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## Setting the scene in Nuuk

*Introducing the cast of characters in Greenlandic foreign policy narratives*

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**Setting the scene in Nuuk:  
Introducing the cast of characters in Greenlandic foreign policy narratives**

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## 1. Greenland's postcolonial foreign relations: diversification of the constitutive dependency

Greenland has for decades worked towards enhanced independent agency in international politics as a way to escape the unilateral dependency on Denmark. The renewed global interest in the Arctic has given new impetus to a strategy of diversifying its dependency relations as a way to postcoloniality. As the Government of Greenland puts it in its foreign policy strategy; "It is important that the interest in the Arctic and Greenland is converted into concrete opportunities for the Greenlandic people and its development as a nation" (Naalakkersuisut, 2011:3). By referring to narratives of tradition and modernity, Greenland has used this increased interest in the Arctic to enhance relations with Inuit kinsmen, Nordic siblings, the UN, the USA and the EU while seeking to establish new bilateral relations with Asian powers. This chapter will put each of these relations in a historical perspective and investigate how Greenland's foreign policy is guided by the national self-image in combining symbolic elements of indigenous cultural traditions with envisioned future independence. The basic narratives of tradition and modernity, however, sometimes clash. Hence, the chapter introduces the core cast of characters in the most important narratives, which Greenland is telling about its place in the world through official documents, speeches and media statements, supplemented with secondary literature.<sup>1</sup> Empirically, the analysis, thus, gives priority to the collective narrative told by official Greenlandic representatives on the international level.

Theoretically, the analysis draws on the tradition<sup>ii</sup> of analysing international politics and foreign policy as driven by narratively structured discourses constructing nation state identities in relation to different Others. If there was no difference, one could not meaningfully talk about identity. On the one hand, any identity needs a radical Other to exist (Derrida 1988:52; Connolly 1991:64f; Campbell 1998: ix-x). In Greenland, Denmark has for centuries been this central Other, at once constituting and threatening to eradicate Greenlandic identity. The emergence of collective Inuit identity seems to have been provoked by the encounter with *qallunaat* [white people], and in the case of Greenland, Danes were the *qallunaat* who stayed to make a lasting impression (Sørensen 1994: 109). This contrast is still defining for Greenlandic identity, as noted by Sørensen when concluding on his fieldwork in the housing projects of Nuuk: "[G]reenlandicness and Danishness are mutually experienced and applied as mutually negating each other in this ethno-political universe." (1991:48) Denmark appears in Greenlandic identity discourse as those who first corrupted indigenous Greenlandic culture and identity (Gad 2005: 66ff; 2016:46): To be authentic, Greenland needs a population, which speaks Greenlandic, it needs hunters who provide for

themselves by providing the Greenlanders with *kalaalimerngit* [Greenlandic food] and selling sealskin to *qallunaat*. However, this basic narrative of decline of traditional Inuit culture coexist unhappily with the inclusion of a series of distinctly modern elements in Greenlandic everyday life and identity discourse: No one imagines a Greenland which does not include 100 HP outboard motors, the internet, Canadian Goose outdoor gear or democracy and 'Scandinavian level' welfare services (Gad 2005: ch 3.4). Hence, the narrative of decline of tradition has - each and every day - to be reconciled with a narrative of modernisation. In the combination of these two narratives, Denmark is casted as the one preventing the resurrection of Greenlandic identity in the form of an independent nation state (ibid.: 46f).

On the other hand, identity narratives seldom just relate the identity of the self to one other - most often a whole cast of characters is involved (Ricoeur 1988:248; Hansen 2006:40; Gad 2010:38, 418). Over the decades since the instigation of home rule in 1979, the Government of Greenland has increasingly engaged in foreign relations, seeking up fora and relations which would allow Greenland to participate either separately or as part of a Danish delegation (Petersen 2006). At times, Greenland seemed to pursue a rather indiscriminate approach. Initially, the main objective was to gain entrance - and thereby recognition - rather than any particular substantial interest (cf. Nielsen 2001:15). Gradually, a more considered and prioritised approach developed.<sup>iii</sup> In these efforts, "Greenland has always been hedging its bets in relation to the international society and world society by playing both the national horse and the affiliation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples of the world." (Petersen 2006:17). Hence, Greenlandic identity narratives have involved an ever wider cast of characters; some primarily linked to tradition, others to modernisation; some casted in positive terms, some in negative terms.

