

Political Participation in Greenland in the 19th Century, State Hegemony, and Emancipation

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Abstract

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, parts of the West Greenlandic population have been able to influence the colonial administration through local, regional, and national councils. Based on the preliminary findings of my current research project, this paper explores and discusses the *modus operandi* of the councils from the points of view of theories of discourse and hegemony and transactional anthropological theory.

Introduction

It may come as a surprise to many that the Native inhabitants of Greenland have had local, regional (district) and national councils in Greenland for almost a century-and-a-half and, through them, have influenced matters of various kinds and scopes. Many Danes, too, are not aware that the Danish state introduced regional councils in each of their colonial (factory) districts in West Greenland at the beginning of the 1860s. Today, Greenland has Home Rule status as part of the so-called *Rigsfællesskab*, which consists of Denmark, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland. The Home Rule government has authority for domestic matters except mineral exploitation, and foreign policy and defense. In this article I will shed some light on parts of the history leading to the current situation. I will, especially, discuss and exemplify the local population's use of the councils in the early period, from 1862 to 1910. And, as I do not expect all readers to be familiar with Danish/Greenlandic history, I will begin with a short overview of some of its basics.

The monarchs of the Norwegian and Danish double monarchy had considered Greenland a part of their realm since Norse settlers had agreed to place themselves under the Norwegian crown in the Middle Ages. Greenland was not limited as it is today. It encompassed an area that more or less covered most of the North Atlantic to the north and west of Iceland. Following several attempts to resume contact during the 17th century, the crown renewed its colonisation of West Greenland in the first part of the 18th century. From 1721, and for the following fifty years or so, private trade companies with

Crown charters established a number of factories, called “colonies” (*kolonier* in Danish). Apparently the trade did not prove sufficiently profitable and on the request of the last remaining trade company, the state took over the trade and the general administration of the factories in 1775. This was the beginning of a state trade monopoly, which lasted until 1950 and considerably restricted access to Greenland.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Danish state had factories in all “Danish Greenland,” i.e., the west coast of Greenland from Nanortalik in the south to Upernavik in the North. Ammassalik in East Greenland was colonised in 1894 and Avanersuaq (Thule) in northernmost West Greenland was colonised in 1910 by a private company. East Greenland and Avanersuaq were not integrated into the general political and administrative systems of Greenland until the beginning of the 1960s.

From the late 18th century until 1950, West Greenland was divided into two provinces (“Inspectorates”) each headed by a Governor (“Inspector”) who reported directly to the administration in Copenhagen. In the 19th century the Northern Inspectorate was divided into seven factory districts and the Southern into six and later five. Each district was headed by a factor (“colony manager”) who oversaw a number of trade stations (“out places”), each headed by a trade assistant.

The Lutheran mission—also a crown responsibility—was represented in missionary districts so large that the missionaries could not possibly cover them on their own (often they were composed of several factory districts). The missionaries educated so-called “national” (Greenlandic) catechists who served as their deputies in these large districts. In the 1840s, the state established two catechists’ colleges, one in Ilulissat in North Greenland and one in Nuuk in South Greenland. In addition, there were a limited number of Moravian mission stations in Southwest Greenland from the 1730s until 1900.

In economics, the state pursued a so-called “equilibrium policy” from approximately 1825. That meant that, in principle, the state was to neither gain nor lose in the trade with the Greenlanders. A one-year surplus was to be stored for use later. The Danish state was probably set on the prospects of mineral exploitation and the geo-political significance of Greenland rather than on immediate profits from blubber and skins. This is not to say that royal trade was insignificant; it did finance the presence of the Danish state in Greenland. Also, in some periods of the 19th century it presented a surplus, which the Exchequer appropriated (Thorleifsen, 1999, p. 220).

From the late 18th century, the relationship between the Europeans and the Greenlanders was regulated by a Royal ordinance, the so-called “Instructions of 1782” (*Instruxen af 1782*). The ordinance mainly focussed on European (Danish as well as other) trade with the Greenlanders, as well as other kinds of intercourse that occurred. Its main aim seemed to be protection of the Da-

nish trade monopoly and general limitation of the relations between Europeans and Greenlanders. The ordinance, however, also emphasised the protection of the Greenlanders against “corruptive influence” from sailors and other Europeans. The Instructions primarily established rules for the Europeans in Greenland—mainly employed by the KGH (Royal Trade Company) and the mission—and for Greenlanders who were employed by the state. There were only a few regulations concerning Greenlanders in free enterprise, ones not employed by the state, who were the largest group by far, and considered to lie outside the authority of the state in most cases. However, intercourse between Greenlanders and Europeans—whalers, for instance—was governed in a restrictive manner by the Instructions. Severe crime and crime committed against Europeans were also covered. But, by and large, the ordinance left the Greenlanders to govern themselves. No formal written legal framework placed the Greenlanders under general Danish jurisdiction. No formal written law governing relations among Greenlanders existed.

The Councils

This situation changed around 1860, when the state introduced councils with Greenlandic participation in every factory district. Up to 1950, we can distinguish between three periods. 1862 to 1910 was the time of the first type of councils, the so-called *Forstanderskaber* (pl.; *Forstanderskab* in the singular). I shall elaborate on them below. 1911-25 was the period of the Community Councils (*Kommuneråd*) and the Provincial Councils (*Landsråd*). In 1925, District Councils (*Sysselråd*) were added and, thus, from 1925 to 1950, there were three levels: local, district (factory), and provincial. In 1950, modern municipalities were introduced on what was formerly the factory district level and the two *Landsråd* were combined into one, leaving councils on only two levels.

