

## MAIN SECTION

# From Harbor to Harbor: Postcolonial Relations and Agencies

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## ABSTRACT

The comparative reading of postcolonial spaces of port cities on both sides of the trading poles offer a new understanding of their cultures and urban structures and reveal overlooked relations on a global level. The harbors have been key sites in the transfer of goods, people and cultures, the connection of distant but related worlds as well as the execution of power. These spaces hence need to be read relationally. They are formed by and represent uneven power relations of the colonial past and the corresponding agency of this construct up to the present day. As such, a correlated study of port cities may reveal a deeper understanding of them. Flensburg and Charlotte Amalie are the two poles of a post-colonial relation that is not yet analyzed systematically. They are connected by a shared history that still powerfully shapes their cultural and physical spaces. The significance of their past as two extremes in the Danish colonial empire is analyzed through the lens of cultural theories from the Caribbean and post-colonial urban theories. As a case study, this research frames a novel view of the past and present relation between Europe and the Caribbean, with a particular focus on the ports as spaces of interaction and potential hybridization.

## KEYWORDS

*Charlotte Amalie; Danish West Indies; Flensburg; Historic Urban Centers; Post-Colonial*

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FIG. 1 Map of Charlotte Amalie (Caribbean) and Flensburg (Baltic Sea). Graphic by Alissa Diesch

Harbors are important knots in the networks of exchange, connecting to large-scale and close-by environments. Port cities, therefore, potentially have a particular, cosmopolitan culture which can be revealed only in the context of multiple scales. Harbors receive input from spaces far away and spread their local products, people and ideas on a global level. Working on the postcolonial spaces in the city of Flensburg in a research and design studio of architecture and urbanism and following the paradigm of periphery by Schröder as a “rediscovery of places beyond the metropolis,”<sup>1</sup> the paper proposes a comparative reading of Flensburg and Charlotte Amalie. The interconnection and hybridization of both port cultures are based on the cultural and physical postcolonial spaces as “materiality of place, the imaginative spatialities of desire and a cultural politics of territory are fundamental parts of colonial and postcolonial formations in the present”.<sup>2</sup> Because “[p]ort cities are cosmopolitan, but the scholarship about them is often parochial,”<sup>3</sup> a correlated analysis of linked harbor cities reveals ignored power relations and a new framework for reading historic urban structures.

Flensburg in the Baltic Sea and Charlotte Amalie in the Caribbean are two small but very different and spatially distant port cities. They are deeply connected through their history and ports but not yet analyzed coherently. By comparatively studying the two cities—linking cross-references and embracing their complexities—multi-layered aspects of past and future cosmopolitanisms emerge. These specific characteristics are a product of their port activities and hence they appear particularly clearly in these environments. Using—as a starting point—the history of the cities, a focus is put on the contemporary spaces and contextualization to show the still

1 Jörg Schröder, “Open Habitat,” in *Dynamics of Periphery*, ed. Jörg Schröder, et. al. (Berlin: Jovis, 2018), 13

2 Jane Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*. (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), X

3 Josef W. Konvitz, “Port Cities and Urban History,” *Journal of Urban History* 19/3 (1993): 115

active agencies of the colonial past and through that, to trace the creation and transformation of port culture in the pairing.

By employing a range of postcolonial theories by Said, Bhabha, King, Jacobs and Yeoh, the text suggests an explorative approximation of the cities under their postcolonial influence as well as their role as a port city in the past and present to open up new questions and further research [Fig. 1].

