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## The Postcolonial North Atlantic

Iceland, Greenland  
and the Faroe Islands



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The Postcolonial North Atlantic  
Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands

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EBBE VOLQUARSEN/LILL-ANN KÖRBER

### The Postcolonial North Atlantic: An Introduction

If the Nordic Countries were one family, the old empires of Sweden and Denmark would be the parents, wrote Icelandic author Hallgrímur Helgason in the Danish weekly newspaper *Weekendavisen* in April 2013.<sup>1</sup> Norway, until 1814 a province in the Kingdom of Denmark and then part of the Suedo-Norwegian Union, became an independent state in 1905. In Helgason's satire, Norway is the affluent eldest sister of the family who looks gorgeous in her brand new opera gown. Brother Finland, the secret illegitimate child of the family, once belonged to Sweden, but became a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809. Even since gaining independence in 1917, Finland has remained a mysterious family member that nobody is able to understand. Finally, there are Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. The Faroes are, in Helgason's family portrait, depicted as a chain-smoking bachelor in his forties who still lives with his mother, whereas Brother Iceland left home much too early and went to America as a teenager. He came into contact with drugs and adopted the Americans' arrogance. After his return he had a serious car accident. With this image Helgason alludes to the crash of the Icelandic banks in 2008. Greenland is the youngest child of the family, adopted by Mother Denmark who never had enough time to adequately take care of her. This, the satire suggests, may be one explanation for the country's myriad social problems, a topic that is often emphasized in the Danish media.

Helgason's text was published prior to the Icelandic general election in 2013, during which the Icelandic electorate subsequently voted the same political parties back into office whose politicians are often blamed for the 2008 crisis that caused the collapse of the national financial system and brought the country to the brink of bankruptcy. As the author of novels such as *101 Reykjavík* (1996) and *Höfundur Íslands* («The Author of Iceland»; 2001), Helgason is one of the most well-respected literary voices of his country. In his article, he not only criticizes his countrymen's amazingly short memory, he also satirizes the paternalism that gave the historical Danish presence in the region a civilizing mission and thus legitimacy. Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Danes have continually employed

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1 HELGASON: 2013, 6.

mother-child metaphors when describing their country's relationship with its North Atlantic dependencies.<sup>2</sup>

But despite these entangled family connections, Helgason's text also illustrates the large differences between the individual countries that form a region constituted through its common historical affiliation to the Kingdom of Denmark. Besides Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, the region also includes Norway. Even after Norway was transferred to Sweden in 1814 (as a result of Denmark's alliance with France during the Napoleonic wars), Denmark still remained a medium-sized European empire.<sup>3</sup> The king not only ruled over Jutland, Zealand, Funen and the islands in the North Atlantic; to the south, his territory also encompassed the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, which Denmark lost to Prussia fifty years later. What is more, until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Denmark also ruled over colonies in Africa and Asia, and until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup> However, with the demise of Norway at the latest, the dissolution of the formerly multinational and multilingual Danish Empire had begun. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Denmark was transformed into a small nation-state – for a while the smallest in Europe.<sup>5</sup> In Norway today, the country's historical subordination and its past as a peripheral province are hardly an issue anymore, and even less so a problematical one. As Helgason suggests, this may partly be due to the prosperity of the country, generated by huge oil discoveries, but probably also to the fact that Norway was the first of the former Danish territories in the North Atlantic to gain independence – way back in 1905.

A common feature of the articles in this book is that they in one way or another deal with the complex aftermath of Denmark's sovereignty over its North Atlantic territories and address the multiple conflicts that result from this – some of which are apparent while others smolder out of

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2 See e.g. THISTED: 2003 on the case of Greenland.

3 GLENTHØJ: 2012 provides a seminal study on Danish and Norwegian identity before and after 1814.

4 See IPSEN and FUR: 2009 for a brief overview of Scandinavian colonialism.

5 Since the loss of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864, Danish historiography as often confined itself to the shrunken area of the small nation state and disregarded historical events that took place outside the country's present borders, a phenomenon which OLWIG: 2003 calls »deglobalization«. The Danish historians BREGNSBO and JENSEN: 2005 have tried to revise this practice and therefore explicitly provided a history of the Danish Empire and its demise.

sight, just below the surface. This thematic priority directs the focus away from Norway and towards Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. In these countries, their common history with Denmark still has significant impact on political debates and social and cultural phenomena. Unless otherwise indicated, they are meant when the authors of this book speak about »the North Atlantic«.

