

Young kalaallit men's negotiation of masculinity

Maskulinitetsval hjá ungum kalaallit monnum

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Abstract

This article investigates young kalaallit's perspectives on gender identity and culture with focus on their presentations of kalaaleq man and social marginalization. Relying on qualitative data collected during a field trip to Nuuk in spring 2014, this article outlines the close connection between dominant (gendered) images of the traditional hunter lifestyle and discourses on the social and cultural predicaments of contemporary man in Greenland. I suggest men's identity negotiation process to be characterized by navigation between cultural narratives on their kalaallit ancestors and alternative images of man disseminated by electronic media and through the modern urban setting. Young men use multiple masculinities from different sources to express their ways of being kalaallit men.

Úrtak

Í hesari greinini kanna vit sjónarmiðini hjá ungum kalaallit monnum viðvíkjandi kynssamleika og mentan, við serligum denti á lýsingum teirra av kalaaleq manninum

og sosialu marginaliseringini av honum í samfelagnum. Við stóði í kvalitatívum empiriskum tilfari, ið varð savnað saman á vári 2014, vísir greinin, hvussu tætt samband er millum ráðandi myndirnar av siðbundna veiðumanna-lívsstílnum og kjakið um sosialu og mentanarlígu trupulleikarnar, sum grønlenskir menn stríðast við í dag. Eg meti samleika-arbeiðið hjá monnum í dag, at vera merkt av siglingini millum mentanarlígar forteljingar um kalaallit forfedrarnar og nýggjar myndir av monnum, sum talgildir miðlar og modernað býarlív breiða út. Ungir menn brúka margfaldar maskulinitetir úr ymsum keldum at greiða frá teirra máta at vera ein kalaallit mann uppá.

Framework and focus

Kalaallit Nunaat (meaning Land of the Kalaallit in Western Greenlandic language) is with its surface covering almost 2.2 million km² the world's largest island. Greenland was a closed Danish colonial territory from 1721 until 1953, thereafter a Danish County until 1979, when Greenland achieved Home Rule. In 2009, Greenland obtained self-rule.

The colonial policy since the 18th century (and up to the 1950s) has often been described as ‘positive isolation’ and/or ‘economic paternalism’ (Connell, 2016, p475). The population is 56.000 inhabitants of whom 89 percent are indigenous Greenlandic Inuit (including European mixed). The remaining inhabitants are mainly Danes. To indigenous people of the circumpolar north, says Mark Nuttall, „Greenland provides a model of regional self-government for which there is no precedent“ (1998, p16). The case of Greenland is interesting, because it shows how indigenous people on the fringe of Europe in postcolonial time struggle to gain cultural recognition and extended rights of self-determination, and how closely this project is connected to the renegotiation and performance of gender identities (Gaini, 2017).

This study counts on empirical data from semi-structured qualitative (individual and group) interviews, group discussions and local school surveys in Nuuk (the capital of Greenland, 16.000 inhabitants) gathered in spring 2014. During my fieldwork in Nuuk, I interviewed eight kalaallit boys (12-15 years old at the time of the encounter) of varied socio-economic background and from different parts of town. I used a snowball approach to enlist these young participants. The boys were in most of the cases interviewed with a close older relative at place. In half of the cases, I needed assistance from an interpreter, because the boys had poor Danish or English language skills. Additionally, I had conference with

a selection of Danish and Greenlandic specialists affiliated to national institutions – psychologists, teachers/mentors, social workers, researchers, policy-makers, etc. – inquiring their professional experience and knowledge on the everyday life and health of children and young people, with special attention on kalaallit men. The fact that a large majority of the specialists were of Danish origin and educated in Denmark, might indeed reflect a facet of contemporary Greenland’s ambivalent and precarious encounter with ‘western’ concepts and constructions of individual/collective and traditional/modern oppositions in culture. I also prepared a small questionnaire, which was used in 6th and 7th grades in one of the public primary (including lower secondary) schools of Nuuk. The aim of this exercise was to let children express their brief thoughts on contrasts and similarities between boys and girls (in the city and the villages), in a free style. Moreover, I visited the upper secondary school of Nuuk, where I engaged in group interviews and informal discussions with the students of a second cycle social science class. I invited the students, organized in small teams, to contemplate the question of being a man versus a woman in Greenland today, asking them to reflect on presumed differences between generations and between social groups.

I also spent a considerable amount of time observing people and activities in public places in Nuuk. In a kind of ethnographic street phenomenological venture – walking and talking (go-along) with people in the

streets, in restaurants, at grocery stores, etc. – I could examine the meaning of spatial practices and narratives in relation to the everyday life of young kalaallit men (Kusenbach, 2003, p 455–458). While I was located in Nuuk, I would like to mention, I had the opportunity to share my knowledge on youth and gender identities (from previous and ongoing scholarship) at a couple of meetings and seminars – including a lecture, which was voice-recorded and transmitted in local radio. Comments and questions from the audience were highly valuable, because the feedback represents critical assessment of my main hypotheses and (provisional) conclusions.

I have chosen to use the concepts *kalaaleq* (singular) and *kalaallit* (plural) to describe Inuit Greenlanders in this article. These are native Greenlandic conceptions. In a stricter sense, *kalaallit* only covers the Western Greenlandic population, but today it is common to include the Inuit population of Greenland as a whole under the *kalaallit* concept. I only apply the term Inuit when I look at the indigenous population of Canada or of the circumpolar area in general. *Kalaallit* refers to people of Inuit ancestry (most of which are racially mixed), and not of other ethnic groups living in Greenland today.

