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## **Post-colonial identity in Greenland?**

*When the empire dichotomizes back - bring politics back in*

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**Post-Colonial Identity in Greenland?  
When the Empire Dichotomizes Back - Bring Politics Back In**

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**Abstract**

In the gradual unravelling of Greenland's colonial relationship to Denmark, an essentialist conceptualization of Greenlandic identity has played a significant role. However, both our scholarly understanding of post-colonial Greenlandic identity *and* the process towards independence for Greenland could be furthered by bringing politics back in. Based on a discourse analysis of the Greenlandic debate on language, this paper makes three claims: first, the identity projects promoted in Greenland are based on an essentialist conception of identity. Secondly, Greenlandic identity discourse combines elements of traditional Inuit culture and elements of colonial modernity. Thirdly, monolingual Greenlanders are those with the most to gain from abandoning the dichotomy of essentialist identities. Strategically, the paper suggests a *post-post-colonial* Greenlandic identity as a means of avoiding the exclusion of valuable human resources. One step towards relieving the relation to the Danish Other of identificatory weight could be a gradual shift to English as second language.

**Key words:** Greenland, Inuit, identity politics, language policy, post-colonialism, the Other

**1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Greenland is gradually unravelling its colonial relationship to Denmark. In 1953, the legal status of Greenland was transformed: Denmark chose, more or less unilaterally, to integrate the former colony as a county and its inhabitants as Danish citizens. After the Greenlandic version of the 1960s youth rebellion made its way across the Atlantic from the higher education institutions in Denmark,

a Home Rule arrangement was introduced in 1979. At present, the politicians are negotiating 'self-government'; an enhanced version of Home Rule. If post-coloniality refers to a condition in which coloniality proper has formally ended but nevertheless continues to be a seemingly necessary reference for most of society, then Greenland may certainly be labelled a post-colonial society. Whatever the exact result of the ongoing negotiations, Greenlandic society remains post-colonial. In this sense, Greenlandic identity discourse may also be labelled post-colonial (cf. Mongia 1996:2).

In the processes leading first to Home Rule and now to Self Government, the affirmation of a Greenlandic identity based on traditional Inuit culture and Greenlandic language has been decisive. This paper presents a strategic analysis of the current Greenlandic identity discourse and suggests to Greenlandic *identity politicians* a way forward based on this analysis. Specifically, the paper suggests a gradual shift to English as second language as a first step towards a *post-post-colonial* Greenlandic identity. Fighting for a Greenlandic identity beyond post-coloniality might assist Greenland in crucial ways on its path to independence by making an inclusion of Danish-speaking Greenlanders less problematic. It might also represent a step towards an identity discourse which lives up to post-colonialist standards. What this *-ism* implies is laid out in section 2.

The paper then proceeds to make three theoretically informed empirical claims based on a discourse analysis of the Greenlandic debate on language: first (in section 3), that the identity projects promoted in Greenland are generally based on an essentialist conception of identity. Secondly (section 4), that Greenlandic identity discourse cannot be understood with reference to aboriginal Inuit culture alone; elements of modernity, imported by colonialism, have been included. Thirdly (section 5), that monolingual Greenlanders, be they Greenlandic speaking or Danish speaking, are those with the most to gain from abandoning this dichotomy of essentialist identities (Greenlandic vs. Danish). This analysis forms the basis for the strategic proposal made in the conclusion (section 6).

## **2. Bringing politics back into post-colonial studies**

The paper initially characterized Greenland as a post-colonial setting since it is legally past its status as a colony; nevertheless, this colonial relation remains an inescapable reference for society. However, the mere temporal condition of post-coloniality is not alone in attempting to define post-colonial identities: from a safe harbour in academia, post-colonialism is making prescriptions for how to conduct identity politics under post-colonial conditions.

A basic post-colonialist position would be to resist not only Western hegemony but also fixed Modernist categories such as that of 'identity' (Mongia 1996:2ff; Appiah 1996; Hall 1996b:247). In the post-colonial predicament, the Modern demand for steadfast identity is relieved by hybridization, creolization etc. Even if this -ism and its prescriptions have indeed made their way into Greenlandic identity politics (Langgård 2002:82ff; Thomsen 1996:274; Sørensen 1991:52, 151f; Christiansen 2000:67f; Pedersen 1997:153; 171; Bryld 2002:15; Lennert 2001:59), it remains a rather marginal novelty. While differing radically on other levels, the dominating strands of Greenlandic identity discourse remain – as the next section will show – essentialist. Hence, Greenlandic identity discourse is not particularly post-colonial (in the post-colonialist sense). Since the 1960s, the essentialist ethno-nationalist revivalism may be said to have been a wise strategic 'choice' for the Greenlandic elite to further the de-colonization process: it has served as an argument for transferring sovereignty and resources from Denmark to Greenland much more rapidly than anyone imagined possible in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>2</sup>

Literature and the social sciences<sup>3</sup> each played a role in the process of colonization allowing modernization to reach the Other parts of the world (cf. Anderson 1991:Ch.2, 10). If one constructs concepts – of ethnic groups endowed with essential qualities and homogenous nation states with national literatures in national languages – with which to identify the world, one should not be surprised if the empirical world appropriates the concepts and identifies themselves with them (Briggs 1996). Analyzing and theorizing the Danish-Greenlandic relationship explicitly as a post-colonial relationship has, however, largely been carried out by scholars of literature (including Thisted 2002; 2004; 2005; Hauge 2004; 2006; Newman 2004) and history (Thomsen 1996), though anthropology (including Sørensen 1991; 1994; Sejersen 2003) has contributed from comparable perspectives. The fact that the point of gravity in studies observing through post-colonialist lenses is in the humanities is not specific to the Greenlandic case (Petersen 2006:394). When it comes to perceiving the Danish-Greenlandic post-colonial relationship as a *political* relationship, the sociology of law of Hanne Petersen (i.a. 2003; 2006) has come closest, venturing deep into what would count as political philosophy. Political science has remained silent, even if the ongoing (post-)modernization of Greenland has blurred the categorical dividing lines between the First and Fourth Worlds; and even if the social sciences hitherto in charge of Greenland have challenged political science by entering its domain:

