Digital Memory of a Neglected Colonial Past

Visual Representation of Danish Colonialism and Slavery in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Diantha Jayananthan
Malmö University, May 24 2017

Media and Communication Studies:
Culture, Collaborative Media, and the Creative Industries
Faculty of Culture and Society, School of Arts and Communication
One-Year Master Thesis (15 Credits)
Supervisor: Anders Høg Hansen
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how digital mediations of art and performances can contribute to shaping new memories and perceptions about the Danish colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands. By analyzing six pieces of art and performances that engage critically with Danish colonialism and slavery, this study aims to expand the limits of how Danish colonization is traditionally perceived in Danish authoritative representations. Based on theory about visual art, mediatization and digital memory, this study has found that art as an aesthetic tool can revise and challenge traditional ways of engaging with the past and representing it. Art and performances can promote new ways of understanding the complexity of colonialism and bring attention to underrepresented views and voices. Contemporary media plays a key role in how we socially construct memory, as processes of mediatization have changed traditional methods of retrieving and storing knowledge. It is found that digitizing art and publishing it on the archive of the Internet, creates a foundation for potential dialogue, reflection and reconsideration of Denmark’s former role as a colonial power. The Internet allows for access to various, manifold perspectives and memories of the Danish past. Thus digitizing and publishing works of art and performance online, adds a dimension of shaping a ‘social network memory’ where viewers and artists are involved in processes of sharing and reflection that allow for discussions about Denmark’s colonial past.
CONTENTS

List of Figures 4

1. Introduction 5
   Purpose 6
   Research Question 7

2. Key Terms and Concepts 7
   Mediation 7
   Popular Memory 8
   Counter-Narratives 8

3. Analytical Framework 9
   Visual Art and Representation 9
   Digital Memory 10

4. Literature Review 11
   Example of Danish Representation of
   Danish Colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands 11
   Problematic Terminology
   Describing the Enslaved West Africans 12
   Critical Engagement with Representations
   of the Danish Colony in the U.S. Virgin Islands 12
   Danish Self-Perception and Memory of Colonialism 14
   Creating Colonial History and Memory 15
   Visual Representation of Colonial Memory 16
   Digitized Memory 16
   Situating the Study within a Field of Research 17

5. Theoretical Perspective 17
6. **Data and Methodology**
   Collecting the Data 19
   Data Collection 21
   Analytical Approach 22

7. **Analysis**
   *Visual Analysis* 23
   Traces of Danish Colonialism: *Chaney* 24
   Traces of Danish Colonialism: *Black Magic At The White House* 26
   Taking Ownership of the Past 28
   Taking Ownership of the Past: ‘Cariso’ Folktales at Sunset 29
   Taking Ownership of the Past: *Whip It Good* 32
   Taking Ownership of the Past: *The Planter’s Chair* 35
   Imagining Colonialism through Art and Performance 36

   *Visual Mediations, Contemporary Media and Memory* 39
   Memory and Media 39
   An Inclusive Global Archive 40
   Art and Performance: Memory and Dialogue 41

8. **Discussion** 44
   Limitations and Future Studies 45

9. **Conclusion** 47

10. **References** 49
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Exhibition of Chaney</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Dancing Silhouette in <em>Black Magic At The White House</em> (screenshot)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Cariso Performance of the Song ‘Clear De Road’ (screenshot: 2.06 min.)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Cariso Performance of the Song ‘Queen Mary’ (screenshot: 3.30 min.)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ehlers Whipping the White Canvas (screenshot: 1.44 min.)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ehlers in <em>Whip It Good</em> (screenshot: 4.15 min.)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Planter’s Chair</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Polaroid: Woman in the Planter’s Chair</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION

The Danish nation has a past that is entangled in colonialism and participation in transatlantic slave trade. Colonizing the former Danish West Indies, today known as the U.S. Virgin Islands\(^1\) and enslaving West African people, however, are not events that are actively remembered as part of the Danish nation’s popular memory. Some claim that this part of history is rather neglected and silenced in terms of how Danes relate to the colonial past and how it is viewed upon today (Jensen 2017, p. 1; Pedersen 2016, p. 1). Others argue that Danish colonialism is a well documented and researched topic (Andersen 2013, p. 59). Nonetheless, there are no traditions or memorials in Denmark to remind the Danes or form their memory of the former Danish colony or the enslaved people who are part of Danish history (Blaagaard 2011, p. 62; Schmidt 2016, p. 3).

This year, 2017, however, Danish media and cultural institutions have brought renewed and critical attention to the former colony. 2017 is the centennial for Transfer Day\(^2\), the day the former Danish West Indies were ceded to the U.S. Today public debates are emerging about how Denmark as a nation relates to colonialism and slavery and whether the Danish State should apologize for past misdeeds (Halberg & Coley 2016, pp. 124-128; Rasmussen 2017, pp. 6-7). These debates mark a recognition of a somewhat repressed and incomplete chapter in Danish history, which can open new doors for the Danes to reconsider and rethink the past.

Official Danish knowledge about the colony is predominantly created and represented by Danish scholars, who have based their knowledge on colonial records, written and preserved by former colonizers. This authoritative knowledge revolves around the colonial power (Andersen 2013, p. 61; Blaagaard 2011, p. 69; Halberg & Coley 2016, p. 14; Olwig 2003, p. 208; Sebro 2006, p. 3). Considering the social and cultural context of producing colonial records, these will evidently provide exclusively Danish perspectives and narratives. Arguably, knowledge grounded in the colonial archive limits the portrayal of the colonial power as well as the enslaved people, as this knowledge is produced from a position of power and authority to form history (Halberg & Coley 2016, p. 14).

---

\(^1\) In this study I use the current name of the U.S. Virgin Islands. During the Danish colonization (1672-1917) the islands were called the Danish West Indies (The Danish Colony n.d.). Before the Danish colony, the islands were referred to as the Virgin Islands, named by Christopher Columbus in 1493 (History of the Danish West Indies n.d.).

\(^2\) The centennial for Transfer Day, will be referred to as ‘the centennial’ in this study.
This study has evolved from my personal interest in public discussions and representation issues tied to Danish colonialism. Simultaneously with increased media and institutional attention on this topic, I have realized how little insight I myself, and many Danish adults I have met, actually have into Danish colonialism, slave trade and Denmark’s joint history with the U.S. Virgin Islands. Questioning how the colonial history could be re-told to learn new stories about this past, I have pursued this study as an investigation of how the possibilities of contemporary media can shape new ways of representing and remembered the past.

This thesis will continue with a presentation of my main purpose and research question. Next, I will briefly explain a few key concepts that I make use of and present my analytical framework. Afterwards, I will introduce previous research connected to my study in a literature review. Then, I will proceed to my theoretical perspective and present my data and methodology. The next chapter will be my analysis. I will interpret and analyze my data collection of six mediations of art and performances and analyze how these can contribute to new ways of shaping digital memory. In the following chapter, I will provide a discussion of my findings, reflecting on limitations of my study and potential future studies. Last, I will summarize my findings in the conclusion.

**Purpose**

With this thesis, I want to explore new pathways for understanding and remembering Denmark’s past as a colonial power, specifically in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I aim to challenge authoritative discourses and renditions of history and foster critical ways of thinking and imagining the past. To broaden popular understandings of the former Danish colony and challenge Danish perspectives of history, I will examine how contemporary media can be utilized to shape new stories and memories. Colonialism cannot be perceived as only part of the past but must also be seen in light of the present. As Loomba describes the unequal structures of colonialism still exist today and these influence our current societies, our views of the world and each other (Loomba 2005, p. 12).

I use art and performance as media that can capture and create new perceptions of the complex memory of colonialism. I believe that visual mediations potentially have the capacity to apprehend elements and phenomena that literary presentations may not be able to express. According to Leavy, visual arts hold a transformational capability that
cannot be expressed with words, nor will words have the same effect as images (Leavy 2015, p. 228). Thus the visual may be able to communicate parts of what is otherwise unspeakable and provide new perceptions of a complex past and memory.

In the following part, I will present my research question.

**Research Question**
I aim to examine how digitized visual mediations, engaging with the Danish colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands, can form more nuanced and diverse representations of history that highlight underrepresented perspectives, of both the past and the present. I will examine how digital visual data allow for the past to be told with relevance today and open possibilities for storytelling from below.

I will approach my research through the following question:

*In which ways can digitized visual mediations, and the interpretation of these, cultivate processes of shaping new perceptions and memories of Denmark’s past as a colonial power in the U.S. Virgin Islands?*

**2. KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**
For purposes of clarification, I will present brief definitions of a few key concepts.

**Mediation**
I use the term mediation when referring to my empirical data, consisting of digitized productions of art and performances. The data is either digitized as documentation of artwork or produced as a digital productions and then shared online. According to Couldry, the term mediation can be used to explain the practice of transmitting something through media (Couldry 2008, p. 379). Furthermore, mediation can be used to understand the concept of digital storytelling, the practice of telling stories through digital formats and storing and sharing these online (Couldry 2008, p. 374). Based on Couldry’s definition of mediation, the sense in which I use mediation, will include media productions, productions that are transformed into a digital form and the practice of communicating stories digitally.
**Popular Memory**

The term popular memory is used as a reference to a collective and social process of remembering the past and constructing memories of it. I draw upon the Popular Memory Group’s (2007 [1982]) conceptualization of the concept. Rather than only engaging with the past, the Popular Memory Group perceives memory as a connection between past and present (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 211). Here, memory is part of an active process of reworking past events (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 243). One could say that we perceive the past through the eyes of the present and construct representations of the past within a certain context, with certain knowledge and modes of thinking. According to the Popular Memory Group, a society’s popular memory can be understood as a collective process, wherein everyone participates in producing memory, however, on unequal terms (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 207). Popular memory can be seen as a contrast to dominant historical representations, which are related to dominant institutions and tend to gain a position as central representations (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 207). Representations of individual narratives, the experiences of different social positions and specific social/cultural/historical contexts can influence the collective memory (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 234).