This article investigates and analyses the link between (gendered) images of the traditional hunter lifestyle and current discourses on the social and cultural challenges of young kalaallit men. It surmises that the identity negotiation is generally recognized by its association with a pair of incongruous

sources of identification: (a) the construction of kalaallit ancestors' work-oriented manhood and (b) the presentation of new men's styles and ideals in electronic media; styles which are manifested in contemporary urban social practice and gender performance. Thus, my emerging query is *how* to illustrate and define kalaallit masculinity? The article focuses on young people's narratives and conversations on changing gender identities in Greenland today. Greenland has been presented as an arctic society without multiple gender identities in premodern time, people being gathered in a sort of 'unitary human identity' (McCallum in High, 2010, p754). Development towards (Scandinavian-style) societal modernization since the 1950s and 1960s has excavated gendered fault lines and stimulated critical consideration of gender and self-identity: what does it mean to be male *kalaaleq* in the opening of the 21st century? The meaning of being a man is not taken for granted anymore, and many young kalaallit experience a burdensome pressure to accomplish conflicting expectations (both locally and nationally) as regards their performance of masculinity in everyday life contexts. This dilemma, which can be explained as a predicament of complex identity negotiation along trajectories resonating cultural and socio-political ruptures and structures of a society in shift, can be scaled down to the following point: How to be a brave hunter and a modern urban man at the same time?

My study discloses traits of a complex society in shift looking at its past the way

the refugee looks at his birthplace and at its future the way the mountaineer looks at the captivating peak ahead. Times changed fast, places of memory disappeared, but the imagined future is promising. Greenlanders, I rapidly learned, are more interested in the present than in the past.

First world enterprise

Setting sail for a quest for the nature of kalaallit men and masculinities, we are confronted with the question of *where* to start. The well-known and self-perpetuating proposition of universal male supremacy is hard to detect empirically in the Arctic – or for that matter anywhere. Nevertheless, it represents a premise underlying important occidental feminist discourses on men and masculinities, many of which, especially in the realm of social and educational science, count on Raewyn Connell's influential theoretical work on power and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000, 2005). Wherever they are situated, Connell says categorically in her early work, men enjoy „higher levels of recognition, i.e. they and their activities are regarded as more important, newsworthy, and appropriate to resource“ (2005, p247). This assumed gender-based overall dominance, Connell points out, does not necessarily incorporate (local) masculinity concepts „in the sense of modern North American/European culture“ (ibid., p68). Then, how can we decipher universal male supremacy in cultures – for instance kalaallit – not considering „women and men as bearers of polarized character types“? (ibid.)

Is it even possible? Connell acknowledges socially constructed gender oppositions to be disputable, since they are claimed by conflicting discourses (ibid., p3) linked to a variety of cultural models of knowledge. Before her careful reinterpretation of feminist theory ‘on a world scale’ a few years ago (Connell, 2015), Connell had bypassed explicit conference on the problem of differences between western and non-western constructions of ‘masculinity’. Feminist gender studies focusing on the global south produce empirical and descriptive writing, a kind of exotic ethnography, but the theory always comes from the global north (Connell, 2015, p50-52).

It is, from my point of view, also noteworthy that a fairly unhidden moral advocacy for the gender equality model of advanced ‘welfare states’ (especially the Scandinavian cases) has fuelled and channelled the lion's share of occidental critical research on men and masculinities since the 1980s (Hearn, 2012). This scheme, reflecting predominantly urban middle-class scholars' desire to face the ‘problem’ of structural gender inequality and sexual suppression in the context of (late) modern society, does not necessarily help us understand the ‘Other’ in other parts of the world. One of the obstacles is, as stressed by for instance Alès and Barraud (in Rodrigue, 2003), that tension in western societies tends to ‘cloud the issue’. The western perception of ‘gender equality’ and model of social relations is not always beneficial for studies of Inuit communities (ibid.) They are forcing gender

issues „down the throats of Inuit women“, an annoyed woman from Nunavut (Canada), referring to mainstream (white) Canadians, told ethnographer Jessen Williamson in the late 1980s. 'Equality' and 'power', Guemple (1995, p17) says referring to the same problem of (cultural) translation,

are certainly outgrowths of contemporary Euro-North American interests in gender relations and so express cultural values and sentiments that can be 'exported' to other cultures only with some care.

There is, says feminist Chandra T. Mohanty, a „colonial gaze in Northern gender scholarship“ (in Connell, 2015, p50). Even if masculinity research mainly is a 'First World enterprise' (Kimmel, 2005), masculinity will always be „interpolated by cultural, historical and geographical location“ (Beynon, 2002, p1). With the occidental gender equality rationale as measure, we risk labelling relatively large groups of boys and men – in western societies and beyond – as 'obstacle' to general societal progress. This manifests, in dramatic moral rhetoric, the demonization of young men assumed to have reactionary misogynist values and attitudes guiding their performance of (counter feminist) masculinity (Lorentzen, 2007). Man, in this line of reasoning, symbolizes a menace. The moral panic, echoed in public debate, hints that 'untamed' man is in need of cultural rehabilitation and domestication, which will offer him a new set of values fitting contemporary realities (Guttman, 1997;

Johansson, 2011). He has to emancipate from old habits and to bet on a positive „version of masculinity open to equality with women“ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p853). Men's current challenge, as they struggle to overcome the so-called 'crisis' of masculinity, says Faludi shamelessly, lies in figuring out how to be human (in Cross 2010, p258).

