

# Young Greenlanders in the urban space of Nuuk Les jeunes groenlandais dans l'espace urbain de Nuuk

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## Article abstract

This paper discusses young urban Greenlanders living in Nuuk, and how they depict themselves in selected lyrics and the feature film *Eskimo Weekend*. Although Greenland is moving along at many levels in a transition process between old and new life styles, it has left the younger generation in a kind of limbo. Compared to their parents' generation, which was occupied in finding its place in a post-colonial nation-building context, young Greenlanders are more focused on their individual lives. During the 1990s, they tried in different ways to reach their parents and the politicians in order to make them comprehend the serious neglect many of the young people have suffered in their short lives. Through their songs, the popular Greenlandic Rap group Prussic asked adults to take children and young people seriously, to listen to them and most importantly, to raise them like "normal kids" being loved and cared for without parents' abuse of drugs and alcohol. As seen in the film *Eskimo Weekend*, the young Greenlanders are fascinated with global tendencies, but at the same time, they are trying to find a balance between the idea of a lifestyle linked to tradition, and that of a lifestyle linked to modernity.

# Young Greenlanders in the urban space of Nuuk

Birgit Kleist Pedersen\*

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**Résumé:** Les jeunes groenlandais dans l'espace urbain de Nuuk

Cet article se propose de réfléchir sur la jeunesse groenlandaise urbaine de Nuuk, et d'interroger le regard qu'elle porte sur elle-même à travers des textes de chansons et le film *Eskimo Weekend*. Bien que le Groenland ait largement terminé sa transition d'un mode de vie traditionnel à un mode de vie plus moderne, la jeune génération n'en cherche pas moins de nouveaux repères. Comparés à la génération de leurs parents, occupée à trouver sa place dans le contexte d'une société post-coloniale, les jeunes Groenlandais vivent beaucoup plus centrés sur eux-mêmes. Pendant les années 1990, ils ont tenté de différentes manières de se faire entendre de leurs parents et des politiciens, et de leur faire comprendre les injustices qu'ils avaient subies au cours de leur courte existence. À travers ses chansons, le groupe de rap groenlandais populaire Prussic a demandé aux adultes de prendre les enfants et les jeunes au sérieux, de les écouter et, ce qui plus important, de les élever comme des «enfants normaux», aimés et compris par des parents qui ne soient ni drogués ni alcooliques. Du point de vue du film *Eskimo Weekend*, les jeunes Groenlandais semblent fascinés par les modes et les tendances globales, même s'ils essayent de trouver un équilibre entre un mode de vie hérité de la tradition et un mode de vie plus moderne.

**Abstract:** Young Greenlanders in the urban space of Nuuk

This paper discusses young urban Greenlanders living in Nuuk, and how they depict themselves in selected lyrics and the feature film *Eskimo Weekend*. Although Greenland is moving along at many levels in a transition process between old and new life styles, it has left the younger generation in a kind of limbo. Compared to their parents' generation, which was occupied in finding its place in a post-colonial nation-building context, young Greenlanders are more focused on their individual lives. During the 1990s, they tried in different ways to reach their parents and the politicians in order to make them comprehend the serious neglect many of the young people have suffered in their short lives. Through their songs, the popular Greenlandic Rap group Prussic asked adults to take children and young people seriously, to listen to them and most importantly, to raise them like "normal kids" being loved and cared for without parents' abuse of drugs and alcohol. As seen in the film *Eskimo Weekend*, the young Greenlanders are fascinated with global tendencies, but at the same time, they are trying to find a balance between the idea of a lifestyle linked to tradition, and that of a lifestyle linked to modernity.

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## Introduction

Since the 1960s, the population of Greenland has been increasing progressively in the cities. With the growth of the population in the three biggest urban centres, Nuuk, Sisimiut and Ilulissat, there has been a gradual decline of the population living elsewhere in Greenland. In January 2007, the total population of the 18 cities and towns numbered 47,000, while the total population of the villages and settlements numbered 9,271. This means that 83% of the population lives in towns and cities (Naatsorsueqqissaartarfik 2007: 76, 90).

