Greenland’s Future
Narratives of Natural Resource Development
in the 1900s until the 1960s

Janina Priebe

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Fakultetsopponent: Docent Matthias Heymann,
Center for Videnskabsstudier, Institut for Matematik, Aarhus
Universitet, Danmark.

Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies
Organization
Umeå University
Department of
Historical, Philosophical
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Author
Janina Priebe

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Abstract
This doctoral thesis identifies and analyzes narratives of Greenland’s future that emerged in the context of developing and modernizing the dependency’s natural resources industries in the 1900s until the 1960s. After almost two centuries of Danish colonial rule, the turn of the 20th century witnessed a profound change in Greenland’s governance. Although contested at first, the notion of cultural progress increasingly linked developing a modern industry to a productive economy under Danish auspices. Ideas of modernity that connected rationalities of the market with political power and science were unparalleled in the colonial discourse on Greenland’s future. How were the development of Greenland’s natural resource industries and its role in Danish governance debated? Which narratives emerged in this context? As the studies in this compilation thesis suggest, the rationalities of science, markets, and power became entangled in an unprecedented way during these decades, creating new ways to imagine Greenland’s future.

The first paper analyzes the application of a private stakeholder group of Copenhagen’s financial and economic elite for access to Greenland as a private, for-profit venture to extract and trade with the colony’s living resources in 1905. The motif of an Arctic scramble was constructed through the authority of science, still resonating in the debate on rare earth mining today. The second paper identifies the business relationships between the group’s members, connecting major Danish financial institutes and private economic interests in the late 19th and early 20th century. The third paper focuses on the commercialization of Greenlandic fisheries in the 1910s until the late 1920s and the fisheries scientist Adolf Severin Jensen (1866-1953). Jensen’s work is an example of how applied sciences connected both scientific and political agendas, carried out in a colonial setting.

The fourth paper focuses on the narrative analysis of (Danish-language) Greenlandic newspaper coverage of Qullissat between 1942 and 1968. Representations of the coal mine and nearby settlement on Greenland’s west coast, which were closed down in 1972, are at the center of this study. While the coal mine was presented as a Danish success to establish an independent energy supply and to introduce modernization measures, it was presented as a Greenlandic failure to adapt to modern demands of economic productivity in the years leading up to its closure.

Keywords
Greenland, modernization, narrative, fisheries, colonial history, mining, state monopoly, natural resources, 20th-century history of Greenland, history of science and ideas

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