Introduction

*PERNILLE IPSEN AND GUNLÖG FUR**

There is a story of a young Norwegian boy, aged 6 or so, who met with a friend of his mother's who happened to be a historian working on colonial encounters. The boy, who was fascinated with American Indians, peppered the historian with questions about the confrontation between Indians and European colonists. His eyes filled with tears as he heard about loss of lands and culture, reservations, and how white people had moved into areas previously inhabited by Indians. Finally he asked in a quavering voice: "But, there were no Norwegians there, were there?"

He is not alone in wanting that question to be answered in the negative. Histories of colonial dominion awaken in many Scandinavians hope that our ancestors did not participate in that soiled and sordid past, and a desire to believe that Scandinavian nations have always been defending the world's diversely oppressed and colonised peoples. Like the young boy, we long for history to demonstrate that our slate is clean. Or, said differently: Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, collectively known as the Nordic, or Scandinavian, countries share a set of discourses about the history of European expansion and colonialism in which direct engagement with colonialism appears to have been on a small scale and belonging to a distant past. Somehow the distance of the colonial past and the often more "indirect" colonial nature of Scandinavian engagements with the European expansion—given that none of the Scandinavian countries managed to attain actual empires like other European states—have allowed twentieth century Scandinavians to adopt a claim of innocence in confrontations with Europe's colonial past.

However, as shown in the following four articles broaching 400 years of Scandinavian expansion and engagements with a colonial world, the kingdoms and the people of Denmark-Norway[1] and Sweden-Finland were in fact engaged in both colonial expansion, trade, exploration, and missionary activities.[2] Scandinavian colonisation may appear small and insignificant in comparison to that of contemporary European states, but the engagements with European expansion were diverse and geographically widespread. And it was not for lack of trying. As suggested by Már Jónsson in this issue, the result of the European expansion was not a given. Both Danish and Swedish kings had colonial ambitions that matched those of the Netherlands and England; the overseas trading companies established in this period were equivalent to the better known Dutch and English companies founded

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at the same time; and throughout the following centuries Scandinavian kings, merchants, explorers, and missionaries were engaged in Europe's colonial expansion directly as well as indirectly.

Even with a narrow definition of colonial history as the history of remote colonies or territories at a considerable distance from the colonial centre—generally beyond the seas—accounts of Scandinavian colonialism contain a myriad of histories.[3] Both Danish and Swedish kings and merchants established overseas plantation colonies based on racial slavery. While trade formed the basis of Sweden's colonial venture in North America (New Sweden, 1638), the colony St. Barthélemy (1784-1848) served partly as a nexus for the distribution of slaves. Denmark-Norway established a plantation colony in the Caribbean on the islands St. Thomas (1672), St. John (1718), and St. Croix (1733). In addition, Denmark-Norway established colonies in present-day India (Tranquebar 1620; Serampore 1755) and held authority over Greenland,[4] Iceland,[5] and the Faroe Islands.[6] Both Sweden and Denmark-Norway established trading posts on the coast of West Africa to participate first in the gold trade and later the slave trade.

However, after half a century of postcolonial critique of European colonial narratives, colonialism is no longer limited to colonies or colonial institutions. As both ideology and economic system, colonialism was not contained in colonies, but reached local encounters in trading posts, explorations, and missions; and as it made its way around the world it followed Danish and Swedish ships and people as well as Dutch, English, Spanish, Brandenburgers, Portuguese, Italians, French, and other Europeans. As a system of unequal power relations, Scandinavian colonialism is similar to other European colonialisms, and many of its repercussions have been the same on social, economic, political and cultural levels. When the definition of colonialism is broadened to include more than colonies and colonial institutions, Scandinavian engagement in the European expansion is therefore a larger and more complicated history. Indeed, when tracing colonialism beyond colonies to specific historical localities that may or may not have been called colonies, but that, nevertheless, were structured by European colonialism, it becomes clear that Scandinavian colonisation, trade, exploration and mission were all part of a larger system of European expansion.

