

## **Politically Unidentified Foreign Subject - Is Greenland still an issue?**

Perspectives on the art project Melting Barricades  
By Khaled Ramadan, 2004

The only museum to be dismantled by American forces and not by looters during the invasion of Iraq was the famous bunker which had “mistakenly” been hit by an American bomb in 1991. Hundreds of civilians were killed in the attack. Later the bunker was transformed into a museum for the fatality of war.

The American Army may succeed in dismantling the physical space, but the memory and the truth of what actually happened can never be forgotten.

Despite the so-called post-colonial and post-slavery periods, truth dismantlement and fact cancellation is a basic character of colonialism, regardless of time and place. During conflicts, replacing fact with fiction is a kind of contamination which is usually perpetrated by a strong conqueror. Dismantlement of truth, however, will always be temporary.

As explained by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* from 1978, it is a general assumption that efficient colonial conquest requires knowledge of the nation to be conquered. By being well informed and knowledgeable about the people they want to colonise, the colonisers almost came to own what they conquered.

The colonised, on the other hand, became dependent on the coloniser’s values, economy, foreign policy, and interests. This has led to diminishment of essential existential questions. Identity and character loss as well as shaky self-confidence have stopped many small colonised nations from exercising their rights of self-determination. Instead they become “integrated”. Independency has become an issue. However, independency has become synonymous with uncertainty.

In this way the colonised nation has become the studied, the observed, the object. The colonisers are the scholars, the students, the anthropologists, the observers, and in almost all cases the conquerors regard themselves as the only civilising agent. Contemporary Iraq is no exception. Neither is contemporary Greenland.

In his famous essay *Here Comes Everybody* art critic and historian Thomas McEvelley writes:

“When we look at the European art history of the last five hundred years in this way, seeing both its internal developments and its external connections with social and economic forces, the problem grows, the disturbance spreads. For what we see in the large view is that European art arose and was sustained within a matrix of two vast historical movements.

The first of these movements was the colonial and imperial expansion of the European societies that enabled them over a period of several hundred years to spread around the world like, as Susan Sontag once put it, “the cancer of history”, meanwhile cornering most

of the wealth of the world and impoverishing almost everyone else. It is worth looking more closely at the relative chronologies of art and power in this era.”<sup>1</sup>

McEvelley draws parallels between the Western culture’s Renaissance and Enlightenment and its barbarism taking place at the very same time. The honorable part is included in history while the less honorable part is excluded. He emphasises that independence from colonialism did not end the hegemony of the West. Rather, the West’s hegemonic position has been reinforced through increased economic, political, and cultural domination in the postcolonial world.

## **Green Connection**

Through the ages, several small nations have been subjected to a patronising conqueror. Basic rights have been denied these nations in accordance with the idea that “what I am doing to you and what I want you to do, is to your own advantage” and “I must enslave you first, in order to give you freedom and prosperity afterwards”. So all that the colonisers did and are still doing is for the good of the colonised. *Iraqi Freedom* is a good example.

Greenland is no exception in this regard. This little big nation is in a stage of fatigue following the dictates of its conqueror. “You are a sovereign nation, but we are still working on the question of your identity”.

For so many years Greenland has been an attractive field for foreign scientists and researchers. To change the perspective of the research, the Home Rule Government began to build research institutions of its own and formulate a research policy in the 90s. The general goal of the Greenlandic research is to contribute to the improvement of life for the population and to contribute actively to the development of the Greenlandic society. Such progress could be used as a podium for moves towards independence and partition.

Relatively few studies have been carried out by daring researchers, academics, and artists which attempt to enlighten the Greenlandic issue and all the controversies surrounding it. Despite its extreme location on the world map, Greenland was never excluded from world politics and military strategy.

It has always been a quiet “cold war” battle field. The aliens approaching the region in the shape of Western man, have rendered the location of Greenland significant, but the inhabitants insignificant.

The exhibition *Melting Barricades* poses a significant question in relation to self interest and national interest. Even after modern Greenland has managed to penetrate the strategic domain related to its tactical location, the conqueror has never given first priority to the interest of Greenland and the Greenlandic society.

The military base in Thule illustrates the American interest in isolating part of Greenland and keeping it clean, protected, and American, while the rest of the island is treated as a dumping site. What if the Greenlandic society starts to negotiate its own interests and seek its own protection? Would that not be a basic right of a population living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas McEvelley: *Here Comes Everybody* in exhibition catalogue *From Beyond the Pale*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1994. Also published in *Ekbatana* exhibition catalogue, Images of the World, Nikolaj Exhibition Space, Copenhagen 2000.

This is where *Melting Barricades* comes in. The exhibition negotiates the establishment of a local Greenlandic Army to protect its population, a sovereign government capable of protecting what is left of its values, traditions, and heritage, as it is the case with all nations which regard their values, traditions, and heritage as valuable. As a small exclusive minority among the world populations, Greenlandic values and traditions should be of similar relevancy to the world as Greenland's natural environment.

From an artistic and cultural historical perspective, Greenland has always been the Orient of modern Denmark. By characterising it as a political experimental lab, Greenland has been denied a fully appreciated identity. For Denmark, this cold Nordic sphere is an exotic nature, never culture. Denmark needs Greenland and its pure nature. How white and well preserved it should always be.

However, under the white snow lies a major pollution catastrophe lately discovered by *Green Peace*. If such a discovery was made in Denmark itself, would the reaction of a mother who cares be the same? The pure ecological site has turned out to be a chemical dumping site.

Anthropologically Greenland is still a protected area, a national park, a site where "luxury expeditions" find their way for the sake of entertainment, while the inhabitants are on a daily expedition gathering new knowledge and preserving what is left of the heritage.

"They cannot present themselves, they must be represented". In Northern European consciousness there has always been confusion on the subject of Greenland, what it is and whose it is.

Strange logics surround Greenland as the minority/majority case it has always been. The permanent population of Greenland is no less ambivalent about its position in the world than the mobile population outside Greenland.

Greenland never existed as a state before, not literally. That alone gives the Greenlandic society a special position in the world. For historic, natural, and geographic reasons, Greenland should be able to view the new world order from a different angle and contribute to the world society by playing its crucial card in relation to world security.

As part of the global challenge, Greenland has an obligation to participate; it should interact with the rest of the world by approaching it instead of waiting for the world to approach it.

Because of its neutrality, Greenlandic society can provide more objective views on world conflicts. This little big country can help to provide the world with an environmentally cold, but humanistically warm peace.

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