Postcolonial Sovereignty in Greenland and Indigenous Australia

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Abstract

This article explores continuities, overlaps and differences between notions of sovereignty in Greenland and Australia. It operates from the premise that sovereignty in the handed-down Westphalian conceptualisation needs to be challenged to better correspond with the vast heterogeneity of colonial and postcolonial experiences across the globe, historically distorted by colonialism and invasion. The article pursues the question of defining different and locally grown formulations of sovereignty through a comparison of Greenland – Kalaallit Nunaat - and Indigenous Australia. In both cases this search takes place against the legacy of vested interests by the former colonial powers, Denmark, and Britain/settler colonial Australia, in preventing the articulation of a different sovereignty not premised on narrowly defined European views on territoriality as a given and colonialism as having the final say on how sovereignty may be described and circumscribed.

Introduction

When this special issue of *Kult* on Greenland/Kalaallit Nunaat was first envisaged, the idea took departure in the upcoming anniversary of Hans Egede's arrival in Greenland in 1721. Then came COVID 19 and events to commemorate the anniversary largely disappeared. Probably with considerable relief to many on both sides of the North Atlantic. Hans Egede was, and is, a controversial and divisive figure in Greenland and Denmark. In Denmark this can be seen in Kim Leine's Hans Egede novel, *Rød mand/Sort mand*, which Leine (2018) has described as the second novel in a trilogy on "the Greenlanders' fight for freedom" (Skyum-Nielsen 2018). In Greenland, in 2020, the Black Lives Matters protests and their partial focus on removing statues of white colonisers

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from the public space led to a discussion and referendum on the removal of the statue of Hans Egede from its elevated position above Nuuk.

I begin my article with this short aside on Egede, because he, in his capacity as Greenland's coloniser, is the embodiment of the origin of sovereignty issues between Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark and of why they subsequently panned out the way they did. It is of course well-known that Hans Egede came both to look for and rechristianise descendants of the Viking settlers that had brought Christianity with them to Southern Greenland, but he also came sponsored by those who sought to economically profit from the whale trade pioneered by the Dutch. Such interests were shared by Danish(-Norwegian) merchants and the King, the sovereign of the then Danish-Norwegian kingdom. I could continue this historical account here with detailing how Denmark pursued its interests in Greenland and how those interests underwent a number of transformations over the subsequent 300 years – yet never disappeared. However, I will leave that history with the summary statement that Denmark came, was and has remained in Greenland for 300 years – to protect Danish interests. To a critical international audience – versed in postcolonial, decolonial, whiteness or racialisation studies - this may seem a statement too obvious to merit inclusion, but in a Danish language patrolled discourse on the relationship between Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark, the disavowal of Danish interests taking precedence over Greenlandic remains the norm. Not that there does not exist a counter discourse. Indeed, the counter discourse is as old as Danish colonialism in Greenland itself, but the (moral) defence of the realm reigns supreme. Here is Jens Dahl in 1986 identifying the parameters of that defence pertaining to the years, when Greenland had ceased being labelled a colony:

> There is a great deal of mystery surrounding the application of the term "colony" to the Greenlandic society after 1953. It is part of the Danish self-image in general and particularly among the civil servants and science people attached to Greenland that we can act confidently, assured that after 1953 we have certainly not acted out of the interests of a *colonial* power in our work. Subjectively seen, the colonial system was supposedly dismantled, but objectively we are in a condition of alienated self-justification. Just as obvious as it is to us that France conducts unmitigated colonial policy in Polynesia, just as clear it is to the French that the Danish policy in Greenland reflects the relationship between colony and colonial power. And the conclusion is also then in all its simplicity that the Greenlandic society also after 1953, has to be analysed inside an overall framework of a colonial system, because […] "the strongest

> colonisation appeared after the colonial status of Greenland was abolished," to borrow a historian's characterisation of the situation. (Jensen 2018: 111).

