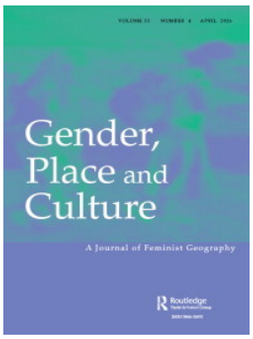

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Sculpting belonging in Europe: Denmark's 'I AM QUEEN MARY,' Black presence and the Danish past

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ABSTRACT

The monument I AM QUEEN MARY, honoring Mary Leticia Thomas—a leader of the 1878 *Fireburn* uprising in the Danish West Indies—made international headlines for illuminating Denmark's colonial history in the Caribbean and the resistance against it. Despite its significance, the monument stood in Copenhagen for less than three years. Taking I AM QUEEN MARY as a point of departure and drawing on interviews with five Afro-Danish women practitioners (2021–2023), this paper explores how Afro-European formations simultaneously inscribe the African diaspora into Europe and Europe into the African diaspora, with a focus on the intersections of race, gender, and memory. The paper concludes by reflecting on the monument's now empty acropodium and what stakes I AM QUEEN MARY's absence represents.

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Introduction

On 27 December 2020, Danish-Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers and US Virgin Islands (USVI) artist La Vaughn Belle confronted the fact that that their monument, I AM QUEEN MARY (IAQM) would be removed from the entrance of Copenhagen's Vestindisk Pakhus (the West Indies Warehouse), where it had stood since 31 March 2018. Accepted and funded as a temporary project, the monument was made out of a black-coated Styrofoam-like material hardly suitable to withstand the harbor's conditions, leaving the artists to continuously care for it if they wanted IAQM to remain. But when the Danish climate decapitated the figure of one of the 'Queens' leading the St. Croix 1878 *Fireburn* uprising so close to the prison where she was punished for that leadership role, the artists had to remove Mary altogether. And so, another pedestal relating to Europe's colonial past was rendered empty at this moment of Europe's postcolonial identity crisis, where 'it is no longer clear what symbols can be held on a pedestal to reflect an increasingly diverse public with many having roots in former colonies and holding collective memories that directly challenge those of the hegemonic, colonial metropole.' (Eldar, 2023, 485)

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Yet (Queen) Mary Leticia Thomas was not an enslaver toppled down by those protesting Europe's whitewashed narratives of colonial benevolence. Rather, she was a woman who stood up against the brutal exploitation these narratives are hiding. Her statue shed light on Denmark's possibly biggest labor rebellion, protesting the continued exploitation of Afro-Caribbean workers in the then Danish West Indies (DWI) 30 years after slavery was abolished on the DWI's islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. Jan. Since Denmark sold what is today the 'unincorporated territory' of the USVI on 31 March 1917, the nearly 250 years of Danish colonial rule and enslavement in the Caribbean were almost forgotten in Denmark. Erected 101 years after what is remembered in the USVI as 'Transfer Day,' IAQM offered Denmark a reminder that Danish exploitation of Afro-Caribbeans not only enriched Denmark but was also forcefully resisted.

Since 2017 marked the centennial commemoration of Transfer Day, IAQM was not alone in reminding Danes of this troubled history with numerous exhibitions, newspaper articles, and cultural productions dealing with the topic.[1] Nonetheless, IAQM's size (seven-meter-tall), novelty (the first monument of a black woman), location, and position made national and international headlines, making it a focal point in debates about the significance and meaning of this history to contemporary Denmark. Other than being the former colonial warehouse, Vestindisk Pakhus prominently stands on the harbor front and only 400 meters away from the Amalienborg royal palace. In addition, it functions as the National Gallery of Denmark's (SMK)[2] royal cast collection of over 2000 plaster casts of sculptures from Greek antiquity to the late Renaissance. Whereas a colossal replica of Michelangelo's David used to guard the entrance to the collection alone, IAQM adorned the other side of the entrance, her size surpassing the king's while seating.

Calm and commending, with a sugar bill in one hand and a torch in the other, Queen Mary occupied the all too familiar position for many Black women in Denmark, namely 'being the only Black woman in a white, male-dominated space' (Diallo, 2019, 220). Her gaze fixed on the water. Her back turned to the white figures of Western art peering through the windows. The peacock chair and her posture a direct reference to the Black Panther Party's Huey P. Newton. Her name evokes the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike slogan 'I AM A MAN', and even the 'I am Malcolm X' chant from the 1992 Spike Lee film *Malcolm X* (iamqueenmary.com n.d.). As such IAQM linked well-known Black liberation struggles and figures to what in Denmark almost became forgotten history and heroines.

Forgotten, or repressed histories, are central to what Stuart Hall, (1991, 18) referred to as Europe's 'internalist story' with 'capitalism growing from the womb of feudalism and Europe's self-generating capacity to produce, like a silk-worm, the circumstances of her own evolution from within her own body.' By erasing colonial history, the story constructs Europe and Europeans as detached from- and superior to- the rest of the world. This construction, simultaneously denies Europeans racialized as non-white claims to Europe while expunging the centrality of racism to European formations (Goldberg, 2006). In the process, it fosters white nativism and nationalism, which fortifies Europe's borders with 'the outside world' and undermines the European project, with its alleged cosmopolitan values, from within (Bhambra, 2017; De Genova, 2016; El-Tayeb, 2011; Gilroy, 2009).

For those reasons, scholars have argued for the urgent need to challenge the internalist narrative by queering European ethnicity (El-Tayeb, 2011), plurversalizing Europe (Suárez-Krabbe, 2014), creolizing it (Rodríguez and Tate 2015), fostering multicultural conviviality within it (Gilroy, 2009), or re:membering it (Eldar, 2023). What all these approaches have in common is their emphasis on the need to revisit and revise articulations of European history and the role minorities' counter-memories can play in such revisions. The latter approach focusing on how 'materialization of Black narratives in the European memoryscape' like that of IAQM has potential to:

> (1) tackle white ignorance and exclusionary nativism by uncovering Europe's contingency upon other(ed) geographies, (2) contribute to creating/fostering a Black sense of place in European cities, and (3) addressing Europe's identity crisis and lay new conceptual foundations for a hybrid and inclusive 'Europe' (Eldar, 2023, 485)

Through IAQM, I examine how Afro-European formations both inscribe the African diaspora into Europe and, conversely, embed Europe within the African diaspora, highlighting the crucial role of gender within these entangled dynamics. I argue that efforts to queer diasporic identities are inseparable from projects of reimagining European identity and that such reconfigurations depend on a critical re-reading of the European space, making the commemorative landscape an apt arena for intervention. After locating Denmark as a suitable point of departure for these conversations, I provide some context to situate I AM QUEEN MARY as a case study before diving into the theoretical arguments. To ground these theoretical arguments, I engage with the accounts of five Afro-Danish women practitioners whom I interviewed between 2021 and 2023. I conclude by returning to I AM QUEEN MARY's empty plinth and reviewing what is at stake.

