

The Continuing Effects of Colonisation in Avanersuaq

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This paper questions the structure behind the substantial difficulties confronting the Inughuit, an Indigenous people from Avanersuaq (Northwest Greenland). By studying the colonial history of Avanersuaq, it identifies a specific ethnologic discourse which has systematically described the Inughuit as 'primitive' Kalaallit (West Greenlanders) since European explorers first encountered the Inughuit. It then assesses how this discourse has justified the gradual exclusion of the Inughuit from policy-making and their assimilation into the West Greenlandic society. This dynamic, initiated by the establishment of a Trading Station in Avanersuaq in 1910, has been maintained by the Danish and Greenlandic authorities since then. This assessment then allows a greater reflection on the economic and cultural instabilities the Inughuit continue to face. Indeed, this paper demonstrates that these adversities are inextricably linked to the authorities' assumption that the Inughuit are 'primitive' - later 'underdeveloped' - Kalaallit and to the subsequent dispossession of the Inughuit of their political agency. In light of this analysis, this study concludes that colonisation has continuing effects in Avanersuaq today, which should be comprehensively addressed by the competent authorities to ensure the resiliency of the Inughuit as a distinct community.

Introduction

In 1996, the association 'Hingitaq 53' (which translates in English as 'The Expelled of 1953', Spiermann, 2004: 572) decided to sue the Danish Prime Minister's Office regarding the expulsion and expropriation of several families following the establishment of an American Air Base in northwest Greenland. In doing so, the association made known to the outer world the Inughuit, a small Indigenous people from Avanersuaq (northwest Greenland), which it sought to represent in Court (Hingitaq 53 v. Denmark, 2006). Hingitaq 53 argued that the Inughuit (singular: Inughuaq) were a self-identifying Indigenous people, distinct from the Kalaallit (South and West Greenlanders), and entitled to specific rights. The case went to the Danish Supreme Court, which recognised that Inughuit had been forcibly relocated from their territory. However, the Court also ruled that the Inughuit were not an Indigenous people distinct from the Kalaallit (Hingitaq 53 v. Denmark, 2006). This ruling has often been accused of endangering the livelihood of the Inughuit as a distinct community. Indeed, the then president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Aqqaluk Lyngø, warned that the current political and legal dynamics may lead the Inughuit to "join other

Indigenous peoples globally whose language, culture and presence are no longer with us” (Lynge, 2002: 10).

Nineteen years later, while the Inughuit still maintain their distinct culture and traditions (Drieux, 2019), the worrying dynamics Lynge had denounced similarly seem to be persisting. Indeed, Inughuit and scholars have both highlighted that their existence as a distinct people fundamentally remains threatened, as they today look to be confronted with increasing political, economic, social, cultural and climatic difficulties (Ngiviu, 2014). The welfare services provided in Avanersuaq seem either defective or absent (Ngiviu, 2014) and this precariousness has led to the closure of many settlements in Avanersuaq, with the majority of the population now concentrated in Qaanaaq (Drieux, 2019).

On the other hand, the non-recognition of the Inughuit has been condemned on the international scene. For instance, the Human Rights Committee, in 2008, noted “with concern that [...] the Supreme Court did not recognise the Thule Tribe of Greenland as a separate group capable of vindicating its traditional rights, despite the tribe’s perception to the contrary” (para. 13). The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have raised similar concerns (CERD, 2002, 2010; CESCR 2019). The Inuit Circumpolar Council further condemned the Danish and Greenlandic authorities, contending that “the existence of an Indigenous community is a question of fact, and not an instrument of domestic law” (Inuit Circumpolar Council, 2011: para. 16). Additionally, several scholars and politicians have supported and developed this argumentation since then (Ngiviu, 2014; Lynge, 2002; Wulff, 2005; Gismondi, 2017). These contentions are based on the fact that the Inughuit have self-identified as a distinct Indigenous people, a criterion which is “fundamental” according to the Convention of the International Labour Organisation concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO C169, art. 1.2), but also with the idea that the Inughuit still retain their own social, linguistic and cultural traits today (Ngiviu, 2014; Lynge, 2002).¹

In light of the present state of affairs and consideration of the aforementioned argumentations, this article reflects on the non-recognition of the Inughuit as a distinct Indigenous people and the concerns deriving from it. In that perspective, the article will attempt to identify the systemic dynamics behind these issues by interrogating Avanersuaq’s colonial past.² In doing so, it will reconsider the prevailing official narrative and question the existence of structuring dynamics that could be behind the Inughuit’s contemporary precarious situation. This paper will first analyse the colonial ethnologic discourse made regarding the Inughuit and its influence on the exclusion of the Inughuit from decision-making. Secondly, it will reflect on the dispossession of the Inughuit from their political agency as a means to understand the difficulties their community must face today.

(The discourse studied hereinafter is full of racial aspersions, some of which are particularly violent and may be hurtful to some readers. Their presence in this article does not reflect my acceptance of them.)

Part 1: A history of political exclusion

Antony Anghie has bluntly summarised that Western colonisers have systematically tried to “define, subordinate and exclude the native” (Anghie, 2004: 38). By applying this reasoning to Avanersuaq’s history, this section will question the identification of the Inughuit as ‘primitive’ Kalaallit, and reflect on their subsequent exclusion from policy-making.

