**Documenting Greenland: Popular Geopolitics on Film**

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The documentary genre is attracting ever more interest in the academic fields of critical geopolitics and elements of international relations (IR), which have undergone a sustained visual and specifically cinematic turn (see Shapiro 2009; Weber 2011). Within that embrace of the documentary genre, scholars have explored how such films deploy the everyday, the affective, and the embodied as a way of creatively addressing the multiscale and multisited qualities of world politics. But the documentary ethos might also apply to fictional films as well in the sense of their approach to the actualities of everyday life and their commitment to making distinct claims about their subject matter. The recent climate-change mockumentary *The Age of Stupid* (Franny Armstrong, United Kingdom, 2009), for instance, features an archivist living in a tower in the high Arctic. It is 2055, and the world has been consumed by unrelenting environmental destruction, leaving cities and physical environments across the globe in chaos. The surviving archivist, who is charged with preserving what is left of human repositories of knowledge, ends up viewing archival footage from the early twenty-first century. Using documentary segments and some animation in combination with a science-fiction narrative arc, the film playfully explores the boundaries between fact and fictional modes of storytelling and in so doing pursues a political project designed to expose human rapaciousness and economic and environmental shortsightedness. Throughout, it asks us to consider the veracity of the archival footage, and the footage itself works as evidence of human avarice and myopia.

This chapter explores the intersection between documentary and fictional films and their geographical representations of Greenland, including geopolitical relationships, agents and objects, ecologies, and indigenous communities. Our range in terms of themes and topics embraces US, Danish, and Greenlandic productions. The sample includes a multitude of genres, such as documentary, docudrama, and fictional, informed by historical experiences of Greenland as a Danish colony. Contemporary thrillers with embedded documentary material, such as Christina Rosendahl’s *The Idealist* (*Idealisten,* Denmark, 2015), provide further diversity because of its usage of archival footage of the 1968 US B-52 crash near Thule Air Base and of the subsequent clean-up operation. Here, selected archival footage supports the film’s authentic feel and strengthens the notion that it is based on real events.

Contextually, much of what we address is framed by the onset of the Cold War in the late 1940s and culminates with short documentary films, such as Ivalo Frank’s *Faith, Hope and Greenland* (*Tro, Håb og Grønland*, Greenland, 2009) and *Greenland Year Zero* ([Anders Graver](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm4786060?ref_=tt_ov_dr) and [Niels Bjørn](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm4900470?ref_=tt_ov_dr), Denmark, 2011). These films are resolutely forward-looking in terms of framing Greenland and Greenlandic society at the cusp of a political future involving greater autonomy and even independence if resource-related revenue streams deliver on their apparent promise—as also explored in Christoffer Guldbrandsen’s documentary *Greenland Year 0* (*Grønland År 0*, Denmark, 2013). While these interventions offer a cinematic coda, other films, such as *Echoes* (Ivalo Frank, Denmark, 2010) and the feature-length films *The Experiment* (*Eksperimentet*,[Louise Friedberg](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0295003?ref_=tt_ov_dr), Denmark, 2010) and, again, *The Idealist* (2015), remind us of colonial and Cold War aesthetic and geopolitical modalities that continue to inform the representational politics surrounding Greenland. Another example of this is *The Shooter* (*Skytten*, Anette Olesen, Denmark, 2013), which updates a 1977 film (*The Marksman* [*Skytten*],Franz Ernst and Tom Hedegaard, Denmark), substituting a drama about a nuclear power station for a drama about oil drilling in the Arctic, reminding us of the plurality of geopolitical currents influencing cinematic representations of Greenland.

When Greenland’s colonial status was repealed in 1953, incorporating Greenland into the Kingdom of Denmark as an overseas county (a Danish *amt*), Greenlanders also became Danish citizens. While the country remains part of the Danish realm, which also includes the Faroe Islands, there has long been a growing desire to obtain greater self-government. This led to home rule being implemented in 1979, and since 2009, the country has enjoyed greater autonomy in the manner in which it conducts its domestic affairs. Foreign affairs remain largely the responsibility of the Danish Folketing(parliament), yet this has not prevented the government of Greenland from becoming more actively involved in bilateral relationships with key states, such as the United States and more latterly China and South Korea. Climate change and increased globalization have opened up new trading routes, oil, minerals, and increased influence. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, Greenland has been a popular subject of exploration for many filmmakers and documentarians.