*[A] main purpose of earlier anthropology consisted in identifying cultures. Representatives of these so-called other cultures are now perfectly able to identify themselves, which leaves the scholars either out of job or with a new mission: to identify their identifications; in other words, to study reflexive identity politics. (Eriksen 2000:8).*

When focusing on reflexive *identity politics*, political science must follow Derrida and read the social world as text. In this sense, there is nothing wrong with the way the scholars of literature tell their stories. Quite the contrary, the artefacts they study both reflect and shape the wider identity discourses to some degree. Only it is important to remember that literature does not tell all the stories; important parts are neglected.

Hence, it is time to bring politics back into the study of Greenlandic identity in three ways: a) By broadening the empirical focus from literary texts to include overtly political texts and non-literary texts focusing on identity and language; b) by zooming in, not on the identities constructed, but on identity political negotiations and conflicts as such; c) by assuming responsibility for furthering the identity negotiations based on a strategic analysis of the current identity political landscape:<sup>4</sup>

First, we must study other texts – other parts of the social world – than literature to understand the post-colonial condition. Novels and other literary constructs are important statements in the ongoing negotiation of Greenlandic identity (Thisted 2002:202, 221), and one of the main themes in Greenlandic literature is the relationship between Greenland and Denmark in general and the tensions between Greenlandic and Danish identity, culture and language in particular (Berthelsen 1983; 1988; Thisted 2002:204). A general aim of Greenlandic literature has been to help Greenlanders escape the subordinate position in relation to Denmark. However, the strategies for this escape have ranged from a propagation of assimilation to the dominant identity to the affirmation of a separate identity of equal or even superior value (Thisted 2002:205; cf. Berthelsen 1983; 1988). Literary texts do state and summarize important positions in Greenlandic identity politics, but they are much too sparse (cf. Berthelsen 1988:146) to represent the nuances of Greenlandic identity politics.<sup>5</sup>

The literary texts could fruitfully be supplemented with two bodies of more political texts: texts produced within the framework of institutionalized politics may be useful, since they appeal to voters and hence presumably aim to resonate with the general public (Wæver 2002:42). Texts dealing with questions identified as central to identity and colonial relations may be political, even

though they purport not to be. In Greenland, it is difficult to speak about language without committing a political act; even if an important aspect of identity politics in Greenland and elsewhere consists of insisting on being above politics.

Second, and more importantly, it might be rewarding to focus on the struggles to define identity rather than on the identity constructs as such communicated; more on identity politics than any single representation. We must study texts revealing disagreements within them or study disagreements between different instantiations of texts. Theoretically, this is warranted by the fact that identity is always in the making as ongoing discourse; it is always a claim (empirically, it seems obvious to me that Greenlandic identity is presently more of a struggle than anything else...). The carefully knitted literary texts may be more closed than more immediate reactions in other parts of identity negotiations.

It should be clear from the first and second points that the third point – the responsibility to further the identity political negotiations – may only be tended to on the basis of an analysis of the present Greenlandic identity discourse. The debate on language stands central in Greenlandic identity politics, as Greenlandic language is featured as a prominent element in Greenlandic identity and, hence, as an active diacriticon for inclusion/exclusion (Gad 2005:77f, 146; cf. Sejersen 1999:130; Kleivan 1999b:98; Lennert 2001:57). This is why the following sections present an overview of the basic elements in Greenlandic identity politics necessary to understand the problematique of language policy in Greenland, before the concluding section in the paper takes up the constructive task of suggesting a path forward.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Digital essentialism in Greenlandic identity discourse**

This section of the paper claims that the identity projects currently promoted in Greenland are based on essentialist conceptions of identity. To make this claim, a basic definition of identity is initially provided in two parts by noting, first, that identity is a discursive phenomenon, and, secondly, that identity is constituted in relation to Others.

The point of departure for this paper is that within the social sciences, 'identity' is always – whether consciously or not – shorthand for 'identity discourse'. Literally, no two persons are identical. Nor are any of us identical with those we were merely one or two experiences ago (cf. Fink 1991). So identity is not something out there; nor is not something inside. Identity (i.e. identity

discourse) is when we speak *about* A and B being identical; or when we speak *as if* A and B were identical. This means that we can only observe identity in discourse (Frello 2003:5f).

The claim that someone is identical entails that someone else is said to be different. Hence, identity discourse involves drawing boundaries and thereby including some as identical and excluding others as different (cf. Derrida 1988:52). Bearing the colonial relations in mind, it comes as no surprise that the primary Other from which Greenlandic identity is different – and from which Greenlandic identity is threatened – is Denmark, Danes and phenomena perceived as being Danish (Sørensen 1991:48, 121).

A number of traits inherent in Greenlandic identity discourse indicate that both the Greenlandic identity and its Danish Other are seen as springing from *essentially* different cultures (cf. Sørensen 1994:168ff, 176ff) which do not easily mix. Cultural elements and practices appear to be *digitally* or discretely distributed: either they are thoroughly Danish and, hence, not Greenlandic; or they are truly Greenlandic and, hence, not Danish. The possibility of an *analogue* gradation from Greenlandic to Danish or combinability of Greenlandic and Danish is precluded (cf. Langgård 2003:219ff; Frello 2003:73-4; Eriksen 1993:114ff et passim).

