

# Greenland, Arctic Orientalism and the search for definitions of a contemporary postcolonial geography

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## Abstract:

This article begins by discussing the applicability of Orientalism in the Arctic where it was first applied by Ann Fienup-Riordan in her work in the 1990s in relation to Inuit representation in American cinema/documentary. The article moves on to consider more broadly approaches to the Arctic in order to identify it as a postcolonial geography. It raises the question whether the concept of an Arctic region is too broad for a postcolonial approach through a more specific focus on Greenland. While Greenland is obviously a part of the Arctic, the island also requires a colonial and postcolonial contextualisation of its own, not least due to the particularity of its history. The exemplification through the Greenlandic case is discussed through the analysis of three major Danish, and Danish-Greenlandic films on Greenland, *Qivitoq* (1956), *Heart of Light* (1998) and *The Experiment* (2010). The article discusses what postcolonial sensibilities can be articulated through an analysis of the three films with a particular emphasis on the negotiation of Greenlandic, Greenlandic-Danish and Danish identities. Reading Greenland through a postcolonial lens as manifested in the Greenlandic space the films grant returns to article to its opening considerations of the relationship between articulation and representation in a postcolonial space enabled by Said's intervention.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has had many repercussions beyond the 'geography' of his ground-breaking study of how representations of the 'Orient' have been used by the West to create

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an image of the Orient suited to bolster the West's narrative of its own justified colonial presence in the 'Orient'. There is little point in revisiting the debates over *Orientalism's* merits and flaws. Suffice it to state that making it the starting point of a narrative displacement of a dominant form of representation away from the 'Orient' to a specific part of the 'Arctic', clearly signals a perception of *Orientalism* as an extremely productive way of conceptualising representation. The enormously varied and contentious debate that followed in the wake of *Orientalism* has, however, not followed it to the Arctic, nor has its insights produced a similar discourse about the interests served by Arctic representations. Arguably, there are only three texts that make *Orientalism* a deliberate and staged reference point, and even here there is little consistency in terminology and approach, nor are power relations particularly central. The earliest of these is Ann Fienup-Riordan's conceptualisation of the term Eskimo-Orientalism in her 1995 account of representation of Inuit in American cinema/documentary. The two later studies have in a general sense adopted her approach, but renamed the field. Carina Keskitalo's area study of the Arctic and Kirsten Thisted's exploration of Danish narratives about Greenland both use the term 'Arctic Orientalism'.<sup>2</sup> Fienup-Riordan introduces the term Eskimo-Orientalism in her study, *Freeze-Frame: Alaska Eskimos in the Movies*, a book concerned with representation of Inuit<sup>3</sup> in predominantly American films. In contrast to Said's thorough discussion of the term, Orientalism, Fienup-Riordan's study only contains a short passage where she discusses how she arrived at the term 'Eskimo-Orientalism' as a way of translating Orientalism to the field of Arctic representation:

Just as representations of the Orient mirrors the Occident in specific historical moments (Said 1978), so representations of Eskimos provide another window into the history of the West. Like the representation of the Orient, the representation of the Eskimo is about origins – in this case the origin of society in the 'pure primitive': peaceful, happy, childlike, noble, independent, and free. The Eskimo of the movies is 'essential man,' stripped of social constraint and High Culture. That twentieth-century Inupiaq and Yup'ik men and women were members of complex societies governed by elaborate cultural constraints was unimportant. Their position at the geographic and historical fringe of Western Civilization made them the perfect foils for an 'Eskimo orientalism' as potent as its namesake. (Fienup-Riordan 1995: xi-xii)

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<sup>2</sup> Some readers may be pondering whether I have forgotten Ryall et al (2010), but they refer to rather than actually engage with Said's conceptualisation of Orientalism, and their choice of the term 'Arcticism' also suggests a distancing from a Saidian inspired reading, not least because they do not engage with the question of the re-contextualisation required.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'Inuit' refers to Arctic peoples generally in Greenland, Russia, Canada and Alaska. It has replaced the term 'eskimo' considered derogatory by many Inuit people. See also Fienup-Riordan's (1995: xviii-xix) discussion about her choice of terminology.