**Counter-Narratives**

Counter-narrative is employed to conceptualize the role of the chosen data and describe socially and culturally underrepresented perspectives of Denmark’s colonial past that exist in tension with cultural, historical dominant or normative assumptions. Based on Andrews’ (2014) definition, I use the notion of counter-narratives, as a term for stories that do not fit into dominant discourses or representations (Andrews 2014, p. 1). According to Andrews, counter-narratives are told or lived by people and communities who experience their position as being outside, countering a dominant representation, dominant groups or ‘normal’ experiences. Dominant narratives are especially clear to and impact those whom the narratives do not involve or address (Andrews 2014, p. 3). This experience of countering a dominant culture can also be described as counter-stories or counter-memories (Andrews 2014, p. 2). Nonetheless, I will consistently use the word counter-narrative, to emphasize my focus on the shape of stories, how they are told and framed in relation to dominant stories.
3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will introduce the two main theories that I will use to interpret and analyze my empirical data with. The first part of my analysis will concern visual arts as a communication form and the second will concern mediatization, the Internet as an archive and shaping memory by utilizing the technologies of contemporary media.

Visual Art and Representation
To analyze my data, I will mainly draw on Leavy’s (2014) theorization of the concept, arts-based research, and hooks’ (1995) theorization of art and struggle over representation. I use these theories to interpret my audio-/visual data as tools that can promote dialogue in a process of understanding and meaning-making. Both hooks and Leavy focus on the possibilities of raising critical awareness and fostering a critical consciousness among viewers by presenting new ideas and images. Their theories conceptualize art and visual representations as mediums for conveying beliefs, ideas and dominant views about society and culture. Visual media is viewed as a potential transformative tool to resist and change stereotypical ways of thinking (hooks 1995, p. 170; Leavy 2015, pp. 24, 228).

Through studies of and conversations with Black American artists and by engaging with the production of art and the reception of it, hooks determines that artistic practices in specifically Black communities are empowering for Black artists to define themselves, revise and challenge history (hooks 1995, p. 170). She uses the term ‘aesthetic intervention’ to describe an artistic method of resistance to social oppression and critical engagement with racially structured social struggles (hooks 1995, p. 167). hooks’ theory goes well with arts-based research, which is appropriate for critical studies that seek to challenge dominant ideologies and normative views of the world (Leavy 2015, pp. 25-26). As a tool in qualitative research, visual data can give access to underrepresented voices and perspectives. The oppositional power and immediacy of visual expression can create strong impressions among viewers and evoke emotions, certain moods and promote reflection (Leavy 2015, pp. 292-293). Here the visual expression can connect with the viewer on an emotional level and may cultivate compassion, empathy and sympathy (Leavy 2015, p. 23).
Digital Memory

To examine how digital mediations can contribute to new ways of shaping memory, I will use Hoskins’ (2009) theory about mediatization of memory and Hartley’s (2012) theory about the Internet as an archive of memory and knowledge.

Hoskins engages with the connection between media and memory in contemporary societies. He uses the term mediatization to describe the impact of media on social and cultural practices. These are increasingly embedded in structures of digital media (Hoskins 2009, p. 29). With contemporary media there are endless possibilities for recording, archiving and retrieving digital sources (Hoskins 2009, p. 41). According to Hoskins, the properties of contemporary media are transforming the way we store knowledge, what and how we remember. Technologies of media have gained an important role in the way social and collective memory is formed (Hoskins 2009, pp. 27-28). Here the Internet plays a crucial role, as this medium both reshapes and remediates ‘old’ media and former formats into digital sources. Thereby digital memory has introduced new ways of storing, accessing and representing the past (Hoskins 2009, p. 31).

Hartley conceptualizes the Internet and its features as an archive. According to Hartley, the Internet has changed ideas of what an archive can be, how knowledge can be stored, shared and lost. The Internet can be described as a global archive of memory and knowledge (Hartley 2012, pp. 157-158). Everything that is uploaded online, is stored as in any other archive — of course until deleted again. The status of content in the online archive, however, differ from documents and artifacts in traditional physical archives such as libraries, museums etc. (Hartley 2012, p. 14). Content on the Internet often is tied to uncertainty and unreliability because of the uncertain time frames of accessibility. Nonetheless, with the emergence of the Internet, authoritative institutions of memory, also appear online and use this a medium for archiving (Hartley 2012, p. 157).

I have now introduced my analytical framework and in the following section, I will present a literature review.
4. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review I will introduce previous research about representation issues of the Danish colony in the U.S. Virgin Islands, history and memory of colonialism and digital memory. First, I will present an example of an authoritative Danish portrayal of the colony and slavery to illustrate how the past has been represented and why I seek to broaden the Danish understanding of the past. I will continue by presenting research with a critical approach to former representations, including studies that have questioned authoritative renditions and sought to open up for new questions, discourses and methods for understanding the colonial past. I will explain how visual, artistic representation of colonialism previously have been engaged with and shed light on previous research engaging with digital memory.

Example of Danish Representation of Danish Colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands

The anthology *Fra slaveri til frihed: Det dansk-vestindiske slavesamfund 1672-1848* [From Slavery to Freedom: The Danish West Indian Slave Society 1672-1848]³ (Nielsen 2001) is a collection of texts by eight historians and anthropologists. It was published by the National Museum of Denmark to mark the 150th anniversary of the formal abolition of slavery in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This example of modern ‘history from above’ provides a look into how Danish colonialism has been portrayed. The book implicitly articulates the dominant position of Danish scholars and Denmark as a metropolitan center of power to produce knowledge serving the Danish national identity. Compared to old classic descriptions of the colony, with focus on colonial establishment, shipping and administration (Halberg & Coley 2016, p. 15), this book, however, is an expression of considerable progress by actually engaging with Danish slave society and slavery.

With reoccurring questioning of the actual inhumanity of slavery, the trauma and brutality of slavery fails to be acknowledged. For instance, it is explicitly questioned whether Danish colonial drawings and paintings of slaves working peacefully on plantations with beautiful landscapes in the background (Nielsen 2001, p. 67), were produced as idealized images of Danish colonialism or if Danish colonialism did in fact not involve cruelty (Nielsen 2001, p. 71).

---

³ My translation from Danish to English.
The editor Nielsen distances himself from Virgin Islanders’ portrayals of Danish colonialism as they do not compare the conditions of the enslaved with the conditions of life that applied to inhabitants in Denmark or any West African countries. These portrayals are described as out of context (Nielsen 2001 p. 85). By Nielsen presenting his own portrayal as more accurate, he ends up describing the work of memory created by descendants of the enslaved as invalid and inaccurate. In a discussion of how the lives of the enslaved people could be compared to the lives of Danish serfs, Nielsen provides readers with the impression that the way Danish colonizers treated the enslaved in the U.S. Virgin Islands was comparable to how a Danish landlord would treat his serfs (Nielsen 2001, pp. 85-87).

Throughout the book, the authors describing the slave society, fail to recognize the scale of violence in human trade. Past perceptions of race hierarchy and Black people as primitive ‘sub-humans’ are overlooked. Instead colonial perspectives are reproduced, by for instance using the word ‘negro’ in some chapters, when referring to the enslaved.

Problematic Terminology Describing the Enslaved West Africans

Use of language and words have powerful influence on how the past and social structures are represented. Several Danish literary works about colonialism in the U.S. Virgin Islands tend to reproduce problematic views of race by using the word negro, when referring to the enslaved people (see Gøbel 2008; Hansen 1967; Hansen 2004; Lauring 1987; Lauring 2014; Nielsen 2001). Negro relates to a colonial strategy of oppression and demonstration of power. When official or authoritative texts use this word, they implicitly rearticulate the position of a former colonial power. Like the word negro, the word slave is also used when mentioning enslaved people. In recent scholarship, slave is considered an inaccurate term for the position of enslaved people and instead enslaved is employed as concept. Whereas slave tends to dehumanize and diminish the identity of the enslaved, enslaved underlines the process of being made a slave with force (Halberg & Coley 2016; Olsen 2017; Scherfig et. al. 2017).

Critical Engagement with Representations of the Danish Colony in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Sebro (2006) identifies a national romantic and a critical approach to Danish history of colonialism. The national romantic position dominates the common Danish view of the past, both in academic research and the public sphere (Sebro 2006). Within and outside
of Denmark, scholars have critically addressed issues concerning Danish cultural and historical memory and representations of colonialism. These issues concern a missing tradition of remembering colonialism and slavery in Denmark. Several scholars have pointed out that Danish portrayals of colonialism often provide a Danish understanding of history (Andersen 2013; Bastian 2003; Blaagaard 2011; Halberg & Coley 2016; Olwig 2003; Scherfig et. al. 2017; Sebro 2006). Suggestions for creating broader and more holistic representations of Danish colonialism revolve around including cultural traditions such as oral and performative storytelling, which are practiced in the U.S. Virgin Islands, as sources of history. Some scholars acknowledge that instead of limiting knowledge about the past to written records created by the colonial power, both written and non-written records are useful traditions when constructing social memory (Bastian 2003; Blaagaard 2011; Halberg & Coley 2016).

After the sale of the U.S. Virgin Islands, records conducted by Danish colonizers were transferred to Denmark. This transfer has been claimed to be a loss of access to historical archives for the inhabitants of the U.S. Virgin Islands (Bastian 2003). On the occasion of the centennial for the sale of the islands, the Danish National Archives have digitized and published more than five million documents online (www.virgin-islands-history.org). Even so, the records are written in Danish which excludes Virgin Islanders from fully accessing them (Ravn & Rasmussen 2017, p. 6).

