



## Neo-Colonialism with a Human Face – the Cosy Self-Colonization in Danish Home Rule

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Thank you very much for the invitation to this exciting seminar and exhibition. I will speak mostly on the background of the Faroese experiences. There are very many similarities between Greenland and the Faroe Islands, but also many differences. I will start by showing you where the Faroe Islands are placed in the world.



We are here in the middle of the Nordic area, in fact precisely in the center of the Nordic area. We used to say that the Faroe Islands is a country or a land but that's not quite so. We are both land and sea and if you include our sea in our official zone, then it's quite a big territory.

When we talk about the Danish state today or the Danish realm, we must bear in mind that the mother state or the metropolitan state is much smaller than its colonies. Actually the Faroese periphery is twice as big as the Danish and of course, the Greenlandic territories are thirty times as big as the Danish territory. I will come back to this because I think this is very important for understanding Danish colonialism in the 21st century.

Denmark has managed to maintain and uphold the sovereignty over the Faroe Islands and Greenland throughout the whole period of de-colonisation and up until the 21st century. I think that there are a number of very clever ways of managing that and I will try to explain how.

In the Faroe Islands, we have a very strong political movement working towards independence. However, the Danish state always manages to stop it, or encapsulate it, and to get the Faroe Islands to remain within the Danish realm. Quite recently the Danish government managed to stop a majority for Faroese independence and to divide the majority so that it tore apart. I think that the “cleverness” of this Danish policy is not based upon hard powers. This is not a story of violence, this is a story of non-violence, of non-hard violence. In other words, Denmark has used the tools of soft powers to ensure its control over the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

American History professor Benedict Anderson said in an interview with the Danish newspaper *Information* in October 2005, “All the Historians know that Denmark was once an empire, but as I understand it is not something you could learn about in school. Instead they learn about this friendly little harmless nation and its nice people.” I think this is very well put. Of course, the Danish are very nice people, but the ancient Danish state is the same as any other colonial power.

As we talked about yesterday [day 1 of public hearing, ed.], in Denmark you learn nothing in school about the colonial history of Denmark or about the modern Danish state and the existing colonies. It's put aside in a merely romantic description of Danish Vikings and Danish kings, who invaded other countries in ancient times. In the Faroe Islands as well, we learn nothing about our modern history. Only recently, in the 1990s, we started to learn about Faroese history in school, but we could not learn anything about Greenland. In Faroese schools we were not able to learn about Greenland despite the fact that we belong to the same realm and despite the fact that we are in the same position. In order to understand this and to see it from the Danish state's point of view, I would like to quote Winston Churchill who stated that, “states do not have friends, states have interests.” He was quite right of course. Geo-politics is not a question of friends and feelings, but a question of mere power. In one way or the other, Denmark has managed to stay out of this perception. Allegedly in the interest of Denmark and the rest of the Nordic states. Denmark is a small nation that has fought for its freedom and for democracy and freedom for all peoples worldwide. In relation to Greenland and the Faroe Islands, Denmark is

further like a helpful and protective mother that creates all welfare and thus creates the welfare for each and one of us. Denmark is also the protective mother who protects us against the mean and bad world out there. We internalize this concept of the Danish state and thus it becomes part of our own state of mind.

So, I claim that the Danish state is a state of mind of our own. In the Faroe Islands, this state of mind and this concept of our own identity and of our own history are simply based on myths. We are pictured through these myths and we want to see ourselves through these myths, which are mainly produced and reproduced by Danish media – on the rare occasion that we are mentioned in Denmark. Actually, the terminology used in these myths always hides the power of the Danish state. For example, the Danish colonial state is not called the colonial state, it's called the state of community, in Danish *Rigsfællesskab*. It's a community of equal peoples based on mutual respect and equality between Greenlandic, Danish and Faroese. Though, what kind of myth do we ourselves produce and reproduce?



In the Faroe Islands one of the great myths is this.

The picture of these romantic and quite primitive islanders who eat whale and dance in the night and they climb cliffs to collect birds eggs and so on. These are myths that we are always met with outside of the Faroe Islands and which are also internalized by us, because in fact we are actually quite proud of them. The second myth about the Faroese-Danish relations is the political myth that the entire Faroese independence movement is made up by crazy nationalists trying to cut off the branch we are sitting on. This is not just a depiction made by Danish politics, it is very common in Faroese politics as well – which includes

parties that are against independence. Thirdly, a very effective myth goes that we receive this annual block grant from Denmark, this “great gift” and so we have to be grateful as it is only for our own good – it’s only to help us build our society. Very often Danish commentators and the Danish Parliament describe us as ungrateful receivers of these great gifts from the Danish tax payers that we mainly spend on luxury items and on whiskey and beer. It’s a very effective myth imbedded in the relationship between the Faroe Islands and Denmark.

