

The Danish Child in Greenland: Literary Memoirs in a Postcolonial Perspective

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the relationship between literature, memory, and postcolonial narratives from Greenland in the novel *Godhavn* (2014) by Danish author Iben Mondrup and in the collection of poems *Alting blinker* (2009) by Danish author Naja Marie Aidt. Through a reading of these literary memoirs based on childhood experiences in Greenland in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, I show how the fictional and poetic memory process creates particular, complex and disturbing images which contribute to a wider understanding of the postcolonial relationship between Greenland and Denmark. Applying a theoretical framework of postcolonial theory and memory theory, this article explores how the momentary nature of memory and the culturally ambiguous perspective of the Danish child in the analysed works can be seen as a critical approach to the cultural and social positions and negotiations in the postcolonial Greenland of this period.

In his reading of the novel *Sultekunstnerinde* (2004) by Danish author Lotte Inuk, Ebbe Volquardsen argues the novel's specific perspective of the Danish girl, Charlie, in postcolonial Greenland contributes to 'a long overdue rethinking and revaluation of some long-held approaches to the Danish-Greenlandic relations that have been powerful since colonial times'(Volquardsen 2014: 412). This article examines how literary memoirs, the novel *Godhavn* (2014) by Danish author Iben Mondrup and the collection of poems

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*Alting blinker*² (2009) by Danish author Naja Marie Aidt in similar ways process childhood memories from Greenland through fiction and give the reader an insight into the complexity of the Greenlandic-Danish relationship and shared history from a critical and challenging perspective of Danish children. In *Godhavn*, the West Greenlandic town Godhavn (now Qeqertarsuaq) is seen through the eyes of three Danish siblings, and in *Everything shimmers*, glimpses of memories from an early childhood in Greenland intertwine with experiences from New York and the former Danish colony The West Indies. Neither Mondrup nor Aidt draw any clear and definite portrayals of postcolonial Greenland. Instead, they construct complex and ambiguous images of Greenlandic society in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, an era where a growing number of Danish families came to work and live in Greenland. In this period, a new political awakening also arose among the Greenlandic population, leading to the establishment of the home-rule government in 1979. Without any clear-cut historical indicators, the two works still articulate literary images of a certain period in Greenlandic history in which huge changes took place. These changes are further described in the historic work *I skyggen af kajakkerne* (2005) by Tupaanaq Rosing Olsen, which outlines the political developments that led to home rule. Even though it is a time after the colonial era that officially ended in 1953, when Greenland was included as an administrative county in the kingdom of Denmark, I will argue that some underlying colonial mechanisms still function in Greenland between Danish newcomers and Greenlanders. I suggest that the literary works by Mondrup and Aidt possess an awareness of these remnants of the colonial structures between the Danes and the Greenlanders, observed through the eyes of the children. In this article, the terms Danish *newcomers* will be applied to define the positions of the Danish families in Greenland at this time, rather than the terms *settler* or *colonizer* which are associated with an earlier period of colonization in Greenland.

My intention is to create a composite reading based on postcolonial theory and memory theory in order to determine how these different theoretical fields contribute to a comprehension of the relationship between literature, postcolonial narratives, and memory. The emphasis of this article is not on the autobiographical links between the

² In this article, I use the English translation *Everything shimmers* from the Danish version, *Alting blinker*, translated by Susanne Nied in 2015.

literary texts and the authors' childhood experiences in Greenland. Nevertheless, I do consider their literary memoirs to be situated knowledge which unveil intimate, affective, and specific postcolonial narratives, which may serve as a critical approach to the cultural negotiations between the Greenlanders and the Danish newcomers in postcolonial Greenland. In his book *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*, David Huddart stresses the importance of these situated standpoints in autobiographical literature as a part of a postcolonial study: 'particular standpoints are the ones to which we should turn when we really want to know that which is unsaid in a situation, or that which is denied and perhaps disavowed by a society. For the unsaid or the disavowed, we need to look to situated knowledge' (Huddart 2008: 12). Based on Donna Haraway's concept of *situated knowledge*, Huddart argues that the understanding of personal memories as specific and situated knowledge allows for the denied and disavowed margins in colonial and postcolonial history to be heard. Walter Benjamin unfolds his historic materialism in his essay 'On the concept of History'. Here, Benjamin distances himself from the idea of a coherent development of history of humanity, which he defines as a "homogeneous, empty time" (Eiland and Jennings 2001: 395). The task of the historic materialist is to resist this writing of history: 'He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain' (392). Benjamin elaborates further on his critical understanding of the writing of history as only short glimpses: 'The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognisability, and is never seen again' (390). In Benjamin's childhood memoirs *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, he uses his own experiences as a child in Berlin to construct small poetic images of the city in the period around 1900 and develop his idea of the past as images. For Walter Benjamin the child, its many mysterious and unintelligible tableaux unveil the discrepancies of memory and of the writing of history. The gaze of the small child challenges a coherent and teleological writing of history and shows its subversive potential to Benjamin. As Benjamin points out the significance of literature, photography, and art to understand this uncertain flicker of history, Homi Bhabha also turns to literary images of the colonial past and the postcolonial present in his book *The Location of Culture* in order to comprehend the complex negotiations of cultural identifications in colonial and postcolonial societies. In addition to Bhabha's concepts of *hybridity*, *mimicry*, and *sly*