The country comprises beautiful, if apparently vulnerable, landscapes (even icescapes), ones that offer apparent “documentary evidence” of climatic and geopolitical change. The documentary *Chasing Ice* (Jeff Orlowski, United States, 2012) picks up on this trope of the fate of ice being indicative of rapid change, and, as the film implies, once confronted with the evidence of icy instability, then it should become harder to underappreciate the severity of ongoing climate change. Other films discussed in this chapter also work with the idea of state change to chart the transformation of Greenland from having colony status to overseas amt status to home rule and then self-rule with the longer-term prospect of potential independence. Among these films is a six-part documentary series *The History of the Realm*,produced for the Danish Broadcasting Cooperation (*Rigsfællesskabets Historie*,DR,Denmark, 2015), which documents the historical developments underpinning Denmark’s relations with Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Using archival footage, interviews, and historical materials, the series documents the meeting between “the hunters, the missionaries, the kings, and the fishermen” and asks whether the historical relationship still has a place and a purpose. In many ways, it presents the relationship between Denmark and Greenland as one that is challenged.

While this chapter is grounded in these ecological, political, and geopolitical contexts, our intention is not to offer an exhaustive list of films that have addressed Greenland either through location filming or indirectly via narrative arc and characterization. There is a longer filmography to be drawn, including *Traveling with Greenlandic Dogs* (*Kørsel med Grønlandske Hunde*, Peter Elfelt, Denmark, 1897) and the exploits of such explorers as Knud Rasmussen (*Med Hundeslæde gennem Alaska* [*With Dogsled through Alaska*], Leo Hansen, Denmark, 1926), but that lies beyond the scope of our chapter (see Nørrested 2011). Rather, through a selection of films, we explore the ways in which Greenland is represented as a place within a variety of documentary, fictional, and hybrid documentary styles and ethoses.

What we offer is an intervention in the agenda-setting work of scholars in the edited collection entitled *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, which offers the first full-length treatment of Arctic film traditions, genres, topics, and practitioners to date (MacKenzie and Westerstahl Stenport 2015, 1). As a collection, it also posits the existence of a “critical Arctic studies,” challenging “(1) a policy-driven governance and geopolitical-instrumentalist approach, and (2) a natural sciences model motivated by hypothesis testing and the determining of causal relationships. Both of these approaches elide the complexities of the region’s representational and cultural history. . . . Critical Arctic Studies foregrounds the necessity of analyzing cultural representations and their circulation within various public spheres” (MacKenzie and Westerstahl Stenport 2015, 2). As part of our contribution to what we endorse as a “critical Arctic studies” project, we examine and interrogate the manner in which Greenland has been and continues to be embedded in national and transnational representational economies, which we identify as geopolitical, understood here as being preoccupied with the representational qualities of space and place and the manner in which Greenland as a location is represented as having geopolitical and strategic qualities. Initially, we bring two strands of scholarship into contact with one another: critical Arctic studies and critical geopolitics. Thereafter, we consider how Greenland is represented within documentary film cultures. We address place-based representations ranging from Cold War experimentation to emerging resource frontier (*Frøken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne / Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, Bille August, United States, 1997; *Vanishing Point*, [Stephen A. Smith](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm6721816?ref_=tt_ov_dr), [Julia Szucs](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3727866?ref_=tt_ov_dr), Canada, 2013) and as epicenter of anxieties about climate change (*The Expedition to the End of the World*, Daniel Dencik, Denmark, 2013). Finally, we consider the growing presence of fourth cinema / indigenous filmmaking in Greenland (*Nuummioq*,[Torben Bech](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3418756?ref_=tt_ov_dr) and [Otto Rosing](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0743022?ref_=tt_ov_dr), Greenland 2009), such events as the Greenland Eyes Festival, and the work of documentary filmmakers, such as Ivalo Frank (see also Frank in this volume).

**Documenting Film, Critical Geopolitics, and Critical Arctic Studies**

Within political geography and the discipline of international relations (IR), there has been, to echo Roland Bleiker (2001), an “aesthetic turn” in geopolitical and IR theorizing. Since this publication, the IR community has embraced visual analysis and methodologies, including film and filmic practices, such as documentary filmmaking by scholars/activists like Cynthia Weber. The latter’s “I Am an American” project offered a powerful illustration of what a social science perspective can offer documentary film theory and practice. Using the Ad Council’s public service announcement “I Am an American” as a starting point, Weber’s film project borrowed the format but radically transformed the content by focusing on those with unsettled claims about citizenship, loyalty. and post-9/11 geopolitics. For Weber, her interviewees were those who challenged the idea that the claim “I am an American” applied neatly to everyone regardless of background, geographical location, occupation, and place of birth. By focusing on the illegal migrant, the nonreturning soldier, and the vigilante, Weber offers a countergeopolitical intervention: a project that challenges the domineering political imaginaries (e.g., the United States as innocent victim of terrorism) and the shifting sites and spaces of the War on Terror (to the inner city and the borderlands of the United States) (Weber 2011).