## Flensburg

Flensburg is a German port city on the Baltic Sea, but until 1864 the city belonged to Denmark. From the middle ages on, Flensburg had been a city of merchants with the harbor as the region's economic center. This legacy shapes the spatial and cultural reality of the city until today. While it was not a formal part of the Hanseatic League, a commercial confederation of merchant guilds and market towns around the Baltic Sea and Europe's north-west, it still maintained strong trading relations to the league. While Flensburg profited from the trade, Denmark has been described by scholars as a colony of the Hanseatic League, which worked with the same colonialists ideas from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, forcing Denmark to export agricultural products to repurchase them as finished products.<sup>4</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> century put an end to the thriving previous century through the plague, the Dano-Hanseatic-War, storm surges and a major fire which left the people of Flensburg impoverished.<sup>5</sup> Only a century later though, Flensburg, through the downfall of the Hanseatic League, obtained a new role, turning into a dominant figure in actively executing trade relations and becoming one of the most important market towns in the Scandinavian realm. Quickly, the range of the city expanded to Greenland for whaling, followed by trading routes into the Mediterranean Sea where the merchants accessed new markets and connected the city to new ideas and cultural resources.<sup>6</sup> Following this significant expansion, Flensburg's shipping companies started their first ventures into the Caribbean, where the Kingdom of Denmark from 1666 on, held a colony known as the Danish West Indies.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, Flensburg was a city characterized by its active colonial trade, profiting directly from the Caribbean plantation economy, which relied on slavery to produce sugarcane and molasses under the Danish imperial order.<sup>7</sup> Having become the second biggest harbor in

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4 Svend Karup, "Räuber oder Vorbild? Die Hanse aus dänischer Sicht", in *Praxis Geschichte (Hanse und Handel)* 14/1 (2001): 37

5 Flensburg Gesellschaft für Flensburger Stadtgeschichte ed., *Geschichte einer Grenzstadt*. Flensburg, 1966, 44

6 *ibid.*, 51

7 *ibid.*, 225-233





FIG. 2 Flensburg and its historic urban structure. Graphic by Jes Hansen for Master Studio "Cosmopolitan Habitats" 2020

the Danish *helstaten*,<sup>8</sup> Flensburg was of major importance in the trade with the former Danish West Indies and was directly linked to its imperial exploitation. Many ships reached Flensburg from the Caribbean harbors of Fredriksted, Christianssted, or Charlotte Amalie during this time, mainly importing sugar and resources for the rum production. While the city firstly focused on refining sugar for the local and European market, it began turning to the production of "rum blend" after the industrialization of Copenhagen and Hamburg made the refining uneconomical.<sup>9</sup> This absence of industrialization and the upholding of artisan methods in the city, had a major influence on the preservation of Flensburg's 18th century cityscape, which is still visible today. While in other harbor cities small-scale structures were demolished for the new spatial requirements,

8 The Danish *helstaten* describes the overall territory controlled by Denmark between 1773 and the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1864.

9 Flensburg Gesellschaft ed., *Geschichte einer Grenzstadt*, 339.



the Kaufmannshöfe (traders yards) and the general harbor structure of Flensburg survived, conserving the colonial spatial reality.

In contrast to Charlotte Amalie, the role as a pole in the Danish colonial empire was seized much earlier. In 1864 at the end of the Second Schleswig War, Flensburg became part of Prussia. Through that, Flensburg lost its trading rights with the Danish colonies and while it was still possible to import the resources for the rum production from Jamaica, the rising costs made the trade increasingly uninteresting.<sup>10</sup> As a direct result, the former twenty rum producers in the city were reduced to one still producing today. Although the colonial trade lost its economic importance for the city of Flensburg over 150 years ago, the traces of this chapter of the city's history molded its socio-cultural self-conception and its spatial configuration in a long-lasting way. The years since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were marked by the constant reduction of maritime trade links until the current loss of status of commercial port, as proven by the decreasing cargo turnover. The former flourishing harbor is now occupied by sail ships and historic ships hinting at its past and providing a backdrop to the touristic marketing image of the Rum-City [Fig. 2].

## Charlotte Amalie

Today Charlotte Amalie, situated on the island of St. Thomas, is the capital of the American Virgin Islands. However, the island has been a Danish colony for several centuries. With the arrival of Europeans to the "New World" at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the entire region of the Caribbean experienced a stark transformation into a territory of transit and exchange while at the same time being fully altered in its population and environment. This holds true for St. Thomas and its surrounding isles. Columbus himself visited the island, initiating its destiny of becoming a territory in use of the "Old World". As the site of global connection and exchange, the harbor has since then played a decisive role and is, therefore, an ideal scenario to analyze general dynamics of postcolonial agency.