Today, Norwegian gender researcher Lorentzen gratefully ascertains, most men are „aware of the fact that there is a gender-equality wind blowing across the globe“ (2011, p118-119) – a fresh wind replacing dystopian centuries when gender was the „equivalent to difference and inequality“. The tide has turned and the 'reformed man' is gaining ground, but who is he? The prototype is, according to Hollstein,

between 27 and 40 years old, graduated in humanities or in social sciences, is not only interested in but is also engaged in current events, works as a teacher, psychologist, social worker or journalist, and is politically progressive. (in Meuser, 2003, p139-140)

I would have added that he might also work as a gender researcher and be in his forties. He is, additionally, a citizen of a 'multi-optional' and 'de-traditionalized' society (Beck, 1998; Gross, 1994). However, is Lorentzen's „gender-equality wind“ blowing across the world being chased by a gale splitting men into different subgroups based on competing cultural and gender identities? Focusing

on masculinity as a cultural construction, for instance among kalaallit, invites critical discussions on the post- and neo-colonial breeze in peripheral corners of the world not necessarily resonating schemes designing 'masculinity' as solution to the presupposed 'legitimacy of patriarchy' problem (Connell 1995). Practically all societies have native conceptualizations of men and women in their local language. It is therefore pre-emptive to analyse the situation in arctic communities without postulating that they mirror gender contrasts and values familiar to what is recognized in western societies. As Connell says in a recent article: The problem is not that ideas do not emerge in the global periphery, but that there is a general „deficit of recognition and circulation“ of these ideas (Connell 2015, p52)

Gender in Greenland

Circumpolar communities were until quite recently, more or less, terra incognita in international studies of gender, as their apparent lack of long-established gendered hierarchies led most (western) scholars interested in the analysis of gendered dichotomies towards other more promising territories (Guemple, 1995; Klein and Ackerman, 1995). Most arctic societies, including *Kalaallit Nunaat*, have been portrayed as relatively egalitarian without elaborate historic class structures (Giffen, 1975; Jensen Williamson, 2010; Rodrigue, 2003). The relationship between man and woman was genuinely complementary, not oppositional, and Inuit cosmology unified men and women against the natural and super-

natural 'Other' – nature and the world of the spirits (Briggs, 1974). Gender is certainly not unimportant as research subject in the Arctic, and many studies, for instance Briggs' (1971, 1998) well-known work on interpersonal relationship in Northern Canada's Inuit communities, outline interesting differences between girls' and boys' societal roles and statuses from an emic approach with detailed information on local language and culture.

The shift from terra incognita to discovered and mapped place (of gender), does not imply that gender has become a major topic in arctic anthropological debate. Among indigenous ethnic groups of Amazonia, for instance, Descola notes, „gender differences appear to be secondary to broader relations between humans and nonhumans“ (in High, 2010, p753), a general hypothesis in congruence with my observations from Greenland at the north western corner of the same continent. Nevertheless (without any other comparison), the Indian warrior and the kalaaleq hunter, in Amazonia and Greenland respectively, continue to be models for young men's gendered agency and construction of masculine identity (ibid.)

The hunt continues to be an important point of identification among kalaallit. Man and woman, with different skills and knowledge, living together „like good comrades“ (Rasmussen, 1976), would not have survived in the extraordinarily harsh arctic ecosystem without the help of each other (Condon and Stern, 1993, p391-392). Man could only reach home with fresh meat for the family, if his clothes, made by the women, were

providing adequate protection against the biting cold of the hunting grounds. If the sewn seam was not tight, causing torn garment, man would most likely face immediate death. While there was a practical division of labour in the settlement, keeping everyone busy with different imperative tasks, kalaallit gender work relations were characterized by a large degree of flexibility (ibid.) The cultural formulation of 'personness', Guemple (1995, p27) claims, was gender-neutral in Inuit communities. Among kalaallit, Jessen Williamson says, men and women expressed a profound „sense of genderlessness, with every person seen primarily as a human being rather than being identified by characteristics of sex“ (2004, p188). Men and women, says Briggs, „had control over their respective spheres of activity“ (in Condon and Stern, 1993, p394), but they could indeed also wield influence upon the other's choices. Therefore, she says, „Inuit women enjoyed consideration and respect“ (ibid.) Among Inuit in Nunavut, some women were known for their hunting skills, and a man could – in rare cases – even take the role as midwife (Gombay, 2000, p131). Early literature on the Arctic, often written by non-specialists relying on Inuit myth and legend as source of knowledge, commonly portrayed women as strongly suppressed by their male relatives, but which message did these authors want to bring home?