civility, he also applies the concepts of *historic displacement* and *time-lag* to define Western modernity as a ruptured and delayed construction (Bhabha 2004: 341). Bhabha understands culture as shifting movements between different cultural identifications, full of discursive gaps and ambivalences (50). Through the constitution of these cultural positions, an excess of meaning, a *différance*, is produced, which makes the articulation of cultural fields uncertain with a liberating potential in its ambivalent structures of power as Bhabha suggests, through his reading of Frantz Fanon:

The time of liberation is, as Fanon powerfully evokes, a time of cultural uncertainty, and, most crucially, of signifiatory or representational undecidability ... The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. (51)

Similar to Benjamin's dialectic images of memory, in which the relationship between past experiences and the present narrator shape both the personal and collective memories, the cultural difference challenges binary relationships, which constitutes the cultural representations and its power. The literary distance to childhood experiences by the implied author is, as Lilian Munk Rösing emphasizes in her book *At læse barnet – Litteratur og psykoanalyse*, not necessarily a sign of a lacking empathy with the child, but rather the adult narrator's underlining of the subversive and critical perspective of the remembered child (Rösing 2001: 239). I believe that the works by Mondrup and Aidt hold a rewarding representational suspense and do not seem willing to accept the power of any fixed cultural representations of postcolonial Greenland.

The kaleidoscopic childhood memories in the novel *Godhavn*

In the novel *Godhavn*, three Danish children, Bjørk, Knut, and Hilde, experience their cultural positions and interrelated constructions of identity as children in a Danish family in Godhavn. The novel is freely based on Mondrup's own childhood in the actual town of Godhavn, now Qeqertarsuaq, in West Greenland. The name Godhavn is a combination of the Danish words *god* (good) and the word *havn* (harbour). The concept of goodness implied in this name and the colonial connotations in the 'Danification' of the name, pre-

empty central themes in the novel, a point that I will return to. Through the children's point of view, the relationships between their families and both Danish and Greenlandic families living in the town are displayed with its complexities and ambiguities. Each sibling seems to have a specific view of the town and sense of the cultural negotiations taking place, shifting, and constituting new cultural identifications accessible for the inhabitants of the town. The novel is structured in a threefold format, where each sibling gives a name to his or her own part, and the narrative of each part is thereby determined by the age and personality of the individual child.

The youngest sibling, the six-year-old girl Bjørk, moves open-mindedly and playfully around the town between her own home and the homes of her friends. Her movements seem to draw a distinctive topography of the town, the abodes, the local nature, the social structures, and even the different political sentiments. In the following, a consonant narration, close to the child's own perceptions, appears in the description of her friend Karline's Greenlandic home: 'It is seal and whale it smells of and that is how Bjørk smells when she has been visiting Karline; a smell of ocean which stays in the clothes, it comes out of Karline's mouth when she talks, it belongs to all of Karline's sounds.'³ Through these tactile sensitivities of smells and sounds, Bjørk's observations articulate small cultural differences between her own home and Karline's home without describing them as Danish or Greenlandic. The friendship between Bjørk and Karline is not described as a Danish-Greenlandic relationship until they begin school, where they are divided into Danish and Greenlandic classes. This division of classes suddenly creates a distance between the two friends and shows how these institutional structures create social differences among the Greenlandic and Danish children at the school.

