**Uumasuusivissuaq: Spirit and Indigenous Writing**

The scholarship on Indigenous peoples is deeply steeped in colonization and often assumes positionality that comes from western point of view. This is problematic and much needs to be done to decolonize written, academic knowledge on indigenous peoples. The author argues for process to decolonization and invites Indigenous writers to consider a writing in form poetry that the authors states comes from giftedness of inner soul – namely the spirit. The author is a female *kalaaleq* (Inuk from Greenland) who start this publication with her poetry. A narrative of the poem is provided contextualizing her subject into what has been written and argues for positionality of Indigenous writers.

*Taalliaq The Poem*

*Uumasuusivissuaq The Great Animal Farm (1)*

Sassuma Arnarsua The feared Lady Down Under (2)

ileranavissorsuaq how worrisome

ersinalaaveqisoq. how very frightening.

Uumasuusivissuit Your orchard (1)

isorartoq, takoranneq. is limitless, and legendary. (3)

Sunaaffami I am now realizing that (4)

natsiisiveqartutit indeed you have a garden (1)

qilalugaasivissuarmik. full of whales and belugas.

Aarrit piaqqisarfii The birth cradles (5) of walruses,

tigaagulliillu pinnguartarfii the playgrounds of the minke whales

illit kisivit you, alone look after

minguerlugit salittarpatit. to replenish.

Arferit ungilleeriartut The restless big whales, itchy

pukiisigut kumiassalaarlugit you calm them down

toqqissisartarpatit. gently, scratching their bellies. (6)

Timmissat aqqarlutik The hungry birds, diving too deep

Ammut inorsisoortut sucked out of air (7)

qummut supoorsinernik you feed, blowing them your breath.

nerlersortarpatit.

Anernippit imarsuaq Your supreme spirit (8)

inuunissaqalertittarpaa enlivens the oceans

imungarsuaq immersorlugu creating immense lives

immap inussua nourishing and feeding

qaarsilaartillugu. the essence of oceans. (9)

Maligissat nooqutsertapatit You decorate the tips

qaqqorinnik qaartussanik of waves intended for

qoqernartulertarlugit. deafening blasts. (10)

Sunaaffami imarsuaq You caress

toqqissisartarit orsuersillugu(11) the restless sea to serenity (12)

imungarsuaq, allowing the mountains

qaqqarsuit qilassuarlu and the sky to see themselves

alianaassusersuartik in your mirror

kusanassusersuartillu adoring

tarramikkut takulaassammassuk. their own immense beauty.

Sunaaffami naasuutitit I have come to realize that

supoornikkut imungarsuaq it is your creative breath that allows

pujoralliisarputit the plants to blow their seeds,

soorluli aalisakkat the fish to spawn

suaannik immuinillu and your blowing is what makes

imarsuaq isortittarit. the oceans murky in creation.

Iliveqarfissuatit tupinnaqaat The burial grounds of the magnificent

uumasorsuarnut mikisunullu and the insignificant that you have created

tulluat! Nalissaqanngillat befits them all and are remarkable,

asuna ornigarneqat! beyond words!

No wonder these are well attended! (13)

Pinngortitannit isumaginninnerit Your ordinance in your own creation

nalissaqanngilaq is magnificent, nothing to compare it with

tarniginnaq, anersaaginnaq. so enriching in soul and spirit.

Arnakattak You, the square lady

inukuluinnaasugut we are mere human beings and yet

itummanniitippatsigut you hold us in your palms

nukissuatit tupinnaqaat your strength immeasurable

tukkunersuit ingalluni. Even more so is your generosity.(14)

Atsaat ataqqinartumik In reverence

aatsaalli naassaanngitsumik may your rule last forever

atajuarit! Naalagaaffiillu Thy Queendom (15)

tikijuttuarli isuaqanngitsumut. (16) be welcomed, over and over.

Aatsaalli arnarsuaq You ugly Lady Down Under

ileranavissorsuaq that evokes in us

ersinalaaveqisoq. so much fear and worry. (17)

*Indigenous Negotiation of Decolonization and Paradigm Shift*

I am a *kalaaleq* (an Inuk from Greenland) and consider myself an Indigenous person. Much like Wilson (2008) I question how Indigenous thought is delivered in writing. While writing, I am mindful that Indigenous scholars become instrumental in the processes of decolonization of their communities (Smith, 1999) and cognizant that our academic colleagues also need to recognize that they themselves are in need of decolonization (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, and Jessen Williamson, 2011) and ignite these processes. For these reasons, I intend to keep the attention of these seemingly disparate communities sustained and nourished from my own writing. I appreciate Wilson’s statement ``... if Indigenous scholars are to be freed from the need to constantly justify [Indigenous] research and knowledge systems from a dominant system perspectives, it may be necessary for us to be clearer in our articulation of exactly what our paradigm entails`` (2008 p: 12).

