‘Three Hundred Years Hence’:

Colonialism, Indigeneity, Modernism and Nationalism in the Interpretative Repertoires of the Greenland Hans Egede Statue Debate

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Introduction

In 1931, Augo Lynge’s *Ukiut 300-ngornerat* (in English: *Three Hundred Years Hence*) became the second novel ever published in *Kalaallisut* (West-Greenlandic). Looking three centuries ahead from the arrival of the missionary Hans Egede and the beginning of Danish colonisation of the island in 1721,[2] this piece of speculative fiction provides an optimistic modernistic view of future Greenland as a thriving, technologically advanced society. Clearly moulded in the image of the former coloniser, Greenland of 2021 as described in the novel is a Danish county, with an ethnically mixed, Greenland-Danish population. While modernisation has been fully embraced, in Lynge’s Greenland, traditional culture is barely surviving, and the county is largely bilingual (*Kalaallisut*-Danish). The Greenland population are confidently settled in their collective identity in a comfortable, integrated relationship with Denmark (Lynge, 1931/1989).

Some might well consider Lynge’s 2021 version of Greenland a dystopia, rather than the ideal society he probably envisaged, and it is easy to imagine the alternatives that later generations might propose. The diametrically opposite society, for instance, would be a 2021 Greenland entirely populated by Greenlandic-speaking Inuit, with the ties to Denmark long and fully severed, the Nordic version of modernity replaced by one in which Indigenous values and traditions play a much larger role.

As we compare the fiction with Greenland of today, on a number of counts Lynge was not too far off the mark. On certain others, however, realities today are very different. By Lynge’s standards, Greenland can be said to be less economically prosperous than he foresaw. Also, the confidently modernist purpose of Greenlanders, including a shared vision for a ‘Nordic’ kind of future, is

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much less prevalent, and the relationship between Greenland and Denmark/Greenlanders and Danes is more complex, to put it mildly.

In Arctic human science research it is not uncommon to make clear distinctions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and communities (see, e.g., McElroy, 2008; Dingman, 2013; Fondahl et al., 2015; Vowel, 2016), and between traditional knowledge, like *Inuit Qaujimajatunqangiit*, and 'Western' epistemology (see, e.g., Karetak et al., 2017). The recent ICASS X conference that attracted researchers from across the world, for example, had numerous sessions dedicated to issues specified as 'Indigenous', such as: 'Arctic Policy and Indigenous Peoples in Russia', and 'The Power of Indigenous Arts and Crafts' (ICASS, 2021). There are very good reasons for that, including the importance of recognising past wrongs and continuing inequalities, and supporting decolonisation processes and the development of systems of governance that involve communities and addresses societal needs in manners that respect and include Indigenous ways and values.

It is tempting also to 'read' Greenland into a similar dichotomous narrative, placing on one side the Inuit Indigenous identity of the colonised, and the Western-Danish identity of the colonisers on the other. Greenland of 2021, however, is a culturally hybrid, socially, economically and politically composite country that does not easily fit into such a categorical framework. While Inuit cultural elements manifest themselves, they appear in numerous multi-faceted identity discourses that compete for hegemony and are constantly (re-)negotiated.

In recent years, the Black Lives Matter movement and related calls for social justice have once again pushed to the fore questions of inequality in the wake of colonisation. At the level of principles, fewer seem to oppose the view that past wrongs must be righted, and that those historically subjugated by practices and discourses of colonialism be provided with the voice and power of self-determination. The specific unfolding of such principles is not straightforward, however, and the practical form that the re-assertion of rights and identity ought to take is not necessarily agreed. Also in the case of Greenland, identity discourses are competing and the visions for the future not always neatly aligned.

Much useful research has been carried out on the topic of the nature of Greenland national (post-colonial) identity and the implications regarding optimal forms of governance (see e.g. Dahl, 2010; Shadian, 2010; Thisted, 2011; Strandsbjerg 2014; Sejersen, 2015; Gad, 2016; Markussen, 2017; Nuttal, 2018), and most scholars recognise the existence of different discourses in this regard. Klaus Georg Hansen, for example, detects four dominant discourses about Greenlandic society through its colonial history. Two that he describes as 'western' and two 'Inuit' (Hansen, 2017: 77). Engaged in the debate about Greenlandic decolonisation, Birgit Kleist Pedersen suggests it is high time Greenlanders free themselves of the partly self-imposed victim-position of a colonised people, and suggests that younger generations are already busy doing that (Pedersen, 2014: 307). Regardless if one agrees with Kleist's main argument, it is certain that her main premise holds: that as regards the "highly disputed question about what it means to be a Greenlander" (Ibid.: 304), there is a "diversity of discourses" (Ibid.: 307).

The negotiation of such discourses is not entirely an academic endeavour, but one with very real-life consequences. As Ulrik Pram Gad puts it, "the future course of Greenland is determined by a political negotiation of 'who we are' and how to realize that ideal" (Gad, 2017: 105). This explains, perhaps, the insistence by some political actors to keep having that debate. This is evidenced, for example, by Pele Broberg's (of the political party *Naleraq*, currently *Nalaakkersuisoq*/Minister in the Greenland government) proposal for a parliamentary query debate on the topic: 'Who is a Greenlander? – What do we understand by Greenland identity?' (*Sermitsiaq*, 2020a).

Greenland is a small country of only 56,000 inhabitants (plus approximately 20,000 expatriate Greenlanders living primarily in Denmark) but it is a society characterised by much social, economic and cultural diversity, nevertheless. Hence, it is hardly surprising that Greenlanders cherish and regret different historical memories, nor that they have diverse visions for the future of their country. The heated debate in the summer of 2020 about the Hans Egede statue in Nuuk's Colonial Harbour testifies to this.

In 2020, during the night before Greenland's National Day, 21 June, the Hans Egede statue was provided with a whip, covered in red paint, and symbols resembling Tunniit (traditional, Paleo-Inuit) tattoo patterns and the word 'DECOLONIZE' were spray-painted on its plinth. During that summer, statues around the world were defaced in the name of decolonisation, were removed by official order, or ceremoniously sunk to the bottom of rivers and canals by activists. In the wake has followed debates about the extent to which such assaults on public memorials should be accepted as the last resort and only means of attaining a voice for those suppressed, or condemned as a perversion of the democratic conversation that forces less radical voices into the background.

