

CHAPTER 5



Representations of Greenland: Danish and Greenlandic Literary Perspectives

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Introduction

Located within the Arctic Circle, Greenland may not be part of the continental European landmass, but through its political history as a Danish colony and its status as one of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) of the European Union (EU), it forms the northernmost border of geo-political Europe. This chapter will consider how Greenland's position on the periphery of Europe, as well as its history as a colony and autonomous region of the Kingdom of Denmark, continue to have an impact on its literature, causing it to be viewed as a minority literature in relation to both Nordic and European writing more broadly. Contextualizing the analysis provided in this chapter, this short introduction will situate contemporary Greenlandic writing within the history of Danish colonialism and imperialism in Greenland and illustrate the lasting impact of Danish colonial rule on the culture, language, and politics of Greenland.

The minority status of Greenlandic literature needs to be considered in relation both to the history of colonialism and to ongoing imperialism in the Arctic region. The colonial history of Greenland can be traced back to 1262, when Norse Viking settlers who had populated southern parts of the island since the tenth century, living separately from the Inuit population in the north, accepted the rule of the Norwegian King.¹ Although the Norse settlements in Greenland were wiped out by the sixteenth century, the territory remained part of the Kingdom of Norway and it was not until 1721, when Hans Egede (1686–1758) led a mission to Greenland in an attempt to re-establish contact with the lost Norse settlements, that interest in recolonizing the island was renewed. Once they realized the Norse population no longer existed, Egede's mission, 'partly financed by colonial trade, quickly changed its focus to the conversion of the Greenlanders', and by 1780 the Royal Greenlandic Trading Department was established to administer the colony's trade.² Greenland remained part of the Danish-Norwegian realm until the Treaty of Kiel in 1814, when Norway was ceded to Sweden and the Norwegian overseas possessions were transferred to Denmark.

In 1953 the Danish *Grundlov* (constitution) was updated and Greenland's official status as a colony ended. The remaining Danish possessions in the North Atlantic — Greenland and the Faroe Islands — were integrated into the Kingdom of Denmark, reclassified as autonomous Danish provinces, and given representation in *Folketinget* (the Danish Parliament).³ This was partly in response to international pressure to decolonize; however, it did little to satisfy the national independence movements that had been growing in both the Faroe Islands and Greenland throughout the twentieth century. In a referendum in 1979 Greenlanders voted in favour of independence and the Greenlandic government was established. The Greenland Home Rule Act handed over responsibility for the day-to-day governing of Greenland to the Greenlanders, while foreign affairs, the legal system and defence remained overseen by the Danish government. Due to continued pressure for autonomy another referendum was held in 2008 and Greenlanders once again voted in favour of independence, which resulted in the 2009 Act on Greenland Self-Government. The act extended the powers of the Greenlandic home rule government, including control of the legal system, but kept responsibility for foreign policy and security under the Danish government. The relationship between Denmark and Greenland continues to raise debate in Greenland but independence remains 'the ultimate political goal for the Greenlandic nation'.⁴ The current debates about independence tend to focus on the issue of the Greenlandic national economy, which is still subsidized by the Danish state, and is framed by the issue of funding economic growth and national independence via the extraction of natural resources at a time when the effects of climate change are undeniable.⁵ Thus, the Greenlandic context troubles any straightforward notion of decolonization leading to sovereignty, but instead offers a valuable opportunity to consider how new forms of political and cultural domination continue to shape Greenland's postcolonial condition after colonialism is supposed to have officially ended.⁶

Danish political and cultural imperialism in Greenland has also had a profound effect on the Greenlandic language and its cultural production, and the close ties between Denmark and Greenland continue to shape the way Greenlandic literature is written, read, and circulated. The Greenlandic language consists of four main dialects, with Kalaallisut, the West-Greenlandic dialect, as the official language since 2009. However, for much of the twentieth century Danish was the primary language of public life, culture, and learning, and it continues to be spoken widely in Greenland today. This was due in part to the changes in the *Grundlov* in 1953, when the Danish *grønlandspolitik* (Greenlandic policy) moved to a policy of 'Danification' and Danish was made the official language of Greenland. However, it was also the early colonial administration that was initially responsible for making Greenlandic a written language, with the Danish Mission and other Christian groups producing hymn books in Greenlandic and teaching the Greenlanders to read and write in both Danish and Greenlandic.⁷ It was not until the start of the twentieth century that the first Greenlandic novels were written, a moment that coincided with increased influence from the outside world and rapid social change in Greenland, including improvements in education leading to an increase in literacy and the

creation of local and regional councils that enabled Greenlanders to participate in the political and cultural life of their country.⁸ Prior to this, Greenland had an oral literary culture, which was made up of stories, songs, poetry, spells and fables that were shared by Inuit people across the arctic region.⁹ The process of Danification was met with protest, expressed in political songs and poetry as well as in the Greenlandic newspapers. A project of cultural and linguistic revival accompanied the country's increased political autonomy in the late 1970s and '80s, which led to an increasing number of literary works being published in Greenlandic.¹⁰

Today Greenlandic authors continue to write and publish in both Danish and Greenlandic, but the literary output remains small and international circulation tends to be restricted to Denmark and the Nordic region. Furthermore, until 2021, when Niviaq Korneliusen was awarded the prize for her second novel *Naasuliardarpi* (not yet translated), in the fifty-year history of the prestigious Nordic Council's Literature Prize no Greenlandic writer had ever won, despite regular nominations. However, Greenland has been an important subject in Danish literature, including in the internationally bestselling novel by Peter Høeg, *Frøken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne* [*Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*] (1992), and in the recent works of Danish-Norwegian author Kim Leine, whose historical novel set in Greenland, *Profeterne i Evighedsfjorden* [*The Prophets of Eternal Fjord*] (2012) was awarded the Nordic Council's Literature Prize in 2013. Indeed, the Danish literary tradition of writing novels about Greenland stretches back to the nineteenth century, and includes works such as Bernhard Ingemann's *Kunuk og Naja* (1842), and Nobel Prize-winning author Henrik Pontoppidan's *Isbjørnen - et Portræt* [*The Polar Bear - a Portrait*] (1887). Cultural historian Kirsten Thisted calls this body of literature 'den danske grønlandslitteratur' [Danish Greenland literature], and the fact that it is more widely read, translated and circulated than Greenlandic literature points to a lasting imbalance of power between the two countries.¹¹