While Wilson turned his academic writing into series of letters to his sons, I have used Inuit story telling (Jessen Williamson 2012) to ground my own academic writing. I have employed deconstruction and reconstruction (Ghosh 1996), finding the academic material on Inuit generally overbearing (Jessen Williamson 2011 a). As well, I use *kalaallit* (plural of ‘kalaaleq’) terms and concepts to convey *kalaallit* paradigms. According to Wilson (2008), the latter is:

a set of underlying beliefs that guide our actions...[including] the way that we view reality (ontology), how we think about or know this reality (epistemology), our ethics and moral (axiology) and how we go about gaining more knowledge about the reality (methodology) (2008:13).

Applying these principles to my own endeavours, I published a book on how *kalaallit* philosophy on equality between men and woman unfolds in present day gender relations (Jessen Williamson b 2011).

Poetry writing is an unexpected augmentation of my writing. Although I speak three languages, have obtained the highest educational achievement in the form of a doctoral degree, have published and have been invited to make numerous national and international presentations, I have never considered myself gifted. I use the term ‘giftedness’ in regard to poetry writing since I have very little control of the processes involved in producing poems. Academic writing entails a specific form of communication that involves rituals of thinking, processes that involve measured and conscious deliberation, deeply grounded in analysis, highlighting specific cultural insights. Poetry writing, on the other hand, comes like a strong wave, welling up from inside. I become the means through which a poem is expressed and I literally stop doing anything else until the emerging poetry is fully expressed in words and meaning. It is in that context that I claim that poetry writing materializes inner giftedness as it entails all the sets of underlying beliefs of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology that Wilson wants us to apply. Academic writing is contrived while poetry writing can be likened to a release of stored energy.

I wrote poetry in the 1970s when I was undergoing tremendous pressure becoming assimilated into Danish culture while desperately holding on to the little *kalaallit* identity afforded to me by the education system. Poetry back then came to me in heavy waves of darkness and I pushed it away since the content would be devastating for my wellbeing. I repressed it then, but forty years later it came back to me in truly generous and uplifting ways. I feel much indebted to this gift, particularly as it is wrapped in my *kalaallisut* language – my mother tongue, and also in the English language as the case is with the above poem titled Uumasuusivissuaq/The Great Garden. I have decided that the poem should be explained as a narrative contextualized in writing acceptable to academia.

*The Narrative of the Uumasuusivissuaq/ the Great Animal Farm.*

(1)The title of this poem came about from a discussion I had with Dr. David Natcher (<http://ilmi.usask.ca/people/david-natcher/index.php>). He is the Director of Indigenous Land and Resource Management at the University of Saskatchewan. During 2011 and 2012, we were in the midst of developing an application to establish a partnership on resource management encouraged by Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. We named the application ‘Angerlartoq’ – the home comer/ returner. The program was to compare the *kalaallit* (as Greenland Inuit call themselves) and Inuit (Nunavut) practices on resource management. We intended to highlight the sharp differences between scientific and Indigenous knowledge. It is well known that Inuit and scientific perceptions of the arctic environment and its wildlife are grounded in different knowledge systems, relationships and interactions (Turrell 2006; Sejersen 2004), and during one of our conversations Dr. Natcher and I addressed the differences in thinking on ownership and management of resources.

We knew that polar bears are tagged and/or tattooed by wildlife biologists in an effort to manage wildlife in Nunavut and elsewhere. When Inuit catch such animals, there is a genuine feeling of loss; the so-called ‘wildlife’ has been ‘manhandled.’ The feelings that Inuit have in finding ‘man-handled’ goods, I explained to Dr. Natcher, must be the same as the feeling of encroachment people experience when vegetable gardens are raided in the south. I imagine great disappointment when potatoes or carrots are dug up by people not known to the grower, and the thought of the produce being ‘manhandled’ in one’s own garden by a total stranger must leave one with the same feeling as Inuit have when they find ‘wildlife’ ‘manhandled.’ In my thinking Uumasuusivissuaq – the Great Animal Farm – frames our conversation.

