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Greenland's Reconciliation Commission and the Production of National Narratives

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Abstract

Greenland is a former colony of Denmark and today remains part of the Danish Realm. The Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission, which began working in 2014, represents an effort by Greenland to come to terms with its recent history while its government simultaneously pursues the economic growth needed for greater independence from Denmark. The existence of this commission and the debate that has ensued about its approach and composition reflect multiple visions of the world – sometimes competing, sometimes overlapping – and Greenland’s place in it. Notably, the commission has proceeded without Denmark’s participation, suggesting a distinctive approach to the reconciliation process. Drawing on interviews conducted in Greenland and Denmark and primary source documents, this research project presents a case study of the commission and an analysis of the national identity narratives that are evoked in stories told about the reconciliation commission. The four themes that emerged – Greenland as victim; Greenland as historical project; Greenland as unity-in-progress; Greenland as sovereign actor – are illuminating for understanding the national identity building efforts as part of Greenland's path forward.

Key words: Greenland; reconciliation commission; post-colonial studies; identity; narrative

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1. Introduction

When the prime ministers of Greenland and Denmark met in Nuuk on 21 June 2009, there was a powerful sense of hope for the future. The Self Government Act, which would grant Greenland greater autonomy and authority over its affairs, had been negotiated for several years and would now take effect. The government would from then on be known officially as Naalakkersuisut, in place of the Danish *Landsstyre*. After several hundred years under Danish authority as a colony and then territory within the Danish Realm, what would this new transition mean for Greenland? As then-Prime Minister Kuupik Kleist remarked, “We cherish a hope and a wish that our future will see light and bear fruit. The introduction of Self Governance opens up for new opportunities; the gateway through which we must pass is now wide open.”¹

The official decolonization of various European empires was at its height in the early to mid-twentieth century, but many small territories and nations continue to have legal relationships with the former metropole; several of these comprise the Overseas Counties and Territories of the European Union, of which Greenland is one. In recent decades, Greenland has experienced a political movement to gain independence from the former colonizer and the embrace of traditional Inuit heritage, with the 2009 act only the most recent development in a series of changes. In the midst of this state of affairs, Greenland’s way of life and self-image have come up for debate. As Ulrik Pram Gad, a political scientist with a speciality in Greenlandic affairs, puts it, “Greenland’s present identity is transitional – Greenland sees itself on the way from colonial dependency to future independence.”²

Greenland presents a particularly interesting case at the moment because its international profile has grown dramatically in recent years. Global players are looking to the north as the nexus of several strategic geo-political and economic issues: climate change, oil and mineral resources, and shipping routes through the Arctic. Controversy remains over who owns what portion of the Arctic seas, and Greenland has been courted

¹ Kuupik Kleist, “Speech on the inauguration of Greenland Selfgovernment 21st of June 2009 in the morning,” accessed 14 May 2016. Available at <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Engelske-tekster/Taler/Kuupik%20Kleist%20tale.pdf>

² Ulrik Pram Gad, “Greenland projecting sovereignty – Denmark protecting sovereignty away,” in *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games: the EU overseas countries and territories*, eds. Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ulrik Pram Gad, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 219.

by EU politicians who see great value in investing in closer ties to Greenland today as a means of securing a strong position in the Arctic in the future. Meanwhile, the government of Greenland, representing the population of 56,000 people who call the island home, is relying on projected economic growth in order to boost the country's chances to gain full independence. Oil and mining development plans were seen as a boon that could fuel future economic self-sufficiency, but the outlook for how quickly anticipated returns might arrive has been lowered after a slow start to the industry, not helped by the global drop in oil prices.³

In this context, understanding how Greenland as a national community is in the making for its residents is an appealing area for research. I was drawn to this subject in part due to my personal fascination with the understated role that the history of colonialism plays in Scandinavia's self-image. In the domain of European Studies, Peo Hansen has raised what he considers a problematic lack of research investigating the importance of colonialism and decolonization for the formulation of European identity in the process of European integration.⁴ Iver Neumann, whose research has analyzed how the self/other perspective has influenced identity formation in Europe and its "peripheral" states, also observes that the legacies of the Danish empire have been understudied and would be fruitful for comparative analysis.

Possibly because Greenland is still part of Denmark, the observation is rarely made that Greenland resembles the Latin American states in being run by Europeans who are presiding over an ethnically mixed population...one notes the broad temporary parallel between postimperial developments in other postimperial European states, such as Great Britain and Portugal.⁵

Meanwhile, significant scholarship in Denmark and Greenland has been devoted to the study of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship in the framework of Othering, though much of it emphasizes the images of Greenland and Greenlanders constructed and used by Danes. Kirsten Thisted has conducted literary and cultural analysis of the post-colonial relationship, and Lill Rastad Bjørst has worked with the concept of "Eskimo

³ See fx. Committee for Greenlandic Mineral Resources to the Benefit of Society, "To the Benefit of Greenland," Illisimatusarfik (2013), available at <http://nyheder.ku.dk/groenlands-naturressourcer/rapportogbaggrundspapir/> for an assessment of mining potential in a political and historical context and Bryce Gray, "Slow Markets Won't Deter Greenland Mining Projects," *Arctic Deeply* 4 March 2016, for a more recent outlook.

⁴ Peo Hansen, "European Integration, European Identity and the Colonial Connection," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5: 4 (2002).

⁵ Iver B. Neumann, "Imperializing Norden," *Cooperation and Conflict* 49: 1 (2014): 124.

Orientalism” to deconstruct the representation of Greenlanders and how prejudicial images come to be internalized.⁶

However, the dominant views of Greenland you will encounter in a superficial search of the international press and some academic disciplines are quite limited. A common portrayal suggests Greenland as an empty landscape: icy, exotic and inhospitable on the surface, full of potential for natural resource extraction below; this is also where society can see the effects of global warming take its toll on the ice. Also typical is the narrative of Greenlanders as semi-autonomous indigenous subjects of the kingdom of Denmark, who when mentioned at all are associated closely with their perceived failings: drunkenness, child abuse, and over-reliance on welfare benefits. Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin refer to illusory Danish narratives of “benign colonialism” that seek to minimize the negative interpretation of colonial history in Greenland, after such representations were used to assert authority over the territory during the colonial period.⁷

While these studies provide a valuable focus on Greenlandic society and, in particular, literature and media, research that provides analysis of specific cultural and political dynamics in Greenland today (and particularly books and papers written in English) is much less plentiful. With this paper, I aim to present a close investigation of Greenlandic society and how its identity is debated, formulated, and contested in action, not through an inquiry into the past but the present, and by focusing not on external representations of Greenland but on events happening in the country. To do this in practice, I have focused on a specific case: the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission, a political undertaking that can be analysed in the framework of national identity narrative construction. In 2013, the Greenlandic government established a Reconciliation Commission (officially named Saammaateqatigiinnissamut Isumalioqatigiissitaq in Greenlandic; Forsoningskommissionen in Danish) that would investigate the legacy of colonialism and attempt to create a dialogue around any unresolved tensions. As the commission is ongoing, its results are yet to be determined.

⁶ Lill Rastad Bjørst, *En anden verden- fordomme og stereotyper om Grønland og Arktis* (BIOS, 2008).

⁷ Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin, “Narrative and Practice: An Introduction,” in *Narrating the Arctic*, eds. Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin (Canton, MA: Science History Publishing, 2002), 22.

The Danish reaction to the creation of the commission was largely negative, but it has pressed on without the participation of Denmark and with a somewhat modified, internally focused program.

I learned of the existence of the commission after coming across the online archives of the Rethinking Nordic Colonialism project⁸ and seeking to learn more about the legacy of colonial history in the Arctic and researchers who were (re-)examining understudied perspectives. In Greenland, the Reconciliation Commission is just one venue that has been chosen for pursuing the agenda of development; I was eager to investigate how this project would define and attempt to achieve such a lofty goal as reconciliation. I immediately had many questions: How will this society try to work through the colonial past in an institutionalized, official setting? Will it work? How might it help? How does the act of simply creating the commission reflect certain ideas about Greenland and its future?

Greenland's Reconciliation Commission also drew my interest in researching something new and relatively un-studied, to help contribute to the academic literature concerning Greenland in this field. The case presents descriptive details that haven't been collected in academic form before. The scope of this paper does not include an evaluation of the effectiveness of this or other truth and/or reconciliation commissions, but sees the commission as an occurrence through which broader issues in Greenlandic society can be examined. Its existence suggests a shift away from collective self-image of dependency (for a time, in a feedback loop with the Danish constructed image of inferiority and immaturity), and it appears it may be used for as part of a bigger strategy of building Greenland's international "brand" to gain legitimacy and attract foreign investment. The commission is of interest as well because of the importance of the identity debate to Greenland's future, which ties to its future relationship with Denmark, other Nordic states, and regional and international institutions like the EU and the UN. Not only is Greenland seen as a role model for other indigenous populations around the world, but through this commission it may also have indications for other European states addressing the role of "Others" within their societies – and particularly how those groups might pursue their own futures.

⁸ Rethinking Nordic Colonialism was a multi-national, multidisciplinary conference and exhibition on the subject of colonialism in the Nordic countries, held in 2006. Its website contains the project's archives: <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org/>.

I've approached this study with close attention to the history of the colonial relationship, without assuming Greenland to be irredeemably shaped with reference to Danish control or mistreatment. It is also important to stress that "Greenland" as a national personality is distinct from its people and its public discourse: opinions about the commission in Greenland are not uniform, and voices of disagreement appear through this paper. No substantial research dedicated to the commission is yet in print, but upcoming publications include Kirsten Thisted's book chapter in *Arctic Environmental Modernities*, expected in the fall of 2016, and Astrid Nonbo Andersen's ongoing postdoctoral project for the Danish Institute for International Studies.

1.2 Research questions

I am focusing on the following research questions to frame the analysis of this project, concerned with both the Reconciliation Commission itself and its wider implications.

- What is the nature of Greenland's Reconciliation Commission? What were its origins and how does it function?
- As Greenland – or at least, certain communities and political forces in Greenland – looks towards a future of independence, what narratives will emerge to guide national identity building?
- What might a model for reconciliation between a former colony or minority group and a European power look like?

The first two questions form the bulk of this paper. The final question is useful for conceptualizing the implications of this analysis and possible areas for future research, as discussed in the Conclusion.

1.3 Thesis structure

The paper begins with an elaboration of the theoretical and methodological approach that has guided data collection and analysis during this project. This is followed by a chapter providing an overview of the historical relationship of Greenland and Denmark leading up to the present day; I learned early in my research that attempting to understand Greenland and its place in the world today is incomplete without learning about the Danish role in its history. The subsequent section adheres to a case study format to present the Reconciliation Commission in detail, and is followed by a closer

qualitative analysis of four narrative themes that emerged from personal interviews as well as selected primary documents.

2. Theoretical and methodological approach

2.1 Theoretical background: constructionism, narrative theory, postcolonial history and identity formation

This section provides an outline of my theoretical orientation, which has informed both my interest in the subject and the methodology I have chosen in order to collect data and conduct analysis.

This research is grounded in a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism developed in twentieth century sociological research in the intellectual context of postmodernism, and has been adapted throughout the social sciences and humanities.⁹ Its main tenets hold that reality as experienced by human societies is subjective and shaped by social processes, and that knowledge about the world is constructed by the humans who engage it and cannot be taken for granted.¹⁰ In applied terms, this means that concepts like gender or nationality shouldn't be understood as self-evident or natural attributes of the world, but as fundamentally human ideas that can vary over time and across cultures.

Constructionism is particularly relevant in the study of identity formation and, as in this case, collective national identity. Works like Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* adopt this perspective to identify the ways in which key actors and historical and social processes shape a community's sense of self. Following Cerulo's characterization, "the social constructionist approach to identity rejects any category that sets forward essential or core features as the unique property of a collective's members."¹¹ The postmodern turn in social constructionist identity theory has taken into greater consideration the role that power and discourse play in identity construction, as well as investigating the "real, present day political and other reasons why essentialist

⁹ Vivien Burr, *Introduction to Social Constructionism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 9-10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹¹ Karen A. Cerulo, "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions" in *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997), 387.

identities continue to be invoked and often deeply felt.”¹² For the purposes of this research, I approached the concepts of Greenlandic cultural and political identity as contingent on the particular developments of history and on the lived experiences of the individuals and groups involved, rather than presuming a natural or given understanding of “Greenlandicness.” As the subject of this research, the Reconciliation Commission constitutes a venue in which Greenlanders are actively engaging with their collective identity; this identity as such is not fixed but presently open for public debate.¹³

However, the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot provided an important critique of extreme constructivist view as it concerns historical narrative, which informs my understanding of the logic and meaning of the narratives surrounding the commission. Referring to historian Hayden White and the debate concerning whether revisionist accounts of the Holocaust can be said to ‘matter’ if they are just an interpretative narrative of history like all others, Trouillot insists that credibility is essential to understanding how certain narratives become powerful. “At some stage, for reasons that are themselves historical, most often spurred by controversy, collectivities experience the need to impose a test of credibility on certain events and narratives because it matters *to them* whether these events are true or false, whether these stories are fact or fiction.”¹⁴ Developing a Greenlandic history and sense of self that rings *true* is a guiding aspect of the commission’s work.

A narrative is most simply defined as a story: an account or text in some form that features a plot.¹⁵ Narratives can be told by an individual person or constructed by an organization or group; in this research, I am interested in collective narratives created and used in Greenland. Auerbach identifies such “national meta-narratives” or “super-stories” which are particularly contentious in historical moments when a nation is seeking to define its legitimacy.¹⁶ In the specific context of a struggle or power

¹² Calhoun (1995) cited in *ibid*, 391.

¹³ My analysis is however open to the political utility of an essentialist conception of identity in daily life, part of the reason why programs like these can be so controversial.

¹⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the past: power and the production of history*. (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 11.