Drawing on this distinction between Greenlandic literature and Danish literature, this chapter will compare the representation of Greenland and Greenlanders in recent Greenlandic and Danish Greenland literature and question what is gained and lost in the majority representation of the Greenlandic minority. I shall first consider some of the reasons for the lack of critical engagement with Danish colonialism. Secondly, I will explore Peter Høeg's *Frøken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne* and Kim Leine's *Kalak* (2007) and show that even though both authors are critical of Danish colonialism, they nonetheless default to negative stereotypes of Greenlanders and Greenland that reflect attitudes still prevalent in Danish society. The final section will focus on two recent novels by Greenlandic authors, Niviaq Korneliusen's *HOMO Sapienne* (2014) and Juaaka Lyberth's *Godt i Vej* [*Well on Our Way*] (2014),¹² in order to consider the different ways they represent Greenland and engage with the history and legacies of Danish colonial rule.

Nordic Colonialism

Despite centuries of colonial rule in the North Atlantic, as well as in the Caribbean, Africa, and India, Denmark is still rarely thought of as a colonial power and is usually excluded from discussions about the European imperial project. This is also largely the case within Denmark, where the image of a ‘democratic and peace-loving country is a central part of the Danish national narrative’.¹³ Furthermore, the idea that Danish colonialism was somehow more benign than that of other European empires has tended to characterize the discussion of Danish involvement in Greenland, focusing on the subsidies paid by the Danish government to Greenland and the modernization programs introduced in the 1950s and ’60s, as opposed to the violence (in its many forms) entailed in colonial expansion.¹⁴ Although Greenlanders have repeatedly protested against Danish colonial rule and voted in their majority for independence in several referenda, this attitude remains firmly in place in most parts of Danish society. This is illustrated, as Thisted has recently argued, in the lack of public debate in Denmark over the 2009 Act on Greenland Self-Government:

[...] at the time when the act was formulated, most Danes — including most Danish politicians — thought it completely unrealistic that Greenland would ever want full independence. The power relationship between Denmark and Greenland has been so unequal, and from a Danish point of view, Greenland has been so underdeveloped and completely dependent on Danish assistance, that such a solution has seemed barely conceivable.¹⁵

Indeed, Lars Jensen has suggested that the character of postcolonial Denmark can be defined precisely by this ‘lack of attention [...] towards the colonies and the idea of Denmark as part of an overseas imperial enterprise’, an oversight that is ‘matched by an equally underrated significance granted to the remnants of the Danish empire, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, as a formative influence on contemporary Danish history’.¹⁶ Jensen also draws attention to the negative attitude of many Danes towards the people of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, who are seen as ‘ungrateful and somehow lacking citizen[s] (and therefore never quite ready for autonomy)’.¹⁷ This idea is repeated through ‘education, media representation and the Danish political establishment’, alongside negative stereotypes that portray Greenlanders as benefit scroungers, alcoholics, and drug addicts without due consideration of the profound and violent disruption caused by colonialism to traditional ways of life.¹⁸

It is noteworthy, therefore, that Greenland remains a topic of interest for Danish writers, and it is contradictory, as Thisted has highlighted, that while much of Danish society has avoided participating in the reconciliation process recently set in motion by the Greenlanders to recover and work through the colonial past, the reading public have flocked around authors such as Kim Leine, whose novels deal directly with the colonial past. Leine follows in the footsteps of Peter Høeg, who in 1992 brought the issue of Nordic colonialism to public attention, both in Denmark and internationally, with his postcolonial crime thriller *Frøken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne*. It is this disconnect between the popularity of Greenland as a trope in Danish literature versus the ‘cultural amnesia’ of Danish colonialism in Danish

society that is the focus of this chapter.¹⁹ In order to understand this situation further, the following section will consider the representation of Greenland and Greenlanders in Høeg's and Leine's novels and show that despite being critical of Danish colonialism both authors continue to rely on negative stereotypes of Greenlanders.

Danish Greenland Literature: Peter Høeg's *Froken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne* and Kim Leine's *Kalak*

Published in Danish in 1992, Peter Høeg's critically acclaimed novel *Froken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne* (*Smilla*), was translated into English in 1993, made into a feature-length film in 1997, and has since become a key text in the Nordic noir literary canon. The novel deals with the mysterious death of a young Greenlandic boy called Esajas, who the police believe has fallen from the roof of his apartment block in Copenhagen whilst playing. On analysing the footprints left in the snow, the protagonist, Smilla, a neighbour and friend, believes Esajas may have been running away from someone. With the help of Peter, a mechanic living in her apartment block, Smilla starts an investigation of her own, which leads her all over Copenhagen and eventually back to Greenland where she was raised. Through her investigations, Smilla reveals a violent history related to a series of Danish scientific expeditions to Gela Alta, an island off the coast of Greenland, where a valuable meteorite has been found. She discovers that Esajas's father, a diver on a previous expedition, died of a parasite he contracted from the waters surrounding the meteorite, and that Esajas, having accompanied his father to Gela Alta, has been murdered because of his possible knowledge of the meteorite's location. Drawing on the narrative conventions of noir, Høeg presents a nuanced critique of Danish colonialism in the novel, illustrating both the violence of the past and new manifestations of colonial exploitation and oppression.

