



Youth Writes Back TV: Performative Notes from a Workshop on Youth Experiences and Postcolonial Situations

Act 2: Greenland, April 21 – May 14, 2006

Host of the program: Humphrey Polepole flying in from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Guests: AneMarie Ottosen and Janus Chemnitz Kleist.

The program was held in three different languages: Humphrey would ask questions in English, AneMarie would answer in Greenlandic¹ and Janus in Danish. This is an English version of what was being said. The questions are based on discussions from a youth workshop held in Nuuk in the spring of 2006 as part of *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism*.

IDENTITY:

Who are we identity-wise?

Janus: We are Greenlanders. But at the same time we are citizens in the Kingdom of Denmark. Some people think this is very confusing, that we are both Greenlanders and Danish citizens. Others see it as something positive. Myself, I'm very proud of my Danish heritage; of course not all is good, but in general if we compare ourselves to the rest of the world, I think Denmark has behaved really nicely!

What make us Greenlandic?

Janus: First and foremost I would say the language, then on the other hand I do not speak Greenlandic! So as a rule, I think one can call oneself Greenlandic if ones feels Greenlandic.

Do we see elements of dilution?

Janus: In some ways we are very European or very American and in other ways we have kept our cultural heritage. I think we are diluted in many ways. Firstly, there is the language, which a fairly

large number of the population does not speak. Then, there is the livelihood; if we see the Greenlander as a hunter or fisherman – well, then a lot of us are studying to become something very much different from hunters and fishermen. So in that sense we are diluted. Dilution can be good. Some things in life are so strong they need dilution and I believe culture needs dilution in order to evolve and function. It is what you choose to dilute it with that is important.

What makes this (our) generation different from our parents'? Do we see any development either positive or negative?

Janus: I guess we think we stay young longer than they did. When my parents were my age they had three children and good steady jobs both of them. I'm still studying and believing and more or less living like I'll be forever young.

In terms of being a Greenlander, I think our generation is much better at seeing the people living here as Greenlanders even though one might not speak Greenlandic. We do not divide people up into Greenlanders and non-Greenlanders as much as the generation of our parents.

How would you consider the social relations in the past and the present within the Greenlandic society?

Janus: Here in Nuuk, we are not very good at greeting strangers in the street. When you go to a small village or smaller town, you'll find that literally everybody looks one in the eyes and nods or says hello. Here in Nuuk, we just pass each other on the street if we do not know the person.

What makes our society multicultural or monocultural?

Janus: I guess all cultures are multicultural. Only if a culture lives all secluded with no contact to the outside, I guess you can talk of a monocultural society. And I guess there are no such cultures left... But aspects of a culture can be kept monocultural, but they will still be diluted in some ways. Being part of a hunters' culture is a strong part of the Greenlandic identity, but the way we hunt is very diluted; these days most of the population hunt for pleasure and not for survival and we hunt with modern equipment such as rifles and motor boats. We strengthen our culture through music,

but it is with modern equipment like guitars and so on. Not just singing and the traditional drum.

Are there challenges we see or face in maintaining our cultural identities?

Janus: Definitely. In terms of our Greenlandic language, major challenges lie ahead of us. ICYC (Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council) has together with KIK (Greenlandic Students' Organization) and other young people made a small unscientific survey to get an idea of the language skills and habits of the students in Greenland. The very preliminary results are a bit paradoxical. Nearly all of the respondents consider themselves Greenlandic and feel that their understanding and use of the Greenlandic language in reading and writing is very good. But most of them prefer to read in Danish. If Greenlanders stop using the Greenlandic language as a written language, this could very much dilute the language. A language needs to be used in both, talking, writing and in reading to develop and survive for the generations to come.

Is there still more room for absorbing other cultures? Media-wise? Cross-boarder relations etc.

Janus: Lately, we here in Greenland have been under strong influence from Tanzania! We have seen that the culture represented by an African is very similar to ours. The way you have been open, relaxed and your humour seems very similar to ours.

What inspires and influences youth identity? And what more could be done to see a Greenlandic youth identity?

Janus: Music is the first thing that springs to mind. One's friends, I guess, are also very important in identifying one's identity and of course the language. It seems that more and more English phrases or words enter conversations among young people. Even my six-year old nephew uses English phrases when he speaks. I guess this is a way of saying I'm also apart of the world outside of Greenland...