While Fienup-Riordan identifies the overlapping concerns between Orientalism and Eskimo-Orientalism she does not elaborate on the ways the predominant (or to use a more Marxist term hegemonic) Western representations about the Arctic relate to Said's conceptualisation of Orientalism. Nor does she discuss how the narrative form she investigates (film) has a particular history, quite different from the predominantly French and British 'colonial literature' and post-1945 American area studies of the Orient that form the backbone of Said's study, or how this difference may be engaged with theoretically and methodologically. If these are limitations related to the point of origin in the cultural translation she performs, there are equally challenging limitations pertaining to her conceptualisation of the discourse on the Arctic. Hence the clearly North American bias in her chosen material is already reflected in the title of her book. This can be justified by a necessary choice of focus, but her inclusion of references to Knud Rasmussen's films about Greenland without any reference to any specificity of a Danish-Greenlandic discourse can only suggest she sees that as an integral part of a wider Western discourse on the Arctic. But this approach fails to address the very different types of narratives about the Arctic, which in each case (Norway, Russia, Denmark, the US and Canada)<sup>4</sup> clearly served purposes which quickly become expressions of a particular national(ist) agenda in relation to the purposes the discourse on the Arctic served. 'Arctic Orientalism' like Orientalism itself is simultaneously a Western mirror, but also a far more specifically defined national-imperial mirror. Fienup-Riordan's book in this way identifies the productiveness of considering Said's insights in relation to the Arctic as a whole, but fails to address the questions of what types of national imaginings the Arctic produced and in the service of what interests.

Keskitalo's *Negotiating the Arctic* in similar fashion to Fienup-Riordan's study engages only to a quite limited extent with Orientalism as a way of understanding differentiated Western ways of conceptualising the Arctic. In fact, one has to wait right to the end of the book to find the brief discussion on Orientalism, which, when it occurs, potentially explodes the whole approach of area studies – to the Arctic. 'Potentially', because we aren't told about the repercussions for the conceptualisation of the Arctic as a region. The book's lack of an articulated Greenlandic focus for example raises the question under what circumstances Greenland can be seen to simply constitute a

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<sup>4</sup> Other less climatically strict approaches to the Arctic region would include Iceland, Sweden and Finland. See Nuttall and Callaghan 2000, xxix-xxxii, and Jensen's (2015) for a discussion of the definition of the Arctic and its limits.

part of the Arctic, and of a wider representational history of the Arctic. Does Denmark imagine the Arctic and Greenland in a similar way to the US? The question of Greenland's peculiar status in the Arctic, politically and in terms of cultural identity, has preoccupied a number of scholars (Bjørst 2008, Graugaard 2009, Thisted 1996, 2002). Kirsten Thisted's work in particular represents a useful development of a Greenlandic 'Arctic Orientalism' discourse, which she uses as a point of departure for discussing Danish narratives about Greenland.

