To Live Up to Our Name "Greenland": Politics of Comparison in Greenland's Green Transition

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In 2021, the Government of Greenland made an active, discursive shift in the political discourse regarding Greenlandic development. Since the last general election, the political agenda has changed from prioritizing industrialization and the development of extractive industries (with little focus on ratifying international treaties and commitments to lower CO2 emissions to limit global warming) to suddenly wanting to "live up to our name, Greenland" by kickstarting a green transition with the ambition to be an exporter of hydropower and mining rare earth elements (REE) to support the technology for the green transition. At the time of writing, Greenland has no formal climate strategy for the country or a strategy for green energy transition. Analyzing collected data (presentations at COP26 and the related notes, videos, reports, and statements) is therefore the best way to understand Greenland's up-to-date priorities related to the green transition and position in the international climate change debate. Greenland lacks a nicely sealed package of peers and keeps on searching for other nation-states to get inspiration. Therefore, the following research question is posed: To whom (or what) does Greenland compare itself to in the process of finding a fitting model for future green transition? The reading strategy for this article is inspired by the politics of comparison with the act of comparing and producing categories as the object of study.

1. Introduction

"We want to be known for our commitment to renewable resources and live up to our name, Greenland." (Naaja Nathanielsen Greenlandic Naalakkersuisoq (Minister) for Housing, Infrastructure, Justice, Minerals and Gender Equality at the 2021 Arctic Circle Assembly)

The green transition agenda is at the center of attention for governments, organizations, businesses, and academia, including The European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), and new Arctic policies echo this agenda. Most Greenlanders agree both on the goal of independence and the need to prepare society by getting the most out of scarce human resources (Gad, 2016). Until now, the focus has been on finding the right polity format, reconfiguring infrastructure, and igniting economic growth by developing fisheries, mining, and tourism as the economic expectations shape preferences for national independence (Agneman, 2022). In April 2021, the left-wing Inuit

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Ataqatigiit party topped the polls in the general election. Environmental concerns over the plans for open-pit mining at Kvanefjeld divided public opinion[2]. What is significant here is how it is the first time that environmental concerns have been such a major topic in a Greenlandic election. These environmental concerns have led the new government (led by the Inuit Ataqatigiit party) to raise their ambitions for more international cooperation in this matter (Koalitionsaftale, 2021) and greater commitment to global environmental policies like the Paris Agreement (2015). To make their new global approach clear, the first sentence of the new Coalition Agreement with the Siumut party from 2022 underlined that "we are part of the global society" (Koalitionsaftale, 2022: 1).[3] Meanwhile, Siumut were hesitating and asked for an investigation of the consequences of Greenland's accession to the Paris Agreement, which postponed the final decision about Greenland's commitment. [4]

A small glimpse into the motivation for this study is that, just as fossil fuels of coal, gas and oil made possible a general increase in European welfare (Willig & Blok, 2020), hydropower and technologies dependent on Rare Earth Elements (REE) could be the key to the green transition—if done smartly. This means that Greenland's resources have the potential to make an important contribution to the green transition (Kalvig, 2021). Offering its resources to the green transition has the potential both to alter Greenland's relationships with other states and economies while at the same time facilitating a welfare state model with a high quality of life, even outside of the urban centers (Hastrup & Lien, 2020).

In order to meet the 2015 Paris Agreement goals, the world's energy systems must transition away from fossil fuels. The EU and US have engaged for some time in geopolitical competition related to the more critical minerals motivated by the Chinese near-monopoly on REE production. With the new global resource pressure from Russia and the Middle East tailored to oil and natural gas exports, a tendency for resource nationalism has seized the day, where governments position themselves around the achievement of a fair share of potential resource wealth (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2021: 5-6). A green transition and the future and identity of the nation are therefore often linked—as Ms. Nathanielsen (MP) wants Greenland to live up to its name by having a green image. The wellbeing and national image are important for most Greenlandic politicians, as they see Greenland as a state in formation and thus part of international organizations and global discourses (Gad, 2016; Ren, Gad & Bjørst, 2019). For the Government of Greenland (GoG), the green transition agenda translates into an ambition to produce energy from hydropower and wind turbines for export and to support new industries. Moreover, REE mining in Greenland has been framed as a contribution to the global green transition (Egede, 2022). According to Greenland's new mineral strategy, "Greenland is to be an attractive mining country which investors will prefer over other mining countries" (Greenland's Mineral Strategy 2020—2024: 8). In other words, Greenland wants to be "attractive" and known for its commitment to renewable resources and to develop a green image.