From 1911 to the 1950s there were approximately 60 small *Kommuneråd* in West Greenland, each comprising one or a few settlements. Unlike the *Forstanderskaber*, as we will see below, the *Kommuneråd* mostly had Greenlandic members although, according to the law, state authorities had the right to appoint (Danish) members as well. The *Kommuneråd* also elected their own chairmen from among their members and they elected the members for the *Landsråd* as well. There were two *Landsråd*, one for each province. In each district, the members of the *Kommuneråd* and the *Sysselråd* elected one member for the *Landsråd*. The Provincial Governor chaired the *Landsråd* of his province. The *Sysselråd*, one for each factory district, were composed of the chairmen of the *Kommuneråd*, the district’s member of the *Landsråd*, and all the State officials who were under Danish law. However, their number could not surpass the number of the Greenlandic members. The province governor appointed the chairman of the *Sysselråd* in his province.

The general tasks of the local and district (factory) councils were twofold. The initial idea was that they should take care of the social welfare system but already the rules for the *Forstanderskaber* of the 1860s allotted juridical tasks to them as well. Thus the *Kommuneråd* could issue bylaws, which the governor should confirm. The council members also had police and tribunal tasks and they judged in probate cases as well as in civil and criminal cases. However, their jurisdiction was limited to persons of “Greenlandic nationality” except Greenlanders employed by the KGH, the civil administration, or as vicars or head catechists. Such persons and Danes belonged under Danish law. For them there were “mixed tribunals” consisting of persons under Danish and Greenlandic laws. The governor judged in certain severe cases and had superintendence with the tribunals.

The *Landsråd* concerned itself with more general matters, among them policy making and planning at a higher level. According to law, the state had to consult the *Landsråd* in all matters concerning Greenland and the Greenlandic politicians insisted on that provision. When, for instance, the Danish government allowed fishermen from the Faeroe islands (also under the Danish realm) to fish in Greenlandic waters in the 1930s without the prior acceptance of the two Greenlandic *Landsråd*, the latter filed a very sharp protest (Kjær Sørensen, 1983, p. 79). The same was the case in the early 1920s when the state appointed a number of Greenlanders to take part in formulating a new law concerning the government of Greenland. The two *Landsråd* both pointed out that the Greenlanders—i.e., the *Landsråd* were the ones to appoint the Greenlandic participants, not the Danish government (Kjær Sørensen, 1983, p. 67). In the 1950s, the *Landsråd* took on a very active role in formulating a population relocation policy with the aim of making the population settle at those places that seemed best fit for development. Generally, the Greenlandic politicians in the *Landsråd* seemed self-confident and persistent in pursuing their goals and asserting their policies vis-à-vis the state. Thus, reading the minutes from the *Landsråd* of the 1950s does not confirm the popular picture of timid, subdued, and non-assertive Greenlandic politicians confronting an invincible state, which is often conveyed in the literature.

In 1950, the political and administrative system was thoroughly revised in connection with the so-called “New Deal Policy” (*Nyordningen*). Modern municipalities were introduced substituting the *Kommuneråd* and *Sysselråd* and the factory districts and the two provincial councils were merged. In 1978 the Danish parliament passed the law of Home Rule that was implemented in 1979 as a tentative culmination of Greenlandic self-rule and political self-determination. The Home Rule law explicitly ensures that mineral exploitation, defence and foreign policy are not considered Home Rule matters. But the Greenlandic Home Rule government, *Naalakkersuisut* in Greenlandic, is represented and has a say in many important forums where bi- or multilateral

matters relevant to Greenland are decided. Both in the field of mineral exploitation and foreign policy, Greenlandic politicians and bureaucracy are continually pushing the limits and thus gradually appropriating more and more responsibility and influence. An example of this dynamic is the letter by U.S. president George W. Bush concerning the National Missile Defense (NMD) plans and the American air base in Greenland, which was sent directly to Greenland's Home Rule "premier," Jonathan Motzfeldt, in January 2001. Certain Danish parliamentarians were enraged and Motzfeldt seemed delighted with the symbolic impact of the event, which clearly is in line with Greenlandic aspirations. In January 2001, the so-called Self Rule Commission (*Selvestyrekommission*), composed of Greenlanders only and appointed by the Home Rule parliament, was contemplating the future of the Danish/Greenlandic relationship (Thorleifsen, 2000).

The Forstanderskaber

In my current research project I am trying to uncover the way in which regional councils of 19th century Greenland, the *Forstanderskaber*, functioned. My aim is to focus primarily on the Greenlandic side, i.e., what use Greenlandic members made of the councils inside the given framework. I am taking my point of departure in discourse theory and methodology (van Dijk, 1997) as well as in theories of transaction, process, and generativity in the vein of, for instance, Leach (1954), Barth (1966, 1981, 1994), Borofsky (1993), and Hylland Eriksen (1993) (also Cheater, 1999). These theories highlight the *processes*, which create historically bound (cultural) structures, not the structures as things (or "stuff") in themselves outside time and place. Generally discourse theories concur with this approach as they define people as actors inside changing settings (e.g., van Dijk, 1997).

In my view much academic writing on Greenland and other (former) colonial regions and indigenous populations lean heavily on cultural explanations and on a culture concept that derives from nationalist ideology and philosophy as well as from cultural relativism (e.g., Høiriis, 1988; Hylland Eriksen, 1995). This presents an inherent danger of *a priori* placing the actors inside certain culturally defined frameworks, which leads us to presuppose or even prescribe particular patterns of cultural action and behaviour. Often actors appear as mere agents who propagate *a priori* defined cultures and are predisposed to act in certain ways because they "belong" to a "culture." This implies that actors may act more or less "culturally correctly." Certain kinds of action may be interpreted as being in disaccord with the actor's culture as preconceived by the author and his or her audience. Such culturally incorrect behaviour is often attributed to cultural hegemony exercised by a dominant culture (see, e.g., Goldschmidt, 1987, 1991). Such ideas, implying a one-to-one relationship between culture and individuals, indicate an implicit basic pri-

mordialist and essentialist culture conception (Sørensen, 1994). Culture's core present inside every person and a constituent of personal identity cannot change. Different cultures will remain different and, in essence, incompatible. Thus, change of culture will often be interpreted as a violation of the culture and of the persons belonging to it. The culture concept as a main analytical means will often result in *a priori* conclusions and thus hamper, rather than advance, analysis.