The indigenous population of St. Thomas quickly diminished after the contact with Europeans due to murder and diseases. Little is known of how they have used the bay that would become the port of the island and about its role in the dawn of colonial rule. After several decades of being used as a stopover by different seafarers and pirates, in 1666, the Danish took over the island, using it as a geo-strategic location in the colonial game.<sup>11</sup> In 1672 the first port town was erected to protect the harbor and it soon began receiving African slaves to get started on another benefit of colonialism: the exploitation of the land, in this case the sugar cane production and its by-product rum. Up to 50.000 African slaves arrived on the

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10 *ibid.*, 356.

11 Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Saint Thomas," Encyclopædia Britannica (2018)

island during the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, becoming the largest part of the local population, while the power and economic benefits remained in the hands of the European minority.<sup>12</sup> Danes, but also planters, traders, merchants, sailors, and craftsmen from other European nations without a foothold in the Caribbean, had also been attracted by the colonial niche outside the huge regional empires of France, Spain and England.<sup>13</sup> Sugar was a profitable business until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the abolition of slavery and the introduction of sugar beet in Europe caused a decline for this industry. The geo-strategic position of the island and the free port are, since then, crucial assets in the economy of Charlotte Amalie. The location was the central argument when in 1917, during WW I, the USA bought the islands from neutral Denmark to prevent the possible danger of German submarines being stationed in the Caribbean, threatening the US. The Islands became the American Virgin Islands and since then are an unincorporated and organized territory of the United States, remaining until today in a state of not fully defined autonomy.

By that time, another stakeholder had already entered the stage, the Danish West Indian Company (WICO), a company founded in 1905 owning and running the majority of the port facilities.<sup>14</sup> The original field of action of the company was to search for benefits from the transatlantic trade by supplying coal and water to the steamships, used commercially on the Atlantic trade since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with big expectations after the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. The company additionally adopted the connection of the island's harbor with the Danish ports, using the political network for a continuation of the economic relations. This shift, turning the political dependences into a business, leaves the extraterritorial ownership and profit transfer of the harbor from the Caribbean back to Europe even after the shift of national affiliation unchanged. The power structure of the colony, as well as in parallel the material and personnel infrastructure of the harbor, were reused. The former governor of the island was a leading founding member and the representative governor's residence in Charlotte Amalie became home to the president of WICO who used to put out the Danish flag every day until 1993.<sup>15</sup> A perfect maintenance of relations and symbols.

In 1936 WICO started operating in a new business area as a tourist company was opened within the enterprise reacting to the change of image of the Caribbean from savage to "health and freedom".<sup>16</sup> Tourism quickly became the most important economic sector of the US Virgin Islands and

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12 Nathalia Brichet, "A Postcolonial Dilemma Tale," *Itinerario* 2 (2019), 351

13 Christian Williamson and Douglas Armstrong. "A 19th Century Urban Port Town Merchant's Residence in Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas, Danish West Indies" in *Proceedings of the XXIII Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology*, ed. Samantha A. Rebovich (Antigua: Dockyard Museum, English Harbour, 2011), 278

14 Brichet, "A Postcolonial Dilemma Tale," 354

15 *ibid.*, 353

16 *ibid.*, 358.



FIG. 3 Charlotte Amalie and its historic urban structure. Graphic by Jes Hansen for Master Studio "Cosmopolitan Habitats" 2020

today, 80% of the economy is related to it.<sup>17</sup> While in the beginning tourists were intended to stay on the islands and Denmark and its past were sold as a nostalgic brand, in the 1960s, the WICO expanded the port facilities to attract more and bigger cruise ships, through which tourists would only stay a few hours in Charlotte Amalie. These decisions were mostly taken without the local population, which only selectively had economic benefit from its harbor but was affected strongly by these decisions. Being an unincorporated and organized territory of the United States until 1968, the population was not even allowed to elect their own governor, and the treaties of 1917 granting WICO extensive powers were valid until the 1990s. Since 1993, after the divestiture of WICO, ongoing lawsuits strive to redistribute the company. However, the big share of profits of cruise ship tourism still seems to flow off the island, while the destiny of the local economy depends on the decisions taken abroad [Fig. 3].