An ambivalent cultural negotiation between Bjørk's family and Karline becomes apparent at the dinner table:

When Karline eats at Bjørk's home, Bjørk's mother and father speak Greenlandic at the table. They ask Karline all kind of things, while Knut and Hilde make faces. But Karline answers all

³'Det er sæl og hval der lugter af, og sådan lugter Bjørk også når hun har været hjemme hos Karline; en lugt af hav der sidder i tøjet, den kommer ud af Karlins mund, når hun snakker, den hører sammen med alle Karlins lyde' (Mondrup 2014: 22).

of it. In Danish. And it puzzles Bjørk. – You speak Danish, she asks. – What did you think, Karline says, we learn it everywhere, *Søren og Mette*, and things like that. I speak almost every language.⁴

This scene displays a reciprocal linguistic assimilation between the parents and Karline. The parents approach Karline by speaking Greenlandic and she, most likely to be polite, answers in Danish. The fact that Bjørk is unaware of Karline's ability to speak Danish, shows her own bilingual shifts between Greenlandic and Danish. Karline has learned Danish from *Søren and Mette*, one of the most common readers in Denmark at this time, which shows the Danification of Greenland still at work, in spite of a growing desire of the new political movement in Greenland at the time for Greenlandic to be the main language. Karline's final remark 'I speak almost every language' implies her awareness of the possibility as a Greenlander to gain access to the world and not just to Denmark.

Visiting her new friend Cecilie who just moved to Godhavn with her mother, Bjørk experiences some of the social differences between the two Danish homes. Cecilie reproduces her mother's reserved view on Greenland. These reservations are stated through the cited dialogue between the girls: 'My mother is angry because I can't take dance lessons up here, you can't do anything at all.'⁵ Contrary to Bjørk's father who tries to assimilate into a Greenlandic way of living, Cecilie's mother is not eager to integrate. Instead, she orders Danish groceries in order to, as she says, survive: 'One day, there are three large boxes of frozen groceries at Cecilie and her mother's place. Roast pork, ducks, pork sausage, and ice cream cake. Cecilie's mother says, it is the only way that they can survive because none of them like the food that they eat up here.'⁶ Through their conversations, Bjørk learns new and, for her, unknown things about the inhabitants of the town: 'They marry their own family and that is not allowed. / - and it is because they

⁴ 'Når Karline spiser hos Bjørk, snakker Bjørks mor og far grønlandsk ved middagsbordet. Alt muligt spørger de hende om men Knut og Hilde sidder og laver ansigter. Men Karline svarer på det hele. På dansk. Og det undrer Bjørk. – Kan du da dansk, spørger hun.

-hvad tror du siger Karline, - det lærer vi jo alle steder, *Søren og Mette*, og sådan noget, jeg snakker næsten alle sprog' (Mondrup 2014: 22).

⁵ 'Min mor er sur over at jeg ikke kan gå til dans heroppe, man kan jo ikke lave noget som helst' (Mondrup 2014: 77).

⁶ 'En dag står der tre store kasser med frosne madvarer hjemme hos Cecilie og hendes mor. Flæskesteg, ænder, medisterpølse og islagkager. Det er den eneste måde de kan overleve på, siger Cecilies mor, for ingen af dem kan lide den mad man spiser heroppe' (Mondrup 2014: 80).

drink, Cecilie says, it makes them crazy, like the Indians, they cannot take it,'⁷ and the conclusion added by Cecilie's mother: 'You should not mix blood.'⁸ Bjørk is introduced to racist and ethnocentric opinions, which are spoken by Cecilie's mother and imitated by Cecilie, but these depictions of the Greenlanders do not keep Bjørk away from the house. Here, she experiences a loving attention from Cecilie's mother, who insists on Bjørk calling her 'Lillemor' (Little mother). Bjørk finds herself in an ambivalent position between her own open-minded but distant mother and Lillemor, whose motherly kindness towards Bjørk contrasts with her attitude towards the Greenlanders. By letting the small child, Bjørk, get so easily attached to the different families of the town, the novel gives the reader a close look at the complex social and cultural positions and identifications existing in the West Greenlandic town. Without moral closures, Bjørk admires both her own open-minded parents, Karline's Greenlandic family, and Lillemor, who says her racist statements inside her cosy home.