Yet what this article seeks to do departs radically from all of these approaches in two fundamental ways. First of all because it departs from the assumption that it is necessary to look at the particularities of the various Arctic histories, and not least the various shapes of 'colonialism's cultures' (to use a term employed by Nicholas Thomas (1994)) to which they were subjected. Here, Greenland's history is evidently so different from Arctic Canada, Alaska and Arctic Russia/Siberia that one is forced to ask whether in fact it makes sense to use this wholesale regional colonialism approach to the Arctic. Or whether it is in fact not more useful to look at the specific forms that colonial culture took and the particular forms of anticolonialism that developed in various parts of the Arctic. Secondly, the emphasis on particular forms of narrative and disciplinary approaches in Fienup-Riordan, Keskitalo and Thisted's work is important in order to understand how disciplinary approaches inevitably not only shape their fields but also more generally convey conceptualisations beyond the discourse of the discipline itself. This is clear from one of the perhaps most crucial insights from *Orientalism's* early sections, where Said argues that had the perceptions of the Orient merely been an issue of Western writers (mis)representing the Orient then the issue would have been one that could be consigned to literature studies. Said's central argument is that such representations formed a wider part of a colonial administrative culture seeking to justify its own totalising presence. This has consequences for all three approaches to 'Arctic Orientalism'. Keskitalo's Political Science/International Relations approach may be useful to understand the evolution of a political culture both in terms of the colonial and the postcolonial. But it omits to address the wider forms of colonial subjection in the broader form of colonialism's culture, and through this contemporary political representation becomes an issue of a quite narrowly defined question of political agency, rather than a much broader and profound discourse about the foundation of political representation. Fienup-Riordan and Thisted address these wider representational questions since their work is more immediately related to Said's work, yet they both fail to address the repercussions of their findings to that colonialism's culture without which Said's *Orientalism* is reduced to a very limited critique of a Eurocentric aestheticism. To avoid

these pitfalls requires a perusal of how a particularly configured Arctic Orientalism can be understood in the broader economy of representation. More specifically, because the focus in this article is on Greenland (and Denmark), it requires investigating what happens when the politics of a dominant Danish aesthetic narrative is exposed, or undermined, by a Greenlandic perspective, and whether this opens up a new representational space. To answer these questions within a workable framework, I will look at three films about Greenland, the first Danish feature film about Greenland, *Qivitoq*, from 1956, the Danish-Greenlandic film, *Heart of Light* from 1998, and the Danish film, *The Experiment*, from 2010. The three films share a focus on the modernisation era<sup>5</sup> in Greenland as their backdrop, and are of course also noteworthy simply by being a few out of a handful of films about Greenland. *Qivitoq* is set during the time of modernisation which also works as a central theme in the film. *Heart of Light* is primarily concerned with the aftermath of the modernisation era, and its alienating consequences. But crucial sequences from the modernisation period itself ties its contemporary focus directly to the modernisation era. *The Experiment* is a film about the ‘repatriated’ Greenlandic children taken to Denmark in the 1950s. It deals exclusively with their return to a Greenland they struggle to recognise as home, and which struggles to recognise them as Greenlanders. The analysis will read across the films with two particular themes in mind: Modernisation as a program instigated by the Danes that subsequent accounts largely concur in condemning because it reduced the Greenlanders to mere bystanders or second-class citizens (see Dahl 1986, and Jensen 2012). The second theme examines Greenlandic agency as a way of conceptualising Greenlandic resistance to the imposed modernisation in the three films.

### **Modernisation as discourse in the three films**

*Qivitoq* projects the Danish protagonist, with the generic 1950s Danish name, Jens, as the local administrator of a small outpost only reachable by ship from the major settlements. His main mission appears to be to persuade a local Greenlandic, Pavia, to purchase his own fishing boat. Modernisation in the shape of a money based economy is arriving at the small settlement, and Jens appears to have identified Pavia as the only local with the required talent and drive to help him

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<sup>5</sup> The Greenlandic modernisation era began when the Danish government renewed its presence in Greenland after the Second World War had cut off Denmark from Greenland for five years. More specifically it refers to two detailed sets of plans for a complete overhaul of how Greenland was run, known as the G50 and G60 plans. In many respects the ‘modernisation’ process continued after the 1960s, but it was now accompanied by a strong and irrepressible Greenlandic critique of the effects of this process on Greenlandic society accompanied by some critical Danish voices.

