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The Politics of the Right to Self-Determination: Reframing the Debate on Greenland's Autonomy

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to shed light on autonomy structures in Greenland and the processes that alter them. The paper will utilize “autonomy in external relations” and “autonomy in internal relations” as tools in a new analytical framework that replaces autonomism, which is traditionally conceived in terms of integration and separation between the center and the periphery. To achieve the above objective, I will consider the relationship between resource development and autonomy, specifically trends in Greenland and changes in the policies of the Greenland Self-Rule Government, as it attempts to enhance its autonomy by attracting foreign investment and obtaining greater financial benefits from natural resources such as ore and oil.

Introduction

Autonomy movements in West Europe since the 1970s have been on many occasions taken up in debates as examples that can shed light on the relationship between the state and a region or a group within it, and can help explain the authority and power shared by the two sides.¹ The premise on which such debates have been based is that a central government exercises its supreme power over the entire demarcated area of a country and never ceases to oversee various lesser state entities. Therefore, there is a tendency to view autonomy as a kind of a protest against the inflexibility of the state-centered structure. Debates about the Danish territory of Greenland, the largest island in the world, located in the northern Atlantic, have not been an exception in that sense. Greenland gained the right to home-rule in internal affairs in 1979, the right to have its own say in foreign relations and matters of security in 2003, and to expand its autonomy (self-rule) in 2009. The autonomy movement in Greenland has often been understood as a movement opposed to Denmark and aimed at reducing its dependence on it as much as possible.² However, in reality Greenland is and has been dependent

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¹ Sakio Takayanagi, “The Center-Periphery Structure in Europe: Internal Factors Impeding International integration,” *International Politics [Kokusai Seiji]* 77 (1984): 23–41 [In Japanese]; Takashi Miyajima, et al., eds. *The Europe of Regions: Stratification, Realignment and Revival* (Tokyo: Jinbun Shoin, 2007) [In Japanese]; Stein G. Rokkan and Derek W. Urwin, *Economy, Territory, Identity, Politics of West European Peripheries* (London, Beverly Hills, New Delhi: Sage, 1983).

² Inge Adriansen, “Symbolbrug i Riget og Rigsfællesskabet,” in *Nationale Symboler i Det Danske Rige 1830-2000, Bind I Fra Fyrstestat til Nationalstater*, ed. Inge Adriansen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2003); Sjurdur Skaale, ed., *The Right To National Self-Determination: The Faroe Islands and Greenland*



Figure 1: Danish Territory of Greenland

on Denmark and has, of its own accord, chosen to remain a part of the Danish state (Rigsfællesskabet) while simultaneously seeking power that would enable it to negotiate with external agents, such as the European Community (EC) / European Union (EU), the United States, and its geographic neighbors, countries along the coast of the North Sea. That is, in its autonomy, Greenland has not been intent on relativizing or destroying the framework of the Danish state.³

In this paper, while citing Greenland's autonomy as a case of reference, I will call into question the principles behind past thinking about autonomy. By introducing "autonomy in external relations" and "autonomy in internal relations" as new analytical tools replacing past principles, I will attempt to reform our understanding of not only the autonomy of the area under review, but the theory of autonomy itself. Furthermore, by quoting interviews I conducted at Greenland's Self-Rule Government, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and companies specializing in developing natural resources in far off regions, I will shed light on the fact that a shift in the structure of Greenland's four-decade long autonomy is now apparent due to environmental transformations brought about by climate change.

(Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004).

³ Minori Takahashi, *Political Science Regarding Self-determination: External Autonomy in the Danish Territory of Greenland* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2013) [In Japanese].

Principles Governing Thinking about Autonomy

Many scholars have attempted to analyze the conditions of social change in conjunction with legal and practical sovereignty and the territoriality of a sovereign state, with a focus on regions.⁴ In such attempts, efforts have been made to shed light on various characteristics of social change that cannot be fully grasped within a state-centric framework. Concepts such as autonomy, minority rights, and social movements have been utilized, as well as the medium of “regions.” Of course, when it comes to social movements becoming movements for autonomy or when it comes to granting rights to minorities, much will depend on variables such as local history, political culture, customs, mentality, and the geographical (geopolitical) position of the region. In such cases, it is impossible to ignore variance and diversity. This is because the above notions are generally deeply intertwined with local historical and political trends. However, attention should be paid to the fact that in discussions on the social dynamics of regions, a region’s relationship with the central government, often viewed as identical to processes of integration and separation between “the center” and “the periphery,” has repeatedly been taken as the frame of reference.⁵ That is, in past studies, based on the premise that a conflicting relationship exists between the periphery and the center, movements seeking autonomy have been placed in the context of “the political reaction (subordination or resistance) of peripheral communities to conquest or integration attempts by a state.”⁶ It may be said that such studies have been, to a varying degree, based on “the notion of protest.”⁷

If we resort to a somewhat simple classification, it can be said that such studies have conducted analyses by combining the positions of “autonomism” and “separatism.” In “autonomism,” the periphery mostly takes into account its economic dependence on the center (central government), and rather than aspiring for the dissolution of the relationship between the center and periphery, aims to secure its survival by prioritizing benefits that result from compromises and strategic cooperation with the center. As a result, a region on the periphery chooses to move within the existing state system. For example, Japanese scholars Takashi Miyajima and Takamichi Kajita state that autonomist movements, rather than questioning the existence of the state framework itself, aim for “a reexamination of the form of the state by calling for a federation.”⁸ Furthermore, Japanese political geographer Takashi Yamazaki calls movements that seek a reexamination of the form of a state through becoming a part of it, “movements for the restoration of the lost land,” and cites the

⁴ Hiroshi Momose, “Introduction: About ‘Regions and International Relations,’” in *Changing Political Power and Resistance: Regions in the Study of International Relations*, ed. Hiroshi Momose (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2012) [In Japanese].

⁵ For example, see: Gen Kikkawa, *The Limits of Ethnic Self-Determination: International Security Surrounding Minorities* (Tokyo: Yushindo Kobunsha, 2009) [In Japanese].

⁶ Takashi Yamazaki, *Politics, Space and Places: Towards Developing ‘Political Geography’* (Kyoto: Nakanishiya, 2010), 55 [In Japanese].