1.1 The construction of an ethnologic discourse

An ethnologic discourse built by explorers

The political rejection of the Inughuit appears to be a long process, originating in the Inughuit's encounter with white explorers and still ongoing today. Indeed, while the colonisation of South and West Greenland was initiated in 1721 by Hans Egede (Rud, 2017), the Inughuit were not known to Europeans until Scottish polar explorer John Ross encountered them while searching for the Northwest Passage in 1818 (Ross, 1819). His encounter was to be rapidly repeated by other European and American explorers. Interestingly, the explorers' discourses regarding the Inughuit are quite similar, as they directly and systematically identified the Inughuit as 'authentic' and 'primitive' Greenlanders, in comparison with the already-colonised Kalaallit. For instance, Ross wrote that when his translator, Sacheuse, saw them, he exclaimed: "These are *right* Eskimaux, these are *our* fathers!" (1819: 169) This idea, which would have been expressed by the expedition's Greenlandic translator was soon confirmed by Ross himself, as the explorer claimed that "the similarity of the language proves that they are the same people" (even though, a few pages earlier, Ross claimed the Inughuit were "unintelligible to Sacheuse" (1819: 164, 169)).

In 1854, Elisha Kane, after overwintering in Avanersuaq, incited the Inughuit to move south, where they would join other "tribes" (1879: 208). Kane, genuinely confident that the Inughuit were isolated Kalaallit, thought it would be more suitable for them to join their kin in the Danish colonies of Greenland. In 1858, M'Clintock reiterated Kane's proposal. The rapid assessment made by M'Clintock is that the Inughuit were uncivilised, "filthy", "wretched", "repulsive" (1869: 114). Therefore, M'Clintock was confident that these "degraded" West Greenlanders left out from colonisation would be better off in South Greenland (1869: 114).

The explorers' discourse, relayed south, influenced the Western scientific world. In 1866, the English geographer Clements Markham thus remarked that the Inughuit represented a "small remnant of [the] ancient wanderers" who populated the whole island of Greenland (1866: 136). By describing the Inughuit as the fathers of the westernised Kalaallit, Markham not only reduced the Inughuit to a notion of primitivity but also fixed the Inughuit to the past, effectively essentialising them as remnants of another era. At the end of the 20th century, Robert Bartlett furthered this reasoning as he argued that before the arrival of white men, the Inughuit "lived literally in a stone age" (1928: 324).

Robert Peary's attitude towards the Inughuit between 1891 and 1909 confirmed the dialectic presenting the Inughuit as authentic, uncivilised Kalaallit. Indeed, Peary obviously saw the Inughuit as 'primitives', as he described them as "a race of children" (1914: 492). On the other hand, Peary praised this deemed primitivity in some of his texts, only to uphold the idea that the Inughuit were original Greenlanders. Peary indeed assured that the Inughuit ought to stay "uncontaminated, pure-blooded" and avoid the fate of their kin in South Greenland, whom he identified as "half-breed human products, inferior to either original stock" (1914: 508).

From a Danish perspective, it appears that the Inughuit's primitivity was romanticised. For instance, the journalist Mylius-Erichsen, who went to Avanersuaq in the *1902-1904 Danish Literary Expedition* used his experience with the Inughuit to denounce the colonial project in South and West Greenland (Rud, 2017: 25-26). Mylius-Erichsen distinguished three different groups of

Greenlanders depending on their level of interaction with Western culture, thereby designating the Inughuit as the most authentic Greenlanders (Rud, 2017: 26).

Knud Rasmussen, who also went to Avanersuaq with the Danish Literary Expedition, came back with a similar discourse. Rasmussen effectively argued that the Inughuit had been slowly emerging “from the palaeolithic conditions under which they had hitherto been accustomed to live” (1915: 285). Convinced that the Inughuit’s perceived childish culture should be “gently” brought to maturity (Rasmussen, 1999: xx), and concerned by Peary’s recent departure from Avanersuaq (who left the Inughuit in a state of dependence regarding Western products), Knud Rasmussen tried to make Denmark extend its colony to Avanersuaq (Gilberg, 1988: 48). Since Denmark refused, Rasmussen decided to conduct this project himself and established the Thule Trading Station in Uummannaq (the Inughuit’s biggest settlement) in 1910. Rasmussen explained that he created the station to secure the Greenlandic land north of the Danish colony, (Brøsted, 1988) a crucial endeavour since the Inughuit were viewed as the fathers of the West Greenlanders.

Confirmed by the Danish and Greenlandic authorities ever since

Because Denmark did not see a potential colony in Avanersuaq as economically profitable at first (Drieux, 2019), and because Knud Rasmussen was already securing the land for Denmark without upsetting other Western nations (Brøsted, 1988), Avanersuaq was not incorporated into the Danish colonial area until 1921 (Hingitaq 53 v. Denmark, 2006) and the Thule trading station remained private property until 1937 (Brøsted, 1988). However, multiple examples demonstrate that the Danish administration systematically identified the Inughuit as authentic, primitive, West Greenlanders long before these dates. Indeed, since the Inughuit were described as merely uncolonised Kalaallit, the Danish authorities have early on regarded them as Danish subjects. In 1858, the Inspector of North Greenland thus asked explorer Francis M’Clintock “to convey from their isolated locality these arctic highlanders [...] to the Danish settlements in Greenland” (M’Clintock, 1869: 115). This was not an isolated event, as the Danish administration further expressed the idea that it had authority for Avanersuaq in 1907 (Harper, 2017) and 1916 (Cession of the Danish West Indies, United-States - Denmark).

In 1920, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs even argued that “[w]hen it was found that Eskimos were also living outside the districts hitherto subject to the Danish administration [...] Denmark extended her missionary enterprise and commercial activities to those regions” (Denmark v. Norway, 1933: para. 357). This dialectic, underpins, again, the idea that the Inughuit were simply uncolonised West Greenlanders whom Denmark had always considered to be under its jurisdiction, and that it was mere logic to extend the Danish presence to the area.