In either case, the interesting fact remains that in a municipally organised petition on the future of the Hans Egede statue, the inhabitants of Sermersooq/Nuuk eventually voted against the removal of it (Sermersooq, 2020). In various Greenlandic and Danish media the discussion that followed the refiguring has been described in simple terms as one between a 'woke' young generation, and a conservative older generation (see e.g., KNR, 2021a). The situation, this article argues, is much more intricate and complex than that, and the statue debate provides an excellent 'prism' through which to observe it. It tells a story about 'interpretative repertoires' (Wetherell & Potter, 1988) within Greenland, as regards both interpretations of Greenland's history and its present, visions for its future, and 'what it means to be a Greenlander'.

Methodology

To contextualize and provide a solid basis for further analysis, the article will first provide a brief introduction to Hans Egede and the statue at the centre of the debacle. It then provides an analysis of dominant collective social identity discourses and identity politics in Greenland in the past hundred years. In the next part of the article, an analysis of the Hans Egede statue debate observes positions and manifestations and assembles them into coherent 'interpretative repertoires' drawn upon by debaters.

Data for this analysis were collected from three sources primarily: visual manifestations of activism and artistic expression as reported in the news media and posted in various social media fora; individuals' commentary on online news items and to social media postings (predominantly Facebook); and comments posted in connection with the official (municipal) petition on the future of the statue. The story was massively covered by Greenland media (*Sermitsiaq*, *Nuuk Ugeavis*, *Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa* (KNR; the Greenland Broadcasting Corporation)) as well as a number of Danish and international media, and many readers took the opportunity to comment on articles in the 'Comments' sections of these media. Those comments, in both Danish and *Kalaallisut*, provide for rich empirical data for evidence of discourses engaged by those who actively partook in the debate. Approximately two thirds of the comments were made in Danish, one third in *Kalaallisut*, very few in English. Comments in all three languages have been included in the data set and the analysis.

The emphasis on social media as a source of data is warranted by the fact that Greenlanders are particularly active in regards to commenting on postings on Facebook – in fact the most active population in the world (*Greenlandtoday*.com, 2018). When we add to that the fact that an estimated 40,000 Greenlanders, the equivalent of 86% of the population aged 13 or older, have a profile on that particular social media platform (Hootsuite/We are Social, 2019), this makes it particularly relevant for such data collection. In addition, the referendum organised by *Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq* (the municipal authorities) allowed not just for the submission of a vote but also for voters to leave a comment to explain their view/vote. Such comments are obviously relevant to the analysis also.[3] All empirical data has been subject to qualitative content analysis. Initial coding was inspired by Turnowski (2020), and Andersen & Krebs (2020), followed by rounds of re-coding and theming to qualify an understanding of which themes connected how, and which 'interpretative repertoires' manifested themselves in the debate.

Confronted with the complexity of voices, and not least their simultaneous positioning within apparently competing discourses, it becomes clear that, in this case also, ascribing fixed positions to individuals or groups of people makes little analytical or practical sense. Although sharp points and 'bastions' of opinion exist in this debate, the picture seems to be one of discursive 'spheres', that sometimes merge, and that individuals enter or exit, even as they engage in specific discussion. This kind of porousness of social identity discourses is well theorised in social psychology by Wetherell and Potter (e.g. 1988). Wetherell summarises their points: "Some order can be placed on […] various positions by noting that they fit within several recognizable broader interpretative repertoires available to the [users]. An interpretative repertoire is a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes" (Wetherell, 1998: 400).

The usefulness of interpretative reservoirs, also in this analysis, lies in their ability to encompass discursive 'variability' (a key concept to Wetherell and Potter) to reflect how individuals "draw […] on different, often inconsistent resources, as they seem appropriate" (Wetherell & Potter, 1988: 176). In the analysis of the Hans Egede statue debate, this allows us to move beyond the placement of individual statements in narrowly defined categories of 'opinion' or 'attitude', to a discussion of the discursive repertoires from which debaters draw.

Hans Egede and the statue

To set the scene of the current debate, first let us revisit the events that the statue commemorates, and the history of the statue itself. Godthåb (present-day Nuuk) was founded by the Danish-Norwegian priest and missionary Hans Povelsen Egede in 1728. He had arrived to Greenland in 1721 with the purpose of converting heathens (initially expected to be Roman Catholic descendants of the Norse) to the proper Lutheran Christian faith (Gulløv, 2021; Fægteborg, 2009: 42). Thus, the 2020 debate about the statue of Hans Egede, and his legacy in Greenland society, just precedes the 300th anniversary of the Danish mission to and colonisation of Greenland.

Egede was sponsored by the Bergen Company, which invested in the project with the purpose of establishing a profitable trading colony (Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2021). After several set-backs, the mission and trading activities expanded during the 18th Century, and Danish religious, economic, political and social influence expanded with it, as Greenland was effectively colonised, with a heavy emphasis on the first two of the three 'M's' of imperialism: "Merchants, missionaries, and the military" (Schoppa quoted in Dunch, 2002: 308).

Depressed by numerous tragedies in his own life and that of the mission, Egede left Greenland permanently in 1736 to live the rest of his life in Denmark. The mission was continued by others, most notably his son, Povl. Hans Egede was ordained Bishop of Greenland and became known in his own days as the 'Apostle to Greenland' (Gulløv, 2021).

Kathrine Kjærgaard (2010) has convincingly described Egede's legacy as a central motif in 19thcentury Greenland nation-building, and how a "Christian-patriotic cult" commemorated his arrival and work, allowing Egede to "work […] his way into the collective Greenlandic consciousness" (382). A testament to his importance in that period are the popular watercolours by Aron of Kangeq (1822-1869) depicting the deliverance of the Greenlanders from barbarism and superstition, as well as remnant references to Egede in much of contemporary Greenland. In Nuuk, this includes a street, a hotel and a church named after him, as well as the tapestries by Hans Lynge (1906-1988) in the town hall council chambers.

Today, 95% of Greenlanders are members of the People's Church of Greenland (*Kristeligt Dagblad*, 2017), and there is a rich catalogue of hymns in *Kalaallisut* and religious art which places local Lutheran Protestantism as a central element in some Greenland national identity discourses. Significantly, this national-religious symbiosis is seen also in political procedure, such as the Siumut party opening its general meeting with a sermon (*Sermitsiaq*, 2020b), or at the official opening of each session of the local assembly, the *Inatsisartut*. On this occasion, all MLAs ceremoniously dress up in *Kalaallisuut,* the national costume, to march in procession from Hans Egede's House to attend mass at the Church of Our Saviour, before continuing on *en bloc* through Nuuk to the *Inatsisartut*.

