideologically framed the history, nature and traditions of the islands, a framing which had the power to transform the space.⁹¹³ Judging from touristic reproductions at the time, it seems the strategy was indeed a great success – if, for example, you read an American tourist brochure claiming that the islands were “more Danish colonial in atmosphere than suggestions to the States”⁹¹⁴, or a travel description by Danish author Henning Henningsen from 1967, claiming the homely atmosphere of Virgin Island cities: “The cities seem very homely in their architecture (...) you feel you are at home when wandering the streets”.⁹¹⁵ And the narrative is even more prevalent today, where a Danish cultural past is indeed dominant in touristic reproductions of the islands, always labelled by their colonial name, *Danish West India*, and continually presented as “Caribbean tropical islands with a twist of Danish cultural history”⁹¹⁶ - a place “steeped in Danish history”.⁹¹⁷

This national-romantic version of the Danish imperial history has been dominant in Danish popular culture and memory since the sale, despite imperial-critical currents in history writing and public debates. Here in the 21st century, Historian Louise Sebro has argued, a new wave of interest in the former colonies is yet another way of finding a secure identity by remembering the former Danish grandeur in times of globalisation.⁹¹⁸ This interest is expressed through increased travel, restoration projects, historical investigations and journalistic attention. It is also practiced through putting the abolition of slave trade on the islands into school curriculums, through debates about guilt and the question of apologising for slavery, as well as through national-romantic TV-shows about Danes in the former colonies.⁹¹⁹ A very popular version of this was the Danish public service channel's

⁹¹³ Cited in Adrian Franklin and Mike Crang, “The Trouble with Tourism and Travel Theory”, *Tourist Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2001), p. 17.

⁹¹⁴ Tourist Brochure: “Virgin Islands”, 07211: Axel Dessau, 1928-77: Scrapbog vedr. Rejser, pk. 32.

⁹¹⁵ Henning Henningsen, “Virgin Islands 1967”, *Handels- og Søfartsmuseets Årbog*, no. 4 (1967), p. 88.

⁹¹⁶ www.nyhavn.dk/dansk-vestindien (Sept. 23, 2016).

⁹¹⁷ www.albatros-travel.dk/rejser/albatros-dansk-vestindien-krydstogt-kultur-og-badeferie (Sept. 23, 2016).

⁹¹⁸ Louise Sebro, “Danmark og den koloniale fortid”, *Arkæologisk Forum* no. 14 (2006), pp. 1-5.

⁹¹⁹ Nonbo Andersen, “Vore gamle tropekolonier..?” and Louise Sebro, “Danmark og den kolonial fortid”.

Christmas TV-calendar in 2003, where the U.S. Virgin Islands were connected to Greenland and Denmark via the story of a group of Danish Christmas elves, who were forgotten on the islands after the sale, and who now needed help to stop an evil tycoon from turning St. Croix into (American) "Santaland".⁹²⁰ Apart from being an example of a re-staging of the end of empire, it is also a reflection of the great focus on especially these Caribbean islands. Even though historians and knowledge institutions are concerned with the full spectre of Danish colonialism, popular culture's romantic vision of a colonial past is almost always expressed through the "Danish West Indies". The common image of an exotic paradise, which - intriguingly - was once *ours*, where we can combine the pleasure of experiencing such an historical adventure with shopping and tropical beaches, seems utterly magnetic. As we have seen, this magnetism is at least partly a product of early remembrances and productions of (the end of) empire on the islands.

Concluding remarks

As we have seen, in the decades after the sale, Island Danes - on and off the islands - expressed productive nostalgia in the form of idyllisation, melancholia and evocation. As the discourse of tropicality changed, they contributed to the production of a tropical playground where one could flee civilisation, when practicing as modern tropical tourists, or when creating the grounds for a tourism industry. Especially after returning to Denmark, many felt a void and a sadness that their world order had changed. Through this postcolonial melancholia, they became the engines of the creation of a narrative of loss about the islands. However, what began as a melancholic mourning among a small circle of Island Danes, national-conservative businessmen with interests on the islands and island travellers, soon became a broader national quest to expand Denmark and regain