¹⁵ Catherine Kohler Riessman “Narrative Analysis,” in *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁶ Yehudith Auerbach, “National Narratives in a Conflict of Identity,” in *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Jerusalem: JIIS, 2010), 102. While I find Auerbach’s characterization useful in this context, I am avoiding the use of the term “metanarrative” in the

imbalance with another group, these narratives attempt to address three questions: “1.) Who are we? 2.) What are our ties and our rights to the disputed land? 3.) What is our role in history generally and in relation to the second group specifically?”¹⁷ The case of Greenland is not shaped by violent struggle against Denmark, but the former’s pursuit of sovereignty has occasioned public debate on the answers to these questions, which is now embodied in the official Reconciliation Commission. In her analysis of the truth commissions of South Africa and East Germany, Andrews compares the narratives of healing that framed each project and how they attempted to shape the evolving national narratives in their respective countries.¹⁸ In my analytical approach, I follow her argument that such commissions “both produce and are produced by grand national narratives, and must be understood in the particular context(s) in which they emerge and the particular goals, either implicit or explicit, which guide their work.”¹⁹

Due to Greenland’s particular history, this research is also grounded in a postcolonial perspective. As one primer on postcolonial theory explains, “postcolonialism, as a term, describes practices and ideas as various as those within feminism or socialism”²⁰ As a field, postcolonial theory developed in the twentieth century in response to the independence movements and decolonization efforts happening around the world and the literary works being produced by their participants. Frantz Fanon’s seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) identified the negative psychological effects that imperialism wrought on colonial subjects and how it shaped a community’s identity. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) built on the idea of the internalization of the colonial experience to develop his theory of a discursive regime used in the West to dominate and exert superiority over the Oriental ‘Other.’²¹ Today, researchers in this field share a basic belief that the global practice of colonialism had significant consequences for peoples and nations who participated in or were subjected to it, and the need for analysis that is framed in the context of colonial histories and relationships.

remainder of this paper due to its conventional association with singular claims of universality or truth (eg. Enlightenment rationalism as metanarrative) in this field.

¹⁷ Ibid, 103.

¹⁸ Molly Andrews, “Grand national narratives and the project of truth commissions: a comparative analysis” in *Media, Culture & Society*, 25: 1 (2003).

¹⁹ Ibid, 46.

²⁰ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7.

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 3.

As an approach, postcolonialism can be said to focus on the peripheral or marginal perspective, readdressing or challenging what had in many cases been a dominant Eurocentric conception across various fields, including literature, history, political science, and anthropology.²² “Postcolonialism is used as a critical analytical perspective on both historical and contemporary colonial discourses and relations of power.”²³ Postcolonial research today does not as a general practice adhere to strict binary view of colonial relationships, but has evolved to reflect the changes wrought by recent globalization, “including the study of manifold asymmetrical power relations.”²⁴

In the context of this research, an important takeaway from the postcolonial framework is the view forwarded by Volquardsen and Körber that not only globally but specifically in the Nordic context, the asymmetrical power relationships established during the official colonial period have demonstrable effects on today’s societies, from continued “dependency relations in the North Atlantic” to “current processes of minoritization and majoritization as well as on mechanisms of social exclusion.”²⁵ Furthermore, Egede Lyngø argues that coming to terms with postcolonial ethnic identity will play an important role in achieving equality for Greenlanders in the years to come. “Greenland did not go through a process of de-colonization, as did many postcolonial countries. Although Greenland has achieved greater self-determination with the Home Rule, we should never forget the fact that the country was under colonial influence for more than 250 years.”²⁶ The language of mental or social decolonization and the periodization of history into moments before, during and after colonization are concepts that are not limited to academia, but have become part of the public debate in Greenland.²⁷

²² Birgit Kleist Pedersen, “Greenlandic Images and the Post-Colonial: Is it such a Big Deal after all?”, in *The postcolonial North Atlantic: Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands*, ed. Lill-Ann Körber and Ebbe Volquardsen (Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut, 2014), 284.

²³ Astrid Andersen, Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen and Ina Knoblock, “Feminism in Postcolonial Nordic Spaces,” in *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 23:4 (2015), 240.

²⁴ Ebbe Volquardsen and Lill-Ann Körber, “The Postcolonial North Atlantic: An Introduction,” in *The postcolonial North Atlantic: Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands*, ed. Lill-Ann Körber and Ebbe Volquardsen (Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut, 2014), 19-20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20. The authors also maintain that these long-lasting effects can be seen in new contexts, e.g. immigration debates.

²⁶ Aviâja Egede Lyngø, “The Best Colony in the World” (2006), 2.

²⁷ Particularly in the area of language policy. See Gad, “Post-Colonial Identity in Greenland? When The Empire Dichotomizes Back – Bring Politics Back in” *Institut for Statskundskab* (2008), 12-15.

Given the focus on the commission as a deliberate political exercise, this research project draws from social science theory on the building of national collective identity, beyond the framework of the postcolonial. Jacobsen's research argues that debates about identity in Greenland are not just symbolic but play an important role in current, ongoing nation-building and international political strategy.²⁸ Gad in particular emphasizes the importance of bringing politics "back into the study of Greenlandic identity," citing the need for research "zooming in, not on the identities constructed, but on identity political negotiations and conflicts as such."²⁹ With this approach in mind, the case of Greenland's reconciliation commission and the consequences it has for Greenland's political trajectory can prove important for understanding Greenland's position in the international community. Ole Wæver's theoretical view of foreign policy as "being based on a specific identity representation, whose contingent composition is what defines the state's self-image" underscores the power of national narratives and the relevance of this research.³⁰

2.2 Case study

This research is a case analysis of a specific political project: the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission. This commission, which began working in 2014, represents an effort by Greenland to reconcile with its recent history while its government simultaneously pursues the economic growth needed for greater independence from Denmark. I follow Creswell's definition of case study research, which he specifies as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes."³¹

Based on my process of research design, this study could be categorized as an intrinsic study according to Stake's case typology. According to Stake, an intrinsic case study is

²⁸ Marc Jacobsen, "The Power of Collective Identity Narration: Greenland's Way to a More Autonomous Foreign Policy," in *Arctic Yearbook* (2015), 1-2.

²⁹ Ulrik Pram Gad, "Post-Colonial Identity," 6.

³⁰ Wæver cited in Jacobsen, "Power of Collective Identity," 2.

³¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, 2nd Edition* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2006), 73.

undertaken because “in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest.”³² This holds true for my research, as I was curious to learn about the commission but academic analysis is very limited so far and English-language news coverage is scarce. At the same time, the commission could also be seen to function as an instrumental case, which Grandy explains is used to “explore in depth a particular phenomenon” in a way that is useful for broader comparison and analysis.³³

Background research on Greenland and its historical relationship to Denmark and Europe led to the decision to focus my study on the commission as a relatively unexplored subject that could be conducted using qualitative methods. This is typical of instrumental case study research, whose focus “is more likely to be known in advance and designed around established theory or methods.”³⁴ However, in this research project I have not chosen to compare Greenland’s Reconciliation Commission with other commissions that have taken place elsewhere. The individual circumstances are quite different and exploring the similarities and differences between this case and, say, South Africa does not fit within the framework of this project, though it would likely be a fruitful area for future research. Due to my interest both in the commission as a significant event in its own right and to its relevance to the broader field of collective identity narratives, this research can fit both the intrinsic and instrumental classification of case studies, which Stake admits “seldom fit neatly” as labels for qualitative research.³⁵ “Researchers often have multiple research interests and thus engage in both intrinsic and instrumental case research.”³⁶

The case study method of analysis requires providing a detailed presentation of the chosen case while situating the subject in the context necessary to provide the reader with more than superficial understanding.³⁷ An important feature of case study research is triangulation, which entails the use of multiple independent sources of data to check

³² Robert E. Stake, “Case Studies” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1994), 237.

³³ Gina Grandy, “Instrumental Case Study” in *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research: A-K*, ed. Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos and Elden Wiebe (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), 474.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ State, “Case Studies,” 238.

³⁶ Grandy, Instrumental Case Study, 474.

³⁷ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 74.

findings and ensure more robust analytical conclusions.³⁸ To develop a reliable body of data as well as ensure that I had taken conflicting accounts into consideration, I used multiple semi-structured interviews, email exchanges, artefacts, news coverage, official websites and reports, social media posts, and informal conversations as the basis for the information presented about the case.

2.3 Narrative analysis: Theory in practice

Though the case study approach on its own can entail an analysis of themes that are apparent in the case under consideration,³⁹ I specifically have set out to define my analytical approach beyond the descriptive presentation of the case as a form of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is used in the humanities and social sciences to study how meaning is constructed and uncover patterns in how the subject understands their world. This form of analysis elevates the personal story, anecdote or opinion to the level of data, allowing this research to foreground the experiences, ambiguities and direct involvement of the respondents as participants in Greenlandic identity construction. In the context of a case study, this approach is useful for identifying patterns in the concepts and perspectives that are featured in the case.⁴⁰ Following Boje's explanation, "narrative analysis can make the implicit narratives in case study explicit."⁴¹ For my purposes, narrative analysis will be used a method to investigate the way in which the story of the commission has been told, and the portrayal of Greenland as a society that this entails.

Narrative analysis is important to the study of reconciliation commissions because, as Moon argues in the case of South Africa, they "explicitly undertook the task of telling a story" in the desire for future reconciliation.⁴² The Greenlandic commission itself is using personal narratives about individual experiences in the post-colonial period as one of its sources of material to develop its analysis and ultimately its policy

³⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012), 13.

³⁹ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 75.

⁴⁰ David Michael Boje, "Narrative Analysis" in *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research: L-Z*, ed. Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos and Elden Wiebe (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), 591.

⁴¹ Boje, "Narrative Analysis", 593.

⁴² Claire S. Moon, "Narrating Political Reconciliation: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa," in *Social and Legal Studies* 15 (2006), 258.

recommendations. However, this research does not make use of the stories and testimonies provided by the regular people who participate in the commission's interviews and workshops. While it is certainly a worthwhile area for research, I decided based on the constraints of the project and my language limitations to avoid using oral history narratives of personal, potentially traumatic experiences as the basis for my inquiry. Instead, I am focused on the narratives that emerge in conversation with and in writings by those involved in administering the commission itself, as well as some of the commission's supporters and detractors. The existence of this commission and the debate about its approach and composition reflect multiple visions of the world – sometimes competing, sometimes overlapping – and Greenland's place in it.

The narratives I have selected for analysis are drawn from the semi-structured interviews I conducted, as well as three primary narratives from Greenland. As Riessman explains, conducting an interview as a researcher is a participatory process, which I am involved in constructing.⁴³ According to her typology of narrative analysis, thematic analysis focuses on the content of the data – what is said – rather than on its use of language (“how”), the interactive nature of the storytelling (“to whom”), or its performative aspects (“for what purposes”).⁴⁴ Thematic analysis can be used on diverse sources of texts and is the appropriate method for showcasing “how stories can have effects beyond their meanings for individual storytellers, creating possibilities for social identities, group belonging, and collective action.”⁴⁵ This methodological choice guided how I approached data collection, transcription, and coding the materials for analysis.

After the material selection was finalized, I coded the data using an inductive process of reading and re-reading, highlighting key phrases and sentences that could form common threads between the texts. In this iterative process, themes emerged that were then grouped into the four I have identified for deeper analysis. It is important to say that in this process, I was not attempting to identify the ‘correct’ or even most popular narratives of Greenland's nation-building efforts that emerge in stories about the commission. Because I followed a social constructionist approach, I worked with the

⁴³ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007), 21-22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 53-54.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

perspective that these narratives are “changing over time and being influenced by societal views about what was deemed to be an acceptable or unacceptable narrative.”⁴⁶

2.4 Sources of data

This research is based on qualitative sources: interviews conducted with eleven respondents and three selected texts documenting the work of the Reconciliation Commission.⁴⁷ The documents were selected as representations of the commission’s point of view at different times and in different formats. Other sources used to inform the case description and thematic analysis include newspaper articles, the commission’s website, which featured details about its mandate and ideological perspective and a listing of public events, its Facebook page, and videos documenting its work. Further contextual understanding was gained from several informal conversations, presentations and media I observed or participated in Denmark and Greenland. The majority of the formal interviews were conducted in person and captured with audio recording as well as written fieldnotes, though some of the exchanges were conducted over email and telephone when meetings were not possible. The main locations for these conversations were Copenhagen, Denmark; Nuuk, Greenland; and Kangerlussuaq, Greenland. While my research towards presenting the case is informed by many sources, not all of which are Greenlandic, I attempted to rely on primary interview and textual data composed by people in Greenland for developing analytical themes.

2.5 Interviewing as method

Interviewing as a qualitative method is highly useful when researchers are seeking firsthand knowledge of a subject. More personal and nuanced than a written survey, interviews can also provide access to a respondent’s opinions and interpretations concerning the issue at hand.

I sought to conduct interviews with respondents who fit into the following professional profiles:

- Former and current commission officials
- Government employees

⁴⁶ Sally V. Hunter, “Analysing and representing narrative data: The long and winding road” in *Current Narratives* 2 (2009), 50. Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/currentnarratives/vol1/iss2/5>

⁴⁷ See Appendix for list & original text of documents included for thematic analysis.

- Politicians
- Cultural institution authorities and other prominent community members

These criteria essentially designated respondents who were both informed and relatively powerful in Greenlandic society. I anticipated that people working in high profile institutions or who had close dealings with political and bureaucratic machinations would be well versed in discussions of identity and how it can be politicized. This approach follows in line with Gad’s interest in the role of “identity politicians” in Greenland, who are directly involved in “negotiations over what Greenlandic identity should be” and are likely positioned to have a wider impact society.⁴⁸ This research thus offers a distinctly ‘elite’ view of the commission. This also seemed to be the most feasible approach, as it would have been difficult to develop a valid sample group of respondents who were not as prominent and easily accessible (see Limitations section for further discussion).

As my goal was to both gather information about the commission using the local context and vocabulary and learn more about the respondents’ beliefs, I chose to use the semi-structured ethnographic interview format for the majority of my conversations. The choice of semi-structured interviewing allowed me to collect factual details about my subject while also encouraging introspective discussion and sensitivity to the respondents’ personal views. Each interview was customized based on the respondent or respondents I was meeting, in order to better develop rapport.⁴⁹ I prepared a topic and question guide in advance of each meeting but tried to conduct the interviews in a conversational manner, open to issues and directions the respondents found interesting and relevant to discuss with me. I also attempted to ask open-ended questions in a way that would avoid biasing their replies.⁵⁰ This allowed me to uncover issues relevant to the research that I had not anticipated or concepts whose contextual meaning I had not grasped, which could then be explored for greater clarification.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ulrik Pram Gad, “Post-Colonial Identity in Greenland? When The Empire Dichotomizes Back – Bring Politics Back in” Institut for Statskundskab, Working Paper (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2008), 8.

⁴⁹ Paul S. Gray et al., *The Research Imagination: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Methods* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 153.

⁵⁰ Robert K. Merton, Marjorie Fiske and Patricia L. Kendal, *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures* (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1990). 53-54.

⁵¹ Gray, *Research Imagination*, 157.

I relied on the transcription software InqScribe to transcribe the interview recordings. Because I am not attempting a language-based or discourse analysis, I refrained from a highly precise method which would focus on capturing intonations, pauses, etc. but instead followed the more straightforward method indicated by Rubin to capture the conversations in a way that would allow for thematic analysis as well as accurate quotation, “only the level of detail we are likely to analyze.”⁵² In moments where the respondent's intended meaning was unclear, I relied on the comparison of the audio recording and my fieldnotes to make a determination. Out of concern for avoiding the misrepresentation of the respondents' views, if parts of a phrase were undecipherable, I did not consider the sentence in my analysis.