⁷ Yoshiro Matsui, “The Formation and Development of the Right to Self-Determination,” *Science and Thought [Kagaku to Shisou]* 62 (1986): 2 (242) [In Japanese].

⁸ Takashi Miyajima and Takamichi Kajita, eds., *Regions and States in Contemporary Europe: A Visual Angle on the Changing Problem of Center-periphery* (Tokyo: Yushindo Kobunsha, 1988), 13. [In Japanese].

movement to return Okinawa to Japan as an example.⁹ On the other hand, “separatism” denotes movements that prefer breaking away from the existing center-periphery relationship and acquiring or enhancing political autonomy to making short-term political and economic gains. Separatism emphasizes differences with the center and involves a break-up of the sovereign state and the creation of a new state, community, and ethnic or regional union. For example, Yamazaki cites the Basque independence movement as an example of a “separatist, independence movement” that seeks secession from a state.¹⁰

If we focus on autonomist demands within a periphery, we notice the tendency of such actors to achieve their demands or secure their interests within an internal dimension. They do so by either maintaining “the ruler and the ruled” relationship inherent in center-periphery relations, or by avoiding issues related to the character of that relationship. What is characteristic of sub-state entities in such cases is that they show interest in having their position clearly stated in the constitution of the center. For example, Hideki Hasegawa, citing the case of the island of Corsica in France, argues that an autonomy that is not guaranteed by the constitution of a state is an “incomplete autonomy” (That is, according to him, the ideational destination that should be aspired for is “complete autonomy,” which implies a guarantee by the mainland’s constitution).¹¹ Hasegawa’s study is representative of past research that analyzed autonomy from the viewpoint of autonomism. Thus, opting for the autonomist choice means settling for a relationship of, at least, legal superiority and inferiority. In autonomism, there is a tendency to opt for maintaining the legal status of a periphery or for avoiding the pursuit of the question of its status for the sake of maintaining the living standard and the social order built by the local inhabitants through economic or political dependence on the center. In contrast, in separatism there is a tendency to call into question the superiority of the center, even if that involves short-term risks, such as a fall in living standards,¹² and a tendency of aspire to the achievement of self-rule and independence. In separatism, the autonomist option of striving for internal autonomy, or for “complete autonomy” within the constitution of the mainland, is itself subjected to criticism. As a result, the separatist option seeks to relativize and weaken its unequal relationship with the center.

The important point to remember is that, although past scholarship has had a certain breadth, whether it addressed autonomism or separatism, has tended to view the autonomy of the periphery relative to the center. That is, past scholarship has been oriented towards the kind of autonomy that has the center as its main target. It may be said that past discussions on autonomy have uniformly revolved around the inquiry into how an entity that has been pushed into a peripheral position by the center acquires autonomy. In such studies the center has been viewed as the location that controls

⁹ Yamazaki, *Politics, Space and Places*, 88–89.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hideki Hasegawa, “The Problem of Autonomy in Islands: The Case of French Corsica,” *The Journal of Island Studies [Tousho Kenkyu]* founding issue (2000) [In Japanese].

¹² There are a significant number of cases where, as in Spain’s Basque region and Catalonia, the “political center” and the “economic center” are not the same, so movements for autonomy in the political periphery do not necessarily lead to a fall in people’s living standard.

most of the traffic between the owners of political, economic and cultural resources within a certain space, while the periphery has been seen as seeking a position in relation to that center.

Autonomy of the Danish Territory of Greenland

Similar to a number of other studies, Greenland's autonomy (Hjemmestyre, Selvstyre) has been placed in contexts that take the center-periphery relationship as its framework of reference. For that reason, Greenland's home/self-rule has often been viewed as being in opposition to Denmark, and as a movement that seeks to reduce its dependence on Denmark. For example, in the early 1970s, beginning with the debate about Denmark's entry into the EC, a new generation of politicians in Greenland (born in the 1930s) began to demand the right of self-determination, eventually managing to obtain the right to home-rule in internal matters in 1979.¹³ A former U.S. official, Dov Zakheim, interpreted these results as a stepping-stone to Greenland's full independence (selvstændighed).¹⁴ Also, Danish historian Finn Gad explained Greenland's aspirations for home-rule that emerged in the 1970s in following words: "Radicalization has become apparent...as a result of discontent with the present political establishment."¹⁵ Both of these authors depict Denmark as an opponent of Greenland. Furthermore, Japanese political expert Tadamasu Fukiura judged Greenland, which obtained the right to have its own say in matters of diplomacy and security in 2003 and the right to independently conduct negotiations with mainland Denmark in 2009, to be "an area that is set to become independent."¹⁶ Thus, Greenland's push for autonomy has been interpreted as a challenge to the framework of the Danish state and as its desire for broad powers that relativize that framework.

However, to state the conclusion first, the true character of Greenland's movement for autonomy is that it seeks the right to negotiate directly with external agents while continuing to depend on Denmark. That is, Greenland's push for autonomy does not imply the intention to relativize or destroy the framework of the state.¹⁷ For example, Jakob Janussen from the Greenland's Home-Rule Government, who was involved in negotiations regarding the right to self-determination in the 1970s, has stated that debates regarding Denmark's entry into the EC at the beginning of that decade aroused in Greenlanders an awareness regarding Greenland's waters and fishing grounds and, thus, awareness regarding autonomy. That strengthened the demands that Greenland be given a voice

¹³ *Betænkning 837. Hjemmestyre i Grønland. Bind 1: Hjemmestyreordningen* (Nuuk: Kommissionen om Hjemmestyre i Grønland, 1978).

¹⁴ Dov S. Zakheim, "NATO's Northern Front: Developments and Prospects," *Cooperation and Conflict* 17:3 (1982).

¹⁵ Finn Gad, "Denmark's Policies toward Greenland," *Western Policy toward American Indians* 14 (1992): 57.

¹⁶ Tadamasu Fukiura, "An Examination of National Flags and State Sovereignty," *Foreign Affairs [Kaigai Jijou]* 58:5 (2010): 40–41 [In Japanese].