## Cosmopolitan peripheries

By focusing on Charlotte Amalie and Flensburg, we examine a global yet fameless postcolonial constellation of two rather small cities, which have not been in the spotlight yet. They have never become big "nodes of a globalization"<sup>18</sup> or hubs of economic power, which has rendered them less significant for the generation of urban theory.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, they are an interesting case study to reveal overlooked relations and dynamics of cities formed by globalization for more than five centuries. The

17 *ibid.*, 349

18 Ananya Roy, "The 21st-Century Metropolis," *Regional Studies*, 43, no. 6 (2009), 821

19 Jennifer Robinson, "Global and World Cities," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, no. 3 (2002)



“rediscovery of places beyond the metropolis”<sup>20</sup> is necessary to diversify the field of urban studies, particularly as “there is still considerable work to be done to produce a cosmopolitan, postcolonial urban studies”.<sup>21</sup> With the comparative work about Flensburg and Charlotte Amalie, one can trace back colonial agency and some “discrepant cosmopolitanism”<sup>22</sup> outside the metropolitan hubs of the former empires and megacities in the previous colonies. At first sight, the two minor cities do not seem to have much in common, however, without each other they would not be what they are today. They owe their cityscape, their historic urban structures and, to a considerable extent, their contemporary image to the relationship that had connected them politically for two centuries and on an economic level even beyond. In “the local [...] the adaptive persistence of imperial structures of power, the always present postcolonial counterflows and the unanticipated trajectories of identity and power”<sup>23</sup> can be grasped in their spatialities until today. Both cities have remained small, Flensburg (56 km<sup>2</sup>) counts 86.000 inhabitants and Charlotte Amalie 10.000 (the entire island of St. Thomas (83 km<sup>2</sup>) 52.000 inhabitants), so there has been little spatial-architectural transformation of the city cores and the material traces are still present. Different to big cargo ports like Hamburg or Rotterdam, which have continued their expansion and the historic structures have been largely reshaped, Flensburg’s historic trading house structure has remained largely untouched, as is the urban fabric of the historic area of Charlotte Amalie. This makes it possible to study particular small-scale spatial structures that were shaped during the heydays of colonial exchange and their effects on the cityscapes on both sides of the ocean. This study focuses on the relation of the two port cities, that is of postcolonial character, especially highlighting spatial-material assets, particularly the harbor area, and their shifting symbolic meaning, appropriation and commodification.

## Postcolonial linkages

Postcolonialism is understood not simply as the period after the official ending of the colonial period, which in the case of Flensburg would be 1864, becoming a Prussian city, and for Charlotte Amalie 1917, being sold to the USA, but also regarding its aftereffects and continuing agencies. This affects both cities, particularly as the colonial era has strongly influenced what they are today and needs to be analyzed comprehensively.<sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> This has not yet been done sufficiently. To analyze these continuing

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20 Schröder, “Open Habitat,” 13

21 Robinson, “Global and World Cities,” 533

22 *ibid.*, 532

23 Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, 9

24 Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*

25 Anthony King, “Postcolonial Cities, Postcolonial Critiques,” in *Negotiating Urban Conflicts. Interaction, Space and Control* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2006).

systems of postcolonialism, King proposes “an essentially comparative, cross-cultural, and cross-temporal perspective”<sup>26</sup>, focusing on questions of culture, heritage and representation in a comprehensive analysis, comprising a global view. Yeoh formulates clearly: “Not only are the ‘colonial city’ and the ‘imperial city’ umbilically connected in terms of economic linkages as well as cultural hybridization, but their ‘post-equivalents’ cannot be disentangled one from the other and need to be analysed within a single ‘postcolonial’ framework of intertwining histories and relations”.<sup>27</sup> The often subconscious presence of the “other” in both cities, the agency of past times and the shifting interpretations of both create third spaces which, according to Bhabha, are not of one culture or the other but an entirely new concept:<sup>28</sup> “cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation”<sup>29</sup> which also include spaces and spatial attributions as well as the rehistoricization, appropriation and translation of their signs.