[Their] general attitude towards 'the primitive' was dominated by a more or less Hobbesian view. That is, they saw the Arctic life as little more than

an interminable struggle to survive. Consequently, social life was necessarily simple and brutish, with men totally dominant because of their 'naturally' superior strength and ferocity. (Guemple 1995, p18-19)

Kinship was based on patrilineal (which should not be confused with the term patriarchal, which refers to strong persistent male power dominance) descent, hence extended family ties were being initiated through fathers and male siblings (Tróndheim, 2010). Boys were (and this has not changed in the case of many contemporary kalaallit families) rarely appointed any chores or responsibilities in the family's house (Condon and Stern, 1993, p410). Kalaallit men were often described as rude and dominant in early accounts by explorers and 'scientists'. Frederica de Laguna, in her book based on an archaeological expedition (1929), narrates about two sons from a kalaallit family that „have a very sweet expression, and lack that somewhat *brutish masculinity* that so many Greenland man have“ (1977, p220-221, my italics). These boys, in her description, are unusual because of their lack of the barbaric character of kalaallit men. In the old days, a boy would only gain respect among men, if he (on his own) had killed a wild animal, so it was important to create conditions helping him through this rite de passage symbolizing the delicate childhood/adulthood transition:

The bear jumped onto a small ice floe, and Angutidluarssuq was standing be-

side it with his spear without killing it. He was waiting for a small orphaned boy that never had got a bear because he didn't have dogs [...] Angutidluarssuq helped him to kill it. (Freuchen, 1953, p52)

A boy's first killing is still today „a cornerstone in the life of the family“ (Sejersen, 2004, p77). In some Canadian Inuit communities, a boy's first prey would be distributed to the whole community hence the boy would learn that the yield of the hunt is for the wellbeing of everyone (Pelly, 2001). Traditionally, kalaallit men built kayaks and hunting tools, and their (masculine) qualities and competences comprised, for instance, „courage, physical strength, precision, speed, watchfulness, fearlessness, mobility for hunting purposes, and outdoor work“ (Pars, 2015, p70-71). In the old days, hunting was, so to speak, the „cynosure for males“ (Guemple, 1995, p20)

The past half century has marked a striking transformation of Greenlandic society, people moving from remote rural settlements to central urban areas with a strong Danish influence – in architecture, culture, political organization, etc. – and, by that, also experiencing the sharp transition from traditional lifestyles to modern everyday lives with reduced subsistence activities (Connell, 2016, p475). Urbanization, modernization and Danish (neo-) colonial influence have, together with the introduction of digital media in the era of globalization, profoundly changed young people's cultural and gender identities in Greenland (Kjeldgaard, 2003; Rygaard, 2003). Any search for kalaallit

masculinity will therefore have to look at constructed images of man – linked to the ancient hunter, to modern urban man, to man in media (movies, sports, music, etc.), and to individualized combinations of these prototypes. Kalaallit men have frequently been portrayed as the losers of the new era; as proud men lost in times past; and quite many of them have, sadly, perished before reaching old age.

Being a kalaaleq boy in Nuuk

Most young kalaallit that I met in Nuuk said, mutually, that it is not easy to be a man today. They point at conflicting expectations to man's performance of masculinity, as well as to his ambivalent relation to the hunter of the past (Gaini, 2015; Lynge, 2012). The duty of the elder, forming kalaallit moral foundation, used to be to pass his wisdom on proper social conduct to the younger generations (Fienup-Riordan, 1990, p199). The discrepancy between new and old ideals entails a new schism between groups of kalaallit men following different identity trajectories. When I talked to young people in Nuuk, very few considered the hunter style to play an important role in contemporary young men's future (except when referring to some of the remote villages), but they emphasized that the hunter image is an important point of reference for young kalaallit men's masculine identification. This is contrary to what for instance Dahl reports, when he claims young people's identities no longer to be „rooted in the notion of an imagined traditional Greenland culture“ (2010,

p137). Young people in Nuuk seem quite satisfied with life in a modern city with many opportunities, yet they admire their village peers, who, from the urban perspective, live a more 'authentic' Greenlandic life in close contact with the nature and hunting grounds (Gaini, 2015). A young male kalaaleq, who grew up in a village on the west coast, but now is an upper secondary school student in the capital, told me for instance:

There is a different culture in a city and in a village. In my village, there was more fishing, and other ways of being male adult. You sail alone, you make food on your own and everything [...] I feel good as Greenlander with the good cultures that I have in my life.

For this young man, clearly, local rural and urban cultures are interconnected and form an integral point of identification, even if he accentuates the contrast between Nuuk and the villages. „People are friendly [in Greenland], but especially in the villages“, a 19 years old boy from Nuuk told me. A male student from the upper secondary school of Nuuk, who grew up in a small East Greenland town, was talking about sexual identities and values in the villages, among other things. He told me:

I was a bit different, because most of my friends were girls. In the beginning it was a bit unacceptable for the villagers that I was gay, because of lack of knowledge. Over time it didn't matter.

Even if many young kalaallit are concerned

about the shift in men's status and position in society, young women and men in the capital still seem to agree that Greenlandic society (and kalaallit families) gives boys a higher degree of freedom than girls. A young man told me for instance: „[women] have a hard time, while we enjoy life“. He also, implicitly, indicated mixed feelings about Greenlandic men by saying: „...but women are good, they are good people“. Maybe not (all) men are good? Maybe they do not (always) treat women well? Male students from the upper secondary school repeatedly told me, with minor variation in phrasing, that „it is good to be a man in Greenland“. Most of them emphasized their freedom and appeal (access to women), but also their contact with 'unspoiled' nature – for hunting, recreation and meditation. „It is cool to be a man in Greenland“, a 23 years old man said, because „you have same value as anyone else, except if you have committed murder or something similar“. Neymar (the name of a famous Brazilian soccer player), the self-ascribed nickname of a football-crazed teenage kalaaleq, told me about what seems to be a leisure enterprise of many young urban men (and something that they consider a *difference* between boys and girls): computer games. „It is great to be a man here“, he says well satisfied, „because we can play FIFA [soccer game] the whole day or Call of Duty [warfare game]“. Let us take a closer look at Salloq, a well-articulated and cheery Nuuk boy, eager to share his thoughts about gender and boyhood with me.