The protagonist, Smilla, is central to the novel's postcolonial critique. Smilla's mother was a Greenlandic Inuit hunter who had died when she was a young child, and her father is a middle-class Danish doctor from Copenhagen. The novel is permeated with both joyful memories of her childhood in Greenland and the trauma of her relocation and institutionalization in Denmark after the death of her mother, an experience that echoes a well-known social experiment in the 1950s, when twenty-two Greenlandic children from disadvantaged families were removed from their families and relocated for re-education in Denmark.²⁰ Smilla is represented as highly intelligent but prone to bouts of depression, a loner, estranged emotionally from her father, but dependent on his money, with a failed career that does not live up to her intellectual potential. In their essay on Høeg's novel, Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Mealor describe Smilla as 'a hybrid', and suggests that her hybridity manifests itself in several ways, including 'in her passion for ice which is fuelled by a combination of her instinctive (Eskimo) "feeling for snow" and expert (Western) knowledge in glacial morphology'.²¹ They argue that through the character of Smilla Høeg presents an essentialist perspective on identity as 'closed,

secured within its boundaries and only [...] fractured or repressed by the various forms of subjugation which [...] are exercised by the colonial regime', and that '[i]ndigenous resistance' therefore takes 'the form of an attempt to regain or rediscover the authentic pre-colonial identity'.²² Smilla's dislocated sense of self, they argue, is rooted in her 'frustrations as a hybrid', and her inability to recover this 'true identity'.²³ This argument underestimates the complexity of postcolonial identity formation, which is not a matter of return to some originary pre-colonial state. It also significantly undervalues Smilla's determination to find out the truth about Esajas, and her willingness to put herself at risk by joining the return expedition to Gela Alta under the guise of a ship's stewardess in order to confront those involved. Poddar and Mealar are also dismissive of Høeg's emphasis on colonialism as part of capitalist imperialism, suggesting (in a later version of the essay) that while Høeg is critical of Danish colonialism, it is 'presented essentially as one of capitalism's evils'.²⁴ I argue that one of the strengths of Høeg's postcolonial critique in the novel is precisely that it reveals capitalism, globalization and colonialism to be intimately connected by showing that exploitation and oppression of the Greenlandic population continues through institutions such as the Cryolite Corporation, the company behind the scientific expeditions to Gela Alta and the death of Esajas and his father.

Indeed, this is captured in an illuminating description towards the end of the novel of Sonne, a Danish sailor onboard the *Kronos* who takes it upon himself to protect Smilla from the other crewmen. After mocking him affectionately for being typically Danish, Smilla describes his reactions:

Han rødmer. Han vil gerne protestere. Gerne tages højtideligt. Gerne hævde sin autoritet. Som Danmark. Med blå øjne, røde kinder, og reelle hensigter. Men uden om ham er der store kræfter, pengene, udviklingen, misbruget, kollisionen mellem den nye og den gamle verden. Han har ikke forstået hvad der foregår. At han kun bliver tålt så længe han følger med.²⁵

[He blushes. He wants to protest. Wants to be taken seriously. Wants to raise his authority. The same way as Denmark does. With blue eyes, pink cheeks, and honourable intentions. But all around him are powerful forces, money, development, abuse, the clash between the new and the old world. He doesn't understand what is happening. That he will only be tolerated as long as he keeps in line.]

By suggesting that it is the 'powerful forces' of capitalism that keep Smilla and Sonne, a 'pæn ung Dansker' [nice young Dane], locked in the same uneven relations of power as during colonial rule, Høeg shows that the violence and oppression of colonialism continue, despite its official end in 1953.²⁶ Furthermore, through the Gela Alta plot, Høeg makes it clear that the pursuit and domination of knowledge and resources at the heart of the colonial project are still present and active through the 'new imperialism' of late capitalism.²⁷

However, despite Høeg's nuanced representation of capitalist imperialism, he nonetheless defers to stereotypes about Greenlanders that are common in Danish society, particularly the widespread idea that Greenlanders have alcohol and social

problems and, as suggested by Jensen, are ‘somehow lacking citizen[s]’. Juliane, Esajas’s mother for instance, is represented as a dysfunctional alcoholic who is unable to care for Esajas properly and vulnerable both to the bureaucracy of the Danish welfare state and the cronies of the Cryolite Corporation. Although alcohol abuse is seen as the biggest public health concern in Greenland and the root cause of other social problems such as violence, sexual assaults, and suicides, alcohol consumption has decreased steadily in Greenland since the 1980s, a trend that is very similar in Denmark, where alcohol has also been the primary health and social concern since the mid-twentieth century.²⁸ However, despite this, the idea that all Greenlanders are problem-drinkers is still widespread in Danish society, and although Høeg represents both Smilla and Juliane sympathetically, and wields a clear critique of Danish colonialism, he nonetheless fails to leave these damaging stereotypes behind.

Like Høeg, the Danish-Norwegian author Kim Leine relies on similarly problematic representations of Greenlanders in his recent novels. Leine has become an important voice in Denmark about issues relating to Greenland and both his debut novel *Kalak* and his highly acclaimed historical novel *Profeterne I Evighedsfjorden* (2012) deal with the history and legacies of colonial rule.²⁹ Leine describes *Kalak* as an *Erindringsroman* [autobiographical novel] — a novel based on his experience of working as a nurse in Greenland for fifteen years. The novel deals closely with the social problems in both Danish and Greenlandic society, including alcoholism, suicide, and sexual abuse. The protagonist, Kim, is born in Norway in a community of Jehovah’s Witnesses. At the age of seventeen he runs away to live with his sexually abusive father who has moved away to Copenhagen earlier in the novel. Kim decides to study nursing so he can escape Copenhagen and fulfil his dream of working in Africa. During his studies Kim meets Lærke, they marry and have two children together. Once qualified, Kim is offered work in Nuuk, Greenland’s capital, an opportunity that offers him an ‘arktisk version af den gamle drøm om Afrika og bushen’ [arctic version of the old dream of Africa and the bush].³⁰ Despite warnings about ‘danskerhadet, volden, drikkeriet, fjendtligheden’ [hatred of the Danes, the violence, the drinking, the hostility], Kim feels at home in Nuuk, learning the language quickly, and entering into numerous affairs with co-workers and neighbours.³¹ Halfway through the novel Lærke and Kim divorce, she returns to Denmark with the children and, in what is almost a mirror image of Høeg’s Smilla, Kim is left trapped between the two countries.