2.6 Ethical considerations

This project is not an attempt to make determinations about authenticity in Greenlandic culture. Works such as Linda Riber's *Kalaallit Nunaat - silarsuaq, eqqarsaatigisatsitut ippoq* (Greenland – the world is, as we think it) document the complicated tableau of who ‘counts’ as Greenlandic given the nation's diversity of ethnic backgrounds and minority groups; experiences of mono-, bi-, and multilingualism; the division between urban and remote rural life; and social and employment status, to name a few complicating factors that are beyond my scope and ability to address. However, I have actively sought to rely on Greenlandic sources for my primary interview and textual data to the extent that this is possible. The international representation of Greenlandic society and its people is dominated largely by non-Greenlandic voices, which have historically been primarily Danish and thereby given to various non-Greenlandic biases and strategic predilections.⁵³ The Danish narrative(s) of Greenland have already been written and disseminated and has to a large extent informed the image of Greenlandic society in the popular international press. “The West has for approximately three hundred years spoken *for* the peoples of the Arctic and represented them in certain

⁵² Herbert J. Rubin, and Irene S. Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing (2nd ed.): The Art of Hearing Data, 2nd* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2005), 2014. Accessed online 6 May 2016. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.4135/9781452226651.n10>.

⁵³ Kirsten Thisted, “The Power to Represent: Intertextuality and Discourse in *Smilla's Sense of Snow*,” in *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, ed. Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin (Canton, MA: Science History Publishing, 2002), 312. As Thisted and others argue, this includes the pernicious image of the primitive Eskimo who lives in an igloo, has dozens of exotic words for snow, etc.

images...these images are still strong in Western, and above all Danish, consciousness.”⁵⁴

As an outsider, I have tried to remain aware of my complicity in this process while maintaining a strong desire to avoid perpetuating the stereotyped images of Greenland that still persist. I have also tried to the best of my ability to take a critical view towards both academic and journalistic sources of information for possible political motivations or biases coloring their description of events. In light of the way Greenland is often portrayed in English-language news media – eg. as an icy, possibly unpopulated outdoor laboratory for climate scientists⁵⁵ – there is also a need to work against the narrative of the passive and/or powerless Greenlander and emphasize that the Greenlandic past and present is not a fixed culture upon which the Western world acts, but one with agency, a dynamic history, and frequent change.⁵⁶

Several respondents directly or indirectly expressed concern about my role as an outsider and the intended application of my research, as well as privacy concerns. As the work of the commission is on-going and its very existence remains a political issue, the interviewed respondents have been cited or quoted anonymously. Relevant individuals are named when citing publically available materials (eg. speeches, lectures, published interviews). Because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, I have also refrained from including complete transcripts as part of this document, as it would have been impossible to sufficiently obscure identifying details without substantial cuts. It became apparent to me while in Nuuk that the close nature of the community, particularly for those working in media, politics, or cultural affairs, would necessitate extra effort on my part to ensure that I avoid negatively affecting the professional reputations or relationships of the respondents who spoke with me. Furthermore, while their input is central to the project, the analysis and broader discussion is my own, and

⁵⁴ Naja Dyrendom Graugaard, “National Identity in Greenland in the Age of Self-Government” Centre for the Critical Study of Global Power and Politics, Working Paper (Ontario, Canada: Trent University, 2009), 37.

⁵⁵ Thisted observes the way Greenland’s residents today are often portrayed as “passive victims of climate change” who await assistance from the West. Kirsten Thisted, “Discourses of Indigeneity: Branding Greenland in the Age of Self-Government and Climate Change,” in *Science, Geopolitics and Culture in the Polar Region*, ed. Sverker Sörlin (Ashgate: 2013), 230.

⁵⁶ Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

should not be taken as representative of how any individual respondent would describe his or her views.

2.7 Limitations of this research

A major limitation in this research was language ability: I realized early in planning the project that I would not be able to properly interview respondents who were not functionally fluent in English. The timing and logistics of my research made the use of a translator unfeasible, so I was unable to meet with people who spoke only Greenlandic or Danish. I attempted to partially address this gap with Danish-language news coverage and articles (eg. from the national paper *Sermitsiaq*, in which articles appear in Greenlandic and Danish). However, a more complete analysis of Greenlandic perspectives on the commission would require working with Greenlandic-language data.

The sampling of my interviews was limited to people I could meet within my limited timeframe while in Greenland, which meant I spoke primarily with respondents who live and work in Nuuk. In conjunction with language limitations, this meant that I was unable to speak with several people who have worked with the commission whose input would have been valuable, and had to rely on the group of respondents I was able to gain access to. This presents a challenge to the reliability of the analysis, which can be seen as an inherent risk in the qualitative interview format.⁵⁷

I have chosen to study as a case a commission whose activities will remain ongoing through 2017. This means that I am not able to provide an analysis of the results of the commission's work, but only explain the projected, hoped-for outcomes as they stand now. While I believe in the value of studying the commission while it is ongoing to understand the debate about its intentions, for the purposes of generalizability, a more long-term research framework would be a valuable direction for future research. As this project examines a single case, applying its conclusions to areas outside of my scope would be limited without further investigation.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Gray, *Research Imagination*, 160-161.

⁵⁸ Gray, *Research Imagination*, 199.

4. Historical context: From colony to Self Rule

The present-day political debates and dilemmas in Greenland are best understood in light of the history of Greenland's relationship with Denmark. This section provides an overview of key moments in that history, the legacy of which is relevant to understanding the role of the Reconciliation Commission.

The ancestors of today's Greenlandic Inuit population began to arrive on the island in approximately 1250 AD. They coexisted with a Viking community who settled on the southern tip of Greenland from approximately 1000 until 1450, when the last traces of the Norsemen have been identified. In 1721, the kingdom of Denmark-Norway sent missionary Hans Egede to re-establish contact with who they believed to be their long-lost Christian brethren, and established a permanent settlement and trading post in Greenland. From this period, the historical nature of Greenland's relationship to Denmark should be situated within the broader history of global colonialism (though the precise categorization of the nature of this relationship and its timeframe remains contested).⁵⁹ Neumann describes the Danish activity in Greenland as "another classic variant of overseas imperialism... a settler colony in the classic European mould that also includes places like the United States, Australia and South Africa, where a group of Europeans challenged and subordinated an indigenous population."⁶⁰ Oslund prefers Jürgen Osterhammel's framework of "informal empire," in part due to the comparative lack of military force and violent means of domination that is characteristic of other histories of colonial dominion.⁶¹

Greenland was one of several outposts of the Danish colonial network, used as a station for the seal and whale trade, a market for Christian proselytizing, and, later, a destination for scientific exploration. The Royal Greenlandic Trading Company (KGH) held a monopoly on trade in Greenland from 1776 until 1950, and managed the

⁵⁹ Natalia Loukacheva, *The Arctic Promise: Legal and Political Autonomy of Greenland and Nunavut* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 18-19. Also see Lars Jensen, "Denmark and its Colonies: an Introduction" in *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), who argues for the importance of recognizing the Danish empire as part of European imperial history as well as the influence of the colonies on Danish national identity (59-62).

⁶⁰ Neumann, "Imperializing Norden," 124-125.

⁶¹ Karen Oslund, *Iceland Imagined: Nature, Culture and Storytelling in the North Atlantic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 22.

government of the colony until the central Danish state took over in 1908.⁶² Initially, the KGH encouraged the Inuit hunters to rely solely on traditional tools and refrain from developing alternative industries that would have competed with the seal trade for labor and resources.⁶³ A 1782 code of conduct policy known as the Instrux set in place guidelines that, in the Danish administrators' view, protected the welfare of the Greenlanders by limiting their contact with European civilization, while preserving Danish superiority in business matters.⁶⁴ Regarded by the Danes with paternalistic, romanticized fascination, the dominant view held that "the island's population needed a guiding hand to keep it safe from the dangers of civilisation and to guard it against damaging financial and spiritual influences... Greenland was more or less sealed off from the rest of the world specifically as a result of the vulnerability/protector mindset."⁶⁵

Beginning in 1857, regional councils (*Forstandersakberne*) were established in West Greenland to administer welfare and justice matters, featuring both state officials and local Greenlandic representatives as members.⁶⁶ At the beginning of the twentieth century, these were replaced by local community councils (*Kommuneråd*) and two provincial councils (*Landsråd*) in North and South Greenland. Also at this time, the colony shifted to a focus on fishing in place of seal hunting, particularly in southern Greenland, as the administration encouraged the concentration of the population around newly-built processing plants.⁶⁷ A dispute with Norway concerning territorial sovereignty over East Greenland was decided at The Hague in Denmark's favor in

⁶² Erik Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark before 1945," in *Phasing out the Colonial Status of Greenland, 1945-54: A Historical Study*, ed. Erik Beukel, Frede P. Jensen and Jens Elo Rytter (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010), 16.

⁶³ Oslund, *Iceland Imagined*, 95.

⁶⁴ Loukacheva, *Arctic Promise*, 21.

⁶⁵ Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark," 15.

⁶⁶ See Søren Forchhammer, "Political Participation in Greenland in the 19th Century, State Hegemony, and Emancipation," in *The Northern Review* 23 (2001) for a detailed look at the creation and functioning of these councils. Many researchers see these councils as the origin of the development of Greenlandic nationalism and political engagement, though Petersen (1995) insists that their existence cannot be used to deny Greenland's status as a colony.

⁶⁷ Axel Kjær Sørensen, *Denmark and Greenland in the twentieth century* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press Monographs on Greenland, 2006), 37-38.

1933, solidifying international recognition of Denmark's authority over the entire island.⁶⁸

The Second World War was a turning point in Greenland's history. The German occupation of Denmark in 1940 effectively cut Copenhagen off from the administration of the island, while the United States established military bases and weather stations for over 5,000 personnel.⁶⁹ For the Greenlanders, this experience fostered greater openness in Greenlandic society towards the rest of the world.⁷⁰ In 1953, Greenland's colonial status was officially abolished on Denmark's initiative and the island was integrated as part of the Danish kingdom, as the international post-war climate shifted and institutions like the UN began to pay closer critical attention to the world's remaining colonial powers and their possessions.⁷¹ Greenland became a constitutionally equal territory and was given two seats in the Danish parliament. The ensuing modernisation period of the 1950s and 1960s was characterized by a focus on quickly implementing socio-economic development through a series of Danish commissions, strategies and policies designed with the benefit of the local population in mind; "never in the past had so much Danish been introduced in so short time."⁷²

While the Greenlandic population was not in principle opposed to the introduction of modern, European elements, certain aspects of the modernisation program came to be a source of consternation and trauma that, in time, spurred a movement in favor of Greenlandic independence.⁷³ The birthplace criterion law (*fødestedskriterium*) established that state employees born in Denmark would earn a higher wage than those from Greenland for the same position, ostensibly to better attract skilled Danish workers

⁶⁸ Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark," 20. This is not to say that disputed claims to ownership or offers to purchase Greenland would not continue (eg. Icelandic, U.S. interests) through the present.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 26-27.

⁷⁰ Tupaarnaq Rosing Olsen, *Qaannat Alannguanni / I Skyggen Af Kajakkerne – Gronlands Politiske Historie 1939-79*, (Atuagkat, 2005).

⁷¹ Gudmunder Alfredsson, "Greenland under Chapter XI of the United Nations Charter: A Continuing International Law Dispute", in *The Right to National Self-Determination, the Faroe Islands and Greenland*, ed. Sjurður Skaale (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004), 53-54.

⁷² Sørensen, *Denmark and Greenland*, 111.

⁷³ Rauna Kuokkanen, "'To See What State We Are In': First Years of the Greenland Self-Government Act and the Pursuit of Inuit Sovereignty," *Ethnopolitics* (2015), 4. For an analysis of Greenlandic openness to European technology and culture in the 20th century, see Karen Langgård, "Oral/Past Culture and Modern Technical Means in the Literature of the Twentieth Century in Greenland," *Acta Borealia* 25: 1 (2008), 45-57.

to the island to put modernization into effect.⁷⁴ The decades following the end of World War II also saw a series of forced relocations (most famously at the Thule American air force base) and closures of small settlements in order to consolidate the population, which bolstered the growing commercial fishing industry. In his analysis of contemporary public debates and newspaper articles, Heinrich finds that “many Greenlanders...expressed dissatisfaction with their position on the sidelines during development. Why were Greenlanders kept out of leadership positions? And why was unequal pay so rampant? These were common questions.”⁷⁵

Denmark, along with Greenland, joined the European Economic Community in 1973, despite 70% of Greenlanders voting against membership in the national referendum.⁷⁶ Lauritzen identifies this as the galvanizing moment that led to political mobilization and ultimately the negotiation of the Home Rule arrangement in 1979.⁷⁷ Home Rule granted Greenland’s government authority over areas including trade, education, fisheries, culture, taxation, and labor affairs, and established an annual block grant of funding from the Danish state. A campaign of “Greenlandization” in the civil service paralleled a cultural movement to reclaim and advocate Greenlandic Inuit identity.⁷⁸ At the time, “the theme for discussion...was how to expel non-Inuit cultural parts of contemporary culture in Greenland and find a way back to a more Inuit rooted culture.”⁷⁹ This included a greater influence on the use of Greenlandic, which became the primary educational language, in place of Danish. Greenland also developed closer ties with the

⁷⁴ Robert Petersen, “Colonialism as Seen from a Former Colonized Area,” *Arctic Anthropology* 32: 2 (1995), 121. As another measure of demographic changes, “between 1950 and 1970, the number of Danes in Greenland rose from 4.5% to 20% of the population.” Kuokkanen, “To See What State,” 3.

⁷⁵ Jens Heinrich, “Change of status in 1953: The Greenlanders' relationship with Denmark from 1945 to 1954,” in *Phasing out the Colonial Status of Greenland, 1945-54: A Historical Study*, ed. Erik Beukel, Frede P. Jensen and Jens Elo Rytter (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010), 440-441.

⁷⁶ Kuokkanen, “To See What State,” 4. The Home Rule government negotiated the withdrawal of Greenland from the EEC in 1985, an unprecedented arrangement. Greenland instead has the status of OCT (Overseas Counties & Territories).

⁷⁷ Lauritzen (1997) cited in Ulrik Pram Gad, “Greenland: a post-Danish nation sovereign state in the making,” in *Cooperation & Conflict* 49: 1 (2014), 13.

⁷⁸ Graugard, *National Identity in Greenland*, 15.

⁷⁹ Karen Langgård, “Race and Ethnicity, Greenland” in *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

Arctic indigenous community through its leadership in the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).⁸⁰

After several decades, the political parties Siumut and Inuit Ataqatigiit created a commission investigating the potential for greater self-governance. After negotiations between the Danish and Greenlandic administrations, self government was established in 2009, another step in the direction of greater autonomy from Denmark.