Nevertheless until recently, very few articles have focused on urbanisation in a Greenlandic context; in fact, parts of the literature on Greenland issues seem to be characterised by a certain “anti urban tendency,” as the Danish anthropologist Bo Wagner Sørensen claims (Sørensen et al. 2003: 25). Even fewer articles have been published on urban youth, yet in the capital of Nuuk where 26% (14,719) of the total population lives, the 15-25 years old represent 25% (2,155) of this age group in Greenland (8,709) (Naatsorsueqqissaartarfik 2007: 90). In many cases, the young people have migrated from other places in Greenland to attend different kinds of educational programs or to stay with friends or family in Nuuk (Sørensen 2005: 192-193). Recent research on urban life has been undertaken by a team from the University of Copenhagen through the project “Urban Greenland. Movements, Narratives and Creativity 2006-2009.” Its goal was to cover as many aspects of urbanisation and urbanity in Greenland as possible within the theoretical frames of historical, literary, anthropological and eskimological studies, and thereby provide new perspectives on Arctic community studies in general (Thuesen et al. 2006).

Jakub Christensen Medonos, a PhD student in Eskimology, is part of that research team and conducted a research project on urban youth culture in Sisimiut (*ibid.*). An earlier objective of his had been to describe and analyse the Ilulissat urban youth culture and its creativity, especially regarding graffiti. One of his conclusions was that the young Greenlanders make use of the outdoor spaces differently than is seen in general urban research (Medonos 2005). In his Sisimiut project, Medonos concluded that the young Greenlanders’ use of creativity within the subculture groups can be seen as a “transformer of tradition, innovation, redemption, activeness or problem-solving” (Medonos 2007: 173). In this context, the subculture groups are defined as the ones attached to the milieus of hip hop/Rap with orality as a characteristic feature, graffiti through which literacy is represented, and finally the use of video making, which involves movements (*ibid.*: 164). In his analysis, Medonos further claims that the concepts of youth and creativity share movement as an important feature, as youth is in a state of transition, and creativity is seen as a transformer. While youth is in an inevitable transition process, the use of creativity is an active change-over. Youth is undergoing a dynamic process, which cannot be captured, as the meaning of youth changes according to who you are, and where you are (*ibid.*).

In this context, I will reflect on young urban Greenlanders in Nuuk, and how they portray themselves through selected lyrics of Rap, the most popular (*i.e.* most sold)

Greenlandic music genre among the young. I will also discuss how youth portray themselves in the very first short feature film, *Eskimo Weekend* (Høegh 2002), which was directed and produced by a young team of Greenlanders, depicting their perception of urban youth life.

### **Nuuk as a city**

Greenland's four biggest towns are located on its west coast, Nuuk (pop. 14,719), Sisimiut (pop. 5,344), Ilulissat (pop. 4,512) and Qaqortoq (pop. 3,238), which have been politically appointed as the power centres (Sørensen 2005: 187; Naatsorsueqqissaartarfik 2007: 90). The capital, Nuuk, leads in growth with 26% of the entire Greenland population of 56,648 (Naatsorsueqqissaartarfik 2007: 90). Nuuk will expand even more after the April 2008 election on a new municipality reform, which will be implemented by January 1, 2009 and entails a merger of the former 18 municipalities, reducing them to four entities. The new municipalities are: Avannaq/North Greenland (pop. 18,462); Qeqqa/Mid Greenland (pop. 9,740); Kangia/Kitaa (pop. 20,638), and finally, Kujataa/South Greenland (pop. 7,835) (*ibid.*). Nuuk will become the centre of the largest municipality, Kangia/Kitaa, which also includes the former municipalities of Ivittuut and Paamiut on the west coast and the municipalities of Ammassalik and Ittoqqortoormiit on the east coast (Kristensen 2007).

The central administration of the Home Rule Government and other national institutions such as colleges and a newly built university campus are located in Nuuk. In the latter and the other big cities one can find specialised shops of international standards, unlike in the villages where there typically is one shop or two where people buy everything from groceries to hunting gear at the same place. A large shopping centre was recently built in the middle of Nuuk to create a complete "downtown" appropriate to a city which clearly wants to manifest its importance as the capital. Until 2008, the National Culture Centre of Nuuk housed the only "real" cinema in Greenland. Since September 2004, the city also has the only indoor public swimming pool which has become a very popular leisure activity and meeting place. Besides a variety of sports activities, Nuuk also offers a golf course on a mountain plateau planted with imported grass seed, encircled with rock walls.