¹⁷ *Betænkning 837. Hjemmestyre i Grønland: Bind i Hjemmestyreordningen* (Nuuk: Kommissionen om Hjemmestyre i Grønland, 1978). Regeringen og Grønlands Landsstyre, *Fælles Principerklæring mellem Regeringen og Grønlands Landsstyre om Grønlands Inddragelse i Udenrigs- og Sikkerhedspolitikken* (Itilleq: Regeringen og Grønlands Landsstyre, 2003); *Grønlandsk-dansk Selvstyrekommissions Betænkning om Selvstyre i Grønland* (Nuuk: Grønlandsk-dansk selvstyrekommission, 2008).

in the decision making process in such a way that Greenland would be able to *directly negotiate* with the EC.¹⁸ Also, Josef Motzfeldt, Greenland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who sat at the negotiating table when Greenland managed to obtain the right to have a say in matters of diplomacy and security, insisted that Greenland would not use those powers to separate itself from Denmark or the legal framework of the Danish state. Instead, it would use them as a footing to become, *within* that framework, an autonomous agent in external relations, exactly because, as a constituent of Denmark, Greenland bears such responsibility.¹⁹ Furthermore, Mininnguaq Kleist, who for a long time served as Greenland's minister in charge of autonomy issues, has stated repeatedly that Greenland's autonomy should be approached based on the premise that it will fulfill its duty and responsibility as an autonomous region constituting the Danish state, and has stressed that the increase in Greenland's powers should not be understood in opposition to Denmark.²⁰

According to a report published by the Greenland-Denmark Committee on Autonomy (Grønlandsk-dansk selvstyrekommision), the debate on Greenland's autonomy is meant to "maximize Greenlanders' autonomy within the existing state system."²¹ The expression "the existing state system" carries the same meaning as "within the framework of Denmark's constitution."²² In other words, the movement for the autonomy of Greenland should be understood as a movement for obtaining and enhancing Greenland's powers²³ based on the premise that "Greenland will remain a part of the Danish state."²⁴ Similar statements have also been obtained in the interviews the author conducted with Kim Kielsen,²⁵ Emma Kristensen²⁶ and Carl Christian Olsen²⁷ from the Inuit Circumpolar Council, an organization established with the goal of protecting the rights of indigenous Inuit in the polar region.

"External Autonomy" and "Internal Autonomy" as Analytical Concepts

The reason why Greenland is an interesting case is that it urges us to relativize the principles on which our thinking about autonomy and self-determination is based, and points to a new logic or variation in thinking. For example, in debates about the issue of Scotland's secession and independence, the possibility that Scotland could obtain the primary legislative rights in all fields except diplomacy and defense in case its inhabitants did not support independence at a referendum

¹⁸ Jakob Janussen, "Rigsfællesskabet set fra Grønlandsk Side," *Selvstyrekommisjons Proceedings* (Nuuk: Selvstyrekommision, no date), 2.

¹⁹ Grønlands Hjemmestyre, *Offentlig Høring om USA's Anmodning om at Anvende Radaren i Pituffik som led i et Missilskjold* (Nuuk: Grønlands Hjemmestyre, 2003): 62–63.

²⁰ Interview with Mininnguaq Kleist from Greenland's Home-Rule Government, April 15, 2008.

²¹ *Grønlandsk-dansk Selvstyrekommisjons Betænkning*, 14.

²² *Ibid*, 21.

²³ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

²⁵ Interview with Kim Kielsen from Greenland's Home-Rule Government, November 25, 2008.

²⁶ Interview with Emma Kristensen from Greenland's Home-Rule Government, November 26, 2008.

²⁷ Interview with Carl Christian Olsen from the Inuit Circumpolar Council, June 23, 2014.

has been mentioned.²⁸ If we presume that independence movements starting in West Europe in the 1970s appeared as “protests and demands against the political center”²⁹ and that they have developed while oscillating between autonomism and separatism, then the reason why diplomacy and defense are excluded from Scotland’s autonomy is that they are considered to possess the character of self-determination in foreign relations and are seen as prerogatives of independence. Thus, to put it somewhat boldly, tying autonomy in the field of diplomacy and defense to independence has been the basic principle of thinking in the theory of autonomy. Of course, making simple comparisons without reference to local histories and the background of autonomies may come across as naive, but nonetheless, it may be said the case of Greenland, which has obtained powers that directly affect state sovereignty without questioning the framework of the state, is distinct from other cases.

Therefore, in this paper I will not try to explain Greenland’s movement for autonomy in terms of the center-periphery relationship, but will employ the concepts of internal and external autonomy, and attempt to give a view that is different from the above-mentioned past studies. Here “internal autonomy” denotes autonomy that seeks to create a society that can politically and economically stand on its own, without being dependent on the mainland society. On the other hand, “external autonomy” signifies the ability to conduct negotiations with external entities without going through the mainland society, or on an equal footing with the mainland society. What is important to understand about Greenland’s movement for autonomy is that it has not aspired for internal autonomy, but that it has continued to exercise external autonomy based on the premise of internal dependence on Denmark. That Greenland has not aspired for internal autonomy does not mean that it has completely forsaken or renounced it. Rather, it means that in its aspirations for external autonomy Greenland has not sought to create a society that is politically and economically independent from Denmark. That is, Greenland, while longing to acquire powers of negotiation with foreign countries and international organizations (i.e., external autonomy) has based its aspirations on actions that protect the general interests of the Danish state and has not aimed to influence or restrict Denmark’s responsibility and authority in international relations.