The twelve-year-old boy Knut experiences the places and people of Godhavn a little differently than his younger sister, Bjørk. By changing the viewpoint to the philosophical and sensitive boy, the kaleidoscopic narrative of the novel changes its perspective. Even though Knut struggles with his identity, almost being a teenager, he still engages in imaginative play with his best friend, René. They set out on journeys to discover unknown places and creatures in the landscape surrounding Godhavn. As the boys are at a threshold between childhood and their new identity as adolescents, these playful journeys help them to ease this crossing and escape the complexities of their everyday concerns for a while. When René leaves Godhavn to move back to Denmark, Knut grieves the loss of his best friend and tries to cope with the momentary aspects of his life as a Danish child in Godhavn, never knowing for how long his family will stay. His mother encourages him to make friends with the part Danish, part Greenlandic boy Johannes who is now in the Danish classes at the school. However, it is difficult for Knut to hold on to Johannes in a permanent relationship because of Johannes' constant movements between the groups of Danish and Greenlandic children. From a distance,

⁷ 'De gifter sig med deres egen familie, og det må man ikke, /- Og det er også fordi de drikke, siger Cecilie, - det gør dem skøre, ligesom indianerne, de kunne heller ikke tåle det' (Mondrup 2014: 80).

⁸ 'man skal holde sig fra at blande blod' (Mondrup 2014: 83).

Knut admires Johannes for his ability to enter into different positions and different social contexts. It is also at this point that he even begins to think of Johannes as Greenlandic and of his own cultural identity as different from Johannes'. Knut compares Johannes' behaviour to the behaviour of mercury: 'Johannes is exactly like mercury. If you push him, he splits, he spreads, thousands of tiny balls rolling in every direction, disappearing into holes, into grids, under grates. And there, in his hiding, he is put back together again. Knut never knows where he has him.'⁹ Johannes disappears outside any discursive closures through a cultural excess only noticed by Knut, and he is able to use the tactic of mimicry through his constant mercury-like changeability. Bhabha stresses this production of excess in the tactic of mimicry: 'in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference' (Bhabha 2004: 122). Concerned with his social position at the school after René's departure, Knut begins to keep to himself, trying to avoid the feeling of social exclusion. Compared to his two sisters, he is not assimilated to the Greenlandic way of life. He is afraid of the dogs and the blood from the dead animals, and he hates to go on hunts with his father. Trying to get a social foothold, Knut tries to make use of the same social camouflage as Johannes: 'It is like Johannes is using his camouflage inverted. He has several groups, which he belongs to and if he passes by a foreign territory, he enters in there without fear.'¹⁰ Bhabha draws on the theory of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to define the concept of *mimicry* and the use of camouflage: 'The effect of mimicry is camouflage ... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare'(Bhabha 2004: 121). Johannes knows how to widen his social mobility through a tactic of camouflage, as opposed to Knut, who describes his own attempt to adapt to the groups of children as failed and as a negative part of his own unsecure position among the other children: 'no matter how much he looks like them on the outside, he is different, he is not, will never be, one of

⁹ 'Johannes er fuldstændig ligesom kviksølv. Puffer man til ham, deles han, spredes han, tusind bitte små kugler, der triller i alle retninger, forsvinder ned i huller, i riste, under gitre. Og dér, i sit skjul, samles han igen. Knut ved aldrig hvor han har ham' (Mondrup 2014:140).

¹⁰ 'Det er som om Johannes bruger sin camouflage omvendt. Han har flere flokke som han hører til, og kommer han forbi et fremmed territorium, bevæger han sig derind uden at være bange' (Mondrup 2014: 130-131).

them.’¹¹ Knut feels like an outsider and, without any social power, he senses his vulnerable positions as a social and cultural *other* in the community.

Knut also observes the ambivalent status that his parents hold in the town and his mother’s close relationship to the other children in her work as a teacher at the local school: ‘She means so much to so many children and to the children’s parents. It is because she is good at being good. She uses all that she has, and when she comes home from school and sits and relaxes, she is tired. – I have been with children all day, she says, – just leave me alone for a while.’¹² Also, his father, who works at the municipality and is a seal hunter in his spare time is described: ‘He has trousers of dog skin, sewed from the skin of one of their own dogs, and killer instinct. He also has trousers of fabric and an office job. But he is the same man, in disguise.’¹³ These images of the parents and their lives outside the home with each of their obligations in the community, especially the mother’s kind acts, contrast with Knut’s feeling of absence and alienation inside their home: ‘The house is a box floating alone in an enormous darkness with its contents of tables and chairs and things which his family has left in a random order.’¹⁴ The Freudian term *unheimlich* is used by Bhabha to articulate a disturbing and uncanny element hiding in the sphere of the home. He points out how the exterior political and social world invades the home and writes: ‘each “unhomely” house marks a deeper historical displacement’ (Bhabha 2004: 18). The literary image of the uncanny home visualises a forgotten private sphere, closely connected to the historic, social, and political sphere as Bhabha argues: ‘Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed’ (Bhabha 2004: 19). Knut’s feeling of strangeness articulates some underlying, embedded, and common conditions of