The five interlocutors interviewed were deliberately contacted for their varied engagements with IAQM as part of their respective praxis. Additionally, as Danes who are racialized as 'other,' they are well positioned to reflect on the unmarked racial hegemony of whiteness (Skadegård and Horst 2021, 98). This privileged *epistemic* positioning regarding whiteness, however, is also informed by a consciousness of social positioning or belonging to a community/collective (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1989). Therefore, since 'Black racial consciousness' and/or affiliation is not obvious in Denmark (Hunter, 2023), the fact that the five interlocutors embrace an 'Afro' or 'Black' subject position is meaningful. In addition, as the varied circumstances under which black Danes come to form a 'Black consciousness' feed into different racial sensibilities (Hunter, 2023), the fact that each of the five has been raised in a different racial environment sheds light on the diverse nature of the Afro-Danish community and its lived realities.

Denmark and Afro-Europe

Denmark represents a useful case study for wider issues of European identity for several inexhaustive reasons. First, if Europe as a whole has been historically constructed as synonymous with *whiteness* (Goldberg, 2006), Scandinavia has been cemented as a place of *idealized* whiteness and therefore the ultimate representative of 'Europeanness that' other parts of Europe can aspire to (Andreassen, 2014). Secondly, in Denmark the coupling of the pan-European post-Second World War rejection of

'race' (Goldberg, 2006) together with discourses of 'Nordic exceptionalism' produce powerful ideologies of colorblindness, making it particularly difficult to talk about race. Third, within Scandinavia, Denmark has actively rejected even the pretense of multiculturalism, making it a more 'extreme case' than for example, neighboring Sweden (Holtug, 2012). Fourth, the way Denmark severed ties with its former tropical colonies hinders mechanisms of accountability and post-colonial migration to the metropole, making it harder to challenge the 'internalist story' (Jensen, 2018).

For these reasons and more, efforts to cultivate an 'Afro-Danish' identity are particularly illuminating in the quest to re:member Europe. Focusing on the role IAQM plays in this identity formation is further telling due to the fact that it is dedicated to a Black woman and is made by Black women. 'Locating Black feminist and Afro-feminist politics in Europe is provocative' Emejulu Akwugo and Francesca Sobande (2019, 6) write

> because it is radical counter-storytelling about whose knowledge counts, whose politics matter and who gets to be part of the 'European story'. European Black feminist and Afro-feminist politics are nothing new. Indeed, they refract the story of the Enlightenment, colonialism and modernity. The 'Europe' of secular liberalism is not possible without the subjugation of colonised people. European Black feminist and Afro-feminist politics has been at the heart of anti-slavery, anti-colonial and socialist politics on the continent.

IAQM can therefore be seen as an attempt to write Black women into the 'European story.' As such, her makers join a long tradition of 'heritage from below' championed by Black women across the diaspora (Cook and Potter 2018).

Writing Black women into European history challenges both the hegemonic 'European story' and 'diasporic hegemonies' (Campt and Thomas 2008). As Tina Campt and Deborah Thomas (2008) explain, the tendency in diasporic studies to focus on mobility between 'home' and 'host' works to both reify the home/host binary while centering the experiences of men as the primary subjects that move between these spaces while women are confined to the home and its routine temporalities. This prioritization of male bodies is reflected in another 'diasporic hegemony,' that of what Michelle Wright (2015) calls Middle Passage Blackness and its associated epistemologies. In addition to joining others in pointing out how US dominance in formulations of Blackness works to exclude those located outside of the Americas from Blackness, Wright (2015) argues that it also excludes non-cis men in the Americas, alongside anyone else who doesn't see themselves reflected in this canonical memory trope. In addition, Middle Passage Blackness, Wright (2015) argues, fosters ideas of linear spacetime; unbroken movement from past to future, from shared origins in Africa to the Americas.

Taking into account the centrality of memory in shaping a community's history, present and future, Fatima El-Tayeb (2011, 44) argues for a 'construction of a queer diasporic memory within the black European movement.' At its foundation, 'queer diasporic memory' defies normative memory discourses and sensibilities. It is a 'discourse that is not built on linear notions of roots and authentic origins, but on the grounding of a community embracing its 'inauthentic,' fractured nature rather than resolving it through a projected, unambiguous past' (El-Tayeb, 2011, 44). She argues that this memory discourse is especially useful for Black Europeans as they 'seem to be doubly disadvantaged in this regard:'

> they often are perceived as marginal with regard to the key memory trope of the black diaspora in the West, that is, the Middle Passage, while at the same time having in common with other Europeans of color the expulsion from the continent's remembered past. Accordingly, counter-memory discourses and the (re)discovery of narratives of past agency are central concerns for European minority activists. The quest, on the other hand, to erase or marginalize the presence of national Others within lies at the heart not only of national histories, but also of the European (non) memory of colonialism. The experience of being written out of or misrepresented in majority histories therefore is often more relevant to minority communities in Europe than the supposed desire to re-create an ideal home. (El-Tayeb, 2011, 78)

Whereas recognition of the eclectic nature of the European African diaspora may make it easier to speak of 'queering diasporic' memory in Europe, Wright's (2015) shows that the lack of such recognition in the US is what makes it urgent.

To understand how I AM QUEEN MARY may speak to an Afro-Danish 'grounding of a community embracing its "inauthentic," fractured nature' (El-Tayeb, 2011, 44) the next section provides some background about Afro-Denmark before turning to IAQM and the meaning the interlocutors interviewed assign to her.

Becoming Black in a 'colorblind' society

As mentioned in the introduction, the disavowal of 'race' is a European-wide phenomenon. What is special about Scandinavia within Europe, is the simultaneous construction of the region as manifesting 'colorblind' egalitarianism *while* being the pinnacle of whiteness. This paradoxical construction reflected in 'welfare state nationalism,' Nordic postcolonial feminists argue, can be explained from the very origins of the Nordic welfare state (Keskinen et al. 2009). Writing on the Norwegian context, Marianne Gullestad (2002, 46) notes how 'the most common translation of "equality"', *Likhet* (in Danish *Lighed*) means '"likeness", "similarity", "identity", or "sameness"'. It therefore implies 'that social actors must consider themselves as more or less the same in order to feel of equal value.' (Gullestad, 2002, 46). In this Scandinavian context, 'sameness' is predicated on notions of homogeneity that are rooted in whiteness and Lutheranism. This ideology, coupled with 'multicultural' doctrines that engrained ideas of cultures as distinct and fixed, writes Carl-Ulrich Schierup (1994, 277) ushered an interpretation of '"the right to be different"' as '"being different" and "being different" as being "non integrated"' and thus not as *the* welfare-state citizen worthy of equal treatment.