The idea that the Inughuit are authentic Greenlanders was still upheld by ethnologists in the middle of the 20th century. For instance, the French scientist Jean Malaurie, reiterated previous explorers’ arguments as he described the Kalaallit as “mixed-race” or “half-blood”, in contrast with the Inughuit “whose nature, it was told, was exceptionally intact” (2016: 15, 22, 27). The scientist, unmistakably influenced by the explorers’ discourse, even used Bartlett’s “stone age” analogy (2016: 39).

On another note, Malaurie’s overwinter came right before two significant shifts. First, in 1953, Greenland was integrated into the Danish Realm and thus officially decolonised according to the Danish state. This process was furthered in 1979 when Denmark initiated a devolution of its

political powers to the Greenlandic authorities. Second, it can be observed that after World War II, “[p]rimitive peoples were made into Indigenous peoples with specific rights” (Sowa, 2013: 190). However, while these shifts represent important developments for the Greenlandic nation, they did not alter the structural discourse observed hitherto. On one hand, the wording in the 1979 and 2009 Home Rule and Self-Government Acts reinforced the idea that Greenland is a single unit with a singular people. On the other hand, the Danish and Greenlandic authorities underpinned the colonial discourse by officially declaring on signing ILO Convention 169: “[t]here is only one Indigenous people in Denmark [...] namely the original population of Greenland, the Inuit” (ILO Governing Body, 2001: para. 20).

In spite of this, the Inughuit officially countered this dialectic when they sued Denmark in 1996, demanding to be recognised as a distinct Indigenous people and asking for the right to return to their territory (*Hingitaaq 53 v. Denmark*, 2006). Their argumentation was based on both objective and subjective criteria such as historical continuity, colonial domination, cultural distinctiveness and self-identification (*Hingitaaq 53 v. Denmark*, 2006).

The Danish government’s answer to the Inughuit’s claim appeared to be a mere summary of the discourse that had prevailed heretofore: the Inughuit are authentic Kalaallit. Denmark specifically asserted that the Inughuit are “of the same origin as the rest of the population in Greenland” (ILO Governing Body, 2001: para 20), even though recent archaeological studies suggest they had had absolutely no contact with the Kalaallit before their encounter with white men (Ngiviu, 2014). It further argued that all “native Greenlanders (Kalaallit) speak the same language”, (ILO Governing Body, 2001: para 20) even though the Inughuit and the Kalaallit languages are still mutually unintelligible (Ngiviu, 2014). This reductive argumentation is a common colonial dialectic. Colonisers have often homogenised different native groups to create a dichotomy between the Westerners and the “Others” (Staszak, 2009). Therefore, because distinguishing Inughuit and Kalaallit languages can be difficult for foreigners, and because distinguishing the Inughuit from the Westerners was effortless, the Inughuit were simply essentialised as primitive West Greenlanders, just like Native Americans were reduced to “Indians”, and enslaved Africans were homogenised as “Black” (Mignolo, 2008: xiv).

While the Naalakkersuisut (Greenlandic government) tried to support the Inughuit claim at first, it was “hamstrung to act decisively” (Lyng, 2002: 25). The Supreme Court thus ruled in 2004 that the Inughuit were not a distinct Indigenous people. Even if the reached conclusion was not influenced by the colonial dialectic (which is debatable), the decision, in any case, reaffirmed it: the Inughuit are Kalaallit who simply experienced belated colonisation.

Today, while Greenland becomes more and more autonomous, structural mechanisms and entrenched representations still preclude the Greenlandic authorities from supporting the Inughuit. Today, despite the Inughuit still self-identifying as distinct from the Kalaallit, the idea that they are authentic Kalaallit, ‘real’ Greenlanders appears to be deeply rooted in the Greenlandic imaginary (Graugaard, 2009: 149). Furthermore, the Naalakkersuisut has upheld the opinion that there exists only one Indigenous people in Greenland as it contended that “the Inughuit do not constitute a tribal people or a particular Indigenous people within, or coexisting with, the Greenlandic people as a whole” (Naalakkersuisut, 2013: 27).

1.2 The gradual exclusion of the Inughuit from decision-making

Knud Rasmussen, the Thule trading station, and the expression of colonial power

In academic literature, Knud Rasmussen is usually described as a warm-hearted man who disinterestedly wanted to protect the Inughuit and help them develop into a ‘modern’ society while maintaining their identity (Birket-Smith, 1933; Gilberg, 1988; Malaurie, 2016; Drieux, 2019). While the private colony established by Knud Rasmussen between 1910 and 1933 had its advantages (e.g. regarding healthcare and food security (Hastrup, 2019)), the colonial project led by Knud Rasmussen nonetheless excluded the Inughuit from decision-making.

For instance, one must acknowledge that Knud Rasmussen “had the overall responsibility for the entire Station’s finances” (Harhoff, 2000: 158). It is therefore noteworthy that the Inughuit were paid by Rasmussen around a tenth of the selling price of the furs, the rest of the profit thereby going to his Station (Drieux, 2019). Rasmussen justified this policy by arguing that the Inughuit were not ready to take care of such important amounts of money and that it was better to “slowly develop their society”, and “only if they requested so” (Malaurie, 2016: 626). However, “it is quite obvious that the [Inughuit] were not then in a position to be consulted” (Malaurie, 2016: 626).

A second illustration of the colonial mechanisms of Rasmussen’s station can be found in the Hunters’ Council. The Council, established on Rasmussen’s initiative in 1927, has often been described as an innovative tool that “encouraged the Inughuit to have influence on their development” (Gilberg, 1988: 5). However, the Hunters’ Council’s structure looks to be very similar to the Guardians’ Councils’ established in Danish Greenland between 1856 and 1911 (Sørensen, 2006: 15). Indeed, both boards were manned by three Danes (whose seats were permanent) and three elected local hunters (Rud, 2017: 38).