## **2. ICC, UN and Nunavut: Partners in Tradition - symbolism and ambiguous practices**

One relation taken up well before home rule is the wider pan-Inuit identity. This other - or perhaps rather; secondary self - is linked to one of the central discursive elements of Greenlandic identity, i.a. the notion that traditional culture is defining. In popular discourse, Inuit in Canada, Alaska and Chukotka are often mentioned as kinsmen, connoting not just linguistic and cultural ties but also blood ties (Sørensen 1994:125; cf. Dorais 1996:30; Kleivan 1999b:103). Inuit identity, hence, is related to an aboriginal Greenlandic identity (Sejerssen 1999:131), which may - at the extremes - be narrated as a past relict hindering modernisation (Gad 2005: ch. 2.3.3.) or, conversely, as a golden

past which Greenlandic nationalism aims to resurrect (ibid.: ch. 2.3.6-7). This schism was explicit between the succeeding versions of the *Greenland Home Rule policy in the area of Indigenous People* drafted by the Subcommittee on Foreign and Security Policy of the unilateral Greenlandic Commission whose work led to the revised 2009 self-government arrangement (Arbejdsgruppen 2000; 2001; 2002): Those who would like Greenlanders to identify with a past Inuit community use the categories 'indigenous' and 'Inuit' as positive references, while those who would like Greenlanders to see themselves as 'regular, modern people' distance themselves from the 'indigenous people' identity (cf. Christiansen 2000:67f). Inuit and indigenous identification was important for some of the leading figures of the *Siumut* party (est. 1977) as they initiated Greenlandic home rule, and it was part and parcel of the youth rebellion which formed the radical *Inuit Ataqatigiit* party (est. 1978). The status of the pan-Inuit identity in Greenland today might best be paralleled to the status of Nordic identity in Scandinavia (Dorais 1996:30f; cf. Hansen 2002:55, 57): A secondary 'we' that attracts - in some individuals - positive emotions as it symbolises a romantic dream of a pure version of all the positive aspects of our presence freed of the corrupting influence from outside, combined with a certain strategic use, as it grants access to specific rights at a collective level such as whaling (Jacobsen, 2015: 7-9) and resources at an individual level such as jobs and tickets abroad (Søbye 2013).

Greenlanders play an active part in the global movement of indigenous peoples concentrating on the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous People (EMRIP). These forums are important arenas for colonised peoples seeking to challenge both the individual states and the very system of sovereign states by appropriating and 'stretching' the language and tools of the self-same states (Lindroth, 2011). Specifically, the Government of Greenland is represented as part of the Danish delegation in the UNPFII and EMRIP. Here, Greenland enjoys a special position well exemplified by former Premier Kuupik Kleist's speech shortly after the introduction of self-government. He described Greenland's new status as a "de facto implementation of the declaration of indigenous peoples' rights" (Naalakkersuisut 2010: 22; cf. Jacobsen, 2015:6). Moreover, he envisioned that "the experiences of Greenland's process can serve as inspiration for others of the world's indigenous peoples in their struggle for greater autonomy and in their development as a people" (ibid.: 7).

At the same time, Greenlanders are also present at the UNPFII and EMRIP via the Inuit Circumpolar Council<sup>iv</sup> (ICC), which is part of the caucus of indigenous NGOs. The ICC is a transnational organisation, spanning four states, involving people in Canada, Alaska, Chukotka, and

Greenland who identify as Inuit. This central organisational vessel of pan-Inuit identity - while remaining intellectually in opposition to the *qallunaat* states who colonised Inuit - at occasions articulate its identity in a much more convoluted way, which resists any clear cut distinction between state and indigenous identity. Challenging the indivisible sovereignties over the Arctic claimed by the Arctic states, the ICC in 2009 adopted a 'Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic' which insisted that "The inextricable linkages between issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic and Inuit self-determination and other rights require states to accept the presence and role of Inuit as partners in the conduct of international relations in the Arctic." The ICC based their challenge, i.a., on the observation that "Sovereignty is a contested concept, however, and does not have a fixed meaning".<sup>v</sup>

