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Jens Boel and Søren T. Thuesen

Greenland and the World: The Impact of World War II on Danish-Greenlandic Relations

Introduction
The Second World War constitutes one of the major turning points in modern Greenlandic history. It put Greenland on the map of the world and brought the world into the consciousness of Greenlanders. An already emerging Greenlandic nationalism was intensified during the war years, with Greenland’s separation from Denmark and the presence of American military personnel and goods. The Danish colonial power was now contrasted in the minds of Greenlanders with the more superior American power. The war produced a new situation in Greenland, from which there was no way to return to the colonial rule of the pre-war period.

World War II brought changes to the entire Kingdom of Denmark. All three North Atlantic countries within the Kingdom, Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, were separated from Denmark when Germany invaded Denmark in April 1940. All three countries were subjected to ‘friendly invasions’ by Allied forces in the early years of the war, and in all cases, the situation led to the intensification of national sentiments and movements. Iceland declared its independence during the war, in 1944. However, this had been anticipated before the war. The Faeroe Islands achieved Home Rule shortly after the war, in 1948. In Greenland, even though major changes occurred, neither independence nor Home Rule was put on the agenda.

Nevertheless, in agreement with the elected Greenlandic representatives, Greenland was subject to a major reform of rule after the war, but this reform meant a complete incorporation of the country into the Kingdom of Denmark. Greenland’s status as a colony was abolished in 1953, and the country was then treated as an ‘equal’ part of Denmark. Along with this, an intensive programme of so-called modernization was launched. This programme aimed to create living standards similar to those existing in Denmark proper. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the modernization process, but we should note that in terms of material progress, the goals were largely achieved, although at a high price from a cultural and social perspective.

Since 1979, Greenland has had Home Rule which has gradually given the Greenlandic
population control over its own affairs. Decisions on cultural, social, health, environmental and economic issues are taken by the elected representatives of the Greenlandic people. Matters of foreign policy and military issues remain in the hands of the Danish authorities. Concerning foreign policy, however, Greenland has a certain room for manoeuvre; hence, in 1985, Greenland decided to leave the European Community, despite Denmark’s continued membership. And in 1992 Greenland appointed its own permanent representative to the European Community headquarters in Brussels. Furthermore, Greenland participates on its own in international organizations, such as the Inuit Circumpolar Conference.

Looking back, it is evident that many major changes relating to Danish-Greenlandic relations had taken place in Greenland prior to World War II. However, it will be argued in this article that the Second World War constituted a turning point in the process leading to Home Rule. This is not because Greenland was Americanized to any larger extent - neither then, nor later. The effect of the American presence was indirect. Greenland’s separation from Denmark and the close relations established with the U.S.A. and Canada during the war, including the American military presence in Greenland, put Danish colonial rule in a new perspective. The American ‘friendly invasion’ served to promote an already emerging Greenlandic national consciousness. This article will show how and why this happened and discuss the impact of this development in a broader perspective.³

Danish Paternalism: The Long Goodbye

Danish Colonial Rule in Greenland

Denmark-Norway began its colonization of Greenland in 1721, when the missionary Hans Egede arrived at ‘Hábet Ó’ (the Island of Hope). After a difficult beginning, mission stations and trading posts were gradually established along the west coast. Trading and missionary activities, while administratively separate, were still connected in so far as the trade was supposed to finance the mission in Greenland.⁴

From 1774 to 1950, all trading activity in Greenland was controlled by a state company, the Royal Greenland Trading Company. The principles for the administration of Greenland were laid down in the Instruction of 1782. Two governors (‘inspektør’, and from 1925-50 called ‘landsfoged’) were appointed as supreme authorities in Greenland - subordinated to the Board of the Royal Greenland Trading Company in Copenhagen. Greenland was divided into two administrative parts, with one governor presiding over each part: South Greenland with Nuuk/Godthåb⁵ as the center, and North Greenland, with Qeqertarsuaq/Godhavn as administrative capital. Seal hunting and whaling were
the predominant industries in the 18th and 19th centuries. In each ‘colony’ or larger settlement, a colony manager was appointed by the Royal Greenland Trading Company. The colonial traders were particularly interested in oil that could be extracted from blubber. During the 18th and 19th centuries, this oil served as an important means of fuel in Europe.

From an international perspective, both the trade and missionary activity in Greenland were state monopolies, almost entirely controlled by the Danish State (Danish-Norwegian until 1814). As for the mission, the sole exception to the monopoly of the Protestant Lutheran State Church was the permission to establish missionary stations in South Greenland given to the German, pietistic Moravians in 1733 (upheld until 1900). The Danish State thus exercised almost absolute power in Greenland.

Over a long period, influence from the outside world such as the Danish trade and mission and Dutch whalers profoundly altered the patterns of Greenlandic society. The customary ways of organizing social life gradually vanished. The Danish colonial administrator, scientist and reformer H. J. Rink observed in the mid-19th century that the essential ‘institutions’ of cohesion in the Eskimo society, such as the angakok (shaman) institution had been abolished by the colonial power, who had put nothing in its stead. Doing away with the angakok ‘was the same as abolishing the only institution that could be considered to represent appointed magistrates or lawgivers’.

However, Rink may be exaggerating the importance of the angakok, as their actual power at the time of the arrival of the colonizers was in dispute. At the same time, however, Rink stressed that the trading with blubber and fur disturbed the social balance in the Eskimo society, inciting the hunters to trade commodities which would otherwise have been distributed to less fortunate households and individuals in the community settlements.

In order to re-establish some kind of internal order and to educate the Greenlanders along the lines of Danish colonial ideology, such as sense of responsibility, hard work, industry and economy, Rink, from the 1850s, proposed and promoted the establishment of municipal councils with the participation of both Greenlanders and Danes. This measure is traditionally looked upon as the beginning of democratization, which it actually was to some extent even though these councils consisted mainly of the most prominent Greenlanders and had very limited powers.

The Danish colonial rule was increasingly legitimized by the idea that Denmark had a civilizing mission in Greenland. This had already been reflected in the debates in the 19th century and became evident in the 20th. The Danish Government now understood its chief role in Greenland as that of the teacher civilizing the people. It was a Danish version of ‘The White Man’s Burden’. During the debate in 1908 on the first law voted by the
Danish Parliament (Folketing) regulating the Greenland administration, the spokesman for the proposal stressed that the law sought to

lead to greater independence for the people up there, greater sense of responsibility and thereby a development enabling it, in the course of time, to step into an open and natural relation to the whole world, whereas it still is, to a certain extent, placed in a kind of guardianship by the state.\(^7\)

As we shall see, one of the key issues in the Greenlandic context was the issue of when the Greenlanders were ready to step into this ‘natural relation’ based on ‘greater independence’ and who should take that decision.

