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How journalism forgets: on the journalistic representation of colonial biopower in Greenland

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a postcolonial and feminist analysis of 44 newspaper articles published between 1965 and 2022 about “the coil campaign” in Greenland, which fitted Greenlandic Inuit women with the IUD in the 1960s and 1970s, at times without their knowledge or consent. Using a media archive search and conducting a discursive analysis, we explore how journalistic reporting and debates enabled a discourse of colonial virtues and modernization processes deemed necessary, which in turn supported the medical practice. Moreover, the historical media archives show us that journalism not only uncovers these harsh truths and hold politicians accountable but also helps support postcolonial politics and discourses, such as the discourses underpinning the coil campaign to begin with.

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Introduction

To some, journalism is the first draft of history. To others, newspapers are for wrapping fish the following morning. When the Danish broadcasting corporation, Danmarks Radio (DR), in the summer of 2022 released five episodes of the podcast series Spiralkampagnen (the coil campaign), it won prizes and enabled examination of the postcolonial policies and practices of population control in Greenland in the 1960s and 1970s. The podcast uncovered how the Danish administration of the Greenlandic region had carried out a population control measure that entailed fitting nearly half the Greenlandic-Inuit female population in the reproductive age with IUDs. Outrage ensued, when the podcast reported that girls as young as 13 years old were offered and fitted with the coil—some, it turned out later, without their consent. Greenland was a colony of Denmark–Norway and Denmark until 1953 when it was pronounced a county of Denmark. In 1979, the country was granted home rule within the Danish realm and in 2009 self-government. Although, no longer a colony, Greenland continues to be administered from Copenhagen on

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certain political issues, such as foreign policy.¹ Consequently, the disclosure of the coil fitting practice added another layer to at times contentious relationship between the former colonizer and colonized.

Possibly drafting a new chapter of the historical relationship, the journalistic podcast set in motion events of postcolonial reconciliation and reparation. At the time of writing, an independent research committee has been instituted to thoroughly investigate the political decision-making behind the practice, the legal, administrative, and medical foundation for the practice, and how the process was experienced by the Greenlandic-Inuit women involved. Moreover, scholarship and activism are starting to critically engage in the topic (see Naja Dyrendom Graugaard and Amalie Ambrosius Høgfeldt 2023). However, the podcast was not the first time the coil campaign had been journalistically covered and discussed. A search in the Danish journalistic archive, Mediestream, reveals that the campaign had been the topic of political and public debate ever since the conception of the idea in the 1960s. Moreover, the potential implications for the women's reproductive health were well known and reported in Danish newspapers at the time. Arguably, this half a century worth of news and debate were forgotten and keeping fishes wrapped.

In this article, we explore the research question: with what postcolonial and feminist discursive implications did Danish newspapers cover the rolling out and continued practice of fitting the female Greenlandic-Inuit population with IUDs—i.e., the coil campaign—from its inception in the 60s to the 90s²? We want to know to what extent, and in what different ways, the journalistic reporting and debates enabled, tacitly supported, or challenged a discourse of colonial virtues and necessary modernization processes, which in turn supported the medical practice. Based on a discursive analysis of journalistic coverage of the case, we recover the forgotten narrative and argue that while journalism has the potential to remember historical transgressions and give voice to people who have been wronged, journalism has also been part of forgetting historical and technological policies and practices. As a discursive power, journalism played an active role in the modernization reasoning and process, which supported the coil campaign. Thereby journalism helped the initial silencing of the victims of the postcolonial population control. While Danish politicians today seemingly recognize the Danish culpability in Greenlandic-Inuit women's distress due to the 2022 journalistic podcast and the critique it produced, previous journalistic coverage helped enable the very practices that now call on acts of responsibility and apology.