Weber’s project, combining both documentary films and academic writing, exemplifies aesthetic IR in two fundamental ways: first, in association with critical/popular geopolitics, a willingness to embrace a very different model of geopolitics/international politics defined by such cultural texts and materials as films, television, and novels; second, as an engagement with a plethora of visual and textual methodologies, which take as their starting point a critical disposition emphasizing not only the representational logics of images and text but such more-than-representational qualities as emotion and affect. The end result, thus, is to focus more explicitly on what films and images “do” in the world and their capacity to provoke feelings, sensations, and wider affective economies. Addressing what images “do” has been an important consideration for critical scholarship on media and popular cultural representations, including documentary film cultures with their “argumentative structure” and “political commitments” (van Munster and Sylvest 2015). Indigenous communities, including filmmakers and documentarians, have challenged nonindigenous representations of the Arctic region and its population. In her analysis of the Canadian Inuit film *Atanarjuat* (*The Fast Runner*) (2001), Michelle Raheja makes the point that indigenous filmmaking participates in a form of visual sovereignty by populating a land often emptied out of people, culture, and ecology. She notes: “The slowness of the sequencing matches the patience one must have to hunt on the ice, wait for hours at a seal hole, traverse long distances on foot in a dogsled, or battle more than five hundred years of colonialism. . . . The land is not something that the characters are in conflict with and attempt to overcome, but a varied and essential backdrop against which the particularities of the narrative are played out (2007, 1178). In other words, the film’s aesthetic style patiently conveys (one might even claim, documents) the everyday realities of indigenous life on the ice and beyond.

In the case of Greenland, critical scholarship has focused on how popular cultural and geopolitical engagements continue to be informed by the relationship with the colonial power, Denmark. For three centuries, Denmark, Danes, and Danishness have been at the epicenter of the colonial encounter, establishing a trading network, governance structures, and civil culture that endures to this day. The growing autonomy of the government of Greenland, on the one hand, and continued dependence on the so-called block grant from Denmark, on the other, complicates the interaction between Denmark and Greenland. Danish scholars, in the main, have explored how popular and diplomatic cultures play a part in generating new identity narratives for Greenland, emphasizing its pan-Inuit credentials and autonomous role within the Kingdom of Denmark (Gad 2013). In 2012, for example, Greenland, Åland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands started to coordinate with one another in international forums to promote the geographical region of “West Nordic” and the communities therein. In the same year, a West Nordic International Film Festival was initiated as part of raising awareness of the region, all of which have had the shared experience of Danish colonization.

The documentary film, and indeed the documentary ethos, is one that increasingly matters in discussions of a postcolonial Arctic. In a Danish-Greenlandic context, documentary filmmaking has been an important governmental instrument in shaping popular Danish, Greenlandic, and international opinion. As an example, the documentary *Hvor Bjergene Sejler* (*Where the Mountains Float*,Bjarne Henning-Jensen, 1955) shows how the documentary ethos has been used to, on the one hand, demonstrate Danish progress and modernization to the Greenlandic population and, on the other, present Greenland as exotic and mysterious (see also Larsson and Westerstahl Stenport, 2015). The documentary ethos has, thus, allowed for a range of films presenting Greenland as homeland, ranging from the nostalgic Danish propaganda relating to traditional life in small hunting communities to more recent films documenting the effect of increased globalization, modernization, and years of colonial history on the “homeland.”

As a creative form, the documentary is for many indigenous and northern filmmakers well placed to engage in explicitly representational politics about how the Arctic is imagined, remembered, and populated with people living and working in everyday and, at times, extraordinary settings. Some of the work considered in this chapter should be seen as a form of visual and political pushback against Cold War representations of the Arctic as empty space, strategic space, and experimental space with few communities to be concerned with—or, to echo the work of the French theorist Jacques Rancière (2004), a “redistribution of the sensible,” a reaction against the implicit conventions, norms, and rules that shape the way in which modes of perception and reception operate. We might ask how the documentary ethos reveals something about what is made audible, visible, legible, and knowable about Greenland and Greenlanders.