When including in the analysis not just the text but also the murky practices behind the declaration, its claim appears, however, to be based as much in strategic thinking as in an essentially different life-world. Probably the most spectacular example of the involvement of the Danish state with the ICC was when H.R.H Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark was named the official patron of its 2010 General Assembly taking place in Nuuk. Organisationally, the ICC consists of four 'member parties', each representing Inuit in one of the four states, and each organised according to the laws of these states. In the case of Greenland, membership counts a range of civil society organisations. However, the Charter of the ICC was also acceded by *Inatsisartut*, the Parliament of Greenland established by law by the Danish Parliament as part of the Greenland home rule arrangement. As home rule - and later self-government - is territorially rather than ethnically defined, a handful of the members of the Greenlandic delegation to international ICC meetings are appointed by parliament, including representatives of the moderate *Atassut* (est. 1978) and *Demokraatit* (est. 2002) parties, which have been reluctant to define their political projects in ethnic terms. Moreover, the annual budget of *Inatsisartut* pays a substantial part of the annual expenses of the Greenlandic body of ICC. Since 2014, the annual economic support to ICC via the Finance Act has, however, been gradually reduced from 4.39 mio DKK in 2014 to 3.0 mio DKK in 2016 (Naalakkersuisut, 2016:244), leaving the impression that the *Siumut* coalition in this instance downgrades the affiliation with ICC in favour of more modern and state-like activities (cf. Gerhardt, 2011; Strandsbjerg 2014; Jacobsen, 2015). This impression is supported by the very few times ICC is mentioned in the annual foreign policy reports since 2009, where it only appears in connection with the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group and the work at the UN; especially regarding the UN's World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014.

Inuit identity is most often articulated in international forums such as the above mentioned, but it is also the foundation for bilateral relations both focusing on traditional minority rights and modern industrial development. Across the Davis Strait, Canada established Nunavut as a separate territory in 1999 following a Land Claims Agreement signed with Inuit representatives in 1993. The Greenland Home Rule soon after established good formal relations to its new neighbour by signing a Memorandum of Intent with the purpose of generating close cooperation on a list of shared key interests (Okalik & Motzfeldt, 2000) without involvement from Ottawa and Copenhagen (Krarup, 2000). The shared colonial past and common goal of increased autonomy have since then united Greenland and Nunavut resulting in joint statements and agreements regarding both culturally important preservation and development of new opportunities. In line with concerns for tradition, the two governments have concluded agreements regarding strengthening of their respective Inuit languages (Naalakkersuisut, 2015: 73-74) and joint management and research of the polar bear (ibid.:64). In continuation hereof, Greenland and Nunavut have at several occasions issued common statements emphasising dissatisfaction with the EU's ban on seal product import (Governments of Greenland and Nunavut 2014; Naalakkersuisut.gl, 2015a). In line with the modernisation narrative, a direct flight connection between Greenland and Nunavut has been established, folded, and re-established (Naalakkersuisut, 2015:19) and mining experiences have been exchanged. Most recently, a delegation of Greenlandic politicians went to Nunavut, Ottawa and Saskatchewan to learn about their experiences with uranium mining (Naalakkersuisut.gl, 2015b). In climate politics, both perspectives on tradition and development combines in a common quest for indigenous peoples' right to development, as stated by the two governments and ICC at COP21 in Paris (Naalakkersuisut et al., 2015).<sup>vi</sup> Altogether, Nunavut and Greenland are not only partners in tradition but also in transition, and as in the Indigenous world movement, Greenland enjoys presenting itself as the more developed version of indigeneity also in relation to Canadian kinsmen (cf. Søbbye 2013).

### **3. Norden, USA and the EU: Allies in Modernity - more or less threatening**

Like the Inuit, Nordic identity plays a positive role in Greenlandic identity narratives. Often it is rhetorically mobilised as a lesser, more positive other compared to either aggressive Danish modernity or a globalised, American capitalism (Lyng 1999:43). Hence, Norden's international image as an homogenous, peaceful, successful and benevolent alternative to standard Western

capitalism (Katzenstein, 1996; Lawler, 1997; Archer, 2000: 109; Campbell et al., 2006; Kuisma, 2007) is reflected in Greenland. Norden allows modernity to appear in more embracing, less dominating guises than when brought by the Danish other alone. As the Inuit, Norden is often presented within a family metaphoric. However, it is not always clear that the members of the family enjoy equal status. This is mirrored in, i.a., the fact that representatives in Nordic fora from Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the Sami are not offered interpreting services at official meetings, meaning that they have to use one of the so-called 'state bearing languages': Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish (cf. Jacobsen, 2015: 7). The discontent with this differential treatment has been the starting point for establishing an alliance between Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands in 2012 that gives the three autonomous areas the authority to speak on behalf of each other (ibid.). Naalakkersuisut's foreign policy report of 2013 described this alliance as "a pivotal development of Greenland's foreign relations" (Naalakkersuisut 2013: 12, cf.: Jacobsen, 2015:7). Related, an identity as 'West-Nordic' - embodied by a series of smaller fora, containing only Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Iceland - is articulated once in a while. Most often, common geography, common economic structure (fisheries and sheep farming) forms the basis of the narratives. But the shared history as Danish colonies at times seems to be a significant driver behind both the positive identification between the three countries,<sup>vii</sup> but also the basis for arguing for Greenlandic and Faroese equality with the sovereign states in the Nordic fora.<sup>viii</sup>

