

The square, the monument and the re-configurative power of art in postmigrant public spaces

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In these times, we see old monuments fall and new monuments being created, contested and sometimes embraced by local communities. News of such battles has reached far beyond art circles and reverberated in public debates across the world.¹ As W. J. T. Mitchell has pointed out, it is not uncommon that such struggles, and the public works of art themselves, involve some kind of violence and destruction, or their symbolic counterpart, iconoclasm, and the rejection or destruction of the symbolic objects themselves, including public icons and other forms of visual representation (1990: 883-884, 888-889). Oftentimes, such destructive struggles do not target monuments in their capacity of art but primarily because of their historical significance, i.e. for their power to monumentalise the version of history that reigns supreme.

The contestation of monuments revealed its violent and iconoclastic nature forcefully in 2020, after the Minneapolis police killing of black American civilian George Floyd in May ignited numerous *Black Lives Matter*-led protests across the world, calling for an end to systemic racism and an interrogation of the colonialist legacies of contemporary societies. During the course of these demonstrations, angry protesters tore down controversial public symbols of colonialism, slave trade and racism. These symbols are thought to sanction, and even glorify, the racist violence and prejudice against people of African descent that have persisted since the times of colonialism and colonial slavery.

Most of the attacked monuments were in the United States and ranged from monuments to the Confederate States of America to statues of Christopher Co-

¹ The work presented in this chapter has been undertaken within the framework of two research projects. It draws on an understanding of “the postmigrant condition” and postmigrant approaches to art and culture developed in the collaborative project “Art, Culture and Politics in the ‘Postmigrant Condition’”, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark, grant DFF–4180-00341 (2016-18), and it also presents some initial thoughts on the possible roles of contemporary visual art in postmigrant public spaces. These thoughts will be further developed in the project “Togetherness in Difference: Reimagining identities, communities and histories through art”, supported by the Novo Nordisk Foundation grant NNF19OC0053992 (2019-23).

lumbus – a symbol of the genocide of Native American people. Notably, similar and concurrent acts of destruction took place in countries such as: South Africa (in Cape Town, a bust of the mining magnate and politician Cecil John Rhodes was decapitated, cp. Patrick 2020); Belgium (statues of King Leopold II who brutally colonised Congo were vandalised in Brussels and Ghent, cp. Pronczuk and Zaveri 2020); Greenland and Denmark (statues of the colonial missionary Hans Egede were “recoded” using blood-red paint and decolonising slogans, cp. Bergløv and Herskind 2020); and Germany (red paint and slogans on memorials to the Chancellor of the German Empire Otto von Bismarck in Hamburg and Berlin, cp. Doerly 2020, Koldehoff 2020 and Anonymous 2020).

Of special significance is the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in the British city of Bristol. The statue was toppled by protesters on June 7 and dumped in the harbour. After the event, Black Lives Matter activist Jen Reid climbed onto the empty plinth and stood there with her clenched fist raised defiantly above her head as a “living sculpture”. British artist Marc Quinn saw the photo her husband had snapped and posted on his Instagram account. He asked Jen Reid to collaborate on a resin-and-steel sculpture based on the photo and a 3D scan of her body. A little more than month later, on July 15, a team directed by Quinn mounted the sculpture of Reid on the empty plinth in the early morning hours. Although this artistic and political intervention stayed in place for only twenty-four hours before it was removed by the authorities, the sculpture *A Surge of Power (Jen Reid)* gave the public an opportunity to reimagine (British) history by offering a proposal for what might replace Bristol’s old symbol of enslavement, racism and exploitation.²

The acts of iconoclast decommemoration listed here derive from historical precedents. The most important one is probably the “Rhodes Must Fall” campaign in 2015, when thousands of student protestors at the University of Cape Town demanded that a sculpture of Cecil John Rhodes be removed from the campus. The removal of this imposing symbol of colonialism and apartheid was closely linked to more extensive demands for structural change to end the racism still prevailing at the university (Schmahmann 2016). The history of battles over historical monuments in public space is too long to be recounted here.³ However, I would like to mention one more example as an entry point to the topic of this chapter: the re-configurative power of *contemporary* art in public space. In other words, instead of examining antiracist and postcolonial struggles over the monuments of the past, this chapter applies a postmigrant perspective to provide some answers

2 Because Marc Quinn is a white artist, the sculpture and his collaboration with Reid has been criticised by artist Thomas J. Price for being an “opportunistic stunt”, while others have commended Quinn on his gesture of “allyship”, see Bakare 2020 and Bland 2020 for key arguments of this debate.

3 For an authoritative in-depth study, cp. Gamboni 1997.

to the crucial questions of what kinds of art should replace the dismantled monuments, and what kind of blueprints for the future they may afford.

Seen from a postmigrant perspective, a particularly interesting case is the Nigerian-born American artist Olu Oguibe's monument for strangers and refugees, *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument*. On this concrete obelisk, a verse from the Book of Matthew (25:35) reads "I was a stranger and you took me in" in German, English, Arabic and Turkish – the four most commonly spoken languages in the city of Kassel, where the monument was installed at the city's central square, Königsplatz. The work was commissioned for the Documenta 14 exhibition, held in Kassel and Athens in 2017. When the monument was inaugurated in June 2017, Oguibe was awarded the prestigious Arnold Bode Prize for what was perceived by many to be both a call to action and a homage to German hospitality towards refugees. In interviews given that year, Oguibe explained that he and his assisting team used the obelisk – a "timeless" form originating in and spreading from Africa – to project the "universal, timeless principles" of hospitality and charity, together with the principle of gratitude towards hosts as charitable agents who are also deserving of respect. Intending the monument to be a homage to both refugees and the host community, Oguibe thus emphasised that welcoming strangers and refugees involves the development of a *reciprocal* relationship between guest and host, based on an interplay between hospitality towards and gratitude from strangers (2017a: 0:40-2:00 min.).

Considering the polarised and hostile debate concerning refugees and asylum seekers in the wake of the European refugee situation in 2015, and the fact that the exaggerated media attention has aggravated popular anxieties about immigration, it is significant that Oguibe combines classical humanism's compassion with and ethical responsibility for our neighbours with an American postcolonial perspective on anxiety about strangers to explain why pro-refugee and anti-refugee sentiment, or hospitality and suspicion, are both intrinsic to the encounter with strangers. In Oguibe's view, "host anxiety" about newcomers is a natural and legitimate reaction. It is an awareness of the fact that "charity is an act of faith", and that even though newcomers bring new skills and culture that enrich the community, "you take a risk when you take people in" (ibid.: 9:30-10:00 min.). Consequently, host anxiety cannot be reduced to xenophobia pure and simple. Notably, Oguibe explains this point without making any concessions to anti-immigration sentiment, as he refers to the pertinent historical example of immigration to the Americas: European colonisers and settlers were strangers who brought a lot of pain, and not only good things. And they did not bring peace. Oguibe's own pro-refugee position becomes clear, however, when he repeatedly declares that the principles of hospitality and gratitude are a "natural law" that he himself

learned about in early childhood, in the late 1960s, when his family was forcibly displaced as a consequence of the Nigerian-Biafran War (ibid.).⁴

Oguibe reappropriated the monumental form of the obelisk, with its embedded history of colonialism and plunder, thereby summoning “the ghosts of the sedimented conflicts” (Sternfeld 2019: 60). Yet this is not a monument to colonial histories of violence. Colonial ghosts are rather the foil against which the monument measures “the present plights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers” (McLaughlin 2019: unpagged). The declarative mode of the inscription “I was a stranger ...”, and the fact that the words are spoken in the first person, invites the viewer to engage in a performative identification that relates to the voice and body of the refugee. As McLaughlin puts it, “the monument *speaks as* the refugee in the present” (2019: unpagged).