Salloq lives in Nuuk with his family. He is 12 years old and he has five siblings, two

sisters and three brothers, of which one is younger than Salloq. His idol is the famous Argentinean soccer player Leonel Messi, who, on a daily basis, plays for FC Barcelona in Spain. At home, in Greenland, his idol is Aqa Mark, a young ping-pong player from the southern town of Qaqortoq. Salloq wants to be a firefighter or a taxi driver when he grows up. He loves going out in the nature hunting together with his grandfather or uncle, but sometimes also together with his father or brother. Caribou hunting is the most exciting hunt, he says. Salloq likes to spend his spare time together with close friends, most of whom are boys (for instance for PlayStation3 gaming sessions), or to play ping-pong, preparing for the Greenlandic championship. Salloq describes the difference between boys and girls in his age group in this way: girls are less physically energetic; boys always want to use their body. Boys are more relaxed and spend more time out in nature. Some girls like to go hunting and have even shot a reindeer or muskox, but most of them prefer to stay in the city. Boys have more freedom than girls do. In school, he says, the difference is very pronounced. Girls sit quietly and are committed and focused in their work – but at the same time, Salloq adds, they sit and slander the others, especially the boys, in the class – while the boys cannot sit still. The girls love to chat while the boys want to move and to use their body. Salloq also talks about the difference between rural and urban boys in Greenland: the boys from the villages are stronger and work more than the boys from cities. Salloq

is a very active boy with many plans and dreams for his future.

Boys and girls at upper secondary school

Students at the upper secondary school of Nuuk, representing a section of the future elite, all of them bilingual (at least fluent in Danish), told me with pride that women and men have equal rights and equal value in Greenland today. A young woman explains:

I think that there is gender equality now. There are of course still some things that are like in the old days, for instance that it, mostly, is the girls who are preparing food or taking care of children, but it has definitely become more equal lately. Boys can indeed also take care of children and cook, and girls may well work too. Now you can – more or less – do just what you like to do, without having to worry too much about the gender roles. (Woman, 19 years old)

The students, most of which have background from the public schools of the capital, advocate and sympathize modern gender values. „We have stronger willpower“, a female student exclaimed, focusing on the fact that a large majority of the students at the upper secondary high schools in Greenland is female. „Young people’s reflections on gender“, another student stressed, revealing the close link between language and identity in Greenland, „depends very much on if you are mostly Greenlandic, Danish or bilingual“. This explains that the bilin-

gual group of (Danish, kalaallit, and mixed Greenlandic) high school students does not necessarily share the (gender) values of other groups of Greenlanders. A young man reflecting on differences between men's and women's roles told me:

I can say that we men are those who have to – or for the most part have to take care of the family, take difficult decisions, etc. [...] Personally I don't think there is any big difference between gender, because you have to use reason to see. Well, but to be man is to be the one who has to work on things and to get a good economy, protect and everything else that relates to this...

It is expected of young men, notably in the villages, that they show constant strength and sang-froid, a 26 years old male student regretfully narrated. This, he said, discloses men's common inability to seek help when in crisis. „Everyone says that you [man] have to be strong [and] to be proud“, another young man also told me. A teenage girl also said that even if they now live modern lives in modern towns/cities, young male kalaallit are expected to conform to images of men mirroring the old era: „people expect men to be like men, for example muscular, masculine and manly, because our ancestors were like that...“. Anyway, much has changed, and a 17 years old boy, cautiously reflecting on the abrupt transition to modernity, presents this narrative:

In the old days: to be a boy in Green-

land means that you should protect your family, you should have hunting skills, you should fish, navigate boats. You should be self-confident [...] Men should raise boys to become good hunters. Now: What is the difference between Danish and Greenlandic boys? I don't think there is a big difference.

Young people critically negotiate their identities in relation to images of man the hunter, the idealized ancestors performing in stories and tales narrated by elders. The challenge is to find a way to reconcile images of the hunter with images of modern man fitting a new predominantly (culturally) urban context without hunting grounds. Clearly, gender relations are in shift and young people discuss them intensely. Even if many young men, for instance students at secondary and tertiary education institutions, enjoy life as free and admired men in Greenland, they fully aware of the fact that a large group of kalaallit men is in risk of social marginalization – without completed education or fixed job. The pitfall is there, just besides the walked track.