The Greenland of *Kalak* is urban, nocturnal, with dingy nightclubs and women who are all too willing to have sex with Kim. When he first moves to Nuuk, Kim describes it as a place that it takes a while to fall in love with, with its ‘lange rækker af betonblokke, våde, ramponerende og affalsstinkende, og det hvileløst skiftende vejr’ [long rows of cement blocks, wet and smelling of rubbish, and the restless, ever-changing weather].³² This representation of Greenland is in stark contrast with that of *Smilla*, where Greenland is visualized through Smilla’s memories of a traditional nomadic life with her mother. Unlike Leine’s descriptions of the socially deprived capital, Nuuk, Smilla’s memories focus on traditional ways of life in the arctic landscape creating a romanticized image of Greenland untouched by the

modern world. Before arriving in Nuuk, Kim is also warned not to go out alone at night, because a Dane was recently attacked and beaten badly, with no other reason than '[d]e hader os' [they hate us], another very different image to that of the Greenlanders of Høeg's novel who are almost universally victims of violence.³³ However, despite the warnings, when Kim arrives in Greenland he is welcomed with a 'brysk og næsten familiær elsværdighed' [a brusque and yet almost familiar kindness].³⁴

An important aspect of *Kalak* is Leine's description of the Greenlandic language, which Kim learns, one word at a time, and eventually masters. He suggests that '[a]t tale grønlandsk er at ændre sin måde at tænke på, ændre sit billed af verden' [to speak Greenlandic involves changing the way you think, the way you understand the world around you], and he finds the complexities of tone and grammar both intriguing and challenging:

Hvis jeg havde forstillet mig at grønlandsk var en slags natursprog, så bliver jeg skuffet. Jeg forsøger at regne ud hvor mange bøjningsformer et udsagnsord har og når til 600. [...] En sætning med kryds, bolle og firkant består tit kun af et enkelt ord, der til gengæld er sat sammen af kæder på fem til ti stavelser, noget der gør det næsten umuligt at læse en tækst.³⁵

[If I had imagined that Greenlandic would be a kind of natural language, I was sorely mistaken. I try to calculate the inflections of a verb and reach nearly 600. [...] A sentence describing a cross, circle and square consists of just a single word, which in turn is made up of five to ten different spellings, making it almost impossible to read a text.]

Such descriptions not only emphasize the complexity of the Greenlandic language but contribute to the sense of Kim's foreignness in Nuuk at the start of the novel. However, he works hard to integrate and his attempts to communicate in Greenlandic with patients and colleagues in the hospital offer one of the few sympathetic representations of him.

He soon finds, however, that being a foreigner in Greenland in fact gives him a kind of power, as his female co-workers are almost universally attracted to him and he realizes that he only needs to 'række handed frem og sige ordene' [reach out and say the words] to get what he wants from them.³⁶ He initially tries to remain faithful to Lærke, wanting to avoid the stereotype he himself describes as 'hvid man på besøg i tidligere koloni' [white man visiting a former colony], but despite this he becomes involved in a number of sexual relationships with Greenlandic women.³⁷ Leine is thus clearly aware of and uncomfortable with the position of power that Kim, as a Dane, holds in the Greenlandic community, but he does little to challenge this, showing only how he takes advantage of it to steal painkillers from the hospital without suspicion, and how it gives him access to as many women as he likes. Greenland is thus represented as a place for hedonistic and self-destructive behaviours, where the uneven power dynamics at the heart of the colonial encounter between Greenlanders and Danes remains cemented in place.

Where in Høeg's *Smilla* Greenland is represented as an arctic colonial frontier and the indigenous people as nomadic hunters, in Kim Leine's *Kalak* Greenland is

a place that the rapid postcolonial modernization has left crumbling in its wake, full of concrete buildings and rife with alcoholism and drug abuse. Although both these works undoubtedly take a critical stance towards Danish colonialism and the continued imbalance of power between the two countries, they ultimately reproduce stereotypes about Greenland and Greenlanders, without adequately considering these in relation to the disruption to the traditional way of life caused by colonialism in the first place. Having discussed the ways in which Danish authors engage with the history and legacies of Danish colonialism in their representations of Greenland and Greenlanders, the final section of this chapter will move on to consider the key themes and formal features of two recent Greenlandic novels, Juaaka Lyberth's *Godt i Vej* (2014) and Niviaq Korneliusen's *HOMO Sapienne* (2014), to show the very different ways they represent Greenland and the experience and legacies of Danish colonial rule.

Greenlandic Literature: Juaaka Lyberth's *Godt i Vej* and Niviaq Korneliusen's *HOMO Sapienne*

Juaaka Lyberth's coming-of-age novel *Godt i Vej* explores the changes to Greenlandic society and culture in the early 1970s and was nominated for the Nordic Prize for Literature in 2014. The novel follows the life of Paul Erik, nicknamed Pauli, a teenager from Ummannaq in Northern Greenland, who, like other academically promising youths from around the country, attends high school in Nuuk at the College of Education, the centre of the Greenlandic education system.³⁸ The story takes place in the years before home rule and registers the stirring rebellion against Danish authorities that eventually led to the vote for greater independence in 1979. The novel also depicts the development of a Greenlandic youth culture, shaped by international influences, including bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles.³⁹ It opens with Pauli's journey from his village Ummannaq to the college in Nuuk onboard the coastal ship *Disko*. The school is run entirely by Danish teachers, who assert their authority at every opportunity, making sure the students stick to the strict rules governing college life, including the most important rules of all: no drinking and no mixing between the girls' and boys' dormitories. The students are also kept separate from the rest of the population of Nuuk, meaning they rarely interact with anyone who is not a teenager or teacher at the college. As can be expected from the narrative perspective of Pauli, the novel is filled with the concerns of a teenager: sex, relationships, drinking, fashion, and music, and figuring out his place in world. There is thus a deliberately universal quality to Lyberth's novel, which highlights that the life of Greenlandic teenagers in the rebellious era of the 1970s was not that different to that of teenagers elsewhere in the world. However, during the course of the narrative, which is set over the course of a school year, Lyberth simultaneously charts the politicization of the students as they increasingly turn their attention towards Greenland's future.