Hence, while moving toward a green transition might be a technical endeavor, to get technical solutions implemented it must first function as a rhetorical activity, with political effects, which is the focus of this article. Climate change has produced a new global market, and climate change adaptation is seen as a financial and economic imperative (Resch & Gao, 2022: 5). Many problem definitions promoted by great powers as part of the green transition involve resources that may be found in Greenland—but without necessarily recognizing the Greenlandic resources in the

solution envisioned and the planning that lies ahead. Additionally, as part of this dominant discourse, categories for comparison are flagged by Greenlandic politicians and the industry partners—including references to experiences in Norway and Iceland with hydropower and mining experiences from the Canadian Arctic and Australia. Scholars have yet to address what the global green transition agenda flagged will mean for Greenland. At the same time, it is puzzling how "green transition" is often mentioned in political discussions as though it was common knowledge. In this article, I will argue that the green transition concept does not point towards any specific object and that the green transition discourse offers new roles for Greenland to take; bringing with them new models for how Greenlandic society may develop. This study thus uses the "politics of comparison" as an analytical lens to understand Greenland's role and priorities in the green transition and to ask: *To whom (or what) does Greenland compare itself in the process of finding a fitting model for the future green development?*

The data for this analysis centers primarily around Greenland's presentations at COP26 (December 2021) and the related notes, videos, reports, and statements. At the time of writing, Greenland has no formal climate strategy for the country (Bjørst, 2019) or a strategy for green energy transition. Analyzing this collected data is therefore the best way to understand Greenland's up-to-date priorities related to the green transition and position in the international climate change debate. The reading strategy is inspired by the politics of comparison (Gad, 2021), which is a new lens to understand Greenland's path to independence. This theoretical approach is explained in greater detail in the following section. Talking about climate change and the green transition is relatively new in Greenlandic politics, as is the use of related green powerful language (Bjørst, 2018). At the time of writing, the GoG is drafting a national climate strategy[5] . Recently, a big unknown has taken center stage when the global energy crisis emerged as a side effect of Russia invasion of Ukraine. All this might impact climate and energy politics all over the world.

2. Politics of comparison

The drawing of comparisons is a central part of cultural meaning-making (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). But the anthropological literature also recommends being critical towards suggested "units of comparison," as they are not homogenous, given, or stable at all, and researchers should therefore be critical as to the kind of recognition given to such comparisons (Fox, Gingrich & Strathern, 2002: 19-20). In this article, comparison is less a *method* than it is identified as an *object of study*. The point of departure in this study is that the act of comparing will always have a political effect and can potentially be productive in shaping future development (Ren & Jóhannesson, 2022). Greenland does not come with a nicely sealed package of peers - like when the category for comparison is other countries. What appear to be fitting categories for comparison often ultimately clash (Gad, 2021). Additionally, it is important to pay attention to how processes in Greenland are systematically shaped by how actors and knowledge producers identify Greenland with outside models (eg. an Arctic country, developing or developing country, welfare society)[6]. These are postcolonial comparisons, but also categories for comparison which means something for how politics and planning unfold. For Greenland, the politics of comparison is also about who to become as part of this potential (green) hyper-industrialization (Sejersen, 2016). A relational production of identity can therefore also be read out of the comparisons related to the green transition agenda.

Greenland usually tends to compare itself with the Nordic countries due to the common welfare state model. Somewhat regrettably, comparison with Denmark is a convenient habit that speaks to the citizens expectations within the Kingdom of Denmark regarding social benefits, health care, infrastructure, and business models. At the same time, comparisons with Denmark are inevitably made on the background of the colonial/post-colonial relationship over the last 300 years—meaning that a Danish academic elite still dominates the public and private sectors in Greenland. One of the side-effects of this is that Danish has become the primary working language in the governmental bodies and the bigger companies in the private sector in Greenland (Hussain, 2018, Karlsson, 2021). Working in Greenland and making comparisons with Danish standards speaks to historical ties—but the naturalization is frequently contested in contemporary Greenland with reference to the need for decolonization (Thisted & Gremaud, 2020; Graugaard, 2020).[7] In the last 10 years, Greenlandic politicians have been looking for alternative categories and countries for comparison than Denmark in its nation-building process. According to Anderson (1983), a nation is not given; rather, it must be imagined and performed. How a region (or nation) develops is, thus, not given, but more a choice made on specific historical and political grounds (Keskitalo, 2007: 188). For this study, I have been puzzled by how some categorizes are selected and identified as constitutive, while others are ignored or dismissed as irrelevant. The basis of comparison for Greenland as a state in formation is very much in the making. In politics, comparison can stand out as a state project (Stoler, 2001) but as this study illustrates, focusing on Greenland, it is a wider conversation – like a discussion centered around green transition. Recently, the GoG has made an active discursive shift in Greenlandic politics; from prioritizing industrialization and the development of extractive industries and therefore not ratifying any international treaties and commitments to lower CO_2 emissions to limit global warming (Bjørst, 2018) to suddenly declaring a green ambition in October 2021. This kick-started the process of implementing the Paris Agreement (2015). The analysis will prioritize investigation of this new political agenda as presented by the Greenlandic politicians and the many illustrations and articulations of said potentials.