However, the term North Atlantic in no way describes a fixed geographical entity. In international language use, it encompasses a much larger area, namely the parts of the Atlantic Ocean and the adjacent coastal areas that are located north of the equator. According to this definition, even the Caribbean Virgin Islands, which Denmark sold to the USA in 1917, would have been part of the North Atlantic. And, of course, NATO also contains the term »North Atlantic« in its name; here it stands for the ocean that connects the North American and European allies. The film scholar Jerry White, who, under the heading of »Cinema in the North Atlantic«, has undertaken comparative case studies on the cinemas of the Canadian provinces of Québec and Newfoundland, as well as of Ireland and the Faroe Islands, employs a geographically much narrower definition of the North Atlantic, while still describing it as a transcontinental region.<sup>6</sup> Canada, Ireland (and Scotland), and Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have in common their respective history as former colonies or dependencies that are regarded as peripheral from the perspective of the European metropolises. White's inclusion of these areas in the North Atlantic region coincides with a point of view advocated by scholars from the Centre for Nordic Studies at the Orkney and Shetland campuses of the Scottish University of the Highlands and Islands. The imagined community of the »North Atlantic Rim« they posit is book-ended by the coastal areas of Norway at one extreme and Canada at the other and includes Scotland, Ireland, Iceland and Greenland, as well as the Orkney, Shetland and Faroe Islands.<sup>7</sup> Seen from this point of view, what seems like a loosely scattered collection of peripheral outposts from a London or Copenhagen perspective is suddenly transformed into a coherent transatlantic world region,<sup>8</sup> a *center* in its own right. Against the

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6 WHITE: 2009.

7 Cf. Frost's chapter in this volume. For further reading on Scottish-Nordic connections see the contributions in JENNINGS and SANMARK: 2013.

8 Cf. REEPLOEG: 2012.

backdrop of the 2014 referendum on independence in Scotland, whose advocates are calling for closer cooperation between Scotland and the Scandinavian countries (frequently referring to medieval connections), the abstract concept of the »North Atlantic Rim« appears relevant and plausible.

Obviously, notions of a region associated with the term North Atlantic may turn out very differently in an international context. In the Danish language, however, the term almost exclusively covers Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, a designation that has also become prevalent in the region itself. In all the Scandinavian languages, *Vestnorden* (»West Nordic region«) is an alternative name for these countries, sometimes including Norway. The West Nordic Council, which was founded in 1985, is an official cooperation between the parliaments of Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. However, *Vestnorden* has a rather official sound and is thus rarely used in everyday speech.<sup>9</sup> Even the international team of historians who wrote the first history of the region in 2012, chose the title *Naboer i Nordatlanten* (»Neighbors in the North Atlantic«) for their Danish-language book and only in the subtitle speak of *Vestnordens historie gennem 1000 år* (»1,000 years of West Nordic history«).<sup>10</sup> The four seats in the Danish Parliament (the *folketing*) reserved for the representatives from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, are commonly referred to as *de Nordatlantiske mandater* (»the North Atlantic seats«), and the old warehouse of the Royal Greenland Trading Department in the Copenhagen neighborhood of Christianshavn is now called *Nordatlantens Brygge* (»North Atlantic Wharf«). Besides a cultural center – jointly operated by Denmark, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands – and the internationally renowned gourmet restaurant *Noma*, the building houses the permanent representations of Greenland and the Faroe Islands, as well as the Icelandic embassy. So it can be seen that *Nordatlantens Brygge* certainly plays an important part in ensuring that in Denmark, these three countries alone are associated with the term »North Atlantic«.<sup>11</sup>

Of the three North Atlantic countries, only Iceland has an embassy in Copenhagen. In 1944, one year before the end of World War II – during

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9 At least in Denmark this is the case, whereas the term seems to be more common in Norwegian.

10 THOR et al.: 2012.

11 See GREMAUD and THISTED: 2014, 100–105 on the history of *Nordatlantens Brygge*.



which Iceland was occupied by the USA – the country declared its independence from Denmark. A previous national referendum had received the support of the United States, and as early as 1918, Iceland was granted self-government, while still remaining under the Danish crown. Up to the present day, Danish is a compulsory foreign language for all Icelandic schoolchildren, and Copenhagen is still home to a large Icelandic diaspora. However, apart from these connections, the Danish-Icelandic history of dependence has hardly played a major role in the public debates of the postwar period; and very few Icelanders would consider their society to be in any way »postcolonial«. <sup>12</sup> This way of looking at their own past is, however, gradually beginning to change. Since the 2008 financial crisis nearly plunged the once economically strong and at times adventurous Iceland into ruin, artists and scholars in particular have brought the country's short history as an independent nation back into focus. By applying postcolonial and eco-critical approaches, they are uncovering interesting correlations between the rapid rise and often-flamboyant performance of Icelandic businessmen in the years before the crisis and the collective experiences of oppression and humiliation under Danish rule. <sup>13</sup> It is now a widely held assumption that Iceland has tried to make up for its belated industrialization too quickly, driven by the desire to be on a par with the free and prosperous nations of Western and Northern Europe. Hallgrímur Helgason's portrait of the country as an immature teenager who sets out into the world much too early and recklessly crashes his car points in a similar direction.