Majestically placed on a hilltop overlooking the Church of Our Saviour and the Colonial Harbour, today stands a monument to commemorate the part of Greenland history described above (Fig. 1). Mounted on a solid, 2-metre masonry pedestal is a bronze statue of a natural-sized, wig-wearing Egede, dressed from ruff to foot in his cassock. He is leaning on a simple pastoral staff, and a bible is clinched in his left hand, pressed towards his chest. Chiselled into the plinth, below one foot peeking out from under his robe, appears his name: 'HANS EGEDE'. Erected in 1922 on *Kirkebjerget* (Church Hill) in Godthaab, the statue is a replica of Danish sculptor August Saabye's 1913 statue, which still stands in front of Frederik's (the Marble) Church in Copenhagen (Thomsen & Vester, 2016; *Dansk biografisk,* 2021). The Greenland version was funded by private collection among Greenlanders, initiated by the secular and religious authorities, and by donations from Danish churchgoers (Volquardsen, 2020; Andersen & Krebs, 2020). It was erected in 1922 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Egede to Greenland, an event also marked in 1921 by celebrations organised by the colonial administration, including the first visit by a Danish monarch, Christian X, to Greenland.

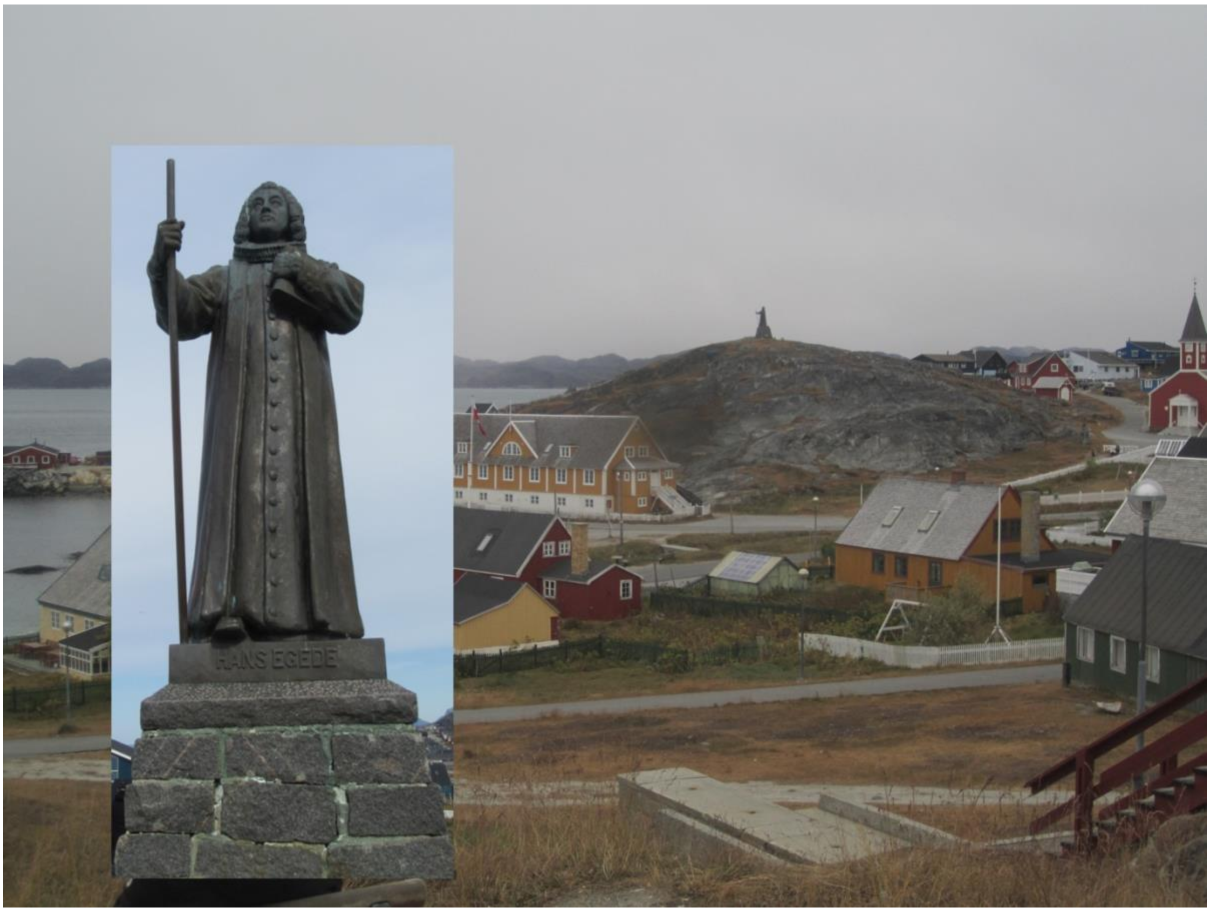

Figure 1. Hans Egede statue in Nuuk's Colonial Harbour

In tune with the Greenland cultural and political revival since the 1960s, the historical role of Hans Egede and his legacy as missionary and coloniser have been critically analysed and publicly debated. In Kjærgaard's words "the legacy of Hans Egede has been incessantly renegotiated" (2010: 377). In literary works, Aqqaluk Lynge's *Ode til Danaiderne* (1970) and recently Kim Leine's popular novels *The Prophets of Eternal Fjord* (2015), and *Rød mand/Sort mand* [*Red Man/Black Man*] (2018) provide a highly sceptical analysis of this part of Greenland history and its socio-cultural consequences. Aviaq Fleischer recently illustrated how, in Greenland popular media and music, the past fifty years have seen a paradigm shift in the representation of Hans Egede, from a reverent to a critical-satirical stance (Fleischer, 2021).

Since the 1970s, the Egede statue in Nuuk has been the object of vandalism/activism (depending on the eye of the beholder): it was first covered in red paint in 1973, a plaque left by the perpetrators asking, rhetorically: "Was it not he who killed our souls? Should we continue to honour him?" (Gulløv & Kapel, 1979: quoted in Kjærgaard, 2010: 393). The statue was doused in paint again in 1977, in 2012 and in 2015. The apparent message on these occasions varied but common to them all has been a theme of opposition to oppression (colonial, Christian, male) (*Sermitsiaq*, 2012a; 2012b, 2015). The statue has also been the object of satire in the works of, among others, cartoonists Robert Holmene and Kunuk Platou.