3. "Green transition" as an empty signifier

There are competing visions and framings of what the green transformation is about, why and if it is needed, what is to be transformed, and who should have the main responsibility for driving the change (e.g., Blythe et al., 2018; O'Brien, 2012). The "green transition" concept is in many ways an empty signifier; that is, a signifier without a signified, which is therefore impossible to define in concise terms (Brown, 2015). While such a concept is subject to constant revision, green transition is at the same time a unifying element in the political landscape and seeks to characterize the overall identity of the discourse as an abstract cipher that can be charged with different meanings (Keller, 2013: 57). A popular empty signifier, which has played a similar role for some time in the Arctic, has been the concept of "sustainability." Brown (2016) refers to "sustainability" as an empty signifier that, due to its lack of specific content, "is able to incorporate diverse agents within the process, including traditional antagonists, under the pretense that they are all working on issues of 'sustainability'" (Brown, 2016: 117). Whereas "sustainability" is about sustaining something (e.g., environment, Indigenous communities, the economy)—green transition is about transforming something and not having the ambition to sustain (not to change) to the same extent. In other words, something must go as part of this transformation (e.g., oil, gas, meat). The logic behind the "green transition" agenda could be understood as a critique of the status quo and an inherent need for transformation to secure human existence. One might argue that "green transition" is a slightly

more substantial sub-case of "sustainable development," and it seems to be linked to a "we" (or society as such), as those who should change to become more sustainable; an agent of change which is not necessarily possible to identify when the discussion is centered only around sustainability.

In much of the broader debate in society, the concept captures "the magnitude of societal change required across critical social, economic and political dimensions to enable sustainability and to avoid dangerous climate change" (Karlsson & Hovelsrud, 2021: 259). But that still leaves a lot of questions open regarding scales of environmental sustainability and distinct ways that transformation can be possible. Like sustainability, the green transition concept links to a future as an intolerable imaginary if we do not transform, and Brown (2016: 124) argues that such imaginaries also have the potential to give expression to radical politics and logics. Green transition is already a well-known rhetorical figure (Amundsen & Hermansen, 2021); being so unclearly defined makes it possible to attach it to surprising relations and contexts. Because they are empty and vaguely defined, empty signifiers are important in politics because they can foster an inclusive and expanding identity discourse about what to become in the future and create a platform for conversations about said future (Gad et al., 2019, Laclau, 2017). In political debate, "green transition" is often mentioned as if we all understand what is meant. However, it does not point toward any specific object. It has no exact meaning, which makes it politically powerful. Thus, Brown (2016) argues that those who speak the hegemonic language (of green transition) are better able to temporarily fix its meaning (ibid: 117). Initiatives can even be stopped or criticized for going against a green transition without even defining what the concept means. Thus, this study will zoom in on the Greenlandic politicians' language and the temporary fixing of its potential meaning. This study exemplifies how it is a slippery slope, however, and one could worry about the possibility of creating substantial change—where anything goes under the banner of sustainability—and the same goes for "green transition." Consequently, we are often not talking about one singular green transformation, but multiple ones.

In parallel to these concerns, depending on how it is introduced, green transition in the Arctic could be socially transformative, and it has certainly gained resonance among the Arctic countries. Talking about "green transition" can be understood as a whole new way of conceiving environmental problems, where environmental management and transformation is seen as a positive-sum game and not a showstopper (i.e., like former discussions about the climate crises; Hulm, 2009). It is time to call for nuance regarding the "green transition" concept, as it does many other things in the political debates than making something greener and, as I would argue in this paper, creates a new category for comparison.

4. Analysis

4.1 Greenland commitments in the Paris Agreement

Parallel to the discursive shift to "live up to the name, Greenland," the conversation about Greenland and the Paris Agreement surfaced in Greenlandic politics. An official note (sagsnr. 2021-16893) to the Parliament of Greenland in January 2022 mentioned how Greenland was considering the "Faroese model," which suggested that the parties did not burden each other and that the Greenlandic NDC was independent of the Danish regulations (Dep- for Udenrigsanliggende, 2022: 1). Both Greenland and the Faroe Islands preferred a model that was not "contrary to the desire for future industrial development in Greenland" (Dep- for

Udenrigsanliggende, 2022: 2).[8] Looking back on when the Paris Agreement was introduced in 2015 and the many expectations to commitment and changes at that time, the agreement has come to be considered less "dangerous" to ratify for a country like Greenland. The NDCs are not on track, as one could expect from the political debate about commitment to the Paris Agreement.[9] Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent how the quality and NDC ambition vary (due to lack of financing, capacity, political commitment, and health priorities subsequent to COVID-19) (UN, 2021; UNFCCC, 2021). In other words, one size does not fit all. Room exists for Greenland's abilities and "special conditions"—an often-used characterization in UN documents. Greenland has previously flirted with the "developing country" category when negotiating their role in the Copenhagen Accord and Rio Declaration (Bjørst, 2011). However, Greenland being a welfare society (with e.g. free school, health care and social benefits) did not at that time make the category directly applicable. According to the letter sent to the Danish PM before COP26, Greenland might flag their position (and category) as Indigenous people to make room for maneuver in the Paris Agreement setup. In the letter is stated:

> It is the intention that Greenland's forthcoming NDC will obligate Greenland to a green transition of the Greenlandic society and at the same time provide space and opportunity for economic development of an independent country in which most of the population can declare indigenous peoples' right to development (Naalakkersuisut, 2021, translated by author).