A study by Bastian (2003) determined that the Virgin Islanders’ collective memory of the past is defined by traditions of mainly oral representations and memorials. Through interviews and observing commemorations in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the study suggests that representation of history purely based on written sources can be problematic (Bastian 2003, p. 6). Nevertheless, Bastian finds that oral and written traditions can complement each other and create a unified consciousness of history (Bastian 2003, p. 10). Shaping a coherent sense of the past, however, I would argue does not mean that the process of understanding or working with the colonial past is a finished chapter. As the inequalities, imbalances and perceptions of the colonial rule are still present in our world today (Loomba 2005, p. 12), the former colonization is relevant and necessary to remember in order to understand current societies and structures. Overall, Bastian’s study questions the status of written sources. It calls attention to issues of ownership and access to evidence of memory as well as to the responsibility and power of owning archives of knowledge.
Like Bastian, Blaagaard (2013) consistently acknowledges that representation of history should include cultural knowledge from the U.S. Virgin Islands, to learn new stories and even question history as we know it (Blaagaard 2011, pp. 61, 65). In a study of Danish journalism and cultural memory of colonialism, Blaagaard found that journalists construct representations of Danish colonialism based on archives of “(…) white and Euro-centric knowledge” (Blaagaard 2011, p. 69). Blaagaard claims that Danish representations of colonialism have been based solely on colonial records, which can be problematic if these records are treated as factual or even objective (Blaagaard 2011, p. 69). When colonial records are used as journalistic sources, one should expect that this is done with criticism towards the sources. Nonetheless, by only using Danish written sources, one can argue that Danish journalism reproduces a Danish rendition of colonial memory and history.

Other studies engaging in critical approaches to representations of the colonial past have dealt with the conditions of the enslaved people. Some studies have drawn attention to the oppression of the colonized and the impact of the revolts that the enslaved people started as resistance in the U.S. Virgin Islands. These studies show how the enslaved people were not willingly subordinated by the colonizers and stress the enslaved people’s influence on the abolition of slavery (Halberg & Coley 2016; Olwig 1980; Sebro 2013; Scherfig et. al. 2017).

**Danish Self-Perception and Memory of Colonialism**

Danish representations of Danish colonialism should be read in the light of how Danes understand their cultural identity and perceive Denmark as a nation. Compared to other former colonial powers, the colonial past can be considered neglected within Danish national self-understanding (Andersen 2013; Blaagaard 2011; Halberg & Coley 2016). According to Andersen, the lack of acknowledgment of Danish participation in slave trade, has led to a colonial history that has not been frequently discussed (Andersen 2013, p. 60). Andersen argues that Danish colonialism is a rather lit topic that has been depicted and represented in various media (Andersen 2013, p. 59). Many of these depictions are, however, often formed and created by Danish scholars for Danish audiences. Such representations tend to be one-sided and cannot be considered unbiased nor impartial. Like Andersen, Olwig also argues that some Danish descriptions of colonialism have been interpreted with great imagination providing misrepresented
renditions of history, painting a nostalgic image of the U.S. Virgin Islands as a tropical paradise (Andersen 2013; Olwig 2003).

By using the concept deglobalization, Olwig describes how Danish postcolonial detachment from the U.S. Virgin Islands has allowed the Danish State to delink itself from the past and form patriotic narratives about Denmark’s colonial achievements (Olwig 2003, pp. 207-208). Descriptions with almost exclusively narrow Danish point of views make up what Olwig claims an imagined world (Olwig 2003, pp. 218-219). Olwig argues that Danish people have a well defined cultural identity that makes it difficult to conceive narratives that do not fit this certain identity (Olwig 2003, p. 217). Obtaining new views of Danish colonialism, according to Olwig, requires that the Danes rethink Danish self-understanding (Olwig 2003, p. 219).

Creating Colonial History and Memory

Scholars engaging with history and memory have pointed out that the way official history is portrayed or remembered within a community does not mirror one ‘true’ history (Jenkins 2004; Lawler 2008; Carr 1961). According to Lawler, narrating the past is in itself an exercise in interpretation. She believes that narrated memory depends on what made sense in the social and political context in which it was constructed (Lawler 2008, pp. 39-40). Jenkins reminds us that history is a narrative representation where data is written into a literary composition. From this perspective, interpretation and representation of the past are discursive practices (Jenkins 1991, p. 34). Jenkins argues that a combination of ideology, epistemology and methodology determines how historians represent the past (Jenkins 1991, p. 19). This means that authoritative representations of the past present certain perspectives of the past that can be as true as any other account. Nevertheless, sources and knowledge utilized to construct history can be questioned in regards of reliability. The construction of literary knowledge written by White Danish scholars cannot be claimed to be neutral as these write from a position of power and place of interest. In addition, these representations tend to highlight the colonizer’s history before the history of slavery and the enslaved. The enslaved people often remain underrepresented and nameless.

Absence of texts and silenced topics can also be elements that form certain discourses and representations. Kilomba emphasizes a historical tendency where the enslaved is silenced by the colonizer (Kilomba 2010, p. 31). According to Kilomba, suppressing the
colonized with silence is a tool to avoid confrontations with ‘Other’ truths and keep truths about slavery and racism quiet (Kilomba 2010, p. 21). The tendency to overlook the enslaved and their descendants, I believe, reproduces an unequal power relation between the Danish State and descendants of the enslaved. Moreover, this makes a nuanced representation of the history impossible. Halberg and Coley explain that even though there is a whole archive describing the Danish colony, this was created by the colonizers and primarily Danish men in the colonial administration. The colonial records provide information about the history that colonizers found significant and wished to record (Halberg & Coley 2017).

**Visual Representation of Colonial Memory**

Visual media can be considered a ubiquitous part of contemporary society and communication, influencing how we perceive the world and how we gain knowledge. Visual data can be used as tools to expose sociological knowledge that would not be accessible elsewhere (Banks 2008, p. 4). The academic engagement with visual methodology has been emerging in recent years (Banks 2008; Emmison, Smith & Mayall 2013; Harrison 2002; Pink 2008).

Previous research engaging with visual communication in a postcolonial context has stressed the capability of artistic expression to shape memory and knowledge in unpredictable ways. Visual production can start processes of rethinking memory and reconfiguring theories. Some scholars perceive visual mediations as tools for shaping new imaginations and empowering oppressed subjects (Chambers et. al. 2014; hooks 1995).

Some scholars have found that visual media are specifically significant for shaping a collective understanding and memory of the open-ended process and complexity of colonial experiences. The visual expression has been used in studies to form new experiences and conceptions of the world. Hence visual data can bridge the complex relation between present and past (Angelis et. al. 2014, pp. 2-3).

**Digitized Memory**

Along with the emergence of the Internet, research about media and social memory have been evolving the last decades. Several scholars have been engaging with the notion of media memory and digital memory as contrary and complementary to
traditional analogue methods of forming memory (Freeman et. al. 2014; Hansen et. al. 2015; Hartley 2012; Garde-Hansen 2009; Morris-Suzuki 2005; van Dijck 2007). Today media and digitization has become part of how both individuals and social institutions store information and knowledge. This development has been explained in different ways. For instance, van Dijck has developed the concept ‘mediated memories’ to theorize the transformation from analogue to digital storage of memory and how this impacts the connection between mind, technology and culture (van Dijck 2007, p. xiii). Digital media contain multiple formats of knowledge and memory, where social institutions as well as amateur producers can contribute with information. Overall, contemporary media provide new ways of thinking about memory and storing, accessing and controlling knowledge about the past (Freeman et. al. 2014, p. 12).

**Situating the Study within a Field of Research**

This review illustrates how researchers have already engaged in critical approaches to national romantic views of Danish colonialism and illuminated that the past can be represented with more nuance by including manifold perspectives. Based on knowledge of former studies that have widened the understanding of colonialism in the U.S. Virgin Islands, this thesis will be a contribution to a critical research field concerning memories of Danish colonialism. To challenge authoritative historical representations, I will focus on new methods for communicating and reflecting upon Denmark’s past. I will use mediations of art and performances to demonstrate how digital media can bring underrepresented views forward and allow for a re-consideration of Denmark’s former colony. Additionally, the mediations will function as tools to explore experiences of ‘realities’ rooted in other narratives than those represented from Danish perspectives.

**5. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In this section, I will describe my theoretical perspectives and position as researcher. This study will be conducted with a qualitative method, where interpretations and analysis will be subjectively influenced by my position. Therefore, I seek to clarify how I as a researcher approach my study.

To emphasize how interpretations of visual data may create new perceptions of Danish colonialism, I will ground my research in the paradigm, interpretivism, which is appropriate for my arts-based method and engaging with different modes of storytelling as well as the experience of these (Collins 2010, p. 40). Ontologically, I draw upon an
interpretivist and an idealist conception, perceiving the construction of reality as multiple in such a way that reality consists of various views of the world, interpreted, constructed and represented by social actors (Blaikie 2010, pp. 93-94).

Epistemologically, this study will be conducted based on a constructionist assumption, where the knowledge that I produce, will reflect my position and stance as researcher (Blaikie 2010, p. 95). Thus this study will provide an example of how visual mediations and reality can be interpreted and be given meaning. Interpretation of the visual depends on the viewer and her/his personal views and background. In addition, analyzing visual data does involve intuition and creativity, which creates ambiguities and the possibility of multiple meanings and interpretations (Leavy 2014, pp. 17-18). A limitation of visual analysis can be exactly this openness to different interpretations, where communication problems and misinterpretations can occur (Spencer 2011, p. 132). I strive to be open to interpretations that run counter to my initial understandings. Instead of making any authoritative claims, I recognize that my interpretations will be subjectively influenced by my personal perspective. This approach allows me, as a researcher, to democratize the process of meaning-making and decentralize my position as an expert (Leavy 2015, p. 26).

To provide a trustworthy study, I aim to persistently explain and clarify my work process. As a woman of color myself, I do write from a position and perception of reality that affects my view of colonialism and the chosen data for this study. The way I react to a certain piece of art, how I relate to it and present it, depends on my current social position and background. I am part of a minority group in Denmark, where I live. I have personal experiences with racism and I can relate to structures of colonialism, unequal power relations and representation issues. I do, however, consider myself partly an outsider in the context of this study, because I am not a descendant of enslaved people. I do not share the history or heritage of the artists and performers whose work I have analyzed and I do not belong to the African diaspora. On the other hand, I am, too, one of the Danes who have not been educated about Denmark’s role in transatlantic slave trade and until recently I did not have much knowledge of Denmark’s past as a colonial power.