A way to avoid the pitfalls inherent in the culture concept can be to perceive the discursive elements as Foucaultian monoliths of text. If we see the historical sources—for instance, minutes from council meetings in 19th century Greenland—as text standing alone, we may be able to analyse it on its own terms without preconceptions about culture and certain culturally prescribed ways of acting. The settings—including the actors' knowledge, values, aims and aspirations as well as legal and linguistic circumstances—necessarily must be included in the analysis but we must be ready at any point to revise our (mis-)conceptions of the actual settings. If we use the term “culture” to designate (parts of) the settings vital for the analysis, we must be able to substantiate it, to tell what its constituent elements are and in which ways they influence the acts of the persons involved. Such cultural analysis must be firmly grounded in either the sources themselves, in other contemporary and spatially relevant sources, or in critical historical studies.

Formation of the Forstanderskaber

The idea and initiative for the formation of regional councils with Greenlandic participation came from Danish and German quarters in Greenland. In 1856, four Europeans in Nuuk, the administrative centre of the Southern Inspectorate, created a proposal with the alleged objective of instituting local councils to take care of the welfare system, which the factors and their assistants at the time administered.

In 1857, preliminary test councils were formed in the Southern Inspectorate. In 1862, the Ministry of the Interior issued an ordinance that made the councils permanent in all five districts of the Southern Inspectorate. The following year, it issued a similar ordinance for the seven districts of the Northern Inspectorate.

There seem to be manifold motives, ideas, and purposes behind the introduction of the councils. The European initiators in Nuuk undoubtedly were inspired by the parish councils in Denmark called *Kommuneforstanderskaber*, which were introduced in Denmark in 1841 (Christensen, 1990). It is also evident that ideas about democracy, civil society, and nationalism, so prominent in Europe in the 19th century, were important to them. According to 19th century Central and North European cultural nationalism, as for instance formulated by the German political philosopher J. G. von Herder, every *Volk*

(people, nation) had the indisputable right to govern itself (Williams, 1981; Fink, 1988; Østergaard, 1992; Hylland Eriksen, 1995), thus also the Greenlanders. Historical accounts of the period show that many Europeans in Greenland, not least the missionaries, were strongly influenced by the ideas of nationalism, which they applied to Greenland and the Greenlanders (see, e.g., Wilhjelm, 1997). In the formation of the councils, seen as a part of the larger social reform, there were ideas of the Greenlanders as a distinct *folk* (people) with a right to govern itself: not, maybe, as an absolutely sovereign nation state but as a distinct people within the realm of the Danish constitutional monarchy. Albeit not formulated explicitly anywhere in the argumentation, the principle of nationality was clearly an important part of the background of the initiators, the civil servants in Nuuk. Other important parts of the societal reforms were the creation of a nation-wide newspaper to which the Greenlanders themselves contributed, at the request of the editor, to the *Atuagagdliutit* a collection of national myths and legends (see, e.g., Rink, 1875), the creation of a national visual art, as for instance the hunter Aaron's famous woodcuts and watercolours (see, e.g., Knuth, 1960; Thisted, 1999), which were made on the request of the governor of South Greenland who was the prime mover in the process. Thus, both national literature and national art were created as part of the societal reform process, which also included the formation of the councils.

Creating a civil society and a sort of "middle class" of proficient and well-to-do seal hunters was another object of the reforms and the councils were seen as one of the ways to obtain it. In the eyes of civil servants, the Greenlandic population had, in too high a degree, made it a strategy to live by odd jobs and aid and too many had moved to factory towns in order to make living easier. The reform initiators wanted people to take care of themselves and they wanted marine mammal hunting to be their primary source of income and the mainstay of society. They envisioned the industrious seal hunter as the backbone of society in the economic as well as political sense, a middle-class citizen with political and economic values and objectives characteristic of middle-class citizens everywhere. This appears from the groundwork as well as from the rules and the actual minutes of the council meetings.

An additional motive, which only appears implicitly, is the wish to cut back the influence of the Royal Trade Company, the KGH. Before the institution of the regional councils, the KGH was in charge of all administration, with the exception of school and mission. The formation of the councils cut out substantial, and central, lumps of KGH administrative tasks. The KGH was mainly left with commercial authority, which, thus, decreased the influence that the KGH had exercised on all levels from the outlying local shopkeeper, the factor and governor to the KGH directorate in the central administration in Copenhagen. Originally the KGH had immense influence on every matter

in the colony. It was never openly stated that the KGH's wings would be clipped by the introduction of the councils, but it certainly was one of its consequences. It appears from discussions accompanying the introduction of the councils that quite a few officials in Greenland, as well as in Denmark, were opposed to the whole idea. They may have had a variety of reasons for that. For one thing, many officials, in their comments on the idea of Greenlandic councils, protested that Greenlanders were too uncivilised and "communistic" to be able to participate in administration and politics (for example, this is demonstrated in a letter from the Inspector of South Greenland to the Ministry of the Interior, March 8th 1856, National Danish Archives). But another reason was certainly that many saw the councils as limiting the authority of the KGH. There was a tendency for the Northern Inspectorate to be more reserved about the whole idea. This is, for instance, reflected in the fact that they had their own rules that were ready a year later than the Southern Inspectorate and that, during the 1860s, the councils in the North only assembled once a year, as opposed to the two yearly assemblies of the councils in the South.