**Showing Greenland as a Cold War/Colonial Frontline**

During the Cold War, the Arctic region was the proverbial frontline of a conflict engulfing the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. The Cold War was spatially wide-ranging and capable of embracing both the most intimate and exceptional spaces, from the suburban American household to the oceans and ice of the northern latitudes of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. As Nielsen et al. (2014, 444) note, “During the early phase of the Cold War, Greenland, situated on the shortest route across the Arctic from Washington to Moscow, and almost equidistant from the two centers of the Cold War superpower struggle, became vital to North America’s strategic air defense.” The early 1950s was a pivotal period in Greenlandic history and geopolitics, as relative isolation and neglect from Denmark ended due to growing interest by the United States in the island. In 1951, a defense agreement was signed between Denmark and the United States, which built upon cooperation during World War II (and after the United States had offered to buy Greenland off Denmark for $100 million), but this time under the auspices of hemispheric security cooperation and NATO. The Greenlandic National Council was told of the agreement but did not, as the provincial council for Greenland at the time, object to Denmark negotiating a security agreement with the United States. The build-up of the US strategic presence in Greenland was captured in American documentaries, such as the Academy Award winners *Men against the Arctic* (Winston Hibler, United States, 1955) and *White Wilderness* (James Algar, United States, 1958), as well as in the long-running *The Big Picture* series (US Army Signal Corps Army Pictorial Service, 1954–61). While other scholars have examined the manner in which Greenland was represented as a polar testing ground for US engineers and armed forces personnel, these documentaries record a particular moment in the US-Greenlandic-Danish relationship, a period in which Greenland and Greenlanders play a modest role cinematically and geopolitically (Farish 2010). In 1953, the Eisenhower administration asked the Danish government for permission to expand a wartime base in Thule, in Northwest Greenland. The construction of this base led to the forced relocation of the local population, which had a profoundly negative impact in terms of resilience and the maintaining of a hunting culture that had provided livelihood and sustained a distinct culture for millennia. This has, for instance, been portrayed in the documentary *Hingitaq-De Fordrevne* (*The Outcasts*, Ulrik Holmstrup, Denmark, 2004), which uses archival footage and interviews with “the outcasts” themselves to document the involuntary displacement of an entire hunting community.

Thule is both geopolitically significant and functions as a cultural recognition point of the trauma inscribed in Greenlandic relations to Denmark and the United States. By 1957, when *The Big Picture* series was screening, the Danish government officially denied that the United States would ever locate nuclear weapons in Greenland. Unbeknownst to Danish and Greenland citizens, the no-nuclear-weapon guarantee was a hollow one, and the United States stationed such weapons at Thule. It was not until 1968, following the crash of a B-52 bomber, that it became apparent that the wider public had been profoundly misled by the Danish government a decade earlier.

But the documentaries themselves are, in the words of van Munster and Sylvest’s intervention, “showing over saying” in terms of documentary style and content (2015, 4). They are predicated on an ethos that is both observational and disclosure-like in the sense of informing the viewer about why the US military is investing in Greenland. *The Big Picture* series documents that activity, but it is not revelatory in the sense that there is neither an attempt to introduce any ambiguity to the US-Danish strategic relationship nor a challenge the notion that Greenland is simply a military testing frontier. Greenlandic, even Danish, agency is barely acknowledged in such documentary geopolitics.

What the remainder of the chapter explores is how other films, some more explicitly documentary in ethos than others, have problematized those depictions of Greenland and Greenlanders without a sense of political, cultural, or economic agency and raised awkward questions about how Denmark’s relationship with Greenland, complicated unquestionably by its strategic Cold War encounters with the United States, has been increasingly challenged by Danish and Greenlandic filmmakers and cultural commentators. Archival footage, subtitles, voice-overs, and characterization have played an important role in recalibrating those geopolitical relationships and even repositioning Greenland in the Danish and wider global popular imagination.

**Revealing Greenland as Neocolonial Experiment**

On Sunday, October 5, 1952, the ship *Umanak* arrived in Nuuk with sixteen Greenlandic children on board. Helene, Dorthe, Daniel, Ole, Karen, and eleven of their peers were returning to their homeland after having spent just over a year in foster care in Denmark. They were all part of a neocolonial social experiment created by the Danish authorities to transform Greenlandic society—and, indeed, the Greenlanders—to make it and them more Danish. The idea was that these children, who had a year earlier been taken from their families and sent to Denmark to learn the Danish language and Danish culture, would return to Greenland as role models for a new generation under the banner of “one nation, one people, one language.”Selected from among predominantly poor Greenlandic families and orphaned children (after tuberculosis had taken the lives of many adults), they were to become the cornerstone in a new Greenlandic school system, a system based on Danish values and a Danish way of life. Greenlanders were to become good and patriotic Danes. That was the idea at least.

*The Experiment* starts with the arrival of the sixteen Greenlandic children in Nuuk. To this end, the narrative frame used for the film also resembles that used for many other films made in and about Greenland, where the story line is driven by the experiences and observations of one or more outsiders (MacKenzie and Westerstahl Stenport 2013). In *The Experiment*,the arrival of the children on board the ship also marks the transition of the viewers into this largely unknown setting, where the children’s navigation through the Greenlandic landscape and their relations become critical to the viewers’ understanding of this unfamiliar place. In many ways, their journey and Nurse Geert’s transformation during the course of the film represent the film’s overarching narrative and the viewers’ transition from arrival to departure. But it is a film that gives little time and space to the children’s experiences in Denmark itself. The journey from Greenland to Denmark and back again is curiously absent from the film.