transform the small community. This perception is shared between Jens and the film's storyline which depicts the Greenlanders in a light not unfamiliar to followers of Tolkien's hobbits. The laid-back attitude of the small naive community is contrasted with the bustling major settlement, whose building activities are sustained by a far greater and more direct Danish involvement. The acquisition and arrival of the single fishing boat in the small community becomes the leitmotif for this emergent new order. Seal hunting and other traditional forms of hunting are no longer feasible economically, and Pavia is the sole character who bears upon his shoulders the responsibility for transforming the community, so it will adapt itself to the new times. Jens is the benevolent orchestrator who continuously pushes Pavia in the direction of the modernisation economy, stressing to Pavia there is no alternative. *Qivitoq* is as a typical Danish, 1950s Hollywood style drama, predictable in its form as a romanticised vision of Greenland, seen largely through the eyes of Jens and other Danes, and the plot revolves around the love affair between the two Danish protagonists cum film stars. Eva, the love interest of Jens, arrives in the large settlement to meet up with her unsuspecting fiancé, a doctor at the local hospital, who during their separation has taken up with a nurse at the hospital. To save her and the Danish community the embarrassment of her presence, she is shipped off to Jens's outpost, where he has to put her up much to his annoyance. Having been abandoned by his wife, who couldn't cope with life in Greenland, and absconded to Denmark, his antagonism towards women is palpable, and Jens and Eva have prolonged angry exchanges until, predictably within the mainstream cinema of the 1950s, they fall in love. Jens's love interest in Eva, however, distracts his attention from Pavia's fishing boat project. Pavia, after being ridiculed by the community because of his inability to catch fish (caused by his own impatience coupled with Jens's failure to provide guidance), goes *Qivitoq*. *Qivitoq* is a term that refers to Greenlanders turning their backs on society after a moment of great humiliation and taking to the mountains.<sup>6</sup> People turning *Qivitoq* perish in the mountains, but in this case Jens rushes after Pavia, and the chase takes both of them into the dangerous area of the glaciers. Jens falls into an ice crevasse, and a little boy who accompanies him finally manages to get Pavia to rescue Jens. Harmony in the little community is restored, and marriage is on the cards for both Pavia and Jens and their somewhat passive girlfriends.

This plot line sounds all too predictable, so why bother with this 1950s idealised image of benevolent Danes helping Greenlanders through the challenging modernisation process? Two

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<sup>6</sup> For an article in Danish that discusses *Qivitoq* (or *Qivittoq*) as a leitmotif in Danish and Greenlandic writing, see Thisted 2004.

reasons stand out in my reading of the three films. One is to look for ambivalences in the immaculised image of a late colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland. The second and related point is to see to what extent later filmic representations of this period are better at capturing the problematic sides of the modernisation process, which has been exposed in subsequent writing about the modernisation era (Dahl 1986, Lidegaard 1973, Viemose 1977, Jensen 2012). To what extent and how do later films incorporate, or correct the largely unproblematised view of the modernisation era held at the time? In other words, the purpose here is to identify to what extent the contemporary and the later engagements with the modernisation era in Greenland are able to do so critically. While it may initially seem unreasonable to expect *Qivitoq* to project a critical perspective, Greenlandic criticism of the modernisation process is, in fact, as old as the modernisation process itself. Hence critical Greenlandic voices were present also at the time when *Qivitoq* was made. The omission of such Greenlandic voices from the film is not merely a narrative choice, but reflects a broader choice of representational strategies that cannot accommodate Greenlandic critical voices, because they disturb too profoundly the Danish narration of benevolence. It is this broader structure beyond the film's narrative that frames the range of narrative choices and types of voices within the film, which inevitably results in the reduction of Greenlanders to stock characters and passive witnesses to the modernisation process pushed by the energetic and restless Jens.