Let me now to try to go behind all this and describe it from my point of view. I have to emphasize that not all Faroe Islanders agree with me. The Faroese people and their opinions differ a lot in regards to the question of independence. Opinions do not differ on whether people want independence – in all opinion polls, a huge majority is for it; they differ on how and when and on how will we cope.

I will not describe to you the colonial history of the Faroe Islands, but give you a short version not to bore you too much. The Faroe Islands were seized by the Norse Vikings in about year 800. It became its own “land” with its own jurisdiction and, as we claim, the oldest parliament in the world. Of course it was the great land owners that met in the Thing and settled and managed a jurisdiction in a kind of parliament. By historic coincidence, when Denmark and Norway joined in a Union of Crowns, the Norwegian King became king of the Faroe Islands. When Norway was then lost to Sweden after the Napoleonic wars, the Treaty of Kiel did not include Norway’s old possessions Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland, which remained under Danish rule. However, not as a part of the Danish state but as part of a type of common wealth with a common king. Back then, the king talked about “our lands” and “our peoples”, not about the Danish nation. The kings were king over many peoples and many lands.

In the wake of this process, the old Faroese parliament was abolished and the Faroes were claimed as a Danish county. In 1850, the Danish constitution was promulgated in the Faroe Islands without any consultation with the Faroese representatives. However, in 1852 the old parliament was reinstated as a kind of county council with no powers at all. One could say that the modern history of the Faroe Islands begins in the 1850s with the system of land-ownership. At that time, the system was boosted by socio-economic change and we actually got modern development in the Faroe Islands. This of course led to the great dilemma – the question that we are still dealing with, which is if we should deal with modernization on our own premises with reference to our own identity or

should we just say that modernization is handled in Danish, whilst the ancient and folkloristic parts of society are done in Faroese.

A national movement formed in the Faroe Islands to gain cultural rights in relation to the Faroese language and every other part of society, and also in relation to political rights – a kind of independence movement. This movement actually went on up until the Second World War. Until then, it was forbidden to speak and teach in Faroese in school, just as it was forbidden to use the Faroese language in church and administration. Then, incidentally, when the Second World War broke out, Denmark was occupied by Germany and the Faroe Islands by the British and overnight we were independent. We were occupied by the Brits, but we took over all responsibilities for the Faroese society: for the economy and for jurisdiction. Actually, despite the whole tragedy of war, it all went quite well. When the Second World War was over, everyone realized that we could not go on being a Danish colony. A referendum was held asking the electorate if they wanted the Home Rule system or full independence. There was a slight majority for full independence. The parliament, which absolutely acknowledged the sovereignty of the referendum, was abolished, however, by the Danish king and two years later we got the Home Rule that we had rejected. In this period of postcolonialism after the Second World War, Denmark cleverly managed to introduce Home Rule in the Faroe Islands despite the fact that a majority was for independence. The same goes for Greenland, which was integrated into the Danish Realm without a prior referendum when the Danes passed a new constitution in 1953 that made Greenland a county of Denmark.

So throughout this period of de-colonization, Denmark still managed to sidetrack the questions of national independence for the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Greenland was added to the UN list of non-self governing territories with special rights to declare independence. The Faroe Islands, though, were never on that list.

This has been going on up until today. The colonial history of Denmark is quite logical actually – as the American professor said, Denmark was once a big empire. In 1450, Denmark ruled the North Atlantic and the whole of Scandinavia. Since then, of course, it has shrunk. In 1944, when Iceland gained its independence, Denmark only had Greenland and the Faroe Islands left, but the remaining territory was still big. So, I understand very well why Denmark even now tries to keep this sovereignty over the Faroe Islands and Greenland. What I don't understand, though, is why it's hidden, why it's not spoken about, and why we uphold this picture of the Danish that never have had any interest in

the North Atlantic and that have gained nothing from the relationship with the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

This is still the picture in the year 2006, in the 21st century. We can try and put ourselves in the position of the Danish Prime Minister. Without the Faroe Islands and Greenland, his country would shrink considerably and it would lose its present role and prestige in relation to international politics.