As suggested by the selection of articles in the present issue, the story about Scandinavian colonialism includes a variety of histories, including some—for instance, the history of trade, missions, and development aid—that have not traditionally been considered as related to colonial history. Scandinavian long distance trading continued and expanded long after the Viking age and, as Klas Rönnbäck has recently argued, Swedish merchants took advantage of the expanding intra-European market for colonial commodities, which may have lessened their interest in acquiring formal overseas colonies with all their concomitant costs.[7] Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians traded in "colonial" products like sugar, coffee, and spices, and participated in the Atlantic slave trade. Swedish trading companies made short-lived attempts at establishments on the African gold coast (Cabo Corso), where Denmark-Norway also settled in 1658 and through the eighteenth century became —for its size—an important agent in the transatlantic slave trade, exporting Africans as slaves to the Danish plantations in the West Indies.[8]

Scandinavian adventurers and scientists circumsailed the globe in search of

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knowledge, honour, and riches, and thus became part of a larger colonial system. Students of Linnaeus covered the globe in their travels and contributed to the vast project of naming and categorising the world's diverse flora, fauna, and human life into one unified natural system. Carsten Niebuhr and his team of researchers travelled through Arabia on an official grant from the Danish king on one of many such state-sponsored expeditions.[9] Scandinavians were employed by other European states, as when several hundred Scandinavians participated in the exploration and management of territories along the river Congo, initiated and sponsored by the Belgian King Leopold.[10]

From the beginning many Scandinavian colonial ventures were European rather than inherently national. Founded in 1616, the Danish East India Company was modelled after the Dutch VOC and to a considerable extent headed by "experts" from the Netherlands. When the Danish East India trade flourished in the late eighteenth century, it was mainly because the major European powers were at war. This enabled Denmark-Norway to utilise the advantages of neutrality. Another important explanation of the success in this period was that illicit fortunes of civil servants in British India often and conveniently were remitted on ships sailing under the Danish flag. Thus, the features of the Danish presence in India were always contingent upon developments among the major colonial powers.[11] Similarly, Dutch financial interests backed colonial efforts in the Swedish African Company, as well as in the South Company, or New Sweden Company, that eventually established a formal colony on the Delaware River in North America. Dutch bankers also funded the planters in the Danish West Indies through much of the eighteenth century, just as the Europeans living in the Danish West Indies were most often not Danish but rather British or Dutch.[12]

Another very important way that Scandinavians came into contact with other populations far from Europe was through missionary activities, which should be included in a colonial history that traces colonialism rather than colonies. As Sunniva Engh mentions in her article in this issue, Norway has sent more missionaries out, proportionally, than any other nation, and other Scandinavian missionary efforts have also been important.[13] Recently, Scandinavian scholars have responded to a renewed focus on religion in historical studies and done interesting work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scandinavian missionaries in India and Africa.[14] In this issue Karina Skeie shows how the Norwegian mission in Madagascar was not isolated from the politics of colonialism, but, on the contrary, operated in a careful balancing act between the French colonial rule and the Malagasy population. The Norwegian mission benefited from working under French colonial rule, where it gained favours in the eyes of the Malagasy to whom it made a difference that the missionaries were not French.

A wider definition of colonialism also challenges Scandinavians to come to terms with what is sometimes labelled inner colonisation. In fact, the story of the colonisation of northernmost Scandinavia, the aboriginal homelands of Saami people, has exactly the characteristics of colonialism, as one ethnic group sought and gained dominance over another. In the early modern era the kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark-Norway vied for dominance, agreeing finally to draw a line dividing the realms in 1751. This agreement contained a separate clause granting Saamis certain rights that were to be eternal. Eternity proved to be of rather short duration,

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however, and during the following century Saami land rights whittled away. By 1905, agreements between Norway and Sweden took no account of Saami needs to move across borders, and Saamis increasingly became viewed as wards of the different governments.[15]

Several recent publications testify to the significance of postcolonial critiques on present-day Scandinavian discourse.[16] But in general, historical writing has paid little attention to modern postcolonial dilemmas or theory.[17] In fact, we suggest that popular historical discourses in Scandinavia have moved directly from no colonialism to post-colonialism without stopping at a thorough investigation of Scandinavian participation in and gains from colonial expansion and exchanges from the early modern period until the present. Furthermore, we propose that such distancing from a history of what Ulla Vuorela has recently discussed as "colonial complicity" has consequences for how the Scandinavian region positions itself in world relations and for the challenges of multiculturalism and cultural encounters within contemporary society.[18] It has, as Sunniva Engh suggests, allowed the Scandinavian nations to style themselves as a modern conscience of the world, and it informs their self-perception as rational, egalitarian, and peaceful. Thus present-day involvement in international affairs and, for example, development aid given to "third world" countries, has been disconnected from the history of Scandinavian involvement in European colonialism.