I am aware that I am not able to provide a neutral nor ‘true’ analysis in any absolute sense. I pursue to conduct this study as an example of how interpretations of digitized
art and performances can contribute to new memories and manifold understandings of Denmark’s history as a colonial power.

6. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, I will describe the methods I have used for my research. I will explain how I gathered my empirical data, define my search criteria and briefly introduce the chosen data. Afterwards, I will elaborate on my analytical approach.

Collecting the Data

The data was collected on the Internet, which facilitates easy and fast ways to search and access public data. Documentation of performances and art is often shared online, where contemporary artists showcase their work on personal websites and online portfolios. According to Hartley, the Internet is a potential source of unlimited information that has transformed traditional ideas of how knowledge can be stored (Hartley 2012, pp. 157-158). Moreover, Hartley perceives the Internet as a digital form of popular memory formed by constantly updating archives and contents (Hartley 2012, p. 156). Considering Hartley’s perception of how the Internet can form popular memory and also considering how the use of Internet subsume much of the daily information accessed in modern societies, like Denmark, I found the Internet to be the most appropriate source of data for my study.

With consideration of ethical issues that may be tied with data from the Internet, such as reliability and unpredictable span of time the content is accessible, I have checked the validity of the sources and whether they have permission to publish the chosen data. I have saved copies of the data, only during the process of conducting my study, in case these would be removed.

Data collected online is based on accessibility and availability to use it. Aside from what data has been accessible, my data collection is build on the following criteria:

- Public data, published on the Internet by valid sources with permission to publish it.
- Still and moving images, including audiovisuals, as mediums of representation.
- Mediations engaging with memory of Denmark’s colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands.
• Contemporary art/performance as expression, to exemplify alternative ways of understanding and broadening perceptions of Danish colonialism.
• Mediations that emphasize underrepresented voices/perspectives. By underrepresented, I mean views that in a Danish context, have not been heard often and stories that are not centered around the colonial power. I see underrepresented voices as counter-narratives in tension with official/authoritative Danish perspectives.

I have set these specific criteria to examine visual and audiovisual representations of issues connected to Danish colonialism and to engage with representations that allow viewers to interpret what is seen/heard in other ways than literate representations. The visual data should not represent ‘reality’, rather elucidate underrepresented views of the past. I believe artistic mediations, compared to documentary, have the capability to express messages in unforeseeable modes and encourage viewers to see and understand a complex history in new ways.

Mainly Google (google.com), YouTube (youtube.com) and Vimeo (vimeo.com) were used to collect data. I have searched for artists engaging with Danish colonialism and mediations of traditional methods of commemorating in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Additionally, I looked for data and artists on lists of upcoming exhibitions in Denmark on the occasion of the centennial in 2017.

Through my search I came across a traditional genre of communicating history with song and dance in the U.S. Virgin Islands called cariso. I chose to find a mediation of this genre to exemplify how inhabitants on the U.S. Virgin Islands have told their history to new generations.

Searching for art and performances, I found few artists engaging specifically with the Danish colonial past or at least few had made their work accessible online. Therefore I have consciously chosen to examine work by the two artists Ehlers and Belle, whom I was already familiar with. In Denmark, these two artists and their art related to Danish colonialism have received a good deal of attention in Danish media. Additionally, both artists actively engage in the debate about Danish participation in slave trade and the former colony in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Early in the process of collecting data I decided to include both Ehlers’ and Belle’s work in my data collection, as I consider their work to be strong examples of untold or unheard narratives that would fit my
criteria. I did, however, wish to include more data, but did not find any that fit my specific criteria. I am aware that my narrow criteria may have eliminated possible data. I did come across Danish artists, for instance Nanna Debois Buhl and Thomas Seest, who have also contributed with artwork concerning Denmark’s past as a colony. Nonetheless, their work did not fill the criteria of stressing underrepresented perspectives about the former colony.

**Data Collection**

The data consists of six different mediations: a series of photographies, a photography of an exhibition and four audio-visual pieces in form of moving images. These mediations of images, performances and audio, break with traditional ways of engaging with the Danish colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands in terms of communicating through artistic expression. I regard the chosen mediations as selective examples of data that can be used to interpret stories about the former colony.

My data collection consists exclusively of work by women. It was not my intention to limit my data to portrayals of or by women, but I have not discovered any visual data of male artists or performers living up to my criteria. I am aware that only engaging with female expression will effect the results of my analysis and limit the portrayal. Moreover, the data consists of art and performances carried out by women of color, either from the U.S. Virgin Islands or Denmark with roots in the Caribbean Basin — the former West Indies. This of course is a result of my selection of data and it can be an advantage for the purpose of my study, because these women make their own representations, instead of being objects of others’ representations. I built this perspective on hooks’ argument that there is little possibility, for Black communities in the U.S., to identify with art because there is a lack of representation or inaccurate portrayals. hooks acknowledges the importance of people being able to recognize themselves or the familiar in art (hooks 1995, pp. 3-4). Choosing mediations by women descending from former enslaved West Africans supports my criteria of bringing forth untold stories and highlights how these women’s representations and perspectives can strengthen their communities or identities.

The first mediation I have chosen is a video of two cariso performances recorded on March 6, 2010 at the Caribbean Museum Center of the Arts, U.S. Virgin Islands. Cariso is a traditional folklore from the U.S. Virgin Islands, where women use song and
movement as medium to pass down history from the memories of the enslaved ancestors to their descendants (Virgin Islands Source 2010).

Next, I will include work by the Danish artist Ehlers, whose video work provides a contemporary form of counter-narrative and reflects a modern way of telling history with relevance today. Ehlers’ work revolves around issues about Denmark’s history as a slave nation and her own ethnicity and identity, which she defines as a Danish/West Indian background (Ehlers 2015). Among her work, I have picked out two videos that I found appropriate for my study to highlight Denmark’s history as a colonial power: *Whip It Good* (Ehlers 2014) and *Black Magic At The White House* (Ehlers 2009).

I will include two pieces by the artist Belle from the U.S. Virgin Islands. Much of her work concerns colonialism, memory and identity. I have chosen her photography series, *The Planter’s Chair* (Belle 2011) and a photography of her exhibition of the paintings *Chaney* (Belle 2014). These two pieces provide a contemporary perspective of the former Danish colony, from the eyes of a Virgin Islander, which can contribute to an understanding of how colonialism has left its marks of the past.

**Analytical Approach**

I have divided my analytical process into two sections. First, I have analyzed my data and the visual content in order to proceed to the next stage, in which I have examined how the interpretation of the data and the data itself can contribute to a digital memory and new ways of shaping popular memory with contemporary media.

Leavy does not provide one specific model or approach, instead she recommends researchers to work with her theory and pursue research as an experiment (Leavy 2015, p. 285). Therefore, I have structured my analysis based on Leavy’s theory about visual art and included hooks’ perspectives of art and representation to interpret my data. From hooks’ theory, I have chosen to use the elements and concepts that I have found relevant for my analysis and consciously picked out the parts that can strengthen my analysis and complement my use of Leavy’s theory.

As a starting point, I have identified patterns and characteristics within my data collection. Leavy frames the four following modes of thinking as key components to generate new knowledge through an arts-based research: *conceptually, symbolically,*
metaphorically and thematically (Leavy 2015, p. 293). Through these four lenses I have observed my data, noted patterns and sought to do this without interpreting or applying meaning to images at this stage.

After noting characteristics and patterns in my data, I moved on to the stage of interpretation and analysis. To proceed with a systematic approach, I have done a thematic analysis based on the main themes and patterns I have observed. I employed what Leavy describes as a creative dialogue, exploring what the visual mediations communicate (Leavy 2015, p. 271). I have examined what the mediations show, what it may mean and how this is communicated. I have held my interpretations up against Leavy’s and hooks’ theories and investigated how my data can challenge literary methods of constructing knowledge and cultivate dialogue about the past as a process of understanding and remembering anew.

To overall examine my data from a larger perspective and how these as digital mediations can contribute to a digital archive and digital memory, I have employed theory about mediatization and the Internet as an archive of both knowledge and memory. I have studied how the possibilities of media technologies and new forms of archiving can contribute to new methods of shaping memory of Danish colonialism. Moreover, how traditional understandings of popular memory can be revised.

7. ANALYSIS
In this chapter, I will present my analysis in two sections. The first section will concentrate on the visual analysis. This part is structured according to the two main themes reoccurring in the data and the analysis of each mediation. The second section will focus on digital memory and media.

Visual Analysis
The interpretation and analysis of art and performances can foster multiple understandings and views, depending on who the viewer is and the context of viewing. This, according to Leavy is an advantage when using arts in social research, because the researcher takes a position as interpreter instead of expert researcher (Leavy 2015, p. 26). As the interpreter, I emphasize that I am providing an analysis of how the following mediations can be seen and understood.
Overall, the mediations can be separated into two categories of reoccurring themes: physical traces of Danish colonialism and taking ownership of history. Looking for concepts, symbols, metaphors and themes, according to Leavy’s approach to arts-based research (Leavy 2015, p. 293), I have found the first continuous concept being the artists and performers taking ownership of their history and the stories they tell. The selected data all contain work that empowers the artists and performers, their heritage and the African diaspora — a diasporic bond that according to hooks links all Black people (hooks 1995, p. 71). I would say that all the mediations in one way or the other, reflect a powerful act of ownership and control of the representations. The other main thematic pattern relates to physical traces of colonialism both in Denmark and in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

I will now continue to the analysis, which will be presented according to the two main themes: physical traces of Danish colonialism and taking ownership of history and herein one mediation at a time.