In the context of the postcolonial city, a particular focus should be put on architecture and spatial environments, their shifts in meaning and appropriation, both in the colonies and the corresponding cities in Europe.<sup>30</sup> In the still rare field of postcolonialism being applied to the built environment—not only in the former colonies but also in the “heart of the empire”—Jacobs provides a body of theory throughout her work “Edge of Empire”. She does not try to construct a “a strict model of cause and effect” though, but “rather, the basis of a loosely comparative project”.<sup>31</sup> Applying this comparative view on the postcolonial spaces, both in the heart and at the edge of the empire, Jacobs shows “how the imperial project is both global in scale but also messy in its local effects”.<sup>32</sup>

Given that ports are the key sites for joining and connecting the multi-scalar linkages of goods, people, places and cultures, they are per se cosmopolitan places and provide even small cities with a gate to global dynamics. They are platforms of exchange where new situations and constellations constantly emerge, which coins them as significant and stimulating parts of their cities’ culture. This holds true for both analyzed ports, as they play a decisive role as global connectors for the two cities, even though in uneven ways. The cities were strongly shaped by their harbors, the resulting global linkages and the flow of goods, people and ideas throughout several centuries. Today the resulting historic material assets of these periods are important resources for generating heritage that is also commodified for touristic purposes. This local heritage is based on

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26 Anthony King, *Postcolonial Cities* (Elsevier Inc, 2009), 5

27 Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “Postcolonial Cities,” *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no 3 (2001), 457

28 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994).

29 *ibid.*

30 King, “Postcolonial Cities, Postcolonial Critiques,” 21

31 Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, 5.

32 *ibid.*, 5.

global exchange in both cases and one can consider these conjunctions as spatio-temporal relations between the two cities, a worldwide network and a dialog of different places and periods.

## Ports and the cities

The harbors of Flensburg and Charlotte Amalie were erected or expanded due to their direct connection through the transatlantic trade from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on and have since then marked the cityscape and self-understanding of the cities. Both have the same cultural and intellectual origin and a shared background of design ideas, and both are central today for contemporary tourism, however, in different ways. For Flensburg, the colonial conquest of the Danish crown in the Caribbean and the following trade monopoly with the Danish West Indies meant an acceleration of the city's prosperity based on multi-scalar trade. The harbor, trading and processing facilities expanded and broadened the number and profit of the trading houses with benefits for the entire city. The harbor of Charlotte Amalie ever since, has been the *raison d'être* of the city and reflects the changing needs of the time, which have always been mostly of long-distance global connections. It has served as a free port, as a transatlantic stopover to recharge resources, as a reception point for slaves from Africa, as a strategic outpost in the North Atlantic for European or US American nations and companies, and as a gateway for international tourists, but it has never achieved to diversify the economy of its hinterland. This is typical for the region, as today, most of the ports in the Caribbean are globally leading in the cruise ship business while being almost irrelevant for container shipping.

Flensburg's harbors are assigned for either current trading or historic-touristic purposes. They are accordingly organized and administered by the city council and the merchants and their respective guilds. The "Flensburger Hafen GmbH" administers the commercially used East Harbor, while the "Historische Hafen Flensburg eGmbH" operates the historic West Harbor. Particular architectural structures, like the trading houses with productive courtyards, appeared and marked the urban space substantially up to the current day. However, Flensburg has never been depending entirely on the intercontinental exchange and had quickly adopted a more diversified economy, too, by further processing the raw material of sugar cane and molasse. The rhizomes of trading on several scales and diverse productions helped Flensburg to develop a sustainable base to cope with the end of the sugar trade and the loss of the linkages to Charlotte Amalie and the Danish West Indies. Today the handling of cargo is not essential anymore for the harbor. It has become a central attraction for the city's tourism though and in that way proves to be still vital today.