As to night life, Nuuk has a number of bars, cafés and restaurants, targeted at different social groups. International artists and bands are frequently invited to perform at either the national culture centre Katuaq, the four sport halls, or in more intimate surroundings depending on the genre of performance. The local music life is varied and vivid, it ranges from groups from different music schools; the city orchestra playing big band and jazz music; rock bands; rapper groups; country-and-western-like local music groups, etc. Many groups are attached to different music studios in Nuuk, the most successful being the Atlantic Music Studio with a branch in Copenhagen. Atlantic Music Studio aims at promoting its most talented artists on the international music scene such as MTV.

## **The Greenlandic youth**

In 1955, one of the first reflections on the idea of a “Greenlandic youth” was written by a then young Greenlandic journalist, Jørgen Fleischer, during his stay in Denmark. Like another 150 young Greenlanders, he was receiving an education within the Danish educational system at that time. Fleischer (1955) saw the emergence of a Greenlandic youth as a specific entity which started after the 1950s construction projects linked to urbanisation had begun. Until then, the parents’ traditional responsibility towards their children had ceased when the young got confirmed, at 14 years of age<sup>1</sup>, and from then on the young person was left to his or her own devices. With the modernisation projects, the importance of educating the younger generation to meet the new challenges of the Greenlandic society became evident. Consequently, the school system was restructured. Danish was introduced as a compulsory subject, evening classes and study groups were established, all kinds of youth clubs emerged and not least, the possibility of further training in Denmark opened a new world for the young Greenlanders. Greenlandic women got the right to vote in 1948, and the rapid modernisation process combined with the impulses from the outside world led to the women’s increasing insistence on being an equal and active part of society. This resulted in a wider access to the educational system and to the political arena (Fleischer 1955).

Rapid changes from 1950 to 1970 caused tremendous social and cultural problems. The issue of Greenlandic identity became a very emotional subject, especially in the 1970s. This also resulted in increasing tensions between the Greenlanders and the Danes with racist under- and overtones from both sides; the children of “intermarried” couples were caught in the middle of the battle not daring to take any side (Sørensen 1997). It was necessary then for Greenlanders to emancipate themselves from the dominant “Danicisation” which at the end resulted in the Home Rule Government in 1979. The aggressive tone of the 1970s has more or less died out during the last 25 years, and the relationship between Greenlanders and Danes has reached a level of mutual respect and good intentions to co-operate, at least at a general level. From a Greenlandic point of view, the criticisms have increasingly changed from a “us versus them” discourse to a “us versus them among ourselves,” mainly resulting from political scandals regarding abuse of power such as the ongoing debate on selling out government owned houses at favourable prices to top politicians and government officials as well as political appointments of friends with the right party interest into important boards of directors within the trades and industries<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Greenlandic youth through rappers lyrics***

The young generation has been brought up with the Home Rule Government and has no passionate feelings about the post-colonial traumatic Greenland-Denmark issue,

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<sup>1</sup> See Langgård (1986: 302) for special rights attached to *inuusuttut* (‘youth’ in Greenlandic).

<sup>2</sup> See debates at [www.sermitsiaq.gl](http://www.sermitsiaq.gl) and search key word “nepotism.”

as expressed by the lead singer, Malik Kleist, of the very popular rock band Chilly Friday<sup>3</sup> from Nuuk:

We don't write nationalistically. You know, now the sun is shining, nature is beautiful and look, a nice seal. It has become a façade behind which you hide. Our texts are more personal and much stronger. Deeper, isn't that what you call it? They are about suicide, drunkenness and children being left on the streets, or children playing out in the middle of the night because they don't dare going home. 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. We don't want to use our parents' bad excuses (in Sørensen 2002: 8, my translation).