It appears basic to Greenlandic identity discourse that, on the inside, every person has a kernel defining the *real* person as it would unfold if allowed. And in parallel: on the inside, every culture seems to have a kernel defining the *real* culture as it would unfold if allowed. This kernel – which basically includes elements of traditional Inuit material culture fitted to survival in the High North (Sørensen 1994:103, 125ff; 1991:187) and which definitively includes Greenlandic language (Thomsen 1996:270) – is hereditary: it takes at least one Greenlandic parent to be a Greenlander (Kleivan 1999b:98).

Hence, a Dane can never be a Greenlander: if s/he learns to speak Greenlandic, new exams emerge: do you know how to behave in Greenlandic nature? Do you enjoy *mattak* (whale skin) and other *kalaalimerngit* (Greenlandic food) (cf. Kleivan 1996; Petersen 1991:18)? The delimitation of Self and Other requires a measure of flexibility to be upheld (Barth 1969).

Nevertheless a Greenlander may be criticized for being *too* Danish: a person's gait and posture may be enough to label her/him Danish (Sørensen 1991:fn.11); walking straight and tall signifies that you are accustomed to level pavement; if you were raised on the rocks of a small settlement, your gait should be more rolling and shuffling (Udvalget 1963:46ff). Well-educated Greenlanders – who spent years in Denmark – need to frequently stress their Greenlandic identity in

meetings etc lest they be called Danish (Sørensen 1991:50; 1994:143; cf. Bryld 2002:15). Modern, urban life is basically excluded from Greenlandic identity, even if most Greenlanders actually live in cities (Thomsen 1996:265, 270).

Even if a Greenlander is *too* Danish, however, due to the inherent kernel of Greenlandic culture, s/he never ceases being a Greenlander. Hence, a Danish-speaking Greenlander – or every Greenlander living in a society influenced by Denmark – must experience a feeling of being split (Sørensen 1994:168ff; cf. Christiansen 2000:64).

Some of the participants in the Greenlandic debate on language – namely some of the monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders – actually did challenge this alleged feeling of being split: 'No', their claim was, they did not feel split between a Greenlandic and a Danish half. But even they upheld the image of Greenlandic and Danish as a digital question of either/or: these Danish-speaking Greenlanders 'merely' tried to re-draw the delimiting line along different diacritica, allowing themselves to be Greenlandic even though they did not speak Greenlandic (Gad 2005:160, 179f, 211ff, 230f).<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, to make sense in Greenlandic identity discourse, you must speak as if *real* Greenlandic identity grows out of an aboriginal Greenlandic culture and as if this culture is essentially discrete from and exclusive *vis-à-vis* that of the Danish Other: Danish and Greenlandic may at best blend like oil and vinegar, but the mixture will most likely behave like waste oil dumped on the water of the fjords of Greenland (cf. Thisted 2002). Any deviation from this position must be argued – at least when 'Danish' and 'Greenlandic' is explicitly related. At the same time, however, a much more complex image of Greenlandic identity emerges when discussing what is actually of value in Greenland of the present and the future. This is the focus of the next section.

#### **4. Modern and traditional elements in Greenlandic identity discourse**

The preceding section found that Greenlandic identity is basically constituted in relation to a Danish Other. Since identity is a discursive phenomenon rather than an essence encoded somewhere once and for all, however, any criterion to include in the Self or exclude as Other is open to challenge by the next honourable speaker. When conceptualizing identity as discourse, we cannot but open identity up to politics (Connolly 1991:ix, 65).<sup>8</sup> This section of the paper claims that Greenlandic identity, as it is implied in discourse, cannot be understood with reference to traditional Inuit culture alone; elements of modernity – imported by colonialism – have been included. The insistence on



simultaneously prioritizing traditional Inuit culture *and* including modern practices as Greenlandic spurs tension in discourse and makes for complex rhetorical manoeuvrings.

Greenlandic identity politics – i.e. the negotiations over what Greenlandic identity should be – evolves around two basic narrative figures: a figure of the decline of traditional culture and a figure of modernization (Gad 2005:61-70, 180-200; cf. Thomsen 1996; Adolphsen 2002; Larsen 1992a:391).

The basic narrative figure of present-day Greenlandic identity politics is the decline of the Noble Greenlandic Savage and his culture. While the image of the noble savage – fitted by his close connection to nature to relate to both man and beast in a respectful and ecologically functional manner – originates in European romanticism, it has been taken over by the Greenlanders themselves as an adequate depiction of their ancestors (cf. Thomsen 1996; Pedersen 1997:165; Sørensen 1994; Sejersen 1999:128). On this background, *development* is "not just a neutral, technological machinery following its own laws. Development refers to Danishness as well. It is assumed that Development leads to a hollowing out of what is specifically Greenlandic" (Sørensen 1994:101, my transl.). Hence, to stop the decline and recover the true values of Inuit tradition, the Danish Other is to be returned to the Eastern shores of the Atlantic Ocean where he belongs. But there is another Other at play as well: the corrupted, present-day Greenlander serves as an Other who must perform the well-known nationalist turn and restore the glory of the Golden Days of Inuit culture to live out his true identity (cf. Smith 1991:161).

However, an alternative narrative figure – that of modernization – has opposite implications: the point of departure is the self-same image of an aboriginal Greenlandic culture in decline – but according to this social Darwinist line of thought, such hunter/gatherer cultures are doomed, as they are not fit for modernity (Gad 2005:61-64, Thomsen 1996:279; Thorleifsen 1992:22f; Kleivan 1999a). In the beginning of the 20th century, the presence of the maternalist Danes was generally presented as being fortunate: the Danes were there to attend to the modernization of the Greenlandic children (cf. Thomsen 1996:269ff). The Danes might be Others, but the real Other to overcome was the noble but doomed savage.

After WWII, formal equality was declared, but the realities were disappointing (Petersen 1992:185; Sørensen 1991:48; Thomsen 1996:271), since social and ethnic cleavages still coincided (Thomsen 1996:272; Larsen 1992b:387; Kleivan, H. 1969; Udvalget 1963:43). Hence, both the modernization figure and the rise of a Greenlandic elite within the Danish framework appeared to

be blocked (cf. Anderson 1991:53ff), and Greenlandic identity discourse was primed for the nationalist turn.