The fact that the young protagonists are shown to be part of the political vision for a modern Greenland is reflected in the novel's title, which in the Danish edition translates as *godt i vej*, literally meaning 'well on the way', an expression that is used

to describe a young person developing or growing up and denotes a sense of hope or promise. The students are regularly reminded that they are the privileged few who are receiving an education with the expectation that they will play leading roles in their country as it develops. The students are encouraged to attend public debates dealing with key questions that relate to the future of the Greenlandic nation. One such debate includes the proposition that a proportion of the Greenlandic population should be relocated to Denmark because

Den grøndlandske befolkning — især den østgrøndlandske — er vokset så meget, at den ikke kan leve af fangst alene. I kan se, at på bare tyve år er befolkningstallet fordoblet. Og dette skaber et væld af problemer, som vi ikke bare kan løse selv.⁴⁰

[The Greenlandic population — particularly in east Greenland — has grown so much that it is impossible to survive on hunting alone. You can see that in just twenty years the population has doubled, and this creates a wealth of problems that we can't just solve ourselves.]

The debates, Lyberth makes sure to mention, are hosted by the Catholic Church and take place in Danish. This not only shows that questions about Greenland's future are reserved for the educated bilingual Greenlanders under the guidance of Danes in positions of power, but also points to the central role played by language in the Danish administration and control of Greenland in the twentieth century.

However, the students also discuss political issues more informally, amongst themselves, and it is in this space, rather than through the formal debates, that the history of Danish colonialism and the ongoing relationship between the two countries is questioned in greater depth. In one such debate towards the end of the novel, Pauli listens intently as his two classmates discuss the impact of Danish colonial rule. His friend Hinnarik claims that the Danish society is the fairest in the world, with free education, healthcare and help for the unemployed. He also suggests that

Hvordan i så end ser på det, så er vores tilknytning til Danmark en fordel for os. Og vi bliver ikke behandlet som koloniserede indfødte som indianerne i Amerika eller negerene i Afrika. Vi skylder Danmark en stor tak, det må vi åbent indrømme.⁴¹

[Whichever way one looks at it, our connection to Denmark is an advantage to us. We don't get treated as colonized natives like the Indians in America or the negros in Africa. We have to admit that we owe Denmark thanks.]

This view is countered by Pauli's friend Jerimi, who argues that Greenland is 'en dansk koloni, og de tog vores gamle tro fra os og gjorde os kristne' [a Danish colony; they took our ancient faith from us and made us Christian], thereby aligning their struggle for independence with that of colonized people elsewhere.⁴² With this discussion Lyberth sketches out the broad positions still dominant in the debate about Greenlandic independence, illustrating both the internalization of the narrative of a benign colonialism, which has been the dominant view of Danish rule in Greenland within Denmark, and, on the other hand, the anti-colonialist stance of those who want full independence and secession from Denmark.

Pauli is less opinionated than his friends and finds Jerimi's passion hard to tolerate, but despite this, he becomes increasingly aware of the daily inequalities between the Greenlanders and the Danes in Nuuk, who are there both as manual workers to support the development of infrastructure, mining, and the fishing industry, and as members of the elite, 'de høje herrer' [the overlords], with leading positions in the administration.⁴³ One episode in particular exposes Pauli to the unfair treatment of Greenlanders and makes him aware of the fact that the Danish-led modernization and urbanization of Greenland hasn't always had a positive impact. Pauli has been admitted to hospital due to an ear infection and while there he befriends a Greenlander called Veerti. In a monologue, Veerti gives Pauli a detailed description of his life, including the changes he has seen since the Second World War and his experiences working as a painter and construction worker in Nuuk. He tells Pauli about growing up in a small community of hunters; about the changes to his village when the seal population began to diminish; and how people had to find new means to survive. Like many former hunters, Veerti ended up working on the construction sites of Nuuk and he has witnessed the social problems, including violence, alcoholism and suicide, that became common place amongst the Greenlanders who had relocated to the city to work in construction or the new fish processing factory. He also complains about the different treatment of his Danish co-workers, who he claims are often drunk at work and yet are treated favourably, while Greenlanders are given the harder jobs or even get fired so their positions can be filled by Danes.

Veerti explains that he has been hospitalized due to feeling dizzy at work, the result of repeated exposure to toxic fumes from the paint used in the building of the controversial Block P. Once the biggest construction project in the Danish realm, Block P was an apartment complex built in central Nuuk as part of the urbanization programme of the 1960s. It was famously inadequate for the Inuit population of Greenland as the corridors were too narrow to accommodate the traditional winter clothing and, as Veerti recalls, the toilets were always blocked because 'dumme grønlændere, [...] smed fjerene ned i dem, når de plukkede alke' [the stupid Greenlanders flushed the feathers down them when they plucked the razorbills].⁴⁴ While Block P certainly epitomizes the underlying violence in the drive to modernize and 'develop' Greenland, it also provides an illustration of the complex and uneven experience of modernity in the colonial peripheries, which can be characterized by the 'coexistence of the past and the contemporary' as the result of the uneven process of capitalist modernization.⁴⁵ Lyberth's depiction of Nuuk, especially through Veerti's story, encapsulates this experience: the industrialization of the fishing industry means more workers are needed in Nuuk to work in the fish processing factory, and the Greenlanders who relocate from the villages to the city bring with them their traditional culture and way of life, which is inadequately housed in modern buildings such as Block P. Indeed, the complex interconnectedness of the modern and the traditional is an overarching theme in Lyberth's novel and central to his representation of Greenland in the 1970s. Thus, although the novel is primarily about the daily life of high school students during

a turbulent moment in Greenlandic history, it provides a valuable insight into how Greenland was administered by the Danish state in the years between the official end of colonial rule in 1953 and Home Rule in 1979.