This statement is very much in line with that of Fleischer (1955: 16): “[...] the fact of being a Greenlander is not enough to obtain a well-paid position in Greenland. The new Greenland needs qualified, determined and competent people” (my translation). Chilly Friday, who predominantly sings in Greenlandic, and occasionally in English, was also the band which shifted the focus from sympathising with suicides to rejecting their action in their 2002 music video *Sialuit* (‘Rain’). In it, the distinct message to potential suicides is “enough of this pathetic self-pitying – respect your life and people who care about you” (my translation). During his engagement in teaching the youngsters how to make video productions in a youth club in Nuuk, another member of the Chilly Friday band, Alex Andersen, met three teenage boys, who were to form the rapper/hip-hop<sup>4</sup> band Prussic, who released their first CD in 2003 titled “Misiliineq Siulleq” (‘First Try’), which sold 4,000 copies the first year and thereby became a so-called silver plate (Ullerup 2006). The lyrics, which are in Greenlandic only, created a stir all over Greenland because of their harsh and very direct wording. Moreover, the lyrics had their source in the boys’ own experiences and backgrounds. This was made clear to the audiences through a variety of youth programmes on TV, interviews in local and Danish newspapers and presentations of the group on a variety of web sites<sup>5</sup>. The lyrics criticise Greenland society for still being in an embryonic state and hiding from the true problems. They are a critique of Greenlanders who keep complaining without being able to pull themselves together.

One of the lyrics which created the most stir is “Angajoqqaat” (‘Parents’). It contained a strong criticism targeted at parents’ and grandparents’ way of bringing up

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<sup>3</sup> Two of their albums have sold 8,000 copies, which means that every 8th person in Greenland had bought their CDs by summer 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Rapping is a vocal style in which the performer speaks rhythmically and in rhyme, generally to a distinct beat. Rap is often used synonymously with hip hop culture, and is also being connected with the DJ acting, graffiti and break dance. The hip hop music and culture began in New York City in the 1970s, primarily among African Americans and Latinos, and has spread to the rest of the world. Rappers may perform poetry which they have written ahead of time, or they may improvise rhymes on the spot, in the so-called free style. ([www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip\\_hop\\_music](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip_hop_music); Medonos 2007: 166, footnote 2).

<sup>5</sup> For example [www.atlanticmusicshop.gl](http://www.atlanticmusicshop.gl) and [www.redbarnet.dk](http://www.redbarnet.dk) (the latter is the site of an organisation in Denmark called ‘Save the Child’) where some of the lyrics are presented, including in Danish translations.

their children/grandchildren and contributed to an intense public debate on child abuses and neglect. The composer, Maasi Pedersen, raps (here in extract):

My parents don't care about me/I am left alone because they want to drink/I am alone every day, they spend money on alcohol instead of feeding me/I envy other children whose parents are happy and smiling/Shit, why are my parents not like that [...]/My father loves hash more than he loves me/I wonder how I will turn out as an adult/will I be like my parents or what/please start bringing me up/I told them to stop/but they won't listen/and I have no rights because I am a child/Do I have to be alone too because I am a child [...]/[...] don't neglect your children/take care of them like others do/No, you don't do anything else but drink and smoke hash, nothing else [...] My father has nothing, he spends it all on booze/Hash ate up all his money/his eyes are red [...] /he didn't even turn up at my confirmation because of booze, shit he doesn't do anything!/He didn't have a present for me, he stayed away, he didn't call [...] /Grandma drinks, even if she cannot afford it, but she borrowed some money from someone[...]/they forget buying food [...] were we supposed to eat? Or, are we just supposed to look at them drinking, no, I am fed up with this!/They are always like that, that's why they're nobody (Prussic 2003: Angajoqqaat, my translation).

Maasi Pedersen released a solo album in 2006, titled *Maasi*, with Alex Andersen from Chilly Friday as his producer. Danish journalist Jørgen Ullerup who interviewed them in Nuuk wrote in *Jyllands-Posten*, one of the biggest daily newspapers in Denmark, “Nuuk’s answer to Tupac Shakur, the rapper Maasi, has made the Greenlanders talk about the problems that hurt” (Ullerup 2006: 4). In the interview, Maasi confirms that his own and Prussic’s lyrics are about taboo issues such as: rotating step-parents, suicide epidemics, rapes and paedophilia scandals. Maasi explains: “I like rappers who express feelings and attitudes. My message is that Greenlanders must be aware of what is going on. I provoke them into taking a stand” (*ibid.*). Alex Andersen states in the interview that the lyrics of Maasi and Prussic had

[...] an effect like a regular bombshell on society. Music has proved to be a better catalyst than other media. Maasi sings without a filter. Some [people] sense it like a slap in the face, others understand and respect it. Greenlanders have always been reluctant to speak about feelings and problems, but now these two little devils<sup>6</sup> scream it all out in their face. This has resulted in children now answering back, instead of hiding in their rooms when parents are drunk (Ullerup 2006: 4, my translation).