However, influence of the central administration in Copenhagen, the Directorate of the KGH, was only slightly affected by the whole business, as most decisions were still heard there. In the 1870s, the main initiator—the governor of the Southern Province—had become director of the KGH in Copenhagen and, in that capacity, he introduced a permanent committee called "The Committee for Matters Concerning the Greenlanders" (*Kommitteén for Grønlandernes Anliggender*), composed of former officials in Greenland—primarily former missionaries appointed by KGH's Director (Oldendow, 1936, p. 62f; National Danish Archives, KGH Afl., 1920, p. 40b). The motive seemed to be to transfer some of the jurisdiction of the KGH Directorate, especially concerning policies and strategies, to the commission members who, from personal experience, knew much about Greenlandic matters. The commission did not seem to have the intended impact, but that is another story.

The motives of the Danish state in introducing regional councils can be characterised as being less idealistic and altruistic than is often assumed. Rather, following the nature of the state, they were about power and control. For one thing, the state probably saw the councils as means to obtain a more efficient administration of and control of the population through a network of Greenlandic council members. The state would benefit from more efficient administration of the welfare system, which was one of the councils' tasks. Furthermore, the state apparently wished to apply the councils to educate and regiment the local population and there is ample evidence that the State, through its representatives in Greenland, used the councils extensively for that purpose. A third objective can be deduced. Through the establishment of the councils, the State created a network of Greenlandic council members whom it could use for varying purposes. They could provide detailed infor-

mation about their localities, and the rules governing the councils certainly demanded them to do so. They were supposed to act as the state's mouth-piece in their localities and as the state's agents, propagating ideas, values and directing a flow of information to the state and from the state to the local population. Furthermore, the state authorities were probably interested in creating a middle-class segment of primary producers in society, which could act as civil society in harmony with contemporary ideas of the relationship between state and citizens.

As we can see from the above, there were two partly conflicting sets of ideals and intentions behind the formation of the first councils. The idea of the Greenlandic nation conflicted with the state's imperative of hegemony, as nationalism was inherently emancipatory and pointed to a future Greenlandic national self-rule. This evidently conflicts with the inherent interests of the state. Related and compatible principles were, for instance, the ones of civil society and the European ("protestant") work ethic, i.e., the idea that the Greenlanders had to be taught and trained to be efficient producers able to support themselves and create a surplus for the colonial system. If necessary, they had to be disciplined to do so. The ideas of civil society and civil rights, on the other hand, implied that the Greenlanders should be trained in democratic process and politics, which would contribute to their eventual emancipation. In the short run, the state would dominate with its ideas of state hegemony and suppress ideas that were contrary to its perceived interests. But, in the longer run, the ideas of nationality, democracy, and civil rights were bound to endure and achieve hegemonic status in the general discourse of Danish and Greenlandic society. Without these ideas, although European and North American in origin, even the thought of a separate Greenland can hardly be imagined. Also the training in democratic and parliamentary principles and procedures in the 19th century councils and their successors seems to be an important, or indispensable, prerequisite to the emerging Greenlandic nation state of today. Thus, by introducing the councils, the state itself planted the seeds of emancipation. In some periods they would be nourished, in others hampered. They would, however, eventually grow and undermine the very basis of state hegemony itself.

The Rules

Rules governing the councils were issued and revised several times. The first ones were applied to the provisional councils in the Southern Inspectorate in 1857. The next set came in 1862 and were applied to the permanent councils in the Southern Inspectorate. They were followed the next year by roughly identical rules applied in the Northern Inspectorate. Some nine years later, in 1872, a new set of rules was issued and, with minor alterations, they lasted until 1910. In the following paragraphs I will be referring to the 1872 rules,

the so-called “Provisional Rules Concerning the Greenlanders’ Treasury and the *Forstanderskaber* in Greenland” (Foreløbige Bestemmelser om Grønlandernes Kasse og Forstanderskaberne i Grønland (Lovtidende, 1872)).

The *Forstanderskaber* had two pillars or major jurisdictions. The first one was administration of aid, such as social security for the elderly, disabled, widows, orphans and the like, acute aid if hunting failed, aid for house building, and for hunting implements such as umiaqs (large skin boats) and qajaqs. Under this main heading the councils also administered the so-called apportionment for hunters who had not received acute aid during the winter.

The second pillar was the administration of justice and law enforcement. The councils had the jurisdiction to pass judgement in probate cases and cases of civil law and to pass sentence in cases of criminal law. Sanctions mentioned in the rules were mainly fines. Under aggravated circumstances, the councils could propose more severe punishment to the governor.

Minor criminal acts included unwarrantedly borrowing of another person’s hunting gear, taking possession of game wounded by another hunter without informing or sharing with him, taking game from traps or nets and taking possession of driftwood secured by another person above the high-water mark (§21). Such offences could be punished with a fine of two *Rigsdaler*, a considerable sum. For comparison, a widow’s social security for a year typically amounted to between five and ten *Rigsdaler* in the 1860s and 1870s and the payment for taking in an orphan was five *Rigsdaler* a year. Major offences included theft of food or private possessions and manifest disobedience towards the members of the *Forstanderskab* (the *Forstandere* (pl.)) (§22). Such offences could result in a fine of up to five *Rigsdaler*. In case of more serious criminal offences such as acts of violence, clandestine childbirth, and repeated or gross theft, the councils would submit a suggestion for punishment to the governor’s order (§23). More severe punishments included corporal punishment and public announcement by posting the offender’s name and offence in the district’s shops.

The council members did not only function as judges or jurors; they had police tasks as well: “Every member of the *Forstanderskab* is both entitled to and obliged to . . . take such instantaneous measures that are necessary for the maintenance of order and security” as it says in the rules (§24).