The history of Danish colonialism and colonial instruments in the Faroe Islands has gone through various stages, which are dissimilar to Greenland, by the way. As I mentioned earlier, in the Middle Ages the kings ruled in the North Atlantic. From 1661 on, the area was dominated by the absolute power of the Danish King who was striving to create a Danish nation state, a central state. The period from 1850-1940 I call "classical colonialism" as the Danish politics towards the Faroe Islands was to assimilate the Faroe Islanders, to make the Faroe Islanders Danish, to re-make the Faroes in Danish, so to speak. It was the period where it was forbidden to speak Faroese and so on. However, in Greenlandic you were actually not allowed to speak Danish because Greenland should stay isolated from the outside world.

After the Second World War, the politics changed gradually. Denmark acknowledged the problems of the cultural struggle and said, "Well, if we can't have the Faroe Islands Danish, then we will just make a Denmark on the Faroe Islands." "So you can have your own language and your own cultural symbols, but we copy the Danish society to the Faroe Islands." This is what I name "neo-colonialism with a human face," which is but a new attempt at maintaining the territory. The last stage that we are in now, I call "neo-colonialism with a human face, without the financial support," but I will get back to that later.

In the neo-classical colonization, as I mentioned, the question was if the Faroe Islands should be modernized on the basis of Faroese language and culture or if one should divide the society in such a way that, say, all the modern institutions and all the structures are in Danish and then Faroese can be maintained as a kind of protected folkloristic museum. It was obviously quite a struggle throughout the first half of the 20th century. The whole system was Danish, but thanks to the independence movement we managed to maintain the Faroese language and further to win the struggle to get our language acknowledged as a language to be used in education, administration, and so on.

It was merely a struggle for acknowledgement of our own symbols, for example a flag, the language and other symbols of our own identity. When the policy changed after the Second World War – and this is my main point, the Home Rule in the Faroe Islands became a tool for self-colonization. Nobody in the Faroe Islands wanted Home Rule. Those who wanted independence were not satisfied and those who wanted to be closer to Denmark were not satisfied either. From this classical colonialism attempting to uphold Danish culture in the Faroe Islands, the system changed to colonization merely in the socio-economic dimension. I claim that the Home Rule system and the building of the modern Faroese society after the Second World War created a culture of dependence and a very intense loyalty towards the financial supporter, namely the Danish state.

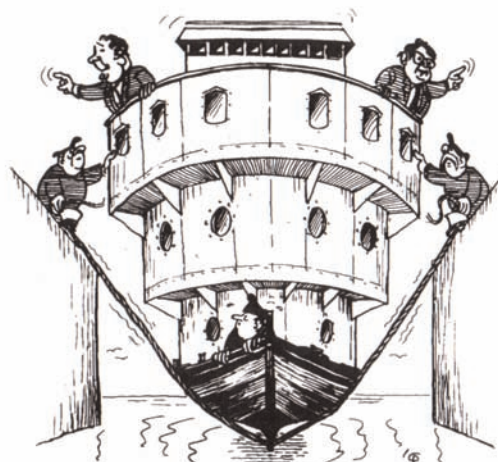
The Home Rule system is actually quite simple. It is a form of government, where the Faroese authorities can manage the local matters and Denmark upholds all the high politics and the relations to the outside world. That's actually Home Rule in a nutshell. We get support from Denmark to uphold the administration, but Denmark sits on all the structures and relations to the outside world.

Home Rule of course meant cultural recognition to some extent, but still in a kind of pseudo way. We have a language that is acknowledged as a special language and not as a national language. According to the Home Rule Act, Danish is the assigned language that we should use aside from Faroese and it must be learned properly. We have our special flag as well, which is not actually a national flag, and we have a special passport, which is actually a Danish passport with the name "Faroese" written under the name of Denmark. Finally, we have these fabulous notes that the Greenlanders are now also trying to introduce, which is Danish currency with local symbols on them.

The Home Rule system has been quite effective; in the Faroe Islands it has not been changed since 1948 even if many have fought to have it changed. I claim that due to Home Rule it has become unbearably easy to be a politician in the Faroe Islands. You get money from Denmark that you distribute to various groups in society, and if there are problems then you say, "Well, I can go to Denmark and get some more money," and you are actually an agent of the Danish state and its government. Home Rule has developed into a huge economic dependence on the part of the Faroe Islands. In the post war period, we were not dependent on Danish money, but when we reached the 1980s, we

were really dependent on Danish subsidies. This is a perfect example of lack of responsibility from both sides, both the Danish and the Faroese. It was not easy to copy all the Danish legislation to the Faroes. Our school system and parliament are merely copies of Danish legislation to protect the Danish mother-state and furthermore to ensure that the Faroese live in a kind of a bubble with no direct links to the outside world and without responding to what happens in the outside world.