Collective social identity discourses and identity politics in Greenland

Since Danish colonisation of Greenland, initiated with the arrival of Hans Egede in 1721, Greenland's formal position within the Danish state has gradually developed from colony over county (1953) towards emancipation as a partly autonomous entity within the Unity of the Realm: Home Rule in 1979 and Self-Government in 2009. With increased autonomy, Greenland has patriated decision-making in a number of policy areas,[4] a national flag (*Erfalasorput*) has been adopted, and Danish place names have been replaced by toponyms in *Kalaallisut*, which has also gained official status as the sole official language. Furthermore, the 2009 Act of Greenland Self-Government recognizes the Greenlanders as a people, and confirms the right of that people to decide whether Greenland should become independent (Act of Greenland Self-Government, 2009: preamble, section 21).

These gains have not come about unprompted but are the results of a five-decade long struggle, which has seen growing demands for self-determination and fate control. A natural part of this process has been negotiations of the identity and destination of the Greenland nation/people (Thisted, 2013; Rud, 2017; Gad, 2017) -- illustrated, for example, by the title of the 1973 landmark album 'Sumut' ('Where to?') by the rock band Sumé.

Today, the end goal (and thus the impetus and purpose of most contemporary policy-making) of full economic and political independence of Greenland has almost become a given, underlying premise in all politics and public debate. All political parties -- expect two minor ones with little political influence -- presently support future economic and political independence for Greenland, and *Naalakkersuisut*'s (the Greenland government) political programmes in the form of coalition agreements have often taken that vista for granted. The 2016-2018 government coalition agreement between Siumut, Inuit Ataqatigiit and Partii Naleraq, for example, opened with the following statement: "Greenland is *irrevocably* on the path to independence, and this process requires not only political stability but also national unity" (Naalakkersuisut, 2016: 2; emphasis added).

Politicians are on fairly safe ground in assuming popular backing for this vision; polls have shown increasing and consistent support throughout Greenland for the notion of a future fully sovereign country (see e.g. *High North News*, 2016 and *Sermitsiaq*, 2016).[5] The exact identity and form of this future nation-state, however, was always under negotiation, and recent years' debates suggest that visions and discourses are still far from neatly aligned. As Kirsten Thisted notes, "The new Arctic is framed by a new context where people are digitally fluent and active members of the global community in a way that makes the future development completely different from previous ages – and thus also completely unpredictable" (Thisted, 2015: 37).

As early as the mid-19th Century, Greenlanders were engaged in a kind of ethnic nation-building that in many ways resembled the Danish equivalent, based as it was on romantic notions of deep relations between "the land, the people, the language and the territory" (Thisted, 2015: 26). Although it incorporated aspects of Indigenous culture, it was, in essence 'European' in form (Langgaard, 2011: 126). Langgaard describes a kind of nationalist mimicry in the early 20th Century which resulted in the Greenlandic appropriation of a Danish nation-building tradition, albeit one with a particular Greenland hue: the Greenland national anthem *Nunarput* from 1912 is written in *Kalaallisut*, and the "sophisticated negotiation" (Ibid.: 128) that was part of the *kalaaliussuseq* debate in literature and news media about the nature of Greenland national identity was also conducted in *Kalaallisut*. Consequently, Langgaard argues that 'mimicry' should not in this context be translated as 'unreflecting imitation' but rather as 'thoughtful appropriation' (Ibid.: 127).

The references to nature and popular culture (like kayaking and hunting) are dominant, but in contrast to Danish and other European romantic nationalisms, there are remarkably few references to historical heroes. The rationale was that the pagans of yore where not converted to Christianity and civilisation until after 1721, and thus not ideal for nation-building purposes (Ibid.: 130-1). Unmistakably ethno-national in outlook, however, Greenland nation-builders made efforts -- as seen, e.g., in Augo Lynges novel, *300 Years Hence*, and Mathias Storch's novel *Sinnattugaq* (*The Dream*) – to imagine a distinctly Greenlandic community in the image of, and therefore equal to, Denmark (Rud, 2017: 121).

The romantic-modernist version of Greenland nation-building, however, was to be fundamentally altered from the 1960s by the dawning anti-/postcolonialist movement, which articulated the Greenland nation through an Indigenous, *Kalaallit* identity, and in opposition to the Danish-Greenland modernisation and welfare projects of the 1950s and 1960s. Through the political mobilisation of Greenland nationalism, a well-articulated, well-educated elite cadre of young Greenlanders insisted on civil rights and a less Danish-designed future through Indigenous-national self-determination (Ibid.: 123-25). Eventually, in 1979 they succeeded in securing Home Rule for Greenland. For most of them, however, the Inuit culture and identity they championed was not pan-Inuit in nature, but ethno-national. Their vision was for *Greenland* post-colonial self-determination, primarily. Consequently, Greenland identity discourse came to "combine […] elements of traditional Inuit culture and elements of colonial modernity" (Gad, 2009: 136).

As Greenland "dichotomised back" (Ibid.) the country achieved increased self-determination by the devolution of political and decision-making powers to Home Rule and Self-Government. In some periods of this process there has been a tendency to downplay the Indigenous elements to allow for a discourse of a Greenland nation *commes les autres* – on equal terms with other nations of the world (see e.g. Thisted, 2020: 352), while other periods have witnessed an insistence on national distinction *via* Indigeneity. An interesting mixture of influences are thus present in modern Greenland national identity-building. The romantic ethno-national idea of the nation is joined by visions of an Indigenous nation, along with another important element: Greenland-Christian national culture keeps insisting on its presence also. The national discourses obviously clash in public debate and elsewhere, but on certain occasions there is a happy marriage of Indigenous, ethno-national and religious heritage. This is seen, for instance, in the Greenland Day celebrations, organised every year since 1985 by the municipalities. They include church services, coffee-*miks* (social get-togethers), the ceremonial hoisting of the national flag (*Erfalasorput*) to choir singing of 'Nunarput Erfalasorlu', its hymn, and -- equally ceremonially -- seal hunting competitions and traditional Inuit games.

In recent years, yet other discursive voices have entered the national identity negotiations.