Although the film is not a documentary, its filmic language in many ways borrows from the documentary genre. And while the film does not use archival footage from the period in question, its opening textual sequence situates and grounds the ensuing drama in the grim realities of postwar Danish-Greenlandic histories, where Denmark was seen to not live up to its responsibilities as the colonial power. It is a documentary in style basing its narrative on real events. It invokes an ethos that puts into sharp relief the public claims of the Danish state with the everyday lived realities of the Greenlandic children affected by the civilizational mission imposed upon them.

Portraying, rather than documenting, their return to Greenland, their first meeting with their new home (the newly established orphanage in Nuuk), their “new mother” (Nurse Geert, the matron of the orphanage), and their resettling into what they once considered their homeland, *The Experiment* focuses on the lived experiences of these children as they navigate their old, new homeland. It does so by dramatizing this particularly tragic chapter in the Danish experience as colonial power, a chapter that has also been portrayed in other mediated formats: first, by the writer Tine Bryld in her book *I den bedste mening* (*With the best intention*,1998) and, second, in an episode of the documentary series of the same name produced for the Danish Broadcasting Cooperation (*I den bedste mening: Grønlandsbørnene* [*With the best intention: The Greenland Children*],DR, Denmark, 2009).

In many ways, *The Experiment* portrays how these Greenlandic children were trapped between two places, forced into the cultural gap that existed between Denmark and Greenland; this culture gap was the focal point of many documentary and fictional films made in and about Greenland during this period, where Greenland and its inhabitants are portrayed as primitive and in stark opposition to a modernized and urbanized Denmark (see Jensen 2015). The film underlines that while these children never became Danish, they were no longer Greenlandic when they returned to Nuuk. “I can’t understand what you’re saying mum” is a particularly poignant moment in the film, when one of the sixteen children, Karen, realizes that her mother speaks Greenlandic. Karen, like the other “experiment” children, no longer speaks her mother tongue.

As the film suggests, and as explained in the opening sequence of the film, Denmark was under particular pressure following World War II to improve living conditions in Greenland. The country was isolated from the rest of the kingdom, the general health among Greenlanders was poor and criticized by the United Nations, and the United States was showing increased interest in Greenland and noting that it would be better placed to care for the indigenous population (Sørensen 2007). To counter such sentiments and demonstrate that Denmark and Greenland were inextricably linked, the Danish government (in collaboration with two Danish NGOs, the Danish Save the Children and Danish Red Cross) set out to “modernize” Greenlandic society. As the Danish governor in Greenland notes in the film, “the goal is to explore whether Greenlandic children are even susceptible to modern stuff.”

The thought behind “the experiment” was more strategic than compassionate in the sense that it was meant as a counternarrative to the geopolitical climate surrounding Denmark’s relations to Greenland (or lack thereof) at the time. The figure of the matron is critical, as her dedication to documenting the progress of the children is pivotal to the overall prospects for the children and for the counternarrative. In the eyes of many Danes, Greenland was an embarrassment to Denmark while Greenlanders were seen as an embarrassment to the idea of “Danishness.” The film plays on this sense of embarrassment as a sentimental and at times poignant reflection on what has later been described as a particularly dark chapter in Danish colonial history. Greenlanders were seen as second-class citizens, a view epitomized in the film by the school principal: “A Greenlander who speaks Danish and wears a suit is still a Greenlander deep down.” The film suggests that the experiment was doomed to fail despite the “best intentions” of the matron of the orphanage, who is shown to be increasingly overwhelmed by the weight of skepticism among her colleagues and, as it turns out, by a failure to spot that her potential star pupil (Karen) might have cheated in her Danish language tests.

Throughout the film and central to the narrative frame, Denmark’s embarrassment with Greenland is embodied in the main Danish representatives in Greenland, such as the governor and the school principal. This sense of embarrassment is juxtaposed against the feelings of anger and sadness that are in many ways embodied in the children, in their parents, and eventually in Geert. Through meetings between the children and their biological Greenlandic parents; Geert, the governor, and the school principal; Geert and the children; the children and Greenland; and Danish and Greenlandic cultures, the film highlights the personal and cultural struggles embedded in the everyday lives of those affected by the Danish-Greenlandic encounter. However, these struggles are not only central to the film’s narrative or as a showcase of a clash between two cultures. They are personified in each of the sixteen children as they arrive in and navigate Greenlandic life and living once again and as the viewers witness their transition. By documenting such seemingly banal and mundane practices and rituals as school lessons and meals, on the one hand, and sleepless nights, crying, and bedwetting, on the other, it suggests that the children are living a social and cultural nightmare over which they have no agency. Rather than returning as role models for a new generation of Greenlanders, their homecoming draws attention to the contrasts between them and what the film presents as “the others”—or perhaps more precisely, the contrasts between them as the new “others” and Greenland as a place of awkward colonial encounters.