However, as Sunniva Engh argues in this present issue, the modern history of Scandinavian development aid to the "third world" can be linked to earlier Christian missions in these areas. Engh suggests that Sweden's and Norway's early and relatively generous development aid should be understood not only as an effort to create stability in the post-war era of the twentieth century, but also as a direct result of the countries' self-perceived roles as particularly qualified aid donors due to their lack of imperial pasts. Unlike the large European colonial empires, Scandinavians could claim innocence in encounters with the countries receiving development aid. But, as Engh explains, Scandinavians in fact drew on knowledge and practice gained from participating in the European expansion as missionaries. In fact Scandinavian missionary work "may be viewed as a forerunner to development aid, both in terms of geographical areas and in terms of the work carried out".

This lack of a direct link to a colonial past may also explain the prominence of Scandinavian representatives in the international political arena. Norwegian Tryggve Lie and Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld served as the first two Secretary Generals of the United Nations, and were followed by a line of Nordic mediators in high-profile international conflicts, such as in the Middle East and Sri Lanka. In part this success stemmed from the fact that the Scandinavian countries had not been large (or recent) players on the colonial market, thus they were able to position themselves as untainted by colonial exploitation. This helped feed a self-perception of the Scandinavian states as small yet large in their defence of human rights and support for minorities. For Sweden and Denmark, at least, this international role offered the chance to build upon past glories as powers to reckon with in a tumultuous and war-torn seventeenth-century Europe. While neither country can claim superpower status in today's world, they can—alongside Norway and Finland—aspire to a role as moral authorities in the international global system. However, as the articles in this issue indicate, this role has required a kind of amnesia, in

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which earlier colonial engagements are either ignored or considered insignificant.

This amnesia is exemplified in the way many Danes remember the Danish plantation colonies in the West Indies. As Karen Fog Olwig has mentioned, there is a Danish tendency to describe the Danish West Indies as "our lost paradise" and narrate the long history of Danish authority over slavery based plantations as a story of national grandeur, in blatant disregard for many decades of international critique of colonialism. Historical events and developments are accentuated or downplayed to fit a narrative of blamelessness. For example, the early Danish abolition of the slave trade in 1803 is referred to as an example of Danish humanitarianism, while the history of Danish plantation slavery is portrayed as an exotic and benign history.[19] In response to what Louise Sebro has called a "striking lack of historical consciousness", it is significant that in 1998 the Danish foreign minister Niels Helveg Petersen —in the 150 year commemoration of the end of slavery in the Danish West Indies— surpassed a chance to make an official and public apology for the Danish exploitation of African slave labour in the colonial era.[20]

It is interesting that the understanding of Scandinavia as upholding a clean "moral consciousness" in the international community has persisted without substantial alteration through both paradigmatic changes in academic research and assaults from the political left. Beginning in the 1960s, attention to social history, and history-from-below, had a profound impact on historical research, leading away from a focus on national politics to a proliferation of studies relating to women, workers, or other subordinated groups. However, this did not alter the fundamentally national historiographical framework of most Scandinavian historians. Nor did the anti-imperialist stance of the radical left in the 1960s and 1970s target Scandinavian colonialism more than marginally. In addition, we propose that not only have postcolonial critiques had little effect on Scandinavian perceptions of history, but there is a general lack of communication between historians and other scholars working on postcolonial issues. When scholars take on a postcolonial perspective it is therefore not on the basis of generations of historical research about Scandinavian engagement with European expansion; they have to start from scratch. Conversely, when historians deal with expansion they are reluctant to engage with postcolonial research. Thus we are left with postcolonial perspectives that are unspecific to the Scandinavian context, and historical studies that perpetuate an idea of non-involvement in colonial expansion.

One issue that is often lost among such different research agendas concerns indigenous peoples. The Scandinavian states have been among the most active in promoting the recognition of indigenous peoples on the international arena. Yet policies formed in relation to indigenous peoples found in Scandinavia—the Saamis and Inuits—show some discrepancies. In this issue, Søren Rud's article offers an illuminating complement to the relationship between the states and the Saamis by focusing on the Danish process of "civilising" the Greenland/Inuit elite. By a close analysis of the intentions and practical organisation of a boarding house for men from Greenland located in Copenhagen, and with reference to the biographies of two men of "mixed blood" (one who did and one who did not have the "right" combination of cultural traits), he concludes that this was a process that can be grasped through the perspective of Foucauldian governmentality. The Inuit had to become self-governing individuals and internalise the expectations of the domi-

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nant society. Specific conditions allowed for a "comparatively effective administrative machinery":[21] a convergence between an idealised image of Inuit culture and the colonial project's dependence on seal hunting made it useful to promote seal hunting, and a well established administrative network—the hallmark of Scandinavian state formation—made the measures effective.