The initial 1960s-1970s national-Indigenous discourse that was used actively as a vehicle in postcolonial endeavours has increasingly been challenged by new generations who see it as an obstacle to proper decolonisation, and therefore in need of reinvention. The critique of it suggests that its once politically useful romantic myth of the 'noble savage' (Langgaard, 2011: 143), with its references to an authentic culture-nature relationship, has become a mental straitjacket to present-day Greenlanders (Thisted, 2015: 25-26). Its limitations are seen to lie in its connotations of a position of victimhood and, as argued by Thisted, under-development and anti-modernity (Thisted, 2017: 234). With increasing legal self-determination and state-building since 1979, the collective social identity discourse about Greenland Indigeneity thus requires, this discourse proposes, more agency to articulate a position of Inuit-in-power. This is a discourse that, to a larger extent than before, draws in a Greenland context on what can be termed a shared pan-Arctic and pan-Inuit repertoire (see e.g. Thomsen et al., 2018). Körber and Volquardsen speak of a "revitalization of Indigenous knowledge and socio-cultural aspects of life, the most visual of which certainly being the recent revival of traditional facial tattooing" with the "potential to bring about epistemological and institutional change [which] allows for global Indigenous solidarization and, in turn, a strengthening of decolonization efforts" (Körber and Volquardsen, 2014: v).

As if the imagined identity battleground was not crowded already, yet another Greenland national discourse can be detected. The Danish-inspired, ethno-national *Kalaallit* discourse that developed in the late 19th century is still powerful, perhaps even with a prominent position in Greenland collective social identity-building, and although challenged by the bilingual, ethnically diverse national visions of early 20th century literati, it is within the past few decades that ethnic nationalism has been seriously challenged by a civic opponent. The focus of this article does not allow for an extensive elaboration of the nature of ethnic and civic forms of nationalism. Basically, however, we find at one end of the continuum 'ethnic' nationalism, an exclusivist form, which considers membership of the nation to be based on common descent or kinship, shared cultural heritage and language – thus, national unity by ascription. At the other end of the continuum we find 'civic' or 'liberal' nationalism, an inclusivist form, which considers membership of the nation to be determined by adherence to shared values, such as democratic citizenship, individual rights, diversity – thus national unity by consent (Tamir, 1993; Smith, 2009; see also Kohn, 1994; Greenfield, 1992; Brubaker, 1992). What is essential to acknowledge, though, is that such 'ethnic' and 'civic' elements necessarily exist in every type of nationalism – only with different emphases. The idea of an 'ethnic-less' nationalism makes little sense. If the perception of being a distinct ethnic group (a people) does not exist, there can be no idea of the nation (Thomsen, 2010: 19).

As argued by Thisted, historical intermingling means that in Greenland "it no longer makes sense to talk about Inuit/Greenland or Danish/European as two distinct cultures, which meet in Greenland. Scandinavia and Europe have long since become part of the present Greenlanders' own heritage" (Thisted, 2015: 26). In addition, immigrants from other parts of the world are arriving to Greenland in tune with Greenland's increased embrace of international trade and communication, while a cosmopolitian, globally educated, bi- or multilingual elite find a civic national discourse increasingly appealing. The Greenlandic terms *Kalaallit* (Greenlanders) and *Kalaallit Nunaat* (Greenland) are argued to be capable of holding both the ethno-Inuit elements and the civic ones. An example of Greenland civic nation-building is the Sermersooq Business Council campaign *Colourful Nuuk* (2015-), which portrays Greenland as a post-modern (tradition-meets-cool modernity), innovative, multicultural and inclusive society (Colourful Nuuk, 2021).

An example of both discursive positions held by politicians is provided in a 2017 KNR televised debate between MLA Aleqa Hammond and MLA Jens B. Frederiksen on the topic 'Kalaaleq qanaq ittuua? ('What does it mean to be Greenlandic'?). In her opening remarks, Hammond argues that a "real Greenlander" is someone who respects and appreciates Greenlandic cultural heritage, food, language and identity (and later stresses that proficiency in the Greenlandic language must be considered a minimum requirement). Frederiksen counters that anyone who chooses to work and live in Greenland ought to be considered Greenlandic, regardless of their language proficiency (KNR 2017; 1:10-3:10). A very recent example is provided by the political crisis that arose after *Naalakkersuisoq* Pele Broberg proposed that non-Inuit Greenlanders ought not to get a vote in a future referendum on Greenland independence (*Berlingske*, 2021). Premier Múte B. Egede felt compelled to publicly denounce his minister's views, and later strip Broberg of two of his portfolios (foreign affairs and climate) (KNR, 2021b).

As elsewhere in the world, the issue of national language as a 'gatekeeper' or access-provider is essential in the ethnic-civic discussion about what kind of nation Greenland is or should be (see Gad, 2017), and here we see continuous negotiation between ethnic and civic national discourses. Similar negotiation is prevalent in official documents: according to the terms of reference of the Constitutional Commission that was set up in 2017 by the *Inatsisartut*, the constitution of the future independent country must be "based on […] the culture, language and identity of […] the Indigenous Greenland people" (Ibid.). The constitution must, however, fully acknowledge that "in present-day Greenland there are many citizens from a different background" (Naalakkersuisut, 2017: 1; author's translation).

In summary, in the discussion about Greenland's present and future place in the world, and the discursive negotiations that constitute contemporary Greenland national identity-building, we find a series of closely inter-related themes: *Kalaallit* Indigenous nationalism vis-à-vis pan-Inuit Indigenism; (post-)colonialism vis-à-vis decolonisation; (post-)modernism vis-à-vis traditionalism; ethnic vis-à-vis civic nationalism. With this complex, but hopefully informative picture of Greenland collective social identity discourses in mind, let us proceed to the second and final part of the analysis.

Interpretative repertoires in the Hans Egede Statue debate

This part of the article will investigate a series of interpretative repertoires in the Hans Egede Statue debate. It is important to emphasize in advance, though, that whereas such description must necessarily, for analytical purposes, be somewhat categorical, the essential idea of interpretative repertoires is that in practical use they overlap, supplement, co-exist (and sometimes internally contradict).

1. Mental decolonisation: Beginning our analysis at the end of the scale most critical to Hans Egede and what the statue represents, we find a repertoire which holds that moving or destroying the statue would be part of a process of mental decolonisation. Here, the essence of the debate is that symbolism matters, and this particular symbol is one of cultural colonisation and oppression. Consequently, its prominent presence, elevated at the centre of Greenland's capital, reinforces a sense of inferiority, which remains an obstacle to Greenlanders' self-determination.