Dahl's comment is discussed in my book, *Postcolonial Denmark,* as part of an overall argument that hinges on seeing "postcolonial debate" in Denmark as flawed. I read the momentum building on an international anti-imperial movement in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – in terms of intellectual and political activism – as having deflated by the 1980s. What Dahl describes is a stalemate, where the introduction of Home Rule in 1979 becomes an argument of a literal conceptualisation of the postcolonial as exclusively post. As if the transition to higher degrees of Greenlandic autonomy are the result of Danish altruism, benevolence and successful civilising mission,[2] leading to increasing Greenlandic participation as they become prepared – by Danes.

The argument over what postcolonial refers to in the Greenlandic-Danish context is both a question of the political process, that is, who drove it, and an academic debate over what the term postcolonial signifies. I am less interested in the academic debate here, which in the Anglophone context, where the term originated, is a dated discourse. Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (2000 [1972]), Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001 [1965], Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1995 [1978]) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Homi Bhabha's "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" (1990), Stuart Hall's "When Was the Post-Colonial? Thinking at the Limit" (1995), Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), and Bart Moore-Gilbert's summary of the debates, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Perspectives, Politics* (1997), collectively set the parameters of the debate, even if nothing could aspire to define the field as a whole. I mention these texts as a challenge to those working in political science and history, the disciplines that have held a disproportionate influence on defining the postcolonial in a Danish-Greenlandic context – as either a political evolutionary process or a historical era question - yet feel uncompelled to refer to these debates. Even though these debates about the entangled reality of political, social and cultural emancipation for colonial subjects, so evidently find their starting point in historical and political science derived anticolonial and emancipatory discourse.

I am not claiming the postcolonial exists only as a field owned by specific scholars, but the term postcolonial in a Danish-Greenlandic context cannot exist in a vacuum from the scholarship that

[2] For details of the arduous process of devolution in the North Atlantic, see Jensen 2018. For the links between Danish colonialism projected as benevolent, altruistic and a civilising influence and nation-empires elsewhere in Europe, see Jensen 2020. For the links between notions of exceptionalism governing nation-empires conceptualisations of selfhood, see Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2022.

developed the term and its reference points. The reluctance to engage these debates speaks volumes about the nation narration Danish mainstream academia engage in, where Greenland becomes an important object for illustrating and justifying Danish acts. And this form of nation narration pertains in a Danish context to a sovereignty discourse that coexists paradoxically and contradictorily as the defence of the realm that always places the interests of Denmark, as Edward Said argues in one of his late critiques of British imperialism, "on top" (Said 2003).

Postcolonial sovereignty

Postcolonial sovereignty captures the dilemma outlined above. If the continued self-interest of the former nation-empire (Jensen 2020) is neglected, postcolonial sovereignty may simply come across as the belated realisation of independence produced collaboratively by colonial and nation-imperial interests seeking both to achieve the same goal – future coexistence. Yet, where in the world, where European nation-empires ruled is there an example of this? Why then should Denmark-Greenland be in a unique position for this to develop? And how to explain through such a prism the sustained Greenlandic protests against Danish assumed superiority that can be traced back through Danish-Greenlandic contact history but also simply be detected in the present – though often ignored by Danish research. Looking for a more productive way of conceptualising postcolonial sovereignty, in my analysis here, requires a detour to the other side of the globe, where sovereignty has been developed to mean something different from its restricted, Eurocentric, formulaic, post-Westphalian configuration where it simply refers to indisputable reign over territory (see Steinberger quotation on *Creative Spirits* webpage[3] see also Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2022). But it also means explaining my personal motivation for writing this article.

I have for decades worked in Australian studies from a postcolonial perspective and have spent collectively years in Australia studying, researching and simply staying there. In a way it was my interest in Indigenous Australia that spurred by interest in Greenland once I began to explore what a postcolonial Denmark might look like. In this way, my interest in Greenland and the later interest in its pursuit of independence has been formed by what I have researched at times before and at times concurrently in Australia. Currently, in a book project, *Remotely Australian*, exploring how the predominant settler colonial way of narrating Australia as a place can be challenged by foregrounding

[3] https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/selfdetermination/aboriginal-sovereignty-in-australia.