Most Greenlandic politics can be read as a negotiation of how this nationalist restoration project is to be configured. The basis for this claim is that the figure of decline cannot perform the restoration of yesterday's aboriginal Inuit culture into a full-fledged independent nation-state. Since the nation state is, if anything, a modern conception (cf. Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1998), the nationalist project must import elements of the figure of modernization. In Greenland, however, modernization comes in Danish guises. Hence the need to carefully select the necessary elements of modernity and precariously articulate them in relation to Greenlandic identity discourse in ways that let modernity in without appearing Danish (Gad 2005:180-200).

No one articulates a Greenlandic society that is not a *democratic welfare* society. Quite to the contrary, democratic values, specific democratic practices and democracy itself, as well as the level of welfare and the development towards an independent welfare state, are repeatedly pointed out as threatened by various elements of implemented or suggested language policy (Gad 2005:150-162, 176-178, 189, 207-211). 'Democracy' and 'welfare' are pointed out as indispensable qualities of Greenland; both in the present-day version and even more the Greenland in the making. This suggests democracy and welfare as irreducible aspects of Greenlandic identity.<sup>9</sup>

The inclusion of these elements in Greenlandic identity does not, however, tell exactly *how* Greenland is supposed to be a democracy and a welfare state. It does not even say *what it means* that Greenland is to be a democracy and a welfare state. It merely lays out some premises for the continued debate to which you, as a participant, must obey if you want to make sense – and which you may utilize as argumentative resources: if you can claim that this or that element of the figure of modernization – i.a. the provision of good Danish language education – is a prerequisite for a prospering welfare state, you have made it necessary for your opponent to tell an even better story (cf. Gad 2005:187ff). And in parallel: if you can argue that this or that – i.a. linguistic rights or limits to voting rights – are a prerequisite for a proper democracy, you have at least forced your opponent into an exchange over what constitutes a proper democracy (Gad 2005:150ff).

The inclusion of these distinctively modern elements induces tensions in Greenlandic identity discourse. This is hardly special; discourse is never absolutely harmoniously constituted (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:ch.3). Furthermore, *identity* discourse is particularly paradoxical, since it is always possible to claim that any development, distortion or distinction violates our being identical

(Derrida 1988:52; Žižek 1992:197; Wæver 1993:26ff). A precise characterization of the tensions in identity discourse is necessary to understand identity politics, since the tensions constitute obvious objectives for political intervention.

The inclusion of 'democracy' in Greenlandic identity spurs a tension between two visions of democracy: one departing from the rights of the individual and insisting that all inhabitants of the territory of Greenland must be equal citizens; and another departing from the rights of ethnic communities, insisting that the Greenlandic democracy provides a means for Inuit Greenlanders to define their own future (Gad 2005:150-162, 211).

The inclusion of 'welfare' in Greenlandic identity offsets a number of tensions. One of the most problematic is the tension between the need for education (provided in Danish) in order to provide the personnel necessary for the welfare state versus the fundamental exclusion of everything Danish, especially the Danish language, from the category of Greenlandic (Gad 2005:180-200, 211).

To sum up: Greenlandic identity and its inherent development towards an independent, democratic welfare nation state depend<sup>10</sup> on articulating selected elements of a figure of modernization into the basic figure of decline. There seems to be agreement concerning the inclusion of at least two modern elements: democracy and welfare; however, there is no agreement as to how these elements ought to be included and how they should be substantiated. The role and place of Danish language specifically highlights these tensions. The next section analyses how the precarious and contradictory construction of Danish language in relation to Greenlandic identity has produced a linguistic elite of bilinguals.

## **5. The linguistic elite in Greenland**

This section claims that monolingual Greenlanders – be they Greenlandic speaking or Danish speaking – are those with the most to gain from abandoning the dichotomy of essentialist identities (Greenlandic vs. Danish). This claim is based on a partial dethroning of Danes as the unequivocal linguistic elite in Greenland.

At one level, it is perfectly legitimate to point out Danish as privileged in relation to Greenlandic in contemporary Greenlandic society: fluency in Danish and higher education (acquired in Denmark) is generally required to occupy leading positions in formal organizations

(business, administration and many interest-based organizations). Hence, Danish speakers occupy most high influence/high income positions in Greenland (Christiansen & Togeby 2003), and you may still credibly apply the colonial categories as a spectrum: the elite is more Danish than the subaltern which is more Greenlandic than the elite. This is the 'colonial' dimension of Greenlandic post-coloniality (cf. Thisted 2002:203-4).

However, there is also a 'post-' dimension of Greenlandic post-coloniality. This 'post-' dimension transcends mere temporal post-coloniality, bearing reminiscence to the post-colonialist/post-structuralist celebration of hybridity and in-betweenness (cf. Bhabha 1996; Gad 2005:221-234). A number of positions in Greenlandic society are generally manned with persons speaking Greenlandic (e.g. MPs, ministers, the bishop, the Ombudsman, most top administrative posts) (Christiansen & Togeby 2003). These positions entail so much interaction with Danish-speaking bodies of administration that knowledge of Danish language seems to be an additional imperative; they have generally been taken by bilinguals.<sup>11</sup> Even though these bilinguals may occasionally be criticized for being too Danish (cf. p. 7 above), their knowledge of Greenlandic language privileges them in relation to monolingual Danish speakers.<sup>12</sup> This privileged position may be utilized beyond the appropriation of formal positions: bilinguals may switch language at strategic points of conversations or meetings to exclude monolinguals (Heilmann 1999:48).