**Paternalism**

*During the last two centuries Denmark, which counts as one of the smaller nations in today’s world, has successfully lighted the torch of human progress, and kept it burning brightly, in distant Greenland, that once-be-nighted island near the top of our globe.*\(^8\)

A modern, sceptical reader will find it hard to believe that Danish colonialism in Greenland was totally benevolent. Perhaps it is more illuminating to inquire as to the impact of Danish rule in Greenland. In what ways did Greenlandic society and the Greenlanders change? To answer this question, one may begin by asking about the main principles on which Danish colonial rule was based.

One of the key organizing concepts of Danish rule is ‘paternalism’, a concept that includes both a protective aspect (the father taking care of his children) and a dominating, patronizing aspect (the father must be in charge because the children are too ignorant, vulnerable and inexperienced to cope with the outside world all by themselves). Fundamentally, paternalism reflects an unequal power relation. However, Danish paternalism in Greenland included an obligation for the ‘father’ (the colonial power) to educate the ‘children’ (the Greenlanders) in order to make them capable of one day facing the modern world on their own. Thus, the concept had a dynamic dimension to it. One might then say that the long-term intention of Danish colonial rule was to render itself superfluous.

From the beginning of Danish colonialism in Greenland in the early 18th century, paternalism dominated the Danish approach to the Greenlandic population. Hans Egede intended to ‘save the souls’ of the presumably heathen indigenous population, but he also wanted to protect them against being destroyed by Western ‘civilization’. His successors followed the same path. The Royal Greenland Trading Company was not entirely
profit-oriented. Early on, it became a premise of the Danish colonial policy that trade on Greenland should not necessarily yield a profit.

From the outset the Royal Greenland Trading Company was established as a kind of ‘protective monopoly’. No private individuals should be able to exploit the native population, and the company was expected to show long-term consideration for the Greenlanders. The Royal Greenland Trading Company had been entrusted with the monopoly over practically all trade between Greenland and the outside world. At the same time, it was in charge of setting prices in Greenland. The company should fix the prices in accordance with the presumed importance of the goods to the population rather than with prices and costs outside Greenland; this was in order to ensure that Greenlanders could obtain commodities judged necessary by the company at low prices.

The possibility of free trade had been considered several times during the period of Danish colonial rule. As early as 1788, the monopoly was discussed in a commission on Greenland affairs. Later on, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the discussions about a possible liberalization continued. On each occasion, proposals to that end were rejected and the state monopoly was maintained, primarily on the grounds that liberalization of prices would prove disastrous for the Greenlanders.

The Danish colonial policy in Greenland also had the declared desire to protect the Greenlanders against any harmful influence from the outside world. In fact, this meant that aside from the people employed by the administration, trade and mission (later church and school), Greenland was not to be open for contact with outsiders (Danes and foreigners alike) without explicit permission from the Greenland Administration in Copenhagen. In the case of the cryolite mine in Ivvittuut, the authorities prohibited the employment of Greenlanders and even tried to avoid any contact between the Danish workers and local Greenlanders, without much success, though.

The desire to protect the Greenlanders, as mentioned above, was closely linked to the intention to educate and develop them. This intention may be considered an essential part of Danish colonial policy in Greenland. Hence, Diamond Jenness observes:

*In no other region of the Arctic have Europeans deliberately trained Eskimos to lead their people up civilization’s steep path [...] Only in Greenland have the educational authorities [...] deliberately trained Eskimos and their Eskimo-speaking descendants to lead their people; and only there has an Eskimo population been successfully integrated into today’s world.*

To put it somewhat less ideologically: From the 19th century onwards, the legitimacy of Danish rule in Greenland was closely associated with its ability to implement an edu-
cational process that would enable the Greenlanders to cope with 'modern' (Western) civilization. Denmark was referred to as a 'mother' with regard to Greenland, evoking the image of a woman protecting her small children against the many dangers lurking in the dark. The Greenlanders had to wait for the time when they would be declared 'adult'. As we shall see later, many Greenlanders judged 1945 to be that very moment.

Greenland and the War

Early on the morning of the 9th of April 1940, German troops crossed the Danish border; within a few hours, the Nazi occupation of Denmark was a fact. The Danish Government protested against the attack but chose to continue functioning. This news reached the governors in Greenland on the very same day, and they had to act quickly. Establishing telegraphic contact, they immediately decided to take over responsibility for the management of the Greenlandic affairs. As legal basis for this decision, they referred to a clause in the Administration Law of 1925 that cited the governors as the supreme authority in Greenland in case the Danish Government should be prevented from carrying out this role.

The predominant questions for the governors were 'How would Greenland’s western neighbors—the U.S.A. and Canada—react towards Greenland? Would it be possible to safeguard Danish sovereignty over the island and to avoid a military occupation? At the very same moment, these were also major concerns of the Danish ambassador in Washington, Henrik Kauffmann. Immediately on receiving the message that Denmark had been occupied, Kauffmann decided to declare himself representative of a free and sovereign Denmark, insisting on his independence vis-à-vis the German-controlled Danish Government. Kauffmann hereby gained the confidence of the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Government maintained its recognition of him.\(^{10}\)

The U.S.A. and Canada were concerned about Greenland for two main reasons. First, Greenland was strategically important as an airbase. The rapidly growing importance of airplanes had been demonstrated by the flights during the past decade from America to Europe via Greenland and across the Atlantic by Charles Lindbergh and others. Furthermore, almost a hundred years earlier, U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward had cited Greenland as one of the three most dangerous staging areas for a possible attack against the United States. According to the Monroe Doctrine from 1823, the U.S.A. would not accept the presence of a hostile European power on the American continent or close to it. In connection with the treaty concerning the sale of the Danish West Indies to the U.S., the American Administration, in 1916, recognized Danish sovereignty over the whole of Greenland. However, the U.S. emphasized in 1920 that it would not accept a transfer of sovereignty over Greenland to any third power. Any risk of German presence on Greenland, especially in times of war, would not be tolerated. Among the strategic
concerns, it should also be emphasized that weather stations were considered of high military value by both sides during the war.

The second source of American concern over Greenland lay in the above-mentioned cryolite mining in Ivittuut, particularly for the belligerent Canada. Cryolite was used as flux in the production of aluminum and was consequently of great importance for the airplane industry. Already before the war, cryolite was by far Greenland’s principal export, and this expanded during the war. The Canadian Government and the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan) in particular were certainly not willing to run the risk of allowing Nazi Germany to take over or destroy the cryolite mine. The key role attached to safeguarding the mine is obvious from the events immediately following the Nazi occupation of Denmark on April 9th, 1940.

Kauffmann did not hesitate to try and convince the U.S. State Department that the Greenlandic administration would act quite independently of the Greenland administration in Denmark. To this end, he also telegraphed the governors on April 13th and 16th, informing them about his position and making it clear that the governors had to break off contacts with Denmark; on the 18th of April, the governors agreed to this in general terms. On May 3rd, the two Provincial Councils of Greenland, in a joint meeting, showed their support for this position by addressing a declaration to the U.S. Government in which they confirmed their loyalty to Denmark and at the same time thanked the U.S.A. for its sympathy and understanding regarding Greenland’s vulnerable position. They expressed the wish that this interest would be maintained until the day when Denmark would regain its freedom. This statement is of particular importance, since the Provincial Councils were composed of elected Greenlandic representatives. Their declaration clearly enhanced the legitimacy of the governors in the eyes of the State Department and possibly in the eyes of the American public as well.