In all the Scandinavian countries (with the earliest and strongest examples being found in Denmark and Norway) populist parties have garnered support for xenophobic policies and for supposedly traditional ethnic values. Immigration has become hotly debated, and segregation in housing and job markets is increasingly seen as a problem not primarily for the newcomers but for those who view it as a threat to previously homogenous societies. This has led to demands for language tests as requirements for citizenship, and for canonisation of school curricula to emphasise Scandinavian history, culture, and values. In Danish debates about immigration, the recent past of a social democratic welfare state is evoked as the "traditional" or "typical" Danish way, and Denmark is depicted as a small country, characterised by social equality, in which Danes live in peace with and almost in isolation from the larger world outside.

The surprise expressed by many Danes, when the outside world reacted so strongly to the newspaper Jyllandsposten's publication of a number of caricatures of the profet in 2005, suggest that the illusion of isolation was alive and well, at least before the "cartoon-crisis". But Denmark in fact has a long history of engagement with the world outside Europe on unequal terms, in the plantation colonies in the West Indies, in Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and India, and in the African slave trade. This longer and more complicated history should not be left out of the discussion when Danes settle their country's account with the past in pursuit of an argument against foreign immigration. Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries are not, and cannot be, isolated from the unequal power relations created by centuries of colonialism and exploitative trading conditions.

To return to where we started: the Norwegian boy's anxious question and his desire to distance himself and his peoples from colonial atrocities is a natural psychological response, but the larger discourses that depict the Scandinavian nations as the conscience of the world have more complicated origins. These discourses needed, for one, a very narrow definition of colonialism as an ideology confined in colonies, which could make Scandinavian colonialism appear negligible in size and as something that occurred in the distant past with scant impact on contemporary societies. Moreover, and second, such discourses emerged because Scandinavian colonial history traditionally relied on conceptual frameworks of colonialism developed by historians of the large colonial empires and which tied colonial ideology to colonial states and their archives. From this perspective, which is often implicitly comparative, the Scandinavian case may seem insignificant.

However, as the following selection of articles show, a Scandinavian colonial history is not only about colonies, but also the development and movement of ideas, networks, groups, and individuals. A definition of colonialism as belonging to colonies or empires might work, to some extent, when writing the histories of the English, Dutch, French, Spanish, or Portuguese colonial empires. In the case of the Scandinavian countries, we need a history that traces colonialism beyond colonies to local encounters; a history where there were plenty of Norwegians, Danes, and

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Swedes, but where they were not necessarily following command from "their" states.

With this issue we hope to contribute to a sustained and growing effort to write the history about Scandinavian engagement in the European expansion. The histories of Scandinavian colonialism related in the four articles may not seem that different from those of other colonialisms in the same period, but focusing on Scandinavian colonialism modifies the perspective by insisting that we turn attention from a history of colonies to a history about colonialism. We hope to expand our understanding of the nature and legacy of colonialism by showing that colonialism circulated far beyond the major European empires. The European expansion was a transnational enterprise involving large parts of Europe, and not only certain states. More often than not Scandinavian colonial encounters took place on what would be called—in terms of imperial history—the "margins" or "fringes" of empire. Therefore, following Scandinavian ships and peoples around the world of European expansion often entails tracing European colonialism to local encounters beyond the imperial radar.