Rud (2014) has compellingly argued that these local boards were Foucauldian tools established by the Danish administration to reinvigorate the Kalaallit’s hunting industriousness and ensure economic profitability. In that perspective, the Hunters’ Council appears to have been an additional means for Rasmussen to direct the Inughuit where he deemed best. Rasmussen’s willingness to empower the Inughuit and protect their traditions can indeed be questioned. For instance, Rasmussen wanted to protect and value the lucrative traditional hunting activity but concomitantly made sure all Inughuit were Christianised during his dominion (Drieux, 2019). Besides, one must note that “Knud Rasmussen had reserved a right of revision for himself”, thereby confirming his desire to control Avanersuaq’s development (Brøsted, 1988: 261).

The essence of Rasmussen’s project was therefore inherently colonial: because the Inughuit were deemed childlike, primitive Kalaallit, Rasmussen decided “with disinterest and obstinacy to integrate progressively into the Greenlandic community, later Danish, this isolated group” (Malaurie, 2016: 577). In such a project, the Inughuit were not the main decision-makers.

The persisting dispossession of the Inughuit’s political agency under Danish dominion

After Rasmussen died in 1933, the station was transferred to Denmark in 1937 through an agreement with the Hunters’ Council (Brøsted, 1988). The Hunters’ Council, recognised as the main decision-making body for the region, agreed to the transfer as long as Avanersuaq was to be administered as a district distinct from the rest of Greenland (Brøsted, 1988). Despite this agreement, it appears that the Inughuit have only been further excluded from decision-making and assimilated into the West Greenlandic polity since then.

The pursuance of the structural exclusion of the Inughuit from decision-making is especially evident regarding the establishment of the Thule Air Base. In 1951, the United States signed a new Defence Agreement with Denmark, in which the construction of an American Airforce Base right next to Uummannaq was planned. The local Inughuit population living in Uummannaq was not consulted in this process (Hingitaq 53 v. Denmark, 2006). In 1953, as the United States decided to expand the Base, the Danish authorities realised the Inughuit had to be expelled from Uummannaq (Wulff, 2005). To prepare this relocation, the Danish administration only summoned the Danes living in Avanersuaq to Copenhagen (Lyng, 2002), evidently bypassing the Inughuit. In other colonial contexts, Anghie has argued that many Indigenous peoples were excluded from such decisions because they were deemed “too primitive to understand the concept of sovereignty” (Anghie, 2004: 91). In light of the aforementioned colonial discourse, it can be argued the Danes held the same reasoning towards the Inughuit. On the Danes’ return, the Inughuit were asked to relocate further north, to Qaanaaq, which had only been a temporary hunting camp until then (Hastrup, 2017: 154). As the revised Danish constitution, granting Greenlanders constitutional rights as full citizens would come into force only five days later, the Inughuit were given four days to leave their village (Johnstone, 2020).

The Danish administration then pursued the exclusion of the Inughuit by completely ignoring the Hunters’ Council grievance in regard to this relocation (it declared it “lost”, although the complaint was found in its “systemic place” in 2000 (Wulff, 2005: 68)). Besides, the feeble responsibility given to the population through the Council was abolished in 1963 when the authorities decided to extend the communal law to Avanersuaq. With this legal change, not only were the Inughuit’s potentially troublemaking complaints silenced, the Council’s demand that Avanersuaq should be administered as a distinct district was also eroded, bringing the Inughuit yet again closer to the Kalaallit.

The furtherance of the excluding dynamics since 1979

Finally, it can be remarked that while the Inughuit, as part of the Greenlandic nation, have been empowered by the 1979 and 2009 reforms, they have been, as a distinct Indigenous people, further disempowered by the semi-autonomous authorities. On that note, it is important to acknowledge that the Naalakkersuisut is acting within a system built during the Danish colonial dominion and still very much dependent on imported Danish skilled labour (Grydehøj, 2020).

On the national level, the Inughuit were further excluded and assimilated in 1998, when the independent constituency for their district was abolished (Gad, 2017). This meant that the Inughuit were no longer guaranteed a seat at the Inatsisartut (Parliament). On the local level, Avanersuaq’s administrative centre 1,080 kilometres away from Qaanaaq and left the Inughuit with only one seat out of seventeen on the Municipal Council, thus reinforcing this structural exclusion (Landstingslov nr. 15 af 5. December 2008).

On the international level, the Naalakkersuisut has used the Pituffik Air Base to serve its agenda while ignoring the Inughuit’s concerns. For instance, in 2002, the US asked to upgrade the missile defence system of the Base (Ackrén, 2019). The Inughuit strongly disapproved of the plan (Lyng, 2002), but the Naalakkersuisut dismissed their demands, as it used this occasion to increase its prerogatives in foreign policy (Kristensen, 2004). The empowerment of the Greenlandic authorities is a positive development yet it has been enabled by ignoring the Inughuit demands who consider

this land theirs. While it could be argued that the inclusion of the Greenlandic authorities guarantees the inclusion of the Inughuit (a reasoning upheld by the predominant ethnologic discourse), the political agency of the Inughuit has been constantly hampered, questioning the actual representivity of the Greenlandic authorities.

Overall, this exclusion and gradual assimilation cannot be understood without taking into account the systemic discourse made towards the Inughuit. Throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries, the aforementioned colonial discourse and political dynamics interplayed and reinforced each other, making the exclusion of the Inughuit structural reasoning. It can then be concluded that the Inughuit are facing a systemic, historically-built, dynamic which has continuously tried to dispossess them of their political agency.