Besides Denmark and Greenland, the 18 Faroe Islands with their 48,000 inhabitants make up the third part of the Commonwealth of the Danish Realm (*rigsfællesskabet*). Just like Iceland, the islands were settled by Norwegian seafarers in the Middle Ages and (like Iceland and Greenland) remained part of the Danish empire when Norway joined the union with Sweden in 1814. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a national movement

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<sup>12</sup> See KJARTANSDÓTTIR and SCHRAM: 2013 on the Icelandic diaspora and the self-exoticizing of Icelanders abroad. HÁLFDANARSON and RASTRICK: 2006 give an excellent overview of the perceptions of the »Icelandic« in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. ÍSLEIFSSON and CHARTIER: 2011 have thus far provided the most profound collection of articles on Iceland's cultural history, including interesting chapters on Icelandic auto- and hetero-images.

<sup>13</sup> See Gremaud and Hennig's chapters in this volume, as well as LOFTSDÓTTIR: 2010, LOFTSDÓTTIR: 2011, GREMAUD: 2010, HENNIG: 2013, and, for a detailed account of the Icelandic financial crisis, BERGMANN: 2014.

developed on the islands. Its main objective was the preservation of the Faroese language, which is reminiscent of modern Icelandic and was under threat at the time due to the dominance of Danish as the official language of school and church. When the entire North Atlantic region was cut off from the »mother country« while Denmark was under German occupation during World War II (the Faroe Islands were occupied by Britain), a Faroese autonomy movement emerged. In 1946, a referendum resulted in a slim majority in favor of an independent Faroese state. However, the result was not recognized by Denmark, which sent a warship to Tórshavn and declared the local parliament deposed. Since 1948, the Faroe Islands have been a self-governing part of the Kingdom of Denmark, during which time the proponents of a Faroese republic have made up a large part of the islands' population, but never gained a majority. Icelanders at times deride the Faroese restraint in terms of disengagement. In Hallgrímur Helgason's family portrait, the Faroe Islands figure as a twixter, unable to move out of mother's house and lead an independent life. In her song »Declare Independence« (2007), Icelandic singer Björk calls for emancipation from »damn colonists«. The use of military jackets bearing the Faroese and Greenlandic flags in the video makes plain that the call for action is directed at Iceland's North Atlantic neighbors who still remain within the Danish Realm.<sup>14</sup>

The skepticism of many Faroe Islanders towards a sovereign island nation does not, however, mean that the relationship between the Faroe Islands and Denmark has always been harmonious and that the history of dependence has not affected the recent past.<sup>15</sup> Gaining recognition of their language in particular has meant a long fight for the Faroe Islanders, with Faroese only becoming the language of education in 1937. Today, Faroese has almost entirely replaced Danish in everyday life. Still, all Faroe Islanders are at least bilingual. The at times purist linguistic policies reveal that language in the Faroe Islands can be both a touchy issue and a fundamental part of national identity. Danish loan words are avoided; instead new Faroese words are created.<sup>16</sup> The two best-known Faroese

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. this book's cover showing a still from the video by Michel Gondry. »Declare Independence« is part of Björk's album *Volta* (2007).

<sup>15</sup> See HOFF: 2012 on the Danish-Faroese relations between 1850 and 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. NAUERBY: 1996 and MITCHINSON: 2010. See on language use in the Faroe Islands also Mitchinson's chapter in this volume.

writers, William Heinesen (1900–1991) and Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen (1900–1938) both wrote in Danish; it took a long time until their novels were generally regarded a part of Faroese national literature.<sup>17</sup> The field of anthropology in particular has yielded some notable works on Faroese society, reflecting the country's history of dependence on Denmark. Some studies, for instance, address spatial order and social monitoring in the small and until recently nearly self-sufficient village communities.<sup>18</sup> Anthropologist Christophe Pons has analyzed the remarkable influence of Evangelical Free Churches on Faroese society and recognizes in the exercise of religion outside the Danish state church an instrument of post-colonial resistance.<sup>19</sup> In the years 2005 and 2006, a heated debate about the inclusion of homosexuality in the Faroese anti-discrimination law aroused international attention. An ingrained homophobia among the population and the substantial impact of the Free Churches, which partly represent fundamentalist positions, came clearly to light.<sup>20</sup> The Danish government, well known for its liberal policy in the field of rights for same-sex couples, suddenly found itself in a classical postcolonial dilemma: contrary to the practice of internal non-interference in Faroese matters, then Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen finally decided to address a critical word.

After the at times negative headlines made by the Faroe Islands and Iceland respectively (the former because of their exclusionary minority policies and the latter because of the financial crisis caused by its own political and economic elite), media coverage of the two countries has calmed down considerably. Within the North Atlantic region, Greenland is currently receiving the largest amount of international attention. Climate change (whose effects are being experienced directly in the Arctic), hopes for the future exploitation of natural mineral resources and hitherto frozen waterways, and the implementation of self-rule in 2009 have moved Greenland into the international limelight.<sup>21</sup> Compared to Iceland and the Faroe Islands, the relationship between Denmark and Greenland

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17 See Marnersdóttir's chapter in this volume on Faroese translations of Heinesen's novels and Moberg's chapter on writing in Danish as a tool to become part of a canon of world literature; cf. also MOBERG: 2010 and MOBERG: 2014.