⁹²⁰ *Nissernes Ø*, Danmarks Radio, shown first in 2003, and again in 2008. It was filmed on/in St. Croix, Denmark and Greenland, and was also broadcasted on the islands under the name "Island of the Pixies". "DRs julekalender vises også i Dansk Vestindien", www.dr.dk, November 27, 2003.

pride in the 1940s and 1950s. Accordingly, the Danish West Indian Association's efforts to remember – and remind Danes of – the history of Denmark on the islands, became the a central part of the islands' tourism strategy – developed by an inspired Danish tourist chief, and effected in part by Friends of Denmark and The Danish West Indian Society. This way, by evoking the past in different ways, the Danish tourism strategy, and the Danish returnees and island travellers, indirectly attempted to take ownership over the history of the islands. Using the colonial past to build their own national narrative, and reproducing the past by staging a Danish culture on the islands, they embodied the paradox of owning the history of others, while denying their own.

Conclusion:

After empire: Articulated and Unarticulated Homes

By the late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth century, imperial governments across Europe were growing more stringent in regulation as a reply to softening divides in the colonies, and as a result of national awakenings. Colonies experienced worker's movements and rebellions, and this collided with a change in the tropical discourse, where environmental determinism was phased out and ideas of culture and biology took over. Faced with the crumbling of their power based in White domination, European colonial powers began to govern the intimate more than ever before. In terms of colonial policy, the old colonial world was turned into a new and more racially demarcated one, and private lives of colonial Whites were highly politicised.

In Denmark's Caribbean colony, however, the policy was a different one. The Danish government saw the islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John as an economic asset which had outlived its purpose and for years there were negotiations about selling the islands to the United States. Only for a short while in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century, were attempts made to make the islands culturally Danish. These attempts were half-hearted and, arguably, came too late. Despite a short period of offering Danish classes in schools, of development schemes and social activities, the Danish state was uninterested in the project – and Island society remained as multicultural as it had been for centuries. Yet - among Danes on the islands and returnees and national-conservatives in Denmark, a general feeling of an emotional bond between Denmark and the islands had emerged. This bond was based in contemporary ideas of development, which to some extent took over from colonialism - and in the shared history, which was

often produced as postcolonial nostalgia. It materialised as a continued private institutional connection and migration circle of Danish employees to the islands. The group of Danes on the islands was small, and they were a minority, even among the Whites. In other words, they lived multicultural lives in a multicultural society. This also meant that they did not speak the dominant language, and their religion and culture was not dominant on the islands – but they came at a time, when national culture came to matter greatly.

The Danish migrants, who travelled the distance to the Virgin Islands narrated, and practised ‘home’, in many ways. On a national-imperial scale, ‘the engines of empire migration’ – the men – were the industrious Danes that an imperial nationalistic debate in Denmark had called for. Thereby, they often perceived themselves as ‘ambassadors’ of Danishness, and often believed in the nationalistic-paternalistic ideas of the need for Danes to develop the ‘primitive’ islands. As employees in the private companies, which had been launched on the idea that *Mother Denmark* had a national responsibility to develop the islands, many of the migrants embodied the continued recruitment pattern to them. The Danes often based their act of migration in affective ties to the islands, such as friendships, familial bonds or in the already existing colonial migration pattern. For this reason, I have labelled them as empire migrants, to capture the fact that they travelled to a world – physically as well as in terms of socio-cultural hierarchies – which was opened up by empire. But also to point out the fact that they, based in the colonial past, framed the islands as home. Especially the new type of migrants, who travelled to work for the private companies, were expected to represent Denmark as well as the company and uphold a distance to local society. As a part of this – and coinciding with a contemporary, Western tendency to domesticate the colonies – many Danish men brought their wives with them or married White women on the islands. In fact, the Danish Island community experienced an upheaval in marital practices towards an all-White and all-Danish marriage culture around and after the end of empire.