**Stating Greenland as Not Denmark**

Several documentary films produced about Greenland in the 1960s and early 1970s were pivotal in the Danish understanding of Greenland and its inhabitants; in particular, the Danish filmmaker Jørgen Roos became one of the most important voices in this context and during this time. *Sisimiut* (Jørgen Roos, Denmark, 1966) and *17 Minutes Greenland* (*[17 Minutter Grønland](http://www.dfi.dk/faktaomfilm/film/da/29651.aspx?id=29651" \o "17 minutter Grønland)*,Jørgen Roos, Denmark, 1967) were two among a range of films that grew out of this new generation and a more critical approach to the transformation processes underway in Greenland. Although these documentaries were both funded by the Danish government, the films became the first Danish films that criticized Danish policy toward Greenland. They examined and commented upon the social and cultural contrasts between Greenland and Denmark, contrasts that became increasingly evident as the Danish modernization “project” got a stronger foothold in Greenland.

*Sisimiut* is the Greenlandic name for the small town Holsteinsborg, in the western part of Greenland. The first Greenlandic fish factory opened there in 1924, and the first shipyard, in 1931. The town came to represent the radical and rapid transformation of Greenlandic society and *Sisimiut* during this period. The film’s criticism of the modernization of Greenlandic society and Danish Greenland policies are exemplified through the agents chosen by Roos to represent Greenland: (1) a former hunter and his wife who are now working for the council collecting rubbish, (2) a girl working in a shrimp factory, and (3) a young fisherman who has to share a place to stay with other poor young people in the town. Highlighting the contrasts between the locals and the Danes posted to Greenland and among Greenlanders themselves, *Sisimiut* depicts the indigenous population as passive spectators to the pervasive transformation processes underway in a place that might, one day, become theirs. Roos treats Greenland as an assemblage of ethnographic-nostalgic encounters between himself, Greenland and its inhabitants, and Denmark. Through such encounters, he portrays the culture clash that had become more and more apparent in Greenland (and symbolically illustrated by the town Sisimiut/Holsteinsborg) at a time when Greenland as place and as society was changing, depicting a clash between Danish industrialism on the one hand and Greenlandic hunting culture on the other. Although the film explores such antagonisms and takes a critical approach to Danish-Greenlandic relations, this criticism appears diffused. Roos highlights that one of the problems in relation to Greenland is the way in which it is “remotely controlled from home [Denmark],” but the film does not present a comprehensive and clear criticism of Danish policies. Rather, the critical tone that runs through the film is created by the soundtrack, which underpins each shot and is dominated by American pop music and Danish popular tunes. Through the soundscape, Roos suggests that the new generation is predominantly oriented toward “the Western way of life.”

The Danish Foreign Ministry, who commissioned the film, did not like the image of Greenland that Roos presented. Similarly, local Greenlanders expressed that the film was not nuanced and focused too much on the poorest aspects of their community, while failing to acknowledge that not all inhabitants were poor and marginalised. This led Roos to make *17 Minutes Greenland*. Reusing much of the material from *Sisimiut* but radically changing the soundscape and the structure, the second film was quite different. Although *17 Minutes Greenland* offers a broad insight into Greenland as a complex place—its landscape, its history, and its way of life—it is stripped of the irony that characterizes much of *Sisimiut*.Roos’s solidarity with and admiration for Greenland and its inhabitants are evidenced in both films. While *Sisimiut* was driven by an inherent criticism of Denmark’s approach to Greenland, *17 Minutes Greenland* offers glimpses of this criticism through subtle features, such as introducing the country by its Greenlandic name, Kaalaallit Nunaat, and using a native speaker as narrator. Indeed, that same year, Roos produced his most critical documentary about Greenlandic relations: *Ultima Thule* (Denmark, 1967). Thule’s geopolitical significance during the Cold War cannot be underestimated, though Roos’s film focuses on the stark contrast between American and Greenlandic living conditions in Qaanaaq (Thule) and external threats to the volatile Arctic community. As such, this documentary foregrounded many of the environmental, societal, cultural, and economic challenges still facing the Greenlandic society.

Underpinning all of this is a documentary ethos that operates with a revelatory and expositional modality. The aim of the documentaries is to educate the viewer (especially the Danish viewer) in the complexities of Greenlandic society. While often critical of Danish governments, Roos’s films nonetheless reveal a certain sense of national pride in the Danish relationship with Greenland.