As the city council of Kassel and the artist failed to reach an agreement on the relocation of the work to another square, the monument was dismantled on October 3, 2018. The timing of the removal to coincide with Germany’s national holiday to commemorate reunification was an insensitive gesture and was seen by some critics as the city’s bowing to anti-immigration pressure from right-wing politicians. Earlier on, Thomas Materner, member of the city council for the right-wing-to-far-right political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), had described the obelisk as “ideologically polarizing, disfigured art” – an uncanny evocation of the Nazi term ‘degenerate art’ (Batycka 2018; McLaughlin 2019; Sternfeld 2019: 52). The dismantling of the sculpture was openly celebrated by the Kassel City branch of AfD (Hickley 2018): on October 3, AfD Kassel-Stadt announced on Facebook:

The champagne corks are popping! The dismantling of the obelisk is a complete success of AfD Kassel and its symbolic significance cannot be overestimated! The symbol of the welcoming culture, in other words the signal of uninhibited entry of illegal, outlandish [*kulturfremder*] migrants into Germany, had to be removed from the center of the city and represents the coming turn in migration politics.⁵

4 McLaughlin links the monument in Kassel to the work that Oguibe exhibited in the Athens iteration of Documenta 14: *Biafra Time Capsule* (2017) comprised books, documents, archival objects and mixed media. Technically speaking, it was not a monument, but it fulfilled the function of a memorial, as it commemorated the experience of child refugees in the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War of 1968-70 and generated “a semi-sacred space consisting of the artist’s personal library materials of childhood memories” (McLaughlin 2019: unpagged). The human disaster of Biafra in the late 1960s thus mirrored the human tragedy of refugees and migrants drowning in huge numbers as they tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea to escape from the many troubled places in the Middle East and Africa.

5 “Die Sektkorken Knallen! Der Abbau des Obelisk ist ein voller Erfolg der AfD Kassel und kann in seiner symbolischen Bedeutung kaum überschätzt werden! Das Symbol der Willkommenskultur, anders gesagt das Signal für eine ungezügelter Einreise illegaler kulturfremder Migranten nach

Shortly after the removal of the obelisk, however, the city and the artist fortunately reached an agreement to relocate the sculpture at the pedestrian shopping street, Treppenstraße, also in the city centre (Neuendorf 2018; Anonymous 2018). As a result, the sculpture returned to its new, permanent location in Kassel on April 18, 2019 (Greenberger 2019; Stolzenhain 2019).

As these examples demonstrate, works of art in public spaces, and the controversies they generate, are expressions of the cultural and historical circumstances from which the works emerge. For this reason, they often provide communities and nations with important collective points of orientation and identification, or with points of counter-identification. In short, people struggle over art in public space because it matters.

This chapter focuses on how art in the public spaces of a society transformed by (im)migration can shape and is, in turn, shaped by the disagreements and negotiations resulting from the need to accommodate increasing cultural diversity and new claims for participation, visibility and the recognition of difference. It explores how artists have made interventions into what I designate as *postmigrant public spaces* and understand to be plural and sometimes tensional, or even conflictual, domains of human encounter impacted by former and ongoing (im)migration, and by new and old forms of nationalism, as suggested by the example from Kassel.

I examine two art projects in Copenhagen. The first project is the award-winning public park *Superkilen* (The Super Wedge) that opened in the multicultural district of Nørrebro in 2012. This extensive recreational area, wedged into one of the city's most ethnically diverse and socially challenged neighbourhoods, was designed by the Danish artist group Superflex, in collaboration with architects from the Copenhagen-based studio Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), and Topotek 1, a Berlin-based group of landscape architects. It is composed of three visually distinct areas, *Den Grønne Park* (The Green Park), *Det Sorte Marked* (The Black Market), and finally *Den Røde Plads* (The Red Square), on which I will focus below. The second project is Jeannette Ehlers' and La Vaughn Belle's collaboration on the sculpture *I Am Queen Mary*, which drew extraordinary national and international media attention when it was inaugurated in 2018. Installed in the Port of Copenhagen, in front of the West Indian Warehouse – an example of architectural heritage from colonial times – it was the first monument in the country to critically commemorate Danish colonialism and complicity in the transatlantic slave trade.⁶

Deutschland, mußte aus der Mitte der Stadt weichen und steht für die kommende Wende in der Migrationspolitik." (AfD Kassel-Stadt 2018). All quotations in German and Danish have been translated by the author.

6 Regarding the site-specific placement of the memorial, cp. Petersen 2018.

I will use these two outstanding projects to shed some light on what the re-configurative power of art can accomplish in postmigrant public spaces. These works may provide us with some much-needed answers to the question of the contested, yet crucial role of public art in democratic societies: How can works of art form a possible loophole of escape from dominant discourses by openly challenging, or subtly circumventing, traditional understandings of national heritage and identity that are no longer in keeping with the times, thereby helping us to imagine national and urban communities otherwise? After considering the two art projects, I will revert to this general question of art's role in shaping postmigrant public spaces.

The square and the monument

Superkilen is an example of how an urban renewal project can mediate between social groups in a heterogeneous area, since the people living in the immediate vicinity of the park have affiliations with more than 50 different nationalities. The involvement of local citizens is a staple of urban renewal projects in Denmark. In this project, it assumed the form of controlled participation whereby the artists and architects remained the ultimate curators of the project (Jespersen 2017: 122).

Led by Superflex, the *Superkilen* project team decided to involve citizens as directly as possible. Instead of using the standard equipment for parks and public spaces in Copenhagen, local people of different migrant and non-migrant backgrounds were asked to nominate specific city objects, such as benches, bins, trees, playgrounds, manhole covers and signage from other countries. The project group sought to engage as many people as possible in proposing objects, through posters in libraries, a call on the Internet and a catalogue of objects that could inspire local residents to think about specific objects, instead of mere functions (such as playgrounds, benches, and more light and green areas).