In Greenland as elsewhere, Norden is often represented as a culturally and politically less brutal contrast to yet another other: the USA (Lyng 1999:43; Qvist 2016; cf. Hansen 2002:57; Adler-Nissen & Gad 2013b). However, there is no agreement on what the role of the USA is in relation to Greenland. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the parliamentary debates of *Inatsisartut* to a large extent circled around emergency planning for a possible war. In one of these debates, *Atassut* chair Daniel Skifte brought his general point home by alerting to the fact that when, during WWII, the supply ships stopped coming from Denmark, the Americans stepped in as both providers and protectors. However, competing representations of the USA - and the Thule Air Base (est. 1951) in particular - involve casting as the neighbourhood bully, as a threat (qua target for bombing in the case of war), and an everyday nuisance (since the base limits the locals' movement) (Lyng 2002; Gad forthcoming). Finally, the very existence of the base - sanctioned by Danish authorities without consulting Greenlanders (cf. above) - has been a symbol for the lack of recognition of Greenland as an actor in international politics.



Jørgen Taagholt concluded an article detailing the evolution and function of the Thule Air Base by encouraging "[t]he Thule hunters [to] declare with pride that they have contributed to securing world peace [by being removed from the base area, as] the balance of terror worked, and the base was an important element in this. So Greenland and the Thule hunters have suffered privations, which have benefitted mankind. A Third World War was avoided." (2002:101-2) Such a narrative has absolutely no resonance in Greenlandic identity politics which is based on the understanding that We, the Inuit, are peaceful; war and military affairs are not our affairs; at most it is a problem imposed upon us from outside. Notable in this regard has been the near-total absence of Russia in Greenlandic foreign policy narratives (also noted by Nielsen 2001:21), spare the routine exchange of fishing quotas in the North East Atlantic. When Greenlandic politicians make (rare) demands for military investments in Greenland, arguments mostly relate to services provided for civil purposes (fisheries control, search and rescue, oil spill response, etc.) (cf. Hammond, 2016).

However, during the late 90ies in the context of a planned upgrade of the Thule radar, the home rule government recurrently demanded that they be allowed to approach Washington directly without the detour via Copenhagen: A common iteration claimed that 'If only we could talk directly to the Americans, they would recognise our legitimate claims, but the Danes will not let us'. Since 2002, Greenlandic prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs have participated in a series of meetings with the USA, culminating in the trilateral 2004 Igaliko agreement and the subsequent instigation of a 'Joint Committee' mandated to promote cooperation between the USA and Greenland.<sup>ix</sup> So, the USA has increasingly played its part as recognisers of independent Greenlandic subjectivity. However, not much practical cooperation has come out of the Joint Committee. Rather, the main gain for Greenland from the negotiations has come in relation to Denmark as a result of postcolonial politics of embarrassment: The series of Thule incidents - including most spectacularly the 1953 relocation of the Inughuit and the crash of an air plane armed with Hydrogen bombs in 1968 - serve as a constant reminder of Denmark not always playing the benevolent, protective role it claims. The mere threat of public shaming for colonial wrongs serves as a bargaining chip for Greenland; but in relation to Denmark rather than to the USA (Kristensen 2004). So apart from the Igaliku agreement - involving a measure of formal recognition from the USA - the substantial results of this strategy takes from Denmark and gives to Greenland: First, a - rare - official apology was extracted from the Danish government for the forceful relocation of the Inughuit. Second, a separate airport was built at Qaanaaq in 2001, partly paid for by the Danish state as a remedy for the forced removal of the Inughuit from Thule. They are now spared the helicopter tour to the USA

base when going to other parts of Greenland or Denmark - provided that they can pay for a ticket in the first place.<sup>x</sup>

Finally, the consecution of Thule affairs also lay behind, the Danish state formally delegating the “full powers to the Government of Greenland to negotiate and conclude agreements under international law on behalf of the Kingdom of Denmark where such agreements relate solely to matters for which internal powers have been transferred to the Greenland Authorities” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005).<sup>xi</sup> ❧❧❧