This sketch of the upper strata of the linguistic stratification in Greenland leaves little doubt that monolingual Greenlandic speakers are placed in the lower end of the stratification along important dimensions. First and foremost, important parts of their daily life – let alone qualified participation in democracy – are impeded by exclusion from information which is of value in any modern society but simply not translated into Greenlandic. This exclusion is one consequence of the Home Rule government giving rhetorical priority to Greenlandic language since 1979 – without substantially prioritizing the means or ends in language policy (Gad 2005:224f). The result of the language policies implemented over the course of 25 years of Home Rule is the impression of the presence of the Danish language in Greenland as a temporary error to be corrected (Gad 2005:157).

This also forms the background for the fact that along other dimensions, monolingual Danish speakers are – as implied in the above sections – excluded from Greenlandic identity and society. The implications of this exclusion may be negligible as concerns temporary migrant workers from Denmark, who generally plan to and actually do return to Denmark after a very short period of time (cf. Tróndheim 2002).<sup>13</sup> Monolingual Danish speakers who consider themselves

Greenlanders – due to being raised and sometimes born in Greenland<sup>14</sup> – are an altogether different question. Ethically, their exclusion is a much more serious problem, since it denies them their right to self-definition. Economically, their exclusion is potentially one of the greatest losses for Greenland on its way to legal, political and economic independence.

The mechanisms of this exclusion are complex. The ambiguity of the 'linguistic market' in Greenland (Langgård 2003:227f; Gad 2005:211-215) serves as the general background: neither the priorities of the Home Rule government nor the expectations of people you meet in the streets or in the workplace are clear as regards the linguistic capabilities of the individual. Nor are the valuations of the linguistic capabilities: on the one hand, speaking Danish constitutes a betrayal of aboriginal Greenlandic identity (Gad 2005:199f). On the other hand, Danish is simultaneously – both at the individual and societal levels – presented as a way forward: as a means to education, to development (economic as well as intellectual) and independence (Gad 2005:187f, 211-215).

This ambiguity influences everyone living in Greenland; however, monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders are probably the most affected: following Butler, one might say that the subject of the Danish-speaking Greenlanders is constituted by the expressed expectations of others – i.e. by discourse – in such a manner that "One is still constituted by discourse, but at a distance from oneself" (1997:33f). If one's self-understanding is at odds with the expressed expectations of the others, "one can be 'put in one's place' by such speech, but such a place may be no place" (1997:4, 137).

The reactions to such displacement may be categorized as either loyalty (silence), voice (attempting to re-identify oneself), or exit (exile in i.a. Denmark).<sup>15</sup> Until recently, silence appears to have been the main option. In 2002, however, a group of monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders founded 'GLDK' as a forum for developing Greenlandic language policy. Implicit in this move was both a criticism of the alleged social repression leading to the prior silence of the group and an attempt at redefining Greenlandic identity discourse to allow for the inclusion of the group (Gad 2005:162-174). One of the occasions – and implicitly one of the weapons employed in the struggle for recognition – was a recent report stating that monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders returning from education in Denmark did not feel welcome (Lund & Nathanielsen 2000). If these monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders do not feel welcome when returning from education in Denmark or other countries, they might very well end up remaining abroad (Gad 2005:189).

Frello warns that "if the concept of hybridity gives rise to an indifferent celebration of difference it creates blindness to the unequal power relations always involved" (Frello 2005:101, my transl.). Taking into account the basic essentialism of Greenlandic identity discourse and the place of monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders, Greenlandic identity politics appears to be far from such an indifferent celebration of hybridity. Quite the contrary, one specific kind of hybridity (bilingualism) seems to be privileged, while another (Danish language in combination with Greenlandic self-identification) seems to be delegitimized. This example serves to stress the importance of remaining aware of the power relations and not just the essentializations, i.e. the specific dynamics and mechanisms of *identity politics* and not just on any resulting dichotomy, be it Greenlandic/Danish or identity/hybridity. However, this makes getting the message through to empirical identity politicians more difficult: it seems as though little neat identity boxes are easier to communicate than complex and nuanced pictures of differentiated hybridity.

To sum up the analysis of this section: the ambiguity of the present Greenlandic 'linguistic market' empowers bilinguals. Hence, even though monolingual Greenlandic speakers are supposed to be the beneficiaries of Home Rule language policies, in effect they lose. Monolingual Danish speakers also lose – especially those identifying themselves as Greenlanders – even if the character of their loss is different than that of monolingual Greenlandic speakers. For the monolingual Danish speakers, however, emigration is a viable alternative. This alternative deprives Greenland of a valuable resource on its path to independence.

## **6. From "The Empire dichotomizes back" to post-post-colonial identity**

Section 3 concluded that making sense to the Greenlandic identity discourse requires speaking as if *real* Greenlandic identity grows out of traditional Inuit culture essentially discrete from and exclusive *vis-à-vis* that of the Danish Other. Any diversion from this position must be argued. This seems to be at odds with the conclusion of section 4, namely that Greenlandic identity and its inherent development towards an independent, democratic welfare nation state depend on articulating selected elements of a figure of modernization into the basic figure of the decline of traditional Inuit culture. This oddity stems from the inability of the Noble Savage to restore his dignity but in the form of a modern, independent nation state. The tensions of the negotiations over how these elements of modernity ought to be included in Greenlandic identity and how they should be substantiated are highlighted by the role and position of Danish language. Section 5 concluded

that the resulting ambiguities of the present Greenlandic 'linguistic market' empower bilinguals primarily over monolingual Greenlandic speakers, though also over monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders.

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, literature and the social sciences each played roles in the colonization process, not least by constructing world views and concepts which the colonial objects of study have subsequently appropriated and now identify with. As the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1982) saw the British Empire strike back against racism in England, and Ashcroft et al. (2002) analyzed post-colonial literature in general as the Empire *writing* back, the Greenlandic identity politics of the last decades of the 20th century can be read as the Danish Empire *dichotomizing* back. The practical result has been the paradoxical empowerment of bilinguals, which this article has identified.