Lyberth's combination of a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age narrative with questions about the relationship between Denmark and Greenland, national identity, and independence gives the novel a clear national allegorical register, which has been a common feature of much Greenlandic writing in the twentieth century. Karen Langgård explains that along with the national newspapers, which began to be published in the late nineteenth century, literature played a vital role in 'the process of nation building' in twentieth-century Greenland, and that writers such as Mathias Storch (1883–1957), who wrote the first Greenlandic novel, *Singnagtugaq* [*A Greenlandic Dream*] (1915), and Augo Lynge (1899–1959), the first Greenlandic representative in the Danish Parliament and author of the novel *Ukiut 300-mngomerat* [*Three Hundred Years After*] (1931), used literature to imagine a future Greenland without colonial domination.⁴⁶ Others, such as the songwriter Moses Olsen (1928–2008), who drew on the Inuit roots of Greenlandic culture and images of Arctic wilderness in his articulation of Greenlandic identity, and the novelist Hans Anton Lynge (1945–), Nordic literature prize nominee in 1991, have continued to explore national questions in the context of modern Greenlandic society.⁴⁷ Indeed, Langgård summarizes Greenlandic literature in the twentieth century as 'a postcolonial literature that deals with nation building', but she also draws attention to the fact that 'from the late 1980s younger readers began to complain that Greenlandic literature did not address their lives'.⁴⁸ Where Lyberth's *Godt I Vej* can be seen as continuing in the tradition of the 'ethnic-national perspective' dominant in Greenlandic writing, young Greenlandic authors such as Niviaq Korneliusen are increasingly distancing themselves from the national-political novel tradition of the past, and instead focus on 'individuality' and non-national forms of belonging in Greenlandic identity.⁴⁹

Korneliusen has recently gained attention in the Nordic region and beyond with her debut novel *HOMO Sapienne*, which was nominated for the Nordic Council's Literature Prize in 2015 and has since been translated into eight languages.⁵⁰ The novel was first published in Greenlandic in 2014 and then translated to Danish by the author; it tells the stories of five young people from Greenland, Fia, Inuk, Arnaq, Inuk/Ivik and Sara, and introduces the reader to Nuuk through its queer topography (the novel's characters are gay, bisexual and transgender). In her foreword to the novel Mette Moestrup observes that 'just because the novel is set in Greenland doesn't mean it is full of endless descriptions of nature, rather it is the subjective experience and communal dramas which are focused on'.⁵¹ However, despite moving away from the traditional themes associated with Greenlandic writing, what it means to be a Greenlandic in the twenty-first century remains a key question for Korneliusen.

Written in a stream of consciousness narrative style, the opening chapter, titled 'Crimson and Clover', tells the story of Fia's breakup with her boyfriend of three years, Peter, and her realization that she is gay after meeting and falling in love with Sara. The chapter starts with a list of Peter and Fia's life plans:

1. Når jeg er færdig med min uddannelse og pengene er på plads, køber vi et hus med mange værelser og en altan.
2. Vi gifter os.
3. Vi for tre/fire børn.
4. Dag efter dag efter dag køber vi ind efter arbejde og kører hjem i vores bil.
5. Vi bliver gamle og dør.⁵²

- [1. When I am finished with my education and our finances are in order, we'll buy a house with many rooms and a balcony.
2. We'll get married.
3. We'll have three or four children.
4. Day in and day out we'll go shopping after work and drive home in our car.
5. We'll grow old and die.]

The list expresses the sense of banality felt by Fia towards the routines prescribed by society for a heterosexual relationship. On the very next page Korneliussen adds a stirring sense of rebellion as Fia describes her realization that the relationship is coming to an end: 'Tak fordi du elsker mig, mig som begår fejl. Men nej, jeg takker nej, siger jeg!' [Thank you for loving me even though I make mistakes. But no, I'm saying no!].⁵³ Fia moves out of the flat she shares with Peter to live with a friend, Arnaq, who introduces her to the queer subculture of Nuuk. Fia's chapter thus sets the tone for the novel's rejection of normative sexual and social relationships, which is echoed in the novel's title and cover image, but through the use of lists and stream of consciousness narration it also introduces Korneliussen's experimentation with the novel form.⁵⁴

In chapter 2, titled 'Home', Korneliussen moves deftly from Fia's stream of consciousness to the narrative perspective of her brother Inuk, which is comprised of a combination of diary entries, notes, lists and fragments, and illustrates the way Korneliussen complicates essentialist notions of Greenlandic identity by showing it to intersect with gender and sexual identity. Inuk, we soon realize, has left Greenland suddenly due to a rumour that he has had an affair with a married member of the Greenlandic parliament called Miki Løvstrøm. In the first few paragraphs of the chapter, Inuk describes feeling 'fængslet' [imprisoned] and 'muret ind bag høje fjelde' [trapped behind the tall mountains] of Greenland, and he leaves suddenly to 'flygte' [escape] to Copenhagen.⁵⁵ Once in Copenhagen he writes a letter to Fia, explaining where he is and telling her not to worry. He begs her to avoid Arnaq, who he claims is 'djæveln selv' [the devil himself], as she revealed the secret of his affair with Løvstrøm at a party.⁵⁶ Inuk denies the affair to his sister but confesses his disappointment and anger at having seen Fia kiss Sara. He blames Arnaq, who is bisexual, for corrupting Fia and describes homosexuals as evil and in need to treatment to be 'cured'. The fragmentary nature of the chapter emphasizes Inuk's psychological breakdown as he comes to terms with being transgender, and it eventually becomes clear that the need to escape from Greenland is as much an attempt to avoid confronting his own sexual and gender identity as it is to escape the unfolding scandal surrounding him and Løvstrøm. Just as Inuk directs anger at Arnaq and Fia, he is angry at Greenland and at himself for being Greenlandic.

In one entry for instance, he writes a list of positive and negative aspects of being Greenlandic,

Man er Grøndlænder når man er med til at udvikle sit land.