The first column, concerning social security and aid, was designated the main activity of the councils. The rules distinguish between two kinds of aid, first, social security benefits for the “deserving poor,” and second, regular “poor relief.” The first sort was intended for deserving widows, orphans, and hunters struck by loss or illness. If the economy allowed, the councils could grant rifles, house-building materials, or coal. Aid for men and orphaned boys aimed at enabling them to provide for themselves and their families (§11A). Poor relief, the second kind of aid, was for persons “who through their own

negligence do not have the necessary clothing and implements when winter begins" (Lovtidende, 1872, §11B).

In addition to the two types of social aid, the *Forstanderskaber* would administer so-called apportionment (*repartition* in Danish). It consisted of the sum left over when all other yearly expenses had been paid and it was meant for Greenlandic seal hunters who had not received poor relief and were not employed by the trade company (the KGH). Greenlandic members of the council allocated the apportionment to the hunters, whom they divided into three classes according to their proficiency as sealers and, thus, as producers for the KGH. The owners of an umiaq and/or a good team of dogs and sled received an additional reward and so did persons who had savings in the KGH savings bank. Greenlandic members who were hunters, the *paarsisut* (pl.; *paarsisoq* in the singular), belonged to the first class and thus received three *parts*, compared to the two and one received by hunters of Classes 2 and 3 respectively.

The activities of the councils were financed by a 20-percent tax levied on all trade goods that the KGH bought from the Greenlanders. Two-thirds of the amount went to the factory treasury, which the *Forstanderskab* administered and one-third to the provincial treasury (Common Treasury), which the Governor administered. The Factory Treasury reserved an amount of 16 *Skilling* (1/6 of a *Rigsdaler*) for each inhabitant of the factory district for the so-called Reserve Fund. The rest was for operational expenditure and for the council to distribute as aid and apportionment. The provincial treasury redistributed some of its balance to needy factory treasuries, and some it used for certain activities related to the common good of the province. The province of South Greenland, for instance, published a periodical called the *Atuagagdliutit* ("stuff to read"), which all inhabitants received once a year without charge through their *Forstanderskab*.

The members of the *Forstanderskaber* were of two kinds. One part were higher-ranking state officials (including Greenlanders) and Moravian missionaries (if a Moravian mission existed in the district). They were dubbed the *misissuisut* in Greenlandic. The other part consisted of skilled hunters (or disabled, formerly proficient hunters), the *paarsisut*. They were elected every three years by the (male) household heads in smaller districts consisting of one or a few localities.

To be eligible for the office of *paarsisoq* it was not sufficient to be a proficient seal hunter. One should also meet certain explicitly expressed moral standards. For example, if a *paarsisoq* received "poor relief" or was fined for a "dishonourable act," he could no longer be *paarsisoq* (§6). The *paarsisoq* was to "keep up orderliness, and guide and set his countrymen a good example" (Lovtidende, 1872). Furthermore, the *paarsisoq* was obliged to be the eyes and ears of state officials: "He shall supervise his district . . . and . . . inform the

Forstanderskab and the Governor about everything they require to know according to the orders of the last-mentioned" (Lovtidende, 1872). He also had an obligation to bring information from the state authorities and the council meetings to the population in his district. Following a council meeting he was supposed to relate to his fellows the decisions of both the authorities and the council and what had been discussed at the assembly.

The *paarsisoq* and, on another level, the *Forstanderskab* thus constituted the formal relation between the state and the population. Not only was the *paarsisoq* supposed to report what happened among the people in his district but he was also to bring information the other way. If a person wanted to complain about or discuss a case that belonged under the jurisdiction of the councils, he had to address the council through his district's *paarsisoq* (Lovtidende, 1872). This implied that one could not address the district factor or the governor or any other person of authority in matters under councils' jurisdiction. The case had to be brought through the *paarsisoq* of the district and it had to wait until he brought it to be heard at a meeting.

The *paarsisut* were to have their travel expenses covered and they received a remuneration for each main meeting and for each official journey they undertook. In addition, there was a banquet at the end of every general assembly. *Paarsisut* who were exceptionally burdened with the administration of poor relief and who did the job well could be granted a special reward of between five and fifty *Rigsdaler*. The council members were granted the right to wear a hat with a cover of blue cloth as a sign of their authority.

The district's missionary always acted as chairman of the council. If he had been in Greenland for less than one year or was absent (most were blessed with a huge mission district), the post would be taken by the factor, who also acted as the council's treasurer (§5).

The councils had two general sessions a year, one in spring and one in the fall (from 1863 to 1872 the northern councils only assembled once a year). The chairman could call extraordinary meetings if he found it necessary. For such meetings only members from the factory town and its immediate vicinity were to be summoned. The day before a general assembly, the *paarsisut* were to hold a preparatory meeting headed by the head catechist where they could discuss matters and prepare lists for the distribution of aid and apportionment (§7). At the general assemblies the debate was to be held in Greenlandic with explanations in Danish for the benefit of the members less proficient in Greenlandic. Likewise the minutes were to be written in Greenlandic and accompanied by translation into Danish. Dissidents could request their opinions to be included in the minutes (§8). Regarding matters outside their jurisdiction, the councils could direct recommendations at the governor (Lovtidende, 1872), who supervised the *Forstanderskaber*. He had the authority

to overrule its decisions but the *Forstanderskab* could appeal his decisions directly to the Danish Minister of the Interior.

The *Paarsisut*

Formation of the councils introduced a new kind of difference into society: One between (potential) council members and the rest of the population. Greenlandic society of that time was probably not generally egalitarian; social differences existed. Not everybody did equally well, some were well-to-do and some poor, some were held in high esteem and some were not. The *Forstanderskaber* did not change that, but they imbued the existing difference with a new quality as they linked differences with the relationship to the state, the Danes.