**Traces of Danish Colonialism: Chaney**

An example of engaging with traces of the former Danish colony comes to show in Belle’s exhibition of Chaney (2014) (Figure 1). Initially both paintings in *Chaney* resemble idyllic blue drawings of flowers and landscapes. They are, however, exhibited together with soil and fragments of porcelain on the floor, which raises questions about Belle’s purpose with the exhibition. For those with no knowledge of the U.S Virgin Islands’ culture or nature, reading Belle’s description of the work, will be helpful and even necessary in order to understand *Chaney*. The paintings replicate drawings of old Danish porcelain. During hard rain in the U.S. Virgin Islands, chaney, broken pieces of porcelain, often appear from the ground. These fragments are originally from the fine porcelain that belonged to Danish colonizers. The porcelain was imported from Denmark during the colony and today bits of it are buried in the soil (Chaney Description n.d.).

The word chaney is slang for a combination of china and money, which comes from children’s games when playing with chaney as money (Chaney Stories from Migrant Fragments n.d.). A quick Google search shows that chaney in the U.S. Virgin Islands are popularly used in jewelry as a valuable object. For the inhabitants of the islands, the
word chaney and Belle’s exhibition of Chaney will probably occur as familiar. On the contrary, for an outsider, Belle’s reference to chaney may be difficult to understand without any accompanying text or explanation. Therefore the interpretation of Chaney depends on who the viewer is. As Leavy stresses, there is not one way of making sense of a piece of visual art. This can be interpreted differently all based on the viewer and also the context of viewing (Leavy 2015, p. 26). Chaney could promote new perceptions of Denmark’s role in the U.S. Virgin Islands in terms of its metaphoric properties. To a Danish viewer Chaney may reveal how inhabitants of the U.S. Virgin Islands are reminded of their past through nature, where chaney appears as evidence of the colony. Chaney can give viewers insight into new aspects of understanding the shared history of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Denmark. According to Leavy, visual art can encourage new ways of seeing and remembering. This is elaborated in the following quote:

“Visual art challenges viewers in an immediate and visceral way while remaining open to a multiplicity of meanings. Images also make lasting impressions in memory and can jar us into seeing differently.”
(Leavy 2015, p. 302).

Figure 1. Exhibition of Chaney (Belle 2014).
Here Leavy puts emphasis on how visual art is open to interpretations and the way one may make meaning of art or the way art may impact us, can be imprinted into our mind and memory. The metaphor of Chaney can be interpreted as evidence of a past that keeps appearing on the surface as something that cannot be forgotten or contained in the past. Seen in this light Chaney captures the essence of how the past and present are inseparable and intertwined. In another view, Chaney can also be a metaphor for a valuable past, where chaney are fragments of the past and the colonial wealth. Appearing as relics from the Danish colony, chaney may not have negative connotations. Chaney can then also be a way of remembering the history that is defining for the community of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**Traces of Danish Colonialism: Black Magic At The White House**

Chaney can be compared to Ehlers video work, Black Magic At The White House (2009) which engages with how Denmark’s former role as a colonial power is visible in Denmark today. Briefly, the video is filmed in the halls of Marienborg, the official residency of the Danish Prime Minister, and a building that is built on the wealth of Danish slave trade (Ehlers 2016, p. 46). In the video Ehlers is dancing in the great halls of Marienborg and we mainly see the silhouette of her, as she has been retouched away and appears as a shadow (see figure 2). Her unretouched body appears in only a few glimpses. In the background an intense drum rhythm is playing. The silhouette draws a white vèvé on the floor, a symbol used in Haitian voudou when opening and closing doors between spirits and mortals (Danbolt 2016, p. 7). The vèvé and dance almost resemble a ritual together with the sound of the drum. The intensity of the dance and drums builds up until the dancer lays down on the floor and the video is over (Ehlers 2009).

There is a sharp contrast between the dancing silhouette, the drums and the classic eighteenth-century Danish interior and space. Ehlers’ practice seems displaced in these settings. As the title, Black Magic At The White House, insinuates, something magical is taking place. The dancing silhouette could be resembling a ghost and the practice of making a vèvé, makes the White House seem haunted by a spirit. Maybe a spirit of the enslaved, whose enslavement and oppression Marienborg has been built upon. The video can be interpreted as a way of bringing together the Danish history of slave trade, colonial wealth and the history of the enslaved West Africans.
Ehlers’ performance resembling a spirit can also be read as a boundless connection between the past and present. This practice can be connected to how Chambers describes collections in the context of a postcolonial museum, a European institution of knowledge and cultural power:

“Here the past refuses to pass, it insists on its right to return and to interrogate and ghost the present (…)” (Chambers 2014, p. 242).

In this context, Chambers describes how the archives and collections perceived as something past can be transformed into something lively and vital in the present (Chambers 2014, p. 242). Seen in this light Ehlers’ video and the use of a ghostly figure can be read as a statement of the *White House* being followed by its past, by spirits of the past that refuse to leave the *House*. With her work Ehlers insists on bringing the past forward and making it alive in form of an invisible dancer. The video becomes a remark on how the past is still ‘living’ or at least present in terms of buildings like Marienborg which might not even have been built without any slave trade or oppression. The dancing silhouette can also be perceived as a comment on the enslaved people being invisible in Danish memory. The silhouette draws connections to how the enslaved have been overlooked as non-existing and unimportant in Danish popular memory. As there exists no Danish memorials or traditions of remembering the people who were enslaved,
the traces of colonialism that do still exist in Denmark occur as houses and other constructions of wealth.

Like in *Chaney*, the past and present are connected in *Black Magic At The White House* through evidences of the past. Neither Belle or Ehlers seem to judge the past but comment on it. Even though *Black Magic At The White House* builds up an intense mood the video can be seen as an ironic, maybe for some even humorous and exaggerated account of how one can understand Danish colonial wealth. Both *Chaney* and *Black Magic At The White House*, may cultivate new ways of thinking about the past or looking at a building such as Marienborg. Here the Danish viewer is invited to reflect on the history and wealth of colonialism. As Leavy describes, art has the ability to communicate important stories, and promote reflection as well as build empathy among viewers (Leavy 2015, p. 292). *Chaney* and *Black Magic At The White House* bring the topic of colonial wealth, economy and power to the surface, which can open up for new dialogues. The viewer may be introduced to new stories about Danish colonialism or perspectives that do not place the Danish colonial power in center. The two pieces manage to place the past in a position, where it can get attention, be questioned and potentially be discussed.

**Taking Ownership of the Past**

In the following part, I will analyze the mediations according to the theme, taking ownership of the past. All the mediations someway empower the artists and performers, their work and also the audiences. In a Danish context, dominant, authoritative representations of slave trade and the former colony are based on colonial records and perspectives. Therefore, the perspectives of enslaved West Africans, their descendants and Black communities are important to bring forward. This to promote more nuanced understandings of the past by including different views and to challenge representations of history based on colonial records. Racializing does play a significant role in this struggle of representation, as the past is not only a matter of colonizer and colonized, but a matter of the Black subject being suppressed by the White. The knowledge that has contributed to existing Danish memory of the colony in the U.S. Virgin Islands, is based on White supremacy and power to choose and decide who and whose history will be represented and how. The data I have chosen on the other hand, function as counter-narratives stretching the limits of representation. The mediations performed and created by Black women form stories that are in tension with authoritative Danish
representations. According to Leavy, in the same way that stereotypical portrayals can implement stereotypical ways of thinking, visual art can shape new ways of seeing (Leavy 2015, p. 228). Based on this argument, I believe that mediations of art and performances hold the potential of illuminating new visions and aspects of the past.

The data I analyze in the following section, all concentrate on the stories of enslaved West Africans or descendants of the enslaved. I will begin with the mediation of two cariso performances.

Taking Ownership of the Past: ‘Cariso’ Folktales at Sunset

Cariso, a song genre in the U.S. Virgin Islands, sets an example of how inhabitants of the U.S. Virgin Islands have formed and told their history from generation to generation. The video ‘Cariso’ Folktales at Sunset (2010) mediates two cariso performances, one of the song, ‘Clear De Road’ and another of ‘Queen Mary’, both performed by women before a live audience in the Caribbean Museum Center of the Arts in the U.S. Virgin Islands (Virgin Islands Source 2010). In this representation, not only the visual, but the oral communication is central.

Cariso is performed by women and the songs are accompanied by drumming (Suarez & West-Durán 2003, p. 209). During slavery, cariso was used as a communication form by the enslaved to spread news across plantations. Today the song genre has become a method of commemorating historical events (Francis 2014, pp. 47-48). This oral and performative tradition connects the community of the U.S. Virgin Islands through cultural memories that are passed on face to face, which make them personal according to how a performer may remember it and deliver it.

The songs ‘Clear De Road’ and ‘Queen Mary’ concern the people who were enslaved by Danish colonizers and how they fought for freedom. It is emphasized how the enslaved resisted against the colonial power and influenced the abolition of slavery. The performances shape an understanding of how Virgin Islanders perceive the former Danish colony. Specifically for the Danish viewer, these performances can open up for stories and perspectives about the past that are underrepresented in Denmark and Danish representations based on colonial records. Whereas Danish authoritative representations are limited to written text and written records, cariso as an oral performance communicates directly to the audience.
Compared to written knowledge, song and dance can be performed for anyone who is present and understands what is said. The accessibility of this genre of storytelling may have made the past and the tradition of remembering it an easier and more valuable tradition for the community of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Whereas in Denmark, the shared history with the Virgin Islanders and the heritage as a colonial power cannot be considered an essential part of Danish self-understanding or popular memory. There is a gap between how the former colonizer and the colonized remember and commemorate their shared past. Cariso consists of stories and experiences positioned in tension with authoritative Danish versions of history. For instance, in the song ‘Clear De Road’, General Buddhoe is brought forth as an organizer of the enslaved people’s revolt against slavery (Virgin Islands Source 2010). Today, General Buddhoe has become a symbol of resistance and freedom in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This story can be considered a counter-narrative in opposition to Danish versions of history, where the Danish Governor-General Peter von Scholten plays a heroic role as the man who freed the enslaved people on his own initiative (Halberg and Coley 2016, p. 95).