The promising constellation of being a European outpost as a trading port and the sugar cane business had attracted several Europeans to settle in



Charlotte Amalie during colonial time. Although being a minority of the population, this community has decisively formed the cityscape of the town and the social contrasts of masters and servants can be retraced in the spatial-architectural segregation of the classes. Existing housing blocks, as well as archaeological studies showcase an upper-class lifestyle during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century with several servants and differentiated spatial transition and accessibility according to gender, race and social position, still resembling colonial configurations.<sup>33</sup> Armstrong, Williamson, Armstrong emphasize the many gates of the analyzed residential complex<sup>34</sup> that manifest the exclusion, segregation, and privileges of the colonial system<sup>35</sup> but also point to the nowadays popular gated communities in many postcolonial cities.

## Interpretation and appropriation

The uncritical prerogative of interpretation and usage of the historic architecture, including the history of the slave and sugar cane trading harbor, to touristic infrastructure, was likewise realized from abroad. This has been hindering a discussion about interpretation and appropriation of these sites and places by the local community who likely represent polyvalent relations and interpretations towards the port as their place of work and identity, and as many of them have their backgrounds based on voluntary and forced migration from several continents throughout the centuries. The simplified historicization as a Danish oversee nostalgia or a disneyfication of its pirate past as a background to sell souvenirs to one-day cruise ship tourists has been an obstacle to enter a public discourse about the island's cosmopolitan self-understanding. After the shift from being a Danish colony to becoming a slightly more self-governed appendix of the US, a major part of the population had not been given the opportunity to challenge the colonial power relations. The appropriation of the architectural symbols representing the hierarchy of the colonial past, like the governor's residence, the harbor and further representative buildings were directly turned private to be kept under the same control. So "the persistent social and spatial maldistributions of resources [...] among the population in some postcolonial cities"<sup>36</sup> is not only ensuring the economic continuity of the colonial system, but it also implies the prerogative of interpretation from the same external view of the former colonizer.

The profit that is generated by owning and administrating important parts of the harbor in Charlotte Amalie until almost 80 years after the end of the colonial period by a Danish company represents another postcolonial

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33 Douglas V. Armstrong, Christian Williamson and Alan D. Armstrong, "Networked Interaction," in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity*, ed. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin. (New York: Springer, 2013)

34 *ibid.*

35 King, "Postcolonial Cities, Postcolonial Critiques," 21

36 *ibid.* 18

construction of “inherent structures of power, inherited from the colonial regime and institutionalized in the [...] practices of city and state bureaucracies”.<sup>37</sup> Ethical, social, and spatial segregation in a native and a European part are essential characteristics of a colonial city, as is its unidirectional, exploitive economic system run by oversea profiteers that withdraw whenever the business goes down.<sup>38 39</sup> Even after political independence, an important share of the island’s economic activity had remained spatially and functionally separated from the city of Charlotte Amalie in the oversea hands of a Danish company. The colonial, exploitive attitude can be seen by the ruthless expansion and privatization of former public land in the 1960s, the decades of judicial trials that followed after officially handing over the harbor in 1993 and in the lacking interest in developing a more diversified and sustainable economic system on the island.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, this proves the continuing agency of the colonial system and, on the other hand, illustrates the different academic views and reputations that exist on the two cities. While Flensburg as a German city is analyzed in many ways under different angles, the bibliography of Charlotte Amalie is mostly narrowed down to its past as a Danish colony or its current situation as a tourist destination.