In other words, Greenland might not pick the category as developing country—arguing instead for the population's identity as Indigenous peoples with a right to development (aligned with UN declarations). This statement can be read as an indication of Greenland's ability to create alternative spaces and room to maneuver in the UN system (Dahl, 2012), where the position as Indigenous peoples grants access to forums beyond the Danish membership. Greenland is still a state in formation and not an independent UN member state—but a member as part of the Kingdom of Denmark. The Paris Agreement could thus be read as a document of potential benefit to Greenland and as supporting its ambition to become an exporter of energy and minerals to new, green technology, thereby playing a central role in the green transition. This is what the GoG hopes for. In a note to the Greenlandic Parliament, the Greenland Department of Foreign Affairs writes:

> Accession to the Paris Agreement is expected to lead to increased interest and access to various climate-related funds and funds from international fora that support the green climate-friendly transition (Høringsnotatet, in Dep- for Udenrigsanliggende, 2022: 3, translated by author).[10]

The extent to which Greenland expects to take advantage of the possibility for so called "capacity-building actions" is unknown. The Paris Agreement reaffirms that: "developed countries should take the lead in providing financial assistance to countries that are less developed and more vulnerable." In other words, Greenland might take advantage of the capacity-building actions and call on their special "national circumstances" with respect to their new green infrastructure (hydropower, wind turbine, P2X, CCS).

The politics of comparison in the pre-COP26 illustrates how Greenland is arguing for its own position in the Paris Agreement and looking for comparability as a nation and an Indigenous population. But this is an evolving process whereby Greenland is looking for ways to develop and

position itself as part of the green transition while looking towards the Faroe Islands, developing countries, and other Indigenous peoples.

4.2 A green Greenland at COP26

Since the introduction of Self Government (2009),[11] the GoG has been following a dual climate strategy, where politicians have argued for a stop to global emissions while at the same time being unwilling to follow global standards as dictated by the Copenhagen Accord (2009), Rio Declaration (2011), and the Paris Agreement (2015). In 2011, Greenland left the Kyoto Protocol[12] due to the inability to meet the reduction targets they signed up for when ratifying the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 (2008–11). In that sense, the announcement at the COP26 in Glasgow to join the Paris Agreement and become "a greener Greenland," as stated in a video at the briefing, represented a discursive shift. Greenland "Premier" Múte B. Egede[13] made the following statement in a press release before the COP26:

> *Naalakkersuisut (the Government of Greenland) believes that we who call the Arctic home must do what we can to lead by example by aiming to reduce CO_2-emissions and to promote a sustainable, green transition in Greenland and beyond. Sustainable green energy solutions are the future, and we have a lot to gain by this transition. Greenland has an abundance of hydropower resources, which surmounts our domestic energy needs. We are right now in the process of opening up to investors, who can help develop these areas, so that Greenland can fuel cheap and sustainable energy for data centers or as an input into storing of energy in hydrogen via Power-2-X processes for example* (PM Múte B. Egede, 01.11.2021 at COP26 in Glasgow).

The "greener Greenland" headline comes with a dual message, as Greenland is literally growing greener as a result of climate change and the melting Ice cap—but at this event, "green" was seen as positive and speaking directly to the global green transition agenda. The ambiguity of greening is well known in environmental discourses, where this form of "green speak" is closely connected to globalization, which speaks to the idea of a global green consciousness (Harré et al. 1999) as touched upon in Egedes reference to "green transition in Greenland and beyond" (see citation). That said, Greenlandic PM Egede has confirmed that "we have a lot to gain by this transition," in the next sentence mentioning how "we" (the GoG) are open to investors. Meanwhile, being open for business is nothing new in Greenland (Bjørst 2018, Nuttall 2018)—but framing it as part of a green solution *is* new.

At COP26, the new Greenlandic position was presented at a side event (Nordic Pavilion in Glasgow) hosted by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The session moderator kicked off the session with a short video: "We will start with a postcard from Greenland illustrating the climate changes, we experience," and the short video was played on a widescreen. In the well-known climate crisis-communication style, the first scene was of a melting iceberg (Bjørst, 2011; Bravo, 2008). The camera pans slowly up a big iceberg on a sunny day, and the melting is quite visible. The speaker says in Greenlandic (subtitles in English): "the entire world is looking to the Nordic Region for solutions to counter climate change. And it is needed." The talk continues about how climate change affects us all and is impacting everyday life in Greenland, as illustrated by pictures of people in downtown Nuuk. The speaker then says: "It's happening right outside our doorstep," and proceeds to explain how Greenland is warming faster than anywhere else in the world and how it rained (instead of snowed) at the research station on the Greenland ice cap last summer. The discourse in the movie then shifts, and the music becomes more dynamic: "The transition towards