The construction of the 'benchmark' welfare-state citizen, however, was also gendered. In contrast to the white Lutheran man, white women were constructed as semi-human, where female sexuality rendered them part animalistic and in need of control (as reflected in the sterilizations of poor white Danish women or those designated as insane) (Blaagaard and Andreassen 2012). Ideas of racial purity and the protection of the worthy 'norm' positioned black and Greenlandic women as especially in need of control due to their construction as mere sexual beings, and therefore a threat to racial hygiene (Blaagaard, 2009; Dyrendom Graugaard, Pihl Sørensen, and Stage 2025). As Robin Mitchell (2020) shows, images and ideas about black women proliferated across Europe to serve various needs, including the elevation of white

women's positions. In the process, 'blond hair, blue eyes, and pale skin have been imbued with particular meanings not only of whiteness, but also as "exemplary" traits of female beauty' (Sawyer, 2008, 90), rendering femininity itself as white property.

The adherence to 'sameness' compounded with the post-Second World War disavowal of racism gave rise to the almost non-sensical use of the term 'ethnicity' (*etnicitet*) as a proxy for race in Denmark. In recent years, within the overwhelming climate of anti-Muslim racism, the term has increasingly been used as a proxy for religion (Hassani, 2020). Here too, however, gender is central in the production of difference. Islam is said to be incompatible with gender-equal Danish society for Muslim men's oppression of Muslim women (Jaffe-Walter, 2025). Other than the innumerous fallacies such proposition encapsulates, it also constructs both white and Muslim women as passive agents who are either unfortunate to be at the mercy of oppressive men or fortunate to be at the mercy of benevolent men who would tolerate their freedom.

The fact that Denmark is hailed as a white and yet colorblind and gender-equal society is predicated in part on the erasure of colonialism and eugenics' centrality to its formation. This 'non-memory' (Blaagaard and Andreassen 2012, 81) allows for the maintenance of colonial modalities, not least in the ongoing subjugation of Greenland but also within Danish society. This lingering reality poses a challenge to Denmark's population of people of African descent amounting to approximately 46,000 individuals, most of which live in Copenhagen (Small, 2018).

The small size of this population feeds what Elizabeth Löwe Hunter (2023) calls 'Black racial isolation,' a key feature within the 'condition of being racialized as Black in an alleged post-racial European context' (Hunter, 2023, 1). The condition of being subjugated to the hegemony of whiteness while being told that 'race' does not exist in Denmark, is further exacerbated by the absence of racial mirroring (Hunter, 2023). Building on Franz Fanon (2008), Hunter (2023) shows how the absence of places where Black subjects can see themselves reflected not through the dominant white gaze- compounded with the lack of language to understand and articulate one's own experience- can lead to a deep sense of *nonbeing*. The lack of mirroring is not only a result of the small number of people with African heritage in Denmark, but also the white gaze baked into the cultural landscape, a landscape of under- and misrepresentation of Black people (Hunter, 2023).

Through 'under-representation' of Black people in Danish history, 'people of African background (and all non-white persons) are portrayed as incompatible with Denmark and Danishness' despite Denmark's reliance on Black peoples labor for its material construction and the Black 'other' for its discursive construction (Hunter, 2023, 97). By placing Danes of color outside the national story, the 'racial geographic' constructs them as outsiders who need to be grateful to the adoptive (mother)land rather than subjects with legitimate claims for equal treatment (Hunter, 2023). For Black Danes who have no genealogical connection to any ancestral geographies other than Denmark, such construction is especially detrimental. This is reflected in the distress caused by the oft-repeated question 'where are you from' and the lack of ability to provide a 'satisfactory' answer (Hunter, 2023).

The failure to acknowledge the violence of colonial history also decontextualizes lingering images of Black people as deviant, hyper-sexual, exotic, ridiculous and

sub-human. The failure to recognize these images as a reflection of colonial violence positions them as harmless, which in turn casts those offended by them as over-sensitive and irrational (Danbolt, 2017; Hunter, 2023; Nielsen-Bobbit, 2020). 'While the search for identity, authenticity and selfhood may characterise young people in general' Marleen De Witte (2019, 610) writes

> what makes it specifically urgent for young people of colour [in Europe] is their routine experience of having their being and belonging questioned, and of being defined by others, often in negative terms, on the basis of their racially phenotyped bodies and a presumed difference of 'culture' inferred from their appearance. In this context of racialised othering, identity becomes an explicit and often politicised quest for self-definition and self-realisation, both on individual and collective levels.

As Hunter (2023) shows, Black racial isolation stands in the way of politicizing or indeed, forming a Black or Afro-Danish[3] identity. While racial segregation exists in Denmark, the small number of Danes with African heritage in the country means that many are embedded in white environments and are thus 'separated *from* not *together with* other Black people' which limits the opportunity to 'develop a "double consciousness"' and instead risks the development of 'a *racial dissociation*, being socialized into identifying with whiteness' (Hunter, 2023, 33). In a reality of anti-Blackness, identification with whiteness can also function as self-preservation (Habel, 2008).

The hurdle that Black racial isolation poses for a formation of a political subjectivity is significant, as it is such a collective, political identity that is central in fighting against the conditions that group the heterogenous Afro-European population as a distinct demographic in Europe. Namely, the 'experience of routinely suffering personal indignities and adverse discrimination' (Hesse, 2009, 3). Nonetheless, against the backdrop of this European reality, the proliferation of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and the wider availability of Black representation online, identification with blackness as a socio-racial position increased in Denmark in recent years (Hunter, 2023).

A partial list of Afro-Danish organizing from the past decade alone includes- BLM Denmark (2016), Afro Empowerment Center (2016), the decolonial feminist collective Marronage (2016), the Cultural Workers' Union for BIPOC in Denmark (2018), Afro Danish Collective (2020), and Afro Dane Youth (2020). In the cultural realm podcasts such as *a Seat at the* Table (2018) by Naima Yasin and Ingrid Baraka and *Thinking Out Loud - Honest Conversations by Us, for Us* (2021) by Atiyo Muse and Aisha Tambajang create spaces for Afro Danish women's (and in the latter case, Afro Danish *Muslim* women') perspectives on contemporary issues in Denmark and beyond while the YouTube channel *Afroden Reports* (2020) showcases the rich Afro Danish life.

This Afro-Danish 'renaissance' was also deeply influenced by and implicated in an unprecedented engagement with Denmark's Black history fueled by the centennial commemoration of 'Transfer Day.' Given the highly eclectic nature of the Afro-Danish population, efforts to forge a common political identity as grounded in a shared past are not obvious. The embrace of the DWI history by some Afro-Danish individuals and groups speaks to the fact that this racial history informs their lives today and reflects how the Afro-Danish population is 'not a community of choice' but one of 'chosen identification' (El-Tayeb, 2011, 68). Recognition of diversity and how far away histories (both spatially and temporally) affect the 'here' and 'now' is clearly reflected in IAQM.