A popular post-structuralist posture in this situation would be to equate the purpose of one's research in identity politics with literature criticism; i.e. not to judge between good and bad identity politics, but to make the public more sensitive to the tools applied by identity politicians (cf. Czarniawska 1998). Such a seemingly neutral posture seems to dodge the responsibility to engage real world identity politics – whether the responsibility springs from the deeds of past colleagues in academia or from a general human condition. Hence, the paper will proceed from the strategic analysis in the proceeding sections to suggest that Greenlandic identity politicians – if their aim is an independent Greenlandic welfare state – venture to develop a post-post-colonial identity as a means to that end.

Appiah insists (1996) that the post-colonial involves a 'space-clearing gesture' providing room for new identities. This gesture clears away coloniality as well as the modern category of the nation. Hall (1996a; cf. Mongia 1996:11) more subtly describes identity as an oscillation between the play of differences versus periods of more or less strategic essentialism: at times the anti-colonial struggle must coalesce around an identity posing a certain fixity in order to attain momentum. At other times, the de-naturalization of the fixed, Modernist categories takes precedence to allow for the emancipations of other particular identities than the after-colonial nationalist.<sup>16</sup> Another way of phrasing the point in this final section of the paper is that it suggests Greenlandic *identity politicians* to revisit their strategy: as 'the Empire has dichotomized back' for some decades, it might be time to bring politics back in to challenge essentialism.

Since the 1960s, the essentialist ethno-nationalist revivalism may be said to have been a wise strategic 'choice' vis-à-vis the Greenlandic de-colonialization process: specifically, it has provided basis for a 'politics of embarrassment' (Kristensen 2004) using the Danish self-understanding as a liberal moralistic pioneer country (cf. Browning 2007; Hansen 2002) in pressing the Danish authorities to enhance Greenland's legal status and political manoeuvring room.

However, the ethno-nationalist revivalism has only been partially successful in spurring the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice from the individual Greenlander required to make Greenland self-sufficient economically and education-wise (cf. Skydsbjerg 2001). Furthermore, placing Greenlandic language as the key diacriticon for inclusion in Greenlandic identity has excluded a most resourceful group needed for creating a future independent Greenlandic welfare state: the monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders who have generally fared best of the Greenlanders pursuing education in Denmark (Skydsbjerg 2001). Hence, the result of ethno-nationalism is a strong will for an independent Greenland<sup>17</sup> – but too few Greenlanders to man an independent Greenlandic welfare state.

To include the monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders and secure that they work for the benefit of a future independent Greenlandic welfare state, Greenlandic identity politicians could aim for constructing a *post-post-colonial* Greenlandic identity;<sup>18</sup> an identity transcending the constant reference to the colonial Other: Denmark.

The basic post-colonialist/post-structuralist critique remains valid: when aimed in the abstract at the Modernist quest for order at the expense of ambiguity – and when aimed at every nicely delimited box resulting from this quest: the idea of a pure language, the idea of a homogenous nation, the idea of the self-sufficient ethnic group, etc. Hybridity, syncretism and related practices (Frello 2005; Mørck 1999) may – if accepted – serve as media for translation and dialogue (Sørensen 1994:140; cf. Todorov 1999:202-241). We must welcome any further relaxation of the walls delimiting the self-perceived homogenous cultures possibly leading to "our living in difference, and not to some of us dying from Otherness" (Neumann 1996:168). But taking into consideration just how sedimented the essentialist conceptions of cultures and identity seem to be, more specific steps must be made available.<sup>19</sup>

One of the distinctive aspects of a colonial – and hence post-colonial – relationship is that the colonized has not itself chosen who to be dominated by.<sup>20</sup> Today, however, Greenland is basically in a position to choose its own dominator. This is not an unconstrained choice – no



choices are – but a choice nevertheless. One of the Comoros – the island of Mayotte – chose to remain colonized<sup>21</sup> by France and enjoy OCT<sup>22</sup> status in relation to the EU – while the other islands opted for independence. Or rather, the majority of the Comoros opted for dissolving their unilateral colonial dependency relation to France into the broader post-colonial dependency relation of any third world country.

60 years ago, Iceland – Greenland's next-door neighbour in a comparable North Atlantic geographical condition – opted for independence from Denmark. In terms of the focus of this paper – i.e. the binary Other relations to the former colonial power – one might today evaluate the result of the subsequent process as a success: Iceland has successfully reoriented and differentiated its relations to include other dependency relations: mainly to the USA for security; the Scandinavian countries for education; but increasingly the UK for education and investment (notably, Icelandic investments abroad).

Greenland *could* make the same differentiation. And – provided the political will – this could be carried out within or outside of the present constitutional status. Three examples: first, nothing prevents the Home Rule government from redirecting the government-owned ships which import almost all goods to Greenland from the Danish provincial port of Aalborg to, say, Halifax. Secondly, the Home Rule government could negotiate a deal to make the partly Home Rule-owned Air Greenland use Iceland's Keflavik as a hub, thereby linking Greenland to both Europe and North America via a shorter detour than via Copenhagen.<sup>23</sup> Thirdly, Greenland could follow the Icelandic model and prioritize the teaching of global English as a second language instead of provincial Danish.<sup>24</sup>

This discussion of replacing Danish with English is a classic in Greenlandic identity politics (Engell 1982:168f). Today, the English language is constructed in a number of different ways in the Greenlandic debate on language (Gad 2005:194-197):

- I) as a road to modernity (just as Danish, only wider);
- II) as a threat to Greenlandic language and identity (just as Danish, only greater);
- III) as an 'Egg of Columbus' providing modernity without the threat of the primary Danish Other.