Young men at the margin

Nuuk is an ugly 'micropolis', says Chemnitz (2013, p7) provocatively, „that never managed to find its identity as a small city“. Other locals say that their city has improved its image, now being a vibrant and self-confident city (e.g. Rygaard, 2010). When the biggest and most emblematic (probably also ugliest) apartment block in Nuuk was demolished a few years ago, it signified a very symbolic

event for thousands of people, especially for the many women and men who, for shorter or longer periods, had been Block P residents themselves. Block P, accommodating more than 500 souls, has been like a reversed gated community in the city, feared by outsiders as a dreary ghetto and appreciated by many insiders as a pleasant and friendly place. It was an outlandish construction, like a colossal concrete iceberg full of small nests not suitable for its dwellers' practical spatial requirements – e.g. „for drying fish on the balcony and slaughtering seal and reindeer in the bathroom“ (Rasmussen and Tierney, 2013, p46). Greenlandic families, who used to live in small low houses, were forced to comply with completely new housing structures in the city. How to take care of your dogs, when you are living on fourth floor in an apartment building? How to shred a seal in a fine modern kitchen? (Jacobsen, 1982, p119).

The erection of massive blocks represented the most spectacular vista in a quite brusque transition from traditional to modern times in Greenland. The move to town symbolized a „move from a world of equals to a world of inequality with Danes as those holding superior positions and power“ (Dahl, 2010, p129). Many kalaallit felt that the city, „where the white man's culture reigned“ (ibid., p132), was not their real home. During the heydays of the national modernization plan many foreign workers (far away from their wives and children) performed (hyper-) masculinity in decadent styles, which would have been disavowed at home (ibid., p194). Kalaallit men were

commonly presented as effeminate (as the 'Other' among men), but this was done without reference to characteristics of kalaallit culture and norms. Danish workers in Nuuk enjoyed a set of lucrative privileges defined as compensation, one of the most obscure and embarrassing examples being the „compensation for not being able to visit the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen“ (Petersen, 1995). Discrimination was institutionalized and based on race, for instance in the 'birthplace-criterion' of the Greenland Civil Servant Act from the 1960s, which entitles Greenland-born staff only 85 percent of Denmark-born staff salaries (ibid.) Rapid change, paving the way for so-called 'welfare colonialism', brought high social costs. Among Inuit migrants in Nuuk and Copenhagen, often most prevalently among young men, there is „a high prevalence of diabetes, cancer, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS, and other NDCs“ (Connell, 2016, p476-477).

In the city the foreign male was like fish in water; he had the job, the behaviour, and the attitudes considered urban and modern. It was practically impossible for male kalaallit to become included in the dominant (hegemonic) masculinity of the city (Coles, 2009). Their body capital (physical appearance), for instance, prevented them from recognition as 'real men' among the (white) migrant workers. This is the dilemma of former 'hunters' dwelling in the cities. „Despair is very normal up here“, a 23 years old man told me with wry grin, hence „it is important to do what you love to do“. Large groups of kalaallit men had the experience of being (passive) spectators without any role in the

deep transformation of their own society. They witnessed changes from the sideline, while large groups of foreign workers, artisans and builders, profited economically from the huge projects launched by the authorities. Kalaallit 'masculinity', in brief, was unwanted and considered inappropriate for the 'new era' (Gaini, 2017)

Becoming a Man

Marginalized men have, in many different settings, been presented as „though they existed outside of and opposed to the rest of society“ (Amit and Dyck, 2013, p5). The processes of social marginalization in Greenland, with focus on young kalaallit men, are, to some extent, shaped by new educational demands and conditions. Contemporary urban youth lifestyles, with the introduction of new 'proper' masculine behaviour (performance) ideals reflecting European/American values and norms, do also affect the social inclusion/exclusion dynamics (Mosse, 1996). The story of the young musician Maasi, a kalaaleq man belonging to what Danish journalist Bryld (2002) defined as the 'Home Rule Generation' (born around 1980), echoes some of the social and cultural fractures in Greenland today. Under the headline 'It is my fault, and only mine', bilingual Greenlandic lifestyle magazine *Anu Una* (Spring 2014) brought his biography to the public. Below follows a summary of the article:

A serious car accident brought an end to Maasi's long-standing alcohol and marijuana abuse in 2012. He was 26 years old at the time and had been an addict for more than

eight years. Maasi gained fame in Greenland when he, as part of the rap trio *Prussic*, in 2013 released the smash album *Misilineq Siulleq* (The First Test). Three friends rebelled against their parents, against abuse and neglect. Nobody in Greenland had written such punching and straightforward texts about painful realities before. Maasi was rapping about his childhood and adolescence together with an alcoholic father.

Again I am alone, again father is drinking, what can Maasi otherwise put up with, he is too small to do anything but to watch while father is drunk. The youngest siblings are crying; the stepmother has escaped long time ago. Maasi is the only one to take care of the children. (Lyrics from the piece *Angajoqqaat*).

He spent his first four years together with the father in Southern Greenland. Maasi does not know why his mother moved to Nuuk and left him with the abusive father. His father tried to commit suicide when Maasi was six years old. Thereafter the boy stayed with his grandparents for a while, before he was sent back to the father. When he was 10 years old, Maasi joined his mother in Nuuk. He started smoking marijuana at the age of 17, but tried to limit the smoking to weekends, as he had vowed not to end up like his father. The promise was broken after a short time. Maasi and his girlfriend got a son when he was 22 years old. Now he was drinking and smoking cannabis every day. The 2012 car accident survival was a wake-up call making the young musician

start thinking about his life and conduct. He put an end to his abuse of alcohol and marijuana and has recently resumed his journalism studies. „I let down my son, and the fault is mine only“, Maasi says in the journal article, and „it was very hard to admit this“. He was successful in popular music ventures, but the transition from boyhood to adulthood is a story of misfortune. Maasi was idolized as the streetwise person with urban (hip-hop) identity, but beyond the youth subcultural context he was labelled as a thug with the masculinity style of men at the margins. He could have focused on the project of resuming the musical career with a view to regain social recognition, but Maasi decided instead to give priority to education. In this way Maasi, trying to save his family, negotiates his masculinity and identity by pondering on the question: what can I possibly do and what is out of reach? Which options do I really have?