¹¹ ‘Uanset at han ligner dem udenpå, skiller han sig ud, han er ikke, og han bliver ikke, ligesom dem’ (Mondrup 2014: 129).

¹² ‘Hun betyder så meget for så mange børn og for børnenes forældre. Det er fordi hun er god til at være god. Hun bruger alt hvad hun har, og når hun kommer hjem fra skolen og sidder og slapper af, er hun træt. - Jeg har været sammen med børn hele dagen, siger hun, - lad mig nu lige sidde lidt i fred’ (Mondrup 2014: 131).

¹³ ‘Han har hundeskindsbukser, syet af skindet fra en af deres egne hunde, og dræberinstinkt. Han har også bukser af stof og et kontorarbejde. Men han er den samme mand, i forklædning’ (Mondrup 2014: 121).

¹⁴ ‘Huset er en kasse der svæver alene i det enorme mørke med sit indhold af borde og stole og ting og sager som hans familie har efterladt i tilfældig orden’ (Mondrup 2014: 135).

being a Danish child in Godhavn, a life which seems to hold an uncertainty and temporality. Knut's intimate experiences and feelings also show the common and the private spheres as being closely knit together. As his younger sister experiences some of the complex social and cultural differences and negotiations between the families in Godhavn with her impressionable mind, Knut articulates from his both sensitive and philosophical point of view some of the cultural and social identifications and positions that are characteristic of the Danish newcomers in a postcolonial Greenland.

Hilde, who turns fifteen and is the eldest sister of the three siblings, also senses the underlying momentary aspects of life as a Danish teenager in Godhavn: 'Second Danish, this gathering of children who are put together only because they come from another place and because they are all going to leave again soon.'¹⁵ She also experiences noticeable changes in her mind and her body, and due to these changes she distances herself more and more from her parents. Her viewpoints are characterized by her critical take on adult life and her new and untested emotional longings and physical desires. Hilde's feelings for Johannes grow throughout the last part of the novel and, being the hunter that she is, she begins to chase him. Hilde has a feeling of coming into existence when Johannes looks at her and makes her feel 'strong and agile'.¹⁶ Even though Johannes calls her 'Danish girl', when she is with him she is able to hold other cultural identifications than those of her Danish parents. For instance, Johannes also names her Arnarulunnguaq, which in Greenlandic means *little lady* and is a name of historic significance as Arnarulunnguaq was the first woman to participate in the Thule expeditions. Compared to Knut's rather insecure position among the children, Hilde shows herself as a strong and talented hunter who is admired by her father, and she holds her social position among the Danish and Greenlandic children of her age with great social confidence. She feels Greenlandic, and her best friend, Olga, confirms this feeling: 'You are not even a real Dane, Olga says, you speak like us.'¹⁷ From this culturally ambiguous position, Hilde has a distinct view of the newcomer Danes in Godhavn: 'They work on the body, from the outside and inside, attend to its functions, adjust a filter there;

¹⁵ 'Anden Danske, denne samling børn der kun er sat sammen fordi de kommer fra et andet sted, og fordi de alle sammen skal rejse igen snart' (Mondrup 2014: 192).

¹⁶ 'Stærk og smidig' (Mondrup 2014: 243).