A strong argument may be constructed in which Danish represents a bulwark against the English tidal wave of globalization (Lyngé 2002; cf. Lyngé 1999). However, a gradual shift to English as

second language could serve a greater good: by facing (English-speaking) globalization without the (Danish-speaking) colonial connotations, elements of modernization *could* very well be easier to incorporate in Greenlandic identity. And more importantly: it might become easier to include Danish-speaking Greenlanders.

The debate on the implications of the advance of English as a global *lingua franca* is heated, both in academia and in a number of national political contexts.<sup>25</sup> To mention just one example: as Estonia and Latvia emerged from Soviet rule and re-established themselves as nation states with a substantial, privileged Russian-speaking stratum, the immediate impulse was to introduce harsh monolingual policies promoting Estonian and Latvian as *the* national languages. Both the more relaxed attitudes of bilingual everyday life and the mellowing effect of European institutional frames on minority policies appear to have eased tensions somewhat.<sup>26</sup> This leads one observer – having noted the "common adoption of the cultural forms of an English-speaking Europe" (Laitin 2003:217) whereby the English language may serve as a communication platform (1996:50, 60) – to optimistically summarize the development by claiming that all residents of Estonia "are adding rather than substituting cultural repertoires" (2003:214).<sup>27</sup>

As speakers of a post-colonial language, the position of Russians in the Estonian linguistic market is somewhat parallel to the position of Danish speakers in Greenland.<sup>28</sup> And as the Icelandic example demonstrates, shifting from Danish to English as the second language in Greenland might contribute to moving much of the identificatory weight away from the strained colonial relation<sup>29</sup> and, hence, aid the Greenlandic welfare state to make the most of its most valuable educational assets on its path to independence: the primarily Danish-speaking Greenlanders. A switch to English might not ameliorate the situation for monolingual Greenlandic speakers immediately. To the contrary, the short-term effect might be to give Danish speakers (whether they also speak Greenlandic or not) an advantage over the rest of the population; being the comparatively most educated, they are more likely to also speak English. Implemented consistently if gradually, however, it should also contribute to making the linguistic market in Greenland more manoeuvrable for monolingual Greenlandic speakers: it could be easier for the individual Greenlander to engage in – and for the Home Rule politicians to prioritize – foreign language education in an educational system focusing on global English instead of colonial Danish.

Furthermore, even if a switch to English would not necessarily entail a shift away from looking to Denmark for the import and export of goods, education, recruitment etc, replacing

Danish with English would make the possibility of such switches in substantial relations more visible. And while the argument of this paper remains that such a differentiation of relations could constitute a way out of post-coloniality, "could" is actually the key word in this section: an equally important element in a move beyond post-colonial identity would be the very acknowledgement and accept of the possibility of an independent Greenlandic agency. Greenland must acknowledge that it possesses a measure of choice in its relations with the rest of the world; it is not forced to stick to Denmark. There might be restraints on the free choices of any actor – individual or collective. But while colonial restrictions were enforced with brute force, at least some of the restrictions in post-coloniality exist mainly within the mind of the (in that sense still-) colonized.

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## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has benefited from comments from my former colleagues in the Home Rule bureaucracy, Mette-Astrid Jessen and Mikaela Engell; comments from the participants in the conference *Managing the Post-Colonial Experience* at the University of Aarhus on 30-31 August 2006; comments from members of the Danish political EU

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studies PhD network; comments from Lene Hansen; and from the anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Language & Politics*. I am thankful to Maarja Siiner and Uffe Jakobsen for leading me to relevant literature on the linguistic situation in the Baltic States.

<sup>2</sup> A number of the leading figures in the Greenlandic youth rebellion, which was the driving force behind the introduction of Home Rule in 1979, remain central in Greenlandic politics, even though they now share their ruling *Siumut* (Forward) party with younger generations of politicians. The veterans of the more radical *Inuit Ataqatigiit* (Human Community) party are almost equally slow in retiring. The moderate tendency in Greenlandic politics has undergone a more thorough rejuvenation in two ways: The old *Atassut* (Link – to Denmark, that is) party now has an all-post-1979 leadership – and it has received competition from the new *Demokraatit* party. Generational questions aside, the question of the relations to Denmark and Danes continue to structure Greenlandic party politics – to such a degree that the initially Marxist Leninist IA has been leading the way in market-oriented reforms to further self-subsistence. For the history and structure of the Greenlandic political party system, cf. Larsen (1992b), and Dahl (1986). For accounts of the political development of the Home Rule arrangement, cf. Skydsbjerg (1999), Lauritzen (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Especially its department for Third and Fourth World; anthropology (Eriksen 2000; Rantonen & Savolainen 2002:75).

<sup>4</sup> A different but related argument for shifting the focus from the *social* construction to the *political* construction of identity is forwarded by Smith (2003:38). It should be clear by now that 'identity politics' is not used in the same way in this paper as it is by certain proponents for US American minority groups (cf. 2003:11; Heyes 2002), who use the label for the struggle for recognition as a predefined minority group and for the subsequent struggle for rights based on this recognition. In a post-structuralist vein, the paper sees these struggles as parts of a greater identity political negotiation process about who is to be recognized as what on the basis of which diacritica and with what effect.

<sup>5</sup> Obviously, other foci possibly leave out other constructs.

<sup>6</sup> The arguments in this paper develop empirical insights from Gad (2005), which documents the empirical claims as well as the specific analytical strategy employed in an empirical analysis focused on the place for monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders in Greenlandic identity discourse. The discourse analysis covered all of the 2002 editions of both of the Greenlandic newspapers *Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten* and *Sermitsiaq*, as well as the 2002 proceedings of the Greenlandic Parliament, *Inatsisartut/Landstinget*. The reasons and apologies for only covering the Danish versions of these papers and the proceedings may be found in Gad 2005:124f.

<sup>7</sup> The inverted commas around 'merely' are added because claiming that you are a Greenlander is difficult when you must do so in Danish (cf. section 5 in this paper, and Gad 2005:231).