Naalakkersuisut (now the official name of the government of Greenland) has gained the ability to assume responsibility of several areas, most notably mineral resources, which have been seen as a path to greater financial self-sufficiency.⁸¹ Denmark retains control over foreign policy and security, and the annual block grant to Greenland – which contributes about 30% to Greenland’s GDP – has been frozen at 3.2 billion Danish kroner, the 2007 level. The present domestic political environment is thus shaped by “the challenge of finding the balance between the pressing need for new revenue sources, for diversifying the country’s struggling economy and engaging in resource extraction, while meeting high environmental and social standards so that the Inuit hunting and fishing culture (which is dependent on healthy natural resources) is not jeopardized.”⁸² Social development and education are important areas that are targeted for development.

In this moment, the national conversation about Greenland’s future relationship to Denmark remains open-ended. Since 2009, explained one respondent, “you have a greater degree of autonomy in Greenland. I think it’s also a symbolic value, that you do take these steps and do get the feeling of, to a greater extent, being able to handle your own matters.” Many see greater independence as inevitable in the long term, but the feeling of close family ties remains strong for many as well. As it stands, the potential for future independence is accounted for in the 2009 act, which states “Decision regarding Greenland’s independence shall be taken by the people of Greenland. [sic]”⁸³

⁸⁰ Graugaard, *National Identity in Greenland*, 55-56.

⁸¹ Gry Søybe, “To be or not to be indigenous: defining people and sovereignty in Greenland after Self-Government,” in *Modernization and Heritage: How to combine the two in Inuit societies*, eds. K. Langgård and K. Pedersen (Nuuk: Forlaget Atuagkat, 2013), 190.

⁸² Kuokkannen, “To See What State”, 10.

⁸³ Statsministeriet, “Act on Greenland Self-Government (Translation)” Chapter 8, Section 21. Accessed at http://www.stm.dk/_a_2957.html. The Act maintains that independence would not be accomplished unilaterally but through negotiation between Naalakkersuisut and Denmark.

Greenland today is not universally in support of total independence, and the spectrum of political parties reveals differing views on in what way and how soon Greenland's relationship to Denmark will change.⁸⁴

5. The Reconciliation Commission: Origins, mission, and function

The direct origins of the Reconciliation Commission are found in the political program of Aleqa Hammond, the former leader of the Greenlandic social democratic party Siumut and Prime Minister from 2013 to 2014. Before her election to the position, Hammond stood out for speaking often about her support for the eventual independence of Greenland and her views for how the country should move in that direction – and away from reliance on Denmark. “My children will have their own country,” she remarked while serving as Greenland's foreign and finance minister.⁸⁵ During the election campaign, both Siumut and the incumbent Inuit Ataqatigiit party had focused on the potential for natural resource exploitation, seen as a means to reduce Greenland's economic dependency on Copenhagen.⁸⁶ “Siumut wants independence,” Hammond told Denmark's news network DR Nyheder. “We want to get away from the block grant scheme... For the future, Greenland works for a sovereign country – outside of the Danish realm.”⁸⁷ Seen as inflammatory and divisive by some, her views nonetheless won her a record number of personal votes.⁸⁸ In an interview after her election, Hammond called for the creation of a commission, explaining that she was directly inspired by Nelson Mandela and South Africa's experiences with reconciliation in the 1990s, finding an important parallel in what she saw as Greenland's need for a “mental emancipation process” on the road to independence. “This is not about a war between

⁸⁴ Jacobsen, “Power of Collective Identity,” 5.

⁸⁵ Charles Emerson, *The Future History of the Arctic* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010), 286.

⁸⁶ “In campaign for March 12 Greenland election, voters stress mining issues,” *Nunatsiaq News*, 22 February 2013. Accessed 9 May 2016, http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674mining_concerns_top_march_12_greenland_election_issues/.

⁸⁷ Hanne Broberg, “Aleqa vil ud af rigsfællesskabet,” *Sermitsiaq*, 20 February 2013, accessed 9 May 2016, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/aleqa-rigsfaellesskabet>.

⁸⁸ Martin Breum, “Hammond to stand in Danish election,” *The Arctic Journal*, 28 May 2015, accessed 9 May 2016, <http://arcticjournal.com/politics/1625/hammond-stand-danish-election>

two countries or a liberation. It is about reconciliation, understanding and respect for the desires we have as a people.”⁸⁹

The coalition agreement for 2013-2017, signed in March 2013 by the leaders of the three Naalakkersuisut coalition parties (Siumut, Atassut, and Partii Inuit), states the objectives for the coming term. After listing their intentions concerning justice matters, municipalities, and the protection of nature, the final item is registered under the header: “Impact of the colonial past,” and reads simply, “It is necessary to reconcile and forgive to distance ourselves from the colonization of our country. There has to be an action plan for this.”⁹⁰ The funding for the commission was established in the 2014 finance law passed in autumn 2013, which references the 2013-2017 coalition agreement as the basis for this new activity. Here, the stated intention of the commission is to “bring the effects of the colonial period on Greenland’s people and culture forward and made visible. This can thereby create opportunities for these impacts to be discussed and worked on.”⁹¹ 2.4 million Danish kroner (approximately 320,000 €) were budgeted for the commission’s secretariat, commissioner compensation and other activities such as public meetings and information campaigns, for each year from 2014 through 2017.⁹²

The establishment of the commission may have at first been superficially reminiscent of the self-government commission in Greenland-Denmark that resulted in the adoption of Self Rule in 2009, considering the high level of consideration and priority it was being

⁸⁹ Mads Dollerup-Scheibel, “Grønlands Aleqa Hammond henter inspiration hos Mandela,” *Arbejdsliv i Norden*, 15 April 2013, accessed 22 April 2016, <http://arbejdslivnorden.org/artikler/portrett/portrett-2013/article.2013-04-11.7619945548>.

⁹⁰ Naalakkersuisut, “Unified Country, Unified People: Coalition agreement 2013-2017” (Nuuk, 2013), accessed April 22, 2016, http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Naalakkersuisut/DK/Koalition%20saftaler/Coalition%20Agreement%202013_2017%20ENG.pdf, 14.

⁹¹ Grønlands Selvstyre, “Finanslov for 2014” (Nuuk, 2013), accessed April 22, 2016, <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Finans/DK/Finanslov/2014/Finanslov%202014%20DK.pdf>, 133. My translation.

⁹² The 2014 budget for the commission was later reduced to 1.4 million Danish kroner, after funds were appropriated as part of a cash injection for the state-owned company Great Greenland, but was restored to approximately 2.4 million kroner in the following years. Grønlands Selvstyre, “Forslag til Tillægsbevillingslov for 2014” (Nuuk 2015), accessed April 22, 2016, <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Finans/DK/Finanslov/2014/TB2014%20-%20dk%20-%20til%20tryk.pdf>, 32.

shown by Naalakkersuisut.⁹³ In the press, Hammond also stressed that this commission was different in aim from a constitutional commission to consider the creation of a separate constitution for Greenland (in place of or in addition to the constitution governing the entire Kingdom of Denmark), which had been suggested by her party and as well as the previous government. Yet given the similarity in format, Hammond foresaw substantial results. “I expect that the work will result in a report and an action plan which will ultimately provide recommendations, including to the country's politicians, to rectify things that prevent the fundamental reconciliation with the colonial era, the relationship between Greenland and Denmark, and our people.”⁹⁴

The creation of the Reconciliation Commission was an immediate cause for controversy in both Denmark and Greenland, which revolved around two general themes. The first centered on the view that the existence of such a commission was an unfairly critical provocation towards Denmark, with some (primarily Danes) arguing that the Danish-Greenlandic relationship was largely one of goodwill and unworthy of being categorized as colonial, historically or in the present day. This rhetoric echoes the notions of “ungrateful” Greenlanders and “benevolent” Danes which have long held sway in the discourse of Denmark and Greenland’s relationship.^{95,96} A similar debate had taken place in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when psychiatrist Fatuma Ali launched a small seminar group intended to foster Danish-Greenlandic reconciliation; as part of the reaction, prominent Danish historian Mads Lidegaard penned an editorial in *Information* titled, “Greenland is not South Africa.”⁹⁷

The other main line of criticism did not necessarily dispute the problematic aspects of the countries’ shared history, but questioned the usefulness and cost of a commission in this form to document experiences that some felt have already been discussed and resolved. Former head of Inuit Ataqatigiit and Home Rule parliament chairman Josef Motzfeldt decried the expense of the commission in an *Information* editorial titled

⁹³ Jessica M. Shadian, “The Arctic Gaze: Redefining the Boundaries of the Nordic Region,” in *Science, Geopolitics and Culture in the Polar Region*, ed. Sverker Sörlin (Ashgate: 2013), 280.

⁹⁴ “Første udspil til en ‘forsoningskommission’,” *Sermitsiaq*, 16 August 2013, accessed 22 April 2016, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/foerste-udspil-forsoningskommission>. My translation.

⁹⁵ Lars Jensen, “Greenland, Arctic Orientalism and the search for definitions of contemporary postcolonial geography,” *Kult* 12 (2014), 149-152.

⁹⁶ Jensen, “Denmark and its Colonies,” 59.

⁹⁷ Kirsten Thisted, “Kolonialisme og forsoning: Dansk-Grønlandsk relationer I en selvstyretid” in *Jordens Folk* (2014), 21-22.

“Greenland lacks self esteem, not reconciliation commissions.”⁹⁸ The close association of Aleqa Hammond with the project and what some considered to be her “aggressive language” in promoting it also contributed to the view that the commission was ultimately created for partisan purposes.⁹⁹ “The attitude that you should solve the problems in a battle is not perceived by many people as the way to do it, because we have a peaceful way of solving the problem.”¹⁰⁰ In this light, the commission was seen as a distraction from more pressing social and political issues.¹⁰¹

Numerous newspaper articles, editorials and blog posts were written to advocate all sides of the controversy. In August of 2013, when the intended commission was first announced in Greenland, Danish prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt remarked at a press conference, “We have no need for reconciliation, but I fully respect that it is a discussion that occupies the Greenlandic people.”¹⁰² This was widely interpreted as a dismissal of Denmark’s willingness to participate, although no formal invitation had officially been extended. The two Greenlandic members of the Danish Folketing, Sara Olsvig and Doris Jacobsen, expressed their disapproval of this decision, with the latter commenting, “It is sad that Denmark does not want to be part of the commission. Canada spent years cataloguing the historic abuses of the Inuit, and Denmark should do something similar if we are to genuinely achieve a good relationship between Greenland and Denmark.”¹⁰³ However, the matter was not officially taken up further on the Danish side, and no arrangement for Danish involvement in the commission was made.

It was soon made clear that Naalakkersuisut’s intentions to create the commission were not contingent on Denmark’s participation, though some were concerned about the apparent consequences for its legitimacy.¹⁰⁴ In her New Year’s speech in January 2014,

⁹⁸ Josef Motzfeldt, “Grønland mangler selvværd, ikke forsoningskommissioner,” *Information*, 24 February 2016, <https://www.information.dk/debat/2014/02/groenland-mangler-selvværd-forsoningskommissioner>.

⁹⁹ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with cultural institution employee, February 2016.

¹⁰¹ Kirsten Thisted, “Kolonialisme og forsoning,” 18-19. Natural resources policy and the approval of uranium mining in particular were hotly contested issues in 2013.

¹⁰² “Danmark på sidelinjen i forhold til forsoningskommission,” *KNR*, 29 August 2013, accessed 27 April 2016, <http://knr.gl/da/nyheder/danmark-p%C3%A5-sidelinjen-i-forhold-til-forsoningskommission>. My translation.

¹⁰³ Nola Grace Gaardmand, “Opgør om Grønlands kolonifortid,” *Sermitsiaq*, 12 April 2014, accessed 22 April 2016, <http://jyllands-posten.dk/indland/article6639267.ece>. My translation.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

after outlining her strategic priorities and the challenges facing Greenland, Hammond spoke at length about the importance of the new reconciliation commission, but pivoted her emphasis to Greenland's own role in the reflection and critical process, without Denmark.

In the steps we have taken, the development of our society and our development as a people, we have neglected the aspect of reflection and reconciliation. We have failed to discuss and consider the events, the colonial structures and the conditions that in some cases still exist today between certain population groups in Greenland. We need to consider these conditions and to debate them within a proper fixed framework, and to face the consequences of the recommendations that may be the result of this debate. The Government of Greenland has therefore taken the initiative to set up the Greenland Reconciliation Commission during 2014.¹⁰⁵

This description emphasized the single-handed role to be played by Greenland in creating the commission, without explicitly referring to the Danish denial of interest in participating. Hammond also concretely introduced the notion that there were problems that Greenland itself should be held responsible for bringing about or failing to resolve, moving the focus at least somewhat away from Denmark's past wrongdoings. One official explained this as a matter of circumstance – “when Denmark refused, the focus was turned toward internal situation in Greenland” – though others insisted that internal focus had always been paramount.¹⁰⁶

In an interview before the budget was approved, Hammond stressed that the commission was to be comprised of people with relevant academic backgrounds rather than politicians, as the commission “should not be the scene of partisan outbursts.”¹⁰⁷ Prohibiting commissioners from holding active political or governmental affiliations would lend the commission a measure of objectivity. The commission's secretariat was responsible for recruiting relevant people to participate and sought a mixed professional profile, suggesting a multidisciplinary mindset was needed for the task at hand. The original roster of members was announced in July of 2014 and included: Aviâja Egede Lynge, a social anthropologist; Amalie Lynge Pedersen, a clinical psychologist; Ida Mathiassen, a teacher; Jens Heinrich, a cultural historian; and Klaus Georg Hansen, a

¹⁰⁵ Aleqa Hammond, “New Year Speech 2014,” accessed 22 April 2016, <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Taler/ENG/Nyt%C3%A5rstale%202014%20ENG.pdf>. English translation provided on Naalakkersuisut website.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹⁰⁷ “Første udspil til en ‘forsoningskommission’” My translation.

social scientist. Karla Jessen Williamson, a professor and former director of the Arctic Institute of North America, was appointed to serve as an honorary member. The majority of the members were raised in Greenland and reside in the capital, Nuuk, excepting Heinrich, who is based in Copenhagen, and Hansen, who is from Denmark but has lived and worked in Greenland for several decades. A four-person advisory group of representatives from all political parties with seats in the Inatsisartut (the Greenlandic parliament) was also formed, with the authority to “comment, recommend or propose possible initiatives, topics and themes” at biannual meetings with the commissioners.¹⁰⁸

Despite the dispute surrounding its origins, the commission was launched at its first working meeting in August 2014 in Ilulissat, with the first task of defining a functional meaning for the term “reconciliation.” This was particularly necessary given the lack of Danish participation, to frame what the process would aim to achieve without following a conceptualization of reconciliation that featured attributes common to other cases of reconciliation commissions, such as the presence of both ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims.’ The definition reads:

Reconciliation is a process through which the Greenlandic society moves itself away from a mindset that is a result of colonial history, by creating understanding of modern sociological issues. The reconciliation process must make room for a common future for the Greenlandic population – across geography, generations, groups and individuals. The reconciliation commission must therefore provide a framework for actions that foster inclusiveness, mutual respect and freedom, on the basis of what the people have reported.¹⁰⁹

The commission website also specifies, “reconciliation is both a goal and a process.” With this definition, reconciliation is held to involve both academic investigation of history and sociological issues, and a personalized discussion of people’s stories from the past and their ideals for the future. Danes are not mentioned as the focus here and Denmark is not mentioned often on the commission’s website, other than references to Denmark as the historical colonial power; no explicit reference is made to changing the current relationship to Denmark. The site also emphasizes that the reconciliation commission is not similar to ‘truth commissions’ in the sense of seeking apologies,

¹⁰⁸ “Kommissoriet,” Reconciliation Commission, accessed 22 April 2016. <http://saammaatta.gl/da/Om-os/Kommissorium/Kommissoriet> My translation.