Alongside the US in the line-up of 'other others', the European Union has long taken up a special role in Greenlandic identity discourse. First, the casting of the EU - or, originally: the EEC - has, like the USA, been a point of contention in Greenlandic politics. Moreover, like the USA's entry on the scene, Danish entry into the EU in 1973 has arguably been decisive for bringing Greenlandic aspirations a step towards self-government at a certain stage: Contrary to the Faroes, who enjoyed home rule since 1948 and, hence, had a separate referendum, Greenland participated in the Danish referendum as any other provincial county. Under that constitutional status, the Greenlandic majority against membership did not matter. The experience of being included in the EEC against its will provided the impetus for finally demanding home rule (Gad 2016; Skydsbjerg 1999). This new status, modelled on the Faroese precedence, made retraction possible - and Greenland has since 1985 been able to praise itself with being the only 'country' to ever leave the EU.

Moreover, the legal arrangement vis-à-vis the EU arrived upon quite early after the introduction of home rule established an independent subjectivity for Greenland. Contrary to the USA, in relation to whom Greenland only gained a direct voice after 2002, the EU has been conducive to Greenlandic agency for a longer period. Greenland utilises this platform for agency established long ago and has gradually expanded to further its position in the new opportunities by improved prospects for being able to harvest resources in the Arctic (cf. Gad et al. 2011; Gad 2016). The Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union (OCTA)<sup>xii</sup> is central to the positioning of Greenland as an individual international actor, taking up a leading role among the OCTA's members. Through this association, a number of potential allies are constructed, while both young Greenlandic diplomats and ministers use the forum as a place to learn the trade of international relations in practice with no superiors posing as superiors. Consequently, OCTA is revered as a nice place for Greenland to practice for sovereign equality (Gad 2016).

#### 4. New Others from the East

During the first decades of the new millennium, new others from the East have been showing up on the radar. In the beginning, the interest focused on China. In a parallel oscillation to the image of the USA, Greenlandic foreign policy narratives featured this new other in diametrically opposing roles. In the late 90ies, the Chinese were casted as the saviors of the Greenlandic national trade, sealing, as a home rule sponsored business development project (PUISI A/S) promised to turn surplus seal meat into cash by selling it as sausages in China. A few years later, Greenland in 2001 played a football match against Tibet as a way of showing sympathy and identification with another colonised people denied access to official FIFA tournaments. This narrative positioned China as an evil oppressor and the match triggered Chinese threats to the Greenlandic shrimp exports and cautious Home Rule Government efforts to defuse the problems (Mortensen, 2007; Nybrandt & Mikkelsen, 2016). However, after the introduction of self-government in 2009, the negative characterisation of the Chinese has faded and instead the role as economic saviours resurfaced - this time qua potential investments in minerals extraction in Greenland. But also officials from Japan and South Korea have become frequent guests in Greenland, enhancing the perception that the connections to the Far East are developing as still more viable trading alternatives to Europe, North America and the Nordic Countries. Particularly, hopes were high that Asian investments in mining would make full Greenlandic independence possible.

At the introduction of self-government on 21 June 2009, representatives from China, Japan and South Korea stood out as some of the more unusual official guests in Nuuk (Naalakkersuisut, 2010:33). Their presence was a sign of the renewed global interest in the Arctic, which, sparked by climate changes and their consequences, had become “a magnet for different countries’ spheres of interest” (Naalakkersuisut, 2009:viii). In the subsequent years, Greenland’s rare earth elements became the centre for attention from China, the EU and later South Korea, who, for some time, competed to win Greenland’s favour. It all accelerated in 2011, when then Minister for Industry and Labour, Ove Karl Berthelsen, paid an official visit to China where he met with number two in the hierarchy of China’s government, Li Keqiang, who - as laid out by Naalakkersuisut at home - showed a significant interest in Greenland’s mineral potential (Naalakkersuisut, 2012:51). China’s Minister for Land and Resources, Xu Shaoshi, reciprocated the visit in April 2012 (ibid.:53) and in response to these events, then EU Commissioner for Industry, Antonio Tajani, entered the fray and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on future mining with Greenland

(Naalakkersuisut, 2013:15). The simultaneous interest from two of the world's greatest powers only enhanced Greenland's bargaining position (cf. Kleist in Hansen, 2012a) and when South Korea's president Lee Myung-Bak shortly after visited Greenland and signed a MoU regarding future mining cooperation (Naalakkersuisut, 2014:50), it was, as Premier Kleist underlined, "yet another prove of Greenland's enhanced foreign policy profile" (Hansen, 2012b).