Danish tropical Whiteness between colonisation and Americanisation

Whiteness was indeed a recognisable form of identification and belonging on the islands. Danish migrants *became* white, when they moved to the islands and entered into the White bourgeois community. Because of a remaining colonial hierarchy on the islands, they often ascended rapidly socially and experienced a general class-move as a part of this. However, Island Danes especially produced a narrative of homeliness connected directly to their Danishness. They mainly practised this through expressing feelings of national unity, inter-socialising and sharing common traditions. From the islands, Danes connected to the homeland through letter-writing, vacations in Denmark, sending children home for school or visits from friends or family – but they also practised home through striving for eating Danish food and celebrating Danish Christmas. The result of their efforts, however, was a mixed culture, which had incorporated many local elements. Compared to other experiences of tropical Whiteness at the time, the Island Danes were not just outdated as rulers, they also had to deal with a new American rule. This was a new power with which they mingled and cooperated, but also criticised as a rule that ruined the authenticity of the islands – and from whom they sometimes tried to protect the local population. Moreover, as the years went by, and Americanisation took on, the focus on a national homeliness with regards to schooling faded, as more and more children were sent to school in the United States, Canada or for example Puerto Rico. Contemporary European-Imperial focus on regulating White children by making sure they practised as Whites, was in practise almost non-existent among Island Danes. In terms of schooling, Danish parents of the middle classes and up did ensure that their children moved in the right circles, but children generally transcended divides in the Island communities, and they were increasingly Americanised through popular culture and in schools. Indeed, Americanisation came to frame the lives of all Island Danes more and more as the Twentieth century unfolded.

The group of Danes was not homogeneous, rather, it was a complex mix of plantation owners, managers, former gendarmes, working class employees in farming or at the port front, middle class bank employees, directors, priests, deaconesses, West Indian Company men, children and housewives. Thus, internally in the group, the Danes experienced very different stays and practiced differently on the islands. Some were mainly practicing as settlers, a sort of representative of the old colonial world, who settled down on the islands and often owned or managed a plantation. Others could rather be characterized as expatriates. Often working for the bank or the West Indian Company, they came to the islands to work for a limited time and planned to go home thereafter. Therefore, this new migrant type to a larger extent upheld racial and class boundaries and identified principally through a national prism. Inbetweeners – such as priests, doctors, deaconesses and children, however, experienced a much larger degree of integration into local society.

The boundaries between the categories of Danish Whiteness on the islands were not solid, of course, they were all at times practicing as ‘resident tourists’⁹²¹, sometimes almost as diplomats, sometimes as colonial masters and sometimes as expatriates – they were all to some extent embodying tropical Whiteness. For Danes also found a homely connection in mimicking the imperial past, as well as a broader imperial connection. Inspired by Western colonial narratives and imaging, they framed locals and local society as different and subordinate – and posed as imperial, tropical Whites. Indeed, the practises of the Island Danes often mirrored those of other contemporary imperial/tropical Whites. They were indeed referring to an image they knew of – from colonial literature, from the established, internationalised elite on the islands and from the colonial past of their Danish ancestors. Although predominantly narrating a tale of Danish homeliness, they mimicked this global image of tropical Whiteness in practise, and repeated

⁹²¹ For more on this resident tourist-role of being both host and guest, see Karen O’Reilly, “Hosts and Guests, Guests and Hosts: British residential tourism in the Costa del Sol”, in *Cultures of Mass Tourism: Doing the Mediterranean in the age of banal mobilities*, eds. P. Obrador Pons, P. Travlou and M. Crang (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008).

practises of the old Danish colonials. However, the situation was different from that of the old colonials: There was no longer a colonial strategy to follow or challenge, no longer a colonial government to legitimise their position – and, paradoxically, as the Danish state pulled out, a strong narrative of nationality and national responsibility had come to underscore the Danish community. How did they, then, (re)configure – socially and culturally – as a group in Twentieth century Island community? How were internal and intimate boundaries now defined and experienced?