This repertoire draws on the Black Lives Matter movement and other social justice movements as moral repositories. It proposes the (dramatic) denouncement of the iconographies and symbols that keep telling Greenlanders that their ways and values are worthless, and that the best/only way forward is through reproduction of Danish values and systems. Here, Greenlanders and Greenland culture remain ethnically unspecified or referred to in generic national terms.

The repertoire can be illustrated with this statement by Aqqalu Berthelsen/Uyarakq, speaking on behalf of those claiming responsibility for the 2020 're-materializing' of the statue: "It is about time that we stop celebrating colonisers and that we start taking back what is rightfully ours. It's time to decolonise our minds and our country. No coloniser deserves to be on top of a mountain like that. We need to learn the truth of our history" (kunstkritikk.com, 22 June 2020) – and by his meme of a beheaded Hans Egede statue posted on his Facebook profile (Berthelsen, 2020) (Fig. 2).

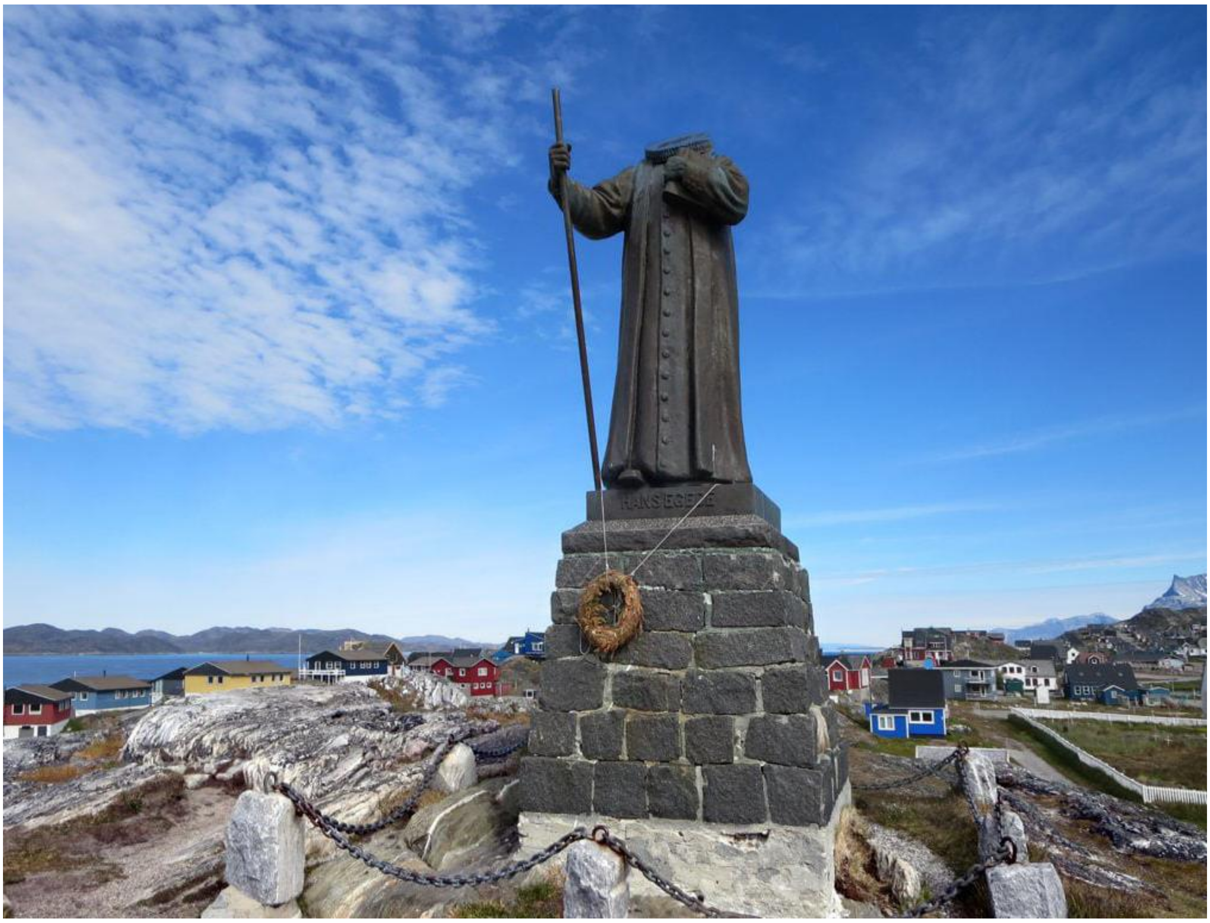

Figure 2. Beheaded Hans Egede statue posted on Aqqalu Berthelsen/Uyarakq's Facebook profile

Similarly, the 'prominent' featuring of the statue in the very popular video for the anti-danification rap: 'Tupilak', by Josef Tarrak-Petrussen (Tarrak, 2017), and graffiti by street artist 'Nuumigoq' incorporating Hans Egede's portrait in red spray-paint along with the word '*UNDSKYLD*' ('SORRY') (Kjærgaard, 2010: 394), presumably illustrate the discursive contents of this interpretative repertoire.

2. Mental decolonisation: The second repertoire has much in common with the first one. Here also, the primary focus is on mental decolonisation but Greenlanders and Greenland culture are specified as Indigenous and Inuit. Merging Christian and Danish influence, the repertoire sees both as the violator of Inuit traditional beliefs, and argues that original Inuit culture and values remain threatened by the dominance of culture and values fundamentally alien to Greenlanders.

The repertoire can be illustrated by this statement by filmmaker Aka Hansen: "The statue of Hans Egede symbolises […] suppression, Christian shaming and racism. And we're supposed to 'celebrate' that next year? […] [P]erhaps we should just throw it into the ocean on the 300th anniversary of Hans Egede's arrival to Greenland. That would be a nice resurrection of our society" (*Nuuk Ugeavis*, 27 June 2020; author's translation).