After the first Greenlandic rapper group Nuuk Posse released its first album in 1992, more rappers came along during the 2000s, and the content of their lyrics is similar to those of Maasi and Prussic. Peter Lyberth (alias Peand-eL), who according to the Atlantic Music Studio has been compared to the American rapper and record producer Eminem, released his album *Eqqissitinnaga* (‘Leave me alone’) in 2005 and exposed further problems to debate through his lyrics in Greenland. He is also one of the innovators and one of the most influential rappers. In February 2008, the latest rapper on the music scene, teenager Malik Egede (alias Don Maliko), won the KNR’s Music Awards Price in the category New Name of the Year for his 2007 debut album *Sinnattupiluk* (‘Nightmare’).

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<sup>6</sup> Maasi Pedersen and Kunuk Kleist.

### *Youth's views on their well-being*

The overall messages in the Rap songs correspond to those of 15-18 years old compiled in a study of their well-being carried out in seven Greenlandic towns in 2004 and 2005. The study's final report focused on suicidal behaviour, the characteristics of youth with a high level of well-being, and the opinions of youth on how to improve the quality of life of children (Dahl-Petersen et al. 2007: 2). According to the informants, children's well-being could be improved with "higher priority [...] placed on family life; initiatives directed toward more openness between parents and children, focus on reducing alcohol consumption among adults and finally, a desire for a more proactive attitude on the part of society" (*ibid.*: 21). The authors conclude by expressing "hopes for change and improvement of conditions for those children and youth who do not thrive. Thus there is reason to be optimistic about the children and youth of the future and for their well-being" (*ibid.*).

In the beginning of 2001, a group of Danish journalists from one of the larger Danish newspapers came to Nuuk to explore the urban youth life. One young journalist, Jens Lenler, was invited by a group of high school students to participate in their night life so he could see for himself how a typical weekend turned out. In his article, headlining this experience, he wrote: "The well educated young people of the capital of Greenland Nuuk do not get more turned on by kamiks and dog sledges than young Danes get turned on by folk dance and *Dybbøl Mølle*<sup>7</sup>. They hang out in cafés, dream about travelling around the world and wallow in the Internet and cell phones" (Lenler 2001: 9, my translation).

The informants of this journalist are very similar to 16-19 years old respondents interviewed in the context of a study on their media habits in 1997<sup>8</sup> among whom there seems to be a correlation between educational skills and orientation towards the external world (Pedersen 2001). These high school students, who have to live in the larger cities to pursue their studies, have no problem distinguishing imagination from reality. They dream of exotic places, but they expect that they will probably move to another place in Greenland if for some reason they were forced to leave. In contrast, the 12-15 years old seem to be quite anchored in their home area. The idea of leaving their home-town, and hence family and friends, even when they recognise that there are no opportunities for them there, is almost unthinkable. They think in realistic terms even when asked to imagine where they would go if they had unlimited options. As expressed by one respondent from one of the most remote villages, "I don't have anywhere to go!" One has to be confronted with a range of possibilities (for leisure activities, travelling, studying, etc.) in order to select one. While 12-15 years old respond in relation to realistic options even when asked to imagine new possibilities, the 16-19 years old have learned to abstract from reality (*ibid.*).

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<sup>7</sup> *Dybbøl Mølle* ('Dybbøl wind mill') was built in 1744 and grinded grain until 1990. It is one of the strongest national symbols of Denmark and stands for courage.

<sup>8</sup> This is an ongoing project on children, youth and media habits and media culture in Greenland started in 1996 in collaboration with my colleague Jette Rygaard.