The problem, a Nuuk school headmaster told me, is that many kalaallit boys do not have a good relationship with their fathers, who in many cases are absent or have left the family altogether. The school, he added, has also created a gap between many boys and their families. The boys do not get the chance to show what they master what they are good at, he told me.

The case of dinghy fishermen

Dinghy fishermen represent an interesting group in Nuuk, with the youth generation, especially the young kalaallit men, facing severe challenges in the modern urban environment. Dinghies are small (today

mainly fiberglass) boats with powerful outboard motors used for fishing in the rough waters near Nuuk. The sons from the dinghy fishing families generally doing poorly at school (Lynge, 2012). Many boys from these families feel rejected at school, not being prepared for the culture and values of the educational institutions (*ibid.*) Current restructuration of the Greenlandic economy will make it quite difficult for them to walk their fathers' and uncles' footsteps – to make a living as traditional dinghy fishermen. This scenario leads thoughts to Willis' classic ethnography on school and working-class boys from the West Midlands, but the English lads could, if nothing else, take over their fathers' low-paid blue-collar jobs (Willis, 1977). Furthermore, the young kalaallit men's resistance at school appears to be more self-destructive than what was the case in the West Midlands (Weyhe, 2011). In case they manage to keep their fathers' trade (fishing from dinghies) in the future, the project will most likely depend on a share of the wives' salaries, similar to what has been observed in the Holman region of Canada:

While hunting and trapping continue to be male-dominated activities, income generated by wives in generally secure wage-labor jobs often provides capital for husbands to purchase the equipment and supplies used in subsistence hunting and trapping. (Condon and Stern, 1993, p395).

On the other hand, in the context of Nuuk,

many wage earning families do indeed embrace the fishermen's contribution to the family economy by providing fresh produce from the sea, and ridicule to the wealthy individuals of the city who are in for their own wealth. Most husbands cherish the wage-earning capacity of their women, and wives thank their men for their hunting and fishing activities (Jessen Williamson, 2011, p77). In many families, says Lynge (2012), the parents feel ashamed and take the blame for the adversities of their sons. It is ironic, you could say, that dinghy fishermen's resilience and pride in some ways, unintentionally, acts as hindrance against social mobility in Greenland. It represents a limitation in men's negotiation of masculinity in everyday life situations. Today, a schoolmaster told me, academic achievement has very high priority among young kalaallit and their families. The main road to social and professional success goes through secondary and tertiary education institutions. Young people make strategic plans for their futures and high quality education is often decisive for the outcome. The adversity of young dinghy fishermen is also an indirect outcome of identity politics in Greenland. Greenlanders who studied in Denmark, but who are not seen by others as 'real' Greenlanders, and vice versa, direct the politics (Connell, 2016, p477).

Youth and inter-generational change

Young kalaallit in Nuuk have, generally, a positive view of their lives and futures, even if they also reflect on the turmoil that the

parent generation endured, and that has had an impact on their construction of the connection between the past and the future, and between the local and the global. Young people are tired of media's incessant depressive narratives about violence, substance abuse and suicide in Greenland since the 1960s (e.g. Bjerregard and Lynge, 2006). Young kalaallit regret negative portrayals of their society as spoiled and dysfunctional. They would rather see their country presented as a young and progressive partner among free nations. This process, turning Greenland into an 'almost independent' nation in a globalizing world, eager to earn recognition rather than sympathy, has indeed changed (power) relations with Denmark. In the beginning of the 21st century, a time of great optimism in Greenland, the politician Jonathan Motzfeldt exclaimed:

There is no way back. The sled has departed. Greenland is a modern industrial society, which competes on the world market. We must forget the old dream about the kayak (in Kentorp, 2002, p3, my translation)

Young kalaallit are fully aware of the human cost of the demanding and antagonistic modernization project orchestrated by Danish authorities, yet most of them do not regret social developments in Greenland (Kjeldgaard, 2003). Many young people in Nuuk have witnessed parents' or close relatives' disgraceful downfall with e.g. alcoholism and violent (or suicidal) behaviour in the aftermath of resettlement to towns/

cities. They blame the colonization, but also their kin as victims of colonial corruption and abuse, for their childhood mayhem. Malik Kleist, member of the rock band *Chilly Friday*, represents a group of young men insulting and condemning the parents for using counter-colonial discourse as excuse for carelessness in their life:

So far, a lot of people have hidden behind the excuse that the Danes destroyed our hunting culture. That became an excuse for drinking and wallowing in self-pity, but in modern Greenland, we have to move on. Greenlandic youth wishes to live a proud and good life instead of being pathetic (in Pedersen, 2008, p95)

In some interesting cases, the lyrics of contemporary popular music (in Greenlandic and English language) act as the bitter speech of offspring (after too long-lasting silence) directed to parents, who failed to protect their kids. Some songs drop real verbal „bombshell[s] on society“ (Andersen in Pedersen, 2008, p96). The search for the link between the past and the future involves strong and ambivalent emotions, because memories of the past are blurred by recent cultural turmoil. A man from East Greenland, Otto, narrates while looking at an old photo of a deceased relative:

I would like to talk about my ancestors [...] My name is Otto, just as my grandfather. This photograph reminds me of a drum dance. But I have never heard my father sing or perform a drum dance. My

father was excellent in telling stories, also funny ones. When we were young, he always took out jokes. Such good story tellers with whom we grew up, we miss them when they pass away. Therefore, my father told his children: tell my stories when I am gone, so that these stories will remain... When I start to narrate, I see my father before my eyes. And still every day we miss his stories (in Buijs, 2016, p551).