In this repertoire we also find references to contrasting, traditional Inuit cosmology and mythological symbolism in the form, for instance, of Christian Rosing's 'Sassuma Arnaa' (Mother of the Sea) sculpture that sits next to the Egede statue in Nuuk's Colonial Harbour. The semiotic drawing upon Inuit tattoo patterns in the spray-painting of the pedestal of the statue in 2020 presumably reflect this type of reference also.[6]

Aviaq Fleischer's analysis of reactions to the cancellation of the marking of the 300th anniversary of the arrival of Hans Egede includes proposals to replace the statue with proper Greenlandic iconography, such as a statue of a sled dog or a hunter (Fleischer, 2021: 414). This idea has been given visual form by the artist Lili Chemnitz who in one of her productions places a monument to the Greenland kayaker on Church Hill, and removes the Hans Egede statue to a park in Copenhagen, next to homeless people (presumably Greenlanders).

3. Heritage interpretation as nation-building: What characterises the third repertoire is the view that a people's past and symbols of that past are essential to 'who we are' – but that heritage interpretation must necessarily recognise both positive and negative aspects in identity formation processes. The Hans Egede memorial is seen to represent Greenlanders' past, including a history of colonisation, but also the ongoing re-appropriation of that past for nation-building purposes. Since the statue obviously offend fellow Greenlanders, this repertoire holds, it should be considered moving it to a more appropriate or relevant place. Alternatively, if left in the current spot, provided with para-textual interpretation that explains various positions in relation to the memorial. A quote by Daniel Thorleifsen, Director of the Greenland National Museum illustrates this repertoire: "Hans Egede's statue is placed very visibly on the top of a hill, and it's impossible not to notice it when arriving to Nuuk. Many people find it provocative that a missionary, considered the representative of colonial power is so dominantly placed in the townscape […]. Perhaps it would be more acceptable if the statue were to be placed in a more appropriate place, either next to Hans Egede's House or the Hans Egede Church?" (*Sermitsiaq*, 2020c; author's translation). Other locations proposed in the debate include the Church of Our Saviour just below Church Hill, and the Greenland National Museum, also located in the Colonial Harbour.

4. Heritage as collective social identity: As we near the end of the scale most positive to Hans Egede and the purpose of the monument, a repertoire focuses on the statue as an historical symbol of Greenland national as well as Nuuk local identity. It is seen as a representation of the collective contemporary 'us' and of the ancestors who funded and placed it there; ancestors whose values, it is argued, must be respected. Emphasis in this repertoire is on commemoration and national/local heritage. Consequently, defacing the memorial is considered vandalism and seen as disrespectful to past and present Greenlanders. Associated with this repertoire is also the argument that Egede's mission, unlike most other missions in the world at the time, insisted on teaching the Gospel in the mother tongue, and thus preserved the essential national trait *Kalaallisut* as a living language.

The repertoire can be illustrated by these words by Orla Dalager, who represents the Nuuk Local History Association (which staged its own 'remain' petition prior to the municipal petition): "The statue is a landmark of the town, and many citizens of the country were engaged in establishing the project […]. My own great-grandfather, a trading manager out in Kangeq, was one of those who came to Nuuk and joined in carrying it up the hill […]. Bad things happened in the 18th century but what use do we have of that today. Not all things were bad. Today, we are baptised, confirmed, married and buried, surely we can't do without that" (*Sermitsiaq*, 2020d; author's translation).

5. Christian heritage as collective social identity: The fifth interpretative repertoire is similar to the repertoire above in many ways, except it has a much larger emphasis on Christian heritage and values. The statue is here considered a religious symbol of the Christian virtues on which contemporary Greenland culture and society are built. This repertoire extends into pro-colonisation argumentation, suggesting that the arrival of Egede, and with him Christianity, spelled the arrival of civilisation to Greenland. Accordingly, the statue must remain where it is because it is a daily reminder of what Egede brought as a gift to generations of Greenlanders. The veneration expressed in this repertoire is illustrated, for example, by the sermon and the laying of a wreath to mark the 250 years since the death of the 'Apostle to Greenland' in 2008 (*Sermitsiaq*, 2008) (Fig. 3).

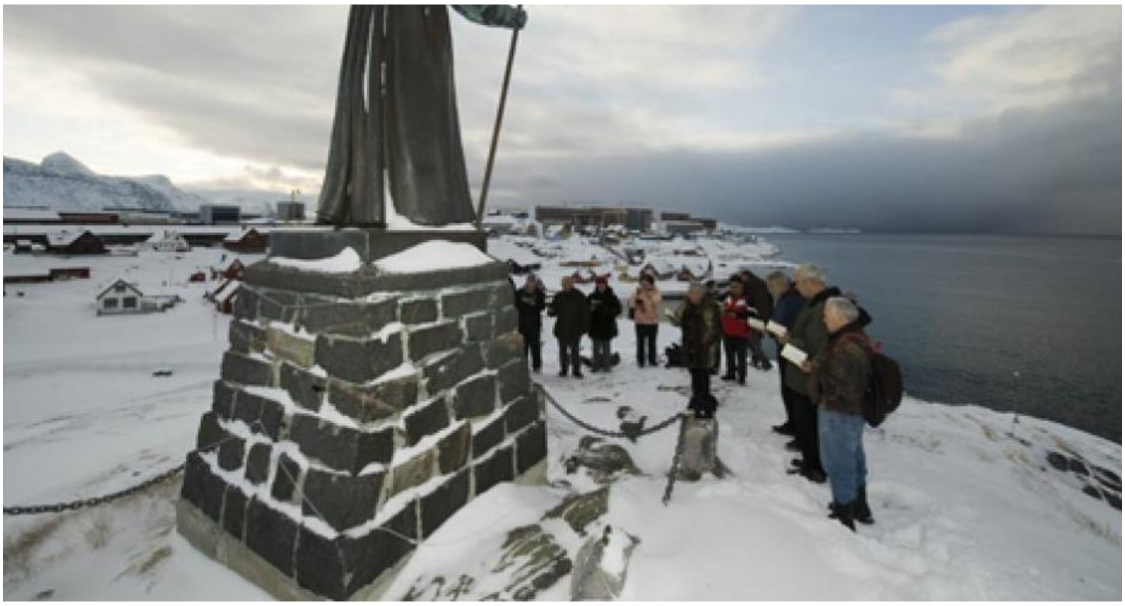

Figure 3. Wreath laying ceremony in 2008

6. Forget symbolic struggles, focus on what matters: The analysis of interpretative repertoires so far has provided an account of discourses that all relate to and feed into debates about the Hans Egede statue. A final repertoire stands out in this regard. In it, the sharply formulated argument is that symbolic struggles are a luxury Greenland cannot afford. They divide the population, the argument goes, and remove focus from the real – social and economic – problems that Greenland faces. Reference is made within this repertoire to social problems of substance abuse, homelessness, housing problems, and public deficits, and the recommendation is that Greenlanders take responsibility for solving those problems instead of dwelling in and on the past. This repertoire is potently illustrated by the absence of votes in the municipal petition: altogether, 23,000 inhabitants of *Kommuneqarfik Sermersoq* were eligible to vote; only 1,500 did (the equivalent of 6.6%) (Andersen & Krebs, 2020).