To unfold our argument, we begin by addressing the intersecting theories on journalism's social and political role and how it is challenged by postcolonial theory, followed by postcolonial theory's ongoing discussion with feminist theory, and what these feminist postcolonial issues look like in the case of Greenland. These theoretical mappings are brought to bear on the empirical data using a qualitative discursive approach to the reading of the Danish newspaper articles. The national and regional newspapers and the podcast are professional journalistic products produced within the Danish media system, which has been characterized as the "democratic corporatist model" (Daniel C Hallin and Paolo Mancini 2004). The media system model explains the relationship between media institutions and political systems in different countries. However, the soft and historically founded power relations of postcolonial representations are to be found, we believe, in a postcolonial critique of journalistic practices, which is why we chart the territory of the critical intersections of journalism and postcolonialism in the theoretical framework that follows.

Theoretical framework

Journalism's tension with postcolonialism

Since professionalization of the journalistic practice in the late 19th century, the social and political role of traditional journalism has been to address an imagined community (Benedict Anderson 1991) and to unify the public (Géraldine Muhlmann 2008). The appeal to the largest number of audience and the desire to bring people together is what Muhlmann (2008, 6) calls unifying journalism, which “means honouring a pact with the public, which allows journalists to aspire to a collectively acceptable approach” (10). To produce a unified “we” and community, journalism adheres to professionalized standards and practices—such as objectivity and balanced reporting—to appropriately inform and educate a citizenry, argues Muhlmann (see also Brian McNair 2005). Consequently, the public comes to believe the journalistic reporting to be true “regardless of their [the readers’] ideology or political bias” (McNair 2005, 32). However, this is only half the story. Taking the United States as a starting point, Juan González and Joseph Torres (2011) show how from the very beginning of journalistic professionalization the journalistic narratives and the unified “we” they produced catered to a white majority by using stereotypes flippantly and believing in the neutrality of technology (3, 137–143). The advent of the telegraph, in this manner, fostered “a change in the actual content and style of news reporting, so that racial stereotyping and the white racial narrative became systemic and widespread in American journalism” (137). Journalism, the argument goes, produces a unified public “we” as well as an external “them” outlining the boundaries of the nation state. Concomitantly, while the journalistic practice and professionalization emerged and grew with the modern nation state, a postcolonial perspective may challenge the perceived boundaries of the nation state on which professional journalism is predicated (Bolette B. Blaagaard 2018, 2).

Postcolonial theory is fundamentally critical of modernity and of Western hegemonic knowledge production, which it seeks to deconstruct (Homi Bhabha 1994; Gurinder K. Bhabra 2014; Edward Said 1978). Western knowledge is produced by claiming an invisible but universal standpoint which constructs the Western subject as the norm and everyone else as other—thus sustaining the position of power held by the Western subject and culture. Postcolonial critiques have argued that journalistic discourses and representation of postcolonial subjects are paramount to the production of national identity and feelings of belonging (Said 1978, 1997). Moreover, sexual differentiation underscores and upholds the hierarchical relationship between Western subjectivity and its Others (Anne McClintock 1995; Meyda Yegenoglu 1998). Journalism’s role in this claim and in maintenance of power cannot be understated (Bolette B. Blaagaard 2020, 311; González and Torres 2011, 160). Postcolonial critique aims to bring to light alternative, subaltern sites of knowledge production, which may take different formats and have different sources. The selection of journalistic sources and voices is pivotal to power construction in news journalism discourse (Bob Franklin and Matt Carlson 2010). González and Torres (2011) convincingly map out the diverse tapestry of American minority media through history, while Blaagaard (2018) focuses on a Danish case of colonial journalism. All do they show the alternative “we” produced through journalism by conducting historical counter-readings (Edward Said 1997, 163–7), i.e., the authors seek to understand

the world from the perspective of (post)colonial and (post)settler history and its political and economic implications and stay sensitive to the perspective of postcolonial subjectivities (Blaagaard 2020, 315). In this way, postcolonial readings of journalistic newspaper articles bring awareness to and seek to deconstruct the constructed and sustained power relations between the discursive “we” and “them” of the articles and their social and political implications.