The Arctic seas or massive land masses are not ‘wildernesses’ for the Inuit. They are the home land for the Inuit (Nuttall 1992). Some waters are extensive ‘production centres’ for many different kinds of sea mammals, sea birds, and fish. Inuit have been hunting in these areas for centuries and know the location of the ‘production centre’ and when to hunt. Since the Inuit have occupied the Arctic for thousands of years, Inuit experiences, observations, and indeed extensive knowledge can startle even the most respected scientists (Huntington 2011). The Inuit sense of various environments of creatures of the arctic I compare to what an agrarian person in the south knows. A good grower knows where best to grow vegetables, fruit trees, grass, and flowers, for example; when to sow the seeds and when to harvest. Inuit on the other hand know where and when to get walrus, seals, fish, and birds.

(2) Uumasuusivissuaq/ the Great Animal Farm exists only because of a creator – a female goddess. Inuit believe strongly in the ‘lady down under’ (Laugrand and Oosten 2010). She was an ordinary Inuk girl who grew up and had an affair with a dog (Stuckenberg 2007). Her father found out and in punishment and banned her to an island. In her attempt to gain her father’s forgiveness, she tried to cling to the railing of her father’s boat as he was rowing away, only to have her fingers chopped off. While sinking slowly, her fingers became the whales, the walrus, the seals, the birds, fish and any other being that Inuit need for their livelihood. She sank to the bottom of the sea and became the goddess of all living beings that can be seen in seas. She controls the animals and the sea birds, protecting them against human frailty and abuse. Among the Canadian Inuit, she is variously named Sedna, Nuliaajuk, and Takannaaluk. In Greenland she is known as Sassuma Arnaa – the Lady Down Under. She holds power so great that only the greatest, most sensitive and courageous shaman can reach her when she gets angry. Many oral stories exist about her and have nourished the Inuit imagination over centuries.

Today she is still greatly celebrated as can be seen throughout the Inuit art world in prints, paintings, sculpture, and poetry. In Canada she is represented sometimes with the tail of fish and, in recent years, a whale. Much rock music being produced in Greenland uses imagery of her; Aka Høgh the famous *kalaaleq* artist commemorated her in many of her paintings, sculptures and other creations (Lynge1998); while Christian Rosing made a stunning cast of her and decorated the old colonial harbour of Nuuk where many delight in Sassuma Arnaata mysterious powers and her relationship with the animals in her ordinance.

(3) The oceans of the world occupy a greater area than land masses (Williams 1988), and in my estimation her area of prowess is much greater than that the land-based Christian God seems to reign over.

(4) As a *kalaaleq* I was baptized, confirmed, and married in a Lutheran church and like many *kalaallit* enjoy the associated church traditions. Over the years many prayers are paid to the Christian God. When I was doing my doctoral studies focused on gender relations I realized that many *kalaallit* men made a point of avoiding church (Jessen Williamson 2011 b). I surmised that the prayers paid to the Christian God took away the gratitude that should have gone to the Lady Down Under. As Christian Inuit we have collectively done a disservice to our earthy (be it salty) provider. She is the one that created all the goods from the ocean that Inuit depend upon. I was guilty praying to a God that does not look after the wild life/animals that the Lady Down Under provides, and I remembered the poet who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace and how the author turned away from years of slavery trade that he enabled (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing\_Grace).

(5) If ever one has given birth to a child or witnessed a birth, one realizes how much body liquid and blood is involved; and the accompanying odour is overwhelming. This can be witnessed in hospitals where women give birth today. The cleanup of bodies and surroundings is extensive and the event is exhausting while at the same time exhilarating. Big whales and walruses are bigger than female human beings, and give birth to much greater beings in weight and size. I can only imagine the processes involved in cleaning up after birth. As far as I know, female walruses and whales give birth on their own and I imagine that the Lady Down Under would clean up the birth cradles.

(6) Some of the great whales get infested by small crustaceans, which stick to the upper layer skin of some whales. It must be really itchy at times. Likewise, I have witnessed caribou bothered by ticks, and while land mammals have access to rocks and sand, the great whales have nothing but liquid in the form of the ocean to rely on.

(7) As a child I enjoyed observing black murres (appat) coming up from the sea gasping desperately for air. I am certain that some would literally get exhausted and die diving too deep. When the birds come up, it is as if something pushed them up.