Since the football match in 2001, relations to the three big Asian powers had only been described in terms of economic importance. And when EU's interest in Greenland's mining potential did not materialise due to lack of finance, cultural understanding and ethnicity became part of the explanation, posing Asians as closer to Greenlanders. In an interview with the Danish newspaper *Weekendavisen*, Premier Kleist described Westerners' attitude as a master mentality with lack of respect for Greenlandic culture: In contrast, "East Asian businessmen apparently do make themselves more acquainted with the state of affairs than Western investors do, who apparently do not care where they are" (quoted in Andersen, 2013). He also pointed out another, for him, natural community with the Asian partners: "Genetically, we Greenlanders are also, after all, more in family with people from the East" (ibid.). The idea that Inuit's ancestors' historic migration patterns from Asia to the Arctic remains relevant, is not unique: HRH princess Alexandra, the first wife of HRH prince Joachim, has a Chinese father. When she donned a traditional Greenlandic women's costume during an official visit, the reaction on the streets was enthusiastic; 'she looks just like us!'. Nevertheless, the Premier's weaving of genetics into the main story line of Greenland's general foreign policy communication about the new Others from the East was new. Indeed, relations with Asia is almost exclusively described in economic terms, hence indirectly referring to the prospective discursive repertoire focusing on modernisation and enhanced self-government.

However, what in the beginning looked like a race between two of the world's most powerful regions, quickly became an exclusively Asian affair: The EU keep buying fishing quota and contributes to the 'sustainable development of the education sector' via a partnership agreement - but European investment in mining never materialized. Relations in the Arctic Council evolved in a parallel way: China, Japan and South Korea were granted permanent observer status in 2013, while the EU's application was turned down by the Canadians explicitly as a way to protest EU's ban on import of seal products (Naalakkersuisut, 2013:1). Though the ban included a so-called 'Inuit exception' (EU, 2009), it *de facto* killed Greenland's seal product export (Sommer, 2012). In response to this development, Greenland has again looked towards the Far East, which is the

“strongest fur market in the world” (Naalakkersuisut, 2014:26). While the interest in Greenland’s mining potential has cooled down lately due to, i.a., the lower global market prices, more efforts have instead been invested in promoting Greenland’s seal fur, seafood and tourist destinations to the three strong Asian economies. Most recently as part of an official visit by Premier Kim Kielsen to Japan, which is currently Greenland’s most important seafood export market outside the EU (Naalakkersuisut, 2015:30-31). In this perspective – and with the need for investments in anticipated future mining projects in mind – Greenlandic politicians increasingly present the relations to the Far East as crucial to Greenland’s economic development and as a central way of diversifying dependency to the outside world.

Thus, for the past decade, the retrospective identification with the Tibetans as a colonised people has given way to economic considerations. Nevertheless, every now and then single-minded focus on economic visions for the future is challenged. Sara Olsvig, then opposition leader, suggested that Greenland should send an official invitation to Dalai Lama to make clear that Greenland is in favour of human rights (EM2015/14, 05:45:12-05:45:29). Vittus Qujaukitsoq, Minister of Foreign Affairs, replied that “It would be interesting if Dalai Lama from Tibet was invited to Greenland. I think that you in *Inatsisartut* must assess what is most important: trade, climate or human rights. What do you find most important?” (ibid., 05:47:57-05:48:22). Qujaukitsoq’s smile at that moment and the fact that Dalai Lama has still not been invited indicate that Greenland’s international relations with the three Asian powers – China in particular – will continue focusing on business (as usual) in the years to come. Such prediction finds support in the fact that Qujaukitsoq cancelled a planned trip to Taiwan at the request of China (Karner & Damkjær, 2017)

## 5. Conclusion: New opportunities brought by the 'Arctic Bonanza' discourse

Greenlandic identity narratives have involved an ever wider cast of characters; some primarily linked to tradition, others to modernisation; some casted in positive terms, some in negative terms.<sup>xiii</sup> The very insistence on diversifying dependency relations from one relation (Copenhagen) to a variety of relations may be counted as one way of moving Greenlandic identity into a postcolonial mode, even if this version of postcolonialism does not (yet) involve full, formal sovereignty. One permanent is the often articulated wish for more independent control with external relations. Considering Asia, Naalakkersuisut claimed that Greenland getting in the driver's seat will “reduce any possible signal confusion considerably” (Naalakkersuisut, 2014:26). This endeavour has a clear precursor in the way in which the weight slowly being shifted from Copenhagen to Nuuk in the triangular relation between Greenland, Denmark and the USA: In 2013, Greenland got its own representation at the Danish embassy in Washington D.C. - just like the one established in Brussels in 1992. Following the same script, the establishment of a permanent representation in Beijing is often mentioned as the obvious next step (Naalakkersuisut, 2014:26). Like the USA and the EU, Asian countries are casted to play central roles as recognisers of independent Greenlandic subjectivity, crucial for the process towards a more autonomous Greenland. In this regard, it might be counted as significant, that the Greenlandic representation in Ottawa established in 1998 was closed down already in 2002. In practice, Greenlandic politicians value global investments over cultural connections (cf. Strandsbjerg 2014).