¹⁰⁹ My translation. See Appendix for Danish original text.

requiring legally formulated claims or in itself providing a venue for restorative payments (though acknowledging that its efforts “may over time show whether there is a need or desire of the people for compensation claims or public apology”¹¹⁰). Instead, the stated focus is on Greenland’s own healing and autonomous process of internal reconciliation, “working towards ‘redress’ without courts and compensation.”¹¹¹

Indeed, once it took form, the commission would move away from citing the South African commission as a direct comparison. “The work of the commission has not directly been influenced by other similar works from elsewhere,” explained a commission official. “However, one may say that the commission has at some level been inspired by works from the Canadian and Australian Reconciliation projects, although, focus of subject not directly comparable.”¹¹² The Canadian example appears to be a more plausible source of inspiration to onlookers, given the cultural connections to Inuit communities in North America. “I think the commission is inspired by the Canadian Inuits,” explained one government employee. “They have also experienced the colonial history – very much more harsh, maybe, than we did.”¹¹³ The insistence that the Greenlandic case was less harsh or notably non-violent compared to what other communities around the world have experienced was a common refrain in discussions about the commission, even as Greenland’s situation was seen as unique.¹¹⁴

The mandate for the commission does not include developing official conclusions or binding policies as its outcome, in addition to the dialogue that the commission hopes to generate with the public in the process of its work. Instead, the commission is to develop a report on its findings and produce recommendations for the government on how to proceed.¹¹⁵ It is not seen as a conclusive project but, its organizers hope, the beginning of process that will take time to develop. “I think one of the main recommendations would be that you have this and that topic you need to examine

¹¹⁰ “Forsoningskommissionen Årlig Statusrapport Juli 2015,” accessed 22 April 2016, 12. <http://saammaatta.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/ForsoningsKommissionen/PDF/FK%20Endelig%20atusrapport%20august%202015%20DK.pdf> My translation.

¹¹¹ “Vores forsoning,” Reconciliation Commission, accessed 22 April 2016. <http://saammaatta.gl/da/Forsoning/Kort-om-sandheds-og-forsoningskommissioner/Groenlands-forsoningskommission> My translation.

¹¹² Email correspondence with commission official, March 2016.

¹¹³ Interview with government employee, February 2016.

¹¹⁴ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹¹⁵ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

further.”¹¹⁶ The final report, in turn, will be based on the multiple methods described as part of the commission’s planned work. This will include relevant historical analysis. The commission has also decided to foreground the importance of personal narratives to its work. Historical documentation and anthropological studies “must be combined with the collection of people’s own narrative stories. Social and cultural factors have a role in shaping how people interpret, remember and recall events.”¹¹⁷

The commission’s investigations are focused on the assimilation and modernization period from 1950 onwards, though not excluding discussion of events that predate Greenland’s incorporation into the Danish realm. This framing draws from the theoretical starting point that the legacy of the colonial and post-colonial experience has visible and subjectively-experienced effects on people in Greenland today. From the first workshop, it was decided that “the commission will work based on the principle that there are differences in how the colonial context has been experienced, and continue to be experienced at different times and locations, as well as across generations, groups and individuals.”¹¹⁸ Its activities are accordingly designed to “uncover” the tensions and challenges that persist, as well as memories of past wrongs.¹¹⁹ In practice, the work of the commission has explored both “historical clearing up” and “the psychological point of view,” reflecting the professional profiles of its members.¹²⁰

The commission’s work began with public outreach to frame their investigations going forward. “Initially we wanted to get a dialogue started, with a general public... First of all, informing people what the commission is, and getting feedback from the public on what their problems were, and how we should proceed. We incorporated these attitudes and problems in what we're doing.”¹²¹ In addition to the group’s working meetings, the commission has held public meetings in municipalities throughout Greenland. The first meeting was held in Tasiilaq, in eastern Greenland, in October 2014. In order to

¹¹⁶ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹¹⁷ “Afdækning,” Reconciliation Commission, accessed 22 April 2016. <http://saammaatta.gl/da/Forsoning/Afdaekning> My translation.

¹¹⁸ “Forsoningskommissionen har sat rammerne for sit arbejde,” 15 August 2014, accessed 22 April 2016. <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/Naalakkersuisut/Nyheder/2014/08/150814-Forsoningskommissionen-har-sat-rammerne-for-sit-arbejde> My translation.

¹¹⁹ “Kommissoriet,” Reconciliation Commission.

¹²⁰ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹²¹ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

increase awareness of their work around Greenland, the commission launched a website and a short infomercial aired on KNR, the national television network, in the spring of 2015.¹²² In May, the popular Greenlandic band Nanook released a song in response to the commission's request that addressed the theme of reconciliation and the band members' personal experiences with inequality. "We hope that the song can bring some positive energy to the sensitive campaign," the band explained.¹²³

In 2015, the commission held "information and dialogue-based" public meetings in 16 towns in northwest, west and south Greenland.¹²⁴ At these events, the commission works to engage with the public and gather information and opinions for analysis. Two focus groups were also held in Nuuk, which gather people who have shared experiences with particular events or incidents (eg. settlement closures, social problems). Approximately 50 individual interviews designed to collect individual narrative stories had been conducted by early 2016, with more planned for the year. Attendance at the public events held in villages and towns has ranged from 13 to 120 people.¹²⁵

The commission's mandate requires annual progress reports, and the first of these was produced in August 2015. Its initial findings included experiences of inequality and feelings of inferiority people faced during the modernization period. "A lot of people talk about differences in pay from the 1960s, people talk about the *fødestedskriteriet* (the birthplace criteria), the concentration of people into towns for job development, language."¹²⁶ Two prominent cases include the experiences of the legal fatherless: Greenlandic children born to an unmarried Greenlandic mother and an absent Danish father, who lacked the legal ability to know the identity of their father or receive an inheritance; and a group of children who were sent from Greenland to be raised by foster families in Denmark as a social experiment.¹²⁷ The report emphasizes that through input from the public, some of the most pressing issues raised concerned the

¹²² The TV spot can be viewed here, in Danish and Greenlandic (with subtitles): <https://vimeo.com/127069789>.

¹²³ "Nanook sang 'Ilunniittuassavoq,'" accessed 22 April 2016.

<http://saammaatta.gl/da/Nyheder/2015/05/Nanook-sang>

¹²⁴ "Aktiviteter," accessed 22 April 2016. <http://saammaatta.gl/da/Aktiviteter>

¹²⁵ Email correspondence with commission official, March 2016.

¹²⁶ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹²⁷ The situation of the 'legally fatherless' lasted from 1914 to 1974. For details about the Greenlandic children removed from their homes, see fx. Tine Bryld, *I den bedste mening* (Gyldendal, 2010) for profiles of their lives.

need for reconciliation between different Greenlandic communities, such as those in East and West Greenland (who speak different dialects), due to problems that are occurring today.



Vi i Grønland har oplevet rivende forandringer

Still from the Reconciliation Commission's TV spot, 2015.

<p>Innuttaasunik ataatsimiisitsinissamut qaaqussisut</p> <p>Saammaateqatigiinnissamut Isumalloqatigiissitap sulial suuppat?</p> <p>Pingasunngornermi decembarip ulluisa 9-ani 2015 Nal. 19.30-21</p> <p>Saammaateqatigiinnissamut Isumalloqatigiissitap Qujanartup Illuani Nanortalimmi innuttaasunik ataatsimiisitsiniarpoq, tassani isumalloqatigiissitap suliaanut tunngavigineqartoq illisimatitsissutigineqassalluni.</p> <p>Ataatsimiinnermi peqataagit ilisimasanik isummanillu tapersiillutit. Ataatsimiisitsineq kalaallisut ingerlanneqassaaq, toqqaannartumillu qallunaatuumut nutserisoqassalluni.</p> <p>Aggialluarisi!</p> 	<p>Invitation til Borgermøde</p> <p>Hvad går forsoningskommissionens arbejde ud på?</p> <p>Onsdag den 9. december 2015 Kl. 19.30-21</p> <p>afholder Forsoningskommissionen et borgermøde i Qujanartup Illua i Nanortalik, hvor der vil blive orienteret om kommissionens arbejdsgrundlag.</p> <p>Kom til mødet og vær med til at bidrage med viden og synspunkter.</p> <p>Mødet afholdes på grønlandsk og vil blive simultantolket til dansk.</p> <p>Vel mødt!</p> 
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Flyers announcing a public meeting in Nanortalik, December 2015.

By mid-2015, three of the original five full-time members had left the commission, due to conflicting professional obligations. Meanwhile, the coalition who had established the commission was no longer in power, following Aleqa Hammond's resignation in October 2014 in the wake of a misuse of funds scandal. In September 2015, *Sermitsiaq* published an article criticizing the commission's set-up. "In four months, the highly controversial Reconciliation Commission, set up by the former Naalakkersuisut coalition, consisted of only two members...the commission is currently operating in violation of its own rules."¹²⁸ With one remaining commissioner living in Denmark (Heinrich) and one in Greenland (Mathiassen), the mandate's specification that a majority of the commissioners reside in Greenland was no longer met. In the same month, the Greenland spokesperson for the Danish political party Dansk Folkeparti referred to the commission as a "farce." While recruitment was in process to replace the departed members of the commission, Heinrich responded to the criticism and maintained that the commission had not failed or ceased to function, as some believed, and was pursuing its objective without Danish participation.¹²⁹ In November, the three new members were announced: Josef Therkildsen, former trade union vice chairman; Dorthe Katrine Olsen, a lecturer; and Anna Heilmann, a municipal administrator. The commission's work and public meetings have since continued.

As the work of the commission has not been completed, its current impact is difficult to estimate. The 2015 progress report acknowledged that there are parts of the population to whom a reconciliation process feels irrelevant, though it is uncertain how this will affect its success. Though the commission's progress has continued to make headlines, in the view of one respondent, "there's been very little discussion about it. It's kind of an old issue...Different groups of people work with these [issues] in different ways."¹³⁰ The official plan for the commission indicates that the group will continue to collect data and personal input before continuing to its analysis phase, set to conclude in 2017. The commission is also hoping to expand its outreach further. "We have had problems connected to initiating cooperation, but I think it's going the right way," said one

¹²⁸ Niels Ole Qvist, "Forsoningskommission arbejder i strid egne regler" *Sermitsiaq*, 1 September 2015, accessed 22 April 2016. <http://sermitsiaq.ag/forsoningskommission-arbejder-i-strid-egne-regler> My translation.

¹²⁹ Sorlanguaq Petersen, "Jens Heinrich: Forsoningskommissionen er ikke en fejl," 5 September 2015, accessed 22 April 2016. Available at <http://sermitsiaq.ag/jens-heinrich-forsoningskommissionen-ikke-fejl>.

¹³⁰ Interview with government employee, February 2016.

commission official. “There are opportunities, but at the same time, a lot of them have their guards up.”¹³¹

5. Thematic analysis

As the work of the commission has unfolded, its authorities, supporters, and detractors have disputed its purpose and contested its validity. Within this debate, certain patterns in ways of talking about the commission have emerged, implicating the project in larger questions of Greenlandic identity, history, development, and the character of Greenland’s relationship to Denmark. In this section, I have carried out an analysis of these themes, seen as narratives being produced in the contexts of Greenlandic national self-determination. This analysis is based on primary source material, with additional details found in newspaper coverage. In addition to the interview transcripts, three documents were coded for narrative themes:

- Aleqa Hammond’s New Year’s Speech 2014
- Official written mandate of the commission from 2014
- Editorial by the commission published in *Atuagagdlitit* in October 2015

The four narratives identified for analysis are described in detail in the following pages. Quotes from interview transcripts are anonymized.

5.1 Victimization: Greenland as a permanent (?) victim of colonial abuses

The work of the commission is fundamentally defined by its official mandate, which begins with the words, “the commission shall initiate activities that will uncover cultural and societal challenges in the society which lead to tension, as a result of the colonial legacy.” The premise appears to be clear: as a Danish colony, Greenland was subjected to circumstances that have had damaging repercussions that carry through to the present. This is in line with the postcolonial principle that the “colonial legacies of economic disempowerment and social tragedies” can have a significant impact on the present in Greenland.¹³² The cases of the judicially fatherless, the children taken to be raised in Denmark, the forced relocations in settlements: these are painful stories of Greenland’s past, recalling a time when many in Greenland were at the mercy of Denmark’s good intentions. This vision presents the narrative of Greenlanders as

¹³¹ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹³² Anderson, “Feminism in Postcolonial,” 241.

victims who will catalogue abuses through the commission, a reclamation and calling-out of wrongs that have caused lasting damage to Greenlandic society and whose survivors may still be here to tell their stories.

But when was this period of victimhood, exactly? Has it ended? The commission has chosen to focus its historical data collection on the modernization period that began in the 1950s – exactly the moment when Greenland ceased to be a colony in constitutional terms. The official end of colonialism is here not used as a valid demarcation point; instead, the experience of coloniality is a red thread that continues through to the present. In a newspaper editorial authored by the commission’s members, the group wrote that “we must dare to talk about how we have experienced a time that cannot be suppressed. For if we suppress the story, we will never move forward.”¹³³ In this narrative, admitting vulnerability and the tragedies of the past is needed to move beyond a history in which Danes are the main agents of authority – to reclaim agency as postcolonial subjects. Critics of the commission have interpreted its framework to require embracing victimhood as a character trait, which some find unpalatable. According to former premier Josef Mozfelt, “instead of crying over how oppressed we are and use almost 10 million kroner on a reconciliation commission, Naalakkersuisut should invest in art and culture that can increase the Greenlandic self-esteem.”¹³⁴ But even here, there is tacit use of the idea that victimhood has affected the character of Greenlanders so that they are uncertain or unconfident in their lives.