The silencing of the Greenlanders removes the possibility of establishing a Greenlandic counter narrative in the film, which can be a way of explaining the existence in the film of curious elements that suggest a disturbing ambivalent dark side to the immaculised image of white, Danish, male benevolence. Eva for example tells Jens during one of their angry exchanges that he constantly bosses the Greenlanders around. While the statement is disconnected from the largely idealised representation of Jens, her verbal attack strikes a chord with the film's representation of the impatient, entrepreneurial, and all-powerful local administrator. Such a reading is sustained by the fact that she clearly strikes a raw nerve in his self-perception. In fact, far from the idealised depiction of the Danish administrator, the film also hints at Jens performing a Danish form of 'Qivitoqism' as he has turned his back on Danish society, after the humiliation of being abandoned by his wife. The Danish form of going Qivitoq is to hide away in a Greenlandic outpost, without being able to return to Denmark. The difference though is that to Jens his Qivitoq experience has become positive, since he has adapted himself to (running) Greenland. He speaks a little Greenlandic and is clearly of the community even as his hierarchical position puts a limit to his

mingling with the locals and ‘justifies’ his bossing everyone around. Furthermore, when he pursues Pavia to bring him back (Pavia is after all Jens’s solitary investment in the local modernisation process), Jens’s nearly fatal accident grants Pavia a space as a rescuer, which momentarily reverses the power relations between the two men. Pavia returns as a restored figure, and one assumes a future successful fisherman, and hence extremely central to the community’s future survival in a now modernised economy. Even so, this space of agency is extremely limited, as Pavia never really speaks, which reinforces the sense of him as a helper rather than a protagonist with agency. The main feature of the film’s ambivalence in terms of its portrayal of power relations is reduced to the ways in which the Danish hegemonic narrative cracks in a very limited number of scenes in the film. And lest too much space is granted to the subversive potential of these cracks, there are plenty of scenes which bolster the image of the entrepreneurial Dane versus the passive Greenlanders, for example when Jens rescues a little boy from the sleigh dogs, while the Greenlanders remain immobilised by fear.

In chronological order, the second film is *Heart of Light*, released in 1998. It tells the story of Rasmus, a Greenlander in his fifties, who has succumbed to alcoholism and self-delusion as he struggles to maintain a traditional hunting life against the encroachment of an internalised Danish way of life pursued by Greenlanders generally, in one of Greenland’s major (but unnamed) towns. His two sons manifest the choices faced by Greenlanders, as one, with the both Danish and Greenlandic name Simon, has a Danish speaking Greenlandic girlfriend, a job, education, listens to Danish music and unproblematically embraces the new Greenland created by the modernisation process. The other brother with the Greenlandic name, Niisi, represents both the search for a more Greenlandic based identity, but seems primarily driven by his desire to reconcile the drunk, but likable father, with the straightlaced alienated, brother. Disaster strikes, as a fall-out between Rasmus and Simon provokes Niisi into shooting Simon’s girlfriend, and subsequently commit suicide. Rasmus performs a ritual of grief and leaves the town in humiliation on a soul-searching mission into the Greenlandic outback. His journey can both be seen as a form of going Qivitoq, it can however also be read as restoring the soul through a ‘shamanistic catharsis’.<sup>7</sup> The film’s mode of social realism is replaced by magic realism, when Rasmus encounters a Qivitoq who shows him his own life story, and through this convinces Rasmus to reform and then return to society. Rasmus

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<sup>7</sup> My seemingly contradictory mixture of Christian and Inuit cosmological references here is deliberate, as indeed the mixing of Christian and Inuit belief is a feature of Greenlandic culture, which signals the survival of elements of an Inuit cosmology within a Greenlandised Christianity.