Charlotte Amalie and Flensburg make use of their individual colonial history in a process of reframing the past for the tourism industry, which both cities’ economies rely on today. Flensburg branded itself as a Rum-City and tells, as part of this marketing scheme, its colonial history as a triumphant and adventurous story of seaman’s, riches and the tropical. This reveals the city’s self-perception of its postcolonial understanding. The tourist relives the glorious historical chapter of Flensburg’s economic rise based on the colonial land seizure and colonial exploitation in the West Indies. The inhuman logic of the colonial reality is talked down in an anecdotal narrative while employing “silences” to frame the past. The Haitian anthropologist Trouillot states: “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct silences will vary accordingly”<sup>41</sup>. These “silences” and the act of “silencing the past” are also present in the telling and reproduction of Flensburg’s and Charlotte Amalie’s postcolonial past and present. In a direct sense, we find the tendencies in the reframing of the past where “history is a story of power, a story about who won”<sup>42</sup>. More indirectly, we find it in the spaces and spatial configurations of the cities acting as agents and actors of their own in the production of history and the historical narrative. Charlotte Amalie—in the more difficult position of being

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37 King, *Postcolonial Cities*, 4

38 *ibid.*, 1

39 Bricet, “A Postcolonial Dilemma Tale,” 351-52

40 *ibid.*, 356

41 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 27

42 *ibid.*, 5



FIG. 4 Rote Straße Flensburg. Image by Sönke Rahn, licensed under CC 3.0

the formerly colonized city—cleanses its history from the horrors and suffering of the slave labor and reinterprets itself as a place of the exotic for the cruise ship tourists flooding the island on their shore excursions, where the historic city becomes a superficial backdrop to the short-lived visits. The visitors are implicitly invited to identify themselves with the position of the European colonizer, enjoying the pleasures of a fully serviced “colonial lifestyle” of the superior class. Both phenomena, which are based on the stereotyping of the past, can be adequately decrypted and understood through Said’s theory of Orientalism which is concerned with the homogenization and stereotypical depiction of the Orient by the colonizers.<sup>43</sup> While Orientalism, according to Said, is foremost intended for the analysis of Middle Eastern and North African lands and societies ruled

43 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, New York: Routledge, 1978), 2 ff





FIG. 5 Riise Mall Charlotte Amalie. Image by Martin Lie, licensed under CC 3.0

and represented by Britain and France, scholars have since proven that the theory is applicable to the representation of the Caribbean, where a similar unequal dichotomy to Orientalism is better described as tropicalisation.<sup>44</sup> [Figs. 4-5]

In both given examples, a form of tropicalisation is employed to create an historic narrative for tourists to consume the colonial past in a simplified and cleansed nostalgic reproduction. If we break down these narratives, we expose a binary division of the occident and the tropical, where the occident stands for superiority and strength and the tropical for exotic “otherness”. Flensburg focuses on its representation as the Rum-City, identifying itself over the main product of its colonial trade and a nostalgic recollection of the heyday of transatlantic trade with the Caribbean. In the present reality of the city, we do not find correlations to this self-depiction, as rum has become a souvenir, with only two rum producers left in the city and the relations with the tropic having ceased over 150 years ago. In that way, the multi-layered reality of postcolonial Flensburg has been reduced to a self-inflicted stereotypical and romanticized representation of its history of seafaring and its relationship with the Danish West Indies. This also extends into the built environment of the city, which in its scenic quality represents the nostalgic recollection of the 18th century and provides a backdrop to the narrative of the Rum-City. A spatial example in the city today are the Kaufmannshöfe, which are a characteristic urban typology of the harbor front in Flensburg. These elongated courtyards, surrounded by former warehouses and with a merchant’s residency towards the main street and a gatehouse towards the harbor front, are still present in the city of today. While they have long lost their original use