We also witnessed a system which most of all resembled speculation in Danish subsidies. The money was merely allocated to the rich and were never used to actually create solidarity in the Faroese society. In the 1990s, the Faroese Home Rule system collapsed, and this is again different from the Greenlandic experience. The old system totally collapsed when the political and the economic system went bankrupt and 50% of the population emigrated to other Nordic countries with a huge debt put on the Faroese tax payers.



21. november:  
Samgongan arbeidir við nýggjari sjálvstýring, í skjal  
av loyva gamla Heimastjórnslógina

What happened with this Home Rule system, as this cartoonist shows, is that we built a very huge building on top of a very small boat, and were rapidly becoming dependent on getting an ever bigger part of our money from the outside to uphold this system. It created a system of easiness for Faroese politicians, who could blame Denmark when things went wrong, and when it went well they could take the credit themselves. We actually developed a system of total lack of responsibility within the Faroese system.



When it all went wrong, it was very clear that there was no protective mother Denmark that could save our poor Faroese people. The only people saved during the big crisis in the Faroe Islands in the 1990s were those who have benefitted the most from the economic bubble in the 1980s, namely the rich, the ship owners, and so on.

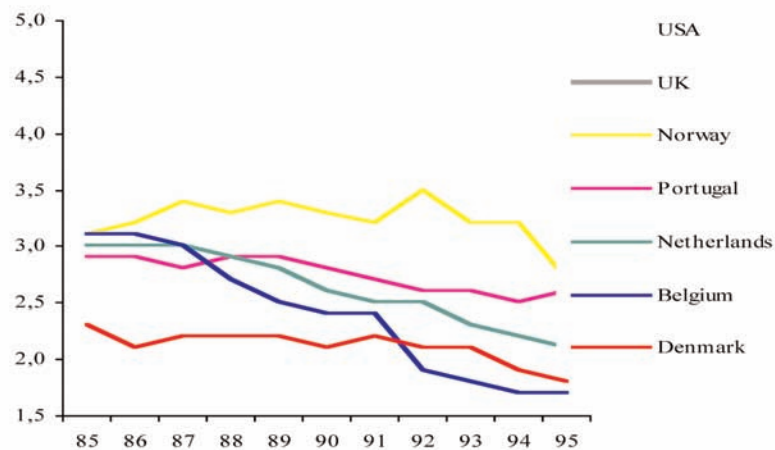
After the total collapse, there was a huge majority saying, “Now we must get out of this bubble, this must never happen again.” We have to take over all responsibilities in society in order to develop in a modern world. We want to gradually abolish the Danish subsidies; we want to cooperate directly with all international organizations and all other countries. We’ve got to change all our relations, not only to a system where all roads lead to Copenhagen, but to a system where we can cooperate with all our neighbours in the North Atlantic, and with the whole world. We need to rebuild our whole society on solidarity and make a social welfare system which is not paid for by the Danes, but by our own tax payers.

In our negotiations with Denmark, as some of you may know, we were not successful. A coalition went to the Danish parliament in order to make treaties abolishing the colonial system and allowing us to take over all powers. There were four meetings. Only one was leading anywhere, the rest were history repeating. There was this creative mixture of the old story about the Faroese Islanders, who are ungrateful to their mother. “We’ve helped you and brought you up since historic times and this is the thanks we get?” was the average reaction from the Danish politicians. As we have seen so often, when there was a Faroese majority for independence, it was divided in accordance with the classical roman politics “Divide et Empere,” or “divide and rule.” Still today, we in the Faroe Islands are divided on this question and on what should be our political and cultural future.

We have to get behind the myth of the Danish state as a caring mother and see the Danish interests in upholding this colonial system. In my opinion, it is merely territorial interests that drive the politics of the Danish state towards the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Of course, the sovereignty especially over Greenland gives the Danish state and the Danish government a position in the international community that they wouldn’t have if it was only Denmark. I believe that the seat that Denmark currently has in the Security Council of the UN would not have been obtainable without having Greenland within the realm. The enormous territory made up of Greenland and the Faroe Islands is very important for Denmark. It has been very important to Danish business and to the Danish

national treaties at all times. Of course, the Faroe Islands and Greenland have been a very important card in the Danish defense policy and in its military position in NATO. For example, we know that the military expenditure of the Danish state compared to other NATO members between 1985 – 1995 has been very very low. Danish membership of the NATO family is cheap merely because they can offer NATO the Faroe Islands and Greenland as optimal areas to place stations.