then goes hunting and returns to the community with his catch. The modernisation process in *Heart of Light* is both a contemporary backdrop (the Greenlandic society completely transformed, ‘Danofied’ and self-alienated, yet Greenlanders, such as Rasmus’s wife and Simon function unproblematically in this world), and a leitmotif in the film. Modernisation as a leitmotif is symbolically represented by an (in)famous rifle, which Niisi uses to shoot Simon’s girlfriend and commit suicide with. Rasmus finds the rifle as he embarks on the soul-searching expedition, and with the Qivitoq as catalyser, discovers the rifle has an engraving which completely turns around his perception of his own role in relation to the Danish modernisation process in Greenland. From the film’s beginning he has thought, he played the role of the subservient Greenlandic child, singing for the Danish important visitor a children’s song in Danish. He now realises that he sang the song in Greenlandic as an anticolonial demonstration – or a performance of an act of mimicry. The 1950s backdrop of the film appears in short sequences. One of these shows Danish visiting dignitaries in the plumed costumes which highlight in the contemporary framework of the film the outlandish and outdated dress code of the Danish establishment reminiscent of European displays of self-aggrandisements elsewhere in the colonial world. This is documentary footage and hence lends additional weight to the contemporary Greenlandic distancing from a Danish administered past. Historical distancing is further strengthened by the black-and-white and visibly dated footage of the arrival of the Danish civil servants. The other sequence that forms a historical backdrop, even if understood in the magic realism space of the Qivitoq’s narrative, is the Qivitoq’s tragic story of being ostracised from the local (Greenlandic) community which made him go Qivitoq. Here the theme, as in *Qivitoq*, is the Greenlandic society as tightly knit and conformity seeking, quick to condemn perceived outsiders. In both films this is the single most condemning attitude attributed to the Greenlanders.

*The Experiment* (2010) is the contemporary film most overtly concerned with the modernisation era. Based on Danish journalist, Tine Bryld’s book, *I den bedste mening [With the Best of Intentions]*, it tells the factual story of the lives of a group of Greenlandic children sent to Denmark in the early 1950s to be educated for a year in Denmark, before returning as Greenlandic-Danish spearheads of the modernisation program in Greenland. As Bryld records in her book, the experiment was a complete disaster. The children did not become spearheads of the modernisation program, some of them developed deep psychological traumas due to their separation from their families and friends in Greenland. They lost their ability to speak Greenlandic, and when they returned to Greenland they has lost their affinity with Greenlandic society. The film does not deal

with their journey to Denmark, their time in Denmark nor their return to Greenland, but begins when they are being placed in an orphanage. This creates problems for the film's narrative, because the absence of their Danish experience, and Greenlandic life before being sent to Denmark means the audience is at a loss about how to understand their situation as anything but the result of an emergency. It also leaves completely unfocused the critique of the system that led to such a practice, which the film obviously seeks to raise. In lieu of a real engagement with the practice, that is, to understand the basis of the Danish cultural perceptions enabling this practice, the film chooses instead to make two disastrous narrative choices. One is the extremely reductive portrait of the Danes in charge of the children's program in Greenland, as unsympathetic, distanced, patriarchs, whose motivation for dealing with the children is reduced to sheer anti-Greenlandic racism coupled with an overdose of misogyny directed at the Danish nurse who seeks to protect the children. There is little doubt that the Greenland of the time witnessed a healthy portion of Danish racism and discriminatory behaviour, and that Danish society generally was characterised by deeply patriarchal structures. But the film reduces these tropes to dated stereotypes, makes them already redundant stereotypes against which a courageous (even if in the film clearly also at times deeply misguided and frustrated), and easily identifiable as contemporary, nurse fights. This impression is strengthened by the film's support of the nurse as the overall protagonist who undergoes a psychological development, while the child protagonist, Karen, although clearly at the centre of the narrative remains a study of a child trapped between Danish and Greenlandic culture. Her agonistic relationship with her Greenlandic family, with whom she can no longer speak, is revealed in a couple of sequences as an attempted reconciliation. But its disastrous end is already foreshadowed through our knowledge that the family is planning to move away. The film's take on the modernisation program is to portray it as a program whose rationales are obscure, while in fact the modernisation program was carefully laid out and structures to support its implementation were put in place. What the film narrates instead is a story of the predictable results of leaving children's welfare in the care of patriarchs. Through this representation the nurse becomes the one mitigating circumstance, and it is extremely tempting to see this strategy as a way for contemporary middle class Danes – not least women – to identify themselves with the nurse against the patriarchal order of the day, which comes across as so stultified that it also appears unthreatening to contemporary metrosexual Danish males. In fact, it is hard to imagine how anyone can identify with these dinosaurs. Yet, it would have been so easy to show, how the Danish-Greenlandic power relations at the time, are precisely not a historical window through which we gaze and shake our heads in