IAQM

It is unclear what Mary Leticia Thomas looked like. The earliest known illustration of her (1888) was drawn by the English Charles Taylor and tells more of white imaginaries of black women than how she might have looked (Danbolt and Wilson 2018). By placing their own idea of Queen Mary's image in front of the Royal Cast Collection, Belle and Ehlers not only reject Taylor's crude representation of Thomas, but also defy Western art's role in colonization and slavery, not least through its representation of black women. In doing so, they join a long line of women of color who 'challenge past misrepresentations, counter-visualise alternative image-making, and contribute towards greater diversification of non-stereotyped aesthetic practices in the art world' (Dixon, 2020, 167).

By creating Thomas' figure through merging images of their bodies, the artists de-centered Thomas herself as the focal point commemorated and gave space to the broader theme of 'hybridity' (see: iamqueenmary.com n.d.). The theme's centrality is reflected in the short description provided on the monument: 'I AM QUEEN MARY - A Hybrid of Bodies, Nations, and Narratives.' It is also reflected in the symbolism embedded in the monument's composition and name, as motioned above. As such, it can be said to embody the characteristics of Black feminist geographies, which Pat Noxolo (2024, 86) sees as fostering 'fluid forms of connectivity, alliances and identities are often mobile and unfixed – they are constantly under debate and in negotiation' (Figures 1 and 2).

Another central way in which IAQM exemplifies 'fluid forms of connectivity' and the ability to embrace diverse diasporic sensibilities is the acropodium serving as its base. Unlike the temporary styrofoam figure, the base was made out of cement and corals from the USVI. Specifically, corals that were cut from the ocean by the enslaved

Figure 1. Danish-Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers and USVI artists La Vaughn Belle in front of IAQM. Photo rights: Jeannette Ehlers License to reproduce obtained from Bildupphovsrätt.

Figure 2. Aerial view of the Vestindisk Pakshus, today the Royal Cast Collection. Photo rights: La Vaughn Belle License to reproduce obtained from Bildupphovsrätt.

to serve as foundations for colonial buildings. Reflecting on the marrying of the two pieces together and how it speaks to the different diasporic sensibilities and needs the artists brought to the project, Belle (2019, 41) explains

> Jeannette's attraction to Huey P. Newton and other icons of Blackness was often mediated in her video and photo work. It comes very much out of her Afro-Danish experience and the need to connect to Blackness both as a response to the lack of a physical black community in Denmark, and as a tool of resistance to living in a country where Danishness was defined by whiteness… Differently, on my side of the Atlantic, living in both the real and symbolic violence of colonial structures with towns named after Danish monarchs, the colonial forts masking as parks and the sugar mills scattered across the landscape like aged tombstones, I was compelled to look for the hidden narratives inscribed in these spaces and subvert their colonial power.

As such, Belle sought to bring to the fore the ways in which exploitation and black labor are foundational to the world we inhabit and are yet hidden in plain sight (Belle, 2019).

The ways in which IAQM enables reflections on different needs and sensibilities across diasporic contexts through a critical re-reading of Europe speaks to a core argument of this paper: that project that queer European identity, also queer diasporic identity. This is encapsulated in Olivette Otele (2020, 102) observation, where seeing 'European geographies as vibrant spaces comprising a multiplicity of identities allows us to further explore the questions of gaze, power and 'mixity' or 'hybridity' in different settings.'

Aside from engaging diasporic multiplicities, the monument's name, 'I AM QUEEN MARY,' also 'leaves us to grapple with its ambiguities.' For Nina Cramer, (2018, 153) these ambiguities include: 'Who is the subject of the sentence? Mary Thomas? The artists? Or the viewer reading or speaking the words?' Depending on the viewer, the present tense and first-person-singular pronoun can be read either as an invitation to identify oneself as Queen Mary or as an encounter with a powerful assertion of the facts of her royal existence. As Creamer points out, the title can also stimulate a questioning of historical omission and push unfamiliar viewers to ask who Queen Mary is and why they haven't heard of her before (Luna and Danbolt 2018).

The type of self-interrogation and questions IAQM's conglomeration of aesthetics, symbolism and position solicits positions the monument as what Campt (2021) calls 'a Black gaze.' In clarifying common misunderstandings of her conceptualization, Campt (in: Laudig and Riggins 2022) defines a 'Black gaze' as 'a looking practice that is not about how black people see, it is not a black perspective or a black vantage point. It is not subjective in that particular way, and it's not collective in that particular way.' Instead, she continues, it is

> a looking practice, that positions you in relationship to blackness, regardless of whether or not you are black… So what that means is, in the contemporary moment where anti-blackness structures our relationship to blackness or being black in the world… When anti-blackness positions black people in an ongoing state of endangerment, precarity, dispossession- what does it mean to… take up a position in relationship to that, as either being implicated, better off, or identifying, right? But again, it's not prescribing what that relationship is, but it is profoundly about registering it, forcing us to, in many cases, be uncomfortable with our proximity to that precarity. And for me, a black gaze names that sense of implication, but also gives us the opportunity to do something about it, so that to the extent that we can recognize, or that we are forced to recognize our *own* position in these relationships, we have the opportunity to say 'no', to say 'I will not,' to say 'I want to do something' to say 'this is hard, and I understand something differently,' to say that 'this overwhelms me, but I need to work on it.' But again, … by virtue of the fact that it's art, and that art affects you, and solicits a response from you, you have to choose what to do with that response. But to the extent that you register it, even if you decide to look away, you feel that. You feel that it's a decision not to engage, and you have to live with that.

It is worth quoting Campt at length before turning to the five Afro-Danish practitioners, as her conceptualization points to the various ways IAQM invites interaction with blackness at this moment. The fact that each of the five chose to interact publicly with IAQM was the reason I contacted them in the first place. As I explained to them when requesting the interview, I wanted to understand what I AM QUEEN MARY might mean to them at this moment. Our conversations (three of which took place online and two at a place chosen by the interlocuter) began with unpacking their decision to interact with IAQM but had unfolded in many different directions. If requested, I elaborated my interests in the topic through my own positioning as a 'wandering' white-Jewish woman born in Israel, educated in eSwatini, Scandinavia and the US and living in Europe. This proved helpful in deepening conversations about diaspora, white-European ignorance, colonial pasts-presents and belonging.

