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Voicing the Arctic – Bring the Archives Back In!

During the past decades, the concept of representation has become dominant within cultural and post colonial studies. This also applies to academic work on the Arctic and Greenland. Again and again it is demonstrated how Danes have (mis)represented Greenlanders, picturing them as brute primitives and/or noble savages, confining them to the role of hunters, "protecting" them from the evils of modernity etc. All this is true, of course, but ironically this type of academic study maintains rather than deconstructs the colonial distribution of subject positions: The Danes are still playing the active part as agents of history, the Greenlanders left in the position as passive and subdued. Greenlandic sources draw quite a different picture than the above listed ones. This paper will return to archives in the very concrete, non metaphorical sense, arguing that to truly investigate the (post)colonial relation time has come to direct the interest towards Greenlandic sources. During colonial times (until 1953) Greenland was thoroughly regulated and controlled by the Danish administration. However, this did not leave the Greenlanders completely without political influence. Neither were they by definition without agency in conflicts with the – indisputably – powerful Danes. The paper will analyze the first private libel case raised by a Danish official (the former inspector of North Greenland) against two Greenlandic council members (members of the Greenlandic "landsråd") brought before the "mixed court" in Godhavn in 1926. Keywords: colonial relations, agency, translation, civil disobedience, "sly civility".