18 See for example GAFFIN: 1996 and GAINI: 2011.

19 PONS: 2011.

20 Cf. VOLQUARDSEN: 2007.

21 See Thisted's chapter in this volume.

falls much more clearly under the heading of »postcolonial«.<sup>22</sup> The main reason for this is that Greenlanders, in contrast to Icelanders and Faroe Islanders, are not descended from medieval Scandinavian settlers, but from an indigenous population. They had already inhabited the Arctic island for centuries when the Europeans (for the first time after some impermanent land acquisition efforts in the Middle Ages) set foot on Greenlandic soil in 1721. From then on, Greenland officially had the status of a Danish colony. In 1953 the country became a Danish province, and in 1979 it received home rule, with its own parliament and government.<sup>23</sup> The Self-Rule Act of 2009 has so far been the culmination of Greenland's emancipation process from the former colonial power. Given the ongoing nation building process, the increasingly self-confident appearance of Greenlandic agents on the international stage<sup>24</sup> and gradually changing Danish perspectives on the former colony<sup>25</sup>, the question has been raised as to whether Greenland already has overcome the stage of postcolonial aftermaths.<sup>26</sup> However, recent political developments give the impression that such an assessment might be too optimistic. The general elections of 2013 can be said to have rather divided than united the young nation. Social conflicts that already were meant to be overcome are flaring up again, e.g. about ethnicity issues, about language policies, about the divide between hunters and fishermen from the villages and an urbanized elite, or about the Danish versus Greenlandic schism. It is too early yet to say what impact these conflicts will have on the nation building process that has taken up pace since the implementation of self-rule. Resource policies, too, involve conflicts and a classical dilemma: the fast and at times

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22 See among others THISTED: 2005 for an account of the postcolonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland.

23 See THOMSEN: 1998 for an excellent overview of Denmark and Greenland's shared history.

24 See THISTED: 2011 on nation building and nation branding in self-governing Greenland, Just's chapter in this volume on the development of a National Theatre in Greenland and Körber's chapter on the use of the Greenlandic flag and map in the context of (re-)appropriation processes. See even POSSIBLE GREENLAND: 2012, the Danish-Greenlandic contribution to the Venice Architecture Biennial in 2012.

25 See Volquardsen's chapter in this volume on new trends in contemporary Danish literature addressing Greenland.

26 See Pedersen's chapter in this volume, as well as GAD: 2009 and KÖRBER: 2011 for approaches to post-postcolonial elements on the Greenlandic language debate and contemporary Greenlandic art respectively.

relentless development of new mines promises on the one hand those revenues that are the prerequisite for possible future independence; on the other hand, they jeopardize the unique Arctic ecosphere. Towards Denmark, the Greenlandic government is adopting an increasingly self-confident – some might say harsh – tone: A reconciliation commission has recently been established,<sup>27</sup> another indication that not all effects of colonialism are yet overcome in contemporary Greenland.

Is it – given the huge differences between Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, their diverse political statuses and their until recently rather sparse mutual contacts – appropriate to speak of a North Atlantic region, considering that region building always presupposes a kind of imagined community? The countries' intensified cooperation in the fields of culture, politics and academics suggests that it is. In 2015 the University of the Faroe Islands (Tórshavn), University of Greenland (Nuuk), University of Akureyri (Iceland), University of Iceland (Reykjavík) and University of Nordland (Bodø, Norway) will launch a joint masters program called »West Nordic Studies, Governance and Sustainable Management«. Even art projects such as the »Nordic Fashion Biennale« that since 2012 has showcased works of designers from Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, the portrait photo book *Nordatlantens Ansigter* (»North Atlantic Faces«; 2008)<sup>28</sup>, or the exhibition *Inside – Outside* held in Akureyri, Tórshavn and Nuuk in 2003, where artists and school students from the three countries examined mutual stereotypes<sup>29</sup>, have a region building effect.

However, there also is older evidence of a regional identity in the North Atlantic. In 1931, when Greenland was still a closed-off colony and contacts with its Icelandic and Faroese neighbors therefore almost non-existent, later Greenlandic politician and member of the Danish *folketing* Augo Lyngé wrote his only novel, *Trehundrede år efter ...* (»Three hundred years after ...«). The novel is set in the future and illustrates the tremendous societal and emancipatory progress that Greenland has made in the 90 years between Lyngé's present (1931) and an imagined year 2021, when the fictitious Greenlandic capital Grønlandshavn celebrates the

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27 Cf. HEINRICH: 2014.

28 SIMONSEN et al.: 2008. See also GREMAUD and THISTED: 2014.

29 SIGURDSSON: 2003.

300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Danish colonization.<sup>30</sup> In Lynge's vision of the future, Greenland is a hypermodern and globally interconnected country as well as an equal partner within a North Atlantic community. The national soccer team wins against the Faroe Islands and almost defeats Denmark, young Greenlanders study at Icelandic universities, and Icelandic immigrants have repopulated those places on the west coast of Greenland where their ancestors founded settlements in the Middle Ages. Lynge's novel is thus an early example of regional awareness.