(8) *Anerneq* is breath in *kalaallisut* (Inuktitut dialect in Greenland) and is also spirit. I wrote in my 2011 publication that any physical being is composed of *anersaaq* and *tarneq*. Spirit in that understanding comes from the time of creation. It comes as an incipient energy given to each creation.

(9) Inuit talk about *Inua* as being the essence from creation (Fitzhugh and Kaplan 1982). It has its own energy. While Sassuma Arnaa is goddess of the sea, and the sea in itself has its own intelligence, she is the one that creates high seas when her animals are mistreated. This makes me wonder how the Lady Down Under is involved in creating tsunamis, hurricanes, and dreadful weather systems currently being experienced around the world. Should she be credited for Sandy that came with so much destruction to the Eastern United States during 2012? What was her involvement in the recent Japanese tsunami and the dreadful one that killed so many in Far Eastern countries? What would provoke her to do such tragedy? What would we as human beings need to do to appease her?

(10) As children we played on rocky outcrops during the storms and we were amazed by the white, frothy blasts as they literally exploded against the rocks of the west coast of Greenland. The strength of the blasts is something one never forgets (see Jessen Williamson 2011 page 39).

(11) I chose to use the Canadian Inuktitut word for ‘absolutely still water’ “orsuertoq.” In Greenland the word would have been ‘qatsungasoq.’ I find the Canadian Inuktitut descriptor much more poetic, and the term refers to oil/fat/blubber ‘orsoq’.

(12) Many travellers in the Arctic would have noticed that once the ocean is absolutely still it creates a calm, sleek mirror of the surroundings. Sometimes it is difficult to see what is land and what is sea. I know that moment when even a single caribou hair’s reflection can be seen on the sleek mirror of the ocean. Knowing the Inuit animalist approach, surely the essence of the mountain and the sky could adore themselves every now and then? Inuit across the Arctic adore the immense beauty their lands, and the state of the sky is a daily conversation to consider for hunting purposes. There is nothing like a promise seeing a good, calm sky.

(13) When fish, birds, crustaceans, seals, or whales die, their remains sink to the bottom of the sea. Every year thousands and thousands of tons of dead bodies sink. While most human beings enjoy burial ground next to churches, land mammals die and lie in the ground. Most of the beings of the oceans simply sink to the bottom of the sea. As human beings it is exceedingly difficult to imagine the incredible amount of decaying bodies in the sea. Imagine the great mammals weighing 30 tons sinking. Imagine, then, the burial grounds in the thousands.

Thinking along these lines, I recall, as a child attending Lutheran church services, I was greatly impressed by a Greenlandic song “Malissuit ataannani, iliviqarfiga” (Erinarsuutit, 1980) “My grave under the great waves...” The song was in commemoration of individuals lost at sea.

(14) Inuit, like many Indigenous populations around the world, see their relationship with the environment as a reciprocal relationship. The land, the sea, the sky and air are all sentient beings, and when you are generous yourself these sentient beings also become generous. As human beings we are merely one in millions of creations. Why would we as human beings in any way be favoured by a Goddess? The sea mammals, fish, and birds are in her domain, but why would Sassuma Arnaa want to give human beings any consideration? In my thinking, only generosity explains her actions.

(15) As mentioned earlier my mind-set has been greatly influenced by the Christian belief system, which is patriarchal. In our Christian prayer it was always “Thy Kingdom.” I am now realizing that in regard to Sasssuma Arnaa there is indeed a need to say “Thy Queendom.” As I was reading Ghosh (1996), she asked if it were not time for us to explore gods that are female. After all, in her mind, as Christians we have become cognizant how male god(s) have had devastating effects on female empowerment and have given very little to female emancipation.

(16) Here, I use the Canadian Inuktitut word for ‘forever’ the Lord’s Prayer ‘isuaqanngittumut.’ The *kalaallisut* version is ‘naassaanngitsumik.’ Again, I find the Canadian Inuktitut so much more poetic.

(17) I do not know why the supreme spirits are always depicted as beautiful and benign. Recently, I have witnessed idealized notions of the Indigenous relationship with the land. Many think that because we have a deep-seated respect for the land that our relationship is equilibrium. This could not be further from the truth. Being out on nuna, Inuit lands is hard work. Our thinking as human beings has to be aligned first for animals to give themselves up, which takes a fair amount of physical and mental exertion – let alone social. Inuit thinking is that physical beauty is one thing but the deepest beauty is in the mind, which must be intent on goodness to ensure good relationship with the animals. According to Bodenhorn (1990), Inuit women are much more attuned to animals than their husbands.