Such feelings of inadequacy, according to the commission’s mandate, stem from the emphasis on all things Danish during the modernization period (although as the commission acknowledges, there were aspects of the program that were implemented to Greenland’s benefit). But embracing victimhood now will lead to personal and societal growth and abolish taboos. “It is a process that will seem difficult at times, and that will require less pleasant topics to be discussed,” explained Aleqa Hammond in her New Year’s speech. “In these situations it is important to remember that we are doing this in order to process events in our history and the relations between us, so as to become stronger as a result of this process.”

¹³³ “Forsoningsprocessen er befolkningens eje,” *Atuagagdliutit*, 7 October 2015, accessed 10 May 2016. My translation.

¹³⁴ Søren Duran Duus, “Tuusi: Grønland mangler selvværd, Aleqa,” *Sermitsiaq*, 25 February 2014, accessed 22 April 2016, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/tuusi-groenland-mangler-selvaerd-aleqa>

In contrast, for some, victimization is seen as an admission of weakness, an exercise in casting blame for events that happened long ago. Several respondents observed that the stories and events addressed through the Reconciliation Commission are largely relevant to a specific generation: those who came of age after the official end of colonialism in 1953 but before the introduction of Home Rule in 1979, and who bore the brunt of the changes at a young age. Beyond the scope of the commission, the usage of a “post-colonial” framework as a way to talk about and understand Greenland today is regarded by some as vocabulary particular to this older generation. While there are people who maintain that the Greenland-Denmark relationship should be characterized as neo-colonialist in nature to this day, at the opposite end of the spectrum are said to be the young people who “have moved on,” frustrated by “self-pitying stories.”¹³⁵ Through one scholarly lens, electing to self-identify as a subject of colonialism perpetuates an image of victimhood that diminishes the image of Greenland as a capable global actor.¹³⁶ In this light, victimhood status is almost automatically implied by choosing to follow a post-colonial framework.

But it is not clear that victimization has to be solely a negative narrative. On the one hand, the characterization echoes the figure of the Eskimo who was imagined to need protecting from Denmark as the subject of the 1782 Instrux, fragile where the Danish kingdom was strong. It also chooses as its starting point to focus on victims of the past, which competes with more pressing political concerns. As one politician explained,

I think it's fine [the commission's] there, but I think it's also very important to look at the very concrete way of bettering the livelihood of people in Greenland, as it is right now. I think it's very important not to focus so much on the past but be much more focused on the future and the now. Because we have quite a lot of social problems in Greenland.¹³⁷

However, in certain contexts, the victimization narrative can serve as a source of strength for Greenland to wield political influence and pursue national goals. As a means to achieve concessions from the EU, for example, Gad describes how Greenland has used its perceived victimized status to secure an exemption to the sealskin trading

¹³⁵ Birgit Kleist Pedersen, “Greenlandic Images and the Post-Colonial: Is it such a Big Deal after all?”, in *The postcolonial North Atlantic: Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands*, ed. Lill-Ann Körber and Ebbe Volquardsen (Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut, 2014), 307.

¹³⁶ Kirsten Thisted, “Kolonialisme og forsoning,” 21.

¹³⁷ Interview with Greenlandic politician, March 2016.

ban, which was accused of being a form of “cultural genocide.”¹³⁸ Similarly, Jacobsen finds that in terms of foreign policy, “international communication by Greenland’s political representatives sometimes rest upon a perception of Greenlanders as a minority with special rights.”¹³⁹ The emergence of this narrative in the work of the commission need not be taken as a fixed attribute ascribed to Greenlandic identity, but in fact coexists with Greenlanders’ assertion of agency, in part as a reaction to and against Denmark’s authority.

5.2 Ownership of history: Telling Greenland’s own story to reclaim national identity

The reassertion of Greenland’s ability and right to write its own history is a common refrain in discussions about the commission. As noted earlier, both the local and global representation of Greenland and its people has been shaped by Denmark for centuries. A commission official explained that this issue is crucial to understanding the difficulties Greenland faces today, and the need for a venue through which to reclaim historical authority. “You have a lack of historical awareness in Greenland, and a lot of the history of Greenland has been written by outsiders, by Danes, and I think that’s part of the problem – that you haven’t had the opportunity to define yourself.”¹⁴⁰ This approach is not primarily concerned with objective truth as such; or rather, it sees the Greenlandic version of history to be a much-needed counter to the dominant Danish mis-tellings and incomplete truths.

In this way, history is imbued with the power to crystallize a stronger national identity, particularly when it can set Greenland apart from Danish authority. In the commission’s published editorial, the members explain:

The process of reconciliation is our own and the people’s own. We as citizens must deal with our own history, our own lives and our society’s challenges... We have to start within ourselves and maybe move a little bit away from allowing outside experts to tell us how we are doing. We, the citizens of Greenland, are the experts on the Greenlandic people and their experiences and feelings.

¹³⁸ Gad, “Post-Danish nation,” 21.

¹³⁹ Jacobsen, “Power of Collective Identity,” 3.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

This effort is not about creating a new school textbook – it aims to use the act of telling history to empower the Greenlandic people. Such an explanation also emphasizes a democratic view of the process, in which ‘the people’ have greater authority than the ‘experts.’ In this narrative, the concern about reconciling different or conflicting stories is minimized – ostensibly all experiences can belong. In line with Trouillot’s foregrounding of the “process of historical production” to understanding history, what is key is that Greenlanders are a people with a history that is no longer written by Danes on the outside.¹⁴¹

The dispute concerning who has the authority to speak on whose behalf was raised in the debates surrounding the commission itself. When Niviaq Korneliussen, the young Greenlandic author of the queer postmodern novel *Homo Sapienne*, wrote the line, “enough of that post-colonial shit,” in a book that focuses on the lives of young people in Nuuk, this was picked up in a story about the commission by Danish writer and University of Greenland lecturer Thorkild Kjærgaard. Kjærgaard references Korneliussen in an editorial lambasting the Greenlanders as overly critical and even petulant towards their mostly benevolent former rulers, going so far as to argue that Greenland today should be thankful that the Danes hadn’t taken a more militant, British approach to imperialism.¹⁴² Meanwhile, Korneliussen explained in conversation with a Danish journalist that her frustration with what she sees as excuse-making is real, but that it feels wrong when someone coming from the outside freely criticizes Greenland’s problems. “[Many Danes] cannot see for themselves the enormous impact [colonialism] has had – there are traces of it in all aspects of Greenland.”¹⁴³ As the controversy surrounding the commission has encapsulated, the terminology used to label the Greenland-Denmark relationship is contested even as it concerns relatively opaque concepts, depending on the identity of who is speaking or writing.

The commission proposes that through its work, Greenland is on the verge of having a new history, a revised version that accounts for Greenlandic experiences, both positive

¹⁴¹ Trouillot, *Silencing the past*, 26.

¹⁴² Thorkild Kjærgaard, "Forsoningskommissionen: en grønlandsk folkekomedie," *Baggrund*, 13 December 2014, accessed 12 April 2016, available at <http://baggrund.com/forsoningskommissionen-en-gronlandsk-folkekomedie/>.

¹⁴³ Mikkel Nordvig, “Samtale med Niviaq Korneliussen del 3,” 7 December 2015, accessed 12 April 2016. <https://www.folkeskolen.dk/577054/samtale-med-niviaq-korneliussen-del-3>. My translation.

and negative - at least covering the last century or so. In the editorial, the commission writes that the change of authorship will impact the nature of what is told.

To tell one's own story has a dual effect, especially when you have not previously told it or, as in the case of Greenland, the story was told by others...First of all, to set things right in relation to the myths and delusions in which the history is shrouded. To what extent were Greenland politicians able to influence development through the provincial councils, or was it only the Danish state apparatus setting the agenda for the development of Greenland? Secondly, it means telling your own story, that you look inward and get a chance to understand your own experiences in your own words.

The suggestion that only Greenlandic voices can 'set things right' comes close to an essentialist view of authentic Greenlandic identity – but could also suggest not that Denmark is inherently incapable of reporting a full history, but that the biases of its structural position should limit its ability to do so with convincing authority. The commission's approach hopes to pair the scholarly benefit of addressing unresolved historical questions and potentially claim greater agency for Greenlanders in their national history with the psychological benefits conferred to individuals who contribute their stories.

Of course, the personal histories told to the commission will be screened, analyzed and consolidated in order to suggest functional policy recommendations and activities, as is the commission's objective. The 2015 progress report was not a catalogue of individual experiences in Greenland, but an edited set of concerns with broad applicability. The commission by dint of its governmental authority holds the power to represent the themes and conclusions of the stories of others, but it is too soon to tell whether this process of historical production will hold sway over the collective consciousness of Greenlanders. If it does, Greenland may follow in line with other small states who are seeking sovereignty, for which a distinct history can significantly enable a small, former colony to "claim an equally distinct ethnic/national identity, which then develops into what are seen as rightful claims towards self-government or decolonization."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Godfrey Baldacchino, "The micropolity sovereignty experience," in *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games: the EU overseas countries and territories*, eds. Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ulrik Pram Gad (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 67.

5.3 Building a united nation: Debating transitional Greenlandicness

In early discussions about the potential reconciliation commission, the project was discussed primarily as an exercise in uncovering and legitimating wrongs suffered by Greenlanders that were, directly or indirectly, caused by the Danish colonial and post-colonial administration. However, once the commission conducted its initial framing phase, it quickly became apparent that for many Greenlanders, some of the most pressing problems in need of reconciliation did not concern particular Danish-led activities during the modernization period, but instead stemmed from internal societal issues between different demographic groups in Greenland. The collective “we” established in the narrative of empowerment through shared history coexists with a narrative of Greenlandic multiplicity that should be brought to the fore in the process of nation-building.

Hammond’s New Year’s speech portrayed Greenlanders as a single people with multiple population groups in need of cooperation in order for the country to progress.

I would suggest that in the intersection between our history and the relations between our population groups we can find some of the greatest taboos in our country today. We must break down these taboos in order to reconcile ourselves to today’s situation and to strengthen our own self-awareness... We must now put ourselves first in our own country, and take the next steps as one nation, so that even more of our people can take control of their own lives and make a positive contribution to our society.

As it concerned intra-Greenlandic issues, the commission was to emphasize the goal of ‘coming together as one nation.’ Demographic divisions had played a prominent role during Hammond’s election, so this was not a new subject. “Social conflicts that already were meant to be overcome are flaring up again, e.g. about ethnicity issues, about language policies, about the divide between hunters and fisherman from the villages and an urbanized elite, or about the Danish vs. Greenlandic schism.”¹⁴⁵ All of these were potential areas of interest for the commission, and together are very ambitious to attempt to address under the auspices of reconciliation, appearing to follow the truism that the first step to fixing a problem is admitting you have one.

Denmark is not mentioned explicitly as a partner to reconcile with in Hammond’s speech, establishing an implicit contrast between what is an “internal” matter for

¹⁴⁵ Volquardsen and Körber, “An Introduction,” 14.

Greenland and what involves Denmark – in effect claiming as Greenland’s responsibility a host of issues that need not concern Denmark and can be addressed without the Danish government. This can be seen in the structure of the commission’s approach to inquiry, defined in its mandate: “To provide insight into contexts, the Commission will gather knowledge and work based on two main approaches: a) Internal sociological issues b) Historical development and cultural interaction in Greenland and between Greenland and Denmark.” Danish workers and families in Greenland, as well as Danes or Greenlanders with mixed heritage (of which there are many), could certainly be an important population group for addressing the ‘taboos’ that Hammond mentions, but they are not referred to here by name. These groups were discussed more openly in interviews, however. “I think that is one of the problems of today,” one official explained, who related to having a hybrid sense of self. “You have to be either Greenlandic or Danish. Well, in Greenland you are either Danish or Greenlandic – you can’t be both, even though you are.”¹⁴⁶ Another, working in the government administration in Nuuk, observed, “because the Greenlandic people and the Danish people are different, and comes from different cultures, we have to sometimes learn how to be together. It can be very easy for some, but there might be some people for whom it may be harder.”¹⁴⁷ There is ambiguity around both defining one’s identity as an individual, and how to manage working and living together in practical life. Concerns with establishing an authentic, unique Greenlandicness that can be easily distinguished from Danishness have created confusion and in some cases alienation in a country that is also at pains to dispel the external image of the frozen-in-time Inuit at odds with modernity.¹⁴⁸

The commission’s planning anticipated the need to host events and meetings in different regions of Greenland, and the members learned through their early sessions that the particularities of opinion and interests of different communities and groups within Greenland constituted an important direction to pursue. “We will during this year creating major initiatives to get in close dialogue with the population and contribute to knowledge on various matters increased,” they explained in the 2015 editorial. “We find it important that understanding between the citizens increases, so different groups of the

¹⁴⁶ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with government employee, February 2016.

¹⁴⁸ Søybe, “To be or not to be indigenous,” 200.

population can feel heard and included.” When it came to their early findings, based on public meetings in Tasiilaq, the commission reported, “if we are to point to a specific need for reconciliation, it is reconciliation between Eastern Greenland and West Greenlanders”¹⁴⁹ Greenland has four municipalities; Nuuk, in the southwest, is the capital and largest city, and smaller towns and settlements are spread throughout the country along the coasts. The communities in East and West Greenland are separated physically as well as practically, due to the prohibitive cost of frequent travel. The language differences between the two are a sensitive issue as well, as seen in the commission’s TV spot, featuring speakers of different dialects: “I hear people say, ‘This is our dialect that is correct, yours is wrong.’”¹⁵⁰ In the commission’s meetings, East Greenlanders spoke about receiving poor treatment when in the West, and the tensions that erupt when West Greenlanders move east.

The differences between the larger towns and smaller settlements are also a point of contention raised through the commission’s work. The trend towards urbanization is seen as deeply threatening to the hunting lifestyle, and Nuuk – home to almost a third of Greenland’s population – can be stereotyped as insufficiently Greenlandic and its population unconcerned about the wellbeing of Greenland’s settlements.¹⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, some Nuuk residents see things differently. “There is a big difference between Nuuk and smaller places,” said one businessman. “In terms of education, in terms of the access to transportation, the cost...Should we have the same service level [in remote places] with the healthcare, or schooling and so on, or should we have young people sent to larger boarding schools?”¹⁵² However, the settlements and the hunters who live there are also regarded as keepers of valued traditional practices. One respondent complained that their role has become overlooked, and that “they are not recognized as essential to the identity and how the culture is today.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ “Behov for forsoning mellem øst og vest,” 16 October 2014, accessed 22 April 2016. <http://saammaatta.gl/da/Nyheder/2014/10/Behov-for-forsoning-mellem-oest-og-vest> My translation.