The Icelandic students, who in 1905 protested against their country's inclusion into the Copenhagen colonial exhibition, had not yet developed such awareness. Their protest illustrates the internal hierarchies within the North Atlantic region, which even today are not completely overcome. The students did not mind that »Eskimos and Negroes« (from the Danish West Indies) were publicly exhibited in Tivoli; they wanted to prevent Icelanders being equated with them.<sup>31</sup> From today's perspective, one might wish that the Icelanders had not just fought their battle against the colonial exhibition for their own sake, but also on behalf of their Greenlandic neighbors. But weren't the students, seen from a 1905 perspective, right in a way? Wasn't Greenland a classic colony, where enlightened Europeans had civilized and Christianized an indigenous population? And wasn't Iceland an admittedly remote province, but also the place where in the Middle Ages, a high culture thrived that had evolved into the epitome of the national heritage of the entire Danish state – see for example the Danish »Golden Age«-writers Adam Oehlenschläger and N.F.S. Grundtvig's works?<sup>32</sup>

There is some truth in both assessments, and it is therefore legitimate to raise the question as to whether it is justified to designate the entire

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30 LYNGE: 1989. See THISTED: 1990 and VOLQUARSEN: 2011, 112–137 for detailed readings of the novel.

31 Cf. Gremaud's chapter in this volume; see also GREMAUD and THISTED: 2014.

32 The concept of crypto-colonialism (coined by HERZFELD: 2002) has proved to be productive to describe the alleged paradox that Iceland on the one hand well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century figured as the cradle of Nordic culture due to its Saga literature, and that on the other hand, Icelanders often were depicted as dirty and uncivilized savages in Danish representations (cf. GREMAUD: 2010 and in this volume; KJARTANSDÓTTIR and SCHRAM: 2013, as well as several of the contributions in ÍSLEIFSSON and CHARTIER: 2011). Michael Herzfeld develops his theory on the example of Greece, which – once regarded as the birthplace of democracy and now the epitome of crisis – has experienced an imagological loss of status similar to Iceland's.

North Atlantic region as postcolonial. The absence of an indigenous population and the centuries-old affiliation with Norway are some strong arguments against speaking of colonialism when describing the historical Danish rule over Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Furthermore, it is a widely held position that doing so amounts to trivializing the fate of the colonized peoples who – for instance in the Belgian Congo – lost their limbs or even their lives under the European reign of terror. However, such an accusation ignores the fact that it is not the degree of bloodiness or brutality that decides whether a hegemonic relationship can be classified as colonial. What is more, the argument reproduces the widespread, yet well-led assumption of the existence of »Nordic Exceptionalism« in terms of European colonialism.<sup>33</sup>

German historian Jürgen Osterhammel has provided a widely accepted and frequently quoted definition of colonialism. According to him, colonialism is

a relationship of domination between collectives, in which the fundamental decisions about the life of the colonized are (taking priority account of external interests) made and effectively carried through by a culturally different minority of colonizers that is hardly willing to adapt itself.<sup>34</sup>

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33 The concept of »Nordic Exceptionalism« refers to the idea of the Nordic countries' special position with regard to international political and cultural phenomena such as colonialism and postcolonialism, but also with regard to their alleged neutrality towards military and fascist regimes. It is connected to narratives of innocence and goodness and contributes to the construction of collective identities. Pan-Nordic self-conceptions of exceptionalism largely coincide with extrinsic hetero-images of the societies of the Nordic countries. See BROWNING: 2007; HENNINGSEN: 2010; VOLQUARDSEN: 2011, 37–43, and VOLQUARDSEN: 2014 on the concept itself and the phenomena subsumed to it. PALMBERG: 2009 and FUR: 2013 critically examine notions of exceptionalism with regard to the Nordic countries' role in European colonialism; so do many of the contributions in JENSEN et al.: 2010 and LOFTSDÓTTIR and JENSEN: 2012. KOEFOED and SIMONSEN: 2007 and WITOSZEK: 2011 pursue studies on exceptionalist narratives of goodness in respectively Danish and Norwegian national identity. HABEL: 2009 uncovers notions of exceptionalism in Swedish perceptions of whiteness, whereas SCHOUGH: 2008 recognizes an exceptionalist »hyperborean figure of thought« (ibid., 12–13) as the epitome of Sweden's cultural self-location.

34 »eine Herrschaftsbeziehung zwischen Kollektiven, bei welcher die fundamentalen Entscheidungen über die Lebensführung der Kolonisierten durch eine kulturell andersartige und kaum anpassungswillige Minderheit von Kolonialherren unter vorrangiger Berücksichtigung externer Interessen getroffen und tatsächlich durchgesetzt werden« (OSTERHAMMEL: 2006, 8). All translations from German by Ebbe Volquardsen. At this point, the official English edition (OSTERHAMMEL: 2005, 16–17) deviates considerably from the German original.