¹⁷ 'Du er heller ikke rigtig dansker, siger Olga – du snakker jo ligesom os' (Mondrup 2014: 206).

but they are not it, not the skin, not the flesh, not in a rapid speed through the bloodstreams.’¹⁸ As a final turning point in the novel, the parents’ goodness is tested when Johannes seeks their help, and they turn him away and take him to the police, where he is accused of trying to strangle the girl Cecilie. As the relationship with Johannes becomes a part of the constitution of Hilde’s Greenlandic identity, Johannes also plays a part in the constitution of the position of the Danish newcomers in Godhavn. As Hilde points out: ‘Johannes is a project.’¹⁹ Johannes becomes a cultural sign of their successful ‘adjustments’ to Godhavn, but through his challenging, ambivalent hybridity, he resists this signification and in the end is punished for this resistance. In the last pages of the book, Hilde tries to resist her parents’ decision to send her to Denmark to continue school and to send Johannes to the police. On their last fishing trip, the balance of power between Hilde and her father seems to turn, as Hilde rescues him from being pulled into the water by a seal. Similar to her smaller sister and brother, Hilde has an eye for the complex interactions and negotiations between Danish and Greenlandic inhabitants of the town and her own position as a Danish child. She sees the hypocrisy of her parents’ actions and the ambivalence of their goodness, and she has the physical and mental power to openly question and fight the social and cultural positions of the town.

The shimmering glimpse of memory from an early childhood in Greenland

The collection of poems *Everything shimmers* by Naja Marie Aidt articulates early childhood memories through arabesques and textual shapes, where present and past images from distant places such as Denmark, New York, the West Indies, and Greenland intertwine in chains of associations. These movements of memories have an involuntary nature, which makes one memory replace the other, resonating with each other as Dan Ringgaard emphasizes in his article ‘Rejsekatalog 2000-2009’. In these poetic and playful texts, Aidt expresses glimpses of an early childhood in Greenland as a Danish child.

¹⁸ ‘De arbejder på kroppen, udefra og indefra, tilser dens funktioner, justerer på et filter dér; men de er den ikke, ikke huden, ikke kødet, ikke i rivende fart gennem blodbanerne’ (Mondrup 2014: 220).

¹⁹ ‘Johannes er et projekt’ (Mondrup 2014: 236).

Through dense formations of text, the early childhood memories from Greenland connect associatively. Rösing stresses how Benjamin, in his childhood memories, abandons any chronological form and replaces it with this dialectic formation of images: ‘Two images from each epoch lays on top of each other and a three-dimensional effect occurs’ (Rösing 2001: 218, *my translation*). Aidt constructs similar layers of images from different times and places to create a spatial sense of memory. Through its different structures, the poems address the author’s arrival and adaption to her new home, New York, away from her earlier homes, Denmark and Greenland. A most-likely Greenlandic landscape emerges in the poem with the title ‘as a boy I was always cheerful and carefree’:

but I wasn't a boy a butterfly is what I was a mouse in a hole a
sled dog, howling at the moon and the nights were-- they were--
black, deep a cluster of houses there in the middle of
nothing and the mountainsides were everywhere like towers
and spires in a kingdom there's a page torn out of the
book there's something gone, vanished as every day vanishes²⁰

The landscape is described as imaginary with words such as ‘towers’, ‘spires’, and ‘kingdom’. From the first glimpse of the apparently Greenlandic childhood memories, the poem installs a fictional filter between the remembered material and the remembering *I*. As Benjamin argues in his reading of Proust in his essay ‘Zum Bilde Proust’: ‘Denn hier spielt für den erinnernden Autor die Hauptrolle gar nicht, was er erlebt hat, sondern da Weben seiner Erinnerung, die Penelopearbeit des eingedenkens.’ (For the remembering author, his own experiences do not play the main part, but instead the very texture of his memories, the memory work of Penelope) (Benjamin 1975: 72). The aim for Proust, and as I argue, for Aidt also, is to examine the process of memory itself, the texture of memories which are woven together like the work of Penelope. The poems seem to unfold as an ontology of memory, approaching the fleeting and moveable essence of memory. In Benjamin’s reading of Proust, the images of the childhood memories emerge as embedded poetic potentials in specific places, rooms, and in the curtains in the hands of the kitchen lady Françoise (Benjamin 1975: 76). This potential for remembrance in the physical materials seems to effect the texture of the sentences in Proust’s literature.