Indigenous perspectives that have a long history of being ignored in the Australian context. Just as Greenlandic voices have been ignored, when they spoke out against Danish discourse on what Greenland "required". That does not make my perspective Indigenous any more than looking at the Greenlandic-Danish context (and from now on insisting on Greenlandic-Danish, rather than Danish-Greenlandic) makes me Greenlandic. I have no family connections, nor old circles of evolving discussions with Greenlanders or Indigenous Australians. Instead, I could frame my approach by seeing Kevin Gilbert's, *Because a White Man Will never Do It* (2013 [1973]), as an indirect call for a white wo/man to do something. So far, I would argue no white person has ever "done it" in Denmark in relation to Greenland and arguably that is now too late. Yet there is different work to be done, both in Australia and Denmark, that begins with the recognition of the importance of Indigenous Australia and Greenland to the construction of a settler colonial Australian and Danish selfhood. My argument here is that if we only see the pursuit of what I labelled above as self-interest (of states), we miss the important point that nation-states function also as the result of emotional investment in moral narratives, or emotional economies, of selfhood. If the self-interest of states were just that, Denmark and Australia could simply claim they suppressed marginalised groups because they had the power and the will to do so. Yet intrinsic to the self-interests of states is the requirement to justify, to legitimate, what anyway amounts to the will and power to subdue those standing in their way. Sovereignty represents the will and power of the state, but also reflects the need to justify and legitimate itself.

Postcolonial, decolonial, racialisation and whiteness studies represent radically different ways of engaging with what sovereignty means, and how it can be articulated, beyond the normative practice of political science. The advantage of engaging Indigenous Australia before returning to Greenland(-Denmark) is that there exists an established academic-activist discourse that has in recent decades homed in on postcolonial sovereignty as a key to open up the locked discourse of settler colonial Australia. I would argue until now in Greenland a parallel situation has predominantly taken the form of an independence discourse rather than one about postcolonial sovereignty. Yet I would also argue that the independence discourse in Greenland is becoming premised on a postcolonial sovereignty discourse that Denmark, and what I would label as the Danish(-Greenlandic) Establishment,[4] seek to constantly undermine by referring to the economic challenges of Greenland and the importance of Danish aid – underpinned by a logic that casts Danish aid as implicitly benevolent and/or based on

[4] I am using Establishment here in a similar vein to Owen Jones (2015) in his book on the British Establishment.

mutual interests. I would also argue that there is a continuous restaging by the Danish(-Greenlandic) Establishment. A current Danish Prime Minister might immediately refer the question of the United States buying Greenland (that is taking over Greenlandic sovereignty from Denmark) to the Greenlandic Premier. Yet no Danish Prime Minister has shied away from defending the Danish record in Greenland. In fact, they have primarily not even felt the urge to question the Danish record before defending it.

Indigenous Australia and postcolonial sovereignty

There are many ways of outlining the Indigenous Australian sovereignty discourse. One could single out academic literature, where Moreton-Robinson's edited volume, *Sovereign Subjects* (2007), and her monograph, *The White Possessive* (2015) are two touchstones. Or one could begin with the more activism-based books, not least, Kevin Gilbert's *Aboriginal Sovereignty* (1987). The space in-between is occupied by different strands, for example books outlining the fault lines of political discourse around Indigenous sovereignty, such as Altman and Hinkson's *Coercive Reconciliation* (2007), and books less concerned with sovereignty as a negotiated space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, and more with what I would classify as recuperative strategies. Such strategies are aimed at bringing forth, what has been repressed, marginalised, silenced by white settlement/settler colonialism and its legacies (Jensen 2005; Wolfe 2006). There are a number of publications, but an important book initiating the mapping out of an Indigenous space would be Michele Grossman's edited volume, *Blacklines* (2003), with a number of contributions by Indigenous public intellectuals. In recent years, the space has been occupied by books such as Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* (2014), a bestseller that uses colonial records to detail evidence of pre-colonial Indigenous land management practices, thus contributing to the dispelling of white settlement's myth of Indigenous Australians as "nomadic" - uninterested in settling or unable to settle - and thus by implication underscoring the terra nullius doctrine of white settlement. Pascoe also wrote a version for children, *Young Dark Emu* (2019), illustrating the enormous educational importance of books narrating Indigenous accounts and counter-narratives to colonial settler narratives neglecting, marginalising and silencing of Indigenous perspectives. The dispelling of settler colonial mythologies and establishing counter-narratives of Indigenous pre-colonial lives, their legacies, and their recuperation strategies in contemporary Australia, also drive two of the most important novels by Indigenous authors to emerge in recent years, Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) and Tara June