bewilderment at its ‘otherworldly’ nature. That it is in fact an instance not at the end of a long history of a colonial relationship, but rather another episode in an ongoing saga of Danish lording it over Greenlanders. The film through this confirms another problematic aspect of the postcolonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland, the Danish inability to accept its history of repression in Greenland as something supported by the central structures of the Danish state and those people who were sent out to ensure its implementation in Greenland. Instead the film takes the Greenlandic children as its hostages in a peculiar gendered statement, where the patriarchy is simultaneously shown up for its misogynist attitude, while being placed safely in the past, and as such inviting contemporary Danes to see themselves as safely removed from such old-fashioned and redundant forms of bureaucratic Danishness.

### **Greenlandic agency**

It is possible to read the three films’ representations of the Greenlanders as instances of Gayatri Spivak’s now famous essay ‘Can the subaltern speak’. Clearly, they can in *Heart of Light*, yet it is equally necessary to ask, whether the Greenlanders are in fact subaltern, not in the sense of belonging to a lower order, since that is clearly the case in all three films. But rather as an ultimate process of othering in the filmic representations, and then seek to establish whether their voices can be recuperated. In *Qivitoq* the Greenlanders are both silenced and silent. Forms of rebellion against the Danish hegemony are episodic at best, such as the stereotype of the ‘lazy native’ represented through one Greenlander who constantly refers to his sore arm as responsible for his inability to help out. His miraculous recovery at the end paves the way for a hope for the rise of an energetic modernity driven Greenland helped by Jens and his morally upright and committed Danish colleagues. To read his ‘laziness’ as sly civility, as silent anticolonial resistance, requires a stretch of the imagination that makes the film’s narrative framework unrecognisable. Yet, Jens after his nearly fatal accident gains a respect for Pavia that presumably no longer lets him be reducible to Jens’s instrumentality. Pavia’s girlfriend’s stubborn refusal to give up waiting for his return also marks a moment in which the Danes are no longer to be relied upon as the deliverer of Greenlandic modernity with Greenlanders as passive bystanders.

Greenlandic agency is at the forefront in *Heart of Light*, even if it is constantly challenged by the structures put in place by the Danish modernisation program. Structures which have long since been put in the hands of Greenlanders with the introduction of Home Rule in 1979, yet, they remain

solidly alienating in the film. Fanon's warning of the internalisation of the coloniser's discourse at the moment of emancipation would be one way in which one could begin to understand this process. Yet, there are also implicit inconsistencies in the film. Why does Rasmus need to embark on his long journey, to accept himself as simultaneously a product of traditional Greenlandic society (complete with a rifle) and the modernisation program which brought very concrete creature comforts to the Greenlanders, when his wife and one of his sons so seamlessly tread the balance between these two Greenlands? The narrative of Rasmus's transformation from drunk and inadequate to a man in charge of his own destiny is a story about reconciliation after traumatic events which have recurred with such alarming frequency in contemporary Greenland. But it is also a story that delivers a very particular form of agency, which reads alarmingly easily as the narrative of the recovered formerly castrated colonial subject, so familiar from for example Anglophone Caribbean novels. This opens for reconciliation only on the conditions set by the recovered Rasmus, where the supportive wife and alienated son remain stock characters compared to the drama unfolding inside Rasmus. What the film does achieve though is to show contemporary Greenlandic problems are not reducible to the, for the Danes, far more comforting narrative of a native inability to cultural transformation. These problems are instead the result of the longterm effects of a Danish modernisation policy in Greenland. Here, it becomes uninteresting whether it was driven by patriarchal will to rule, or a misguided benevolent Danish attitude of wanting the best for the Greenlanders. And why wouldn't it be a mixture of both? The interesting question regarding the Danish viewers, whose possibilities for identification with the marginal Danish actors in the film are virtually non-existent, is to ask what is at stake in identifying with Rasmus in all his inadequate glory in the beginning of the film and through his transformation with the guidance of the Qivitoq? If you accept his transformation you also come to identify with his anti-colonial stance in his refusal to perform to Danish expectations and sing the Danish children's song in Danish. If you accept this as a viewer you also come to identify with Rasmus's view of the children's song as performing a very important role in the process of ensuring the Danish bureaucracy's conversion of Greenlandic children into 'brown' Danes. A Danish nursery rhyme being an instrument of Danish colonialism is deeply disturbing, because it suggests there are no innocent performances in the colonial world.