Denmark’s Stance of Respect for Greenland’s Aspirations

Greenland has sought external autonomy and actually obtained the right to home/self-rule because, not only the politicians in the Home/Self-Rule Government, but also ordinary Greenlanders have desired and pushed for such an autonomy. Denmark’s (the Danish Parliament’s) response has also played an important part. Denmark, which in accordance with Article 19 of the constitution, has the final say in decisions on external relations of the Danish state, has been well aware of the strategic military importance of Greenland, and has all the while desired the continuation of its sovereignty over Greenland. So as to maintain its maritime rights and privileges in the North Sea, Denmark has

²⁸ Naonori Kodate, “Scottish Referendum on Independence: Choosing Everyday Life or Identity?” *Synodos* April 2 (2014). Accessed March 12, 2015: <http://synodos.jp/international/7439>

²⁹ Takayanagi, “The Center-Periphery Structure in Europe,” 24.

respected the will of Greenlanders and has striven to include them in the sharing of the fruits of negotiations. For example, when in March 2009 the issue of enhancing Greenland's autonomy was taken up in the Danish Parliament, then-Assembly Speaker Henrik Høegh (from the Danish Conservative-Liberal Party, Venstre) expressed Denmark's intention to respect the will of the Greenlanders in the following statement:

The Venstre supports Greenland's desire for autonomy. We believe that will assure the modern-day continuation of the ties between Denmark and Greenland and answer Greenland's strong wish for enhancing its autonomy. At the referendum held in spring 2008 many Greenlanders assented to the proposal for the enhancement of autonomy, and we think that we need to respect that wish of Greenland³⁰

Statements of respect for Greenland's wishes are not found only in Høegh's comments. In a vote conducted in the Danish Parliament in May 2009 on the issue of the enhancement of Greenland's autonomy, many Danish MPs (179 delegates, including two representatives from Greenland, elected based on Article 28 of the Danish constitution) voted "yes" out of respect for the will of the Greenlandic people.³¹ Furthermore, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who served as Danish Prime Minister from 2001 to 2009, stated on a different occasion that "the Danish government fully supports Greenland's desire for a broader autonomy,"³² thus clearly indicating Denmark's stance on the issue. Greenlanders' status is often appraised as "the most favorable position among all indigenous people in the world"³³ or "as the most privileged among indigenous peoples of the world."³⁴ However, these statements should not be understood simply as evaluations of Greenland's position, but also as appraisals of Denmark, which respects Greenland's inclination to external autonomy and makes decisions in the final instance (as a constitutional decision maker). Greenland's broad autonomy is further supported by Denmark's stance of respect. Denmark has so far respected Greenland's will even on occasions when Greenland sought broad home-rule that (in consequence) could have directly affected the sovereignty of the Danish state, such as diplomatic powers and even the right to independence.

Here I would like to briefly examine why Denmark respects Greenland's aspirations and why it has incorporated them into its policies. Generally, Denmark's response to Greenland is understood as an expression of the "North European type of democracy" – politics based on

³⁰ *L128 Forslag til lov om Grønlands Selvstyre. Møde nr.65. Fredag 13.03.2009 Ordførertale: Henrik Høegh* (Copenhagen: Folketinget, 2009).

³¹ *L128 Forslag til lov om Grønlands Selvstyre. Afstemning, nr.335. 96.møde, 19.05.2009* (Copenhagen: Folketinget, 2009).

³² Netredaktion, "Tillykke Grønland," *Sermitsiaq*, May 6, 2008.

³³ Hiroshi Momose et al., eds., *History of North Europe* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppan-sha, 2002), 430 [In Japanese].

³⁴ Henry Stewart, "The Inuit of Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Siberia: The World of Tundra," in *Lectures on Indigenous Peoples of the World - The First Peoples Today: 07 North America*, ed. Torao Tomita et al. (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2005), 230 [In Japanese].

compromise and mutual agreement. But what does this exactly mean? To facilitate understanding of this question, it is worth mentioning the opinion of Makoto Murai, who has been observing Danish society from a historian's viewpoint. Murai, while discussing the generation of 1968, explained how the existence of *the other* is viewed in the Danish society. In his words, "the 1968 generation" refers to:

students and other young people of that time who were influenced by the May revolution that began in the Latin Quarter of Paris, who created what is known as "the rebellion of the young" with the purpose of reexamining commonly accepted ideas and conventions and reforming the society, and who resorted to extreme demonstrations while demanding a further removal of unnatural elements, restrictions of freedom and discrimination inherent in the affluent and tranquil "peace-loving" Danish society, that seemed like the greatest paradise that could possibly be created by human benevolence.³⁵

The postwar Danish society they built possesses cultural traits such as "the negation of the existing tranquil, peaceful society, demands for more freedoms, negation of the authority, complete gender equality, respect for the socially disadvantaged, and curiosity directed at the removal of the prejudice toward that which is different."³⁶ These cultural factors have led to the emergence of the thinking in which one should not violate the right of others to do what one does not agree with and does not do.³⁷ Murai calls this "the flexibility of the value system."³⁸

Robert Kuttner, the co-founder and co-editor of the magazine *The American Prospect*, in his broad examination of Danish political and cultural history, points out that "Denmark has socialist elements, but at the same time also possesses a very libertarian culture in which one is given the greatest freedoms, as long as one does not violate the rights of others."³⁹ This means that the Danish society attaches greatest value to individual freedoms, while simultaneously aspiring for equality and minimal social disparity. The beauty of it is that the two do not exist as opposite poles, but coexist together. Of course, in recent years xenophobic tendencies have become apparent as shown by the fact that far right parties such as the Danish People's Party have gained greater social influence, so the treatment of the other in Denmark is not uniform. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the idea of bestowing maximum freedoms on individuals as long as they do not violate others people's rights pervades Danish society. The distinctive nature of the Danish society, which is, as clearly stated by Murai and Kuttner, at once socialist and libertarian, has been an important element shaping the words and deeds of the Danish government in regards to its respect for the will of the Greenlandic people.

³⁵ Makoto Murai, "The Generation of '68: The People Who Changed Denmark," in *Sixty-eight Chapters for Getting to Know Denmark*, ed. Makoto Murai (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2009), 114–115 [In Japanese].

³⁶ Makoto Murai, "Observing Danish Society," *Balto-Scandia [Hokuou-shi Kenkyu]* 24 (2007): 226 [In Japanese].

³⁷ Murai, "Observing Danish Society," 226.

³⁸ Murai, "The Generation of '68," 118.

³⁹ Robert Kuttner, "The Copenhagen Consensus: Reading Adam Smith in Denmark," *Ronza Magazine* May (2008): 282 [In Japanese].