Winch's *The Yield* (2019), both of which won the most prestigious literary award in Australia. Both novels are concerned with uncovering and recuperating Indigenous accounts of relations to the places where the novels are set. In both cases this entails writing against not only historical white narratives of settler colonialism unfolding unproblematically in an "empty land" with a few "straggling" Indigenous "non-communities". Both novels premise their counter-narratives on colonialism as a still unfolding project, where Indigenous Australians struggle against continuing practices of dispossession and displacement as non-Indigenous Australians seek further access to the land and its resources.

In my current book project, *Remotely Australian*, however, I have followed a different path to discuss postcolonial sovereignty. In one chapter, I seek to engage some relatively recent debates on Australian public broadcast television, where sovereignty has been held up as a key term, because sovereignty highlights that Indigenous Australia never ceded sovereignty. Hence, if you were invaded by a foreign country, Britain, but never surrendered or ceded sovereignty, how can Indigenous Australian sovereignty be claimed to be extinguished? Indigenous Australian sovereignty discourse stems from this fact, but it is also a response to perceived inadequacies of other terms that it has replaced, not least reconciliation as well as more limited forms of treaty arrangements. In my chapter on sovereignty, I note a number of petitions that called on Canberra to recognise that specific Indigenous groups had never ceded their territories. I also discuss how a group from the Kimberley in Australia's northwest sought and got an appointment with the British Queen (Australia's sovereign) to discuss land arrangements, since they as they argued shared sovereignty with the Queen (technically the owner of Crown Land), thus in interesting ways bypassing the Commonwealth of Australia in Canberra. In my analysis of the television debates I discuss how Indigenous sovereignty is used as a way to call for justice – not recognition as the end point – in a number of areas: from the still incredibly high incarceration rates of particularly young, Indigenous men, an equally incredible rate of deaths in custody, three decades after a report came with a damning critique of how Indigenous Australians were handled in the prison system,[5] closing the gap which refers to how Indigenous Australians remain disadvantaged and discriminated against in terms of health and education as well as socially and culturally. As should be clear from the above, Indigenous Australian sovereignty is a discourse

[5] Only a handful of the hundreds of recommendations have been implemented three decades later. In Australian debates this tends to be discussed in terms of a shameful indictment of governmental inaction, though it may be more accurate to see it as the result of a reluctance to see justice done for a marginalised population group.

that is far removed from sovereignty's Eurocentric origins in political science literature - to such an extent that it raises the question why then home in on this term, rather than say reconciliation?

The answer is twofold: One aspect is an utter Indigenous exasperation over government inaction. From this perspective, Indigenous prioritising of sovereignty reflects Gilbert's, *Because a White Man Will never Do It*, that is, the realisation it is not in the Australian government's short-term interests to meet the demands of Indigenous Australians. If the government acted on the findings of numerous reports and commissions, this would inevitably expose the racism Indigenous Australians are subjected to, and it would reveal the overwhelming reason for structural racism is settler colonialism and its legacy. It would show an Australian nation built around annihilation, displacement and cultural genocide against its Indigenous population, beginning with land displacement to make room for European-Australian farms and continuing until today with a broader struggle over land and resource access – broadly understood as a continuous practice of extractivism.