With regard to the positions of the U.S. State Department and the Canadian Foreign Office, Kauffmann’s arguments carried the day. In the days following the Nazi invasion of Denmark, Canada had secretly and in great haste organized an invasion force which should primarily occupy the strategically important cryolite mine in Ivittuut. These plans were halted after the U.S. Government dissuaded the Canadians from undertaking such a military occupation. The firm position of Minister Kauffmann and the governors was undoubtedly of crucial importance in avoiding military measures to be taken against Greenland. Another important American concern with regard to a possible military intervention in Greenland was the desire not to provoke Japan to take similar steps towards the Dutch East Indies.11

Following the recognition of the independently acting Administration in Greenland—i.e., the governors in cooperation with the Provincial Councils—the U.S.A. and Canada
decided to send consuls to Nuuk/Godthåb, which now became the administrative and political center of Greenland. The Americans, having given guarantees to Canada in return for Canada aborting its military intervention, had effectively taken on the role of military protector for Greenland. Not surprisingly, therefore, their first step was to send a U.S. Coast Guard cutter to Ivittuut, on May 10th, in order to secure the defense of the cryolite mine. On board the ship were the American consul, James K. Penfield, and vice-consul George L. West. At the end of May, they continued on to Nuuk/Godthåb, where they were soon joined by the Canadian consul, Kenneth P. Kirkwood, and vice-consul Erling Porsild (the son of a Danish scientist well-known in Greenland). These were historic events: never before had diplomatic representatives of foreign powers been present in Greenland.

Even more important, however, was the build-up of supply lines from the U.S.A. and Canada to Greenland. Greenland had been totally dependent on goods of all kinds being shipped from Denmark. The Greenland Administration in Denmark had foreseen difficulties in its communications with Greenland, and in 1939 and early 1940 had provided Greenland with abundant supplies. Still, these could not last for long. The governors and Minister Kauffmann were preoccupied with the supply issue from April 9th, 1940. Kauffmann organized the so-called American Greenland Commission in New York, a business board charged with organizing the purchase and sale of goods to and from Greenland. Several of the members came from the Danish-American diaspora in the U.S.A.

In July 1940, a Greenland Delegation with the task of making arrangements for trade arrived in the United States. The governors came, one at a time, to the U.S.A. in order to help organise these transactions. One of them, Aksel Svane, remained from 1941 and for the duration of the war. From November 1st, 1941, onwards, the Greenland Delegation was considered a Department of the Danish General Consulate in New York. This change was proposed by Kauffmann, as was an official statement from the State Department (dated October 25, 1941) noting that the U.S. Administration hereafter recognized the Danish emissary as the supreme responsible authority for Greenlandic affairs. This development marked the conclusion (even though it was never quite accepted by governor Brun) of the rivalry between Kauffmann and the governors that had existed from the very beginning of events following the Nazi invasion in April 1940. While the State Department, in the early phase, seemed to recognize the role of the governors in Greenland as a kind of provisional government, during 1941 it gradually began to place more confidence in the Danish minister in Washington. Governor Svane certainly did not enhance his position by publicly emphasizing his neutral position on the war. In August 1941, he declared: ‘The silent Dane is the good Dane during these years of war, whether he happens to be at home or abroad’. In contrast, the declarations of Kauffmann were clearly pro-Allied.
The governors, of course, were not happy about the fact that they had been more or less sidetracked by Kauffmann, but there was nothing they could do to alter the U.S. attitude. In their official relations with the State Department, they would have to go through Kauffmann, even though they could always choose to communicate with the American consul in Nuuk/Godthåb.

One explanation for the strengthening of Kauffmann’s position in the U.S.A. was the Greenland Defense Agreement of April 9, 1941. In spite of their declared neutrality, the United States had grown to be more and more involved in the war effort. The Lend-Lease Treaty with England was signed on March 11, 1941 and in order to obtain airfields and bases in Greenland, the State Department presented Kauffmann with a proposal for a Greenland Defense Agreement, and Kauffmann accepted. The governors in Greenland were informed and also accepted the defence treaty after a very brief delay; in fact, they did not have much choice. The treaty confirmed the Americans’ confidence in Kauffmann. He was then discharged by the Danish Government for his acceptance of the Agreement, but the State Department continued to acknowledge him as the legitimate representative of Denmark to the United States.

The Agreement of April 9, 1941 gave the United States the right to establish the bases it considered necessary for the defense of Greenland. It emphasized that the U.S. Government recognized Denmark’s absolute sovereignty over Greenland, but acknowledged that Denmark, for the time being, was not in a position to exercise its authority. By this Agreement, which was confirmed by the free Danish Government after the liberation in May 1945, a crucial step was taken in Greenland’s relations with the outside world. As a consequence of the Agreement, Greenland was effectively supporting the Allied war effort. It was a confirmation of the close relations now existing between Greenland and the U.S.A. That governor Eske Brun’s reaction to Pearl Harbor was: “Then we are at war!”

Already in 1941, governor Brun had organized the North East Greenland Sledge Patrol, a Danish-Greenlandic military unit that patrolled the coast of East Greenland in order to prevent the Germans from gaining a foothold there. The Germans were particularly interested in setting up weather and radio stations. By 1942, the German need for weather reports from Greenland had become more urgent because the Soviet Union was now in the war, and the British had begun convoys to the Russian arctic ports. The Germans needed reliable weather observations for their submarine warfare and long-range reconnaissance.

The Sledge Patrol was sometimes referred to as ‘the Greenland Army’. At its maximum strength, this ‘army’ mustered two officers, one sergeant and six corporals (one of them a Norwegian, the others were Danes) together with six non-combatant Inuit sledge drivers.
This was the total force. The Patrol was charged with monitoring the entire north-east coast, about a hundred thousand square miles.

In early spring 1943, a member of the Sledge Patrol discovered a German meteorological base at Sabine Island. This provoked the most serious incident of combat that has ever taken place on land in Greenland. In the events that followed, one member of the Sledge Patrol, Eli Knudsen, was killed by a German machine-gunner. Even more dramatic is the story of what happened after two other Sledge Patrol members had been taken prisoner by the Germans. One of them escaped with his sledge, the other, Marius Jensen, succeeded in taking the German commander who guarded him as prisoner. Jensen then began what David Howarth has described as ‘the most curious journey recorded in the arctic’.17 For fifteen days, Marius Jensen escorted the German commander 290 miles, while taking care to avoid hostile forces in what was German territory. Jensen succeeded in this extraordinary journey, reaching the rest of the Sledge Patrol in Ittoqqortoormit/ Scoresbysund.