However, Greenlandic foreign policy narratives exhibit a distinct affection when it comes to multilateral fora in which their representatives may pose in virtual sovereign equality: As mentioned above, Greenland takes pride of being first among equals in the Association of Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTA) in Brussels. In West Norden, Greenland gets to sit at the same table as sovereign Iceland - without Denmark. In the Arctic Council to the contrary, the Government of Greenland is represented via the Kingdom of Denmark's delegation - a controversial arrangement in Greenland. Similar Greenlandic dissatisfaction has been articulated in relation to the way Denmark represents distinct Greenlandic interests in the World Trade Organization and in the International Whaling Commission (Jacobsen, 2015). However, the growing global attention and the fact that Denmark's presence in the Arctic is *only* legitimised by Greenland being a part of the Danish Realm do make the Arctic Council a strategically well-chosen forum for articulating the wish for a more autonomous foreign policy.

In Arctic Council, Greenlanders may be part of the ICC's delegation which enjoys the unique status of permanent participant qua indigenous people. Moreover, then Premier Lars Emil Johansen did indeed sign the Ottawa declaration forming the Arctic Council in 1996 - but he did so representing Denmark by delegation. Greenland cannot speak in its own right but only as a representative for Denmark, and only when granted the right to do so by Denmark. In May 2013, Greenland's lower hierarchical status within this constellation was the centre for then Premier Aleqa Hammond's boycott of the ministerial meeting in Kiruna, Sweden: If she could not have a Greenlandic flag at her own table in the first row, she preferred not to be part of the meeting (Josefsen, 2015). The Greenlandic opposition met Hammond's tactics with harsh critique, but the opposition, however, also shared the opinion that both self-governing territories and indigenous peoples should have a greater independent voice in the Arctic Council (Sørensen, 2016). So in relation to the Arctic Council, Greenland seems to be hedging its bets even further by playing not just the national and the indigenous horse (cf. Petersen 2006:17) - participating both through the Danish delegation and the ICC - but also fielding territorial and subregional horses: Greenland argues for including autonomous territories (like Greenland, Nunavut and Alaska) formally in the council's work. And to complicate matters further, the West Nordic Council - combining sovereign Iceland with autonomous Greenland and Faroes - is reportedly preparing an application for observer status in the Arctic Council (Veirum, 2016). In this way, Greenland's representatives oscillate between emphasising either tradition or modernity, depending on whether it is a claim to Inuit identity or is state-centred geopolitics, which may open a door or improve Greenland's room for manoeuvre (cf. Jacobsen, 2015).

Greenland has utilised its unique position as a very small population in command of a very large island on its way to break free from colonial subjugation, to gradually be evermore at the helm of its own foreign affairs on the verge of an Arctic bonanza. The initial tactics pursuing indiscriminate access and visibility has gradually been surpassed by a new tactics prioritizing fora and relations which specifically serve the purpose of diversifying dependence upon several sources of external resources. The different narratives used in this regard have both made the acquisition of full formal Greenlandic sovereignty more plausible and meanwhile it has widened the room to manoeuvre within imperial Danish sovereignty. Notably, Greenland has made this achievement by refraining from a general confrontation (rhetorical or otherwise) with its imperial metropole, Denmark. Rather, confrontations with the colonial overlords have been carefully calculated and occasionally staged to achieve maximum concessions from other Others like the USA and the EU. These

calculations and stagings have, of course, relied on a particular constellation of past and future: the undeniable history of colonial subjugation combined with the enticing projection of an Arctic bonanza ahead. Greenland, hence, may credibly present itself as both a victim of past Danish colonisation and an important, more individual, player in an anticipated prosperous future Arctic in ways, which are not open to other micro-polities. However, as a general strategy for foreign relations even this new, more considered and prioritized tactics is so far an investment that has yet to produce returns beyond brand recognition.