44 Krista A. Thomson, *An Eye for the Tropics*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

and have been forgotten for many decades after the end of the colonial trade, since the 1980s, some of them have been restored and repurposed for the city's tourism. Through this, these former working yards are now flanked with restaurants, bars and small shops, transformed into leisure infrastructure for tourism, and represent a very different reality. In Said's tradition of the contrapuntal reading, it is becoming evident that these very characteristic and atmospheric spaces in the city can be seen as interlinked with the colonial exploitation of the West Indies.<sup>45</sup> Even though there is no mention of the history of these spaces found in them today, their existence is dependent on the colonial experience. Charlotte-Amalie, on the other hand, has a very different position in reproducing its history. At first, Charlotte Amalie has been the colonized city and through that, it is not able to separate itself from the past or be as selective in its retelling as Flensburg, the colonizer's city was. By the definition of colonialization, that people from the outside decide what the colony's resource is, one can assume that tourism in the way it is executed in Charlotte Amalie is a prolongation of the colonial logic, a legacy and still valid agency of being a colony.<sup>46</sup> The exclusion of an important share of the population in commemorating their experience as "heritage" and reducing the legacy to the story of a few that have been and are still the most powerful the prevalent interpretation of the past is reproducing colonial hegemonies.<sup>47</sup> This happens in the field of significance but also by selling the heritage as tourism, again, in the island's most important economic sector. In its competitive role as an American cruise ship destination, the city employs its past and its spatial postcolonial reality to appeal to the city's audience through the agents of tropicalisation. The repurposed colonial architecture in the city center is now the attractor for tourists in the city and much like Flensburg's rum and other signifiers of the past are symbolizing the tropicalisation of the place in the present. The city, which was founded for the sole purpose of colonial trade by the Danish crown, is spatially characterized by its warehouses and courtyard houses directly adjacent to the harbor front. Cleansed from the slave labor and the former uses, many of the warehouses have become souvenir shops for cruise ship tourists over the last decades. In that way, the architecture becomes a tropicalized backdrop for the western-touristic gaze, by eliminating the complexity of the multi-scalar and multi temporal postcolonial reality.<sup>48</sup> Through their reproduction of the tropical in their own way, both cities show that the imaginative machinery of colonialism does not disappear at the point of economic and physical separation. The stereotypical assumptions of the tropical are still renewed in the way the societies understand their postcolonial reality as a material for the present [Fig. 6].

45 Brichet, "A Postcolonial Dilemma Tale," 351-52

46 *ibid.*, 351-52

47 Denis Byrne, "Heritage as Social Action," in *Heritage Reader*, ed. Graham Fairclough et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008)

48 Larsen, Jonas and Urry, John, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (New York: Sage Publications, 2011).



FIG. 6 Blended Ports: Flensburg and Charlotte Amalie related. Graphic by Jes Hansen for Master Studio "Cosmopolitan Habitats" 2020

## Outlook

The multifaceted relations and influences between the cities described, only reflect fragments of a dense network of globalization. Many encounters and continuously emerging cultures have influenced the sites. Understanding the "reach and power of networked analysis using the example of port cities, aiming to showcase a new approach [...] for an interconnected analysis of built and urban form"<sup>49</sup> prepares the ground for including the long-distance flow of ideas and global connections in urban research. Martiniquan philosopher Glissant describes the unpredictable nature of "creolisation" in the Caribbean that is based on the intertwining of cultures, places and people with all its inadvertent and unforeseen constellations as the opposite to a planned mixing and the alleged intended

49 Carola Hein, *Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 244

colonialization projects of segregation and exploitation.<sup>50</sup> Creolisation is built on “mutual respect of heterogeneous elements, that are set in relation, which means that in exchange and mixing the being [...] is not lowered or despised”<sup>51</sup>. By referring to chaos theory, Glissant proposes an archipelagic thinking, an inductive way of relational reasoning based on poetry and the imaginary, to analyze the world and its relationships. However, the unbalanced power relations in these linkages need to be considered and postcolonial theories help to integrate these interactions. This understanding formed in the Caribbean opens up a new view on how to create non-hierarchical relations based on cultural interactions and is a promising framework for pursuing and complementing Flensburg’s and Charlotte Amalie’s relations as well as understanding port cities in general.

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50 Édouard Glissant, *Kultur und Identität*, (Heidelberg: Das Wunderhorn, 2005).

51 *ibid.*, 14. (Translation by author)



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