As a result of the observations of the Sledge Patrol, which were radio-transmitted to governor Eske Brun in Nuuk/Godthåb, the German base at Sabine Island was bombed by American planes on May 29th. In July, the Germans abandoned their base and were picked up by a German seaplane that took them back to Germany.18

In his telegraphic instructions to Captain Poulsen, commander of the Sledge Patrol, governor Brun had stressed the importance of the task carried out by the patrol: ‘Energy and judgment of great importance to our future position in East Greenland.’19 There is no doubt that the political impact of the Sledge Patrol was more important than its limited military significance. The Patrol was a means of showing the willingness and ability of the Greenland Administration in Nuuk/Godthåb to participate directly in the defense of Greenland in general and to establish Danish sovereignty over North East Greenland in particular.

Following the Defense Agreement, the Americans constructed two large airfields (Blieu West I at Narsarsuaq in South Greenland and Blieu West VIII at Kangerlussuaq/Sundre Stromfjord in West Greenland), two minor ones, a large supply base for warships and about a dozen small military installations, including weather stations, lights and radio beacons. Most of these installations were built far removed from peopled settlements. The Americans also built housing, hospitals, movie theaters, roads, sports grounds, radio stations and other facilities at the military bases. The constructions were implemented rapidly, and—as governor Brun later remarked, in a rather impressed way—left an impression that nothing was impossible; all obstacles were regarded as problems to be solved.20

How did this never before seen rapid construction activity and presence of military personnel in their thousands affect the Greenlanders? As to the direct influence, the answer is
'Very little'. According to Governor Brun, the sole head of the Greenland Administration after Governor Svane had departed for New York, 'the Greenlanders practically did not see the Americans at all'. Nevertheless, this statement is—to say the least—strongly exaggerated. In fact, there was a great deal of contact between the bases and the local Greenlandic communities. Especially in East Greenland, incidents occurred that caused concern among both Danish and American authorities. Greenlanders were told that they were not to approach the bases. But a group of Greenlanders left their village to settle at the base in Ilkateq. The Greenlanders moved in under some hangars, lighting their fires between machinery and lived off what they found in the military waste dumps. Attempting to live up to the agreement with the local Danish authorities in Greenland, U.S. Army officials tried to expel the Greenlanders, threatening them by setting up an armed guard in front of them. The tense situation was only eased by the arrival of a Greenlandic-speaking Danish official, who persuaded the Greenlanders to withdraw.

In another incident, the American radar station at Kap Dan was plundered for radio gear worth millions of dollars. In a subsequent search at a nearby village, wiring of many colours was found transformed into a beautiful belt by a creative young Greenlandic woman.

Even though the U.S. troops stationed in Greenland were largely isolated, their bases and other military stations were no secret to the very mobile Greenlandic population. Almost everywhere in Greenland, their presence aroused an enormous curiosity.

The restrictions imposed on the military personnel reflected one of the prime concerns of the Danish colonial policy mentioned above: the intention to protect the Greenlanders against any pernicious influence from the outside world. This desire was clearly manifested in a letter from the Danish governor, Eske Brun, to the American consul in Nunn/Godthåb, dated January 10, 1945. The occasion that brought about this letter was a request from an American military commander to allow some of his personnel to visit a Greenlandic village (Igaliku) for recreational purposes. Brun unequivocally refused the request, using the opportunity to explain in writing to the American consul some of the main principles of the Danish policy towards Greenland. He stressed that the Danish Government had always wanted to 'limit contact between the natives of Greenland and all others' in order to avoid harmful influence from the outside world.

It was also for this reason that Governor Brun had requested that the Americans not employ Greenlanders, a measure to which the Americans agreed. In addition, any other kind of direct contact was to be avoided. In order to enforce this prohibition, Danish supervisors were appointed at five locations (Ilqatq in East Greenland and Qassiarssuk, Narsaq, Narsaq Kujalleq/Frederiksdal and Arsuk in South Greenland). In spite of this official policy, contacts related to sexual relations, sales of handicrafts or encounters
out of pure curiosity did occur. Some incidents provoked the Greenland Administration to step up the policy of restricting the movements of the American personnel outside the bases. According to a confidential dispatch from Max Dunbar, Canadian consul in Nuuk/Godthåb, to the Canadian Ministry of External Affairs, the situation in Qaortoq/Julianehåb in South Greenland was perhaps an exception to the generally favourable impression of the American military personnel held by Danes and Greenlanders. Dunbar wrote that ‘social trouble arose in the course of 1943 [...] resulting in the stopping of all visits by Army and Navy men to Greenland colonies and settlements except for official purposes’. Dunbar added: ‘It is worth noting that Julianehaab, lying close to the largest of the bases, Bluie West 1, had more contact with the Army and Navy than any other colony’. However, with South Greenland as a possible exception, there is no evidence that these contacts were of any major extent on the west coast, where the overwhelming part of the Greenlandic population lived.

The Americans in Greenland were therefore living largely in a world of their own. They constructed a lifestyle almost totally separate from the society, in which they were placed, living exclusively on food imported from back home and in their spare time watching American movies, playing baseball, etc.

What did the American presence actually mean to Greenland? The answer is not simple and remains unanswered with these observations. What took place in Greenland during the war may be described as glimpses of another lifestyle. The glimpses appeared in the shape of new and different material goods—brightly shining kerosene lamps instead of the traditional train oil lamps, multi-colored cotton material and, last but not least, the colourful mail-order catalogues with all kinds of goods in them. A wit has once remarked that the catalogue from the giant American mail order firm Sears and Roebuck has had a greater influence in Greenland than the collected writings of Karl Marx.

In addition to these physical manifestations of ‘the American way of life’, there were also more subtle influences. With the Americans came a glimpse of a new dynamic entrepreneurial spirit, a demonstration of man’s ability to bring about change. This was what impressed governor Brun when he witnessed the construction of the American bases. The Danes in Greenland were especially enamoured by what they witnessed, which contributed in making them join the Greenlandic leaders in 1945 in their demand for reforms. Significant social, economic and cultural changes took place in Greenland during the first decades of the 20th century. In some ways, time had been ripe for political and administrative reform before World War II, but the inherent conservatism of the Greenland Administration led it to oppose any kind of radical change. Likewise, the pressure for reforms from Danes and Greenlanders in Greenland was not very energetic or influential at the time. During the war signs of a new, more dynamic concept of changing social organization emerged and brought about a shift in the order of the
day in Greenland. The American presence—in terms of supplies and personnel—and the special conditions resulting from Greenland’s diplomatic separation from Denmark worked as a catalyst, triggering a reform process.

In 1942, a Greenlandic catechist, Abel Kristiansen, in a radio talk, declared about the sentiments of the Greenlanders after the separation from Denmark: ‘At the moment, we resemble young birds who have gotten lost from their mother, anxiously flying around calling for her’. In 1945, a Greenlandic woman, M. Kleist, in an article in *Grønlandsposten,* also ardently talked about Denmark as a mother to its Greenlandic children. However, she hastened to add: ‘The child is growing up and has begun to talk about being considered an adult’. Something had changed in Greenland. The days of paternalism were coming to an end.