The cariso songs function as counter-narratives to what in Denmark is represented as the authoritative history and maybe even factual history. According to Jenkins, any idea of true history is problematic as history is an interpretive practice, where historians have
put events of the past into patterns of meaning (Jenkins 1991, p. 33). Jenkins stresses that no historical representation completely correlates with the past, rather these are one of many histories about the past (Jenkins 1991, p. 11). As well as written history renders stories about the past, cariso songs also provide a version of how the past have been experienced. Arguably cariso in its form of communication is obviously personal, as cariso is sung as learnt by heart and tradition. Therefore in the Western eye cariso may express subjective and inaccurate stories compared to written documents. And of course there are no methods of making sure cariso tells any true stories. Nonetheless, the songs illuminate how Virgin Islanders have chosen to remember their past.

The women performing in ‘Cariso’ Folktales at Sunset exude a sense of pride and ownership of the stories they share. The rhythm of the drum and the performers’ dance bring emotions and strength into the storytelling. In the performance of ‘Clear De Road’ the singer, her movements and way of approaching the audience, express a passion about the story she is sharing. She delivers the song to the audience as ’our history’ which builds a form of unity and bond between herself and the audience. Furthermore, the performer empowers the audience by including them and their story as part of her performance. Both ‘Clear De Road’ and ‘Queen Mary’ are performed with personality and pride, sort of as a tribute to the ancestors who fought for the people’s freedom. As stories about freedom movements, these songs underline the heroes that are important
for the Virgin Islanders and for their community. The oral culture of shaping narratives is a way for the descendants of enslaved West Africans to take ownership of their own history, instead of being represented by others from Western cultural traditions.

**Taking Ownership of the Past: Whip It Good**

Another example of how an artist takes ownership of history is pronounced in Ehlers’ video work, *Whip It Good* (2014). Ehlers uses a tool with strong connections to European colonialism, the whip, and flips the historical practice of using this by taking it in her own hands. In the video, Ehlers is wearing white cloth as a skirt and top and her black dreadlocks are wrapped in a white cloth too. Her face and body is painted in white stripes, forming a pattern of lines on her body. In complete silence the video begins in a dark room in which Ehlers stands surrounded by grey statues. She is sitting on the floor with a whip, rubbing what looks like black coal on it. She gets up and stands before a large white canvas and starts whipping it. We hear the whip repeatedly smacking against the canvas. She stops and rubs more coal on the whip and continues to whip the canvas until it is filled with black marks. Her act of whipping is cut in fast shots, creating an intense, almost aggressive experience of the practice of whipping. In the end she looks at the canvas and drops the whip on the floor (Ehlers 2014).

Ehlers’ video can be viewed with hooks’ description of the artistic method of aesthetic intervention, utilized to encourage new ways of seeing. hooks explains how artists can
use their work to create a space where the oppressed and exploited can reject a history that denies the oppressed subjectivity. hooks argues that art can have a transformative power both for the viewer and also for the artist her-/himself (hooks 1995, p. 170). In the following quote hooks elaborates how the Black artist and her/his artistic practice can release the Black subject from being objectified:

“Free of the established dominating order, a freedom gained by dislocation and disassociation, by the dynamics of struggle, black artists are empowered to be self-defining, critically reflective, able to challenge, revise, and rework history.” (hooks 1995, p. 170).

Not only is art, in hooks perception, relevant to liberate the Black subject from historical portrayals, but also to empower the artist. As a Danish artist, Ehlers’ position is not equal to the Black American artists that hooks engages with. Nevertheless, Ehlers’ Whip It Good highlights a topic that is part of a vulnerable and partly neglected Danish memory. By using the whip, she brings fourth the history of the enslaved and she creates her own mode of engaging with the past, which undoubtedly aims to challenge how the past is remembered and as hooks says, rework history. Ehlers draws lines back to the atrocities of slavery and the method of punishing enslaved people by whipping their body. This punishment was also used by Danish colonizers in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Initially Ehlers’ video can be interpreted as not alone a comment on Danish slavery but also European history of slavery and punishment.

Ehlers provides a flipped representation, where the Black subject is in control of the whip. As hooks claims, through displacement and dislocation an artist can challenge and revise history (hooks 1995, p. 170). Ehlers’ work engages with both displacement and dislocation. Whip It Good is filmed in Copenhagen, in the building, Vestindisk Pakhus [West Indian Warehouse]4, which was built to store goods brought back from the colony in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Today the building inhabits the Royal Cast Collection, a collection of classic Europeans art sculptures (Danbolt 2016, p. 4). Among these sculptures, Ehlers stands with her painted body and black whip. Her appearance and her surroundings meet in an image of contrasts. Contrasts between Ehlers and the sculptures. Contrasts between the content of the performance and the history of the building. These contrast can be connected back to Ehlers’ work Black Magic At The

---

4 Translation by Danbolt (Danbolt 2016, p. 4).
White House, where the dancing silhouette also seems to be dislocated in the White House.

Most people today will agree that slavery and practices of whipping are misdeeds. With this perception, Ehlers’ work does not highlight an unexpected aspect of colonialism. Nonetheless, a woman of color using a whip, may be an unexpected practice. hooks, claims that viewing portrayals of the Black subject that resists stereotypical portrayals of Blackness and instead form counterhegemonic images, can be provocative or to some extend shocking. They can, however, also provide a fresh vision of insight (hooks 1995, p. 96). Ehlers’ performance in Whip It Good can be argued a new way of portraying the Black subject and twisting colonial history. The performance exudes power and confidence and the practice of whipping, can be interpreted as an act of whipping back. Whipping back against the past, against oppression. Here the white canvas can have different meanings. Danbolt suggests that Ehlers’ use of the white canvas can be a metaphor for new beginnings and intentionally forgetting, which he describes as a central act within colonial imaginary (Danbolt 2016, p. 5). With this understanding Ehlers’ work is not solely about slavery but also could refer to the Danish nation’s way of dealing with the past and remembering the past. The white canvas can also refer to Whiteness, the White subject and the White colonizer, where Ehlers’ practice could be an act of revenge on behalf of the enslaved West Africans. Either how, Whip It Good, arguably aims to challenge and highlight historical structures of colonialism. According
to hooks, where Whiteness have been figured with power and Blackness with powerlessness, the Black artist can pursue an aesthetic intervention to disrupt such conceptions (hooks 1995, p. 168-169). In hooks’ own analysis of the Black American female artist, Emma Amos, she writes following about the artists practice:

“Her intent is not just to break the silence surrounding issues of race and gender as they affect subject; she intervenes and disrupts to lay the groundwork for a new vision of artistic freedom.” (hooks 1995, p. 169).

Comparing hooks’ own analysis with Ehlers’ *Whip It Good*, can bring new dimensions into viewing the video. Ehlers too breaks a silence with her video, at least in a Danish context. Her work may persuade the viewer to see and think in new ways. Connecting a building, which was historically built for the purpose of colonial trade, with the practice of whipping, may for some be a provocative act and a new vision. This might also hold an element of empowerment for the artist herself. Ehlers, holding the whip, emphasizes that she is in control, both of the whip and how she engages with the past and portrays it. She serves viewers with a performance that exchanges the position of the former colonizers with herself, whipping a canvas.

**Taking Ownership of the Past: The Planter’s Chair**

Similar to how Ehlers uses displacement and twisting the use of a historical object, Belle offers a new view on a chair from the colonial era in her series of polaroids under the title, *The Planter’s Chair* (2011). A planter’s chair was designed for the planter in the colonial plantation system. It is low seated and has long arms that fold in and out to rest both arms and feet. In *The Planter’s Chair*, Belle has placed different people in a planter’s chair. These are all Virgin Islanders descending from enslaved West Africans (*The Planter’s Chair Description n.d.*). They have each taken their position in the chair that once belonged to the planter and colonizer. Some look comfortable, while others look awkward, maybe with difficulty finding a proper position in the chair. The chair can be seen as Belle’s way of drawing attention to a symbol of the colonizers’ power and the cultural heritage of the people sitting in it now. In regards of forming group representation in art, hooks emphasizes two factors as important. First, the recognition of something that resembles what we know. Second, defamiliarization, where art may illustrate something we are familiar with, but presented in a new way. According to hooks, the ability of identifying with art is crucial for viewers, in that identification is a
process involving recognition of the familiar and then the defamiliar (hooks 1995, p. 4). Belle uses the chair as an element of recognition and familiarity, while the presentations of Black individuals sitting in the chair brings an aspect of unforeseeability which may foster new ways of understanding the displacement of the Black subject in such a chair. The chair has a specific history that may provoke uncomfortable connotations. On the other hand placing these individuals in the chair can also be Belle’s way of giving the people a sense of power and control in the place of the former colonizer. They are placed in the chair as if to take ownership of the chair and the representation of their community.

**Imagining Colonialism through Art and Performance**

All the analyzed mediations in each their way portray stories that shape an imagination of the colonial past or ways of thinking of it. The interpretation of each work highly depends on who the viewer is and with what perceptions of the world the work is viewed upon. For Danish audiences, the mediations may open up new perspectives on Denmark’s history or create an understanding of how this history is viewed upon by
some people. As Leavy argues, the artistic expression can be a powerful way to grab people’s attention and interest. Additionally she perceives art as potentially emotional, politically moving and aesthetically powerful (Leavy, 2015, p. 23). Based on Leavy’s belief, the data I have chosen can have the ability to attract viewers’ attention and form an understanding of Denmark’s shared history with the U.S. Virgin Islands — a joint history that Denmark has no tradition of remembering.