By virtue of the law, the *paarsisut* were imbued with power and privileges. They were chosen from among the most proficient seal hunters who enjoyed higher living standards than others. Beyond that, by being *paarsisut*, they held considerable power vis-à-vis their fellows in their capacity as police and judicial authority. They decided who to recommend for apportionment, poor relief, and social security, who to report for legal proceedings, who to recommend and who to belittle to the state authorities. They received pecuniary advantages that added to their already comparably high living standards, they sometimes were rewarded with hunting implements like expensive rifles. At meetings (that were hosted generously by the authorities) they had the right to certain amounts of alcohol like *snaps* and rum. This was particularly attractive as alcohol was not available for sale to Greenlanders. The authorities used alcohol as special payment and reward and alcohol was associated with privileges and a was very popular stimulant.

It is not clear whether a privileged class in proper did in fact emerge. In principle everybody had the possibility of obtaining the office of a *forstander*. The requests were not impossible to fulfil and nobody was excluded in advance (except women). So, in principle, no village, kin group or household was excluded from taking part in exercising power and enjoying privileges. Whether people in general actually did so or certain groups were de facto excluded is an interesting question indeed, which I cannot answer at present. To my knowledge, no studies have yet been undertaken to determine the composition of the councils over the years.

Daily Life in the Councils

According to the rules of 1872, the councils all over Danish Greenland assembled once in the spring and once in the fall and could have additional meetings called by the chairman as mentioned above. At the fall assembly, the pool for poor relief and social aid was decided and it was distributed during the winter. In the spring the councils distributed the apportionment from what

was left over on the budget after the distribution of aid during the winter. The councils allocated both aid and apportionment according to lists made by the *paarsisut* at the meeting headed by the head catechist, which was always held a day before the *Forstanderskab's* meeting proper. The *paarsisut* were the ones who decided who should be on the list receiving what. The Danish members were supposed to be mere supervisors, to ensure that nothing improper or unjust took place. At their preparatory meeting the Greenlandic *paarsisut* also had the opportunity to discuss matters they wanted to raise at the meeting proper, individually or as a group. This strengthened them considerably if they were to oppose the state representatives, most of whom were in daily contact and, thus, in a good position to coordinate their efforts at the meetings.

The distribution of aid and apportionment often sparked discussions or, rather, tirades concerning subjects like thrift and industry. Often the chairman criticised the *paarsisut* for being too generous in its distribution of poor relief and social aid. The allotment sessions often seemed to be a platform from which the chairman and other Danish members could promote their ideals of the good compatriot who did not burden society but rather contributed to the common good through the realisation of virtues like industriousness and modesty. The chairman would often request the *paarsisut* to restrain aid to allow for a larger apportionment. It is evident that most Danish members regarded the complex of aid and apportionment as a means of teaching and disciplining the population and of turning them into more proficient and industrious citizens. However, sometimes the Danes sided with the Greenlandic members when they demanded to expand the aid due to failure in hunting or the like. In 1872, in Ilulissat in North Greenland, for instance, the chairman was dissatisfied with the amount spent on aid. His argument was that the apportionment would not be large enough to make it attractive to the hunters of second and third class compared to what they could achieve as poor relief

[The chairman] could not in any way accept such an open-handedness with the pecuniary means of the *Forstanderskab*, which in his opinion to the greatest extent possible ought to be saved for the hunters who managed without receiving aid and thus work for the formation of an independent, honest and tolerably well-to-do hunting rank. . . . The chairman believed that many sharks had been caught and 100 seals and that it could not be necessary to support people and suggested that the want could be self-inflicted. (Extraordinary Meeting of the Ilulissat *Forstanderskab*, February 10th 1873)

The rest of the council members opposed him, the district physician pointing to the risk of widespread hunger-related diseases and suggested including 65 *Rigsdaler* from the previous year's reserves in the aid and apportionment pool. The chairman's attitude and his reference to the social reformatory role

of the councils and the distribution of aid and apportionment were very typical of the state officials in the councils. Less typical was the alliance between *paarsisut* and *misissuisut* in favour of extending the volume of aid for the needy.

Also at the 1864 assembly in the same district the chairman, the factor, made it very clear that the Greenlanders should not take the aid for granted. The chairman expressed his fear that the Greenlanders would come to believe that all

widows, orphans, and others who due to old age or weakness . . . should be entitled to be paupers or to be provided for by the authorities . . . Their families would draw on them, everybody would have a pauper to support . . . What in other societies leads to good [social] order would here lead to a much more pronounced disorder. There is no shame associated to poor relief as elsewhere. (Meeting of the Ilulissat Forstanderskab, July 1st 1864)

According to the chairman, need was not a result of acute failure of the hunting but of the population's recklessness (Meeting of the Ilulissat Forstanderskab, July 1st 1864).

It is clear that the councils were to serve as means of creating an industrious middle-class of seal hunters. In Ilulissat *Forstanderskab* of the 1860s, a council dominated by the chairman (the factor), one of the tools for that end was what the minutes refer to as "encouragements" (*opmuntringer*). Hunter and hunters' wives could be worthy of encouragement in money provided they met certain well-specified criteria familiar with the principles of industriousness and the like. The largest amounts went to hunters who provided themselves with heavy and expensive hunting gear such as skin tents, umiaqs, and skins for umiaqs. In 1868 tents and umiaqs each earned the owner 20 *Rigsdaler*, and skins for an umiaq 10 *Rigsdaler*. It seemed to be the opinion of the (Danish) members that too few of the hunters possessed tents and umiaqs. According to the minutes of the Ilulissat *Forstanderskab*, quite a few received skin tents between 1868 and 1869 and were consequently rewarded but, in spite of the reward, only a few apparently procured umiaqs, a fact that prompted the council to raise the reward to 30 *Rigsdaler*. There were rewards for providing qajaqs or parts of them, for the households who had cached the most provisions for the winter, for hunters who had provided their sons or other boys with qajaqs and trained them, for youth who had shown a special inclination for hunting, for the best pupils of the qajaq school, and a youth prize for diligence (also for state employees).