## How Greenlandic youth voice their concerns

The “Greenlandisation” has been so effective that the lack of language competence in Danish among young people, especially outside Nuuk, has become a problem for further education. On the other hand, the Nuuk youth are constantly criticised by other Greenlanders, coming to the capital from the villages, for speaking too much Danish and code-switching between the two languages<sup>9</sup> (e.g., Jacobsen 2003, 2005, 2008). The Nuuk youth is generally not considered as speaking proper Greenlandic compared to the rest of its peers. In May 2004, young Danish-speaking Greenlanders in Nuuk started a national association, GLDK, to ease communication and tolerance among different linguistic and cultural groups in Greenland. One of their priorities is to focus on the monolingual groups as an equal resource in regard to the bilingual groups as well<sup>10</sup>—they want to be heard and incorporated in the nation-building process. As I noticed during public debates, some people have taken their message as a bad excuse for not being willing to learn Greenlandic, and see them as “cry-babies” playing the victim’s role.

The young music bands from Nuuk experiment with English written lyrics, as Chilly Friday mentioned earlier, and so does the hip hop/rapper Peter Motzfeldt (alias TuuMotz) who was a member of the first hip hop group Nuuk Posse. The lyrics from his solo album, *Alloriarneq* (2007) are all translated into English<sup>11</sup>. In a 2004 private conversation, a Danish journalist complained about it while talking to me about music life among the youth in Greenland, as he found Greenlandic wordings and rhythm much more attractive and appropriate than the broken English that is being used. He should have considered that what might be exotic to him might not be so to the young musicians. It appears that sometimes, a “filter” which a foreign language can provide is needed to express taboo issues as the wordings may seem less harsh in another language than your own.

## Urban youth according to themselves in *Eskimo Weekend*

In 2001, *Eskimo Weekend*, the first youth feature film produced in Greenland, was released. The short feature (27 minutes), directed by the Greenlandic artist and film maker Inuk Silis Høegh (b. 1972), portrays a typical urban youth life during a weekend. The main narrative of the film is about urban youth life in the Arctic, while the minor narrative recounts the relationship among a group of friends in Nuuk, including a love story between the protagonists. Though the narrative seems to be very banal and steered by a classical plot, it is interesting in several ways. First and most importantly, the Greenlandic urban youth defines itself on screen for the first time as the state of mind of the characters are portrayed via an anchoring soundtrack and camera

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<sup>9</sup> On code-switching between Greenlandic and Danish see e.g., Jacobsen (2003, 2005, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> More information on GLDK can be obtained on their web site ([www.gldk.gl](http://www.gldk.gl)).

<sup>11</sup> See [http://atlanticmusicshop.gl/cd/atlantic\\_cd/tuumotz\\_alloriarneq\\_939\\_da.html](http://atlanticmusicshop.gl/cd/atlantic_cd/tuumotz_alloriarneq_939_da.html)

movements. Secondly, the location in Greenland's capital resembles the idea of an urban space with popular hang-out places that young people outside Nuuk will recognise from the national television commercials. Thirdly, the film deliberately plays on intertextuality (see Kristeva 1980: 69), *i.e.* references between fiction and non-fiction as the actors in the film are very close to the real persons in real life. Finally, it also plays on elements from the oral tradition, such as myths, shamanism and traditional proverbs.

The film also integrates humour, irony, self-reflection such as playing deliberately on the stereotypes of Nuummiut (citizens of Nuuk) (see Sørensen 2003). It challenges the political correctness surrounding the omnipresent emotional issue of identity and what it is to be an authentic "Greenlander." For example, the connotation of "Eskimo"<sup>12</sup>—a term Greenlanders only use when abroad to explain what kind of people they belong to—is self-ironic with an underlining appeal to the "us-ness." Interestingly in this context, in June 2008, the Greenland national broadcasting company Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa (KNR) took a vote on the question: "Is Eskimo a term of abuse?" The initiative to take such a vote derived from a recently published book by Danish Eskimologist Lill Rastad Bjørst (2008) in which she claims that the term "Eskimo" is derogatory. She adds that "the stereotyping power in the 'eskimo-orientalism'<sup>13</sup> is striking in cases where Inuit become caricatures of 'hunters' and 'hunters' wives' living in a timeless world" (Bjørst 2008: 15). The result of the vote showed that 60% of the participants gave a negative answer, 31% found the term discriminatory, and 9% did not take a stand. The conclusion is that the term "Eskimo" is acceptable, even at times "very useful" and "effective" when travelling abroad (KNR Radio News, June 11, 2008).