What may be identified in the postcolonial counter-reading is *coloniality*, which Anibal Quijano argues “is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed” (Aníbal Quijano 2007, 170). Coloniality is the persistence of hierarchical cultural, political, and epistemological power relations between the former colonizers and the former colonized peoples and societies. Counter-readings allow for an extrication of “oneself from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all the power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people,” writes Quijano (2007), 177). As “the glue that binds parts of society together” (Marcel Broersma and Chris Peters 2013, 4) and as the twin of modernity, journalism is part and parcel of the discursive reproduction and preservation of coloniality. Journalism both reports on established knowledges founded in colonial power relations but is moreover itself a product of that established knowledge production, blind as it sometimes is to its own power and positioning. From a postcolonial perspective, the postcolonial historical and sexualized context is foundational to journalistic discourses, because of the continued impact of colonialism. At the same time, postcolonial critique seeks to deconstruct journalistic discourses by reading the Western narrative and national identity construction against the grain (Lawrence Grossberg 2002; Said 1978).

Postcolonialism & feminism

Postcolonial theory has overlaps and imbrications with another social critique: that of feminism. “[C]olonialism, imperialism, and male supremacy have persistently represented gender in racial or colonial terms and racial and colonial relations in gender terms” (Sandra Harding 2009, 401). However, the two fields rarely interact when it comes to researching and theorizing science and technology’s implications and power, believes Sandra Harding. She proposes a conjoined conceptual framework, in which women’s lives and experiences are taken as a starting point for research and knowledge production. While the female (reproductive) body has played a central role in the building of the modern nation state, women as subjects have not had agency in the production. Rather “the role of women has been the subject of various modes of politicisation of *inter alia* reproduction (and sterilisation) as a tool of eugenics” (Patricia Rawlinson 2016, 429. Italics in original). This is true even more so of colonized women and it persists through the dominion of coloniality. The female body continues to be a “political-biological actor” for disease and demographic control, which becomes subjected to state regulations reinforced through “biopatriarchal” norms and discourses, writes Patricia Rawlinson (430, 436) in her study examining the contemporary roll-out of the HPV vaccine in “developing” regions. Rawlinson writes:

[These discourses] repudiate dissenting voices, framing the right to refuse, the seeking of alternative modes of healthcare beyond pharmaceuticalisation or the demanding of health systems that serve the diverse needs of women, locally, culturally and racially as unreasonable, and, by extension, a rejection of achieving gender equality and human rights. (436)

Francoise Vergés equally traces how pregnancies of black women in the French colony of Reunion were being forcefully terminated by French doctors in the 1970s. An activity that moreover was ignored by white French feminist at the time (Francoise Vergés 2020). Events that likewise have to be seen taking place at a time when population politics through family planning was introduced by means of donor programs and the UN, all over the developing world aiming at decreasing poverty, but also decreasing populations in previous colonies such as Bangladesh (Michelle Murphy 2017). While colonial, Western women's reproduction is policed using discourses of naturalness and unnaturalness, beauty and even monstrosity (Stine W. Adrian, Charlotte Krøløkke and Janne R. Herrmann 2021), colonized women's bodies are moreover controlled using white bodies, heteronormative models of sex and perceived emancipatory desires as standard (Kim TallBear 2018). Western, white feminism, in this way, becomes enrolled in the patriarchal and neoliberal pursuit of controlling and commercializing colonized women's bodies in the name of Western health practices and feminist emancipation and human rights.

Consequently, the familiar binary of colonizer-colonized may pose problems when gender is taken into account, argues McClintock (1995) in her influential analysis, in which she insists on the intimate relation between imperial power and resistance; money and sexuality; race and gender. McClintock argues that the categories come into existence in and through relations to each other and cannot be conflated to the same categories. "They exist in intimate, reciprocal and contradictory relations" (McClintock 1995, 5). Colonial, white women were "ambiguously placed within this process" of imperialism. They possessed decided, if borrowed, power over colonized women and men (6). Moreover, colonized men and women did not experience imperialism the same way (6). Because colonized women experienced disadvantage in their original culture they had to negotiate their new position in imperial hierarchies differently from their male counterparts, argues McClintock. In this light, it is necessary to understand coloniality in a nuanced and grounded perspective to avoid binaries to simply invert power relations rather than overturning them (15). The governing theme of Western imperialism is always intertwined: "the transmission of white male power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital" (1, 3).