The interviewees have a range of different life experiences and histories. As Hunter (2023) argues, having migrated to Denmark, or being born and raised in Denmark with mixed parentage, or being raised in a completely white environment as a Black child, can contribute to different racial sensibilities, oftentimes relating to access to

racial mirroring and other geographic 'roots' as well as shelter from white domination and the white gaze. These personal circumstances will be described below. While the interlocutors represent such different arrays of circumstances, they by no means can be said to represent the wide Afro-Danish community, a fact that does not detract from the significance of their insights.

Interlocuters

When Bwalya Sørensen, founder and spokesperson of BLM Denmark (BLMDK), first heard of the IAQM project, she was shocked that she never heard about the Fireburn Queens before. Here was a story combining two of Denmark's cherished ideals - labor and women's rights in perhaps the biggest labor uprising in Danish history – but it somehow got written out of history. Sørensen, who was born in Zambia and moved to Europe as a young teenager was also surprised by the lack of black participation in the events and conversations leading up to IAQM's inauguration. She therefore leveraged her influential position to organize the march leading from the former women prison in Christianshavn where Mary Leticia Thomas was imprisoned to the site of the inauguration. As the march call was also posted on the Communist Party's digital newspaper, *Arbejderen* (The Worker), Sørensen reports that older communists also joined to celebrate Queen Mary as a workers' rights hero. A month later, she co-organized (with the feminist organization *Agita*) an International Workers' Day march that began at IAQM to show respect for the 'rebel leaders' (Sørensen, August 19, 2021).

Aisha Tambajang, who was born in Denmark to parents from the Gambia, was equally shocked she had never learned about Fireburn in school. In addition to including this history in the material she taught to schoolchildren, she and her podcast co-host Atiyo Muse decided to use IAQM's image in their podcast logo alongside a map of Africa and the Danish flag (Figure 3). The podcast, *Thinking Out Loud* - carries the English subheading *Voices of the Diaspora*. Despite the fact that people of Somalian ancestry represent the largest single group within the Afro-population in Denmark, hegemonic imaginaries continue to follow a 'single axis framework' (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013) which constructs Muslims as Arab, Black people as Christian, and women as white. Because this logic also manifests within activist circles, Muse and Tambajang felt compelled to create the podcast as a platform to reflect the intersectional existence of Black Muslim women in Denmark (Tambajang, September 28, 2023). In doing so, the podcast also maps Denmark into the Afro-diasporic world and challenges the image of Denmark and 'the Dane' as one limited to ideas of Vikings, the Little Mermaid and being blond (*Why Is Our Podcast in English*, 2021).

Sade Yde Johnson, co-founder of the *Afro-Danish Collective* and member of the *Psychological Network against Discrimination*, grew up as a mixed-heritage child near the royal palace and the harbor. In an op-ed written by her friend Mary Consolata Namagambe (2018) about the IAQM inauguration, Yde Johnson reflected on the significance of the monument:

> She changes my relationship to the story because the statue writes me into the story. Queen Mary mysteriously revives my sense of Danishness because she connects the historical traumas I carry in my body…. As a Danish-Jamaican girl who grew up on Toldbodgade, Queen Mary is the heroine I have been waiting for all my life.

Figure 3. Thinking out Loud podcast logo. Curtesy of host Aisha Tambajang.

Being deeply involved in efforts to bring in the diverse Afro-descendent communities of Denmark into shared spaces, IAQM represented to Yde Johnson a material manifestation of this moment of Black visibility and formation in Denmark (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021).

Photographer Liv Latricia Habel's self-portrait series in *Diasporan Daughters* (2020) was a visual representation of her journey to re-connect with her diasporic identity. The series of self-portraits showcasing different faces and facets of Black, female diasporic existence, including one featuring IAQM, was the result of re-establishing a relationship with her African American father and his family after growing up with her white Danish mother, white stepfather and white siblings in an almost exclusively white environment (Habel, May 5, 2023). Habel's personal journey to foster diasporic Black identity seemed to have coincided with similar efforts within Afro-Danish communities at large, making her *Diasporan Daughters* resonate deeply with the moment.

Educator, poet, organizer and author Lesley-Ann Brown arrived in Denmark as an adult, having been raised in-between Brooklyn and Trinidad and educated in New York City. In her book *Decolonial Daughter: Letters from a Black Woman to her European Son* (2018, 14–15) Brown writes:

> as a child, I was told through state-issued books that I, as a young Black girl, did not matter – because, according to the authors of such histories, no one who looked like me ever attained any greatness. Luckily for me I have always been in possession of a fortitude to correct this dangerous erasure and found Queen Nanny of the Maroons, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and later the three rebel queens of the Fireburn rebellion of St Croix in what is now the US Virgin Islands.

In her video to support the IAQM project, Brown reflected on the various things the monument reminds her of. These include the fact that Denmark's first labor rebellion was led by descendants of people enslaved by European powers; the role Black and indigenous women play in fighting for justice and livable wages; and 'the interconnectedness of our histories, of our struggles and the importance to have courage in the face of it' (Belle, 2021).

Unlike many Danes of African ancestry who grow up in 'colorblind' Denmark without racial mirroring or strong relationship to other ancestral geographies (Hunter, 2023), Brown arrived in Denmark with a strong sense of Black identity. These different circumstances are worth elaborating on as they seem to inform Brown's sensibility with respect to IAQM. Because this sensibility departs from the rest of the accounts provided by the other interlocuter, and because it may point to ways in which different understandings of Blackness co-exist across the diaspora, it will be taken up separately in the section 'Limitations and critique'. Before that however, the following sections revolve around the three main (overlapping) themes arising from the other interviews: Blackness, representation and belonging.

'We relate to her because of her Blackness.'

Reflecting on the great diversity of the black population in Denmark, interlocutors appreciated the Fireburn as a history that can be claimed by Afro-Danish subjects. Habel, for example, explains that the history of enslavement in the Americas in the 1700s is one that a Danish girl of Somalian heritage 'can relate [to] in different ways [as] she can mirror herself and in the people who have been suppressed [since] she's still part of a group who is very suppressed in Denmark,' namely being Black, a woman and a Muslim (Habel, May 5, 2023).

The struggle Tambajang and her co-host face as Black Muslim women and daughters of immigrants from Africa, Tambajang explains, is a completely different struggle than that faced by Mary Thomas. Nonetheless, 'we relate to her because of her Blackness, a lot of the issues that she had was because of her Blackness and we resonate with that.' Among these issues Tambajang explained, is the struggle to be seen as a woman in Danish society. Reflecting on the sexualization of Black women and girls in Danish society and the whiteness of the Danish #MeToo movement, Tambajang says 'I don't feel like I'm seen as a woman [by white women]. I feel like I'm seen as a Muslim…. They don't relate to me as a woman. First they see "Oh she's Muslim."' She then references Sojourner Truth's famous probing from 1851 and places it in contemporary Denmark, drawing another connection between the time and space (in)forming ongoing conditions of Blackness and Black womanhood in particular (Tambajang, September 28, 2023).