Part 2: Systemically dispossessed of their political agency, the Inughuit have to face economic and cultural instabilities

Today, the Inughuit are facing substantial economic and cultural predicaments, reinforced by anthropogenic climate change (Lynge, 2002; Ngiviu, 2014; Drieux, 2019). It is here argued that these problems can only be comprehended and relevantly addressed by understanding the structural dynamics which have progressively excluded the Inughuit from decision-making.

2.1 Economic difficulties in Avanersuaq

An economic development planned from outside and imposed upon the Inughuit

Firstly, it appears that two conclusions can be drawn from Rasmussen's endeavour to develop the economy of Avanersuaq. On one hand, it should be noted that the Inughuit cash economy became "almost exclusively dependent" on the polar fox (Malaurie, 2016: 102). On the other hand, because the Station was by essence meant to be lucrative, it should be recognised that it established a structure in which the Inughuit were meant to be 'productive' (for instance by forbidding hunters to settle in one place for too long (Hastrup, 2017), it can be argued that Rasmussen tried to maximise the hunting ground covered by the hunters and thereby, maximise profitability (Rud, 2017)). While this worked well during Rasmussen's dominion, the issue is that to access the western goods they were increasingly contingent on, the Inughuit were encouraged to sell their catches to a trading post, where the prices were set according to market fluctuations. Therefore, the Inughuit were left in a structural dynamic in which profitability was key but over which they were dependent and lacked control.

This dynamic therefore became a substantial issue after the Second World War, as Denmark decided to abandon the isolation policy it had applied to Greenland hitherto and initiated a rapid modernisation of the country (Hansen, 2008). Throughout this process, instigated by two policy reports (the G-50 and the G-60), economic rationalism was key (Andersen, Jensen & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2016). The two reports created a dynamic in which Greenland had to become developed and productive according to Danish standards, thereby greatly disturbing the economic situation in Avanersuaq.

Although the economic productivity of the Inughuit encouraged by Rasmussen was somewhat appreciated by the G-50 (Grønlandskommissionen, 1950), the general pattern of development in Greenland sapped hunting activities. Indeed the G-50 and the G-60, in their endeavour to substitute hunting with commercial fishing, under-paid the hunters and encouraged them to

become industrial workers (Maurie, 2016). The concomitant collapse of the fox fur market and the loss of the Inughuit's best hunting grounds induced by the 1953 relocation only strengthened the force of these economic policies (Flora et al, 2018; Maurie, 2016). During the period when it was decided to optimise the productivity of the Greenlanders, what had been a lucrative business in Avanersuaq thus became a backwards and unprofitable activity in the eyes of the authorities. The Inughuit did adapt their activities to cope with these new developments while maintaining their hunting traditions, yet Avanersuaq rapidly became an unprofitable region according to Western standards (Maurie, 2016; Drieux, 2019).

The devolution of some political prerogatives to the Home-Rule and later Self-Rule governments does not appear to have changed the general economic dynamic. Indeed, the entrenchment of Greenland's economic dependency on Denmark, combined with the growing unprofitability of the Inughuit has led the Naalakkersuisut to continue the dynamics initiated under the Danish dominion. In that perspective, it has been summarised that the "Naalakkersuisut is more interested in reducing spending and finding ways to increase the country's revenue than increasing its expenditures on projects that are not 'absolutely necessary'" (Hansen, 2020). While these policies are usually not specifically aimed towards Avanersuaq, the Inughuit are especially vulnerable to these since the economic dynamics imposed over Greenland deem hunting, the Inughuit's main activity hitherto, as a backwards practice to be replaced by industrial, productive activities.

An economic vulnerability amplified by decisions unadapted to the specificities of Avanersuaq

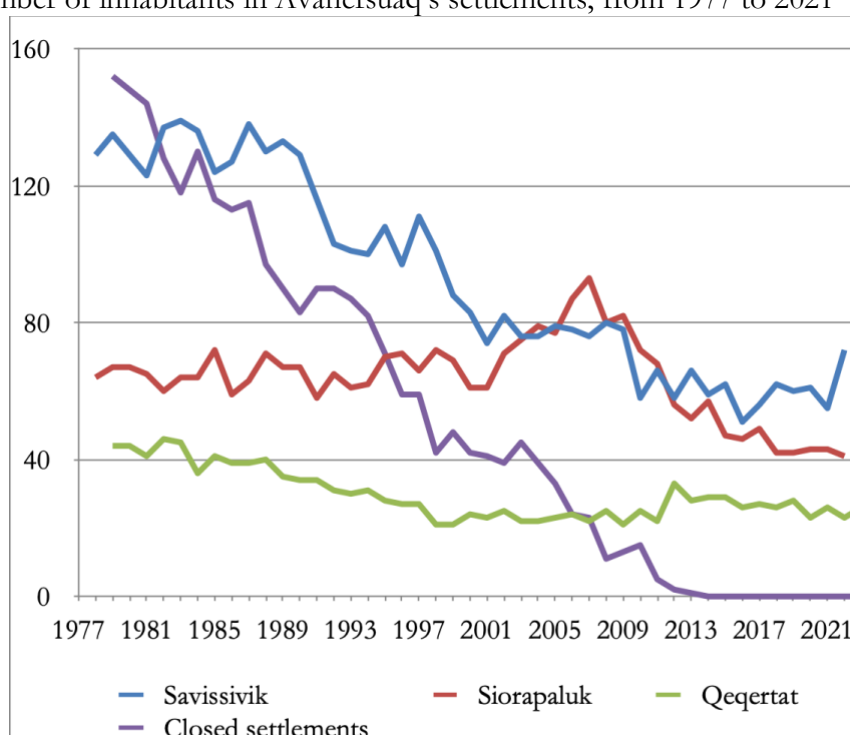
The issue, then, is that the imposition of a western economic system seeking constant profitability over Avanersuaq by the competent, yet external, authorities has often led to choices unadapted to the specificities of the region, effectively jeopardising the resiliency of the Inughuit.