**<A>Problematizing Greenland as Geopolitical Agent <\>**

Like Roos’s *Ultima Thule*,Ivalo Frank’s documentary *Echoes* (2010) addresses the World War II and Cold War legacies of the US military and intelligence presence in Greenland. But it is underwritten by a documentary ethos informed by ambiguity and contingency. Rather than being instructional, it is informed by a sense of political critique, through its usage of shot sequencing and interviews. The initial shot sequence focuses on a deserted and rusting US airbase in Narsarsuaq in southern Greenland, operated by the United States as an aircraft refueling station from 1942 to 1958. The bulk of the documentary then focuses on the lives of a Greenlandic woman and a Danish man, who speak in their living room in their small house. There is a purposeful scale jump, linking the grand strategic plans of the United States for Greenland to the everyday lives of a mixed Danish-Greenlandic couple who have both had experiences of living with, working with, and loving Americans.

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In the intimate setting of their home near an abandoned base, the couple recounts in English rather than Danish or Greenlandic their experiences of living and working with American service personnel. As the documentary unfolds, it is clear that their experiences are intersected by gender, race, nationality, and occupation. Anna talks about her love affairs with former American service personnel and her experiences of living in the United States. Arvid speaks of his professional relationship with American colleagues and the “fun” he had in the process. This married couple embodies the complexities of the US-Greenlandic-Danish security relationship. Anna, in particular, speaks movingly about her experiences of being a Greenlandic woman living and working in a social context shaped by colonialism, patriarchy, and indigenous traditions. The film concludes with Anna speaking about her determination to be a drum dancer, an activity usually carried out by men in her community. The documentary thereby shows her asserting her agency against a geopolitical-strategic context of Greenland being an ongoing site for US military occupation and local gender relations dominated by white and indigenous men.

Franks’s intervention in Greenlandic geopolitics operates on three emotional and geopolitical registers. First, the film explores how geopolitics works through person-to-person experiences and relationships of love, hospitality, and work. Second, state-to-state relationships involving Denmark, Greenland, and the United States are discussed through an examination of places such as airports and airbases, some of which are legacies of past conflict and strategic alliances. Third, the role of objects in signifying past and present geopolitical relationships, such as the enduring material remains of radar stations and the many thousands of rusting oil barrels scattering the landscape, is examined. Without explicitly historicizing the Danish-US-Greenlandic relationship, the film might be read as a timely intervention on the role of the United States in relation to Greenlandic geopolitics and security. From the 1990s onward, the role of Greenland in negotiating that relationship has changed as the Greenlandic government demanded to be consulted on the upgrade of the US radar facilities, for example. With the 2004 Igaliko Agreement, US-Greenland cooperation was formalized, and a joint committee was established. This arguably did more to recalibrate Greenland’s relationship with Denmark—serving as a reminder about such past embarrassments as the 1951–52 social experiment with Greenlandic children, the 1953 relocation of Inughuit to Qaanaaq, and the 1968 Thule air crash—than to actually inaugurate a profound shift in how the United States conducts its strategic business in Greenland.

**Revealing Greenland as Geopolitical Scandal**

Recent Danish film has increasingly turned its attention to the geopolitical contexts of the US presence in Greenland, as demonstrated by *The Idealist*, which builds on historical records. Here, the documentary ethos is one based on archival footage rather than interviewees. It uses official sources and public media broadcasting to create a context in which to privilege an explicitly political argument about complicity and deceit. As a piece of exposition, the film arranges images and text in an argumentative and provocative manner; it aims to uncover and then enlighten. And the usage of the archival records and the documentary work of an investigative journalist give the film an overtly political status in Danish public culture and beyond—making it harder, thus, to dismiss it as an exaggerated or distorted account of actualities.

As portrayed in the film, on January 21, 1968, an American B-52 bomber crashed near the US Thule Air Base in Northwest Greenland. The plane carried four hydrogen bombs, three of which were recovered while elements of the fourth bomb disappeared under the sea ice. The US government was forced, by the Danish authorities, to recover as much of the wreckage as possible and move it all back to the United States under the veil of secrecy. The cover-up was revealed by Poul Brink, a Danish journalist from a local radio station, who discovered that many of the Danish workers sent to Greenland as part of the clean-up operation, Project Crested Ice, had developed a range of skin diseases, including cancer (see Brink 1997). *The Idealist* begins in 1988, twenty years after the crash, and follows hot on the heels of Brink and his nine-year battle against the Danish and US governments, the health services, and his own employers to get to the bottom of the story about Danish Thule workers who had been harmed by the clean-up work carried out in the aftermath of the crash. Although the film takes place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is set against the geopolitical climate of the Cold War and the Danish defense agreement with the United States in 1951. And as the story unfolds, Brink uncovers a 1957 secret letter from former Danish prime minister H. C. Hansen documenting that the 1951 defense agreement between Denmark and the United States allowed the Americans to store nuclear weapons in Greenland. This was in spite of the fact that Denmark had a no nuclear policy—at least officially.