The second part of the answer to what Indigenous sovereignty involves is more complex. Where the first answer is concerned with speaking out against white settler colonialism and how its legacy continues to impact negatively on Indigenous Australian lives, the second answer begins from a different position. It asks what an Indigenous sovereignty might look like when it is not limited to a reaction to white settlement's encroachment on Indigenous lives, but defined on its own terms. Earlier I mentioned examples of recuperation strategies as counter-narratives premised on narrating localised histories through Indigenous voices. In recent years, this has seen a move away from reconciliation (and reparation), partially as a response to a governmental lack of interest, partially as the result of the realisation that reconciliation and reparation remain trapped within a settler colonial logic that understands settler colonialism as the inevitable precursor and frame for a postcolonial settlement. Postcolonial is here understood both as an after (colonial), but also as conditioned by colonialism even if it genuinely attempts to include the Indigene. Paradoxically, the failure of reconciliation, reparation and the lack of treaties, customarily seen as positioning Indigenous Australia in a legal no-man's-land, all work in favour of an Indigenous wiping-the-slate-clean approach, where Indigenous Australians decide what to take to the table, rather than going to the table to see what is being offered by a white, Anglo-centric Australian Commonwealth and its equally challenged states and territories. The works by the Indigenous artists, I mentioned earlier, Pascoe, Wright and Winch (but there are many others, albeit not with the same degree of publicity), all contribute towards the wiping-the-slate-clean approach by telling Indigenous stories, by describing Indigenous lives on the land, prior to, during and with an imagined post. The complexity is captured in the current wave of Indigenous

utopian-dystopian science-fiction that is less interested in science (future) and fiction (future), and more productively read as fiction that is preoccupied with the idea that imagining the future is the first step towards altering the present which again hinges on setting straight the record of the past (Polak 2017).[6] Indigenous sovereignty, in this brief recapitulation of a much broader picture in Australia, might then be understood as a future that imagines a reality of Indigenous sovereignty as a return to a pre-colonial sovereignty never surrendered, conditioned by survival in a genocidal colonial history, and continuous structural racism coupled with renewed dispossession and displacement in the present. The reason arts play such as central role in this process is because without imagination there can be no Indigenous sovereign future, as can be witnessed in how Indigenous references to place and community in Australia are accepted on an unprecedented scale in Australia. Pascoe's *Dark Emu* is about envisaging place in Australia, not as space where unsettled becomes place when settled, but as a time immemorial Indigenous way of interconnected relations with land (and sea in coastal communities). Winch's *The Yield* - in the process of narrating the protagonist's reconnection with her community after self-imposed exile – offers a dictionary of Wiradjuri words that defines the Ncurambang land on Indigenous terms. In Wright's *Carpentaria* it is a gigantic storm of the wet (the monsoon season in Australia's north) that destroys the white settler community in a combined reality-spiritual moment of postcolonial havoc – that also indirectly recruits climate change as the seed of the white community's ultimately self-destructive behaviour.

Shifting the postcolonial lens from Australia to Greenland

It is important to note, as I turn from Australia to Greenland – or in lieu of the Viking misnomer - Kalaallit Nunaat that the idea with the current article is not to demonstrate what Kalaallit Nunaat, or its people, Kalaaleq/Kalaallit, might learn from Indigenous Australia/ns.[7] Postcolonial trajectories, even if shaped by fighting overlapping imperial-colonial strategies of coercion, dispossession and marginalisation, are inevitably also shaped by localised forms of resistance, of counter-narratives and recuperation strategies embedded in structural affiliation with "country". Country here refers to the

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[6] One example of setting the record straight is the current massacre map project (https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php) that seeks to identify where Indigenous Australians were killed indiscriminately until 1930.

[7] I have not, parallel to Kalaallit Nunaat, used an Indigenous Australian language term to refer to their peoples, because of the vastly different Indigenous Australian languages spoken, depending on where you are from. Many languages have disappeared since 1788, but languages also remain and strong efforts are made to recuperate lost languages and language parts, as well as efforts to promote Indigenous Australian language usage. Though larger group oriented references do exist they are regional, not national.