There has been talk about making it hip to speak one's native language and I hope that we'll see that the youth will use the Greenlandic language in the future to create an identity for themselves.

What challenges do we see when relating ourselves (who are we?) with others (e.g. racial issues and prejudice, geographical backgrounds, social classes – the elites and the non-elites)?

Janus: In Greenland, it often seems like it is Nuuk and the other 3-4 larger towns against the rest of Greenland. There is a more or less clear gap between the larger and smaller towns. I guess this is not special for Greenland compared to the rest of the world, but if we want to do the best for Greenland, we have to learn to think of ourselves as a community on a larger scale.

Do we see ourselves raised in a colonial/neo-colonial era? And how do we define our citizenship as Greenlandic... Kaboom! How do we break the ice of silence?

Janus: I feel we live in both a postcolonial, neo-colonial and a colonial era here in Greenland. It depends on how you interpret our relations with Denmark. In some terms, we are free to choose our own future as a Greenlandic country and people, but on the other hand we are very dependent on Denmark. And finally, it seems like many people of our parents' generation are very influenced by being colonized by Denmark.

LANGUAGE:

What language barriers do we meet as Greenlandic young people? How do you see “Grøndansk” [literally “Greendnish”] as a positive/negative language development in our society today? – What’s your opinion?

[Unfortunately, AneMarie Ottosen’s answers are missing in this text, ed.]

How do we relate our Greenlandic nature with the language or languages we use? What do we wish or see as a practical language that is the medium of instruction in the school system – And WHY?

[Unfortunately, AneMarie Ottosen’s answers are missing in this text, ed.]

How do you see a Greenlandic culture being promoted locally and internationally using language as an important tool? How do we define language?

[Unfortunately, AneMarie Ottosen’s answers are missing in this text, ed.]

Our City, the City of Our Dreams!

Part of the “Youth Writes Back TV” program was a spoken word performance by Qillannguaq Berthelsen, Frederikke Lyberth (both recitation) and Edward Mørch (guitar).

I saw a city that had easy access to the whole world. People everywhere exchanging their hopes and dreams. In the city there is a high-tech library containing our language and other stuff that belongs to our country. People everywhere and children alike would with a push of a button learn about the wonders of Greenland.

My view in Salliarnaq before they built something on the mountain. My childhood happiness. The sun was fair on my eyes and I saw snow on the mountain, thinking I would go snow boarding today. But then I saw my view today where I live; all I see is buildings and I hear cars, very stressing to wake up to that. I want to combine the two views I saw. I want to smell the ocean and hear it. But afterwards, I have to come back to reality and hear the cars and the buildings, which are called “the mountains of the cities”, something like that. The nature and modernity have to be combined for humans to survive. Smell the taste of salt from the sea, feeling the wind in my face cleans my mind of troubles. Have to see the ocean everyday to survive the troubles of the city

I see dustbins in many places, all year round – people throw their small pieces of paper in them. Nuuk is dirt free; when the weather is nice, I see young musicians playing their songs in the street – spreading good vibrations and making people smile at each other. I see busy people following their dreams and making them come true in this city.

Effective low-tech industries which are environmentally friendly, clean energy sources, nature and wildlife integrated in the city life, kinda like the Arctic gardens at the old church building. But something that works, not just grass on the sides of the pavement, but the flowers and the plants that we now almost see in the fjords/the wild. An open mega park-like structure with integrated play grounds and resting places for the old, for the youth, animals, no longer threatened by hunting, living alongside humans creating the space and atmosphere that define the city.

I dream of my people interacting with each other: smiling, laughing. I saw happiness. I saw the sun, balloons, picnics, families, and friends. I heard

laughter, birds, feeling the summer wind blowing in my hair. I saw togetherness, and not loneliness. I saw people standing, communicating intellectually and not holding a beer in their hand and bad mouthing, happiness!!! Togetherness!!! (summer, ice cream, corner cafés, children laughing, bicycles, balloons, sun, harmony, picnics, friends, nature, families and flowers).

Note

1. Unfortunately, AneMarie Ottosen's answers are missing in this text.