Even though the project team included proposals and wishes that were not “fully congruent with its own”, the team set the framework and made the final selection, so that *Superkilen* should be seen as a “curated project based on citizens' involvement but not truly collaborative in all its single parts” (Steiner 2013a: 19). The selected objects were either purchased or reproduced in an adapted 1:1 version, depending on whether they met the Danish safety requirements and were suitable for the Danish climate. In total, there are more than 100 different objects from more than 50 different countries (BIG: 23). Interestingly, in five cases, Superflex adopted a far more personally engaging and experimental mode of “extreme” participation, by involving five groups of local residents, mostly elderly and younger people, who were chosen precisely because they represented segments of the local community who would not attend the public meetings on the urban renew-

al project. Together with one of the three artists from Superflex (Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Nielsen and Bjørnstjerne Christiansen), the groups travelled to Palestine, Spain, Thailand, Texas and Jamaica to acquire five specific objects to be installed throughout the area (Christiansen et al. 2013: 56).

Over time, local people may develop affective attachments to some of the objects. These attachments may operate on several levels. They may be highly individualised, but when shared, they may also build a spirit of community and a sense of belonging to a real or imagined micro-community. Residents may identify with 'their' object because they have chosen it; the object may trigger memories of a family's country of origin, places visited on holiday, or countries of temporary residence, i.e. past or temporary homes. The objects can thus function as a form of everyday memory site, where locals may recall places that they feel attached to. People may also feel attracted to certain objects simply because they are visually fascinating landmarks in their neighbourhood, like the giant Japanese Octopus that is cherished by local children, who use it as a climbing frame. Or an object may become a social meeting point, like the Moroccan fountain where young people gather (Steiner 2013a: 16).

Fig. 12.1: Octopus from Tokyo at Det Sorte Marked [The Black Market], part of the urban area Superkilen [Super Wedge], Nørrebro, Copenhagen.



Superflex, with BIG and Topotek 1, 2012. Photo by Iwan Baan.

As political scientist Michael Hanchard has inferred, individual experiences are part of a collective memory, and the boundaries between individual and collective

memory are fluid: “The actual constitution of memory, the cognitive distillation of objects and experiences in a recollection is in some crucial ways a *social* rather than an entirely individual exercise” (2008: 48, original emphasis). Arguably, the social character of memory is more forcefully evident when mediated through *public* displays, rituals, institutions, monuments and spaces. Hence, *Superkilen* prompts the question of how art in postmigrant public spaces like Nørrebro can help us to reimagine urban communities and generate new collective memories.

Fig. 12.2: *Den Røde Plads* [Red Square], part of the urban area *Superkilen* [Super Wedge], Nørrebro, Copenhagen.



Superflex, with BIG and Topotek 1, 2012. Photo by Torben Eskerod.

Zooming in on *Den Røde Plads*, this area is designed for various types of physical and social activity, such as boxing, basketball, resting on swings or simply passing through the area on foot or bicycle. The selection of urban objects is variegated and contradictory, giving visual and spatial expression to the demographic heterogeneity of the neighbourhood. Overall, the aesthetics of the square could be described as deliberately pursuing a *lack* of aesthetic uniformity (Jespersen 2017: 122). As Martin Rein-Cano of Topotek 1 has explained:

The brief was: ‘Deal with the issue of migration in this neighbourhood. Can you somehow make the situation better?’ So, the original subject was not our idea; migration was the point of departure. We just took it very seriously, almost literally. [...] Particularly in the Nordic countries, there is an amazing desire for harmony,

whereas I think we have to learn to live with certain conflicts that we are not going to solve. And maybe we should not look at all of them as being dangerous; some could even contribute to our wealth and enrich cultures. [...] With *Superkilen* the problems and conflicts are getting visible: they turn into a subject. We have created a place that is, instead of being harmonious, conflictual. Look at the objects: We have objects from Israel next to objects from Muslim countries. There are a lot of conflicts, and they are part of the concept. (Ingels et al. 2013: 70-71)

In an insightful essay on *Superkilen*, curator Barbara Steiner examines what she considers to be the key aspects of the project. Firstly, the project group's exploration of different modes of participation, and their limitations. Secondly, their attempt to make visible that Nørrebro is a conflictual and culturally heterogeneous area with a history of battles over urban space, such as the struggle over the children's playground Byggeren (a pet name derivative of "Building Site") in 1980, and the battle over Ungdomshuset (The Youth House) at Jagtvej 69 (Hergel 2019; Sørensen 2019). The young squatters and other regulars who had claimed the right to use the building as a venue for social and cultural activities were evicted in 2007 when the evangelical free church called Faderhuset (The House of The Father) bought the property and had the building demolished. This conflict with the church and the municipality engendered fierce protests from left-wing groups, together with riots in the streets. The protests were rekindled from time to time, most vigorously in 2011. Seemingly oblivious to the open wound of the local conflict, the American street artist Shephard Fairey decorated a gable end facing the vacant plot with a mural painting of a white dove entitled *Peace*. Fairey's mural started a veritable war of images, as *Peace* was vandalised with graffiti. Fairey eventually agreed to collaborate with former members of the 69 Youth House on redecorating the lower half of the mural with images of riot police and explosions, together with the combative slogan of the protesters: "Nothing forgotten, nothing forgiven" (Brooks/Rushe/Eriksen 2011; Nielsen 2015: 148-150).

Taking this local history into consideration, the artistic and conceptual conundrum that Superflex had to address can be summed up as follows: How can an urban park with an embedded art project 'express' a society or an urban community that is heterogeneous, fragmented and regularly riven by conflicts, yet destined to share a common space? Or to phrase it differently, how to express, or make visible, that the neighbourhood and the part of it that became *Superkilen* constitute what I would describe as a postmigrant public space where different vested interests clash, and where no final reconciliation is possible, but where socio-cultural differences are nevertheless negotiated and intertwined to create a convivial, hybrid urban culture of integration?

As opposed to *Den Røde Plads*, *I Am Queen Mary* was conceived as a monument to commemorate Caribbean anticolonial resistance in the former Danish West In-

dies – now the US Virgin Islands. It was the outcome of a unique collaboration between the Copenhagen-based artist Jeannette Ehlers and the Virgin Islands artist La Vaughn Belle, who is based in St. Croix.⁷

Fig. 12.3: I Am Queen Mary in front of the West Indian Warehouse, Copenhagen Harbour. Jeannette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle, 2018. Polystyrene, coral stones and concrete. Height 7 metres, depth 3.89 metres.



Photo by Anne Ring Petersen. Courtesy of the artists.

7 For more elaborate analyses and discussions of the work, cp. Danbolt/Wilson 2018; Drachmann 2017; Petersen 2018.

Ehlers and Belle are both of Caribbean heritage – or Caribbean and Danish, in Ehlers' case. In what follows, I will briefly explain how the artists used the story of a black woman to rewrite the hegemonic version of Danish national history from a postmigrant and transnational perspective informed by a sense of decolonial solidarity, before I move on to discuss the general question of what roles art can play in postmigrant public spaces.