Tambajang's reflection on not being seen as a woman speaks to the ways in which hegemonic imaginaries of Islam are masculinized. White women are looking at her, but they don't see her as a woman like them, meaning, they don't see *her*. Against this reality, Queen Mary stands as a Black woman who is a force to be reckoned with – her hypervisibility demands not to be gazed at as an 'other,' but be seen as a human, a woman and a revolutionary. This demand is by no means trivial. As Katherine McKittrick (2006, 140) writes:

> The geographic act of expressing blackness and black femininity illustrates what happens when gender and race are overtly attached to public space. It points to how uncomfortable the normal can be and how the "sayability" of place is caught up in the expressive economy of the racial-sexual.

The demand for Black, female visibility is also central in Habel's work. Among her self-portraits showcasing different faces and facets of Black, female diasporic existence, one finds Habel in front of IAQM dressed in what can be thought of as Black Panther aesthetic (Figure 4). The image, she explains, is a part of the momentum generated by the BLM demonstrations in 2020 and suggests that Black women suffer from institutional violence too and have an honored place in the history of Black liberation, which also belongs to Danish history (Habel, May 5, 2023). She thus joins Olivette Otele's (2020, 125) reflection that IAQM 'troubled the city's urban landscape and gender positioning, as well as popular assumptions about women's role in resistance movements against oppression.' Nonetheless, Habel's inclusion of the IAQM's resister portrait alongside 'mundane' 'diasporan daughters' also troubles diasporic hegemonies regarding who is seen as a diasporic agent.

Space for Black representation and Black representation in space

Hunter's (2023, 140) description of 'the visual racial landscape having shaped all generations' racial imaginaries' as one 'characterized both by *under-* and

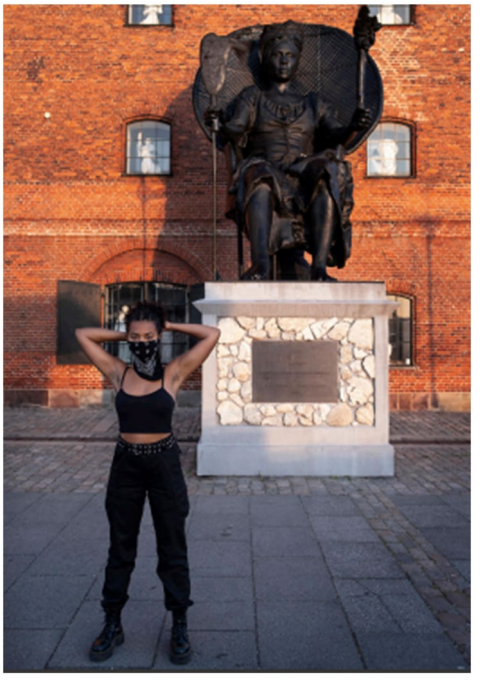

Figure 4. Self-portrait from *Diasporan Daughters* Habel (2020) by Liv Latricia Habel. Photo rights: Liv Latricia Habel. License to reproduce obtained from Bildupphovsrätt.

*mis*representation.' This reality, alongside the profound sense of emptiness Hunter argues it fosters, is reflected in Yde Johnson's account. Growing up by the harbor, she was 'always very fascinated with the Queen's palace as a child' adding, 'I remember my mom always taking me there, but I also felt very alienated.' She therefore finds IAQM's presence 'very moving': 'I feel like 'wow, I'm here. I'm represented here.' Among the things that moved Yde Johnson the most, is the idea that like her mother, she can now take her son to the harbor where IAQM can facilitate a completely different experience of the place than the one she had growing up. Encountering IAQM, she hopes, will inspire his imagination and fill it with positive stories about Black histories and presents (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021).

The significance of the positive representation that exudes confidence, power, and calm, is especially important to her given that 'the portrayal of black people [her son sees] in school is of black people suffering, either in the past or in the present' (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021). Concern for her son's exposure to positive representation was also central to Tambajang's decision to spend a few years in the Gambia. This reality, which speaks both to the absence of mirroring and the misrepresentation of Black people makes the figure of Queen Mary revolutionary also in her afterlife as a monument. 'With Queen Mary' Tambajang feels 'like I could mirror myself, I could relate to that, in the rebel - freedom fighter, you know, advocating for what you feel is right, as a Black woman' (Tambajang, September 28, 2023). For Yde Johnson, who is concerned with the well-being of people experiencing racialization and the ability of Black people in Denmark to unify, lack of positive representation is a central challenge standing in the way of Afro-Danes to find 'some kind of wholeness in their identity' (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021).

Yde Johnson's and Tambajang's accounts deeply resonate with Grada Kilomba (2020, 97) who argues that 'only positive images, and I mean "positive" not "idealized" images, of Blackness created by Blacks themselves, in literature and visual culture, can dismantle this alienation, when one can finally identify positively with oneself and develop a positive self-image.' The emphasis on the identity of the creator is echoed by Yde Johnson. Almost as important as the image of IAQM is the 'fact that it's been created by two black women' and that like Mary Thomas, they were able to bring barriers down and create Black visibility at a place few probably thought would be possible (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021).

While this representation at the harbor connects to Yde Johnson's personal story, for others representation in the powerful landscape of the harbor stands for recognition. For Sørensen, the fact that the monument stands in the capital in such proximity to 'THE Queen' and that her size makes David 'look like a boy' sends a strong message, especially 'if you're a little black girl who grew up in Jutland and everybody calls you the N word and then you come with your school and you stand there and look up.…and say [takes a deep breath] "I am Queen Mary"' (Sørensen, August 19, 2021).

Sørensen's decision to locate this girl in Jutland is not random. As one of Hunter's (2023) interlocutors explained, while Copenhagen is not free of racial oppression, the extreme conditions of racial isolation, hyper-visibility and open bigotry experienced in whiter parts of the country (in her case, southern Jutland) mark the capital as a safer place for Black people. The IAQM's central location claims Black space (physical

and discursive) in the symbolic heart of the nation. For Habel, the significance of 'having somebody like IAQM' as a physical intervention in the public space 'is a part of representing *also* Danish history and is a part of representing…a different citizen in this world [who] doesn't look like the…majority in this country.' The fact that the monument required the state's support also represents to her an official recognition of minorities in Denmark. Lastly, the location provides an opportunity to show the wider world (e.g. tourists) that Denmark has a Black history (Habel, May 5, 2023).