The Attitude of Non-Interference

If so, how has this Danish attitude of respect for Greenlanders' will been expressed in actual political venues? As an interesting example that illustrates this, we can cite the problem of whaling in Denmark's relations with the EU (i.e., the issue of subsistence whaling by indigenous people). In Greenland, the Thule Inuit have engaged in whaling since around 1200 A.D. Among them, whale meat, which contains proteins, iron and fatty acids, has been consumed as a staple food, while whale oil, bones and hair have been used as subsistence goods. Enjoying the benefits of the quota intended for fulfilling the subsistence needs of indigenous people, Greenland continued whaling with the approval of the international community even after the whale-sanctifying ideology according to which whales should not be used for humanity's purposes became prevalent in 1970s. Denmark, although not a whaling country like Norway, Japan or Iceland, has honored Greenland's wishes in this matter to the fullest extent and has tolerated its whaling. Even when in 2008 the European Council of Environmental Ministers called for a strengthening of whale protection around the world,⁴⁰ Denmark did not align itself with the rest of the EU member states. In fact, at the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission: IWC held that year, Denmark expressed the highest respect for Greenland's request for a new quota for hunting humpback whales by taking the stance that this was subsistence whaling by an indigenous people in accordance with Declaration No. 25 attached to the "Final Act of the Treaty on European Union" (Maastricht Treaty). There are opinions that, due to the problem of whaling, Denmark's isolation within the EU is deepening,⁴¹ because it has, for quite a while, been prone to unilateral action in that matter. Nonetheless, Mikaela Engell, who is in charge of Greenland in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explained the reason why her country supported whaling in Greenland by stating, "Denmark, as a sovereign state that contains an autonomous territory, is required to conduct balanced governance."⁴²

From the above example it is possible to glean Denmark's attitude of respect for Greenland's wishes. But, what is even more interesting is that Denmark tends to show that respect not by fully agreeing with Greenland's wishes, but mostly by not interfering. For example, Ole Samsing from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who served as the representative of the Danish government at the EU and the IWC, rather than calling the practice of whaling in Greenland righteous or expressing understanding for the whaling culture itself, opined that it makes no sense to interfere with cultural preferences such as that.⁴³ As for the claim by the World Society for the Protection of Animals that Greenland's whale products are being widely distributed in exchange for money, and that in that sense Greenland's whaling contains a commercial aspect and is in breach of the temporary ban (moratorium) on commercial whaling, Samsing remarked, "That might be and might not be true," but

⁴⁰ European Union, "Strong EU Support for the Protection of Whales (IP/08/896)," *European Commission Press Release Database* (2008). Accessed March 13, 2015: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-08-896_en.htm?locale=en

⁴¹ "Uenighed om Hvalfangst Truer med at Splitte IWC," *Grønlandsposten*, June 10, 2008, 10.

⁴² Interview with Mikaela Engell from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 25, 2008.

⁴³ Interview with Ole Samsing from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 25, 2009.

that “the important thing is to respect the will of the people who live there.” In short, Samsing placed emphasis on the very act of honoring the will of Greenlanders without questioning the commerciality of its whaling. Denmark’s approach of accepting and respecting Greenland’s will without intervening has been evaluated by the Japanese social scientist Yuumi Suzuki as a dereliction of responsibility.⁴⁴ Good or bad, Greenland’s autonomy has been cultivated in the absence of intervention.

Preservation of the Danish State

Attention should be paid to the fact that “nonintervention” here does not mean that Denmark is not intervening in any matters, but, rather, that it tends to be tolerant in matters that do not directly affect Danish internal affairs. Statements by former Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen in the Danish Parliament capture this point nicely. For example, at the council “Denmark, Greenland and the Future” held in January 2003, Rasmussen based the discussion on the enhancement of Greenland’s autonomy on the premise that the Danish state will be preserved.⁴⁵ Of course, the preservation of the Danish state and Greenland’s acquisition of greater powers do not necessarily contradict each other. Nonetheless, in his speech, Rasmussen emphasized “maintaining the centrifugal force of the Danish state.” Furthermore, in a written reply to a question by a delegate of the Red-Green Alliance Keld Albrechtsen about Greenland’s external autonomy, Rasmussen expressed respect for the aspirations and self-determination of Greenland by stating that the choice regarding whether Greenland will stay within the confines of the Danish constitution and in the Danish state or not lies with Greenland itself. However, he also clearly stated that both sides shared a common understanding that the enhancement of Greenland’s autonomy was to be achieved within the framework of the Danish state.⁴⁶ Also, in a speech he made during the closing of the Danish parliament session in June 2008, which came after the publishing of a report on Greenland’s home-rule in 2004, Rasmussen, while welcoming the expansion of Greenland’s external autonomy, emphasized that such orientation was being developed based on the premise that Greenland would remain a part of Denmark.⁴⁷ In addition, on the occasion of the opening of the new parliament session in October of the same year, Rasmussen made a positive remark on Greenland’s efforts to deal with diplomatic issues on its own, but at the same time stated that such efforts must be interpreted as a gradual modernization of the framework of the Danish state.⁴⁸

Rasmussen’s statements at the council and in his speeches to the parliament suggest that

⁴⁴ Yuumi Suzuki, *Denmark’s Light and Shadow: Welfare Society and Neoliberalism* (Tokyo: Liberta, 2010), 78 [In Japanese].

⁴⁵ Anders F. Rasmussen, *Statsministerens Tale ved Konferencen ‘Danmark, Grønland og Fremtiden’ den 9. Januar 2003 i Landstingssalen* (Copenhagen: Statsministeriet, 2003), 1.

⁴⁶ Anders F. Rasmussen, *Statsminister Anders Fogh Rasmussens svar på Spørgsmål nr. S 1356 stillet af Keld Albrechtsen (EL). Dato: 20. December 2004* (Copenhagen: Statsministeriet, 2004).

⁴⁷ Anders F. Rasmussen, *Statsminister Anders Fogh Rasmussens tale ved Folketingets Afslutningsdebat 11. juni 2008* (Copenhagen: Statsministeriet, 2008), 4.

⁴⁸ Anders F. Rasmussen, *Statsminister Anders Fogh Rasmussens Åbningstale i Folketinget Tirsdag den 7. Oktober 2008* (Copenhagen: Statsministeriet, 2008), 9.