Indigenous Australian conceptualisation where it does not refer to nationhood, or *mobhood*,[8] but connectivity to the land that is claiming you. Even processes of wiping the slate clean are not identical, even if civilising mission and imperial-colonial imagined benevolence that make up the white writing on the pre-existing slate are produced by an identical logic aimed at containment, coercion and elimination of the colonial subject (Wolfe 2006). It may appear grossly unfair to frame the attempted genocides against Indigenous Australia with Danish strategies in Greenland, yet if the focus is on cultural annihilation and white replacement strategies then clearly a pattern is detectable across the globe - also between Australia and Greenland. One occasionally cited[9] cross-reference is the Stolen Generations in Australia and what has become known in Greenland and Denmark as The Experiment, where Greenlandic children were taken from their communities and sent to Denmark to be raised as Danes, with a view of returning them to Greenland as spearheads of the Danish modernisation process (an updated civilising mission discourse that replaced former colonial civilising missions). But probably the most consistent parallel pattern is the systematic way in which governments, bureaucrats and people involved with Indigenous Australian and Greenlandic communities naturalised their privilege to lord it over the locals. This entails the need, but also an accompanying desire, to dismiss and/or belittle local knowledge as irrelevant or less relevant simply because it was Indigenous. Yet, much as the dismissal was the product of a white superiority complex, it also served to avoid the logical question: What entitled white settler Australia to rule over Indigenous communities? What entitled in the colonial era Danish missionaries/priests, administrators and traders and in the modernisation period bureaucrats, trade administrators, people in charge of infrastructure and construction workers, teachers, medical staff and many others to steamroll what they thought was good for Greenland, and incidentally for themselves and Denmark? The answer is not benevolence, unless we are meant to believe that Denmark was the exceptional case where imperial-colonial power was driven by altruism. The answer is a national self-interest that also promoted Danish careers in Greenland as both contributing to Danish national pride and the overriding discourse that benevolence was an automatic by-product of national self-interest. The transition from the modernisation process and its now openly criticised consequences for home rule in 1979 and then self-government in 2009 is marked by a bifurcation between two mutually exclusive narratives. One that remains prevalent in Denmark homes in on the steps towards increased autonomy created by Danish altruism, benevolence and clever social engineering preparing Greenlanders for their next level of autonomy. The other that

[8] It is customary among Indigenous Australians to refer to their affiliation with a culture-language group as “our mob”.
[9] Occasionally cited here does not refer to an inconsistent practice as much as reflect the infrequent parallels drawn between Greenland-Denmark and Australia.

I would argue is evolving from a status as contentious in both Denmark and Greenland to becoming, in Kalaallit Nunaat, a mainstream narrative, sees Greenlandic autonomy as the result of strategic battles fought by Greenlandic representatives against those presiding over the interests of Denmark and the Danish state. There are at times inter-generational disagreements over how successful those battles were, and whether home rule and self-government have in fact been accomplished. Or whether it is better described as an entrapped relationship, as illustrated by Julie Edel Hardenberg, artwork *Rigsfællesskabspause* (2005), where the “stitched together” Greenlandic and Danish flags are converted into a straitjacket. Thus, it is not only Greenland but also Denmark that is placed in a bind hampered by the mutually exclusive goals of mutual collaboration and preservation of national (self-)interest.

From sovereignty to postcolonial sovereignty

I argue that in terms of conventional, prescriptive political science, sovereignty is understood as a question of when rather than if, and conceptually seen as stepping-stones paving the way from autonomy to independence. Within this prescriptive frame, however, Greenlandic independence is a projection barred by its preconditions: Small population, limited human resources, economic deficit, inadequate military self-protection, among many other aspects – in other words the caveats regurgitated by Danish politicians, and Danish stakeholders who seek to keep Greenland within the fold, those forces and people that I have labelled the Danish(-Greenlandic) Establishment. What is also interesting concerning their touchstones for warning against Greenlandic independence is what they do not refer to - Danish self-interest. And then of course it is interesting how remarkably similar their arguments are to warnings against granting political autonomous power to Indigenous Australia, and more historically how parallel the Danish arguments are to the Portuguese/Belgian/British/Dutch arguments used against accepting an independent Angola/Congo/India/Indonesia.