¹⁵⁰ “Saammaateqatigiinnissamut Isumalioqatigiissitaq,” 2015, accessed 22 April 2016. <https://vimeo.com/127069789>. My translation.

¹⁵¹ Adam Grydehøj, “Constructing a centre on the periphery: urbanization and urban design in the island city of Nuuk, Greenland,” *Island Studies Journal* (2014), 214.

¹⁵² Interview with Nuuk-based business director, February 2016.

¹⁵³ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

Addressing these issues, or at the very least talking about them, has been made central to the commission's vision of Greenlandic nation building, which is seen in a state of flux. According to Thisted's view of Greenland's recent and not so recent past, "the history of Greenland can be construed as a series of shifts in which the Greenlanders, in a process of profound transition, have appropriated new and alien elements and reinterpreted themselves."¹⁵⁴ The commission is investigating internal divisions, but did not at the outset appear to regard them immutable as its premise. In practice, the commission has been seen as an open-ended forum to discuss social inequality, tension, and discomfort. What is taken for granted is the discreteness of Denmark and Greenland. National narratives along these lines are particularly important "for people in the early stages of building their national identity and consequently – in many cases – in conflict with another national entity, against which they are building their own identity."¹⁵⁵ This features strongly in the country's efforts to 'brand' itself as a nation rather than (solely) as an indigenous minority group.¹⁵⁶ Forging ahead with a vision of united national identity in the wake of adoption of Self Rule is to admit a narrative of Greenland in transition, ripe for redefinition from the inside out.

5.4 International legitimacy: Greenland as global actor

The creation of the reconciliation commission immediately provoked comparisons to other truth, reconciliation, and historical commissions that have taken place in countries around the world. Discussions about the purpose of the commission were also tied to Greenland's symbolic status vis-à-vis the Danish Realm. In promoting and debating the commission, a narrative about Greenland as a global actor seeking equality and legitimacy has emerged. In this light, political references to a post-colonial framework suggest that the colonial relationship itself gives Naalakkersuisut and Greenland the means to pursue greater authority and recognition. In creating the commission, Greenland can be said to be acting in ways to increase international agency and to achieve equality with Denmark.

¹⁵⁴ Thisted, "Branding Greenland," 251.

¹⁵⁵ Auerbach, "National Narratives," 102.

¹⁵⁶ The national tourist board has adopted "Pioneering Nation" branding for Greenland, part of a "strategy of defining a nation open to newcomers." Søbye, "To be or not to be indigenous," 193-194.

By way of introducing the need for Greenland to undergo reconciliation, Hammond situates the project as part of Greenland's development of international visibility, in her New Year's speech.

Greenland was formerly a colony of Denmark. Over time, Greenland has developed into a self-governing nation... We have now come so far that today the people of Greenland are a recognised nation under international law, with the right to self determination. The people of Greenland have achieved this recognition and these rights in accordance with international law under the UN.

Reconciliation is accordingly positioned as the next step in becoming a recognized, self-governing nation, following the trajectory that has been followed for years. The recognition of Greenlanders as "a people" came into effect with the 2009 self-government act. Hammond appeared at the UN World Conference on Indigenous People in 2014 and spoke about Greenland's reconciliation commission; she has also promoted the project to international media. By promoting the commission as linked both to Greenland's story of development and the well-known model of reconciliation, Greenland can be portrayed as on a path towards greater sovereignty.

Indeed, reconciliation (and/or truth) commissions have become an international norm, with 41 such commissions completed or ongoing as of 2006.¹⁵⁷ From a strategic perspective, Greenland's commission can be a means for the government to "strengthen [its] international personality," which Greenlandic civil servant Mininnguaq Kleist identifies as a way to "up-grade your political and international legal status, including achieving the sovereignty over your own country."¹⁵⁸ In this light, the commission does not stand alone as an internal project but also as an outward-looking display of self-sufficiency and development. Several respondents noted how Greenland has been regarded as a model for other indigenous groups because of the degree of autonomy they have been able to achieve. Explained one politician, "we have political independence in so many ways. When you look at other indigenous peoples' communities, for example, I would say the relationship between Greenland and

¹⁵⁷ Michal Ben-Josef Hirsch, Megan MacKenszie and Mohamed Sesay, "Measuring the impacts of truth and reconciliation commissions: Placing the global 'success' of TRCs in local perspective" in *Cooperation and Conflict* 47:3 (2012), 389. DOI: 10.1177/0010836712454273

¹⁵⁸ Mininnguaq Kleist, "The Status of the Greenlandic Inuit: Are the Greenlandic Inuit a People, an Indigenous People, a Minority or a Nation? A Practical, Philosophical and Conceptual Investigation" in *The Right to National Self-Determination, The Faroe Islands and Greenland*, ed. Sjúrdur Skaale, (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004), 120.

Denmark internationally at least is a role model for other indigenous peoples' communities.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, in pursuing nation-building that may lead to complete independence, Greenland sets itself apart from groups like the Canadian Inuit, who are not generally seeking to create their own nation-state.¹⁶⁰

At the same time that the reconciliation commission has fostered discussion about Greenland building its international authority, it has also taken steps towards achieving equality to one state in particular: Denmark. Though the 2009 self government act established the relationship between two equal partners, in practice feelings of inferiority are still strong. “I think, what you're trying to do from a Greenlandic perspective is that you need, or you feel that you need, to circumvent the Danish-Greenlandic relationship in order to progress,” according to one commission official.¹⁶¹ Articles and public comments by Danish political figures and academics that have dismissed the validity of the Greenlandic commission serve this point – that Greenlanders still have to struggle to be taken seriously. One commission official commented ironically that seen from a biased Danish perspective, “Greenland has a very impossible position, because they are the primitive, telling the developed what they have to think.”¹⁶²

This way of contextualizing the commission presents a narrative of Greenland’s efforts in which the process of reconciliation will serve to promote Greenland as an equal partner to Denmark. Whether this is effective, with Denmark not participating, remains to be seen based on commission’s recommendations and an evaluation of its impact. Adler-Nissen and Gad, writing about Greenland’s efforts to achieve independent sovereignty, see the nation as occupying the “postcolonial problematique par excellence: how to acquire subjectivity from a disadvantaged position in a relationship.”¹⁶³ By publically acknowledging traumatic events of the past and taking initiative to resolve them at home, a narrative of Greenland as a sovereign actor on the world stage can be articulated.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Greenlandic politician, March 2016.

¹⁶⁰ Kuokkanen, ‘To See What State,’ 15.

¹⁶¹ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹⁶² Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹⁶³ Adler-Nissen and Gad, *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games* 244.

6. Conclusion

“Although we are not a colony anymore, we are still feeling the effects of colonial times, developmentally, genetically and spiritually.”

This comment, made by the director of the Greenland National Museum, Daniel Thorleifsen, in the commission’s promotional video, captures the ideological impulse that spurred the creation of the project, and the character of the controversy that was to follow.¹⁶⁴ In response to the conscious use of the theoretical framework of post-colonialism in order to pursue the lofty goal of reconciliation, a battle of words erupted about whether Greenland was ever a colony at all and whether Denmark deserved to face further scrutiny for its actions.

With its contentious beginnings, the commission set out to gather information and personal stories on the ground, visiting communities and conducting analysis with the goal of creating a dialogue and, ultimately, developing policy recommendations that Naalakkersuisut can act on in the future. While it began within the agenda of a particular prime minister, the commissioners are working towards society-wide results. “The commission has been working hard on changing this conception [of the commission as Aleqa Hammond’s political project],” explained one commission official. “But it’s a hard job, I think...I think she gained a lot of focus, but at the same time she made our job much harder.”¹⁶⁵

It is not clear that such a job would have ever been easy, but the commission has faced turnover and high profile criticism as its work has progressed, in addition to the logistical and investigative work required of the job. The commission has also proceeded with a focus on Greenland’s internal sociological tensions, making Denmark (as the former colonial power) no longer the main target for its inquiries. “People in Denmark never realized that the commission that we ended up with actually had nothing to do with Denmark,” explained an official affiliated with the commission.¹⁶⁶ However, the commission’s work and its results are very much situated in the context of Greenland’s evolving history and relationship with Denmark.

¹⁶⁴ “Saammaateqatigiinnissamut Isumalioqatigiissitaq,” my translation.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with commission official, February 2016.

In addition to exploring the nature of the commission, with this research I sought to investigate the narratives surrounding the commission itself, in order to better understand the dynamics of Greenland's internal politics and its evolving national identity. This analysis emerged from interviews, primary source documents and newspaper coverage of the commission, and is grounded in narrative inquiry out of concern for how these issues are presented and constructed in the midst of a current event. The four themes that emerged – Greenland as victim; Greenland as historical project; Greenland as unity-in-progress; Greenland as sovereign actor – are useful for understanding the national identity building as part of Greenland's planned way forward.

Following Andrews' formulation, the commission can be seen as a venue for the production of the grand narratives of Greenland, as "citizens of a nation come together in a communal activity of telling and listening to stories of one another; and through such a process the stories of individuals become transformed into threads of a new national narrative."¹⁶⁷ These stories include wounds from the colonial and modernization period that remain unhealed as well as present-day tensions between Greenlanders, and emphasize the need for representations of Greenland made by members of the society instead of outsiders. The strategically ambitious goal of gaining legitimacy before the international community is tied to the feelings of resentment or consternation over Denmark's perceived patronizing attitude towards Greenland and its people. Perhaps the commission will help resolve some of these dilemmas. Gad suggests that potentially, "Greenlandic identity politicians could aim for constructing a post-post-colonial Greenlandic identity, an identity transcending the constant reference to the colonial Other: Denmark."¹⁶⁸ Depending on Greenland's future path of economic development and autonomy, this may prove necessary.

This project set out to answer three research questions; the last concerned how the commission's work could be seen as an indication for the form similar projects may take elsewhere. As a part of the body of academic research investigating identity narratives in Europe, the study of Greenland's grappling with the legacy of colonial occupation and its navigation of nation building today can provide much-needed perspective on the legacies of empire and the importance of the decolonization process

¹⁶⁷ Andrews, "Grand National Narratives," 45.

¹⁶⁸ Gad, "Post-Colonial Identity," 15.

on identity formation. In the unique case of Greenland, reconciliation has come to be inward-looking, politically contentious, and multidisciplinary in its process, and notably has proceeded without Denmark, the expected culpable party. By providing an in-depth discussion of the commission and an analysis of the narratives surrounding its work, this research offers suggestion for areas of interest in future analysis. Along these lines, areas for further research could include comparing this case to other cases of decolonization and reconciliation commissions that have taken place; approaching with a similar lens the cases of former colonies or overseas territories and their relationship to European powers; or, investigating the applicability of this framework to other indigenous and/or minority groups such as the Sami who are living within sovereign states. The notion of 'one-sided' reconciliation as the format for internal sociological investigation and dialogue, while perhaps unintended at the start, could also be explored as a model with relevance elsewhere.

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Appendix: Primary source documents

1) Aleqa Hammond, "New Year Speech 2014." English translation made available on government webpage available at:

<http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Taler/ENG/Nyt%C3%A5rstale%202014%20ENG.pdf>

Original version (in Greenlandic):

<http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Taler/GL/Ukiortaami%20oqalugiaat%202014.pdf>

Relevant selection:

About reconciliation

Greenland was formerly a colony of Denmark. Over time, Greenland has developed into a self-governing nation. During our development as a country and as a people, much of our focus has been on the legal and economic relations between Denmark and Greenland. We have developed in many areas, not all, but in many areas in terms of our rights and economic conditions. We have now come so far that today the people of Greenland are a recognised nation under international law, with the right to self-determination. This people of Greenland have achieved this recognition and these rights in accordance with international law under the UN. Yet in the steps we have taken, the development of our society and our development as a people, we have neglected the aspect of reflection and reconciliation. We have failed to discuss and consider the events, the colonial structures and the conditions that in some cases still exist today between certain population groups in Greenland. We need to consider these conditions and to debate them within a proper fixed framework, and to face the consequences of the recommendations that may be the result of this debate. The Government of Greenland has therefore taken the initiative to set up the Greenland Reconciliation Commission during 2014.

I would suggest that in the intersection between our history and the relations between our population groups we can find some of the greatest taboos in our country today. We must break down these taboos in order to reconcile ourselves to today's situation and to strengthen our own self-awareness. We must also be ready to change things, should discrepancies be discovered. There are conditions that, quite understandably, many of our people have found emotionally challenging, and there are feelings that need to be processed. Reconciliation is therefore the next natural step to take. Reconciliation with the past, with events, with conditions between population groups, and with ourselves. We must now put ourselves first in our own country, and take the next steps as one nation, so that even more of our people can take control of their own lives and make a positive contribution to our society.

Reconciliation is a far-reaching process. It must and may not be an excluding process. Yet it is a process that will seem difficult at times, and that will require less pleasant topics to be discussed. In these situations it is important to remember that we are doing this in order to process events in our history and the relations between us, so as to become stronger as a result of this process. I am looking forward to making a start on

this, and for us to accomplish this; and to moving forward and looking back on the reconciliation process, acknowledging it as a milestone and as a period of reinforcement in the history of our country and our people.

Greenland is a unique country, and the Greenlanders are a unique people. Together with others who have settled here, and who live side by side with us, we are a people who take up the challenges that, from the outside, may seem impossible to resolve. And we do resolve them.

2) Commission mission (Kommissorium). Danish version used as basis for translation available at:

<http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Publications/Formandens%20Departement/Forsoningskommission/Kommissorium%20da.pdf>

Greenlandic version:

<http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Publications/Formandens%20Departement/Forsoningskommission/Kommissorium%20gl.pdf>

Kommissorium for Forsoningskommissionen i Grønland

Indledning

Grønland er en tidligere koloni, der med grundlovsændringen i 1953 fik ændret status og blev en del af Rigsfællesskabet. Grønland har siden udviklet sig til at blive et selvstyrende land. Det grønlandske samfunds udvikling er i høj grad præget af et tankesæt, der er en direkte følge af kolonihistorien. Det har sat sit præg på folket og samfundets udvikling.

Det grønlandske folk har et fælles ansvar for at bidrage til en positiv udvikling. I et mangfoldigt samfund skal der herske respekt for borgernes forskellige erindringer og opfattelser af begivenheder, historiske handlinger og beslutninger igennem tiden. Det er vigtigt at diskutere disse forhold og skabe forståelse for deres betydning for nutidens samfundsforhold samt folkets levevilkår – til gavn for den enkeltes og det grønlandske folks selvbevidsthed.