What Osterhammel writes all applies to Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, if one only thinks of the royal trade monopoly, to which all residents of the North Atlantic region were subjected until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – and the Greenlanders even longer. Osterhammel continues: »In modern times, this usually is accompanied by self-justification based on an ideology of mission, a doctrine that depends on the colonial masters' conviction of their own cultural superiority.«<sup>35</sup> Such doctrines frequently turn up in historical texts written by Danes that address the country's rule over its North Atlantic territories.

The question as to whether the Danish rule over Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands should be labeled as colonialism or rather as the administration of remote provinces or dependencies (sometimes supported by a colonial mentality) is not answered conclusively in this book. As Icelandic historian Guðmundur Hálfánarson shows using the example of Iceland, the quest for an indisputable answer is a futile undertaking that also promises little acquisition of knowledge.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, when the title of this book puts forward the idea of a »postcolonial North Atlantic«, this does not mean that the authors and editors agree on definitions and applications of concepts of colonialism and postcolonialism. Moreover, the title does not imply an assumption of similarity in the dependency relations between Denmark and the three countries discussed. Differences are considerable, both within the region itself and in comparison with other regions that might be classified as postcolonial. Nevertheless, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have in common their history as Danish dependencies within a historically and geographically coherent region. These connections alone make it seem fruitful to analyze similarities and differences from a comparative perspective.

Many of the contributions in this volume go back to a working group, initiated by Lill-Ann Körber and Ebbe Volquardsen at the 20<sup>th</sup> *Conference of German Scandinavian Studies* (ATDS) at the University of Vienna. The aim of the three-day workshop was to instigate a dialog between scholars from the humanities and social sciences who in one way or another are doing work on Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands

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35 »Damit verbinden sich in der Neuzeit in der Regel sendungsideologische Rechtfertigungsdoktrinen, die auf der Überzeugung der Kolonialherren von ihrer eigenen kulturellen Höherwertigkeit beruhen.« (OSTERHAMMEL: 2006, 8).

36 See Hálfánarson's chapter in this volume.



and the aftermaths of the Danish rule over the islands. The perspective on the three countries as one region is relatively new, at least within Scandinavian Studies, but seems – especially in the wake of a growing interest in the circumpolar area of the Arctic – to be becoming gradually established. Since then, the network launched in Vienna has grown as other authors have joined the book project. Many of them are involved in the international research project *Denmark and the New North Atlantic*, which was founded at the University of Copenhagen in 2012 and is led by Kirsten Thisted.<sup>37</sup>

Although the »postcolonial« region addressed in this book is constituted by a common (colonial) past within the Danish empire, the contributions in this volume are based on a broad understanding of postcoloniality. Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands are thus not classified as postcolonial merely because they share a history of foreign rule and oppression, which in different ways affects their present societies. Postcoloniality today is a global phenomenon. Ulla Vuorela has pointed out that even countries without any formal colonial possessions have contributed to the production of orientalisms, exoticisms and notions of colonial »Others«, meaning that a »colonial complicity« can be attributed to them.<sup>38</sup> So even in countries like Norway and Finland (non-sovereign dependencies until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), asymmetries of power and constructions of alterity generated during the period of colonialism and imperialism affect debates about immigration policy, for example. The same applies to Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands: they appear both as (former) subjects as well as the producers of cultural hierarchizations.<sup>39</sup>

When »Postcolonial Studies« became a research subject in the 1980s, the term »postcolonial« was still conceived literally as the timespan that follows the end of a colonial rule, especially in view of the emerging literatures of the British Commonwealth.<sup>40</sup> In the course of globalization and

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37 See the project's homepage: [www.thenewnorthatlantic.com](http://www.thenewnorthatlantic.com) [01.09.2014].

38 VUORELA: 2009. OXFELDT: 2005 provides a seminal study of a certain Nordic variant of orientalism. See also VOLQUARDSEN: 2010 on representations of an oriental »Other«, especially in Danish literature.

39 See Loftsdóttir's chapter in this volume on the Icelandic case, and Kristjánsdóttir's chapter on the special history of the entanglement of Iceland with the Maghreb region in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

40 When referring to its temporal meaning, the term »post-colonialism« is usually hyphenated; cf. HAUGE: 2007 and Pedersen's chapter in this volume, while the spelling

increasing entanglements, an alternative perception of postcolonial phenomena is gaining acceptance that is no longer linked to the dichotomous division of the world into former colonies and former colonial powers. Postcolonial critique as an academic discipline has evolved accordingly, including the study of manifold asymmetrical power relations.<sup>41</sup> After all, the effects of colonialism and imperialism are experienced globally: in London, Paris and Copenhagen, as well as in Reykjavík, Ilulissat, or in Switzerland, where a team of authors recently published a volume on Swiss »colonialism without colonies«. <sup>42</sup> Coinciding with the social and cultural heterogenization of the societies of Northern Europe, which is accompanied by heated debates on immigration and integration, the interest in postcolonial issues is increasing even in Scandinavia. Since one, in contrast to Switzerland, cannot speak of a »colonialism without colonies« in the case of Scandinavia, many of the publications originating from this context<sup>43</sup> combine both aspects: the analysis of real colonial dependency relations in the North Atlantic, in Sápmi<sup>44</sup> or in the Global South, as well as of the effects that colonial hierarchies and knowledge orders have on current processes of minoritization and majorization as well as on mechanisms of social exclusion. With this book we would like to continue the debate that has now started.