carbon-neutral societies requires innovation, investments, and commitments," illustrated by a picture of solar panels from a sunny day in South Greenland. The next clip is from a hydro-power plant, and the speaker says: "Greenland has worked together with our Nordic neighbors for decades on renewable energy solutions. E.g, Norwegian expertise and technology have been used to develop our major hydropower plants." It is then explained how Nukissiorfiit, a Greenlandic energy company, is in running dialogue with other Nordic countries to develop the operation further. The next clip is about the importance of E-fuels to Greenland, its importance for zero-emission shipping, and how it could help Greenland become a CO_2-neutral society, illustrated by a containership sailing on a calm sea. The video proceeds to report on Greenland's domestic use of hydropower, but also that in just a few years, "Greenland still has huge untapped hydropower resources" and that "Greenland can produce electricity to some of the lowest prices globally." According to the video, one way to make use of the surplus electricity is via new industries and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) installations. This statement is illustrated with what looks like an old tunnel from a mine (possibly a gold mine in southern Greenland), which could be used for CCS. The short movie ends with drone aerial footage and upbeat background music. The "postcard from Greenland" video was followed by a minister for the environment and land reform Mairi McAllan from Scotland, who was possibly invited to speak because Scotland was the host of COP26. "Greenland and Scotland have more in common than you think. The most northern part of Scotland is at the same latitude as Cap Farvel, and it is closer to the Arctic Circle than it is to London." She then proceeded to describe the common experiences with settlers and trade routes from the Middle Ages until today, how researchers from Scotland and Greenland have worked together, and she said: "One of our shared challenges is of course climate change. It endangers the future of the Arctic and the entire planet…" "Greenland is central to a sustainable future for our planet and anything living on it. I'm delighted that Greenland shares our ambitions—together, we can achieve our goals and deliver a truly sustainable future." After comparing Greenland with Scotland, and settling the categories for comparison: culture, geography, history, settlers (colonialism), climate change, and research excellence, she went directly to arguing for a "we", including both countries and, in effect, a common goal for the future. In other words, Greenland, and Scotland share much in common, climate change is just part of it. She then gave the floor to Greenlandic PM Egede. First, he echoed the climate crisis narrative familiar from the COP meetings and the scientific assessments about the melting ice cap, accelerating temperatures, and a saying, "What happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic," referring to how pollution is a global phenomenon and that the melting ice cap affects rising sea levels around the world, among other things. He then looked up from his speech, saying: "We want to do our part and be known for our renewable resources and live up to the name Greenland," telling the audience about the new GoG's plans and steps: first, join the Paris Agreement; second, stop all oil and gas exploration licenses; third, a 10-year biodiversity strategy (Greenland's Biodiversity strategy 2030); fourth, plans for new hydropower plants; and fifth, he promised that Greenland would be an exporter of renewable energy (hydropower) in one or two decades. He elaborated, saying: "Theses large hydropower resources can be utilized in cooperation with national and international investors who need large amounts of cheap and renewable energy, for example for data centers or to Power to -X conversion. He finalized his speech by supporting what he characterized as "Zero carbon shipping" and that the GoG planned a conference in Greenland in 2022 about it. His final remarks were: "Greenland will do its part and we hope the rest of the world will do the same. Thank you and Qujanaq."

The argument presented Greenland as both a place of climate change and a country that would push the green transition forward via new technologies and energy solutions. In saying, "we hope the rest of the world will do the same," he underlined how Greenland was now also compatible with other countries in terms of green solutions—possibly setting a better example than most other countries at the COP. The discursive shift in his speech, from Greenland as an object and victim of climate change to Greenland as an empowered subject capable of promoting "a sustainable, green transition in Greenland," was significant.

PM Egede did not follow up on the comparison with Scotland or what could be fitting categories for that exercise. Nevertheless, this could have highlighted some of the critical links between green transition and future independence. For Greenland, the politics of comparison have led to a handful of categories, such as Indigenous peoples, a developing country, Nordic neighbors, a bit like the Faroes Island, and a climate-friendly, green country.

4.3 Greenland—the world's biggest energy island?

More recently, hydropower investment has found its way into political speeches and statements. In the spring of 2021, Naaja Nathanielsen, Greenlandic Minister for Housing, Infrastructure, Justice, Minerals and Gender Equality, worked to find investors interested in Greenland's hydropower projects. The ambition is to become a hydropower exporter in the future, and they are working towards this goal in cooperation with Nukissiorfiit, the national energy company. Nukissiorfiit CEO Kasper Mondrup mentioned the Greenland icecap as "the world's biggest battery" in an interview for a business piece for Danish daily newspaper *Berlingske*; it can produce energy for the next 800 years if it continues to melt at the current rate. In other words, the hydropower potential increases when the ice melts, the water flow increasing by 50% in the last 17 years due to the increased melting. According to Mondrup, "The world's hydropower potential is about to be fully exploited. But Greenland is one of the places in the world where there is a lot of unused hydropower" (Østergaard 2022: 7).

A few days into COP26, Kalistat Lund, Greenlandic Minister for Energy and the Environment, gave a side-event presentation expanding on PM Egede's argument and strategies. Entitled "The world's biggest energy island," he advanced the new government position that "We're heading for a Green Greenland." He highlighted the small population, small energy mix, domestic use of renewable energy, and attractiveness as a provider of clean, cheap energy. In comparison, he showed a graph illustrating the "global weighted average levelized cost of electricity from utility-scale renewable power generator." In general, the category for comparison seemed well argued but almost hypothetical, as this development was conditioned on investors building more hydropower plants and a supply and demand distantly removed from the world's industrial centers. "Attractiveness" was the headline on the slide, which lined up the benefits of hydropower in Greenland; the "competitive cost structure" was especially highlighted.[14] In spring 2022, the ambition was again introduced at the World Hydrogen 2022 Summit in Rotterdam (Holland), where Energy Minister Lund was invited to give a keynote. The conference had 3,000 participants, and his speech was just a few days after a hydropower project in West Greenland was put out to tender (Vestergaard & Wille, 2022). Anders Christian Nordstrøm, director of *P2X* at Ørsted, a Danish multinational power company, was later interviewed for a Greenlandic newspaper, where he mentioned that his company was very interested in the project and ready to become involved in it:

> We think it is very exciting that Greenland is now showing up and will utilize the country's water resources for the benefit of the whole world. Greenland has already come a long way with green energy because the country has invested in hydropower for electricity consumption in cities. It is very sympathetic that Greenland not only thinks about its own supply, but now also reports ready to help the rest of the world (Anders Christian Nordstrøm in Redaktion 2022).