Geopolitically, Greenland is central to *The Idealist*,naturally. It is pivotal to the story and to the premise of the film. However, Greenland as place is only visually represented in the film as the site of the crash, through archival footage from the immediate aftermath of the crash, not as the main battleground. Twenty years after the crash, the battle is fought in the Danish and American archives, in interviews with Danish politicians, in the Danish courts, and in the hunt for new evidence. Hence, Greenland features only as a distant backdrop to the story unfolding in Copenhagen. Rosendahl’s decision to let Brink become the vehicle for telling the story, rather than become the story itself, also means that the film becomes as much about his quest for the truth—and for blaming the Danish government for the sufferings endured by Danish Thule workers. Indeed, a number of tensions are at play in the encounters that Brink has with his surroundings as the story progresses: How do the people that Brink confronts react? How does the former US ambassador react when Brink tracks him down in Texas to ask him about the secret defense agreement between Denmark and the United States? How do the Danish politicians react when Brink accuses them of lying to the public?

The simple yet insistent sound of a 1980s typewriter creates a sense of tension in the story as Brink continues to write reports on his latest discoveries. As if suggestive of how his documentary quest is slow and painful but ultimately sufficiently accumulative in the sense that a big truth will be revealed. As with previous films involving investigative journalists (e.g., *All the President’s Men* 1976), the story of Brink’s quest for an answer to the question of whether Danish politicians lied to Greenlandic and Danish publics in relation to the 1968 crash is shown to be long and drawn out and colored by frustration and obscuration. At the end of the film, audiences are left with the impression that, since H. C. Hansen’s letter of 1957, Denmark has—as Brink points out in the film—based its foreign policy on “one big lie,” a lie rooted in a form of subservience to the much more powerful United States in terms of Cold War geopolitics. This has led Danish historians (Villaume 2015) and former political figures, including two Danish foreign ministers, to criticize the film for being “too selective” in its choice of historical and geopolitical facts (Sparre 2015). In other words, in its insistence on being expositional and instructional through its documentary ethos, the film ends up sacrificing nuance and complexity.

The film and the political reactions to the film have demonstrated that theThule Affair, as it is sometimes called,remains a critical topic in Danish-Greenlandic relations, for many reasons. First, Denmark has never apologized for deceiving the Danish and Greenlandic publics about the presence of nuclear weapons in Greenland during the Cold War. With the continued presence of the US military at Thule Air Base and amid growing talk about possible independence for Greenland, this remains a sensitive topic. Second, Denmark has refused to release key environmental radiation records made at Thule in the aftermath of the 1968 crash. Third, in 1995, all Danes involved in operation Project Crested Ice were awarded 50,000 kroner from the Danish government—although the Thule workers accepted this, the Danish government did not admit any wrongdoing. Fourth, many Greenlanders still believe that the missing bomb is still present in Thule, although a detailed Danish report by Christensen (2009) rejected this claim. What drove Brink to pursue the story in the first place was a desire to humanize the consequences of Cold War geopolitics for communities and workers caught up in the aftermath of a nuclear accident—revealing Greenland, or at least part of it, to be a beneficiary of the US military-industrial complex.

**Conclusion**

The documentaries *Faith, Hope and Greenland* and *Greenland Year Zero* use interview segments with Greenlanders and Danes to mull over and speculate about contemporary and future Greenland. While not offering a definitive road map for a future (independent) Greenland, both participate in anticipatory geopolitics, exploring geophysical change (sea ice loss and glacial melting) in relation to geopolitical shifts in the Arctic region and heralding growing commercial and trading investment and involvement with East Asian states, such as China, Japan, and South Korea. While this has precipitated alarmist media reporting about Chinese workers overwhelming Greenlandic settlements, there has been a growing public dialogue about possible futures facing Greenland, including one based on greater exploitation of such resources as seafood, seal fur, and minerals. In popular cultural terms, complementing the growing autonomy of the government of Greenland, film, popular media, and music have been notable exports during the past decade. The Greenland Eyes International Film Festival, established in 2012, provides a significant example of film and festivals being put to work for the purpose of “providing the audience with a greater awareness of a part of our planet that in recent years has become extremely important globally for reasons ranging from climate change, oil and mineral exploration, and potential independence from Denmark, to mention but a few” (Greenland Eyes Festival 2012).

The documentary ethos is one that ultimately makes claims about actualities, and our chapter explores and investigates a range of sources pertaining to Greenland to consider how it has been understood in a variety of ways and as a particular kind of place—from US documentaries charting their growing Cold War military presence in northern Greenland to Danish and Greenlandic productions that concentrate on Greenland as a lived and dynamic set of places caught up in an Arctic geopolitics haunted by colonial and Cold War relationships and legacies and engaged in speculation about future economic, environmental, and political change. We end with an appeal to the “redistribution of the sensible”, with due recognition of the Arctic as a genuinely dialogical space where the audible, the legible, the viewable, and the knowable are works in progress rather than something that is simply settled by those outside the Arctic region.

**Filmography**

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