The unpacking of what informs conventional prescriptive political science approaches to sovereignty reveals a complexity of interests underpinning nation-imperial interests, prejudicing the emancipation from colonial structures. Postcolonial sovereignty unsurprisingly entails its own complex agendas. Primarily because postcolonial sovereignty rejects the prescribed route to an independent Kalaallit Nunaat informed by the simplistic, linear logic of political science and IR discourse – that mirrors and underpins the language of existing power relations. To ask, as I did in the Indigenous Australia section, what a postcolonial sovereignty defined on Greenlandic terms might look like in Kalaallit

Nunaat, is to reject an instrumentalised Danish logic unable to see Greenland beyond its strategic position in the Arctic and beyond Greenland's significance to Denmark. Postcolonial sovereignty rejects reducing Kalaallit Nunaat's "potential" to its rich resources and the contradictory discourse of underlining its "healthy" relationship with Denmark while serving the interests of Denmark. A gaze informed by a postcolonial sovereignty approach begins by defining the interests of those eager to come to the "rescue" of a "struggling" emergent independent Greenland. In this light, Greenlandic politicians welcoming American interest in Greenland does not mean Greenlanders are blind to the broader American agenda in the Arctic. But it forces the Danish(-Greenlandic) Establishment's out of its smug position to warn Greenlanders against American interests in Greenland to protect and defend Danish interests in Greenland. This, however, in turn exposes the built-in contradictory Danish view of the United States as guarantor of peace in the Arctic through collaboration with Denmark as the upholder of sovereignty, but a threat to Danish sovereignty in Greenland, already compromised since the Second World War through the continued occupation by the Americans of the Thule Air Base.

Laying bare the Danish attitude also reveals that Denmark's interest is not a benevolent or altruistic driven "postcolonial" attitude but marked by continuous national-imperial interests dressed up in language of benevolence and altruism restaged to match Greenland's reassigned position in the Danish realm – from colony, over modernisation period, through home rule to self-government. The Danish(-Greenlandic) Establishment plays a pivotal role in preserving and protecting this view, against criticism and critique from anti-Establishment corners in Denmark and Greenland. The preserve and protect approach takes two different forms. The first position holds there was never anything colonial about the relationship, a position that has in recent years become increasingly marginalised, even if stakeholders of such views, not least Thorkild Kjærgaard and Bo Lidegaard, have been allocated a disproportionate amount of space in mainstream media. The second position is more dynamic. It acknowledges the relationship may have been colonial, remains strategically vague on details, emphasising instead the historical distance to the "colonial era". What is more interesting about this position is what it does not do. It does not outline what that colonial relationship entailed, that is, describe in what ways Denmark's administrative, economic-religious regime in Greenland was, for example, coercive and racist. Rather the position, to the extent it even engages colonialism, relegates colonialism to a bygone era best forgotten. Alternatively, when it engages the colonial relationship, it identifies and details cases and discourses seen as evidence of Danish exceptionalism (Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2022) without having detailed the colonial system the cases are exceptional

to. Thus colonialism as a repressive system may paradoxically be noted as an established truth, but the account of it is nowhere to be found. This is remarkably similar to when contemporary relations between Greenland and Denmark are laid out. Also here the Danish interests in Greenlandic airports, the way Danish continues to operate as a lingua franca in the higher echelons of Greenlandic society, and particularly in the relations between Denmark and Greenland, or the unrequested Danish proposal of military training in Greenland, are not discussed by the Danish/Greenlandic Establishment in terms of displaying Danish interests that either go against Greenlandic interests, or may be problematised simply because they are not called for from Greenland. What the historical and the contemporary cases show is how the Danish policy has been based on protracted negotiations seeking to keep as much influence as possible for as long as possible in the national self-interest. It also reveals that the Greenlandic path to independence is seen as a given, but since its exact nature remains indeterminable it opens for yet another restaging of Danish interests.