'You are good enough. You belong. And you are powerful'

The erasure of Black history from European history constructs Black people in Europe as eternal transients (Otele, 2020) and every encounter with Blackness as 'new' (El-Tayeb, 2011). Building on Gullestad's (2002, 50–51) observation from Norway, citizenship does not dissolve the label of immigrant, *innvandrer* (Danish: *indvandrer*). The term, literally 'one who wanders/travels in,' conceptually fixes people in a state of perpetual arrival. Even as citizens, they are not regarded as those who once entered and settled, but as those who are continuously entering—bound to a present that never allows them to fully arrive.

Under the conditions of racial isolation, Black Danes are subjected to the same whitewashed narrative of Danish history as the rest of society. Therefore, they are also apt targets for un-learning and re-learning to assert their belonging as 'those who cannot see themselves reflected in [the national heritage] mirror cannot properly "belong"' (Hall, 1999, 4). This dynamic is seen in Tambajang's account, who reflects on how she felt that her parents, who immigrated to Denmark as young adults, were expected to keep their heads down and to be grateful to Denmark for receiving them. 'When I was younger, I thought my parents were like the first generation of Black people to go to Denmark, right? Because we don't hear about the history of Black people in Denmark and what Black people have done in Denmark in terms of like activism and revolution.' Learning that Denmark's Black history extends well beyond her parents' generation was groundbreaking confirmation that they are not 'out of place' and can stake their claims for equal membership in the national community (Tambajang, September 28, 2023). Nonetheless, learning that Denmark *has* a black history and that it *hides* it, added another blow, Tambajang (September 28, 2023) says:

> I feel like my relationship with Denmark has just been- I've been constantly heartbroken by the country. You know, you feel that sense of belonging, because that's where you belong. That's where you're born, right? that's where you are raised. That's what you know. But then at the same time, that very place that you feel that way towards is not acknowledging you, and doing it in so many ways

'Marking Black contribution' in the public space of European nations 'is fundamental to creating a society that reflects all its members' (Kelly and Vassell 2023, 11–12). Such visual inclusion in the national story is distinct from other, less visual forms of disseminating historical knowledge of Black contributions. For Sørensen, IAQM's visual power and location communicates to 'our children that "you are good enough." Yeah - into our girls – 'you are good enough. You belong. And you are powerful'". Emphasizing her motivation to increase the visibility of the project Sørensen said 'we wanted a

little Black girl in the other side of the country to know that IAQM is there, [that] we belong here and this is our country, too' (Sørensen, August 19, 2021).

Being physically inscribed into the city through monuments, markers and toponyms, Yde Johnson feels, can contribute to a greater sense of belonging, which she sees as a 'core issue' for Black Danes. For Yde Johnson, with roots in Jamaica, the physical placement of IAQM stands as a sort of embodiment that validates her place in Denmark as a Danish-Caribbean woman. 'She's a part of Danish history…that embodiment was like, "Okay. Yeah, this is also…Denmark. And this is also me, embodied in Danish history." And I haven't seen that or felt that before.' Nonetheless, this validation of being 'in place' within the Danish state, she asserts, requires blurring the meaning of 'Danishness,' as places, like individuals, embody multiplicity: 'Queen Mary is physically placed…the same place as me. Like I am here, and I am also in Jamaica, like I'm also somewhere else, but my physical body is here in Denmark.' Danishness, she concludes, is like Blackness, in the sense that both are 'impossible to grasp.' As such rather than try and contain them, it is better to embrace their fluid, queer and intersectional natures (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021).

Limitations and critique

In addition to their deep appreciation of IAQM, the interlocutors also reflected on the project's limitations. Thinking of the significance IAQM might hold for her son, Yde Johnson said 'I'm also very realistic about like, "Okay, this is one monument among like, how many 1000s of white monuments, maybe it doesn't even catch the attention?"' Similarly, she wondered if under the ongoing conditions of white domination and racial isolation, coming across IAQM might even increase feelings of loneliness for a Black girl seeing it with her white class. The potential gap between the display of Black power and the disempowering reality of anti-Black racism and/or not having anyone to share the meaning of this display with can increase distress and alienation. In addition, she worries about the individualization of the liberation struggle and how it taps into white 'hero' narratives that neglect the centrality of the collective (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021).

Habel, who grew up in an almost exclusively white environment, appreciated being able to look up to a monument that looks like her, but reflects on how beneficial it would have been to have a teacher who looks like her to look up to first (Habel, May 5, 2023). Her remarks contextualize IAQM within the 'representational deprivation' (Hunter, 2023, 2) that gives it its meaning and the structural changes amending such deprivation demands. Habel, not least through her portrait series, also challenges the tendency to mark exceptional leaders as heroes and leave other – predominantly female figures, such as teachers, poets and artists, unseen and unrecognized (Habel, May 5, 2023).

The most challenging critique was offered by Brown. As noted, Brown supported IAQM publicly, and privately also indicated her great appreciation for Belle and Ehlers. Nonetheless, while the other interlocuters attributed great significance to the IAQM's projection of power and the state's recognition of the statute, for Brown, these are cause for concern. Drawing from other Black commemorative projects, she warns that without structural change, these projects might be empty gestures that risk reinforcing

the power of dominant individuals and institutions, even when they are complicit in various forms of racism. In addition, she is afraid that under the weight of the neo-liberal market, artists can be pulled into catering to white and upper-class desires for 'diversity' and lose track of the needs of the people harmed by the discourse they set out to tackle in the first place, the working class and the poor (Brown, July 17, 2022).

Aspects of Brown's critique also resonate with Gary Younge's (2021) sentiments, opposing not only monuments commemorating oppressors, but also those who resisted them. For him, statues at best are symbolic gestures that are unnecessary, given that his 'sense of self-worth is not contingent on seeing those who represent my viewpoints, history and moral compass forced on the broader public.' In an ideal world, of course, one's sense of self-worth should not be contingent on having one's worth recognized in the public space, because such recognition would be redundant (Hunter, 2023). While Trinidad and Brooklyn do not represent an 'ideal world', for Brown (2018, 22)

> Growing up in Trinidad gave me a cultural fortitude to add to what I already received in Brooklyn. While Brooklyn taught me experientially the realities of American racial politics and how to be proud of my diasporic heritage, Trinidad gave me the nail to hammer home a stronger sense of who I am based on where I came from.

This experience is a stark contrast to the reality where many Danes are asked 'where are they from' without having a strong sense of who they are apart from being Danish. Moreover, the ability to answer 'the USA' and being 'boxed' as African-American, which is associated with being 'western' and 'cool,' is completely different than answering 'Somalia,' which occupies a less prestigious place in the white Danish hierarchy of racialization.