First, one can remark that the Inughuit's daily lives are extremely challenged by the high retail prices in Avanersuaq. Indeed, since the uniform price system in retail, where a given product costs the same everywhere in the country, was abolished in 1994 (to cut public spending (Hendriksen, 2014)), life in Avanersuaq is very costly compared to southern towns. For instance, heating the houses (built on Kalaallit/Danish standards) in Avanersuaq is extremely expensive for the Inughuit, as "they must pay double price for fuel to warm their cold houses, compared with towns further south, where temperatures are much higher". The problem is such that during winter "some people are more or less hibernating in just one room, saving on both electricity and heat" (Hastrup, 2019: 16).

Second, the neoliberal management of the public services, based on Danish standards and constantly seeking to optimise spending, has created deficient public services in Avanersuaq. For example, Qaanaaq's hospital is unable to function as planned: the lack of midwives means that women must go to Nuuk to give birth, and the continuity of the aftercare provided to the patients is challenged by a high staff turnover (Witting & Lind Krebs, 2018; Ngiviu, 2014). The optimisation of the economy has led to a division, by sectors, of the state-owned companies providing essential services to the Greenlanders (water, transport, retail, electricity), leaving rural communities in difficult positions (Hendriksen & Hoffmann 2016). Indeed, these newly created sectoral companies were asked to abandon what could be seen as superfluous functions, only to maintain those strictly necessary. However, in remote settlements like Qaanaaq, these functions were not replaced by private companies, for the market is simply not profitable enough, thereby leaving the community with uncoordinated and ill-functioning services (see e.g., Hendriksen & Hoffmann, 2018).

Third, the westernisation and industrialisation of the economy in Greenland has ensured a gradual decrease of the hunting revenues and a progressive closure of the services provided by the State in the smaller settlements. Closing small settlements is economically attractive for the Naalakkersuisut because it enables the authorities to shut down costly services and infrastructures and to cut the allowances it pays to its isolated citizens (Drieux, 2019). Thus, most inhabitants from Avanersuaq's villages have decided to relocate to other, bigger settlements where they would find better economic opportunities and welfare services (Drieux, 2019; Ngiviu, 2014). This dynamic is easily observable: in 1977, 20% of the Inughuit lived in settlements which have now been abandoned (Statistics Greenland, 2021a) and so today, only three (out of 11 in 1950) settlements outside of Qaanaaq remain inhabited (Drieux, 2019). In that perspective, Putdlaq Uvdloriaq, an Inughuit hunter has argued that "people from the North are never heard. The government wants to close the small settlements without worrying about the opinion of the hunters" (Drieux, 2019: 46).

Figure 1: Number of inhabitants in Avanersuaq's settlements, from 1977 to 2021



Source: Statistics Greenland

These developments have created a very precarious economic situation in Avanersuaq: the unemployment rate is high (Statistics Greenland, 2021b; Niras Greenland/AS, 2020) and 22% of the adults in Qaanaaq are thought to be homeless (Hendrisken & Hoffmann, 2016). Underprivileged groups such as young women and people with disabilities are especially impacted by these dynamics (Statistics Greenland, 2021b; Kristiansen, 2021). The Inughuit are thus facing undeniable pressures inciting them to leave the small settlements and to move to bigger towns in the south, where they would find better economic opportunities and welfare services. Although this worrying state of affairs is partly counterbalanced by several endeavours which could galvanise Avanersuaq's economy (Drieux, 2019), it can only be truly altered if Greenland stops developing its economy on Danish standards and allows rural areas (not least Avanersuaq) to develop themselves according to their own needs and standards. Finally, it is important to note that the dynamics overviewed above do not concern only Avanersuaq. Indeed, rural communities in

Greenland usually face the same economic difficulties as the Inughuit, and feel a similar pressure to relocate to bigger towns (Hendriksen, 2014). However, while “[t]he threat of relocation looms over many settlements along the entirety of the Greenlandic west coast, [...] at least those other communities count as Kalaallit” (Ngiviu, 2014: 149). In fact, a relocation of the Inughuit south would mean further assimilation of their community into the Kalaallit society. It is in that perspective that unrecognised and disempowered minorities such as the Inughuit, but also the Iivit in East Greenland, look to be especially vulnerable to these dynamics.

2.2 A worrying cultural discrimination

A linguistic prejudice tending towards assimilation

Finally, Inughuit culture and Indigenous knowledge have historically been disregarded, leading to discriminatory situations today which endanger the livelihood of the community. First, it appears that the language of the Inughuit, Inuktun, still used by most Inughuit in their everyday lives, is strongly discriminated against.

Inuktun is a spoken language closer to some Inuit languages from the Canadian Arctic than Kalaallisut (West Greenlandic) (Fortescue, 1991). Thus, in spite of a century of colonisation, Danification and assimilation which undoubtedly influenced Inuktun, (Fortescue, 1991) Inuktun and Kalaallisut are still mutually unintelligible (Ngiviu, 2014). The Inuit Circumpolar Council has thus contended that “[t]he Inughuit are speaking their own language”, (2011: para. 22) yet the official discourse argues that Inuktun is simply a regional “dialect” and that “Greenlandic” is the official language of the country (Inatsisartutlov nr. 7 af 19. maj 2010 om sprogpolitik, 2010: para. 3). In practice, “Greenlandic” actually means Kalaallisut and Inuktun is never used by the authorities (Mortensen & Barten, 2016).