Negotiation and discussion of identities

It is my impression that many young men have felt caged and misrecognized in the colonial discourse; now they want to deconstruct and reinterpret the ‘lost kalaaleq’ in arrested development. „There are quite a few of us“, says Pia Arke, a female Greenlandic artist, „who belong neither in the west, nor in the marginalized rest“ (in Meredith, 2013). She portrays a society where many young people fall between two imagined ethnic categories: Danish and kalaallit. Where to belong? She confirms on behalf of the ethnically mixed population that „we have to create that place ourselves“ (ibid.). Others, like the young female artist Bolatta, believe it is necessary to uphold ‘our culture’ because „everything is melting together around us“ (in Høegh and Havsteen-Mikkelsen, 2006, p48). Greater focus on indigenous knowledge and local identities offer hope that the value of (decentralized) localism can be revitalized (Connell, 2016, p477). The Greenlandic anthropologist Aviâja Egede Lynge, reinterpreting colonial history, says:

We have always been taught we were one of the best colonies in the world. No slavery, no killings. We learned it through Danish history books and from Danish teachers. With the books telling us how fantastic a colony we were – books about primitive Eskimos, books written from Euro-centric, economic, or self-justifying angles – we haven't really looked beyond this historical oppression [...] We learned how to be Danish and we learned to be thankful. Why, then, should we have a reason to decolonize? And why should we have a reason to ask questions about the 250 years of colonial presence? (in Buijs, 2016, p539).

Young male kalaallit, much more than their female peers, and especially men from underprivileged families in Nuuk and other towns/cities, are used to be associated to the so-called traditional 'hunting culture' as stigma – as something inherently limiting their opportunities and prospects, something segregating them as the Other (the outsider) in the urban community. How does this influence their gender negotiation and identity?

Dinghy fishing families, for instance, might be few in numbers; still, they are sometimes treated as a memento of the general problem of marginalization among young unskilled kalaallit men in the cities today. On the one hand, they are, together with hunting families from some of the remote villages in the north, enjoying respect as the community with closest links to the

'authentic' lifestyles and values of the past. They are therefore the subject of admiration in cultural discourses. On the other hand, they are also viewed as misfits with very poor prospects in society (Gaini, 2017; Weyhe, 2011). Some groups of kalaallit men, as 'minority' in the main cities, are being 'othered', because of their assumed „atavistic, patriarchal, non-equality oriented forms of masculinity“ (Christensen and Jensen, 2014, p70).

Kalaallit masculinities are in flux and young men negotiate their gender identification with many different points of reference: family, school, media and general discourse among peers in Greenland. There is a subtle interplay of masculinities in young men's lives. Most of the kalaallit men are fortunately not situated at the margin; they are quite self-confident navigators in a society in shift, taking leadership political, economic, social, and cultural ventures to the benefit of all Greenlanders. It is important to note that kalaallit men in Nuuk and other towns, in general terms, accept and appreciate women's role as salary providers while coping with (late) modernity. Men, as well as women, young people as well as adults, invest large resources in the quest of adapting to the modern European way of life through education (Jessen Williamson, 2011, p69). While the students at the upper secondary school in Nuuk engage in critical discourses on gender and manhood, with direct connection to gender equality values, many other kalaallit – maybe especially men – do not talk about gender in a critical manner, partly due to traditional

shyness, which precepts men not to be assertive (ibid., p73). Kalaallit are in general very pragmatic, and attach their attitudes on gender-related questions to practical issues relating to everyday life at work and in the family. Jessen Williamson says, in her brilliant book on kalaallit gender relations, that

[b]ecause of the current job-oriented society, the greatly differentiated tasks among men and women have been eradicated, and one can observe men doing dishes and cooking, things that they were never expected to do in the past. Whereas previously men would never have been seen cutting an animal, they do so today. (2011, p74)

The image changes when marginal man is in focus. Widespread demonization of young uneducated kalaallit men is leading to self-approving action intending the 'other' to change from 'primitive' to rational and more civilized conduct and values. When young men for instance gather in public spaces, without visible 'appropriate' errands, it promptly evokes suspicion. Moral panics about young uneducated Inuit men seem to be quite persistent in the urban environment.

Kalaallit men use their resources, their knowledge and experience, their networks and connections, in order to get recognition and respect among men, and to avoid the sense of being stuck in life, of being devaluated as human being – and as kalaallit man. It is clear that masculinity in the context of Greenland cannot be understood without

awareness of social, cultural and ethnic conditions. It is also unthinkable to untangle Greenlandic masculinities without reference to (colonial) historical premises to contemporary urban society. The grasp of change in masculinities in the city also depends on dynamic power relations between and within contemporary masculinities.

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