Greenland is hoping for hydropower development similar to Iceland. As Nukissiorfiit CEO explains:

> We look towards Iceland, which is 20–30 years ahead of us when it comes to industrialization. They have solved the task of becoming 100% self-sufficient with green energy. They have attached five aluminum smelters and several small data centers (Nukissiorfiit CEO Kasper Mondrup in Redaction 2022, translated from Danish by author).

When drawing comparisons with Iceland, industrialization is described as a necessary and positive development mentioning all the things that Iceland has and how Greenland wants to become 100 percent self-sufficient with green energy; attractive to mega industrial projects requiring a lot of energy. Imagining such a community into being, with a hyper-industrialized Greenland, takes a lot of upscaling, which in this example does not consider the spillover to other parts of society and the many ways Greenland and Iceland are incomparable (e.g. infrastructure, population, climate, governance). "Facts" presented as part of the comparison with Iceland gain relevance as they are presented together with the ambition to increase productivity (Stengers, 2020: 17). But greening Greenland might not come without new environmental challenges. The comparison to Iceland works as a rhetorical exercise and operates politically while paving the way for a specific interpretation of green transition with hydropower and the melting of Greenland ice cap as facilitator.

4.4 REE and green transitions

Greenland's mineral deposits and mineralization profile show great diversity and quantities (GEUS 2013). Several dozen minerals could make the green technology of future energy systems possible (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2021). Ten years ago, the GoG started looking for opportunities to export Greenlandic uranium and REE; in effect, they lifted the uranium ban (Bjørst, 2016; Hansen & Johnstone, 2019). In 2014, then Greenlandic PM Aleqa Hammond stated in a *Wall Street Journal* interview, "it is our duty and obligation" to pursue the same conditions as nations considered leaders when it comes to security precautions. "We will be following the highest international standards [and are aiming at] Canada and Australia" (Bomsdorf, 2014). Despite Hammond's time as Premier of Greenland was short the comparison with Canada and Australia were repeated both by Greenlandic MPs and COEs from mining companies at the mining conference PDAC (the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada) in Canada from 2016-2019 (see Bjørst, 2020; 2021).

Even though Greenland has been leaning towards mining standards such as those found in Canada and Australia, the framework and comparison did little to calm local resistance. The comparison with Australian and Canadian standards comes off as self-evident (e.g. quote by PM Hammond),

but tends to overlook the categories for comparison in the critical links between postcolonialism, mining, and Indigenous people's rights. Currently, the two counties are in a process of reconciliation and often criticized for their lack of leadership and action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). More recent research documents show how the postcolonial experience in Greenland has a political effect and impact on the Greenlandic relationship with extractive industries introduced in the country (Bjørst, 2019; Bjørst, Thisted, & Sejersen, 2022).

Whereas mining in Greenland has been articulated as the path to Greenlandic independence for the last 10 years (Bjørst, 2016), the new argument from the mining industry centers around the added value to the world's green transition. In spring 2021, close to the general election in Greenland, Greenland Energy (which is in fact an Australian mining company) posted small banners on the local newspaper's website. The banners referred to a video produced by the company to inform the public about the Kvanefjeld mining project, describing how it would "make the world greener." The clip featured cows running in fields in what could only be southern Greenland (Figure 1). Indirectly, the mining company was drawing a link between the global green transition (achieved via more renewable energy technology) and a positive impact in Greenland—speaking to the logic that green solutions are good for the whole world—also Greenland. In November 2022, the company underlined this tendency even further by changing their name to "Energy Transition Mineral" (Rytoft, 2022). This echoes a tendency in green transition communication, where arguing for something "green" becomes an abstraction charged with different meanings that might not align. The discourse overlooks, for example, the significant climate impact in the production of the REEs and how the REE recycling rate is very limited (Kalvig, 2021). Additionally, REEs in the Kvanefjeld project also include the mining of uranium and thorium, and hence a production of mining waste and tailings that can contaminate the local environment.