Although this official discourse was only transcribed into law in 2010, this dialectic has been upheld since European and American explorers encountered the Inughuit (Ross, 1819; Rasmussen, 1908) despite the fact that Kalaallit missionaries were unable to communicate with the Inughuit when they first arrived in Avanersuaq (Ross, 1819; Harper, 2017). Therefore, although it has been argued that Inuktun’s grammar does not match Kalaallisut’s since then (Ngiviu, 2014), the Danish administration has officially endorsed the explorers’ dialectic since 1908 (Harper, 2017) and has defended the simplistic assertion that Inuktun “does not deviate fundamentally” from Kalaallisut, but that it simply “sounds very different” (Holtved, 1952: 21; ILO Governing Body, 2001).

On account of this, Inuktun is today not protected from outside influences but on the contrary, it is pushed into the background. For instance, only Kalaallisut has an official standardised written form in Greenland today and this form does not match with Inuktun’s singular phonology (Leonard, 2014). Thereby, Inuktun’s “very special sounds and pronunciations are endangered and disappearing” (Ngiviu, 2014: 154).

Furthermore, since Inuktun is not recognised as a language and since there are too few Inughuit teachers to instruct the upper grades, the Inughuit pupils are not taught their native language in school and have to learn their lessons in foreign languages, an exhausting exercise which leads to deschooling both in primary and upper secondary school (Pluym, 1999; Leonard, 2015; Niras Greenland A/S, 2020). The schooling system thus represents a structural vicious circle in which the Inughuit and their language are continually discriminated against. Indeed, the Danish- and Kalaallisut-speaking teachers make it more difficult for pupils to follow their classes, which only

reinforces the strong incentives to drop out of upper secondary education, which increases the lack of Inughuit skilled labour in Avanersuaq and the importation of non-Inughuit teachers and so forth.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the Inughuit are attached to their language, which bears with it an invaluable culture, world-view and knowledge (Drieux, 2019; Schweitzer, Sköld & Ulturgasheva, 2014). Inuktun is thus perpetuated, albeit in different forms influenced by globalisation and Kalaallisut (Drieux, 2019; Leonard, 2015). Although this is a hopeful dynamic, the structural pressure against Inuktun is very concerning. Indeed, the necessity to communicate in Kalaallisut or Danish outside of the private sphere contributes to the assimilation of the Inughuit into the Greenlandic society and erodes the invaluable culture of this Indigenous people. For instance, having sufficient proficiency in Kalaallisut and/or Danish looks to be an absolute necessity today in Avanersuaq to access non-traditional jobs and services (Pluym, 1999). It is important to recognise that the small number of Inuktun speakers makes it particularly difficult for the Greenlandic government to provide the same services in Inuktun and Kalaallisut, yet recognising Inuktun as a language seems necessary, for the present dynamic unmistakably infringes on the Inughuit's cultural rights (Chuffart, 2018). In fact, these circumstances have led the UNESCO to designate Inuktun as a "definitely endangered" language (UNESCO, 2021).

Political and legal threats to the Inughuit hunting culture

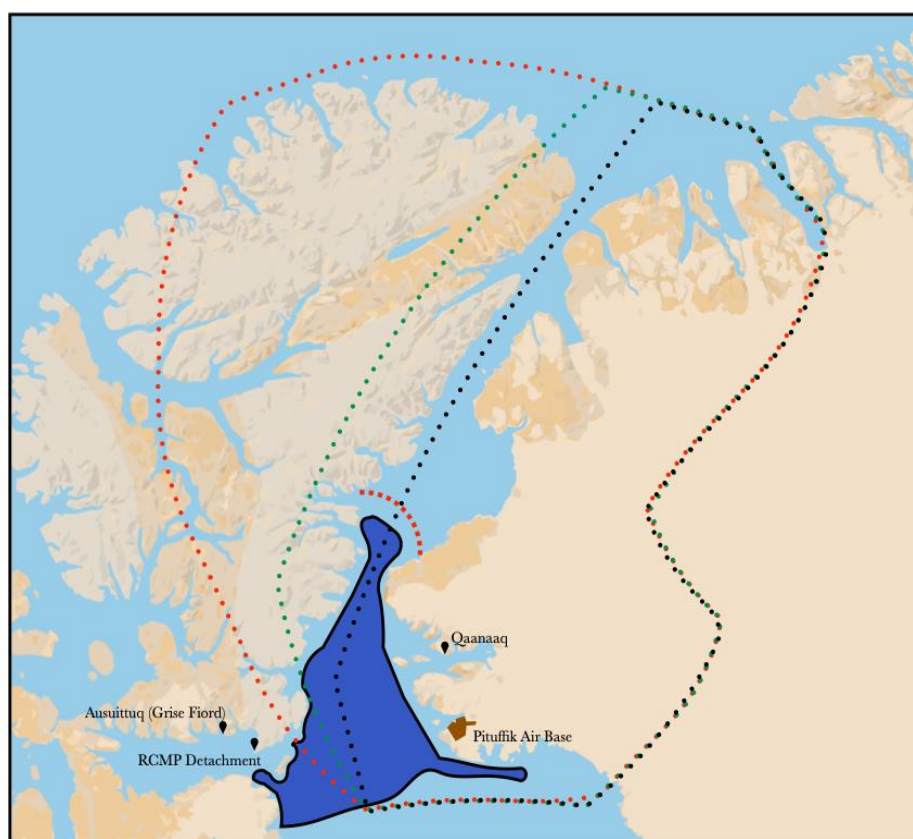
Today, around 130 Inughuit hunters (or 28% of the adult population) continue to provide their community with traditional food (which still represents 60% of the community's food supplies) and clothing and perpetuate the Inughuit's ancient culture (Statistics Greenland, 2021c; Drieux, 2019). Avanersuaq is one of the only places in Greenland where qajaq and dog sledges are not just used in sports but still utilised by the hunters in their activity (Drieux, 2019). However, hunting is becoming increasingly difficult in Avanersuaq for environmental, economic and legal reasons. Today, it is impossible to subsist solely from hunting, and the activity must be combined with other revenues (Drieux, 2019).