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Notes

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1 The kingdoms of Norway and Denmark entered into a union in 1380. From 1536 to 1814 Norway was considered a Danish province.
2 The four articles in this issue were originally presented at conferences hosted by the research network *Global Cultural History*. See editor's note.
3 This definition of colonies is frequently described as the "salt water principle" since it generally assumes that colonies, and colonial activity, took place across the Atlantic or Pacific oceans. For example, see the definition of colonialism (*kolonialism*) in the most recent Swedish encyclopedia (*National Encyklopedin)*. This definition reads: "a system that means that certain more highly developed states control and exploit other countries (on other continents)". Much earlier Scandinavian scholarship has been influenced by this understanding of colonial history and colonialism. Cf. Fur, *Colonialism*, 1-8.
4 Greenland was a Danish colony until 1953 when it became a Danish *amt* (county) and administratively annexed to Denmark until 1979 when Greenland obtained home rule. On 21 June 2009, Greenland got a further extension of its homerule, but Greenland is still not entirely in control of its foreign policy. Both The Faroe Islands and Greenland elect their own representatives to the Danish parlament. For a recent bibliography of literature about Greenland's history see Rud's article in this issue, or Rud, "Erobringen"; Thisted, ed., *Grønlandsforskning*; or Rønsager, *Imellem læger og landsmænd*.
5 Iceland gained home rule in 1904, became an independent kingdom (under the Danish king) in 1918, and finally declared itself a republic in 1944. For a recent bibliography of literature about Iceland's history see: Ax, *De uregerlige*; Bjarnason, "The status"; Hreinsson, *Nätverk*; Jóhannsson, "Jøklens Storm"; or Oslund, "Narrating the North".
6 The Faroe Islands remained a Danish *amt* (county) until 1948, when the population achieved home rule.
7 Rönnbäck, "Free-riding".
8 About the Danish slave trade see: Green-Pedersen: "Danmarks ophævelse"; Green-Pedersen, "The Scope and Structure"; Hernæs, *Slaves, Danes*; Ipsen, *Koko's Daughters*; Justesen, "Danish Settlements"; Justesen: *Danish Sources*; Justesen: "Henrick Richter"; Justesen, "Vestafrika". In Sweden, both the state and private enterprises continued to seek colonies in, among other locations, West Africa, Madagascar, Senegal, Tobago, and Guyana.
9 See Harbsmeier, *Carsten Niebuhrs*; or Harbsmeier, "Orientreisen im 18. Jahrhundert".
10 See Thygesen, *Congo - formoder jeg;* or Thygesen, *Kongospår*; or more literature about Scandinavians in Congo on: http://congo.natmus.dk/artikler.htm.
11 Feldbæk, *India Trade*. For a more recent attempt to analyse the features of Danish colonialism in India in a comparative perspective, see Brimnes, *Constructing*.
12 Christensen, "Jord, slaver og plantere", 137-51; Hall, 7-17; or, more generally, for recent bibliographies of the history of the Danish West Indies: Simonsen, "Skin Colour" and Simonsen, *Slave Stories*; or Jensen, *For slavernes*.
13 Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society*; Bugge, *Dansk Mission*; Okkenhaug, *Gender, Race and Religion*. See also Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival*; Lindmark, *En lappdrängs*.
14 See Vallgårda, "Omvendte omvendelser".
15 Conflicts over land and land use have continued. In 1979, for example, Saamis protested the building of a hydroelectric dam in the hitherto unexploited Alta River in northern Norway, and in 1981 a court case regarding reindeer grazing rights in the Swedish province of Jämtland led all the way to the Supreme Court. The verdict went against the Saamis. More recent cases regarding land have been more favourable to the Saamis, but historian Lennart Lundmark concludes

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in policies over the past centuries and are unlikely to be upset by anything other than international pressure. Lundmark, *Stulet land*, 242-7.

16 For recent popular historical interpretations that have been affected by the "post-colonial turn" see Larsen, *Slavernes slægt*. Published in connection with a TV-documentary shown on Danish public TV that traces contemporary Danes' genealogical connections to African and West Indian ancestors in Ghana, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and North America; Thygesen, *Congo*. An important Swedish contribution is Azar, *Den koloniale*.

17 Kenneth Nyberg argues in a recent book about the Linnaean naturalists that while post-colonial critique of the Linnaean epistemological projects, as well as the travels in themselves, have had some impact on popular writings, the general perspective on Linnaeus and his disciples remains conventional and focuses on them as "masculine, energetic, and adventurous explorers who blaze the way for knowledge, enlightenment, and civilization". Nyberg, *Naturalhistoria*, 33-35. See also Olwig, "Narrating".

18 Vuorela, "Colonial Complicity".

19 See a description of how the discourse about Danish grandeur can exist alongside a narrative of a progressive modern state in Olwig, "Narrating".

20 http://menneskeret.palermo.magenta-aps.dk/tema/slaveri/vort-tabte-paradis/ As Sebro mentions, public Danish TV referred to the Danish West Indies as "our lost paradise" as late as 2003. In the West Indies, Sebro explains, the colonial past is much more present in the media, and many West Indians "express a need to reconcile with the rootlessness resulting from their ancestors' deportation from Africa and their subsequent lives as slaves in the West Indies".

21 See Søren Rud's article in this issue.

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