<sup>8</sup> Much post-structuralist writing relates identity to a single radical Other (cf. Campbell 1992). Such a focus entails a risk of leading to rather monolithic analyses and, hence, a risk of rendering politics – in the sense of negotiating new identities – impossible (cf. Hall 1991:58; Neumann 1996:157; Frello 2003:31).

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<sup>9</sup> This conclusion depends on the specific empirical focus of my analysis. Other foci might have singled out other elements of identity.

<sup>10</sup> At least as Greenlandic identity is constructed in the debate on language.

<sup>11</sup> The election of monolingual Greenlandic-speaking Hans Enoksen, initially as chairman of the ruling *Siumut* party and ultimately as prime minister of the Home Rule government, could be perceived as an insistence on the possibility for monolingual Greenlandic speakers to be eligible for *any* position in post-colonial Greenland. Hence, Enoksen becomes the embodiment of the greater process of *Greenlandization*.

<sup>12</sup> One crude means of demonstrating this point would be to compare the length of formal education of the bilingual members of the elite with the monolingual members of the same elite. The difference, which is substantial, would provide a rough estimate of the privilege awarded by Greenlandic language skills.

<sup>13</sup> Due to the lack of skilled labour in a variety of fields in Greenland, many positions are advertised in Denmark, including most of the positions in the Home Rule bureaucracy requiring university education. Better integration in Greenlandic society of the Danish migrant workers taking these positions might motivate some of them to remain longer and hence lower the transaction costs of importing new temporary workers.

<sup>14</sup> Prior to the introduction of Home Rule, the Danish authorities prioritized the teaching of and in the Danish language over the teaching of and in the Greenlandic language in Greenlandic primary schools. This was intended to ensure the most efficient modernization of Greenland; and the prioritization was made with the explicit accept from – and sometimes even urged by – Greenlandic consultative organs. After the introduction of Home Rule in 1979, separate Danish language classes for the children of (temporary) *Danish* migrants were upheld. However, a number of *Greenlandic* or mixed couple parents preferred for their children to attend these Danish language classes to ensure their opportunity to pursue further education (Engell 1982; Larsen 1992a; Heilmann 1999; cf. Forchhammer 2001). These priorities by Danish and Greenlandic authorities and individuals have meant that a substantial number of Greenlanders today – for most practical purposes – do not speak Greenlandic, but only Danish.

<sup>15</sup> Poststructuralist theorizing of the subject in relation to discourse highlights the problems of Hirschman's category of 'loyalty' (1970), since the silence may be more or less enforced by power relations.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the four models of post-colonial texts in Ashcroft et al. (eds) 2002: Ch.1; three more or less essentialist (the national, the race-based, the comparative) and the fourth focused on hybridity.

<sup>17</sup> Opinion polls consistently indicate that 80-90% of the population favours independence – but 80-90% also add that independence must not be achieved at the cost of a reduction of the level of welfare (Skydsbjerg 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps a 'de-colonized' identity would have been a better label for what the paper is proposing – parallel to the 'de-securitization' advocated by Wæver as an alternative to thinking international politics (and identity politics) in terms of security/insecurity (1995; cf. 1993). If only the 'de-colonization' label had not already been used for the process which unfortunately did not lead to 'de-colonized' identities, but merely to a post-coloniality including the unfortunate traits the paper has been analyzing.



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<sup>19</sup> One important step forward would be accepting Langgård's distinction between language as an identity factor and language as heuristic/communicative tool (2003:229). However, such acceptance cannot be decided top-down; it must be facilitated by a change in practice, such as the one suggested in this paper.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, the present members of the colonizing society have not chosen the relationship either.

<sup>21</sup> Or formally: integrated as an overseas community (*collectivité départementale d'outre-mer*).

<sup>22</sup> Overseas Countries and Territories (TEC art. 187). Greenland enjoys the same status.

<sup>23</sup> There have been no regular west-bound airline services out of Greenland for some years.

<sup>24</sup> Article 9 of the Home Rule Act would probably prevent Danish from immediately being dropped altogether. The present dependence of the Greenlandic welfare state on this language would, however, make such a short-term exercise rather damaging, anyway. Nevertheless, the argument of the paper remains that nothing would prevent greater investments in teaching English. The political discussion concerns where the resources should be drawn from; it need not be from teaching Danish, even though this would probably would be a sane thing to do in the long run.

<sup>25</sup> Fishman et al. 1977; 1996. Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas (1997) take up the point of view that English is a threat as a principled position on language policies in general.

<sup>26</sup> For the development of post-Soviet Estonian and Latvian language policies, see Laitin 2003; Metuzāle-Kangere & Ozolins 2005; Verschik 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Ponarin (2000) rebuffs Laitin's point, aiming more at the meagre possibility of the Estonians ever accepting Russians as Estonians due to an essentialist conception of ethnicity than at the role of English in such a process. Whether Ponarin is right or not, the situation in Greenland is different, since the diacriticon which decisively excludes the monolingual Danish-speaking Greenlanders is the language itself. This article attempts to facilitate the ease of this diacriticon.

<sup>28</sup> Two conditions distinguish the situations: first, the alternative labour market for Danish speakers is comparatively more attractive in economical terms than the market for Russian speakers. Second, the prospects for linguistic self-sufficiency in relation to the labour force are comparatively less credible for a mono-linguistic Greenland of 50,000 inhabitants than it is for a Baltic nation 20-50 times as large. Both conditions make the Danish-speaking Greenlander less disposable.

<sup>29</sup> A switch to English would, of course, not mean the end of all aspects of post-coloniality. English may, as Karen Oslund reminds me, indeed be perceived as the global post-colonial language *per se*. Hence, there is no escape from domination and dependency. Nevertheless, replacing Danish with English might possibly relieve *the* post-colonial bond between Greenland and Denmark, and hence ameliorate *some* of the specific problems facing Greenland on its way to independence.