**Greenlandic Nationalism**

**The question of Greenlandicness**

The Second World War and the separation from Denmark undoubtedly made a strong impression on most Greenlanders. Today, when elderly Greenlanders are asked about the war years and what it meant to them, they recall the excitement over the variety of new material goods from America, but also how they missed certain familiar Danish goods and had to use Greenlandic products in many cases. Some accounts focus on the extraordinary experience of being ruled from Nuuk/Godthåb instead of Copenhagen. When recollecting the war years, some Greenlanders even speak of it as ‘the first Greenlandic Home Rule’, although the participation and influence of Greenlanders in the administration of Greenland was very limited indeed. Some people mention new experiences of togetherness between Greenlanders and local Danes who were, so to speak, caught in the same situation. Finally, there are those who think of the period 1940-1945 as the time of memorable activities of many new Greenlandic associations and organizations as well as a period of nationalist awakening, especially among Greenlandic youth.

In the following, our aim is to shed light on the significance of World War II for the Greenlandic population by discussing the development of Greenlandic nationalism. Our discussion is based mainly on public statements by individuals who comment on issues such as Greenlandic culture, national identity and symbols, but we also describe changes in Greenlandic public life as expressed in the activities of associations and clubs.

At the outset, it must be stated that Greenlandic nationalism was by no means a result of the Second World War. Nationalist ideas date back to the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, new ways of defining Greenlandicness emerged, and the public debate on this
issue ran for years in the Greenlandic newspapers. The debate took place in a context of major economic and cultural change, from hunting and associated systems of commun sharing to the rise of the fishing industry and market economy. This transformation was due partly to a change of climate. The number of hunters dropped from 73% of the workforce in 1911 to 49% in 1930. In the wake of the Second World War, cod-fishing became the single most important industry in Greenland. In South Greenland, sheep breeding had also become significant.

The core of the early discussion on Greenlandic identity was whether national identity was linked to the occupation of seal hunting, or—in a classic nationalist terminology—language, people and history. The specialized hunters seemed to be anxious to maintain the close links between hunting and Greenlandic identity. Some Greenlanders showed open disdain for people who earned their living as casual wage workers at the Royal Greenland Trade and criticized their alleged Danish attitudes. ‘They are to blame for the decline and dilapidation of our country and the shameful disappearance of Greenlandicness’ as Frederik Lynge put it in 1913.

These new viewpoints in this early discussion of national identity were promoted by small group of employees from the Church and school systems of Greenland. These leaders and catechists had their organisational base in Peqatiligmiut, a nation-wide Christi revivalist movement founded in 1907/08. The new Greenlandic elite of non-huntir wage earning employees working for the colonial authorities fought for a definition of Greenlandicness that allowed them to be recognized as Greenlanders proper, alongside hunters, fishermen, artisans, casual workers and so on.

It has been argued that the background for the campaign to eliminate the close connec tion between hunting and being Greenlandic was to avoid equating primitiveness with Greenlandicness. An alternative strategy was to promote a relation between development and Greenlandicness. The Greenlandic historian Daniel Thorleifsen described this reaction by the Greenlandic educated elite to the notion of culture that had been advanced in a contemporary and very influential ethnographic publication, in Greenlandic, by the Danish-Greenlandic explorer and researcher Knud Rasmussen. Rasmussen’s book non-European peoples, ‘Silarsuarmiutssukturit, inuit qavdlunâjângitsoq Inuitânicka perissâningdloo umikât, I-II’ (Copenhagen, 1911-13), was based on evolutionist ideas of social development, with societies evolving along a ‘ladder’ from the simple or primit structures of hunters and gatherers to the complexity of modern nations. Following this line of thinking, there are peoples who are without culture and peoples with culture varying degrees and, of course, Europeans possessing culture in full.

One can dispute whether this early national consciousness is in fact a clear-cut politi nationalism, but it is obvious that the debate on national issues did not arise out of nc
The debate reflects sources of inspiration that came from outside Greenland. The influence of evolutionary ideas with a global perspective is important for understanding the trajectory of nationalist ideas in Greenland. Consider, for example, the argument by a catechist from North Greenland, H. Hansen:

_Greenlandicness exists because of our specific nationality with a distinct language, a distinct country and a specific consciousness of our ancestors. We do not have any specific occupational foundation; this is obvious when we read of the customs and industries of the many peoples without culture. They all have hunting as their occupational foundation—Europeans in the past and nowadays peoples from Africa, Australia and the indigenous population in America as well as many of the peoples of Asia, and this is equally the case of Greenlanders without culture. [...] The hunting float is no sign of Greenlandicness - Africans hunt hippopotamus using float and line without being Greenlanders._

Mainly through Danish newspapers and magazines, the Greenlandic spokesmen were aware of the situation in other colonies around the world. And it is evident that the Danish colonial officials were watching any signs of a nationalist awakening in Greenland. Especially as concerns the formation of Greenlandic associations in the beginning of the century, there seem to have been concerns that nationalism would "spread" to Greenland. The Danes feared what has been called ‘an Icelandic and West Indian situation’.

In the 1930s, the nationalist debate obtained new life through the growing number of associations, clubs and community activities. The educated catechists were not the only ones who were inspired by information and experience from abroad. Members of other occupational groups had been educated in Denmark and returned with new experiences and ideas and the urge to pass them on to their fellow countrymen. The framework of local organizations presented a great opportunity to do so.

Many different people took part in the debate on national issues during the 1930s. One Greenlandic leader was the college teacher and writer Augo Lynge. Partly educated in Denmark and unusually informed on foreign matters, Lynge became an initiator of all sorts of activities after his return to Greenland. He was especially engaged in working to educate and increase skills among Greenlandic youth, and he was the founder of the first Greenlandic sports club in Nuuk/Godthåb in 1933.

Beginning in the 1930s, Lynge was a politician, acting as member of local and national councils in Greenland. After the war, he was elected as one of the first two Greenlandic members of the Danish Parliament; the other was the above-cited Frederik Lynge. Augo Lynge created his own platform of opinion with his magazine _Taqigssut_, which he edited.
and produced from 1934 to 1947. In the magazine, he laid out his opinions on national, cultural, social and economic issues in Greenland and provided a forum for debate on Greenlandic social issues.