We know this from Danish politicians and we in the Faroese government have tried to look at a short time period and to gauge if we are really just receivers of money from Denmark, or if Denmark also gets something out of this in economic terms.

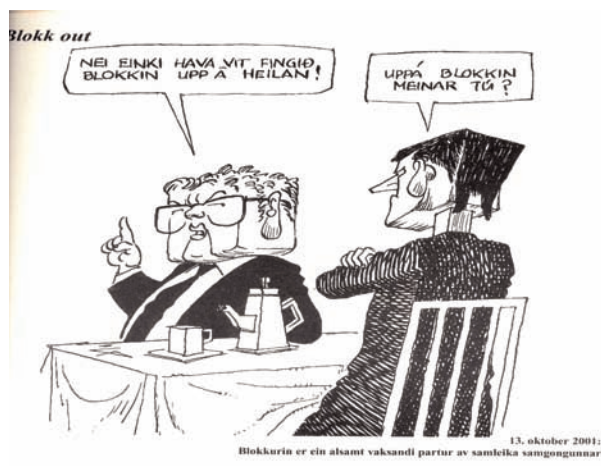


You can't see the individual figures here but this tells how much money Denmark saves in its relation to NATO. All NATO states are supposed to spend 3% of their GDP on the military to be a member, but it appears Denmark has always paid less. Now how much money is Denmark saving? If you compare what Denmark has saved with what Denmark has sent to the Faroe Islands, Denmark enjoys a big surplus. Between 1976 and 1989, when the Cold War ended, Denmark has saved on this account alone about DKK 30 billion [€ 4 billion, ed.] This is only to underline that of course it is not a question of receiver and giver. Obviously, Denmark gets something out of this and that should also be the basis of the future of Faroese and Greenlandic independence. The Faroe Islands and Greenland can't just take this money and use it for themselves, but it still important to think about this in order to balance the whole debate and the whole conception of the relationships between Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

I would like to turn to the other block grant, this huge amount of money that Denmark sends to Greenland. We hear about it everyday in the Danish parliament when Greenland is debated, and you may hear it here everyday too, “Well, we get this huge amount from Denmark.” Just how much money is this, seen from the Danish state’s point of view? What Greenland gets in subsidies each year is only 0.6% of the Danish annual state budget. What the Faroe Islands gets is only 0.1%. If you try to think in very classical colonial terms, this is a very cheap way to uphold the sovereignty over such big territories. Imagine that Greenland would pay 0.6% of its state budget, that is DKK 5 – 6 million [€ 0.67 – 0.93 million] a year in exchange for sovereignty over an area thirty times bigger than Greenland. I believe we need to think in these terms to balance the whole debate of who gains and who pays for these relationships.

We, in the Faroe Islands, have actually tried so many times to achieve and proceed on equal terms of negotiation with Denmark. By now, we have come to the conclusion that we have to rid ourselves of the Danish money. And after the collapse of negotiations with Denmark, we have unilaterally said that we reduce the Danish aid with one third, which is actually a big amount of money for us. And we have frozen it so that it’s not affected by inflation. We believe it is of major importance to get out of this *culture of dependence* in order to get on with our political struggle. Currently, this is the main tool towards Faroese independence.

When we debate this in the Faroe Islands there are some disadvantages as well. For the last five or six years, the whole debate has been centered on money. All the questions around independence and the relationship with Denmark have been about money, money, money – especially the Danish block aid.



That's why the cartoonist has drawn the Faroese politicians as having very block-like heads, as they are blocked and not very visionary in their outlook, which has always been about money.

Today, we have been debating the question of "when are you ready?" [at the public hearing, ed.]. I can tell you that we have been ready in the Faroe Islands for at least one hundred years. For one hundred years, the independence movement has been constantly active. Then on the other hand, of course we are never ready. I agree with the participant who said yesterday, "We can't wait for things to come, we have to get into it," and I attempt to compare preparing for independence with learning how to ride a bicycle. It's not until we get up on the bike that things happen. I don't claim independence as just a theory. If we look at the Faroese example and all the areas we have taken over saying, "this is our own responsibility and here we try to build upon our own identity," then, I believe, it has been a success. Fifty years ago, they said it would be hopeless to teach Faroese in all parts of the Faroese school system because there are no textbooks and so forth. The same was said about having Faroese television, "oh forget it, it's impossible." But when we did it, it ended up being very successful and prosperous.