I Am Queen Mary pays tribute to Mary Thomas, one of the leaders of the Fireburn labour rebellion against the Danish rule in the (then) Danish West Indies. The colony became the US Virgin Islands in 1917, when Denmark divested the islands by selling them off to the USA, without involving the Virgin Islanders in this crucial political decision. The memorial was planned to be a contribution to the 2017 centennial commemoration of the transfer of the Danish West Indies to the USA but was not unveiled until March 2018. In the Caribbean, 'queen' was an honorary title for the women who headed the social life on the plantations, such as Mary Thomas. She was one of four queens who led the 1878 rebellion of plantation workers in Saint Croix, where the harsh conditions had only improved insignificantly since the abolition of slavery in 1848.⁸ The uprising was brutally quelled by the local Danish authorities, and the four women instigators were sent to a women's prison in Copenhagen until 1887, when they were returned to serve the rest of their life sentences in Saint Croix (G. M. Schmidt 2016). Today, they are considered to be key figures in the history of the Virgin Islands (Scherfig/Damkjær 2016).

Ehlers and Belle used a staged self-portrait of Ehlers posing in a peacock chair as a model for the sculpture, in which they literally and metaphorically embodied a heroine of the Caribbean anti-colonial rebellions. The photo derives from the recording of the video-filmed performance *Whip It Good* (2013-) in 2014. In *Whip It Good*, Ehlers critically re-enacted one of the slavery era's savage forms of punishment, flogging, by giving a white canvas a vigorous and callous beating. The photo depicts Ehlers enthroned in a large, wicker peacock chair, wearing the costume for the performance and holding the whip in her raised hands, ready to act. Crucially, Ehlers' self-portrait alludes to a famous photo of the African American activist and co-founder of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton, posing in a similar chair, armed with spear and rifle. By allusion, Ehlers thus identifies herself as an heir to the black revolutionary and civil rights movements.

It should be noted that the monument complexifies the conflation of gendered, racialised and national identifications of the photographic image. For one thing, Queen Mary's insignia, torch and cane bill have been substituted for the suppres-

8 The three other queens were Axeline Elisabeth Salomon (Queen Agnes), Mathilde McBean (Queen Mathilde) and the recently discovered fourth queen, Susanna "Bottom Belly" Abrahamson (Scherfig/Damkjær 2016).

sor's whip, thereby subtly associating the figure of the Caribbean female rebel with the image and spirit of Huey P. Newton as a more recent protagonist of Black rebellion. Moreover, the figure itself has been transformed into an amalgamation of the physical appearance of the two artists. By dint of their different nationalities, they are able to symbolically renegotiate the exploitative colonial relationship between the two unequally positioned countries. They redefine this relationship on contemporary terms as a transnational collaboration that evokes the far-reaching transatlantic and diasporic connections between people of African descent struggling against similar forms of misrecognition and racism.

This symbolic hybrid body was generated by morphing 3D images of the artists to create a model that was subsequently used to produce the three-dimensional sculpture in a process reminiscent of the one that Marc Quinn used for the counter-monument *A Surge of Power (Jen Reid)* (2020) which is congenial with the homage to the power of black female protest in *I Am Queen Mary*. Cut out of large blocks of polystyrene and coated in layers of sealant and black paint to reinforce the surface, the figure of Mary was made to look like a classical bronze sculpture.⁹ Furthermore the artists also transformed and recoded the traditional European plinth by drawing on a local colonial architectural heritage: Coral stones from the Virgin Islands, sourced from Belle's historic properties, were incorporated into the plinth as a tribute to the enslaved who had been sent out at low tide to cut them from the ocean. By incorporating the material product of slave labour and approximating the foundations of the sculpture to those of most colonial-era buildings in the US Virgin Islands, Belle and Ehlers added to the monument a critical reminder that Danish colonial wealth was based on slave labour.

Moving on from the memorial's function as a monumentalisation of postcolonial critique, the questions I would like to pose concerning Ehlers' and Belle's project are: How may it help change the understanding of Danish heritage, history and identity? And how does it resonate with the ideas of the postmigrant condition and postmigrant public space?

As a Copenhagen-based artist, Ehlers grew up in the nascent "postmigrant condition" of the Danish population towards which this public art project is primarily addressed.¹⁰ I propose, *firstly*, that *I Am Queen Mary* should be acknowledged as a

9 See the project website of *I Am Queen Mary*, <https://www.iamqueenmary.com/new-page-2> (accessed October 16, 2019). In March 2019, the artists were granted permission to extend the project in front of the West Indian Warehouse for another year, and in April 2019, the Culture and Leisure Administration of the City of Copenhagen decided to support the artists' wish to have the statue cast in bronze, and to become a permanent part of Copenhagen's public space, by granting them DKK 52,500 for a preliminary investigation, fundraising and public consultation. Cp. <https://www.tv2lorry.dk/artikel/fra-flamingo-til-permanent-sort-kvinde-skal-blive> (accessed October 16, 2019).

10 In our co-authored book, the Danish-based postmigration research group have preferred the term "the postmigrant condition" to the term "postmigrant society" used in German social sci-

contribution to the “migrantisation” of Danish national heritage and official culture, because it aids the recognition that histories of migration are an integral and formative part of the history of the nation. Central to the story that the monument tells, and the way it tells this story, are stories of migration, including the forced voyages of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean, the journeys of Danish colonisers and merchant ships between Denmark and the West Indies, and those of Mary Thomas, La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers between St. Croix and Copenhagen. *Secondly*, I submit that Ehlers and Belle have not used the black body to commemorate the victimhood of enslaved Africans. They have rather used the black body as an emancipatory means to rewrite the dominant narrative of Danish history and create a symbolic space for empowered racialised subjects in Danish society and public consciousness.

Fig. 12.4: *Moder Danmark* [Mother Denmark].

Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann, 1851.

Oil on canvas, 149 x 119 cm. MIN 891.



Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Photo by Ole Haupt.

ences (Foroutan 2016, 2019), because the book gives a certain priority to Danish examples, and it is doubtful whether Danish society as a whole can be described as postmigrant, and whether the politically and sociologically oriented concept of the postmigrant society is apt for framing *cultural* analysis (Schramm/Moslund/Petersen 2019: xi-xii, 7-9, 38, 59-60). Terminological differences notwithstanding, German and Danish scholars share an understanding of postmigration as referring to a conflictual societal predicament, and this common understanding undergirds my examination of art's transformative potential in postmigrant public spaces.

In addition, the sculpture proposes another “face of the nation” (Antonsich 2018): a black, decolonial counter-image to the popular national-romantic female personification of Denmark; a counter-image to, for example, the perhaps most cherished incarnation of this allegorical figure, *Moder Danmark* (Mother Denmark), painted by Polish-born Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann in 1851.

Today, this painting is still deployed by some people to propagate a white nationalist image of the nation, for instance when, in 2000, the anti-immigration, national-conservative Danish People’s Party used it as the front-cover image of the party’s magazine *Dansk Folkeblad*. Inverting the figure of Mother Denmark, the magazine created the illusion that her determined forward stride and visionary gaze were aimed, not at some distant and undefined point on the horizon, but at the title of the party organ, “The Danish People’s Magazine”, with the anti-EU headline “It Concerns Freedom: Vote Danish – Vote No” appearing in bold yellow type below the name (Dansk Folkeparti 2000).