Man er Grøndlænder når man taler sit sprog.

[...]

Man er Grøndlænder når man er alkoholiker.

Man er Grøndlænder når man banker sin partner.

[...]

Man er Grøndlænder når man er homo.⁵⁷

[You're a Greenlander when you contribute to developing your country.

You're a Greenlander when you speak your language.

[...]

You're a Greenlander when you're an alcoholic.

You're a Greenlander when you beat your partner.

[...]

You're a Greenlander when you're a homo.]

However, despite the initial relief at having 'escaped', Inuk does not feel at home in Copenhagen, but instead feels isolated amongst the Danes, unable to 'grine med danskerne' and 'deltage i en samtale med danskerne' [laugh with the Danes and contribute to a conversation with the Danes].⁵⁸ Towards the end of the chapter the anger towards Fia and Arnaq dissipates, and Inuk comes out as transgender, writing that Inuk has 'forsvundet' [disappeared], and instead 'kommer Ivik frem' [Ivik has appeared]. With coming out as transgender, the hatred for Greenland also disappears and in the final diary entry and letter Ivik writes about feeling homesick, claiming, in English, that '[h]ome is in me. Home is me. I am home'.⁵⁹ The feeling of being 'at home' in Greenland is thus fundamentally subjective and tied to feeling at home in yourself; as much an internal, subjective experience, as a national identity defined by an external set of criteria around language, culture, and geography.

Korneliussen does not just challenge the established portrayals of life in Greenland associated with both Greenlandic and Danish-Greenlandic literature, but, as we have seen in the quotes above, she also challenges the established conventions of the novel form to create a 'hybridt litterært værk der går på tværs af forskellige mediegenerer, skriver sig ind i en mere transnational kontekst' [hybrid literary work that crosses the lines of several different forms of media and writes itself into a more transnational context].⁶⁰ The form of her novel can itself be read as a form of protest to the image of Greenland presented in both *Smilla* and *Kalak*, and the inclusion of song lyrics and text messages make it clear that this is neither the deprived Nuuk of Leine's *Kalak* nor the traditional image of Greenland that Smilla remembers in Høeg's novel. Furthermore, the fact that Korneliussen translated the novel into Danish herself might be worth considering in light of the minority status of the Greenlandic language and literature. Also encountered in literature of the Iberian peninsula, where Catalan, Basque and Galician writers are translating their work into Castilian,⁶¹ and in some postcolonial writing, notably by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who has translated his later works from Gikuyu to English, self-translation can be seen as a direct attempt to challenge the hegemony

of dominant languages in a given region by asserting and maintaining control of the text after publication. From this perspective the act of self-translation resists the colonial hierarchies still in place within the Nordic region, which are often played out at the level of culture.

Finally, by writing about the queer community in Greenland, Korneliussen consciously aligns herself with an international LGBTQ+ community and literary tradition, exploring the complexity of identity from an entirely different perspective. In her depiction of the lives of Fia, Inuk, Arnaq, Ivik and Sara she articulates a Greenlandic identity which is distinctly rooted in the present and thereby claims the representation of Greenlandic identity for her own generation. Read in tandem with Lyberth's *Godt i Vej*, the two novels mark a generational shift from a focus on postcolonial nation-building to Greenland's place within the late capitalist, globalized world.

Conclusion: Greenlandic Literature and the Postcolonial Canon

This chapter has provided an introduction to Greenlandic literature and has endeavoured to think through some of the issues contributing to Greenlandic literature's minority status. Through comparison of recent Greenlandic and Danish Greenland novels, it has shown that although the history and legacies of Danish colonialism are still not widely discussed in Danish society, the complex relationship between Denmark and Greenland is an important feature in the literary cultures of both countries. In the Danish Greenland literature canon, as illustrated in the novels by Kim Leine and Peter Høeg, Greenland continues to be a space for exploration, adventure, exoticism — an 'arktisk version af den gamle drøm om Afrika' [arctic version of the old dream of Africa], and Greenlanders tend to be represented using negative stereotypes, despite the fact that for instance the two Danish authors considered here are broadly critical of Danish colonialism and imperialism. The Greenlandic novels, *Godt i Vej* and *HOMO Sapienne*, on the other hand, both offer very different insights into Greenlandic life and culture. In *Godt i Vej*, Lyberth pairs a coming-of-age narrative with the burgeoning independence of the Greenlandic nation and shows the impact of rapid modernization of Greenlandic society in a way that highlights the ongoing influence of Danish political and cultural hegemony. Finally, in *HOMO Sapienne* Korneliussen makes a move away from the national themes of the past in her conception of Greenlandic identity, aligning her queer characters with an international LGBTQ+ community instead. By outlining some features of Greenlandic literature in relation to its status as minority and postcolonial literature, this chapter has contributed both to current attempts to configure and analyse the contemporary 'power paradigm'⁶² of the Danish state in relation to its former colonies, and to the ongoing efforts to expand the geographical and temporal reach of postcolonial studies.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. Axel Kjær Sørensen, *Denmark- Greenland in the Twentieth Century* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2007).
2. Magdalena Naum and Jonas Nordin, *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena* (New York: Springer, 2013).
3. Kristian H. Nielsen, 'Transforming Greenland: Imperial Formations in the Cold War', *New Global Studies* 7.2 (2013), pp. 129–54.
4. Kirsten Thisted, 'Emotions, Finances and Independence: Uranium as a "happy object" in the Greenlandic Debate on Secession from Denmark,' *Polar Record*, 56.1(2020), 1–12.
5. Thisted.
6. Adam Grydehøj notes that Greenland was 'never a site of settler colonialism', instead being administered by Denmark 'to maximize resource extraction', primarily seal skins and commercial fishing. 'Unravelling Economic Dependence and Independence in Relation to Island Sovereignty: The Case of Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland)', *Island Studies Journal*, 15.1 (2020), 89–112 (p. 95).
7. Karen Langgård, 'Greenlandic Writers', in *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literature: Continental Europe and its Empires*, ed. by Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. Patke and Lars Jensen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 71–72.
8. Christian Berthelsen, 'Greenlandic Literature: Its Traditions, Changes, and Trends', *Arctic Anthropology*, 23 (1986), 339–45.
9. Berthelsen.
10. Langgård, 'Greenlandic Writers'.
11. Kirsten Thisted, 'Imperiets Genføds- Profeterne I Evighedsfjorden og den Dansk-Grønlandske Historieskivning', *Nordlit*, 35 (2015), 105–21.
12. Lyberth's novel was originally published in Greenlandic as *Naleqqusseruttortut* in 2012, and subsequently translated into Danish by Lars Wind in 2014. The title of the novel in Danish translates as *Well on the Way. HOMO Sapienne* was published simultaneously in Danish and Greenlandic. As my Greenlandic is limited, I will be relying on the Danish translations of both novels and provide a brief translation of quotes for the readers.
13. Thisted, 'Emotions, Finance and Uranium', p. 2.
14. See Lars Jensen and Kristín Loftsdóttir, *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012) on Nordic exceptionalism.
15. Thisted, 'Emotions, Finance and Uranium', p. 2.
16. In 'Introduction: Denmark and its Colonies', *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literature: Continental Europe and its Empire*, ed. by Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. Patke and Lars Jensen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), Lars Jensen describes Greenland and the Faroe Islands as 'reluctant members of the Danish Commonwealth (*Rigsfællesskabet*)', p. 59.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Bolette Blaagaard, 'Remembering Nordic Colonialism: Danish Cultural Memory in Journalistic Practice', *KULT-Postkolonial Temaserie*, 7 (2010), 101–21 (p. 102).
20. The controversial experiment, which sought to make the Greenlandic children into model Danish citizens, has been criticized as an act of cultural genocide, and came to public attention again recently after the current Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, gave an official apology to the remaining six survivors, following the publication of a report investigating the event coordinated by the Danish government and the Greenlandic *landsstyre* [national government]. See Emma Qvirin Holst, 'Frederiksen siger undskyld til grønlandske eksperimentbørn', *Altinget*, (2020) <<https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/frederiksen-siger-undskyld-til-gronlandske-eksperimentboern>> [accessed 4 January 2021].
21. Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Meador, 'Danish Imperial Fantasies: Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*', in *Translating Nations*, ed. by Prem Poddar (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000), pp. 161–202 (p. 176).