The mediations empower the work of the artists and performers who deal with the past through their own unique visions and methods. Still the involvement of the viewers is essential for the mediations and the artwork. The artistic expression and engagement of the analyzed mediations can be compared to what Bourriaud describes as relational art — art engaging with human interaction and social contexts as opposed to art centered around the private or personal space of an artist. Relational art can be described as a state of encounter (Bourriaud 2002, pp. 14, 18). Thinking about the mediations as relational art and performances, the artist’s and performer’s practices are also invitations into their particular views on reality. Furthermore, this type of art/performance shapes a relation between the viewer and the artist/performer and involves the viewer in the process of making meaning of each work. Looking at the mediations through hooks’ theoretical lens, the issue of race is inevitable. I have not sought to look at the mediations with a lens of race though. Nevertheless, the mediations do decentralize the White subject and bring focus to the Black subject and its experiences. But as hooks explains, solely engaging with racial differences and focusing on these can reproduce the hegemony of colonialism and imperialism. Instead one should engage with art that transforms the way we see race, as a tool that might help viewers to see race and racialized issues (hooks 1995, pp. 66-67). With this understanding I claim that mediations such as *Whip It Good*, ‘Cariso’ Folktales at Sunset and *The Planter’s Chair* can cultivate an understanding and recognition of issues tied to representation of race and racialized groups, instead of overlooking the problems and discussions concerning race and ethnicity. Engaging with such issues can also be a way of encouraging critical thoughts about colonial structures and hegemonies and expand ideas of society, reality, past and present.

In each their way, the mediations provide a perspective and contribution to how the past can be remembered. For instance, the cariso performances and Belle’s work provide an idea of the stories that are important for the Virgin Islanders and how there is a
difference between stories about the colonial past in Denmark and in the U.S. Virgin Islands. To reshape the Danish nation’s popular memory, I believe that not only official or authoritative representations matter, but also individual experiences and representations from other positions in society. I base this on the Popular Memory Groups’ explanation that stories and productions by social individuals are important when creating narratives about the past. These individuals are claimed to speak from certain positions that are representative and significant for any larger account (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 234). Furthermore, visual mediations may cultivate debates and processes of learning about the past. This way digital mediations and artwork are not only products but also processes of interaction and meaning-making that can shape relations between viewers, mediations and memory.

An important aspect of interpreting the presented mediations concern the context of watching them, where they are viewed and on which device. Digitized mediations that are accessible on the Internet, will most likely be viewed on a computer screen or mobile device. When most of the art and performances have originally been created, performed and exhibited before live audiences, the digitization of these will impact how they are experienced and received by online viewers. In a time where images and videos are a ubiquitous parts of the Internet, the way mediations are received and watched will be a subjective and personal matter. Compared to viewing art and performance live and first hand, online mediations possibly make less impact as mediations that can be consumed in any given situation. This can limit the purpose or uniqueness of a performance or artwork as it will become a digitized version of its original function. Nevertheless, the mediations exemplify methods of engaging with the past and broadening perceptions of a complex past. Furthermore, online mediations in their format and content emphasize Jenkins statement that there exists one past and many histories portraying it (Jenkins 1991, p. 11).

I have now provided an understanding of how I see and interpret the different mediations of art and performances. In the next section I will examine to what extend the mediations can be perceived as part of an online archive of knowledge and memory. Furthermore, how the interpretation of the mediations can influence the popular memory of Danish colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands.
Visual Mediations, Contemporary Media and Memory
In this part I will position my interpretations and analyses from the previous section within a framework of mediatization and digital memory to examine how digital mediations can contribute to new ways of forming popular memory.

Memory and Media
I have chosen to engage with mediations that can be retrieved from the Internet, because the features of the Internet make it possible for artists and institutions to publish art or mediations hereof and allow individuals to access these easily. The Internet is a source of unlimited information. As Hartley describes, the emergence of the Internet has accomplished to question and renew traditional ways of thinking about knowledge and archiving knowledge (Hartley 2012, p. 157). The Internet and technologies of media have come to play a significant role in how we use media to learn about the world and also how we create our memories of it.

To describe the connection between technologies of contemporary media and memory, Hoskins uses the term mediatization (Hoskins 2009, p. 27). Mediatization is an important concept to understand the processes in which daily practices increasingly are intertwined with properties of media. The way contemporary media are used and the amount of information people retrieve from the Internet does affect how media is perceived today. Media have become essential in our ways of communicating and sharing information with each other. Hoskins argues that mediatization contributes to defining shifts in contemporary mediascapes which effect what and how individuals remember (Hoskins 2009, p. 28). One could argue that content, such as images and videos that are encountered on various media, create a certain mental picture of social or cultural aspects. For example, Belle’s work *The Planter’s Chair* engages with the colonial past from the perspective of a Virgin Islander. By placing the Black individual in what once was a chair of power and control, Belle opposes stereotypical thoughts and images of a planter’s chair and encourages the viewer to look at the chair and the Black individual in a new way.

The mediations I have analyzed, contribute with examples of how a memory of Denmark’s colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands can be formed today. With the notion of memory Hoskins refers to the presentation and dissemination of everything in the past. This applies both to individual and collective memory and intersections between
these (Hoskins 2009, p. 27). The video ‘Cariso’ Folktales at Sunset documents an important tradition of storytelling in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It illuminates how Virgin Islanders have used song and dance to pass on their stories about the colony and how these stories differ from Danish stories. As a digitized video, accessible on the Internet, this mediation gives viewers access to an account of the past that may not have been encountered elsewhere. The process of mediatization, enables representation of the past to form and share memory by the means of contemporary media technologies.

**An Inclusive Global Archive**

All content that is uploaded and stored on the Internet can be perceived as part of a larger archive. Hartley describes the Internet as a global archive of memory and knowledge, where content is perceived as stored memory (Hartley 2012, pp. 157-158). In this sense once a video or image is uploaded online, it becomes a resource of knowledge and memory. The mediations I have analyzed are part of what Hartley calls a global archive and they exist here alongside all other memories of Denmark’s colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The global archive is not a selective archive in terms of what perspectives or stories are being represented and not. From a Danish view, the analyzed mediations, function as counter-narratives introducing stories that decentralize the colonial power and make untold stories accessible to the public. For instance, ‘Cariso’ Folktales at Sunset presents different stories about the past than Danish authoritative representations. As a digital documentation of traditional cariso this video allows for Virgin Islanders to bring attention to their stories about the past and their heritage.

The possibility for everyone to participate in and contribute to the global archive can be regarded as what Garde-Hansen calls a process of ‘democratization of the archives’, wherein information and knowledge is set free by the means of media technologies (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 70). The global archive and online media allow all users to share as well as retrieve information. Thus the global archive can be seen as a tool to strengthen democratic processes of participating and bring underrepresented perspectives forward as well as different genres of communicating the past. According to the Popular Memory Group, to create any form of popular memory, everything and everyone that form and establish an idea about the past must be included, as popular memory is a social production of memory (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 207). Popular memory is about representativeness in terms of social
positions as shared and collective (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 239). Understanding popular memory as a social construction, makes the global archive an ideal tool to shape a collective memory that includes various perspectives and modes of dealing with the joint history of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Denmark.

With the concept ‘probability archive’, Hartley describes that even with the random, dynamic, sometimes chaotic, stream of information on the Internet, there is high probability that you will find what you are looking for (Hartley 2012, p. 166). Users of the Internet have access to multiple forms of knowledge and they are presented to various versions of the same event in terms of different perspectives, modes of representation and multiple positions and interests. Having access to various opinions and stories can be considered another dimension of the ‘democratization of the archives’. The practice of sharing and publishing art and performances online is also a way of strengthening the participatory role of users and their ability to retrieve information. For instance, as Hartley mentions, art is normally exhibited and performed in location-based museums. When art is documented and shared online the number of viewers can be multiplied and the work will be distributed on a new level (Hartley 2012, p. 169). Art on the global archive is accessible for all users, regardless of their location or reachability of any particular museum or exhibition. In this way the process of mediatization makes culture accessible for more audiences.

The ‘probability archive’ as a concept, however, emphasizes the mass of information that users encounter on the archive of the Internet and the likelihood of encountering what one is searching for. Creating memory and knowledge based on this type of archive means that memory depends on the information that we stumble upon on, which leaves users to evaluate the reliability of encountered information. The ‘probability archive’ exposes users to conflicting views, which can form a critical awareness and broaden the comprehension of the past through the opinion of others.

**Art and Performance: Memory and Dialogue**

Shaping memory and knowledge about the past through art and performances can be considered an alternative way of learning about the past. Nevertheless, Leavy argues that art can be a valuable source of information about the surrounding social and cultural world (Leavy 2015, p. 228). Art as an expression and its ability to open up for different visions can be seen as a tool to foster manifold ideas about the past. According
to hooks, the creation and public sharing of art is essential to any practice of freedom. She argues that it is necessary to liberate the mind and the imagination of underrepresented voices in order to oppose dominant representations (hooks 1995, p. 4). With this motive the properties of contemporary media are obvious tools for promoting art and performances, and more generally mediations that portray underrepresented views. As Hoskins describes, current relationships between audiences and media afford visibility and accessibility of memory in a whole new way. Digital memory is fluid in its form as deterritorialized and diffused (Hoskins 2009, p. 29). The digital mode of sharing and accessing memory, is appropriate for hooks’ view of the necessity of releasing and sharing art in order to disseminate different perspectives and modes of remembering. Furthermore, the accessibility of different memories of the past can challenge authoritative representations.

With new visions one can shape an imagination of the past and form visual modes of remembering it. Artwork like Chaney leaves the viewer with a mental image of how the Virgin Islanders are reminded of their past. The intense practice of whipping, in Whip It Good, may foster new thoughts and emotions about the impact of the Danish colonization and how this past can be remembered with relevance today. As fictional, audio-/visual accounts the mediations allow viewers to make their own interpretations and understandings of Denmark’s and the U.S. Virgin Islands’ shared past. Thus the mediations differ from the authoritative Danish accounts of history that reproduce and form fixed histories about the past.