Postmigrant public spaces

Northern European societies are currently struggling to come to terms with globalisation- and migration-induced transformations of society. The conflictual nature of this process is widely recognised by academics engaged in researching “postmigrant societies” and “the postmigrant condition”. Drawing on these conceptual frameworks for analysing contemporary social change, I understand postmigrant public spaces to be contested contact zones. It should be added that I define public spaces broadly, as they comprise both material and symbolic dimensions, as well as various forms of public discourse, dissent and protest in both physical and media spaces.

The influence of Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the “public sphere” (Habermas 1989 [1962]) on theories of and debates concerning ‘art in public space’ can hardly be overestimated. As political theorist Chantal Mouffe has observed, Habermas understood the political public space to be “the place where a rational consensus takes place” among citizens with equal access to this democratic sphere, adding that Habermas has since accepted that such an ideal situation of equity and consensus is impossible, given the constrictions of social life (2007a: 3–4). However, in the discourse on artistic practices and public space, Habermas’s early formulation of the bourgeois model of rational-critical debate, and his ideal of the public sphere as a universally accessible place where a unifying consensus can be reached, have often been adopted as the very definition of public space (Baldini 2019: 10; Nielsen 2015: 50–51; Nilsson 2012: passim; Franzen/König/Plath 2007: 373–374, 431–433). As a result, there has been a widespread tendency to idealise art in public space as a means to generate, if not the actual consensus of a unitary public, then forms that

derive from that ideal, such as ‘social cohesion’, ‘shared values’ and the building of ‘community’ based on everyone’s democratic ‘access’ to interaction with art in a public-sphere environment. As literary scholar Michael Warner has argued in his authoritative book *Publics and Counterpublics*, Habermas’ theory of the public sphere has been the subject of much criticism, “much of it marred by reductive summaries” (2005: 50), but the very extent of the debate reveals the ability of Habermas’ theory to withstand it and lead to a rethinking of the public sphere. In his own revisionist reading, Warner uses Habermas’ theory to reconceptualise “the public”. To that end, he emphasises that Habermas acknowledged the plurality of discourses, voices and social contexts, and that there is, therefore, “no necessary conflict between the public sphere and the idea of multiple publics” (ibid.: 56). In the context of art in public spaces where people encounter art and each other coincidentally, and often as strangers, it is significant that Warner departs from Habermas’ concern with face-to-face argumentative dialogue in his later work on communicative rationality (ibid.: 56), and explicitly states that co-presence is not required to generate a public: “It exists *by virtue of being addressed*” (Warner 2005: 67, original emphasis). Following and at the same time diverging from Habermas, Warner defines a public as follows:

The ideal unity of the public sphere is best understood as an imaginary convergence point that is the backdrop of critical discourse in each of these contexts and publics – an implied but abstract point that is often referred to as ‘the public’ or ‘public opinion’ [...] A ‘public’ in this context is a special kind of virtual social object, enabling a special mode of address. [...] In modern societies, a public is by definition an indefinite audience rather than a social constituency that could be numbered or named. (ibid.: 55-56)

In continuation of Warner, I would like to propose that, in the discourses on art in public spaces, the Habermasian ideal still functions as such an imaginary convergence point and discursive nodal point that puts into place a normative idea of what artists and art projects should accomplish – especially where monuments and other permanently installed artworks are concerned. Importantly, it coexists with another imaginary convergence point and normative idea of ‘radical art’ that is capable of producing critical publics that are defined by their tension with the wider public and/or a dominant culture. Warner provides a helpful working definition of such counterpublics:

Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying [...]. A counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of

opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theatre, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like. [...] participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed. (Ibid.: 56-57)

At this junction, some observations on what bearing Warner's understanding of publics and counterpublics has on the concept of postmigrant public space seem in order. As explained in the introduction, I understand postmigrant public spaces to be plural and sometimes conflictual domains of human encounter impacted by former and ongoing (im)migration, and by new and old forms of nationalism. In their capacity as public spaces, they can accommodate multiple (counter)publics. Yet since these sites of contestation and competition are fraught with social fragmentation, and because they are regulated, like all public spaces, by mechanisms of exclusion that distribute 'access' unequally, postmigrant public spaces tend towards agonistic plurality, rather than gesturing towards the imaginary Habermasian convergence point of ideal unity.

Furthermore, unlike the notion of the nation as a public sphere, the concept of postmigrant public space does not draw imaginary geo-political borders around a 'national' public. Where membership is concerned, the boundaries of postmigrant public spaces are not coterminous with the physical borders of a place, site or territory. This feature links the concept to the idea of "post-publics", as defined by curator and art theorist Simon Sheikh (of which more below). Postmigrant public spaces are permeable and relatively open spaces because the indefinite (counter)publics that emerge within them, do so "*by virtue of being addressed*", as Warner submits (Warner 2005: 67, original emphasis). Put differently, the concept proposed here foregrounds the discursive and material anchor points that postmigrant public spaces have within a nation state, while also taking due account of another defining feature: Their complex and expansive connections with *transnational* publics, flows and spaces of productions beyond the local and the nation state.

As publics – and counterpublics – are not coterminous with postmigrant public spaces, they are better understood to be protean formations of participants that exist, and coexist, within them. As publics come into being by being addressed, they are arguably sensitive to and to some extent determined by the communicative context. In postmigrant public spaces, publics and counterpublics are formed in circumstances of considerable political and social tensions and struggles. "The omnipresence of the discourse on migration" may lead us to believe that these conflicts are only about migration and integration, but in reality they go far deeper into the core conflicts of modern plural democracy and its struggles about recognition, equal access to participation and an equal share of the assets

of society, to all of which immigrants and their descendants are now also laying claim (Foroutan 2019: 14).

These postmigrant conditions are likely to shape (counter)publics, and their content and form, in ways that may be both explicit and implicit. As these publics emerge from a climate of fierce debate involving strong feelings, clashes between opposing interests and protracted controversies about the smallest things connected with the vexed issues of immigration, integration and recognition,¹¹ the publics tend to contest each other's assumptions and protocols. Postmigrant public spaces are thus filled with frictions and negotiations, not only between any one counterpublic and a larger public (or 'the public'), as Warner suggests, but also internally among a plurality of sub- and counterpublics.¹² This tensional coexistence infuses postmigrant public spaces with a particular dynamic in which conflict mingles with conviviality. As explained below, the concept of postmigrant public space proposed here is theoretically underpinned by Mouffe's understanding of democratic public spaces as being inherently conflictual. The concept also resonates with Sheikh's diagnosis of the public sphere in the 21st century as being fragmented and almost impossible to locate in specific places; in other words, worlds apart from Habermas' ideal of a unitary public sphere. Referencing Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge's notion of a "proletarian" public sphere defined in opposition to Habermas's notion of the normative "bourgeois" public sphere, Sheikh identifies a change in how public spaces are commonly understood:

[T]oday, we would not describe public spaces only in dialectics of class struggle, but rather as a multiplicity of struggles, among them struggles for recognition, partly in shape of access to the public space, as well as the struggle for the right to struggle itself, for dissent. (2007: 5)

Sheikh crystallises his analysis of this transformation into the idea that, in the 21st century, the idea of a unitary public sphere, in particular the notion of "the-public-as-nation" (ibid.: 5-6), has been replaced by new kinds of public formations: post-publics. The concept of postmigrant public space can be understood as a parallel to Sheikh's concept in the sense that, in both cases, the prefix "post" signals that they are critical terms that do not represent a departure from, but rather a

11 For instance, the debates on the removal of the n-word from children's books, and on whether or not pork should be served in nursery schools, to mention two recent Danish examples.