In addition to hunting-related rewards, there were rewards for providers who had at least three persons to care for and who had neither borrowed nor received assistance for a year, there was a reward for diligent housewives ("married or unmarried Greenlanders who distinguishes herself by domesticity and orderliness and by attending to their house fellows . . . and . . . by dex-

terity in all genuinely Greenlandic womanly activities . . ." (Meeting of the Ilulissat *Forstanderskab*, March 30th 1868). Additionally, the *Forstanderskab* rewarded persons who, in the eyes of the members, had distinguished themselves. In 1869, one of the *paarsisut* received no less than three rewards (Meeting of the Ilulissat *Forstanderskab*, March 30th 1868 and April 21st 1869).

Although a little extreme, the Ilulissat policy was not atypical. In the 1860s, the different councils had different practices. The one of Ilulissat was contrary to the rules, in that the chairman had arrogated considerable power contrary to the rules. But the other councils had a similar didactic policy. The Danes in the councils were typically the ones initiating and supporting this policy whilst the Greenlanders were more reluctant. This was particularly pronounced when it came to cutting expenses for aid. Although the Greenlandic members had an economic incentive to cut aid because cutting the aid made the apportionment larger, they also had to consider their home bases and their kin. It is doubtful whether they saw it their interest to educate their fellow Greenlanders along the lines of the state officials. The Upernavik 1875 spring assembly exemplifies the conflict between the state and Greenlandic members. During the winter, the *paarsisut*, in the chairman's opinion, had used aid too early and in disaccord with the rules as they had not distributed it in kind but in cash. The chairman scolded them for misconduct in their office and indirectly threatened them with sanctions should a similar mismanagement occur again (Meeting of the Upernavik *Forstanderskab*, April 8th 1875).

Administration of justice was the other leg of the councils' work. It was the expressed idea that the *paarsisut* should be in charge of this side just as it was in the social aid side. However, as with issues of social aid, state officials had a considerable influence. Rink, who, as the governor of North Greenland, initiated the councils and submitted the matter of administration of justice to the district councils in the 1870s, as director of the KGH. The objective was allegedly to integrate the traditional legal usage of the Greenlanders in the councils' administration of justice (Danish National Archives, KGH Direktorat, Diverse Korrespondance, p. 62).

Already a legal usage was spontaneously developing in the councils and it seemed to be based on the *paarsisut*'s perceptions of law and order as well as on Danish usage. Judging from the councils minutes, the *paarsisut* seemed to be initiators in many cases of criminal law, which is not surprising, as they were obliged by the rules to report everything of interest to the council including criminal acts and violations of rules. There are cases of *paarsisut* being reprimanded for not reporting on theft and other offences like breaking quarantine or violating a prohibition of intercourse with certain settlements, mining communities, or foreign whalers. According to the rules, such neglect could lead to expulsion from the council. I have not encountered such cases

of expulsion, although there are cases of *paarsisut* withholding information about or even taking part in such minor offences themselves.

The Greenlandic members of the councils were not necessarily protective of their fellow Greenlanders. There are quite a few cases where one or more of the *paarsisut* demanded severe sentences like public corporal punishment, and sometimes they were so hard on their fellows that the governor or the Ministry of the Interior in Copenhagen told them to hold back because they went too far in their demands of severe punishment. However, other examples show the *paarsisut* as shielding. Mostly the *paarsisut* seemed inclined to prosecute theft and amoral behaviour like adultery and other unauthorised sexual relationships and there are examples that they were also hard on religious offences. For instance, in a specific case from the Upernavik district, a *paarsisoq* demands severe corporal punishment for a girl who has committed blasphemy (Meeting of the Upernavik *Forstanderskab*, April 8th 1875). Regarding offences like violation of quarantine or prohibition against intercourse with the cryolite mine in Ivittuut in South Greenland, the *paarsisut* seldom demanded any prosecution at all, probably because they regarded them as trifles and the prohibitions as obstacles to the kinds of activities they themselves took part in. It also lies close at hand to assume that the *paarsisuts'* relationship to the offenders may have influenced their attitude, causing them, in some cases, to turn a blind eye while, in other cases, demanding severe punishment.

Most cases in the material I reviewed deal with theft, a few with violence or religious and moral offences, and a few were probate cases and cases of civil law. Sanctions vary from admonitions to public corporal punishment. The roster includes fees of varying value, payment of indemnity, exclusion from entertainment at Christmas and at the King's birthday, prohibition against selling and buying or even entering KGH's shops or buildings, expulsion from a settlement, and deprivation of the right to receive apportionment and aid. As examples of more severe sanctions that required the governor's or even the ministry's participation, we find such acts as publication of name, offence and sentence in the district's KGH stores, and most corporal punishment. In more severe cases, corporal punishment would be executed "under the flag," i.e., in public, in a central place: in the factory town under one of the most prominent signs of authority.

A few cases will illustrate the different types of sanctions. First, one of theft: On April the fifth, the maidservant Philippine was sentenced by the *Forstanderskab* in Qaqortoq, South Greenland, to be excluded for two years from participating in the public entertainment for Christmas and the King's birthday. Her friend, the maidservant Klara, was sentenced to a similar exclusion for one-and-a-half years. Their offence was that they had stolen figs and sugar, which they had eaten on the spot, from Philippine's employer, a Da-

nish shipmaster. Philippine was considered the leader as she had opened a chest with a "strange key."