Digital mediations can be perceived as not just products or files, but as content that can promote new perspectives, foster new questions and cultivate negotiations of these. Storing art and performances online can create a relation between the art and audiences and encourage online discussions. For instance, Black Magic At The White House and its implicit reference to Marienborg’s connection with slave trade, could raise attention towards Denmark’s history as a slave nation. Besides highlighting a connection between The White House and its history, Ehlers’ video serves as a remark about how the history of slavery has been silenced or even invisible in the Danish public. Black Magic At The White House tells stories about places like Marienborg that are different from the usual associations of importance and grandeur. By shaping a counter-narrative about the building’s history, Ehlers’ art is capable of making viewers question and think about what they see, and why she has made this artwork. While much of the expressions
and metaphors used in the video are left open to interpretation, the work is also open for viewers to make their own meanings of it. Here both Ehlers’ work and potential discussions become part of the ‘probability archive’ of different opinions and discussions. On the occasion of the centennial of Transfer Day, the topic of Denmark’s past as a slave nation has received increased attention and is being discussed more frequently on public Danish media. In these discussions, artwork like Black Magic At The White House can function as an opening for shaping new stories and memories of the past.

Hoskins suggests that digital memory can be perceived as a ‘social network memory’, based on the emergence of practices such as social networking, sharing and participation on contemporary media (Hoskins 2009, p. 41). With Hoskins’ view, digitized stories of art and performances and online discussions of these can be perceived as digital memories that are part of a social mode of sharing and remembering. As accessible sources mediations of art and performances contribute to a digital memory on the Internet that represent a social process of storing and remembering. Digitization and publishing artwork online becomes a method of creating awareness, encouraging viewers to relate to what is seen and promoting dialogue. Thus digitizing and publishing work of art and performance online, adds an extra dimension to the work in terms of shaping a ‘social network memory’ by involving viewers and their perceptions in processes of interpreting artwork and discussing Denmark’s colonial past.

Establishing a popular memory of Denmark’s colonial past and broadening the comprehension of this requires that everyone can participate and contribute both with their understandings and perspectives of the topic. As an archive, the Internet plays a key role in including all voices and perceptions in a process of shaping a socially constructed memory. The ‘probability archive’ as social archive, opens up for possibilities to overcome dominant knowledge or ignoring untold stories. Furthermore, digitized art and performances become openings for dialogue among viewers to exchange views and shape meanings through reflection. According to the Popular Memory Group, popular memory is based on the accounts of social individuals and their productions and representations from different positions in society (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 234). In contemporary societies, in an era of mediatization and unlimited possibilities of contributing to the global archive of the
Internet, one finds ideal conditions for the social production of popular memory. Digitized art about Denmark’s colonial past, may cultivate public or inner dialogues among audiences and found a process of shaping and reshaping memory of Denmark’s and the U.S. Virgin Islands’ shared past.

8. DISCUSSION

Creating memory through contemporary media and ‘social network memory’, makes it necessary to rethink the Popular Memory Groups’ understanding of popular memory. Working with the concept of popular memory today as a concept of representativeness in terms of social positions as shared and collective (Popular Memory Group 2007 [1982], p. 239), the term must be related to contemporary media and media use. The participatory and active role of media audiences, and the increasing influence of media, means that the social production of popular memory is increasingly shaped through media.

The practice of shaping memories and sharing knowledge about Denmark’s colonial past is increasingly drawn into the mediascape and becoming part of a ‘social network memory’ (Hoskins 2009, p. 41). In this study, the ‘social network memory’ is emphasized in the interaction between artists/performers, their work and audiences. Here audiences are both viewers of art and participants in giving art meaning and reflecting on it. As counter-narratives, Ehlers’, and Belle’s work and the cariso performances, create a foundation for dialogue and reconsideration of Denmark’s role as a colonial power. The mediations challenge Danish, authoritative perspectives and literate representations.

Based on current media attention and debate about the topic in Denmark, I would argue that a process of reconsidering the past and former representations of the past has already begun (see Jensen 2017; Pedersen 2016; Schmidt 2016; Rasmussen, 2017). The role as a former colonial power is, however, only just beginning to be processed as part of Danish national identity and cultural heritage. There is still a long way to go in order to fully acknowledge the impact and still present structures of colonialism in Denmark.

Using art and performance in this study as tools to broaden the popular memory of the colonial past does not mean that I aim to establish or request a new fixed or static
memory of the past. Colonialism and decolonization can be considered social and cultural processes that, in the same way as popular memory, are active processes of reconsidering and reworking the past repeatedly. How we may perceive and understand particular artwork concerning the Danish colonization, can change over time, depending on our own views and social position. As Bourriaud explains, there is no end of art or end of history. Everything can be reenacted and related to new social contexts and relations (Bourriaud 2002, p. 18). The same applies to the representation of colonialism and its complexity.

Colonialism is difficult to grasp as a concept or a social phenomenon. Nevertheless, the qualities and uniqueness of artistic expression can capture some of the fragility and complexity of colonialism. Moreover, it can expand the limits of how Danish colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands is perceived and talked about. Art can potentially contribute to a cultural change in the way the past is understood and communicated.

Every representation operates within a certain discourse or ideology, which makes both the process of writing academic history and the process of interpreting art and performances biased matters. Art and performances are in their very form subjective representations, which is not concealed in any way. Therefore the expression of art and performance can be seen as an openly interpretive mode of communication. This openness can, however, also be a confusing experience of unclear messages, as art and performances do not tell a whole story but brings up fragments and emotions connected to it. Art and performances do not necessarily provide a straightforward narrative about the past. By illuminating an imagination of the past, art can foster a certain ambience though. For example, Ehlers’ *Whip It Good* does not portray one specific story about Denmark’s colonial past. Instead, Ehlers uses metaphor, location and her own body to provoke feelings and emotions to imagine the colonial past. The interpretation and understanding of her video, however, depends on how the viewer receives it.

**Limitations and Future Studies**
Compared to other studies that have previously engaged with the Danish colonial past, this study provides an idea of how media and accessible mediations of art can encourage new perceptions, imaginations and memories of the past. The way art shapes a connections with the past does not give the viewer any exact idea of historical events or individuals. Therefore a limitation in this study is that by analyzing art, I cannot provide
any specific knowledge about Denmark’s colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands or the role of the Danes in transatlantic slave trade. Neither can I say much about how the different artworks and performances might influence audiences or their perceptions of the colonial past. Instead this study can create an understanding of certain elements of Denmark’s colonial past, evoke emotions, empathy and illuminate the living and existing connection between past and present. Additionally, this study emphasizes that representing colonialism is not only about historical facts and events. Working with colonialism means to engage with a process that is tied to a history of oppression, sensitivity and emotion.

Another limitation in the study concerns the data collection. I would have liked to include more data to both broaden the gender spectrum of the representations that I have worked with and to involve more perspectives on Denmark’s past. My choice of data and the criteria for the data may have excluded potential mediations and thereby potential perspectives.

Future studies could examine how mediations of art and performances influence audiences and their views on the colonial past. One could look into how the colonial past is perceives and discussed among Danes today. An approach could be to show different mediations of art and performances to a group of audiences and interview them afterwards about their reactions and thoughts.

I would also recommend to examine public debates on Danish media (e.g. television, radio, newspaper) that have emerged on the occasion of marking the centennial. A selection of data could be examined in regards of how these reflect and represent the Danish relation to the colonial past and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This to determine the impact of increased media attention on Denmark’s participation in slave trade and Denmark as a colonial rule. Such a study could highlight how discussions, representations and reflections about the past allow for Danes to shape new social memories of the past and more broader — shaping a popular memory and culture for remembering the past.
9. CONCLUSION

Mediations of art and performances engaging with the Danish colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands can promote new ways of understanding the past by including different perspectives about the past and different relations to the past. Each analyzed mediation has contributed with views that can be considered underrepresented in a Danish context. Furthermore, the qualities of art and performances has benefitted this study in terms of emphasizing and expressing the complexity and vulnerability of colonialism and slavery. Artistic expression allows for bringing colonialism, as an ongoing process and a still functioning structure, forward together with the emotions and issues that are integral to it.

The analyzed mediations oppose stereotypical portrayals of the Black individual and bring up topics about Danish colonial wealth, colonial methods of punishment with the whip and repression of slave trade and the enslaved people. Such topics have until the occurring centennial been repressed within Danish popular memory. Therefore bringing attention to this history, can create a foundation for dialogue and reconsideration of Denmark’s role as a colonial power. Furthermore, these mediations strengthen the voices of the artists, their heritage and their communities.

Understanding popular memory as a social construction, makes the global archive of the Internet an ideal tool to form a shared and collective memory that includes various perspectives and modes of dealing with the joint history of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Denmark. The global archive challenges traditional ways of accessing knowledge and opens up the accessibility of different views on the past. Digitizing art and performances makes underrepresented views about the past available to audiences no longer constrained by location.

The digitization of art and performances can be considered an opening of dialogue among viewers to exchange views and reflect on what is seen and what it means. As part of a social archive, viewers of online art and performance are invited into a process of meaning-making and reflection. The active, participatory role of audiences on contemporary media may cultivate processes of creating a social memory of the colonial past. The possibility for everyone to participate in and contribute to the global archive, can be seen as a way of setting knowledge free by the means of media technologies.
In order to create a Danish culture for remembering the colonial past, there has to be objects as memorials that can encourage a process of commemorating the past and shaping memories about the former colony, the enslaved people and the impact of colonialism. I have suggested that art and performances as alternative modes of representation can function as tools for bringing attention to the Danish colonial past and potentially cultivate a cultural change in the way the past is remembered. Emerging debates about the Danish colonial past have already marked a social recognition of what can be considered a repressed Danish history. To push these debates further, art and performances as digital mediations can potentially place the past in a position of exposure and discussion.
10. REFERENCES


Rasmussen, Anita Brask (2017, March 31) “Der er en grund til at min bog header ‘Ingen undskylldning’” [“There is as reason that my book is named ‘No Apology’”]. Information, Section 2 (Kultur), pp. 6-7.

Ravn, Anna Raaby & Rasmussen, Anita Brask (2017, March 17) Historien bestemmes af det bilk, der retted mod den [The history is determined by the gaze viewing it]. Information, Section 2 (Kultur), pp. 6-7.


Schmidt, Gudrun Marie (2016, December 27) Skulptur skal give de slavegjorte stemme [Sculpture shall give the enslaved a voice]. Politiken, Section 2 (Kultur), p. 3.