Forsoningsprocessen skal bidrage til at viden om samfundsforhold og forståelse borgerne imellem forøges. En større bevidsthed om eget udgangspunkt giver en forbedret mulighed for et inkluderende og respektfuld samfund og en tryk udvikling.

Idet Naalakkersuisut, med udgangspunkt i regeringsgrundlaget, ønsker at forsoning finder sted i befolkningen, nedsættes en kommission til at forestå processen. Kommissionen understøttes af et sekretariat.

Kommissorium

I koalitionsaftalen står: For at lægge afstand til koloniseringen af vort land, er det nødvendigt at der finder forsoning og tilgivelse sted. Der udarbejdes en handlingsplan for dette.

Kommissionen skal igangsætte aktiviteter der skal afdække kultur- og samfundsmæssige udfordringer i samfundet der afstedkommer spændingsforhold, som følge af den koloniale arv.

For at skabe indblik i sammenhænge skal kommissionen indsamle viden og arbejde målrettet ud fra to overordnede indfaldsvinkler:

a) Interne sociologiske problemstillinger

b) Historisk udvikling og kulturel interaktion i Grønland samt mellem Grønland og Danmark

Målet for kommissionens arbejde er at skabe dialog og indblik omkring den socio-historiske udvikling i Grønland, således at man som samfund tager ved lære af konsekvenserne omkring egne handlinger for derigennem at skabe bedre rammer for fremtiden.

Arbejdsproces

Gennem igangsættelse af forskellige projekter skal der arbejdes for at skabe forståelse for diversiteten i samfundet.

Kommissionen skal konkretisere og tilrettelægge de forskellige projekter, deres mål og delmål. I forbindelse med projekter kan der nedsættes arbejdsgrupper, der skal bidrage til kommissionens aktiviteter samt handlingsplaner for forøget forsoning.

Kommissionen understøttet af sekretariatet fastlægger en overordnet strategi samt arbejdsplan for aktiviteterne og indsamlingen af viden. I denne arbejdsplan skal indgå offentlige, inddragende arrangementer.

Kommissionen skal løbende formidle sit arbejde via en til formålet oprettet hjemmeside. Kommissionen skal i øvrigt afgøre, hvordan viden, resultater og anbefalinger mest hensigtsmæssigt formidles.

Kommissionen skal aflevere årlig statusrapport og skal i udgangspunktet afslutte sit arbejde i udgangen af 2017, med mulig forlængelse, hvor kommissionen fremlægger sit samlede arbejde og anbefalinger i en betænkning. Hvis kommissionen har grund til at forlænge sit arbejde, kan kommissionen fremsætte sit begrundede ønske til Naalakkersuisut, der efterfølgende vil vurdere anmodningen for ønsket.

Sammensætning

Forsoningskommissionen består af 4-6 medlemmer der udpeges af Naalakkersuisut. Medlemmerne skal have relevante faglige og personlige kompetencer til at indgå i arbejdet. De nærmere arbejdsforhold fastlægges i en kontrakt.

Majoriteten af medlemmerne skal bo i Grønland af både administrative, økonomiske og logistiske hensyn samt ud fra et nærhedsprincip.

Kommissionen kan inddrage ressourcepersoner til at bidrage og indgå i de relevante arbejdsgrupper eller aktiviteter som kommissionen igangsætter. Ressourcepersonerne

skal udpeges efter deres relevante kompetencer passende til de forskellige aktiviteter der iværksættes.

Naalakkersuisut kan i samråd med kommissionen udpege 2-3 internationale ressourcepersoner til at indgå i arbejdsgrupper. Desuden kan Naalakkersuisut udpege æresmedlemmer til at indgå i kommissionen.

De repræsenterede partier i Inatsisartut har muligheden for at nedsætte en politisk udpeget følgegruppe, hvor hvert parti kan udnævne én faglig relevant repræsentant. Følgegruppen kan kommentere, anbefale, eller stille forslag om mulige initiativer, emner og temaer. Kommissionen skal vurdere følgegruppens input, og afgør suverænt prioriteringerne i sit arbejde.

3) “Forsoningsprocessen er befolkningens eje” editorial published by commission in *Atuagagdliutit*, 7 October 2015. Danish version used as basis for translation available at: <http://saammaatta.gl/da/Nyheder/2015/10/Forsoningskommissionen-er-befolkningens-eje>

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Forsoningsprocessen er befolkningens eje

I juli 2014 blev Grønlands Forsoningskommission nedsat under det daværende Naalakkersuisut. Kommissionens opgave er groft sagt, at identificere den koloniale arv og dens indvirkning på dagens Grønland. Kommissionen skal på den baggrund igangsætte forsoningshandlinger – hvilket blandt andet kommer til at give sig udslag i en dialog med befolkningen i Grønland og i øvrigt folk med tilknytning til landet. I sidste ende skal kommissionen komme med anbefalinger om, hvordan Grønland kan give slip på fortiden og komme videre. Det handler om, at vi skal turde tale om, hvordan vi har oplevet en tid, som ikke kan fortrænges. For hvis vi fortrænger historien, kommer vi aldrig videre. Et kendt grønlandsk citat lyder: At fortie et spøgelse, får det blot til at vokse sig større.

Kritikere af Forsoningskommissionen kan ikke se pointen med en forsoning. Historikeren Thorkild Kjærgaard har kaldt den en farce, sågar benægtet at landet har været en koloni, og politikeren Søren Espersen kalder den en fejl, som ingen dansk regering vil støtte. Begge har været meget passionerede og følelsesladede i deres kritik. Forfatteren Niviaq Korneliussens udmelding om “Enough of that post-colonialshit” i *Homo Sapienne* (2014) er af visse blevet taget til indtægt for, at Forsoningskommissionen også, fra ihvert fald én grønlandsk intellektuel, ses som en fejl. Sætningen skal dog forstås ud fra, at det grønlandske samfund og den enkelte grønlænder ikke længere kan på råde sig offerrollen ved at henvise til dethistoriske forløb. Niviaq Korneliussen mener, at den enkelte i stedet bør tage ansvar for eget liv og dermed bidrage til samfundsudviklingen. Nedsættelsen er i den henseende et skridt i den rigtige retning. I øvrigt en nedsættelse som Niviaq Korneliussen støtter op om.

Forsoningsprocessen er vores egen

Forsoningsprocessen handler grundlæggende om, at vi som borgere skal tage et medansvar og aktivtforholde os til vores samfundsudfordringer. Det handler om at styrke forhold og skabe bedre rammer for fremtiden. Forsoningsprocessen skal bidrage til at der skabes større indblik og forståelse for sammenhænge af hændelser.

Det handler om mig, dig og vores forhold til alle borgere uanset baggrund. Forsoningsprocessen er vores egen og befolkningens egen. Vi skal som borgere forholde os til vores egen historie, vores egen hverdag og vores samfundsudfordringer. Vi er alle som borgere med til at forme vores samfund og vores egne handlinger spiller en rolle i hvordan samfundet fungerer. Vi skal som borgere hver især være bevidst om vores rolle og værdi som borger i vores fælles samfund. Vi skal derfor kunne lytte til hinanden for at skabe forståelse for de udfordringer, de enkelte har været eller er berørt af. Vi skal tage udgangspunkt i os selv og måske bevæge os en lille smule væk fra at lade udefrakommende eksperter fortælle os hvordan vi har det. Vi, borgerne i Grønland, er eksperterne om det grønlandske folk og dets oplevelser og følelser. Således kan vi som borgere være med til at skabe forbedringer for vores egen hverdag og samfund. På denne måde sætter vi skub i tingenes tilstand for at komme videre.

Man må lære at udnytte alles fulde potentiale

Vi har netop afholdt en række borger- og informationsmøder, i Nordgrønland, hvor vi har fået indhentet endel værdifulde udsagn. Et af de første skridt som kommissionen har iværksat, er en indsamling af beretninger og fortællinger fra befolkningen i Grønland, via interviewundersøgelse og egentlige interview – altså en dialog om, hvad udfordringerne i dagens Grønland er for nogle.

Mange relevante emner er blevet belyst og den viden som kommissionen indtil nu har indhentet, handler om dagligdags udfordringer. Disse udfordringer er generelt af demokratisk karakter og kredser overordnet om emner som uddannelse, beskæftigelse, samfund, kommunale- og stedforhold, sociale forhold, og menneskelig adfærd. Mange føler en manglende indflydelse på lokale forhold – og samfundsændringer bliver indført uden at befolkningen bliver inddraget nok i beslutningerne.

Oftest spørges der, hvad det har med forsoning at gøre? Svaret er ganske enkelt. Selvom en masse mennesker, der har interesse for Grønland, har viden om hvad befolkningen i Grønland tænker og mener, så er det bedste at få informationerne fra kilden selv. Blandt de informationer som kommissionen hidtil har erhvervet sig handler grundlæggende om følelsen af manglende indflydelse på lokale forhold. Følelsen af at politiske beslutninger bliver truffet henover hovederne på befolkningen har klare fortællinger i de historiske. Se bare på lukningen af Qullissat eller flytningen af Thulebefolkningen. Altså er en af udfordringerne i dag af demokratisk karakter.

En anden ting som skinner igennem via dialogen med befolkningen er frustrationer angående det, at man taler hinanden ned, altså en form for grønlandsk jantelov og en deraf følgende mangel af tro på egne evner og muligheder. Hvorfor er det sådan? Det er tilsyneladende svært at hæve sig op og udmærke sig i forhold til ens medborgere, uden at man skal tales ned igen. Et samfund med så få mennesker som det grønlandske må udnytte alles fulde potentiale, uagtet at man kan være uenige.

Følelsen af utilstrækkelighed, og den deraf følgende nedgørelse af andre, ligger dybt i befolkningen – og endel af dette stammer fra den historiske udvikling, hvor mantraet fra slutningen af 1940'erne frem vardenisering - Grønland og grønlænderne skulle blive ligesom Danmark og danskerne. Daniseringen var ikkeudelukkende Danmarks fortjeneste – også grønlandske politikere pressede på for at fremme udviklingen, og begge parter evnede at skabe rammerne for og indholdet i det moderne Grønland. Tanken bag helemoderniseringsprocessen var prisværdig og blev også gennemført med succes i mange henseender. Samtidigt bevægede man sig ud i ukendt farvand, og derfor var fejltagelser uundgåelige, og disse eksperimenter havde konsekvenser for mange mennesker. Grønlandiseringen, der fulgte i kølvandet på Hjemmestyret, var en reaktion på daniseringen. Følelsen af at ville selv i eget hjem, er forståelig, men det var en reaktion født i følelsens vold, og i det lange løb måske ikke den bedste beslutning. Omvendt er der også noget intuitivt skævt i at køre en udvikling, der ikke tager udgangspunkt i befolkningen. Det at man i lange perioder ikke har gjort dette har hægtet befolkningen af, og gjort befolkningen til tilskuere til landets udvikling.

Når udgangspunktet er, at man ikke vil nedgøres for at forsøge noget alternativt, så er det vigtigste at undgå at lave fejl. Det er selvsagt ikke befordrende for en positiv udvikling – i stedet gemmer mange sig bag et system eller bag et regelsæt, uden fleksibilitet og uden et menneskeligt ansigt. Udvikling kommer ud af at turde prøve. Det er let at lave fejl, når man prøver noget nyt. Alle laver fejl, men ikke alle lærer af dem. Men uden at prøve kommer man ingen vegne.

Den almene befolknings historie er vigtig

Forsoningskommissionen har en opgave i at formidle disse holdninger og tanker fra folk, som normalt ikke kommer til orde. På samme led ønsker kommissionen at fortælle en revideret historie, skrevet med udgangspunkt i den grønlandske befolkning, hvor hovedfokus vil være på den almene befolkning, og specifikt dem, der mærkede konsekvenserne af udviklingen.

Hvis den historiske bevidsthed i den grønlandske befolkning ikke omfatter den almene befolknings historie, så er det let at se historien ud fra beslutningstagernes vinkel, og så fremgår følelserne af manglende indflydelse ikke. At fortælle ens egen historie har en dobbeltvirkende effekt, specielt når man ikke tidligere har fortalt den eller, som i Grønlands tilfælde, at historien er fortalt af andre, og i reglen er det ikke en historie om de der på allernærmeste hold blev berørt af udviklingen. Først og fremmest sætter det ting på plads i forhold til de myter og vrangforestillinger historien er omgærdet af. I hvor høj grad evnede de grønlandske politikere igennem landsrådene at påvirke udviklingen, eller var det udelukkende det danske statsapparat der satte dagsordenen for Grønlands udvikling? For det andet, så betyder det at fortælle ens egen historie, at man kigger indad og får en mulighed for at forstå egne oplevelser, med egne ord og medens nære som referencepunkter.

Er der så en direkte sammenhæng mellem det historiske og det nutidige? Ja! Hvis dagens samfund ikke er et resultat på godt og ondt af det, som kommer før, så er der ingen mening i at kende historien.

At tage den historiske udvikling op til overvejelse

Det er Forsoningskommissionens opgave at tage den historiske udvikling op til overvejelse. Både for at se på fejltagelserne, men også for at se på det gode i udviklingen. Det siges, at Grønland er et af de tidligerekoloniserede samfund i verden, hvor det går bedst. Det grønlandske sprog er bevaret, ligesom dengrønlandske kultur lever i bedste velgående og uddannelsesniveaet er stigende. Samtidigt er der problemer og til kritikerne af Forsoningskommissionen vil vi spørge – hvad er jeres løsningsforlag til problemerne, for det anerkendes vel at der er problemer som bør adresseres? Idéen med kommissionen er ikke til for at skabe splid, men at skabe (historisk) bevidsthed og aftabuisere svære emner.

Vi vil i løbet af dette år skabe større initiativer for at komme i tæt dialog med befolkningen, og medvirke til at viden om forskellige forhold forøges. Vi finder det vigtigt at forståelse borgerne imellem øges, så forskellige grupper af befolkningen kan føle sig hørt og inkluderet. Hvad vi hidtil har indhentet er foreløbigt bidrag fra befolkningen i dele af Nord- og Østgrønland. Og vi er naturligvis spændte på hvad andre borgere fra andre landsdele kan komme med af yderligere bidrag.

Vi vil gerne benytte lejligheden til at sige tak til borgerne i Nordgrønland og de forskellige institutioner såsom SPS, Piareersarfiit, alderdomshjemmene, Sullissviit og personale i folkeskolerne for deres deltagelse og bidrag.

Forsoningskommissionen håber at kunne bidrage til at give plads til alle og fremme et mere rummeligt og sammenhængende samfund. For grundlæggende handler det om at styrke det grønlandske samfund, påtværs af landets befolkningsgrupper

-Forsoningskommissionen