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The book is organized into three sections, dedicated to Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland respectively. It starts, however, with an exception to this three-part division. In his chapter »The Concept of the North Atlantic Rim; or, Questioning the North«, William Frost (University of Sheffield) presents and discusses the potential of the already mentioned con-

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without hyphen commonly refers to more general cultural phenomena and their (academic) critique.

41 See for instance RANDEIRA and RÖMHILD: 2013 on the manifold entanglements in a postcolonial Europe. ZIMMERER: 2013 provides a seminal study on the highly diverse aftermaths of and politics of remembrance about (an almost forgotten) German colonialism.

42 PURTSCHERT et al.: 2012.

43 See e.g. KESKINEN et al.: 2009, JENSEN: 2012, LOFTSDÓTTIR and JENSEN: 2012, NAUM and NORDIN: 2013.

44 Sápmi is the name of the transnational area inhabited by the Sami in Northern Norway, Sweden and Finland and on the Russian Kola Peninsula.

cept of the »North Atlantic Rim« as an analytical tool to describe ongoing regionalization processes in the North Atlantic. He invites us to participate in a mind game that is a reflection of recent political events and debates: What if we, on our mental maps, loosen the ties between the North Atlantic islands and their former or current rulers on the mainland? What if we allow the former periphery to gain center stage? What if regional affiliations and alliances replace the interpretational sovereignty of the nation state or the crown? Will we witness the birth of more independent nations and the blossoming of West Nordic cooperation? Will a post-postcolonial North Atlantic resemble the dimensions of the Viking realm of the beginning of the second millennium, rather than Europe since its colonial expansion?

### Iceland

Is Iceland a postcolony at all? This question is at the core of debates about the relevance of postcolonial theoretical approaches to the study of Icelandic history and present-day Iceland. The authors represented in this volume would answer in the affirmative if asked about the relevance of such approaches, but would suggest a modification of their assumptions to match the specific Icelandic situation. Our contributors analyze identity constructions with regard to earlier and current power configurations and examine concepts of sovereignty and its effects. They propose and make use of terms and concepts such as crypto-colonialism, eco-criticism or ocean/Atlantic studies in order to delineate Iceland's position in this context, with the common goal of describing entanglements and alliances beyond a concentration on the relation to Denmark, but without losing the focus on power relations and relational nation building processes.

In »Iceland Perceived: Nordic, European or a Colonial Other?«, historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (University of Iceland) provides a historically informed overview of Iceland's situatedness vis-à-vis the Nordic countries, Europe and a global postcolonial fabric. Anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir (University of Iceland) discusses Icelandic identity construction processes from a social anthropological angle in her article »Icelandic Identities in a Postcolonial Context«. In »Iceland as Centre and Periphery. Postcolonial and Crypto-colonial Perspectives«, art historian and cultural critic Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud (University of Copenhagen) introduces theoretical approaches to the study of the Icelandic situation,

thus continuing and specifying Frost's discussion of an ongoing shift of center and periphery in the North Atlantic with regard to Iceland. Based on a reading of Andri Snær Magnason's controversial best-selling book *Dreamland. A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation* (*Draumlandið – sjálfshjálparhandbók handa hræddri þjóð*; 2006), Reinhard Hennig (Mid Sweden University) presents yet another theoretical concept – eco-criticism – which proves fruitful for the analysis of recent debates about the North Atlantic and Arctic countries' (geo-)political and economic sovereignty of their natural resources.

In »Searching for a Home, Searching for a Language«, Helga Birgisdóttir (University of Iceland) re-reads an Icelandic classic, Jón Sveinsson's well-known »Nonni« books, from a postcolonial perspective. She combines aspects of language, literary history and migration to illustrate the complexities of »Icelandicness« in the case of Jón Sveinsson and his series of children's books. In her article on Guðríður Símonardóttir and her role in the so-called Turkish Abductions and its literary representations, Dagný Kristjánsdóttir (University of Iceland) focuses on a curiosity in the history of colonialism and interregional entanglements. Her contribution on a historical link between Iceland and Northern Africa shows clearly that studies of postcoloniality must be extended beyond the traditional study of relations between the metropolitan centers of continental or mainland Europe and overseas »peripheries«. Such an extension allows us to grasp constructions of Self and Other beyond this conventional dualism and to prevent a re-centralizing of the centers that colonialism and postcolonialism paradoxically seem to have in common. Moreover, an angle on Atlantic or – more general – ocean studies, and hence on the history of seafaring, opens the way for perspectives on alternative routes of the movement of people, goods and ideas – which in this case connect 17<sup>th</sup> century Iceland and the Ottoman Empire.