Even though Whiteness was a crucial category in constructing boundaries and securing position, the ideal of tropical Whiteness was not only negotiated through the notion of race, but indeed also by class, gender, education and who your employer was. Tropical Whiteness as an elite category was produced through embodied practises, which all had an inherent signalling of bourgeoisie. Wearing White clothes and tropical helmets, eating some sort of Danish food, but also participating in the internationalised cocktail culture, doing supervisory work – and not manual – were all part of this. And even in a community where there were no intimate regulations from above, who you socialised with, who you were intimate with, who you married and how appropriately you controlled and displayed your emotions, mattered greatly. Indeed, with the entry of new empire migrants working for the bank and West Indian Company, practise became more demarcated, contrary to the case in most European colonies at the time. This was most of all the case in the ‘cosmopolitan’ port world of St. Thomas, where many expatriates came to live and work. Here the bourgeois, national culture of the new empire migrant families was most articulated. On St. Croix, which was still predominantly a farm area with old plantations, multi-cultural settler culture of the old empire, where Danes to a larger degree integrated into local community prevailed. As the balance tipped in the years following the sale, and the majority of Danes were now belonging to the expatriate group, an overall image of a new bourgeois groups of Danes, who were guided by the entangled ideas of nationality and class, emerged. It is interesting how this group without official rules and

guidelines, but based in new global ideas of nationalistic racism, and regulated by rumour and gossip, continued colonial, affective divides and actually changed practise to a more cultural racism after the end of empire. Culturally based, national racism was not a specific Danish phenomenon, of course - it resounded the changes in the global tropical discourse - but so was the specific situation of having no colonial state to dictate stricter regulation for intimacies, while intimate relations were in practise increasingly White-on-White or all-Danish.

The narrative of homeliness and the idea of a distance between the group of Danes, or the group of Whites, and local society was complicated in everyday practice and in intimate relations. Despite their different positions in the community, and the different social codes that followed, they all daily reproduced invisible boundaries between themselves and local life. Paradoxically, they also routinely breached these boundaries and encountered locals, when moving around in public space, through intimate relations - or in their homes. On the islands, their physical homes were spaces where local life was encountered. The homes were not very private spaces, as they were often used for representation, and most Danes had local servants working in the homes. Danish families and their servants routinely reproduced the imperial nationalistic discourse and kept racial differentiation in place in the homes, but the encounters in the homes, were at the same time the most intimate point of actual, physical contact. Danes had servants for many reasons, one of the main reasons was that it was a common practise among Whites on the islands. But, the homes themselves also demanded a specific lifestyle. The often pre-prepared households with mahogany furniture and living spaces separate from working spaces created a space for bourgeoisie.

What we have, thus, seen in the practises and narratives of the Danish migrants on the islands, is a complex set of both articulated and unarticulated manifestations of home. Articulated through their letters, memoirs, interviews and articles, unspoken, but practised, in their daily island life - and displayed in their photographs. Clear narratives come to light, when reading and listening to the

migrants themselves: They tell us how Danes stuck together, and how Danishness was a key marker for them, when socialising and identifying on the islands. Both statements hold a lot of truth to them, but they leave out several unarticulated concepts. What we seldom see in the narratives of the migrants is the crucial role of Whiteness in identification processes and hierarchies on the islands, or how an unspoken, and probably unconscious, connection to a European imperial discourse affected Danish island life. Moreover, the multiple daily interactions and connections with local space and local people was often unrecognised.

When we, then, explored the photographs of island life and the actual practises on the islands, we discovered that Danes were generally relating to, challenging and reproducing many different versions – or scales – of home. They were not just reproducing the former empire *as home*, Denmark as the distant homeland, or Danishness and Danish relations as homeliness on the islands. They were also reconstructing Whiteness as a sense of belonging – and they mimicked the comfortable and familiar European, imperial images and notions of ‘tropical life’, in their practise of a distant life in the Caribbean. What, in turn, stands out when we observe the Danish migrants from this perspective, is the contours of a specific Island Danishness, which was a mixture of Danish culture and practises, imperial tropes, bourgeoisie and local elements that increasingly incorporated American culture.