In the film, the commonly used expression is "you, Eskimo erection!"—the latter being the name of the depicted rock band. Although the term "Eskimo" is used in the feature, "Inuk" and its plural form "Inuit" have been avoided probably because of their ambiguous use in a Greenlandic context where the term designates human beings in general. The Greenlanders call themselves Kalaallit, the meaning of which is still uncertain<sup>14</sup>. The nickname deriving from this term is *kalak* and is used when a person behaves in what is normatively considered as bad manners. Understatements such as this nickname are a characteristic feature of self-expression among Greenlanders, and *Eskimo Weekend* is no exception.

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<sup>12</sup> "Eskimo" comes from a proto-Algonquian term meaning "speaking the language of a foreign land" and not "eater of raw meat" as often erroneously believed (Mailhot 1978: 59).

<sup>13</sup> Bjørst (2008: 119) has adopted the term "eskimo-orientalism" from Ann Fienup-Riordan (1995: XI).

<sup>14</sup> According to Samuel Kleinschmidt (1871: 164), it is probably derived from the Icelandic "Skrælling," a term that used to refer to the Inuit of Greenland. Note that many loanwords are adjusted to Greenlandic through vowel harmony: skrælling → sikalaaleq or sakalaaleq → kalaaleq.

## The film's main characters

The protagonist Siiva has the fairest skin colour and is depicted as the most enthusiastic “authentic Eskimo wannabe” reflecting on his great and courageous ancestors, while in a state of intoxication. He is wearing polar bear claws around his neck, ancient Inuit snow glasses made of bone, and his walls are decorated with posters of stereotypical Inuit images from Alaska and Canada. One poster shows the frame of a *qajaq* with detailed descriptions of its parts. That image symbolises the Greenlandic culture from the 1970s, with the idea of a glorious, but almost forgotten, past—like an afterglow of former splendour no longer necessary for surviving. Siiva's counterpart, the friend with the most characteristic Greenlandic physical features, dark skin and brown eyes, is depicted as the most enthusiastic “Western/European wannabe,” constantly code switching between Greenlandic, Danish and English, wearing the newest branded outfits and accessories. Not worrying about anything else but “sex, drugs and rock'n roll,” he is living in the present—a stereotypical image of young urban people, especially from Nuuk (Sørensen et al. 2003)<sup>15</sup>. Though both characters are depicted in an excessive but opposite way, it is the protagonist Siiva the audience feels empathy for as he is the one we get to know mentally as well as his female counterpart Vivi. The fair haired Vivi and her girl-friend Katsi are both very European-looking, liking cocktails and smart outfits. They use city-like body language signalling appropriate self-awareness, far from the general self-image of Greenlanders conducting modest or understated behaviour. Vivi is stopping over in Nuuk on her way to Australia as an exchange student, which is not treated as something extraordinary by the characters of the film.

## Decoding *Eskimo Weekend*

The feature is built on oppositions: dark versus fair; man versus woman; Inuit values versus Western values; local versus global; young versus old; Greenlandic versus Danish; and present versus past. In the frame of the semiotics “reception theory” (Hall 1993 [1973]), one can interpret any message in the film from three hypothetical positions depending on the context. In the “dominant-hegemonic” position, there is an accordance between what is encoded by the transmitter and what is decoded by the recipient. In the “oppositional” position, the viewer chooses an alternative decoding within the frames of particular interests (*e.g.*, political, social, ideological). Finally, in the “negotiated” position, the decoding of the “text” (widely defined) occurs as a mixture of an adaptive/hegemonic view and of oppositional elements (*ibid.*).