12 Warner distinguishes between *counterpublics* that hinge on a self-perception as minorities with a subordinate status, and *sub-publics* that are organised as parallel discursive arenas centering on a particular content or thematic discussion. Sub-publics would thus include, for example, sub-cultures and youth cultures. The oppositional character of counterpublics, on the other hand, is a function of form, argues Warner, as counterpublics are structured by alternative protocols and "mark themselves off against a dominant cultural horizon" (Warner 2005: 119).

critical examination of, their basic modalities: The categories of the public and its adjacent counterpublics, and the categories of the public sphere and public space.¹³ The concept of postmigrant public space is thus a critical term that can help us transform the notion of the postmigrant condition into an analytical mode through which we can, in Sheikh's words, "understand our actuality in order to act in it, obviously, but also in order to reconfigure it, to imagine it anew" (ibid.: 7).

Lastly, but importantly, my conceptualisation of art's role in postmigrant public space as a plural sphere of multiple publics is also indebted to Warner's adamant insistence that the very idea of a public is a motivating and generative factor:

[I]t seems that in order to address a public, one must forget or ignore the fictional nature of the entity one addresses. The idea of a public is motivating, not simply instrumental. It is constitutive of a social imaginary. (2005: 12)

I do, however, deviate from Warner with respect to his general claim that a counterpublic always at some level maintains "an awareness of its subordinate status" in relation to a dominant one (ibid.: 56) – be it "the public", "the majority" or "the establishment". This may hold true of the queer and feminist counterpublics that are his primary examples, but I would argue that one of the characteristics of postmigrant public spaces is that the interaction between the different (counter) publics within them is contingent upon the recognition of differences and plurality, rather than relations of subordination.

Turning now to Chantal Mouffe's theory of conflict as integral to democratic politics, I would like to suggest that the two projects under discussion here could be characterised as "agonistic" interventions into urban spaces, because they seek to instigate a change of perception and collective identification by renegotiating, rather than simply rejecting, historical perceptions of community and history that still hold sway over collective imagination.

Mouffe's point of departure is German jurist Carl Schmitt's idea that a defining feature of politics is the identification of a friend and an enemy, and the ensuing conflict between them. She contends, however, that conflicts need not involve the identification of an enemy whom one wants to destroy, and that democratic politics are a conflict between adversaries who may disagree, but who ultimately respect each other's right to exist. Mouffe calls this kind of respectful conflict "agonistic pluralism", in contrast to both the antagonism of Schmitt's struggle against an enemy and the liberal ideas of the possibility of a universal consensus based on reason (2007a: 2).¹⁴

13 Cp. Petersen/Schramm/Wiegand 2019a: 52-56.

14 For a critical in-depth analysis of Mouffe's theory of democracy and concept of agonism, cp. Papastergiadis 2017.

Mouffe's occasional essays on art and politics have ensured that her distinction between antagonism and agonism has found its way into critical analyses of art in public space (Nielsen 2015; Mouffe 2007b). Mouffe defines public space as a "battleground" in which "different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation". Not only does she emphasise that there is "no underlying principle of unity", she also proposes that the agonistic approach perceives public space to be "always plural", as it acknowledges that there is a diversity of voices and spaces, presenting different forms of articulation. The "agonistic confrontation" may thus take place on "a multiplicity of discursive surfaces" (2007b: 3). It is perfectly in line with this understanding of public space that Mouffe defines "critical art" as an art that "foment dissensus", i.e. art is a troublemaker that "makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate" (2007a: 5).

Recurring to the two art projects in Copenhagen, I ask: Are they critical troublemakers? If so, what is postmigrant about the way they "foment dissensus"? I raise this question because it could be argued that any artistic intervention into any public space may potentially produce agonistic, or even antagonistic conflicts, because art in public space often provokes controversy.

Think of the classical case of Richard Serra's minimalist *Tilted Arc*, installed in Federal Plaza in Manhattan from 1981 to 1989. Critics found this almost 37-meters long and 3½-meters high plate of rust-covered COR-TEN steel ugly and oppressive. They perceived it as a violation of public space, because it formed a physical barrier that cut across the square, ruining the site and interfering with the social life of the plaza. Following an acrimonious public debate accompanied by vandalism, the sculpture became the object of public legal proceedings and was eventually removed in 1989 as the result of a Federal lawsuit.¹⁵

I submit that both *Superkilen* and *I Am Queen Mary* are critical troublemakers in the sense that these art projects were created to provoke reactions by rupturing the ossified image of a homogeneous Denmark and claiming visibility in public space for under- and non-represented groups.

Although *Den Røde Plads* enjoys local popularity, it has provoked a critique similar to that launched against *Tilted Arc*. For instance, Kristine Samson and José Abasolo have described *Superkilen* as a "colonisation" of the authentic Nørrebro neighbourhood.¹⁶ Romanticising the past, they criticise the project for being "a formal, designed colonization of otherwise informal playful activities" (Samson/Abasolo 2013: 90). Similarly, Brett Bloom claims that the artists were "instrumentalised" by

15 Mitchell 1990: 883. See also Senie 2002; Jordan 1988 and <https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/gallery-lost-art-richard-serra> (accessed January 25, 2019).

16 For a sociological study of how local identity is constructed among inhabitants of the Nørrebro district, cp. G. Schmidt 2019.

municipal city planners, architects and the private foundation Realdania to pursue their purpose: to furnish those in power with a democratic, integration-friendly face and conjure up the illusion that citizens have real influence on urban renewal projects (Bloom 2013: 57). Bloom thus maintains that *Superkilen* hides the truth that “the power of money has overruled the democratic process” (ibid.: 48).