In the early phase of Greenlandic nationalism, Christianity and nationality were closely linked. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, nationalist thinking acquired a much more secular tendency. The first Greenlandic novels reflect this development. The first two present visions of the future of Greenland. Mathias Storch's *Sinnaqtuugaq* ("The dream"), from 1913, depicts a future, independent, Christian and modern Greenland. The year is 2105, and Greenland is inhabited solely by Greenlanders. In another novel, *Ukpat 300-ngornerat* (Three hundred years after), from 1931, Augo Lyngør imagines a Greenland 300 years after the arrival of Hans Egede. In Lyngør's imagination, Greenland has been transformed into a society much like the Danish and with the status of an equal 'county' of Denmark. In 1938, Hans Lyngør published a novel, *Erssigngitsup pimassâ* ("The will of the invisible") that, unlike the first two novels, did not speculate about the future, but instead envisioned the Greenlandic society of the past. It is tempting to interpret this change of view in the late 1930s as a sign of the urge to deal with Greenlandic culture, history and Greenlandicness at a time of change. The novel of Hans Lyngør was a sign of a new generation of Greenlanders who now took pride in their identity as Greenlanders and who were unwilling to abruptly renounce their cultural heritage for dreams of a Danish-style Greenland in some distant future.

At the time of the outbreak of World War II, Greenlanders in general seemed to be aware of the voices of their more radical countrymen who spoke with pride about their origin as Greenlanders. Through literature, song and the press, people had become familiar with nationalist visions and ideas, such as the idea of the Greenlanders constituting a distinct people with the possibility of obtaining a place among the civilized or 'mature' nations of the world.

During the war, Greenlandic nationalist debate developed further, in the sense that Greenland was increasingly referred to as a nation, comparable to other nations. One might explain this by the increased knowledge of other peoples and nations that had been provided by the press and by the educational system. Greenlanders were becoming much more aware of the ideas of what generally 'constitutes' a nation, of what is needed in order to speak about a nation. A lesson was presented here: Danish nationalist symbols and rituals were practiced with enthusiasm by the Danes in Greenland during the war. Greenlanders had been urged to participate in the national celebrations of Denmark and did so willingly, but for some Greenlanders, the lesson was something else: that Greenland ought to be celebrated in the same way by its own people.

In 1942-43, a debate occurred in the newspaper *Grønlandsposten* as to whether a Na-
tional Day or days of national celebration in Greenland should be introduced in order to reinforce the sense of unity between Greenlanders and Danes. One Greenlander, Peter Nielsen, twisted the argument by interpreting the expression 'Greenland's national days of celebration' as 'Greenlanders' national days of celebration', adding that in his opinion, national sentiments could not be shared with another people.39

Discussing national symbols in Greenland, Inge Kleivan points out the two important unifying symbols of Greenland and Denmark at this time, namely the monarch and the flag. The King of Denmark and the Danish flag, the Dannebrog, were not only key national symbols to Danes, but also to Greenlanders.40 Greenlandic authors wrote songs about the Dannebrog being the common property of Greenlanders and Danes. The radio broadcast praises to the flag; in 1943, for instance, Frederik Lyngè stated that flying the Dannebrog in Greenland 'bears witness to the love which binds Denmark and Greenland together, because the flag belongs to us all.'41

'The Children of Our Land'

During the war, in 1942, Augo Lyngø founded a youth association in Nuuk/Godthåb called Nunatta Qitornaí (Children of Our Land). Unlike many of the earlier youth associations, this one did not have a Christian foundation. Its main concern was the enlightenment and awakening of Greenlandic youth to awareness of language and nation and participation in community activity. The association grew rapidly. With all sorts of activities and entertainment, it appealed to the young people who at the time were beginning to project themselves as a group with a special life style, with separate interests, in other words, an incipient youth culture.

Nuuk/Godthåb had been the center of higher education in Greenland for about a hundred years. The catechist training college hosted youth education at various levels, with catechist/teacher education being the highest level. The fact that Nuuk/Godthåb became the 'capital' of Greenland during the war, with a high concentration of national institutions, tended to create a sense of being at the center of events, at least in Greenland. Nuuk/Godthåb was still a small town of under 1,000 inhabitants. However, with its relatively large number of students, there was a basis for development of a specific youth culture. This youth was becoming aware of the ways of life of young people in other countries, for instance their music, habits, behaviour and ways of relating to society.

The Danish community of Nuuk/Godthåb took a mixed attitude towards Nunatta Qitornaí. Some Danes appreciated the association's aim of activating the 'idle' youth and lauded the association for contributing to the national Greenlandic charitable fund for rebuilding Denmark after the war. Other Danes, like the rector of the catechist training college,
reacted with reserve and concern. The rector prohibited his students from joining an association outside the college; students were instead encouraged to adhere to a number of newly started associations only for college students.

Augo Lynge was a controversial figure in Nuuk/Godthåb. He was outspoken in his addresses to the Danish audience. By publishing *Taqigssit*, he was in control of the medium for disseminating his political ideas—and, most importantly, very few Danes were able to read or address this magazine because it was in Greenlandic. Since the early 1930s, Lynge had been a teacher at the catechist training college. According to pupils at the time, they were very fond of him. Nevertheless, in 1943 he was abruptly transferred to another college in North Greenland. This transfer was apparently due to fears by Danish authorities of his nationalist views and his influence, especially on the youth of Nuuk/Godthåb.

Local affiliates of *Ninatta Qiornat* and many other local associations were established in other Greenlandic towns during the war. Although the majority of these new organisations did not present themselves as political associations, the rapid growth of public forums clearly suggested a need for community action and communication.

**Communication and knowledge of the world**

The war put a focus on the means of communication, on language generally, and on the written press and radio communication. Only very few Greenlanders spoke Danish; most of these were catechists or people trained in Denmark. Access to Danish as a means of communication and information as well as a means of influencing authorities was a resource of few.

Viewing the war from the perspective of media development, the period was remarkable in terms of 'nation-building'. The establishment of institutions operating from Greenland and on a Greenlandic rather than Danish scale contributed to the symbolic and spiritual creation of a Greenlandic national consciousness.

In addition to the two older national newspapers in Greenlandic, *Atuagagdlitit*, produced in Nuuk/Godthåb from 1861, and *Avangnamiog*, produced in Qeqertasuaq/Godhavn from 1913, a national Danish-language newspaper, *Greelandsposten*, was established in Nuuk/Godthåb in 1941 on the initiative of Governor Eske Brun. The editor appointed by Brun was the zoologist and writer Christian Vibe.

Together with Kristoffer Lynge, the Greenlandic editor of *Atuagagdlitit*, Vibe was simultaneously given the task of setting up a national radio broadcasting station. It seems
that there were two main reasons for this media initiative. One was the aim of national
unification, to create a sense of fellowship, not only between Danes and Greenlanders,
but between all residents in Greenland; the other was a desire to prevent the spread of
false rumours, especially among Greenlanders, about events in Greenland and in the
outside world.