From Qaqortoq, there is a case of immorality and social disorder. The *paarsisoq* at Qaqortoq complained at the spring meeting in April 1872 that there was an immoral relationship between a man, "S," and the girl Pua in the settlement of Igaliku (today near the former American airbase Narsarsuaq in South Greenland, quite a distance from Qaqortoq). According to the *paarsisoq* the relationship entailed violent scenes, which made the *paarsisoq* fear that a serious accident might occur. The *Forstanderskab* ruled that the girl should be relocated from Igaliku and taken to her father at the small settlement of Ukivisoq. On June 17th, the council had an extraordinary meeting, the only item on the agenda being the case of "S" and Pua. Two *paarsisut* had visited "S" in an attempt to bring Pua back to her father but because "S" had been very "insolent and threatening" they had left without the girl Pua. The council decided that "S" should be fined two *Rigsdaler*, that he should pay the expenses for the two *paarsisut* including their transportation by *umiaq*, and that he was responsible for bringing Pua back to her father at his own cost by July the 15th at the latest. They members apparently did not relent in spite of a letter from "S" in which he excused his behaviour by referring to the work pressure caused by haymaking and capelin catch at the time the *paarsisut* visited Igaliku. On September 25th 1873, the *Forstanderskab* resumed the case as the couple had apparently come together again in spite of the *Forstanderskab's* decision:

It was decided to inform 'S' . . . that if he had not brought the girl Pua to her home three days after his reception of this resolution of the *Forstanderskab* he and all other residents of Igaliku would be excluded from trade at all trade stations until the *Forstanderskab's* demand has been fulfilled. Furthermore 'S' . . . is fined a fee of 5 *Rigsdaler* for his defiance of the *Forstanderskab*. (Meeting of the Qaqortoq *Forstanderskab*, September 25th 1873)

This is the last mention of the "indecent relationship" between the two. Probably the *Forstanderskab* had its way and split the couple, thus ending this case of immorality in Igaliku.

In this particular case, the Greenlandic *paarsisut* seem as keen as the *missuisut* to end the affair and sanction the male (and main?) offender. A *paarsisoq* reported the relationship in the first place, and several *paarsisut* took part in executing the decisions of the *Forstanderskab*. This can be attributed to their duty to report from their districts and take part in the work of the council in general. However, it would be easy for the Qaqortoq *paarsisoq* to ignore what happened in Igaliku, which was in another district, so his reporting on the relationship probably indicates a genuine wish to bring the relationship to an end. It is not unlikely that the *paarsisoq* has been urged by other Greenlanders nearer to the scene to do something. These are suppositions, however,

as the material does not really tell anything about the motives or thoughts of the persons involved. What can be told from it is that the Greenlanders took an active part in the process and seemed quite eager for it.

There is a somewhat similar case from Upernavik in 1875 where the *Forstanderskab* accused a girl at the trade station settlement of Tasiusaq of blasphemy. Seemingly, the chairman is the one who has initially pointed to the girl and referred the matter to the council but the Greenlandic *paarsisut* seem very keen on sentencing the girl to a severe corporal punishment:

On the occasion of an alarming case of a young girl at Tasiusaq who had committed gross blasphemy, the chairman informed that he at the preparatory meeting had given an account of the case as well as his own and the factor's recommendation to the governor and the members present expressed the view that she had to be punished and at Frederik Christiansen's [a *paarsisoq*, SF] suggestion with a beating, the character of which was recommended to the governor's decision as laid down in § 24 of the "Preliminary Provisions" [the rules of 1872, SF]. (Meeting of the Upernavik *Forstanderskab*, April 8th 1875)

Of 49 cases of law I have recorded, one or more *paarsisut* initiated eleven of them, the chairman two, and other *misissuisut* six. For the rest, the initiator is not indicated. These numbers could suggest that it was a general trend that the Greenlandic hunters in the councils, the *paarsisut*, were not unwilling to report unlawful acts to the councils for prosecution.

There are also suggestions in the material that theft and immorality were the types of offence they were most willing to report. As hinted above, the type of offence they seemed the most unwilling to report was breach of quarantine and violation of prohibitions against visiting certain places like the cryolite mine in Ivittuut. In short, it seems from the material that the *paarsisut* defended certain values like private property and values connected to the Christian religion and opposed infringements on these values such as blasphemy, immorality, theft, and violence. On the other hand, the *paarsisut* did not seem to be very keen on reporting offences of types that they themselves could commit as hunters such as barter expeditions to closed-off settlements, whaling ships, or mining communities where they could obtain useful or prestigious trade goods (maybe at better prices) and they could find entertainment.

The councils provided those Greenlandic hunters who could become members with a higher position in their society, both on local and regional levels. We could say hunter-members and would-be members took on the role of a middle-class bourgeoisie (or middle class) and, in the councils, used their positions to protect their interests as such. They did so in tactical as well as in more strategic ways. They acted tactically in the sense that they opposed individual actions that seemed to violate them or their peers as middle-class citizens. They acted strategically in the sense that they used their position

to form the general make-up of society so that it conformed to their interests as they themselves perceived them. In this process, they often sided with Danish colonial officials and against their fellow Greenlanders. In other words, ethnicity and shared culture seemed to matter less than class as parameters for group affiliation and political action.

The introduction of these councils in the mid 19th century contributed to the formation of Greenlandic society as we know it today. Not only did the councils introduce political concepts and institutions that were and are essential in Europe, like nation, democracy, and civil society, they also provided an essential part of the base for the formation of a new middle class. They contributed to the ideological framework of such a class as well as the formation of political and legal institutions on which it could consolidate.

About the Author

Søren Forchhammer is an "eskimologist" who has worked intensively with a variety of subjects concerning Greenland. As a student he lived for long periods in settlements in North West Greenland studying hunting and fishing and the impacts of the Home Rule development policy for settlements and outlying regions. As an archivist at Greenland's National Museum and Archives in the Greenland capital of Nuuk, he wrote a Ph.D. dissertation about the Greenlandic population localisation policy from the 1950s to the 1990s. His current research project deals with the impact of the regional councils in 19th century West Greenland and the Greenlanders' appropriation of the councils and their inherent political and administrative models.

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