Conversely, Barbara Steiner acknowledges that the creation of large-scale projects, such as a 750-meters long recreative space to be used or traversed daily by thousands of citizens, cannot be achieved without substantial funding (in this case by the Copenhagen City Council, Realdania and the Danish Art Council), and that funding providers will demand qualified results (2013b: 22). Unlike Bloom, who would like to see all decisions handed over to local groups and activists, she draws attention to the high risk of ending up with mediocre results and chaotic spaces if the artists and architects had staked the ambitious design of this large urban zone on local people and activists with no prior urban design and planning experience. In other words, for Steiner, the involvement of local citizens, with their often conflicting wishes and interests, must be subordinated to the overall design and functionality of the project (ibid.: 20-22). She asserts that by drawing on “the cultural practice of cut and paste” (ibid.: 17), Superflex succeeded in fulfilling some of the local people’s wishes. It should also be noted that Superflex’s contradictory, friction-filled constellations of urban objects suggest neither cohesion nor consensus; quite the contrary: They are emphatically anti-assimilationist and might even be seen as *questioning* the very possibility of public consensus and social cohesion. As Steiner concludes:

Superkilen is the expression of a society that is becoming more and more heterogeneous and fragmented [...] *Superkilen* allows various positions, values, and identifications without levelling or embracing them in an all-reconciling gesture. With *Superkilen* the project team has found a spatial and visual expression for an inherently heterogeneous, yet shared, space. [...] It pictures a utopian flare rather than a reality already achieved. It triggers the imagination of a plural ‘we’ that resigns from re-establishing a substantial and exclusive identity [...]. (Ibid.: 22-23)

To conclude, *Superkilen* is an ambitious, but also ambiguous project, infused with good intentions of expressing and building a new sense of community, but also blemished by some questionable effects. This recreational area appears as a heterogeneous, yet shared postmigrant public space that evokes a sense of global entanglement and intimates that multiple belonging and a new understanding of urban community as a plural “we” are possible. Yet the flipside of the project is that Superflex’s “cut and paste” aesthetic of appropriation – combining a deliberate lack of visual uniformity with a multiculturalist approach to diversity – does not evade the pitfall of ethnicisation. In the context of this chapter, it should be

noted that local residents were not asked to nominate urban outdoor objects specifically from their/their family's country of origin, but simply to propose objects from other countries. Although the project team's strategy of participation was not ethnicity-dependent, *Superkilen* does not eliminate the risk of people reading this giant permanent exhibition of found objects as a monumental instance of multicultural labelling, in which the totality of signs stands for 'cultural diversity' and the individual signs might be misinterpreted as synecdoches for the inhabitants' 'countries of origin'.¹⁷ If *Superkilen* is read this way, national/ethnic ancestry is too easily perceived to be the principal identity marker of Nørrebro's inhabitants, thereby potentially perpetuating stigmatising processes of othering and exoticisation.

Conversely, *I Am Queen Mary* engages critically with what Michael Hanchard terms *state memory* and understands to be the generalising and centralising, institutionally supported narrative of the nation's history. Hanchard distinguishes state memory from *black memory*, as a collective form of memory that has been deployed for different, sometimes adversarial purposes. Adopting spatial metaphors, he conceptualises state memory as vertically constituted and black memory as horizontally constituted, because the "archaeological deposits" of the latter are "strewn across several time zones and territories" (Hanchard 2008: 46). Although the two forms are not "co-terminous" (*ibid.*), they are necessarily interwoven, as all citizens – also black and other racialised, diasporic people – live within the structures of nation states. It follows that, even if diasporic memory is not defined and delimited by nation-state structures, it resides within, not outside these structures. Hanchard also submits that specific attributes distinguish black memory from other forms of memory, although these attributes are not exclusive

17 The fact that participation was not made dependent on ethnicity is seen, for example, from the ad campaign for *Superkilen* (2009), which states (in Danish): "So if you have seen, for example, a fantastic bench in Turkey, a lamppost in Sweden, a fountain in Portugal or a chess table in Egypt that you would like to have in your new park, then send your proposal to: forslag@superkilen.dk" (Steiner 2013b: 52). For instance, the double bench from Valladolid in Mexico was suggested by a young couple who saw it on their honeymoon. As regards Superflex's "Extreme Participation" initiative, the idea to have a spot with soil from Palestine was proposed by two young women of Palestinian descent, Alaa Al-Assadi and Hiba Marwan, while the sculpture of a Spanish bull was proposed by two elderly women from the Mjølnerparken Nordic Walking group, Tove Lerche and Conni Justesen, who had visited Spain many times in their lives and had "a feeling of being at home on that territory" (*ibid.*: 147). Likewise, the Boxing Ring from Thailand was chosen by two Thai-boxing youths from Mjølnerparken, Ali Asif and Billal El-Sheikh – names that suggest Arabic, rather than Thai descentance (*ibid.*: 145-60). However, the complexity of the participants' backgrounds and cross-cultural identifications is not communicated by the *Superkilen* itself. Judging by the three times I have discussed *Superkilen* with audiences before writing this chapter, people may be prone to read the objects as authentic identity markers of the inhabitants' migrant backgrounds, unless they are provided with this information.

to black memory: racism, slavery, reparations, anticolonial struggle with its associated forms of nationalism, and, importantly, migration (ibid.: 47).

With regard to *I Am Queen Mary*, it is vital to bear in mind Hanchard's point that "not just memory but *memorialization* is part of a larger political project, underscoring the relationship between memory and representation" (ibid.: 48, original emphasis). *I Am Queen Mary* decentralises the patriotic narrative of state memory and infuses new transnational memories and significance into the Danish-West Indian past by staging a transformative postcolonial encounter, in which Denmark and the Danish West Indies/US Virgin Islands meet and merge through a performative process of hybridisation involving the bodily and symbolic morph of Ehlers and Belle. In contrast to *Superkilen*, this work was not commissioned, but resulted from the extraordinary perseverance of Ehlers and Belle. It could be argued that not only the memorial, but also the preceding process, was based on a principle of transformative dialogism and collaboration. While the memorial was still in the making, La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers engaged a group of dedicated volunteers to work on the project. The artists worked closely with them to clean tons of coral stones that were to be integrated into the plinth of the monument as a homage to the enslaved Africans who had once cut them from the sea for the foundations of colonial buildings in St. Croix.¹⁸ In addition, the artists gave a string of artist's talks in which they co-presented the project and discussed Danish colonialism and their own decolonising intention with different audiences in Copenhagen¹⁹ and the US Virgin Islands. The Virgin Islanders were more critical than the Danes, and in particular of the artists' decision to use their own bodies to represent one of 'their' heroines, and to picture Mary Thomas as a calmly seated ruler, instead of a fiery freedom fighter, and also of the location of the memorial in the (post)colonial capital of Copenhagen.²⁰ As critical Crucian voices pointed

18 See the website of the memorial: <https://www.iamqueenmary.com/new-page-2> (accessed September 16, 2019).

19 Among others, they gave a talk on October 1, 2017 at the Royal Cast Collection housed in the West Indian Warehouse in front of which the monument was eventually installed, and another talk at the Workers Museum in Copenhagen on October 11, 2017 when a small-scale plaster-cast model of the memorial was incorporated into the exhibition "Stop Slavery!" ("Stop slaveri!"). The talks that the artists consider to be the most important are listed on the memorial's website, see: <https://www.iamqueenmary.com/events> and <https://www.iamqueenmary.com/new-page-1> (accessed September 16, 2019). The collaborative, commemorative and transformative nature of the process of cleaning the coral stones is captured in this short video of La Vaughn Belle and Michael K. Wilson scrubbing stones: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7GgIOQoek> (accessed September 16, 2019).

20 La Vaughn Belle summarises some of the key ideas and points of critique in this interview with News 2 US Virgin Islands: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7GgIOQoek> (accessed September 16, 2019).

out, this location resulted in an unequal distribution of media attention, funds and access to the memorial. By giving an outline of the criticism at artist's talks in Copenhagen, Belle ensured that Crucian viewpoints were incorporated into the local Danish discourse on *I Am Queen Mary* and that the presence and transnational contribution of 'other voices' (and other counterpublics) were implied.