At one level, the initiative was a sign of a local government trying to control public
opinion. Before the war, news from Denmark and the outside world arrived in Greenland
through the filter put up by the Danish media and especially by the colonial authorities in
Copenhagen. Suddenly, the news telegrams received in Nukk were primarily American.
This was cause for some concern within the Danish community in Greenland, at least to
Grønlandspostens’s editor, Christian Vibe. Vibe insisted on maintaining a Danish filter
on foreign information by monitoring not only American news telegrams, but also the
B.B.C., Swedish and even German newscasts.42

Both the Danish community as well as the Danish-reading Greenlandic elite welcomed
the Danish newspaper and broadcasting in Greenland as an alternative to the much missed
papers and radio communication from Denmark. Grønlandsposten and Danish-language
radio broadcasts were not only valued as information, but also as channels for getting
Greenlanders used to reading and hearing the Danish language.43

One effect of this Danish media initiative during the war was an intensified demand for
access to the Danish language. For the Greenlandic leaders, this demand did not clash
with their Greenlandic nationalism. In a delicate way, they associated their demand
for access to Danish language with new definitions of Greenlandic national identity as
‘Eskimo-Danish’.

Hans Christiansen, a Greenlandic telegraphist, argued in Grønlandsposten in 1944, that
Greenlanders would have to improve their knowledge of Danish, ‘the language of the
motherland’, in order to be able to understand ‘the events out in the world’. The war had
taught Greenlanders a lesson. Speaking only Greenlandic, Greenlanders had to rely on the
resident Danes to obtain the goods necessary from America. Hans Christiansen stated:

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\text{We can no longer be without all the nice goods which the rest of the world}
\text{offers us and has been offering us for the last 223 years. We are aware that}
\text{we are no longer able to manage with Greenlandic products alone. What}
\text{if we had been on our own in Greenland, what would we have done when}
\text{we were left behind by the occupation of Denmark?}^{44}
\]

His argument for learning Danish takes two directions: for the sake of Greenland, it is the
basic condition for cultural development and a must if Greenlanders are to ‘cope in the
competition with the white man”; for the sake of Denmark, the teaching of Danish would help ‘demonstrate Denmark’s border to the North as firm and immovable as possible’.

In the debate on nationalism, the perhaps most outspoken Greenlandic leader speaking along these lines was the above-mentioned Augo Lyng. In 1945, Lyng developed his position on language and identity in two articles in Grenlandsposten, entitled ‘Our “isolation diseases”’ and ‘On the national’. Lyng concludes:

> Let’s say it openly: we want development within the Danish realm and within its framework of social, political, economic and cultural equality. Similar demands, similar duties, similar opportunities for Dane and Greenlander, or in other words, we want to create out of the Greenlander a good Danish citizen.”

Nowadays, it is hard to imagine that Augo Lyng was feared by some Danes as a kind of Greenlandic rebel. His critique of Danish colonialism is held within very vague expressions. He gives Denmark all the credit a ‘motherland’ deserves and even more, but he sneaks in a criticism of a very substantial nature:

> We have been very lucky to obtain an unusually humane and unselfish mother country. The Danish people came [to Greenland] with the best of intentions. They wanted to bring us a better religion. They wanted to help us to a higher culture. They did not come as a conqueror of land or as a competitor to the scarce resources. [...] But all the same, however humane and philanthropic our teachers acted, it was inevitable that the doctrine of the Greenlander as a second-class human being was adopted in the consciousness of the [Greenlandic] people - with the accompanying demoralizing effects.”

In addition to newspapers and radio broadcasting, film became an important source of information on the outside world during the war. Both the American and Canadian consulates provided films of all sorts. American newsreels presented the American war effort around the world to the Greenlandic audience with only a few months’ delay. Entertaining movies, westerns and other Hollywood productions were discussed among Danes, who compared them to the well-known European films. A topic of discussion was whether westerns were substandard or not. Defending westerns and Americans, the head of the catechist training college in Nuuk/Godthåb, A. Fuglsang-Damgaard, was more ironic in his comments:

> Maybe it is true that there are several bad ones among the American [films], but it is bound to be so when we tend, as we usually do, to put a minus sign on everything that is American and a plus sign on all that is European. Of
course, the Americans are rude and ungrateful in not maintaining ‘our good European taste’ to a full extent. But we have to accept the fact that they are building an independent culture. And concerning the cowboy films [i.e. westerns], we must remember that they have had a ‘cowboy period’ interwoven in their history.  

To understand this type of discussion, it must be added that it seems to be yet another example of the paternalist attitude taken by Danes toward the Greenlandic population. The Greenlanders were not to be spoiled by the bad influence on the part of the Americans, be it films or by such products as the American country and western records provided to the Greenlandic radio by the U.S. consulate.

'The maturing of the Greenlanders'

We believed that the world was nothing of our business. We thought that our fatherland, Greenland, would always be too remote to interest the rest of the world. We believed that Greenland would never be short of anything. This was due to our too firm belief in the help given by Denmark in supplies and connections to the outside world. Despite great difficulties, Greenland during recent years has been supplied with the goods necessary from America. We now understand that our time is indeed one of difficulty. And we can no longer say that we don’t care about the world and that the world doesn’t care about us.

The war-time separation from Denmark gave rise to rather conflicting sentiments among Greenlanders. On the one hand, the separation caused a deep interest in the future of Denmark, a concern about the destiny of the Danish people and not least, a longing for the day of reunion. On the other hand, the period of separation represented an unforeseen opportunity to obtain experiences of self-reliance, generally resulting in more self-confident and radical Greenlandic attitudes. But to the disappointment of the Greenlandic leaders and spokesmen, the Danish post-war colonial policy, as articulated immediately after the war, showed little sign of reform. The disappointment and bitterness were expressed by the Greenlandic newspaper editor Kristoffer Lynge at a public meeting in Denmark in 1947:

We hoped that the maturing of the Greenlanders during the war would be recognized, and in appreciation of this, we counted on being heard when the future policy on Greenland was being planned. We counted on Denmark being wise enough to value the experiences gained through difficult conditions and to use these in the best interests of Greenland. But it appears that we were wrong.
The dominant Greenlandic metaphor about the relationship between Denmark and Greenland at the time was, as mentioned earlier, that of mother and child. The colonial power described as the nurturing mother and Greenland as the youth or near-adult was a frequent image. Along these lines, what Kristoffer Lyng points out as the result of the separation of Greenland from Denmark is one of the Greenlandic people gaining ‘maturity’, becoming ‘adult’ and self-confident. Consequently, the goal should be to be able to relate to the Danes on a more equal basis, as one nation to another, as one adult to another. To the disappointment of Lyng and other Greenlanders, as well as to the Danes in Greenland their counterparts in the Greenland Administration in Copenhagen were neither willing to acknowledge Greenland as a ‘fully grown’ nation nor Greenlanders as responsible equal partners.

What Lyng refers to as the process of ‘maturation’ is in fact another way of speaking about the intensification of the Greenlandic national identity which was catalyzed by the war-time separation from Denmark and the presence in Greenland of a foreign national power, the United States.