*Negotiating Praxis*

Freire’s (1970) work galvanized the academic discourse in social justice education. He writes:

Education…becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits (p58).

Indeed those of us in academia today, Indigenous or not, all received an education that resembles the banking concept of Freire. And it is in that regard that I argue earlier that processes of decolonization became a reality for both communities welcome the input of our non-Indigenous scholars as I see that it is their job to unravel the knowledge associated with indigenous populations around the world.

Freire (1970) is also the philosopher who promoted praxis based on liberated education. Indeed his thinking and reasoning have occupied my philosophizing since I came across his writing, and realized that material written on the Inuit is well informed by his ‘banking’ concept. Many of the concepts and imagination on Inuit are based on non-Inuit scholars’ filing and reorganization of old deposits, and certainly includes the assumptions and worldview of the scholars. The scholars’ claims on Inuit knowledge may not always be true to the way Inuit see things and according to Brant-Castellano: “Scientific research is dominated by positivist thinking that assumes only observable phenomena matter… [and] missed deeper significance” (p.103). She quoted Little Bear who claims that scholars “have done a fairly decent job of describing the customs themselves, but they have failed miserably in finding and interpreting the meanings behind the customs. The function of Aboriginal values and customs is to maintain the relationships that hold creation together” (p. 103)

Ghosh’s writing informed me later that much of the academic writing is based on perspectives that are predominantly Christian, male, and informed by the perspective of the upper classes. We may add that these are seen through a heterosexual lens, and little thought has been given to disabled individuals. Ghosh’s (1996) and Egbo’s (2009) writings together address the issues of processes involving deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge. Both claim that knowledge indeed is a social construction. I fully appreciate Wilson’s statement that as Indigenous scholars we “be freed from the need to constantly justify [Indigenous] research and knowledge systems from a dominant system perspectives” (2008 p: 12).

Admittedly such endeavours are not easy to process. We all need help from anyone interested in unfolding the rich knowledge of our Indigenous communities and materialize what Wilson wants us to do namely “be clearer in our articulation of exactly what our paradigm entails``(2008 p: 12). Indeed very little literature is to be found that speaks to how Indigenous people get to know. I agreed with Kawagley (1993) that Indigenous knowledge comes about as an interplay between the soul/spirit and the body; and I have shown some aspects of that in my book. To show the dynamic processes and the relational aspects of Inuit knowledge in form of text would be challenging in light of reductionist and static way of presenting knowledge in academic circles. Second, it is only recently that Indigenous scholars have been accepted in academia and have become cultural brokers for both the Indigenous and academic communities. Most of us are strongly influenced by the stringent assimilatory measures that we experienced while growing up in our various communities. The fact that many Indigenous scholars address the issues from our own cultural communities speaks to the strength and aspirations of our communities. I managed to produce a model that may respond to Freire’s liberation of education, and the deconstruction and reconstruction that Ghosh and Egbo suggest. I believe that my work on kalaalit gender relations (Jessen Williamson 2011 b) included ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology that Wilson thought we should produce and certainly beyond these notions. To me these appear to be from scholarly world and we need to figure out how to ground these in our respective indigenous communities.

The question then becomes if I indeed feel liberated, emancipated, and empowered? While I feel entrapped when writing academic papers due to the cultural expectations of having to use sources of information steeped in colonial attitude, I do feel liberated and free when writing poetry. While academic writing is labour intensive, eating up energy, resources, and effort, my poetry writing emerges from energy deep from creation that indeed lifts my spirit up. I feel nourished and my soul feels the dance consisting of words that come with no warning – urging me to get the notion in the two languages that best describe my being. I feel deep wonderment at what emerges. This wonderment goes on for years and pushes me through difficult times in wondrous ways.

As *kalaallit* we have a notion that a whole human being has to be respected. I addressed what that means in my book (2011), where I describe how we are physical beings are driven by the interplay between the name/soul entity of our human conscience and that of the spirit. I believe that the innate energy that comes from my spiritual entity is the very essence that allows me poetry writing. I have very little control over this creativity. This lack of control gives me the praxis that Freire recommends, and it has given me years of wonderment.

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