So my conclusion is that we are quite ready in the Faroe Islands for political independence on all levels. Well, it's good to know that the Danish Parliament has passed a new act that affects both the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The legislation, which implies a new Home Rule Act for the Faroe Islands, increases Danish power over all matters of foreign policy and international relations. Up until now, despite the Home Rule system, the Faroe Islands and Greenland have made their own treaties with other countries, but today, if we are to make them, we have to make them on behalf of Denmark. The new legislation says if you are to go deal with the outer world, you have to sign in the name of the Danish Kingdom on behalf of, in our case, Faroe Islands. To me, this is a huge step back for Faroese and Greenlandic politics.

Up until this stage, the Faroes and Greenland got financial support and were economically dependent on Denmark. Now, we can pay for ourselves but still Denmark holds all the benefits and all the tools to develop in the modern age. I claim that – and we've discussed this yesterday as well – that what is really blocking the road towards a civilized conversation in the Faroe Islands and in Greenland is nationalism. Whenever we claim our rights, we are labeled "nationalist," but actually I think that Danish nationalism is the big road blockage

here. We see this tendency not only in relation to Greenland and the Faroe Islands, but also in the Danish immigration policy, which reinstates the question of “them and us,” these ungrateful foreigners versus the Danish state. The debates on the Faroe Islands and of Greenland are also symptomatic. The Danes have to teach all others their own values because they are the best – we see that in all relations. Recently, there was actually a majority in the Danish parliament that said, “Well, if people in Denmark are to obtain social security, they have to speak proper Danish.” Danish policies towards the European Union are also very much based upon that, “Well, we can participate in the European Union, but then the people have to be just like us.” Then they have to copy Danish legislation and systems. The recent controversy about the Mohammed cartoons shows that Denmark’s self-image as this cozy little nation that never has interests in anything is being challenged. The Danes are campaigning abroad saying, “No, no, the Danes are not against foreigners, all Danes are very open minded.” Danish nationalism is, as I see it, a huge obstacle to a civilized relationship also between Denmark and its colonies today.

We are often asked in the Danish Parliament if this whole perspective of territorial interests is the right perspective to apply today? Does the independence of Greenland and the Faroe Islands presuppose that Denmark is made smaller? I don’t think so. I think Denmark and all the Nordic countries would be much bigger in a cultural sense, in a valuable sense, if they would support the emergence of an independent Faroes and an independent Greenland. In my opinion, we certainly all belong to the Nordic family. We could function as a good example for other parts in the world in relation to creating a system for how small nations and small peoples cope with globalization. When we discussed globalization yesterday, I quite agreed with Jacqui M. Alexander that today’s discourse on the globalization process is nothing more than neo-colonialism. We see that the capital and the power are concentrated in very few places and in very few hands. That is the one side, the actual side, of globalization.

On the other side, I think globalization should and could mean the possibility for small nations to be equal in a democratic, diversified world. I believe that the Faroes and Greenland could be good examples for other countries as well. We shouldn’t fear globalization in the Faroe Islands and in Greenland because we have actually lived with it for a very long time. In order to cope with globalization, we must modernize, not isolate and protect ourselves. I think we are facing all these challenges and we shouldn’t be afraid of them. Though, now we see the old nation state face the same challenges. What we see in Denmark today is the

same fear of, “Oh, we are overwhelmed by foreigners and we have to protect ourselves from the outside world and to protect our culture,” and so on. And so we actually have something to teach the other, old nation states with our examples.

I think that our answers to globalization in the Faroe Islands is to gain independence; and I don't know if you see it the same way in Greenland. Not in order to isolate ourselves and not to preserve an ancient nationalistic policy, but in order to be on the same footing as other peoples in the world, and in order to take part in all the new relationships between peoples and countries in the world today. I always say to the Danish Government and also to the Nordic Council, when I initiate the debate on Nordic colonialism in meetings with them, that all the Nordic countries must reconsider the Nordic family and if they want to support the process towards more agents, more small sovereign countries, within the family. There hasn't been much of a response to this, though.

So let me conclude by paraphrasing Mahatma Ghandi. When he was asked what he thought of the Western civilization, he answered that, “that would be a good idea.” When debating postcolonialism, I would say that that would be a good idea – it would be good to finally introduce postcolonialism, because at the moment we are not really there. When it comes to the relationship between the Faroe Islands and Denmark, we are in a period of neo-colonialism.

Thank you very much.