### Faroe Islands

Comparable to the section on Iceland, the focus of the section on the Faroe Islands is directed towards the specificity of the Faroese situation within a postcolonial framework. The Faroe Islands share with Greenland their status as a self-governed entity within the Danish Realm. They have in common current nation building processes and debates about moves towards independence. The main difference refers back to the re-

spective histories of settlement and their consequences for issues of language, ethnicity, culture, belonging and cohabitation. The kinship between Faroese and the Scandinavian languages is just one relic of the Viking settlers who came from today's Norway and populated the previously uninhabited islands; contrast this with the coexistence of an indigenous population and Northern European settlers in Greenland. Our authors raise the question of how the relationship with Denmark, and the position of the Faroe Islands towards Europe and a globalized world, is debated and negotiated with regard to language, literature and politics. What terms, concepts and contexts are at scholars' disposal to describe phenomena and processes that are specific to the Faroe Islands, but nevertheless comparable to those of their North Atlantic neighbors?

John K. Mitchinson (University College London) focuses on (de-)colonization from a linguo-historical and political perspective in his article »Othering the Other«. He examines the link between linguistic policies and nation building and associated attributions to Self and Other. Under the title »The Faroese Rest in the West«, literary scholar Bergur Rønne Moberg (University of Copenhagen) presents the concept of world literature and its relevance for a revision and positioning of Faroese literature. The question is how to describe Faroese literature's specific position in a situation marked by two interdependent factors: the underrepresentation of aesthetic as opposed to political considerations in the context of postcolonial studies, and the shortcomings of terms and concepts derived from European literary history. The following two contributions are examples of how such questions are applied to readings of concrete literary texts, both of them classics of the Faroese literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Malan Marnersdóttir (University of the Faroe Islands) makes use of central findings of translation theory in her reading of William Heinesen's work from a postcolonial angle: translation always involves both linguistic and cultural transformations. Anne-Kari Skarðhamar (Oslo and Akershus University College) traces the literary reflection of the Faroese history of decolonization in Gunnar Hoydal's novel *Í havsins hjarta* (»In the Heart of the Sea«; 2007), in which historical events are highlighted as national places of remembrance. In his article »Postcolonial Politics and the Debates on Membership of the European Communities in the Faroe Islands (1959–1974)«, political scientist Christian Rebhan (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin/University of Iceland) examines the relevance of postcolonial perspectives not only for identity construction pro-

cesses, but even for the history of political and social institutions and cooperation. He raises the question of a political representation of the former Danish North Atlantic territories, of specific regional interests that potentially result in new alliances, while other cooperations or commitments are dismantled.

### Greenland

Just like the Faroe Islands, Greenland is a self-governed part of the Danish Realm. Since the introduction of self-rule in 2009, Kalaallisut (Greenlandic) has gained official language status, and Greenland is autonomous in most political fields, with the exceptions of foreign and security policy. The ongoing nation building process can be seen, for example, in the constitution of national cultural institutions such as a National Theatre (2011) or a National Gallery (currently in the planning stage), or in the context of current debates about a Greenlandic constitution. Geographically, Greenland belongs to the North American continent, and its indigenous population links it closely to the entire circumpolar region. Thus, new questions arise with regard to Greenland's cultural, historical and political affiliations with the North Atlantic region and its European neighbors. New questions even arise concerning past and present relations of center and periphery: as an Arctic country presumably rich in natural resources, Greenland today finds itself in the center of Danish, European and international geopolitical and economic interests.

Discussing recent cultural phenomena, Birgit Kleist Pedersen (University of Greenland) asks whether postcolonialism is relevant at all, or if Greenland is already on a post-postcolonial course. She argues that a negotiation of Danish-Greenlandic power relations has long since been replaced by a global consciousness marked by complete flexibility with regard to belonging and affinity. In »A Short Story of the Greenlandic Theatre«, Christina Just (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) shows how Greenland's postcolonial history is reflected by the history of cultural institutions and art forms. She looks into exoticizing and ethnicizing tendencies in the reception of Greenlandic theatre, into the reflection of a multiple cultural heritage in today's theatre practices in Greenland, as well as into the effects of cultural policy on both institutional and aesthetic levels.

In her article »Politics, Oil and Rock 'n' roll«, Kirsten Thisted (University of Copenhagen) analyzes fictionalizations of the current scramble

for the Arctic and interconnected debates about indigenous rights. In which ways do such imaginations of Greenlandic/Arctic resources and residents influence current geopolitics? In her chapter »Mapping Greenland: The Greenlandic Flag and Critical Cartography in Literature, Art and Fashion«, Lill-Ann Körber (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) explores the history of the Greenlandic flag against the backdrop of decolonization and nation building. On the basis of projects between art, fashion and performance, she traces appropriation and re-appropriation practices connected to cartography and national symbols. Based on a reading of several Danish-Greenlandic migration novels, Ebbe Volquardsen! (University of Giessen) focuses on the literary reflection of the relationship between Denmark and its former colony.

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It is our hope that the journey to an utterly fascinating, dynamic and diverse region, its contemporary history, current events and academic exploration, will be as joyful for all our readers as it has been for us.

Berlin and Gießen, September 2014  
Lill-Ann Körber and Ebbe Volquardsen

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