Epilogue

_A spring wind, maybe even an icebreaking hurricane, is moving down the coast of Greenland. The big world is closing in on Greenland. The Greenlanders have discovered the world, they want to learn from it and to become part of it._

With these words by the Danish editor of _Greenlandsposten_, the post-war theme in Greenland was clearly indicated. The sense of autonomy experienced during the war had made it obvious to Greenlanders as well as to the most influential Danes in Greenland that substantial and speedy reform was needed. The object of the reforms should be to encourage rapid political, social and economic development. The spokesmen for Greenlandic nationalism did not demand independence or the like. They ‘only’ wanted to put Greenlanders on the same footing as their compatriots in Denmark. They wanted more decisions to be taken in Greenland instead of by the Greenland Administration in distant Copenhagen.

This meant that the days of traditional Danish colonial paternalism were numbered. For a short interlude after the war, the Greenland Administration in Copenhagen tried to maintain something close to status quo. Yet pressure from nationally awakened Greenlanders and Danes working in Greenland combined with certain political factors within Denmark succeeded in bringing about reform. Among the most important of these political factors was the impact of the worldwide rise of anti-colonial sentiment as expressed within the
newly established United Nations. The Danish Government did not want to see its relations to Greenland being equated with the relations between the large European powers and their colonies.

The decisive step was taken in 1948, when the Provincial Councils of Greenland, in reply to an inquiry from Danish Prime Minister Hans Hedtoft, declared that they wanted to reach the economic and cultural standards of other nations. The year 1948, therefore, marked the starting point of a new era in Greenland, leading to a radical transformation of the country on all levels—political, social and economic. It also marked a turning point in the development of Greenlandic nationalism: the break-down of old-style Danish paternalism during the Second World War was accompanied by the emergence of a pragmatic Greenlandic nationalism pursuing equality within the Kingdom of Denmark.

As to the military presence of the Americans in Greenland, it is only quite recently that significant reductions in American forces have taken place. At the dawn of the cold war, the Americans believed that it would be against their strategic interests to abandon their bases in Greenland. The Agreement on the Defense of Greenland was therefore renewed in 1951. The Americans established the giant Thule Air Base in the northernmost part of Greenland. During the cold war, the Thule Air Base was considered of high military value and regarded as one of Denmark’s most important contributions to the NATO-alliance.

Up until 1992, the United States had paid for the running of Søndre Strømfjord airport, the most important civil airport in Greenland (the other important airport in Greenland, Narsarsuaq in South Greenland, was also constructed by the Americans during the war and was handed over to Denmark in 1958). The American announcement of their decision to pull out of Søndre Strømfjord led to the following headline in a Greenlandic newspaper: ‘Yankees don’t go home!’

In comparative perspective, what is striking here is the limited extent to which the American ‘friendly invasion’ actually influenced the Greenlandic society during the war and in the decades that followed. The American military personnel were always kept at the fringes of Greenlandic society. The significance of the friendly invasion was that it acted as a catalyst for change in a decisive period in modern Greenlandic history.

Translation: Steven Sampson
Notes

1 A number of articles and studies related to World War II have been published since 1993, when this article was first published in Danish. It is not possible to provide a full record of these works here, but one remarkable study should be mentioned: Lidegaard 1996.

2 Iceland was invaded by the British in May 1940, and the Americans succeeded as ‘friendly invaders’ in July 1941. The British invaded the Faroe Islands in April 1940 and remained for the duration of the war.

3 In 1991, Greenland had a population of 55,533 people, of which 8,842 were born in Denmark. Greenland is a vast country, 2,175,600 square kilometres, of which only the coasts are inhabited. About 85% of Greenland is covered by an enormous ice cap (Cf. Gronland. Kaldeallit Nunataq 1990. Statistisk årbog. [Nuuk, 1991]).

4 For a brief survey in English of Greenland’s colonial history, see Gad 1984a. The most important general works on Greenland’s colonial history in Danish, also covering World War II, are: Gad 1984b and Sorensen 1983.

5 Many towns and places in Greenland have two names, one in Greenlandic and one in Danish. In the following, both names will be cited in Greenlandic/Danish format.

6 Rink 1974:142.

7 Rigesadstidende, Folketingets Forhandlinger 1907-08 sp. 7984.

8 Jenness 1967:7. Diamond Jenness was an influential Canadian anthropologist. He reflects a kind of idealistic belief in Progress, Modernity and Western Civilization now long gone - buried in the midst of colonial wars and ecological crises.

9 Jenness 1968:15.

10 Lokkegaard 1968:28-37 and 396-402. Lokkegaard’s work remains the most extensive study yet of Greenland’s foreign relations during the first half of the war. It contains a summary in English. Some of the documents related to the continued recognition of Kauffmann as Danish minister are published in Shepard and Myers 1941:236-239. As regards published sources for the history of Greenland during the war, the 1946 ‘Yearbook of the Greenlandic Society’ in Copenhagen is of particular interest; it was entirely devoted to describing the administration and the course of events in Greenland during the war: Det Gronlandske Selskabs Aarskrift 1946.


12 Danish National Archives, Gesandtskabsarkiver, Washington, j.nr. RU.13.

13 Interview in the Danish daily Berlingske Tidende, August 17, 1941, republished in several American newspapers.

14 The Agreement is published in Shepard and Myers 1941:232-235.

15 Vibe 1946a:104.

16 Howarth 1957-49. Howarth provides a gripping account of the fighting that took place on the northeast coast of Greenland in early spring of 1943.

17 Ibid.: 225.

18 Ibid.: 245-249.

19 Ibid.: 106.

20 Vibe 1946a:111.
21 Ibid.: 113.
23 Ibid.: 100.
24 Gronlands Styrelse, journalsager 1945, j.nr. 10328, Rigsarkivet (Danish National Archives).
25 Dispatch from Dunbar dated October 3, 1944, in: Kenneth P. Kirkwood Papers, National Archives of Greenland (photocopies from the Canadian National Archives). Dunbar described the events in Julianehåb in a more detailed dispatch dated November 26, 1943.
26 At the end of 1938, 16,969 Greenlanders lived in West Greenland, 1,071 in East Greenland, and 271 at Thule in North Greenland. The total number of Europeans in Greenland (almost exclusively Danes) was 397 (Sammenlægning af Statistiske oplysninger om Grønland, (Copenhagen: Gronlands Styrelse, 1942-1947):36.
28 Gronlandsposten, Godthåb, February 1, 1943.
29 Gronlandsposten, July 1, 1945.
31 For a presentation of the debate, see Petersen 1991; Berthelsen 1976; Langgård 1987, Appendix 1.6-16.
34 For a thorough study of Pequtiqinmiit, see Thuesen 1988. For an introduction in English, see Balle 1929.
38 For thorough analyses of the first Greenlandic novels, see Thisted 1990a and 1990b.
41 Gronlandsposten, September 16, 1943.
43 Gronlandsposten, July 16, 1943.
44 Gronlandsposten, April 16, 1944; our translation.
45 Gronlandsposten, November 1, 1945.
46 Gronlandsposten, November 1, 1945.
47 Gronlandsposten, November 1, 1944.
49 Hans Christiansen, Gronlandsposten, April 16, 1944.
51 Christian Vibe, Gronlandsposten, August 1, 1945.
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