The dialogic nature of the process and the memorial subverts the patriotic Danish narrative that glorifies the nation's role in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, since the memorial redirects attention to the fact that the very *cause* of abolition was Denmark's complicity in the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery. It thus makes claims in contemporary society, not only about the past, but also about the relationship between past injustices and present inequalities. At the same time, the memorial engages with the absence of black and diasporic iconography and symbols in nation-state imagery, such as public monuments. It seeks to redress the balance by renarrating colonial history in a way that *makes visible* the colonised and people of colour as commemorable agents of historical change. As Hanchard observes, the absence of representation or black iconography in foundational symbols in the USA has resulted in "the absence of reflection, in two related but distinct meanings of the word. US African Americans would not see themselves reflected in the imagery of the nation; the white nation, in turn, would not reflect on the absence of black imagery until well into the late 20th century" (2008: 58). This observation also applies to the representation of people of colour in Denmark, except that the issue of absence has only begun to come into the reckoning in the 21st century (Petersen/Schramm/Wiegand 2019b: 38-44).

By merging their bodies into one sculpture, Belle and Ehlers evoke an expanded notion of the national 'we' that is capable of encompassing a community of citizens with diverse ethnic backgrounds and transnational affiliations, based on co-ethnic identification. Such co-ethnic identification is central to diasporic subjects with a sense of belonging to an imagined ethnic or national community that is not defined and confined by nation-state borders. The merging of the artists' bodies could thus be said to encapsulate a sense of self that literary scholar Ato Quayson has described as "no longer tied exclusively to the immediate of present location but rather [extended] to encompass all the other places of co-ethnic identification" (Quayson 2013: 147). Quayson adds that such affective bonds may be forged through various instruments of commemoration, such as private heirlooms, stories, rituals – and public monuments (ibid.). *I Am Queen Mary* is one such instrument and reminds us that the nation state and its population are criss-crossed by past and present transnational connections. As I suggested in the above analysis of *Den Røde Plads*, people, especially local citizens, may develop affective attachments to artworks in the public space. Such attachments can be forged on an individual level, through identification with Queen Mary as she is embodied by two contemporary women of colour, although it should be remem-

bered that dis- or counter-identification with this figure of violent anticolonial resistance is, of course, also a possible response. The declarative mode of the statement that makes up the title *I Am Queen Mary* suggests that the artists intended the memorial to generate solidarity through identification, the idea being that by saying the title aloud, the viewer would momentarily incorporate Queen Mary as part of their own being – become her, or be allied with the cause that she symbolises. The title contains an intertextual reference to the closing scene of Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X* (1992), in which the pupils in a South African classroom, one by one, rise from their seats to declare "I Am Malcolm X", so that the assertive rhythmic repetition evokes a shared commitment to the transnational struggle for the equality and recognition of people of African descent. Thus, identification at the level of shared experience – that of the countless visitors to the memorial declaring to "be" Mary – may engender a sense of imagined community from which a new postmigrant and postcolonial sense of solidarity and collective identity with a "utopian flare" (Steiner 2013a: 23) may spring forth. By virtue of its declarative and monumental mode of address to anyone who is attracted to the site, *I Am Queen Mary* produces a postmigrant public space. It generates a fluctuating, heterogeneous public – an indefinite audience, rather than a social constituency, as Warner would say (2005: 55) – a public in which Danes and Virgin Islanders can participate, as well as tourists and strangers who just happen to pass by. Moreover, its identificatory mode of address points to yet another characteristic of postmigrant public spaces: although they are inherently agonistic, they have scope to build solidarity and alliances.

The re-configurative power of art

Art in public space is always a potential, and sometimes unwitting, producer of trouble (Mouffe 2007a) – as evidenced by the protests against Serra's *Tilted Arc*, Oguibe's obelisk and the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, as well as by *Superkilen* and *I Am Queen Mary*. This potential can, I contend, be mobilised for postmigrant ends. Seen from a combined agonistic and postmigrant perspective, critical art engages with the struggles that are part of the postmigrant condition. To boil them down into a single issue is impossible, but my overall impression is that much of the critical art that engages with postmigration sets out to "trouble the sameness-strangeness divide", to use cultural geographer Marco Antonsich's wording (2018: 1). In doing so, it tends to shift the focus away from the reproduction of what Antonsich aptly terms "the taken-for-grantedness of the nation in its racialised essence" (ibid.: 10). Instead, it creates interruptions that could possibly pry open the apparent semantic stability of European national self-perceptions and rupture the monoculturalism and hegemonic whiteness which underpin their cultural forms.

Furthermore, I propose that it is possible to identify a common *postmigrant* pattern that structures and interconnects critical artistic interventions into public spaces, which, at face value, present themselves as radically different. Superflex's collaborative artistic practice arguably seems to be at odds with that of Belle and Ehlers. I will nevertheless argue that they are based on a similar strategy or overall artistic approach to postmigrant public spaces. By seeking to identify a common pattern, I will answer my initial question of the re-configurative power of art in postmigrant public spaces: How can art open up a social and national imagination pervaded by anxieties about immigration and cultural diversity to other ways of thinking about collective identity?

To answer this question, I draw on a general point developed by Frauke Wiegand, Moritz Schramm and myself in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition* (Petersen/Schramm/Wiegand 2019a). I propose that, overall, 'postmigrant' artistic interventions into public space could be said to perform a tripartite gesture in that they seek to clear, claim and create space. As my colleagues and I have argued, postmigrant approaches to art and culture are often driven by a desire for societal improvement. As a potential vehicle of social change, they are driven, firstly, by an ambition to *clear* space, as they seek to be rid of polarising distinctions such as migrants versus non-migrants, and white people versus people of colour. Instead, postmigrant approaches emphasise interrelations between people. Secondly, they involve *claiming* space. Yet the very act of claiming implies taking or reclaiming something, such as historical narratives (i.e. claiming the right to tell other stories or to tell familiar stories differently) and narratives of who 'we' are (i.e. claiming the right to collective redefinition and self-identification). Claiming thus necessitates struggle. As a consequence, the concept of postmigration refers, in our understanding, to a conflictual process of societal transformation that entails difficult renegotiation of, among other things, public space, collective identity and national history, including the acknowledgement that colonial barbarism has been fundamental to the evolvement of modern European nation states. It should be added that this is a process which entails that formerly marginalised counterpublics claim access to public space as they "struggle for the right to struggle itself, for dissent" (Sheikh 2007: 8). Thirdly, my colleagues and I propose that postmigration is propelled by endeavours to *create* space. Some of these attempts generate actual spaces and material sites of negotiation, *and* they include ambitious art projects, such as the *Superkilen* and *I am Queen Mary*, that critically renegotiate the terms of representation and gesture towards a more equitable society and polyvocal public culture. As this chapter has demonstrated, it is in connection with the third ambition, the creation of new spaces, that the re-configurative power of art manifests itself most compellingly.

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