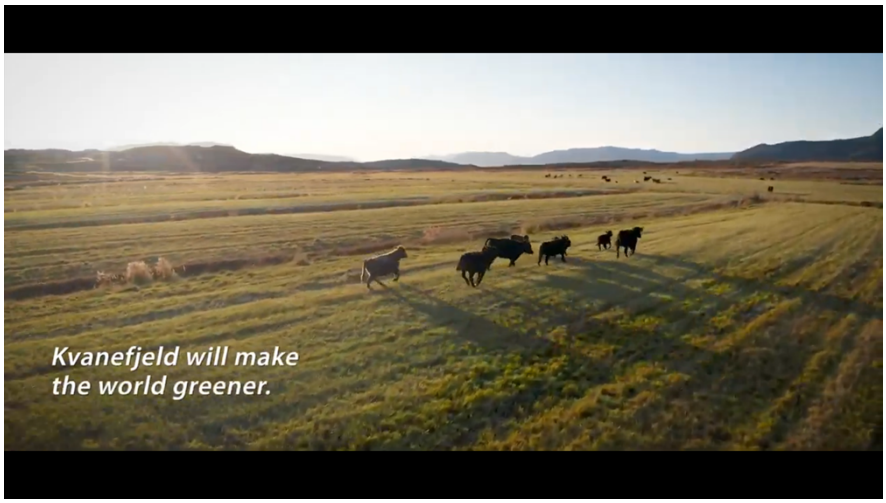

Figure 1. (Snapshot from a video produced by Greenland Minerals A/S to inform the public about the Kvanefjeld mining project, describing how it would "make the world greener.") (Greenland Minerals A/S, 2021)

TANBREEZ is another potential REE project built around mining activities in Killavaat Alannguat (Kringlerne) in southern Greenland. On February 18, 2021, TANBREEZ was granted an exploitation license, and the banner at the top of the company website is "Mining for Greener

Technologies" (Figure 2, http://tanbreez.com/). The TANBREEZ website assures the reader that "here are only background values of thorium and uranium in the eudialyte (similar to background values in ordinary country rock), meaning the final REE contains no radioactive elements" (http://tanbreez.com/).

Figure 2. (Frontpage of the mining company TANBREEZ's website: http://tanbreez.com/)

Despite the very positive press releases from mining companies in Greenland, the prospects for a mining project that could create jobs and prosperity for Greenland remain to be seen. Greenland has yet to become a location for mining or a green energy exporter. According to a report from Statistics Greenland (2020), 95 persons are employed in the extractive sector in Greenland (65 self-identify as Greenlanders) (Statistics Greenland, 2020: 21). The revenue was only DKK 99,172, and the value added has been negative since 2015 (Statistics Greenland, 2020: 23).

The potential for Greenland REE exports was not mentioned by the MPs at COP26, where renewable energy was the focus of the Greenlandic presentations. However, the two projects represent the tendency to simply sell a resource extraction project as a path to progress and lately as the road to green transition – without really defining what it is. Additionally, many of the prospective mining projects in Greenland are situated remotely and will rely on diesel generators and other industrial installations that could double Greenlandic CO_2 emissions in just a few years. Comparisons with Australia and Canada overlook how Australia has been criticized for not honoring what they pledge in the Paris Agreement (Woodroofe, 2021), and Canada, which left the Kyoto Protocol after failing to meet its targets and just recently started to follow the targets mentioned in the Paris Agreement (2015).

5. Conclusion

The green transition discourse may open new possibilities for political action for Greenland. Thus, the Greenlandic version of green transition includes a form of industrialization in which Greenland exports hydropower and REEs to support the technology for the green transition globally and can offer carbon capture and storage to help new industries reduce emissions. A "Greener Greenland" represents the imagined fullness of society that is (presently) absent and imagined as a Plan B or alternative to an economy that relies so extensively on the export of fish and seafood. It speaks to a future in which Greenland is less financially dependent on Denmark, less dependent of fossil fuels, can attract new industries and has trade agreements all over the world. What can be read out

of the Greenlandic politics of comparison when it comes to the green transition agenda is that Greenland sees itself as a state-in-formation and looks to other nation-states for inspiration. As the analysis shows, the politics of comparison lead Greenland to compare itself to, Iceland, Norway, Scotland, Australia and Canada, however, this also comes with old and new categories as being: Indigenous, a developing country, a Nordic country, a green country, not a "burden" to Denmark, Denmark "not a burden" to Greenland (e.g. Paris Agreement), a bit like Scotland, a bit like Iceland, a bit like Norway, and a bit like Australia and Canada. The relationship to Demark is delicate, and Greenland prefers to avoid comparing itself with Denmark. To say it more directly, the identity politics project to "be like Denmark" is not part of the green transition discourse. When Denmark is mentioned, it is often as one of the Nordic countries, which in this context is considered more desirable than mentioning the Kingdom of Denmark. The hydropower potential and minerals required by green technologies make Greenland stand out as different to Denmark; in effect, Greenland can present visions for a green future without referring to the Kingdom of Denmark and former postcolonial relationships. But Denmark does play a part in the green transition investments in Greenland. In March 2021, Greenland and Denmark announced a new funding agreement for DKK 3.1 billion (ca. $480 million) to build two major hydroelectric power plants in Greenland (Statsministeriet, 2022) and attract more investors to other green projects. Like this, green transition requires extensive investments and close cooperation with the Nordic countries and the EU (and the US and China). According to a recent report from the U.S. Agency for International Development (2021: 4): "Political and social risks weigh heavily on investment decisions, a fact that illustrates the importance of good governance and stability for developing countries to take advantage of the potential green minerals boom". GoG would like to use the category Indigenous when they find it appropriate and tend to categorize the country as a developing country in terms of CO2 reduction but without using the term "developing country". As such, Greenland cannot be directly categorized as a developing country, but could meet the same challenges with securing the political "stability" the investors ask for when mining REE (and uranium). Greenland is not on the map as a mining country, but the potential might be there, because over the past 10 years, the total consumption of REE's has grown by about 50% and with the current use of REE for new technologies the world may face a supply challenge by 2030 (Kalvig, 2021: 23).