From an hegemonic position, the urban youth depicted in the film is rootless and frustrated, being caught in a limbo between the traditional hunting culture and modernity; its only consolation is to escape into the universe of alcohol, drugs, parties,

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<sup>15</sup> Sørensen et al. (2003) have done research on the urban space in Greenland in 2001 and 2002, mostly focusing on the narratives of the newcomers to Nuuk and their views on the city compared to their home areas. It is part of a larger migration project under the direction of anthropologist Bo Wagner Sørensen (Roskilde University, Denmark).

and promiscuity. With the oppositional position, one could, for example, interpret the self-definition of the urban youth from a gendered political aspect: tough urban guys “consuming” a variety of women as if they were commodities or food. Indeed in the feature, girls are commented on as “*suaasat* quality” (*suaasat* being a popular Greenlandic dish), and as “light or dark meat,” (“dark meat” meaning Greenlandic women). From a face value perspective, the women are depicted verbally in quite a discriminatory manner. Yet, the women’s “codes” for men are fish: gold fish for quality guys, and the traditional low status fish, sea scorpion, for the no-good guys.

At last, if one chooses the negotiated position and turns the obvious dichotomies upside down, the message of the film is not as clear-cut as it seems to be. The women are depicted as better educated, more mature, emotionally more open, with better manners and style, and with ambitions for the future. In spite of being portrayed as immature boys fooling around, the guys do reflect on their existence, the importance of friendship, and actually care for each others’ state of mind, albeit not as openly as the girls. In *Eskimo Weekend*, the Greenlandic man is depicted through the protagonist who is not able to talk freely about his problems, his only way to communicate being with lyrics. He sings to his friend in a modern version of the traditional drum song duel (English subtitles): “With words I will split hairs/with a sharp tongue/you stabbed me in the back/a knife in my heart/you attacked me/inside/I thought you were my friend” (his friend having him believe that he slept with his girlfriend). At the end, through his encounter with an older fisherman who makes him acknowledge that he has to get out of his shell and act according to his inner will, he turns out a happier person.

The characters of *Eskimo Weekend* are realistically portrayed and very close to non-fictional persons living in Nuuk. While integrating similarities between Eskimo Erection, the hot band in the feature, and Chilly Friday, the real life most popular rock band, the film also plays on the fact that the female protagonist is on her way to Australia as an exchange student, which the actress actually was in real life. It is also noteworthy that the band crew is the same in the film and in real life, and they made the soundtrack to the film. The flow between fiction and non-fiction is also seen in Greenlandic literature. If one tells a tale, a ghost story or one about any event, it has to be as truthfully as possible to legitimate its value, which is a reminiscence of the oral tradition (Pedersen 2005; Thisted 1993).

## **Conclusion**

Compared to their parents’ generation which was occupied in finding its place in a post-colonial nation-building context, the young Greenlanders have been more focused on their individual lives. All during the 1990s and 2000s, they have tried to reach their parents and the politicians to tell them of the serious neglect many have suffered in their short lives because of all kinds of adults’ abuse. One powerful way to challenge and question the behaviours of their parents has been through lyrics. In its songs, the very popular rapper group Prussic asks adults to take children and young people seriously, to listen to them, and most importantly, to bring them up like normal kids

with love and care, without parents' abuse of drugs and alcohol. Maasi, the member of Prussic who went solo, continues his criticism of society and is still targeting irresponsible adults. Peand-eL and Don Maliko, likewise, also deliver the clear message that it is time for parents, adults and politicians to start thinking as mature adults. The rock band Chilly Friday even wrote a song which rejected the action of potential suicides, asking people to respect their life and the people who care about them. Another effective way to send messages to the adults and portray the Greenlandic youth has been the 2001 film *Eskimo Weekend*. In that film, the young Greenlanders define themselves as both local and global without being tied up in a nationalistic straitjacket. Though fascinated with global tendencies, they do not deny their cultural inheritance—they try to find a balance between tradition and modernity. The film plays on the stereotypes attached to urban youth from Nuuk such as being tough, arrogant, smart and out going, while at the same time expressing a self-ironic distance. The underlying message from these young people, I believe, is that “sex, drugs and rock'n'roll” may play an important role in their urban life, but the young people actually do reflect on the past, present and future in a responsible way. The sense of responsibility is also confirmed in a recent study (Dahl-Petersen et al. 2007) which included recommendations from Greenlandic youth on what is needed for children to have a better quality of life.

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