The Greenlandic response to Danish self-interest has been premised on recognising this as a given, traceable at least back to the post-war years, when Denmark could no longer unilaterally decide over Greenland, because of the era of decolonisation, stemming not least from the pressure from the UN, and the simultaneous rise of the Cold War that led to the wartime presence of the United States becoming permanent. Currently, postcolonial sovereignty in Greenland faces the obstacle of the Danish sovereignty over Greenland managed through the euphemistically named, *Rigsfællesskabet [*literally: *the Common Realm]*. *Rigsfællesskabet* on the one hand projects three nations, Denmark, Faroe Islands and Greenland, united under one sovereignty, while on the other hand operating as a strategic way for Denmark to promote its interests in the Arctic, bolstered over the last two decades by a militant foreign policy aimed at preserving the one-way special relationship with the United States. Postcolonial sovereignty in Kalaallit Nunaat, however, also exists outside the Danish-Greenlandic relationship or it would not be postcolonial. Outside this relationship, the articulation of postcolonial sovereignty redefines a Greenlandic outlook that is both local, regional and global. Regionally this entails not accepting the Danish pursuit of national self-interest to secure American goodwill, but promoting a separate course where demilitarisation is not understood as guaranteed by wielding the biggest weapon but by keeping weapons away. Whoever wins an arms race in the Arctic will not be an Arctic based sovereignty and once again the environment will pay the price. Globally, Kalaallit Nunaat has come to occupy a central place in the climate crisis and has sought to act on this crisis by not accepting large-scale environmentally destructive extractivism projects. And by

accepting the Ilulissat Icefjord Centre next door to the glacier that has become internationally famous as the illustration of the onslaught of climate change (Holst and Jensen 2015).

Conclusion: The layers of postcolonial sovereignty in Kalaallit Nunaat and Indigenous Australia

The article's section on Kalaallit Nunaat has spoken about postcolonial sovereignty primarily in terms of the interest of an emergent nation-state no longer held to ransom by its former nation-empire. There is little grounds for Indigenous Australian comparison here, because Indigenous Australia remains far from the level of political autonomy achieved by Kalaallit Nunaat, for many reasons. The Kimberley, for example, may be the same distance from Canberra as Nuuk from Copenhagen, but all of Kalaallit Nunaat is a remote location from Denmark, whereas the distance in Australia is covered by continuous settler colonial sovereignty and of course a whole range of Indigenous Australian "country". One interesting historical example in Australia of insistent political autonomy, however, would be the Indigenous Australian Tent Embassy erected on the grounds outside the Australian parliament in 1972, or the Indigenous flag created around the same time as the Greenlandic flag. A current example would be the issuing of Indigenous Australian passports to refugees incarcerated in off-shore detention, to welcome refugees to an Australia that is Indigenous Australian "country". This shows the constantly renewed struggle between Indigenous Australia and settler colonial Australia, where Indigenous Australians point out that as self-recognised invaders, non-Indigenous Australia has no legal let alone moral grounds to reject people coming by boat to Australia, as they did themselves.

Hence postcolonial sovereignty speaks to practice and to activism at a local level. In Kalaallit Nunaat, postcolonial sovereignty entails struggle with a very familiar ring to Indigenous Australian battles fought against settler colonialism and contemporary structural racism. Many Danes, including people who have produced research on Greenland, would here insert a caveat, pointing out that Greenland has had political autonomy since 1979. Current problems are the result of a malfunctioning Greenlandic political system. The Danish mistakes, where they are occasionally admitted but seldom addressed, are seen as historical, the socio-economic problems in Greenland seen as a vindication of the Danish rule – not an indictment. The Danish attitude results from a desire to shelter the Danish continued presence in Greenland, not to change, let alone challenge, the Danish presence – historically or contemporarily. The Greenlandic debate is over how a future Kalaallit Nunaat defined

exclusively on Greenlandic premises may take shape. This requires removing the Danish ghost from the machinery that currently informs Greenlandic society. And that Danish ghost is present in almost every conceivable aspect of Greenlandic society. And determines the vast majority of Danish interventions in Greenland, from administrative agents public as well as private – to Danish research in Greenland. I invite Greenlanders to reflect whether my research involuntarily enters the same trap. To do otherwise would be to conveniently obscure my own Danish whiteness.

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