Brown's strong Black identity and deep knowledge of intersectional oppression and resistance informs a more radical politics that dismisses the need for dominant society's validation for self-worth. For Black Danes, who live in a society that pretends to be colorblind on one hand and rejects them for their color on the other, this validation is unfortunately central. As Oda-Kange Midtvåge Diallo (2019, 224–225) writes, 'to fully embody a self-styled identity, we are dependent on the acceptance and acknowledgement of others, of the society in which we live,' a society marked by 'a struggle against the hegemony of whiteness and patriarchy.' Brown is not oblivious to this discrepancy. In many ways, the entire premise of her book *Decolonial Daughter* can be seen as a way to equip her Danish son with the tools he will need to counter the Danish forces of white ignorance and 'colorblindness' that actively work against the ability to develop a grounded identity and radical politics.

Yde Johnson, who grew up in Denmark but is deeply connected to her Jamaican roots, is not worried about powerful individuals and institutions' interests in co-opting Black projects. Recognizing the circumstances working against the formation of a healthy Afro-Danish identity, she sees IAQM as a beginning more than anything else. She also trusts the Afro-Danish community to not be satisfied with symbolic gestures (as important as those can be) and reclaim co-opted projects (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021). 'With Denmark avoiding its colonial past, and race being left out of the discourse' writes Midtvåge Diallo (2019, 227), 'those who experience racism are left without words to express themselves. Instead, they find other spaces of Black expression and belonging, which mostly happens in safe environments and outside of the

professional world.' For Yde Johnson, IAQM provides both the space, and the words needed for Black expression and belonging from which more path-breaking politics can emerge (Yde Johnson, August 17, 2021). Above all, by normalizing Black presence in contemporary Denmark's public space and re-inscribing Black presence into the Danish past, IAQM undermines the 'racial geographic' logic upon which racial exclusion and the question 'where are you from' are based on.

IAQM is not an ideal project, but one that reflects the needs of this not-ideal space-time of contemporary Denmark and one that would hopefully be unnecessary in the future. Imagining Denmark without IAQM, unfortunately, is not hard, as the only way to see the monument since its lightweight material succumbed to the elements is through augmented reality apps. While it has since received permission to occupy that space permanently, the only funding secured to that end is a million kroner, conditioned on the artists' ability to raise the rest of the funds by themselves. As such, the vacant coral plinth is a reminder of how grueling it can be for a Black woman to stand alone in this white, male-dominated environment without proper recognition and institutional support. Indeed, to withstand this Danish climate, it seems that one must be made of steel or, better yet, bronze.

Epilogue: what will Europe put on its pedestals?

The I AM QUEEN MARY coral plinth is an empty backdrop to the white figures adorning the windows of the Royal Cast Collection of what used to be the warehouse of the Danish West India Company, and is dwarfed by Michelangelo's uncircumcised hero (Figure 5). In other contexts, empty plinths 'have provided the most compelling space for critical conversation' (Odumosu 2022, 53). The case of IAQM, however, shows us that the space *made* on plinths that once supported oppressive figures and their worldviews is different than the space *taken* from narratives that are already invisiblized in the public space. It is a reflection of the type of space Denmark is enabling when choosing to look away from 'the black gaze' (Campt, 2021).

In the case of IAQM, the space taken has quickly been filled with white supremacy. This is reflected in the Nazi Nordfront manifestation on the plinth that included green smoke and a member standing atop it with a sign saying, 'NO TRIBUTE TO A BLACK CRIMINAL NORDFRONTDK' (*INGEN HYLDEST AF SORTE KRIMINELLE NORDFRONTDK*) and the yellow smoke manifestation of the more "respectable" Generation Identitær whose sign read 'WE HAVE NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF' (*VI HAR INTET AT SKAMME OS OVER*). The manifestations' outcasting of Queen Mary, particularly with the latter's contrast of 'we' in opposition to the invitation 'I AM' solicits, is telling of the way white fragility and fear are choosing to meet IAQM's black gaze. A third demonstration, by "artist" Uwe Max Jensen, is especially telling. As seen in the YouTube video documenting the performance (Jensen, 2023), Jensen began by announcing that after a storm blew off the 'n-queen's head, the plinth could now be used for the 'n-king.' With 'African' music[4] playing in the background, he undressed and painted himself in shiny black paint with help from an aide. He then made his way to the plinth, with a colorful rattler in one hand and a reed-like shaft in the other, naked except for a flimsy golden crown and a tube on his penis.

Shaking the rattler, the naked, middle-aged white man shouted 'unga bunga,' 'ding dong,' 'n-kong' and 'ping pong' as he climbed the plinth where he continued shouting

Figure 5. IAQM's empty coral plinth (photo by the author).

in gibberish as well as: taking a knee, raising the black power fist and shouting 'black lives matter' while doing the Nazi salute with his poorly covered white hands. After continuing to rattle and shout around the former Danish West Indian Warehouse, the performance of fragile white masculinity climaxed with Jensen throwing the shaft, and then himself into the harbor. Upon climbing out of the water, his white buttocks showing, Jensen continued shouting his lines while adding a new plea, for Danish-Swedish hate activist Rasmus Paludan to 'help the n-king now!' (Jensen, 2023)

The evocation of dual-national, Quran-burning Paludan is not the only reminder of the myth of *Nordic* exceptionalism. While the title of the performance 'the N-king returns' (*N-kongen vender tilbage*) is meant to reference Jensen's former usage of the minstrel character in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts from which he was chased away (Jensen, 2023), it also evokes beloved Swedish author Astrid Lindgren and her book *Pippi Longstocking in the South Sea*. In the book, Pippi's father is referred to as the 'n-king' and is described as a beloved ruler of a savage island whose pearls and gold support the independence of the strongest girl in the world, ironically providing an apt metaphor for Nordic white feminism.

In the video's descriptive text, Jensen Blames Belle and Ehlers for unfairly advancing their careers by positioning themselves as victims, making him as an unsuccessful artist the *real* victim (Jensen, 2023). Given the arguments laid out in this paper, it would be redundant to unpack the fallacies in each of Jensen's claims (Jensen, 2023). Nonetheless, despite the fact that the self-anointed naked king speaks loudly for himself (but unfortunately not *only* for himself), Hans Christian Andersen's Denmark has yet to recognize that the emperor has no clothes. Would it take a little girl from Jutland to ask when will the naked, rattling white man go away and the rebel Queen return?

Notes

1. Belle and Ehlers began collaborating on IAQM after a centennial-inspired project they took part in fell through. The project, championed by Danish researcher Helle Stenum, was meant to connect the warehouses in Copenhagen and St. Croix.

2. The IAQM received support from the SMK, the Beckett-Fonden, the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces, the Municipality of Copenhagen and the Wow Factory and 3D Printhuset.
3. While the term 'Black' with its strong African American roots is gaining traction in Europe, identifications with 'Afro-' or 'African' subject positions are more common among people with African heritage populations in Europe, as most of which have strong ties with the African continent.
4. The track, called "African skies," is made by a white artist who labeled the song with the following hashtags: #African #ethnic #voices #drums #chants #emotion #build #humming as well as his name.

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