22. Poddar and Mealor, p. 177.
23. Poddar and Mealor, p. 177.
24. Poddar and Mealor, p. 194.
25. Peter Høeg, *Frøken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne* (Copenhagen: Rosinante, 2010), p. 336.
26. Høeg, p. 335.
27. See David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
28. Peter Bjerregaard, Christina V. L. Larsen, Ivalu K. Sørensen and Janne S. Tolstrup, 'Alcohol in Greenland 1950–2018: Consumption, Drinking Patterns, and Consequences', *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 79 (2020), 1–11.
29. Thisted, 'Imperiets Genfærd-'.
30. Kim Leine, *Kalak* (Nørhaven: Gyldendal, 2007), p. 137.
31. Leine, p. 88.
32. Leine, pp. 81–82.
33. Leine, p. 80.
34. Leine, p. 89.
35. Leine, pp. 89–90.
36. Leine, p. 87.
37. Leine, p. 88.
38. Hans A. Lyngge, 'Juaaka Lyberth', (2014) <<https://www.norden.org/en/nominee/juaaka-lyberth>> [accessed 4 January 2021].
39. Juaaka Lyberth is well known in the Greenlandic cultural scene, having served as the director of *Kulturhuset* [The Culture House] in Nuuk, and is an actor and writer of songs and poems as well as novels.
40. Lyberth, p. 277.
41. Lyberth, p. 279.
42. Lyberth, p. 279.
43. Lyberth, p. 273.
44. Lyberth, p. 249. Blok P was demolished in 2012 and there are plans to demolish similar apartment blocks in central Nuuk.
45. Benita Parry, 'Aspects of Peripheral Modernism', *Ariel: A Review of International Literature in English*, 40.1 (2009), 27–55 (p. 32).
46. Karen Langgård, 'Oral/Past Culture and Modern Technical Means in the Literature of the Twentieth Century in Greenland', *Acta Borealia: A Nordic Journal of Circumpolar Societies*, 25.1 (2008), 45–57 (p. 48).
47. Langgård, 'Oral/Past Culture', p. 53.
48. Langgård, 'Greenlandic Writers', p. 72.
49. Langgård, 'Greenlandic Writers', p. 72.
50. *HOMO Sapienne* was published as *Crimson* in English, translated from the Danish version by Anna Halager. Korneliussen's second novel, *Naasuliardarpi* (2020), has also been nominated for the 2021 Nordic Council Literature Prize.
51. Mette Moestrup, 'Forord', in *HOMO Sapienne* by Niviaq Korneliussen (Nuuk: Milik, 2014), p. 11.
52. Niviaq Korneliussen, *HOMO Sapienne* (Nuuk: Milik, 2014), p. 17.
53. Korneliussen, p. 18.
54. The Greenlandic cover has a picture of a naked woman eating a banana, which Agata Lubowicka suggests along with the novel's title, 'artikulerer en antidiskurs mod normative opfattelser af køn — og menneskelighed' [articulates a counter-discourse against normative understandings of gender and humanity]. See Agata Lubowicka, 'Mellem det (post)koloniale, det (post)nationale og det globale: en analyse af Niviaq Korneliussens *HOMO Sapienne*', *Folia Scandinavica*, 24 (2018), 39–55 (p. 43).
55. Korneliussen, p. 51 and p. 56.
56. Korneliussen, p. 50.
57. Korneliussen, p. 65.
58. Korneliussen, p. 66.

59. Korneliussen, p. 73.

60. Lubowicka, p. 41.

61. See the contribution by Mari Jose Olaziregi in this volume.

62. Lars Jensen, 'Introduction: Denmark and its Colonies', p. 62.