²⁰ <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/8/12/selections-from-naja-marie-aids-ieverthing-shimmers>

Similar interwoven images of memory emerge in Aids' poems and in particular the poem 'as a boy I was always cheerful and carefree'. It is the memories themselves which are loosened by newer experiences. Like small reminiscences, the memories replace each other and, in the following sentences, the faint image of the Greenlandic landscape is replaced by the remembrance of another former Danish colony, The West Indies:

one can travel to the old colonies and see remnants ruins one
can imagine the exploitation the desperate attempt to hold onto
something Danish a tea service a little flag a mill on a
hilltop the Danish West Indies are called the Virgin Islands
now the street is called *Hope Street* no one here knows the
Danish word for hope I'm sitting in the shade looking a gecko in
the eye²¹

This travel memory from a visit to the former Danish colony, The West Indies, forms a reflecting image. The childhood memories from Greenland are in this way connected to an earlier Danish colonial past, which discursive and physical remains the 'I' experiences in the postcolonial present on the islands. Through the poem, these personal experiences are mixed with historical fragments from the colonial history of The West Indies. Using this literary tool, Aids installs her personal memories in a colonial history through this transatlantic cultural mirroring. In the last sentence of the poem, new memories from Greenland are generated from the images of the West Indies: 'a smell of sealskin, urine it was a comforting smell, a good smell when I was a boy it was beautiful hymns, oddly shifting tones the voices fell and rose odd laughter dead drunk man raping a sled dog in the twilight *imerajuk* once I found crowberries under the snow once I read about St. Croix.'²² The small glimpses of memory from Greenland swirl into a tissue of lyric articulations making the social, cultural, and historical objects present through its poetic images.

The childhood memories in the poem 'you say' gather to a continuous collage, as in the following sentences: 'suddenly I remember a lot that I'd forgotten I say a *kiffaq* a boy named Pavia a Danish tradesman's scornful words about a people who migrated across

²¹ <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/8/12/selections-from-naja-marie-aids-ieverything-shimmers>

²² <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/8/12/selections-from-naja-marie-aids-ieverything-shimmers>

the ice from Canada long ago' and further: 'I remember that there weren't any dry cleaners that my father had to send his suit to Copenhagen that my mother got cucumbers in airmail tubes that she raised marigolds in a coldframe that Pavia was handsome and always had a cold that the kiffaq had children with Danish men who promptly left her.'²³ In these distant Greenlandic memories, a coexistence without any visible chronology is created between the personal everyday images of the father's suit, the kiffaq (which means waiter or housekeeper in Greenlandic), the boy Pavia with a cold, the Danish tradesman, and the mother's cucumbers in airmail tubes. Aidt lets the unconscious dream language interact with the colonial past and the cultural currents that are flowing through the poem. It is a playful and experimental approach to the writing of Danish colonial history and Greenlandic postcolonial history through the specific recital of dog fights, a greasy puddle of blood, and the open steaming body of the narwhal.²⁴ In this way, a critical element is to be found in Aidt's poetry. The following sentence: 'that we were Danish fuckers',²⁵ implies the presence of an angry Greenlandic voice in the poem, stating a critical approach to the position of the Danish newcomers in postcolonial Greenland.

Conclusion

In the literary memoirs by Mondrup and Aidt, the fictional and poetic process of memory offers a rewarding and critical approach to the relationship between the Greenlanders and the new comer Danes in postcolonial Greenland. Both works, in their shape and content, construct complex and ambiguous images of memory and do not give any clear answers or moral views in their representation of the Greenlandic-Danish relationship in this period. By the use of playful, experimental, and fragmented narratives, the two works seem to challenge any coherent and homogeneous colonial and postcolonial history in Greenland and instead seek to brush history against the grain. The specific images of

²³ <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/8/12/selections-from-naja-marie-aidts-ieverything-shimmers>

²⁴ <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/8/12/selections-from-naja-marie-aidts-ieverything-shimmers>

²⁵ <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/8/12/selections-from-naja-marie-aidts-ieverything-shimmers>

childhood memories become disturbing with a subversive potential in its, to quote Bhabha, representational ‘undecidability’ and constant production of poetic excess. In this way, the remembered Danish childhood in Greenland occupies an ambivalent and uncertain position in the social and cultural structures in the Greenlandic society. As Volquardsen writes in his reading of Lotte Inuk: ‘in her novel she turns the usual process of minorisation and majorisation upside down’ (Volquardsen 2014: 413). Here the girl Charlie enters into an uncertain position as a Danish outsider, similar to the three siblings in *Godhavn*. In her review of *Godhavn* in the Greenlandic newspaper *AG*, Kirsten Thisted points out the lack of literature from Danes who have lived in Greenland as children and how valuable insight this literature is in a rethinking of Greenlandic-Danish relations (Thisted 2014). Let us hope for more literary images of the Danish child in Greenland to widen and challenge our knowledge of the Danish newcomers in postcolonial Greenland.

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