Denmark will respect Greenland's aspirations as long as it remains within the Danish state. Denmark has indeed been expressing esteem for Greenland's wishes but on the premise that the coherence and unity of the state territory will be maintained. In accordance with that, Denmark has transferred to Greenland broad powers that could potentially have a direct impact on the Danish state's sovereignty, but has kept the right to make final decisions in the fields of diplomacy and security. Thus, a combination of two factors has been at work in Greenland's acquisition of autonomy: Greenland's intention to seek external autonomy that does not necessarily imply autonomy in internal relations, and Denmark's response, which has been respectful of that intention. What is common for both sides is the basic stance of wanting to maintain cooperation *as constituents of the Danish state*.

Recent Changes in the Character of Greenland's Autonomy

Greenland's aspirations to self-determination, that is, its demands for external autonomy, which first emerged in the 1970s, had been for a long time the basic form of its movement for autonomy. In other words, how to behave in external relations while depending on Denmark in internal relations had been the premise of Greenland's actions. However, in recent years a dramatic change has started to occur due to environmental transformations brought about by climate change and the increasing possibility of the exploitation of natural resources such as oil and minerals. In this section, by facilitating the understanding of the trends in Greenland's external autonomy, I wish to examine a portion of the structure of Greenland's autonomy and the changes it is undergoing.

London Mining and the Self-Rule Government

Oil and mining industries are becoming increasingly active in Greenland as a result of transformations in its environment brought about by climate change in recent years. It is estimated that Greenland not only lies on 1,010 billion barrels of oil, which is the equivalent of about 42% of the entire reserves of Saudi Arabia, and natural gas, but that more than 75 metals and minerals such as gold, rubidium, diamonds, copper, olivine, marble and platinum also available for exploitation. This has attracted the interest of many foreign companies, including European and American firms. If we turn our eye only to the most recent events, we can see that in October 2013 the British resource development firm London Mining invested \$2.35 billion to acquire the exploitation rights for the ISUA iron ore mine, located 150 kilometers northeast of the capital Nuuk. In December of the same year, oil companies Chevron, Shell and GreenPeX jointly won the bid for the offshore mining zone KANUMAS, northeast of Greenland, thus pushing the development of the polar region into full swing. Also, the global producer of aluminum Alcoa is negotiating with the Self-Rule Government about its plan to construct and operate a large smeltery in the southwest town of Maniitsoq. It is virtually impossible to enumerate all the examples of growing economic activity in Greenland (Table 1). Since the waters of the Arctic Ocean, that in the past used to lack market allure due to their being covered with thick ice, and Greenland's ice sheet have started melting, Greenland is now attracting a lot of attention as a new industrial frontier.

The British-financed resource development company London Mining has had an especially strong influence on the structure of Greenland’s autonomy. The company conducted a quick assessment of the impact of its proposed operations on the natural environment and society of Greenland, a feasibility study, and also proactively engaged in talks with the locals,⁴⁹ thus raising the prospects of the exploitation of iron in the ISUA area. The company decided to enter Greenland because its ice sheet had started melting.⁵⁰ The Danish company Kryolitselskabet Øresund, which specializes in excavating and trading cryolite, was the first to discover resources in the ISUA area in



Figure 2: Location of ISUA

Original Source: JOGMEC2013 “Trends in World Mining”

⁴⁹ London Mining, *Whitebook: Hearing Responses from the Hearing Portal for London Mining ISUA Project* (Nuuk: London Mining, 2013).

⁵⁰ Interview with Kaj Kleist, Head of Greenland Branch Office of London Mining, June 24, 2014.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
General survey	6	11	12	12	12	14	14	11	21	25
Ore prospecting	17	19	22	33	29	63	67	71	73	77
Exploitation	-	1	1	2	2	2	3	4	4	4

Table 1: Number of Valid Licenses Issued for the Area of Greenland

Source: List of Mineral and Petroleum Licenses in Greenland, 2013

1965. In 1968 it made a geological map and conducted magnetic and gravity probing (This Company started excavating cryolite in Greenland as early as 1865 in the southern town of Ivittuut). Moreover, the iron ore company Marcona explored the possibility of mining in the area in the 1970s, and in the 1990s Rio Tinto conducted further probing with a focus on hematite. However, none of this led to actual exploitation. This was because of the thick ice covering Greenland, which physically impeded drilling and made the cost-benefit ratio unfavorable. However, recent changes in Greenland's environment have reduced such natural obstacles, and have raised the possibility of real operations in the ISUA area. It is already clear that deposits containing between 950 million and 1.5 billion tons of magnetite and iron ore of high purity (70%) exist there. The project's slurry transport plan that envisages a 100-kilometer long pipeline for the transportation of the ore to a port capable of hosting 250,000-ton ships is now being implemented, and preparations for construction work that would enable all year-round operations are under way. According to Kaj Kleist, head of London Mining's Greenland Office, the pressing issue at this moment is how to find a financing partner in order to acquire the final construction permit. If such a permit is granted, it is estimated that the total amount of royalties in the first 15 years of operations would be \$4.5 billion, while the company's contribution to Greenland's economy would be as high as \$5 billion.⁵¹

Although Greenland is politically a highly autonomous entity, in economic terms, it depends on large financial support consisting of gold from the Danish National Treasury and financial aid from the Danish government, which it receives on an annual basis (and which accounts for approximately 35% of Greenland's Gross Domestic Product). London Mining's inroad into Greenland has invigorated the local government dignitaries, who see it as a perfect opportunity to break out of its dependence on Denmark. At least two attention-worthy developments have taken place in relation to that. One is that groundwork for ensuring smooth communication between London Mining and Greenland's government has been laid.⁵² The Self-Rule Government has, through the former head of the Bureau for Minerals and Petroleum: BMP Hans Kristian Vinding Schønwardt, dispatched Kaj Kleist, who in the past occupied a number of high-ranking positions in the government, to the post of head of the London Mining Greenland Branch. Schønwardt, who served as the BMP Minister for seven years from 1998 to 2005, taught at Denmark's Aarhus University as an

⁵¹ London Mining, *London Minings Forretningsplan* (Nuuk: London Mining, no date).