Conclusion

One-and-a-half centuries of national identity negotiation has left its legacy in Greenland society. The analysis above illustrates the criss-crossing, intricate nature of the discursive struggle that is Greenland collective social identity-building, and it is tempting to conclude by trying to align national discourses neatly with specific interpretative repertoires in an all-explaining grid of sorts. Analytical insistence on simple connections would be problematic, however.

In the interpretative repertoires we do indeed recognise remnants of the dominant collective identity discourses from different periods of Greenland nation-building. For example, Augo Lynge's modernistic 'Danish', civic (ethnically diverse, bilingual) national vision for Greenland would sit well with many of the arguments characteristic of repertoires 6 ('Forget symbolic struggles') and 3 ('Heritage as collective social identity'). Yet, its civic nature and visions for a distinct, confident Greenland governed by Greenlanders also brings it close to the essence of interpretative repertoire 1 ('Mental Decolonisation I'). Similarly, it is easy to connect the dots between the most recent wave of Greenlandic de-colonialist nationalism and interpretative repertoire 2 ('Mental Decolonisation II'), with its emphasis on Inuit culture and values. However, its focus on tradition and ethnicity would also appear to resonate well with repertoires like 3 ('Heritage interpretation as nation-building') and 4 ('Heritage as collective social identity').

An emphasis on arguments that rhyme with ethno-cultural nation-building – Indigeneity or (Christian) Greenlandicness – can be detected in repertoires 2, 3, 4 and 5, primarily, whereas there is an absence of distinctly ethno-cultural arguments in 1 and 6 (more than an explicit commitment to civic nation-building). An indication, perhaps, that the repertoires that would immediately seem to 'clash' most in fact draw upon some common understandings.

Another finding that needs mentioning is that the comments posted in *Kalaallisut* in connection with the municipal vote tend to place themselves within repertoires 4 and 5 ('(Christian) Heritage as collective social identity'). The sample is too small and the statistical representativeness insufficient to make any strong conclusions based on this. It might well indicate, however, that proficiency in *Kalaallisut* does not correspond to subscription to 'Mental Decolonisation' repertoires -- once again suggesting that the debate cannot meaningfully be reduced to one between 'Danish' and 'Greenlandic' positions.

Ebbe Volquardsen has argued that as regards the value of monuments, "[t]he decisive question regarding the removal or retainment of memorials is not about the past but about whether they still play a useful role as carriers of identity, and whether they still succeed in representing a narrative that contributes positively to the community […] whether [they] still contribute to the narrative of a common 'we'" (Volquardsen, 2020). There is wisdom in those words, and in the Greenland of 2021 that Augo Lynge envisaged, characterised by common shared values and an agreed clear (modernistic) vision for Greenland, that piece of advice could be followed. Then again, the 2020 statue debate probably would not have taken place in Lynge's futuristic version of Greenland.

A history of colonisation and a tumultuous past century-and-a-half, characterised by nation-building in various forms, including ethnic, civic, Danish, Christian, Inuit, traditionalist and modernist elements, has left Greenland with more competing collective social identity discourses than most societies. The way the Hans Egede statue debate unfolded in real-life 2020 Greenland, with the range of interpretative reservoirs detected here, suggests multiple answers to the question of whether the statue still represents a narrative that 'contributes positively to the community', and to 'the narrative of a common "we"'. What is clear from the analysis is that simple dichotomies (such as young-old, modern-traditional, Indigenous-non-Indigenous, Greenlandic-Danish), although popular and excessively used by politicians and mass media, offer little in academic analysis in regards to the deep understanding of contemporary Greenland national identity-building processes.

Notes

1. I wish to acknowledge the very helpful comments and suggestions I received on drafts of this article from fellow members of the CIRCLA research group at Aalborg University, and Ulrik Pram Gad from the Danish Institute for International Studies. Competent translation from Greenlandic was provided by Kîsta Bianco Kjær. The study also gratefully acknowledges the useful collaboration with *Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq* and the International Arctic Hub in Nuuk, which have kindly assisted by commenting on the relevance of the study/approach and providing access to key data. Also, the insightful, constructive comments provided by two anonymous reviewers have added significantly to the coherence and quality of the article.
2. Whether Greenland was colonised in a 'benign' manner that was significantly different from the ways other Inuit and Indigenous societies were colonised is still being debated (see, e.g., Lynge, 2006; Fægteborg, 2009: 63). It remains, though, that colonial violence in various forms -- some of it 'subjective'/physical, most of it 'systemic' or 'symbolic' (Žižek, 2008) -- was exercised at different points in the history of Danish-Greenland relations.
3. The study of identity discourse expressed in the midst of a heated debate is potentially a delicate endeavour, and discretion must be exercised with regard to the use of such public-personal data. The paper, however, does not seek to detect individual positions but is entirely interested in repertoires that can be characterised as collectively applied/available in Greenland society. Therefore, statements will be anonymized, except those made publically by politicians, pundits and others with a reasonable expectation to be quoted.
4. All areas excluding foreign and security policy, citizenship, monetary policies (all non-patriable), policing, the courts, and work environment policies (all patriable).
5. A 2016 poll carried out by HS Analyse for the major Greenlandic newspaper *Sermitsiaq* asked voters how important it is that Greenland become an independent state. 64% of respondents answered 'very important' or 'somewhat important'; 24% responded that it was unimportant to some degree. A further break-down reveals that support for independence was highest among elderly Greenlanders: those aged 60-69 were most enthusiastic with 70% in favour, while 56% of those aged 18-29 found independence to be important (29% declared themselves undecided on the matter).
6. Maya Sialuk, one of the foremost contemporary Inuit tattoo artists and researcher, has on several occasions distanced herself from the use of traditional Inuit tattoos as political symbols, and also pointed to the fact that the tattoo patterns on the pedestal were in fact upside-down.

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