It is here that *Heart of Light* deals very clearly with a similar theme to *The Experiment*. Also, in *The Experiment* children are encouraged, threatened and coerced into becoming Danish 'brown' colonial subjects in Greenland. Their resistance and collaboration is clearly mapped through their reaction to Greenlanders and things Greenlandic. But what kinds of identifications does the film

enable for the viewer? It is hard to find anything positive to say about the process of their education. Hence institutionalised Denmark is an easy target to identify, and perhaps unsurprisingly so in the neoliberal sentiment of our times. Karen as the second protagonist of the film offers an alternative space for identification to that of the Danish nurse. Here Karen's trapped existence between the two worlds not only does not offer much hope (the family we know will depart from the town and move elsewhere), she ends up suffering a nervous breakdown. Even if the fact that for the first time she cries also suggests the beginning of a healing process. Because we are never presented with her first loss of contact with the family, identifying with her loss as other than remote becomes difficult. Instead the unsuccessful attempts at reconciliation are in focus, but how are we to understand these, if we are not presented with the separation? Agency, as an anticolonial strategy, which is something a film can choose or not choose to emphasise, is hence not given any space in which it can become pronounced as a critique of whatever produced this situation for the children in the first place, and its continuation at the orphanage. Instead we are left with the individual, traumatised experience of the parentless and cultureless child, which again is a far more comforting trope for a Danish audience to identify with. It has no consequences for the ways in which we think, rethink or don't think about Danish-Greenlandic power relations. It takes place, as does *Qivitoq*, inside a carefully patrolled Danish defined space, despite the fact that both films are about a Danish-Greenlandic space opened by the modernisation program, defined and articulated by Danes. While this is predictable in a film made in 1956 about the modernisation program and its consequences, it raises awkward questions when the film is made in 2010. Not only because of the reflexivity that it requires to make a film about such a traumatic incident in Danish-Greenlandic history. Not only because other films have been made elsewhere about numerically far more serious cases, for example in the increasingly routine references to Stolen (Aboriginal) Generations in Australian films (including blockbusters such as *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *Australia*). But more than anything because it is unforgivable that Danish narratives about the Danish-Greenlandic relationship continue to be premised on the idea that anything is possible bar the telling of such episodes as revealing profound aspects about a deeply rooted Danish self-justification in all its ways of dealing with Greenland. It is here that we are brought back to the beginning of this article's mapping of Arctic Orientalism. Far from a belated effort to come to terms with historical practises that we now condemn as colonial in intent, what the films spread over half a century reveal, is that Arctic Orientalism represents one way of engaging with colonialism. A colonialism that continues to inform the way relations between Denmark and Greenland are narrated. Some more critical than

others, yet the scope for rescuing Danes from having to address their historical and contemporary complicity with colonialism seems undiminishing.

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### **The films**

- Heart of Light* (1998). Directed by Jacob Grønlykke. Produced by ASA Film Production
- Qivitoq* (1956). Directed by Erik Balling. Produced by Nordisk Film A/S
- The Experiment* (2010). Directed by Louise N. D. Friedberg. Produced by Nimbus Film