Greenland's politics of comparison and work toward becoming green has a political effect, and it can open up future political identity discourses about what Greenland would like to be. The green transition discourse offers a variety of ways Greenland could be "greener" and meet targets and ideas like other nations. Compared with Iceland, Greenland stands out as very desirable. But the produced categories which are made to fit with Iceland and Greenland tend to overlook that some 80 percent of Greenland's current energy consumption remains carbon-based (Toft, 2021; Departement for Erhverv, 2018), and the limitations related to being a small population with an even smaller workforce spread out over much greater distance to take part in a potential hyper-industrialization. Additionally, this study shows that Greenland uses the green transition agenda to be recognized as comparable and attractive and part of the global green transition agenda. Thus, as the empty signifier it is, the green transition offers a "promise," but one that cannot be articulated directly and therefore is not necessarily binding or committing (e.g. offers the mining companies a stage to perform as green). Like in other countries, the green transition agenda enables "empty gestures" on the part of politicians and other key decision-makers. The politics of comparison

works in a rather selective manner, and inconvenient elements can easily be overlooked—like post-colonialism, demographics, the geographical size of a country, national economies, environmental standards, and so on. As an example, postcolonialism as a new category for comparison could have told a different story about the resistance to REE and uranium mining in Greenland, the "feeling of again being bystanders to development," the environmental concerns and the radically shifting political positions in the debate about uranium and REE (Bjørst, 2017). In sum, all these categories cannot work simultaneously; the application, rejection, and forgetting of categories for comparison obviously closes off some futures and renders others self-evident. Teasing out the green transition project might reveal that it does not lead to independence per se - but rather to a more delicate distribution of dependence with other countries, investors, and industry partners. Analysis of the politics of comparison sheds light on the choices made, future priorities, and what could be the long-term political impact. The "green transition" concept being such an empty signifier makes it a productive avenue for imagining and performing a Greenlandic nation into being.

Notes

1. Bjørst' work was conducted in the frame of the research project Imagining POCO (Imagining Independence - Greenland's Postcolonial Politics of Comparison) funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark. Additionally, her work was supported by the research project FACE-IT (The Future of Arctic Coastal Ecosystems – Identifying Transitions in Fjord Systems and Adjacent Coastal Areas). FACE-IT has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 869154. In July 2022, the paper was presented at The Institute of Arctic Studies (IAS) at Dartmouth as part of a Fulbright Arctic Initiative III exchange.
2. As documented in the documentary "White Paper" by Paninnguaq Lind Jensen and David Heilmann Ottossen 2021.
3. "Fællesskab er en styrke, og fordi vi er en del af det globale samfund, vil vi fortsætte det politiske arbejde med et flertal bag os, for det er nødvendigt nu" (Koalitionsaftale 2022:1).
4. "Der skal ske en analyse om Parisaftalens konsekvenser for samfundet, og denne præsenteres tidligst til Inatsisartuts efterårssamling i 2022 for afgørelse." (Koalitionsaftale 2022: 2)
5. Spring 2022, a national climate strategi was suggested by several Greenlandic stakeholders participating in the planned hearing about the implementation of the Paris Agreement. A national climate strategy and an economic analysis (konsekvensanalyse) of the impact of the Paris Agreement on local businesses was expected before starting the discussion of possible NDC for Greenland (Veirum 2022).
6. Today, the pan-Arctic perspective and comparation is carried out in international forums, such as the Arctic Council and its scientific working groups (Exner-Pirot 2013). Arctic studies have lengthy traditions regarding comparisons aimed at teasing out the Indigenous resistance in the Arctic inspired by the heterogeneity of dominant and subaltern traditions in anthropology (Fox, Gingrich & Strathern 2002:5).

7. During the last 300 years, Denmark has numerous times used Greenland for comparison. In 2009, when Denmark hosted COP15 in Copenhagen, Greenland was used as a climate symbol and a place to experience climate change firsthand. In contrast to this victim position and climate crisis narrative reserved for Greenland, Denmark was presented at the time as being excellently adapted to climate change with ambitions for the climate and technical solutions (Bjørst 2010; 2011).
8. Both Greenland and the Faroe Islands are in different climatic zones than Denmark.
9. As a start, all 193 parties to the Paris Agreement have issued at least a first NDC, and 151 parties have communicated a new or updated NDC (as of 2 November 2021) (UN 2021).
10. "En tiltrædelse af Paris-aftalen forventes at medføre øget interesse og adgang til diverse klimarelaterede fonde og midler fra internationale fora, der støtter den grønne klimavenlige omstilling." (Høringsnotatet, in Dep- for Udenrigsanliggende 2022: 3)
11. In accordance with Act no. 473 of 12 June 2009 on the Greenland Self-Government, climate policy is under the Greenland Self-Government competence.
12. Greenland was part of the Kyoto Protocol and committed to an 8% reduction of CO_2.
13. In the introduction, Múte B. Egede is called "Prime Minister" but in the "post card for Greenland" movie he is referred to as the "Premier of Greenland."
14. He also mentioned the use of seaweed for bioethanol production and how, in the next 10 years, "will we develop this P2X to develop in Greenland" he said.

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