In that perspective, the degradation of hunting conditions is not only economically worrying for the Inughuit, it is also a threat to their cultural well-being and their existence as a distinct community. Indeed, hunting must be understood as both a cultural and economic activity and the cornerstone of the Inughuit identity which qualifies as a cultural right to be protected under international law (Human Rights Committee, 1994). While climate change undeniably challenges hunting in Avanersuaq (Hastrup, 2018), it appears that this activity is also deeply impacted by political and legal developments.

First, geopolitical developments have substantially restricted the Inughuit's access to their hunting grounds. The loss of hunting grounds deriving from the establishment of the Pituffik Air Base has been mentioned already, but it is not the only territory the Inughuit cannot access anymore. Indeed, the Inughuit have traditionally hunted around the North-Water Polynya (Pikialasorsuaq), an area of year-round open water between Avanersuaq and Ellesmere Island (Umimmat Nunaat) closed by an ice-bridge in the north. However, since 1919, the Inughuit's presence in Umimmat Nunaat has been perceived as a threat to Canadian sovereignty by the Canadian authorities (Barr, 2004). Therefore, the Canadian administration has taken several actions aimed at forbidding the Inughuit to hunt in their traditional territories, by first sending the Royal Canadian Mounted Police there (Schledermann, 2003), later by forcibly sending Inuit families to Ausuittuq (McGrath, 2009), and

then by reinforcing border-crossing requirements in 1999 and 2001. Since then, Umimmat Nunaat is therefore inaccessible to the Inughuit (Drieux, 2019). The Inughuit, who still regard Umimmat Nunaat as part of their traditional hunting grounds, have strongly voiced their discontent at the impossibility to hunt much-needed game and visit their relatives living in Canada (Lyberth & Egede, 2013). The Inuit Circumpolar Council has thus launched the “Pikialasorsuaq Commission” in 2013, a project which seeks to establish a co-management system for the region and re-empower the Inuit living around the polynya (Pikialasorsuaq Commission, 2017), yet the support of the Canadian, Danish and Greenlandic governments, is still needed to implement that system.

Figure 2: Map of the Pikialasorsuaq and evolution of the size of the Inughuit’s hunting grounds in Umimmat Nunaat



Legend:

- Pikialasorsuaq
- Ice bridge
- Inughuit traditional hunting grounds
- 1999 restrictions
- 2001 restrictions

Sources:

Google Maps 2021,
 Lyngé 2002, Drieux
 2019, Pikialasorsuaq
 Commission 2017

On the other hand, the Inughuit hunting culture is also threatened at the national level by the establishment of hunting quotas. These quotas, first instigated in 2004, are paradigmatic of the assimilation of the Inughuit into the Greenlandic centralised polity, but also of the postcolonial dynamics pressurising the Naalakkersuisut into adopting Western conservationist methods (Ngiviu, 2014; Drieux, 2019). Today, these constraints completely disregard the Inughuit hunters' traditional knowledge and jeopardise the financial livelihood of the Inughuit hunters (last year, the financial situation of some young hunters was so challenging that some had to rely on their relatives to get necessities such as food (Mølgaard, 2020)). Moreover, they forcibly modify the traditional interactions of the Inughuit with the surrounding ecosystem and effectively endanger an essential part of the Inughuit culture (Andersen, Heide-Jørgensen & Flora, 2018). The quota system is strongly disapproved by the hunters (Sermitsiaq, 2019) who often view it as a humiliating, disrespectful endeavour: "We have our own rules because we know the animals and the region. The government comes in and dictates other rules without knowing our culture" (Drieux, 2019: 442). Nonetheless, the authorities so far have not taken into account the hunters' complaints.

The Inughuit are not passive, subjected victims in these developments, and they continuously adapt to these situations to maintain their traditions (Drieux, 2019), yet to ensure their resiliency in the long term and end this systemic discrimination, the different calls to modify the quota system and to re-open access to Umimmat Nunaat (Pikialasorsuaq Commission, 2017; Nykjær Olsen, 2020) must be answered by the authorities.

Conclusion

In sum, the legal and political history in Avanersuaq is marked by colonial endeavours which defined the Inughuit through an external gaze and excluded them. These historical constructs, maintained, if not furthered, by the Greenlandic and Danish authorities, partly explain the difficulties the Inughuit must face today. The present, discriminative, system, built under Danish dominion, thus has continuing effects in Avanersuaq and Greenland. To protect the rights of the Inughuit and ensure the resiliency of their community, this system must then be questioned comprehensively and the perceptions of the Inughuit, most assuredly, revalued.

Notes

1. Even though the Inughuit are an Indigenous People, it should be understood that they have strong "ties with the larger group of Inuit living in the Arctic regions" (Lynge, 2002: 9). Indeed, the Inughuit can also feel Inuit, Greenlandic, or both. Recognising this distinctiveness is thus a way of enabling better protection of the Inughuit's unique culture, to ensure its livelihood; not a means to create further divisions and tensions within the Greenlandic society.
2. It must, however be recognised that colonisation involves two parties, and the colonised subject is never completely passive. Indeed, the colonial encounter should be understood "as an interactive, dialogic, two-way process rather than a simple active-passive one; as a process involving complex negotiation and exchange" (Gandhi, 2018: 15).

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