Notably, even if squarely placed in the middle of the Arctic, Greenland's foreign policy narratives and initiatives hardly sum up to a fully-fledged 'Arctic policy'. However, elements in the initial visibility tactics and the new tactics of diversifying dependence may come to form the core of a third generation of narratives and initiatives aiming at strategically shaping the Arctic region as a preferred stage to act on for Greenland on its way to independence: First, since the establishment of the Arctic Council, a priority for Greenland has been to expand focus from environmental protection to allow for people actually living in the Arctic. In the AC, this ambition has condensed under the headline 'sustainable development', allowing both care for indigenous culture and - particularly significant in Greenlandic politics - the exploitation of non-renewable resources (Gad et al. 2016). Second, the Greenlandic pragmatism in relation to 'what horse to ride' - the indigenous, the autonomous, the sovereign - could coalesce into a principled promotion of the Arctic as a unique laboratory for creative governance structures: The real test for this ideal would, of course, be whether Greenland will still advocate the participation of indigenous peoples and autonomous territories when it flies its own flag in the front of the UN building in New York as a sovereign state.



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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The analysis presented here is updated and developed on the basis of thoughts presented in Gad (2005; 2016) and Jacobsen (2015). Most of the quotes referred to in this chapter are originally in Danish or Greenlandic. The authors are responsible for the translation from the Danish to the English.

<sup>ii</sup> For more detailed presentations of (varieties of) the analytical strategy employed and its theoretical bases, cf. Jacobsen 2015; Gad 2005; 2010; 2016.

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<sup>iii</sup> I.a., via the introduction of cost/benefit analyses in the annual Foreign Policy Reports presented by the Government of Greenland to the Parliament. The IA led government took yet another step in this direction when it presented a Foreign Policy *Strategy* (Naalakkersuisut 2011) .

<sup>iv</sup> Originally *Inuit Circumpolar Conference*, but re-named to signal its more permanent structure.

<sup>v</sup> Available at [http://inuit.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/File/declarations/ICC\\_Sovereignty\\_Declaration\\_2009\\_poster.pdf](http://inuit.org/fileadmin/user_upload/File/declarations/ICC_Sovereignty_Declaration_2009_poster.pdf) (accessed 13 March 2014); cf. Shadian (2010).

<sup>vi</sup> For more on the paradoxes of Greenlandic self-representation in relation to climate change, cf. Bjørst 2012.

<sup>vii</sup> The West-Nordic identity narratives (Thorleifsen, 2003) and organizations (Fjeldsbø, 2015) sometimes morphs Eastwards to include all of Coastal Norway (which enjoys a comparable economical relation to the North Atlantic fisheries and endures comparable geographical challenges) or just Finnmarken (which has a comparable history of colonial monopoly trade).

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. the press release from West Nordic Council following a joint meeting of the presidencies of West Nordic Council and Nordic Council; "Vestnordiske lande, ikke områder", posted 27 October 2009, available at <http://www.norden.org/sv/aktuellt/nyheter/vestnordiske-lande-ikke-omraader> (accessed 13 March 2014).

<sup>ix</sup> Cf. the presentation on the website of the embassy of the USA to Denmark; <http://denmark.usembassy.gov/gl/jc.html> (accessed 13 March 2014).

<sup>x</sup> Seen from the local perspective of the inhabitants in Qaanaaq, the Home Rule/Danish sponsored disengagement from the USAF base is a much more ambiguous affair (cf. Gad forthcoming).

<sup>xi</sup> Except "Agreements affecting defence and security matters"; "Agreements which shall also apply to Denmark"; and "Agreements to be negotiated within an international organisation of which the Kingdom of Denmark is a member."

<sup>xii</sup> For a full list of OCTA members see: <http://www.octassociation.org/octa-presentation>

<sup>xiii</sup> A recent opinion poll (A4 2013) reported 31 % of respondents in Greenland to prefer Canada (probably imagined primarily as the home of fellow Inuit) as the "closest *future* ally" (italics inserted) of Greenland, hence bypassing Denmark (22 %) and all other listed alternatives (the US, Norway, China and 'Others' each preferred by less than 10 %); 25 % did not know how to answer. However, a different question in the same poll revealed that 84 % approved of "Greenland's participation in the Community of the Realm with Denmark and the Faroes" (for the time being, one supposes). These numbers are compatible on the background of earlier polls consistently indicating that 80-90 % favors independence - however, with 80-90 % adding that independence should not reduce the level of welfare (Skydsbjerg 2002).