Making the history of our tropical home

Also for returnees to Denmark, a narrative of national homeliness was often amplified in the aftermath and turned into an expression of postcolonial melancholia. Indeed, I argue that many Danes with a relation to the islands felt a collective nostalgia, and that their narratives and memories of a *loss* of empire contributed significantly to the contemporary imagination of the Caribbean colony. One of the ways in which nostalgia was manifested, was through tourism. As a part

of Americanisation, tourism made its inroads from the 1930s and slowly transformed the islands. The nostalgia of the Island Danes - along with the ideas of an inventive Danish tourist chief - contributed to the creation of a physical tourist space on the islands, as well as to the present imagination of the islands as a destination. They produced a 'lost paradise' for tourists to consume, and in Denmark they worked to make sure their history was not forgotten. They constructed a national-romantic version of the history of the three islands that had never been culturally Danish - and turned their nostalgia into new forms of Danish expansionism. In fact, in their nostalgic evocation of the islands *as home* in a national and cultural sense, Island Danes on and off the islands, were the very central driving forces behind the creation of a public memory of the colonial past in Denmark. Thereby they also confirmed Stuart Ward's contention, when referring to Britain, that "it is in the end of empire" that the contemporary imperial legacy "comes clearly into view".⁹²²

In their position between two worlds, and arguably between colliding discourses, the Island Danes fought for their world after empire. Returned Island Danes integrated so well into the world of tropical Whiteness on the islands that they, even back in Denmark, referred more to a discourse of imperialism (or White tropicality) than to the contemporary cultural and political movements at home. Paradoxically, the large degree of internationality on the islands - that their narratives often ignored - and the many years of embodying a White bourgeoisie, put them in a position where they felt the destiny, and the future history-writing, of their former colony was an allegory for how their own history and dominant status was at stake. So they held onto the colony and called upon the past. Through processes of productive nostalgia, through producing the islands as home, they were the main actors in a process that gradually reduced the islands to an adventurous and exotic chapter in Danish history. As such, this thesis becomes the history of how the end of empire took form on the islands and in Denmark. It is the

⁹²² Ward, "Introduction", p. 12.

story of how the specific circumstances – the lack of state interest and an imperial identity in Denmark, which had long been overtaken by that of a small state - created a situation where Island Danes took action themselves. Through their nationalistic-paternalistic development ideals and their heavy involvement in memory work – they came to form the national-romantic narrative of the Danish colonial past, even though they were a small minority. In a small window of history, then, a small group of tropical Danes made the islands into ‘home’, and thereby brought a global-imperialistic tendency into Danish colonial history.

Studying the persistence of imperial culture

We have seen how the Danish empire underwent a process of decolonisation in an age of imperialism, and how the self-image of a small state had moved to the very centre of official political discourse *at home*. However, an ideology of imperialism prevailed in smaller parts of Danish civil society. Driving forces, such as the association *De Danske Atlanterhavsøer*, worked to create an imperial awareness in Denmark, and Danish individuals continued to migrate to European colonies. Spurred by adventurousness, and legitimated by a paternalistic idea of a developing mission, some Danes took part in colonisation on behalf of other states, or - as is the focus of this thesis - they continued a practise of imperial culture in a former Danish colony.

Throughout the chapters, we have seen how Island Danes in the U.S. Virgin Islands constructed and continued an imperial culture, which was built upon the existing colonial infrastructure, and bound up on ideas of national responsibility and national prestige. In this sense, it can be argued that they were a postcolonial elite without a metropolitan-political connection or an official support system. As a case study, this thesis is itself a small piece in the larger puzzle of European imperial history, but it also offers an insight into the circulation and perseverance of imperial social practises and culture. This study has displayed how, at least in

the case of the U.S Virgin Islands, imperial culture was not primarily state-driven, but instead practised by private companies and individuals, who linked up to a larger international trend. Imperial history often turns to either the metropole or the colonised when investigating the afterness of empire, and with good reason. However, there is also an afterness worth exploring among the White migrants in the former colonies. As such, the thesis offers methods and concepts for further investigations into the history of decolonisation and imperial culture. It proposes a further focus on understanding (post)colonial migrant groups on an individual microlevel and to borrow theoretical insights on home and migration from cultural geography to do so. It also displays the potential in reading beyond the official empire, both before and after the end of colonial rule. It is the argument of this thesis that employing such a focus could broaden our understanding of the dynamic between the role of the state and political-economic forces and cultural and social networks in processes of decolonisation.

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