⁵² Interview with Kaj Kleist, 2014.

expert in geological economics from 1977 to 1987, and then worked as a consultant in resource development companies Nordic Mining and Norsk Hydro. When London Mining, at the beginning of this century, turned its attention to ISUA and devised a plan to open a branch office in Nuuk, Schönwandt, who also had connections with that British firm, handpicked Kleist as a person who is well versed in the local politics of the region, having long held important positions in the local government.⁵³ Since he had private connections with Schönwandt, Kleist waited until reaching the retirement age of 65 before becoming chief of the London Mining Branch Office in 2009, and he has since contributed to building a continuous relationship with the Self-Rule Government.

Another important development is the enactment of the law concerning legal persons involved in the construction of large-scale projects, popularly known as the “Large Scale Act.” This act stipulates that Greenland can on its own make decisions regarding the acquisition of labor force and the setting of the minimum wage in projects such as the exploration, refinement and sale of oil, natural gas and ore, or the establishment of an aluminum smelting and processing plant. The act was passed in the parliament in December 2012.⁵⁴ The then Prime Minister of the Self-Rule Government Jakob Edvard Kuupik Kleist took the lead in these efforts and secured the assent of the local inhabitants as well as the understanding of the Danish Parliament.⁵⁵ He hoped to alleviate the labor shortage that arose as a consequence of the implementation of large-scale projects and to enable Greenland to quickly start enjoying the wealth created by the natural resources industry by employing a cheap (mostly Chinese) labor force (London Mining and Alcoa each submitted a proposal for hiring 2,300 and 3,000 Chinese laborers, respectively).⁵⁶ During the public campaign for the enactment of that law, praises were sung to the economic autonomy and independence from Denmark.⁵⁷

The Large Scale Act was largely accepted in Denmark, although some opposition could be heard.⁵⁸ Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt from the Social Democratic Party, although stating concern that Greenland might be facing an extremely serious situation since it seemed to be dreaming of an oil bubble,⁵⁹ nonetheless expressed support for Kleist’s actions by noting that the authority regarding the development of natural resources lies with Greenland based on Article 7 of the Autonomy Law implemented in 2009, which deals with the ownership of nonliving resources. Although among experts there were some who expressed the view that Greenland would not be able

⁵³ Kaj Kleist was born in November 1943, in Qaqortoq in south Greenland. At the beginning of the 1980s, as a member of the Siumut party, he was involved in activities aimed at keeping Greenland outside the EC. In the run-up to the 1982 referendum, he was one of the party members at the center of the campaign resisting the entry of Greenland into the EC. Since the 1990s, he has occupied the position of undersecretary in each of the respective government cabinets.

⁵⁴ Kurt Kristensen, ”Så Blev Storskalaloven Vedtaget,” *Sermitsiaq*, December 7, 2012.

⁵⁵ Kuupik Kleist served as Prime Minister of the Self-Rule Government from 2009 to 2013.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth C. Economy, “Paula Briscoe: Greenland – China’s Foothold in Europe?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 1, 2013.

⁵⁷ Interview with Mimi Karlsen from the Self-Rule Government, December 7, 2012.

⁵⁸ Redaktion (Ritzau), ”Thorning Støtter Grønlands Storskalalov,” *Information*, January 8, 2013.

⁵⁹ Rosa Thorsen, ”Grønland i en Meget Alvorlig Situation,” *Sermitsiaq*, February 22, 2013.

to deal with harsh international relations and to negotiate with oil and mining companies on its own,⁶⁰ Schmidt was of the opinion that being an autonomous agent entailed taking on such duties and responsibilities, and said that Denmark was ready to offer its support to Greenland, if necessary. However, the largest opposition party in Greenland Siumut, led by Aleqa Hammond, expressed opposition to the Large Scale Act on the grounds that it would create a framework that would exclude the local people, deprive Greenland's workers of employment opportunities, and invite dumping. Furthermore, the party pointed out that there were numerous elements in the act itself that should not be overlooked, such as the fact that it did not require the signing of a labor agreement as a condition for employment. This would leave open the possibility of London Mining or other resource development firms imposing unfair labor conditions and employment rules on the workers. However, despite the criticism, Kleist managed to secure the support of Atassut, the Democratic and other parties, and have the act adopted in the Parliament. Later, he continued the push for its implementation.

However, a majority of Greenlanders voted for Siumut, which had criticized the act on the grounds that it left out the locals, in general elections in 2013, thus putting a stop to the activities of Kleist and his supporters. Siumut did not achieve a majority vote in the Parliament on its own, but did surpass Kleist's Inuit Ataqatigiit Party by obtaining 12,910 votes, which is 42.8% of the eligible voters. Siumut's leader Hammond accomplished a great leap by winning as many as 6,818 votes, compared to 1,488 at the general elections four years earlier. The reason why she was able to win such an overwhelming support was that she kept emphasizing the need to proactively continue resource development (i.e., continue large scale projects) while prioritizing the employment of Greenlanders. Hammond (and by extension, her Siumut party) won the approval of many local inhabitants by claiming that industrial projects as championed by Kleist did not sufficiently take into consideration the rights and needs of Greenlanders. It should be noted, however, that there is an affinity between Hammond and Kleist in the sense that they both seek to link the wealth created by resource industry with the push for economic self-reliance and political independence. Hammond has suggested the possibility of Greenland's becoming independent in 2021, 300 years after becoming a Danish colony in 1721, and has spoken of natural resources on its territory and in the North Sea as a means for propping its independence.⁶¹ In that sense, the switch from Kleist's to Hammond's regime is but a minor change. Hammond won 5,330 more votes than before by showing clear support for the protection of Greenlanders' rights. However, the expectations regarding natural resources found in Kleist present an extremely important factor in her thinking too.

After the 2013 general elections, Hammond became the first female Prime Minister of Greenland. Upon election, she responded positively to a request by London Mining, submitted through its Greenland Branch Office chief Kaj Kleist, for a contract regarding benefit sharing that contains provisions for the number and type of workers to be employed and the concrete length of the

⁶⁰ See Martin Breum and Jorgen Chemnitz, "No, Greenland Does Not Belong to China," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2013.

⁶¹ Interview with Aleqa Hammond from the Home-Rule Government, March 25, 2008.

planned project. Namely, London Mining submitted a plan for the employment of a 1,000 to 3,000 strong work force that would be immediately given work, and for holding a training program that would educate skilled workers. The plan lays out the employment conditions for the coming three years of construction work: the hourly wage of 80 Danish krone (which is the minimum wage in Denmark) with food and housing provided, and envisages a screening period for examining workers' qualification before the actual hiring, as well as consultations with Greenland's Labor Union (SIK).⁶² President of the SIK Jess G. Berthelsen now sits in London Mining's advisory board, and the British company aims to conduct preparations for the beginning of operations while maintaining good relations not only with Hammond and the Self-Rule Government, but with the SIK, too.⁶³ Also, in October 2013, under the leadership of Prime Minister Hammond, the 25 year long ban on uranium exploitation (the zero tolerance policy) was abolished, and Greenland started moving towards the creation of a resource management system and the realization of large scale development projects that includes the possibility of exporting uranium and other radioactive substances to foreign countries.⁶⁴

It should be noted that Hammond was forced to leave the Prime Minister's post on 30 September 2014 due to suspicion that she was involved in the embezzlement of public funds. Nonetheless, it would be an oversimplification and a misstep in terms of understanding the essence of the matter if we were to think that the policies and institutions she had pushed for suddenly disappeared. In fact, Siumut, led by Hammond's successor Kim Kielsen, won the general elections held on 28 November 2014 (Table 2). Hammond's political actions should be understood as, to a large degree, a continuation of Kleist's policies, and certainly not as bringing change to the political trends in Greenland.

Rethinking Internal Autonomy

The above citation of recent examples of resource development in Greenland sheds light on the activities regarding its internal autonomy, an issue that has until recently been pushed aside. In the Greenland of recent years the establishment of an autonomy that encompasses the field of internal relations has become a pressing matter since Greenland acutely feels the need to directly negotiate with many foreign actors such as London Mining about its nonliving resources. In other words, Greenland, which has come to contain many industrial frontier outlets in recent years, now has to

Atassut	1,919	6.50%
Democrats	3,469	11.80%
Inuit Ataqatigiit	9,783	33.20%
Partii Inuit	477	1.60%
Partii Naleraq	3,423	11.60%
Siumut	10,108	34.30%
Others	22	0.10%

Table 2: The Voting Result

Source: valg.gl

⁶² London Mining, *ISUA Ore Mine Project Greenland* (Nuuk: London Mining, no date).

⁶³ Interview with Kaj Kleist, 2014.

⁶⁴ Naalakkersuisut, *Grønlands olie- og Mineralstrategi 2014-2018, FM 2014/133* (Nuuk: Naalakkersuisut, 2014).

obtain powers for dealing with issues inside its territory (i.e., internal autonomy) in order to be able to independently solve problems concerning the exploitation of nonliving resources and deal with foreign resource development companies (i.e., in order to enhance and deepen the right to negotiate with external entities – the external autonomy). Greenland is thus now forced to reexamine the status of its internal autonomy. This need is manifested, among others, in the implementation of the Large Scale Act and London Mining's promotion of large-scale projects.

The situation of today, in which Greenland's internal autonomy is also becoming the object of discussion, calls into question various existing resource development measures and implies rethinking the framework of the Danish state itself, which has thus far been based on the coordination between Greenland's external autonomy and Denmark's stance of respect for Greenland's wishes.⁶⁵ In closing this paper, I wish to point out that the structure of Greenland's autonomy, in the past characterized by avoidance of posing questions regarding internal autonomy, is now disappearing. Nowadays, in discussions about whether Greenland should act in unison with Denmark or achieve independence can be seen occasionally, and this binary opposition between "integration" and "separation" found in them implies that the distinctive feature of Greenland's autonomy – aspiring for external autonomy without pursuing internal autonomy – is fading. It is not easy to judge whether this is only a temporary phenomenon brought about by a group of politicians who are advocating independence, or whether this means that the very substance of Greenland's autonomy has changed. However, as could be heard in Hammond's statement that "Greenland has never before received so much international attention and has never been placed at the center of international relations to this extent,"⁶⁶ it is certain that the dynamic events regarding resource development in recent years have led Greenland into an environment it had never experienced before.

Concluding Remarks

By dividing autonomy into the concepts of internal and external autonomy and by using them as a point of reference in our argument, this paper aimed to shed light on the reasoning behind Greenland's external autonomy. Greenland's external autonomy did not emerge in opposition to Denmark. Rather, it was characterized by attempts at enhancing or maximizing autonomy while actively embracing its dependence on Denmark. However, activities for the development of natural resources have, in recent years, been spurned by climate change and transformations in Greenland's environment, thus providing the impetus to Greenland's internal autonomy that had previously been neglected.

Kaj Kleist from London Mining, who has strong connections with the Self-Rule Government, has in an interview with the author of this paper conveyed the mood of the entire society of

⁶⁵ Ilisimatusarfik-Grønlands Universitet og Københavns Universitet, *Til Gavn for Grønland – Udvalget for Samfundsgavnlig Udnyttelse af Grønlands Naturressourcer* (Nuuk and Copenhagen: Ilisimatusarfik og Københavns Universitet, 2014).

⁶⁶ Aleqa Hammond, "Epilog: En stærk Grønlandsk Stemme," *Grønlands Nye Internationale Rolle / Magasinet Europa* (2013): 34.

Greenland by saying that: “It is true that Greenland has certain misgivings towards our company because it hasn’t had the experience of hosting large-scale development projects so far.” However, he also stressed that the opposition to resource development in the polar region is limited only to some environment and animal protection groups.⁶⁷ Based on public hearings in which the reaction of locals was not at all negative,⁶⁸ Kleist also predicts that the large-scale developing project by his firm will go ahead without hindrance.

In June 2014, Greenland celebrated its 35th anniversary of the acquisition of the right to home/self-rule. U.S. geographer Laurence Smith has called the polar region north of the 45th north parallel “the new North” and has predicted that this area would become the central stage of international politics.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, can Greenland, while keeping an eye on international affairs, really become a blueprint for a future in which economic development and political autonomy are well balanced by negotiating with external entities? Greenland is now at a crucial juncture in which this question will be answered.

⁶⁷ Interview with Kaj Kleist, 2014.

⁶⁸ London Mining, *Whitebook*.

⁶⁹ Laurence C. Smith, *The World in 2050: Four Forces Shaping Civilization’s Northern Future* (New York: Dutton Adult, 2010).