Analyses, as the ones referenced above, show the tight relationship and interdependencies of postcolonial and women's theories and perspectives. They show how the role of technology, science and knowledge production is played out on women's bodies. This holds true for Danish (post)colonial history and relations. In her rebuke to scholarly arguments supporting Danish colonial exceptionalism, Christina Petterson (2016) shows that not only journalism and medical science but also anthropological studies have supported the hierarchical structures of colonial violence and racism by reinforcing status quo: "From the very beginning of Danish colonialism in Greenland, the Danish colonial administration and mission intervened in Greenlandic everyday affairs and attempted to

control marriage, reproduction and labour” (Petterson 2016, 39). Although, colonies in the southern and northern hemispheres differ in their commercial endeavors, the colonial “construction of a superior metropolitan culture and an inferior periphery, a progressive and advanced metropolitan self versus a backwards, or static, and primitive colonial other” (Lars Jensen 2018, 57) supports a compatible set of hierarchies structuring the colonial spaces. Not realizing and acting to deconstruct these hierarchies amounts to reinforcing them and “ignores the already racialised nature of European self-definition, of which it is a product” (Petterson 2016, 39). In this manner, postcolonial and feminist deconstruction becomes an ethical imperative to scholars and arguably to journalists.

Method

To understand the role of journalistic discourses in the production and maintenance of coloniality, we explore the research question: With what postcolonial and feminist discursive implications do Danish newspapers cover the rolling out and continued practice of fitting the female Greenlandic-Inuit population with IUDs—i.e., the coil campaign—from its inception in the 60s to the 90s? A search on the terms *spiral* (coil) and *Grønland* (Greenland) in the time frame from 1960 to 2022 in the Danish news archive Mediestream gave us 44 articles published between 1965 and 1994 in Danish national and regional newspapers. Our sample shows that from 1994 until 2022 articles about the coil campaign disappeared from public debate until its reemergence with the podcast shedding new light and reversing the discourse. Our study focuses on the early journalistic reporting, adding the podcast as way of discussion.

Although the first search resulted in 532 articles a close read revealed a vast number of overlaps and reprints in the articles. Moreover, the Danish word for coil is also the word for the shape and movement of a spiral, which produced many irrelevant articles.

We approach the research question and articles using a qualitative methodology inspired by Stuart Hall’s (1997/2002) reading of the Foucauldian discursive approach, which allows us to see interweaving meaning-making processes as they combined create the colonial fabric. An initial read-through and coding of the articles readily revealed a thematic division following a temporal development of the decades of publications: i.e., the biomedical theme was followed by the managerial theme, which in turn was succeeded by the self-congratulatory frames. The articles were coded using color coding and notes.

Schematically, our findings may be visualized as in [Figure 1](#) below:

	<i>Mid-60s</i>	<i>Late-60s</i>	<i>70s/80s/90s</i>	<i>2022 podcast</i>
<i>Discourse based on Danish elite sources</i>	Infantilization of Greenlandic-Inuit women	Demographics and reproduction as infrastructure	Self-congratulatory modernization and bio-political strategies	Journalistic protagonists doing detective work
			<i>Late-70s</i>	<i>2022 podcast</i>
<i>Discourse involving Greenlandic-Inuit women and men</i>			Journalistic confusion by the Greenlandic-Inuit position followed by silence	Journalistic initiative followed by political action

Figure 1. Discourses identified by qualitative analysis of 44 articles and a five episodes podcast. The grey area is presented in the section entitled ‘discussion’.

Taking these themes as starting points for the discursive analysis, we read the articles for usage of sources and their positioning in the articles (Franklin and Carlson 2010; Gaye Tuchman 2002) the journalistic rhetoric and repetitions of metaphors, stereotypes, and representations (Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts 1978; Hall 1997/2002) of Inuit population, Danish administration, and gender. Finally, we identify repeated arguments and supposed expert knowledge underpinning the articles, revealing their power of definition. This second reading allowed us to read against the grain of the journalistic angle to the story and identify discourses constructing the postcolonial relationship. Informed by the critical literature in postcolonial and feminist theory iterated in the literature review above, our reading focused on the construction of Greenlandic-Inuit women in relation to reproductive control and family planning and sought to deconstruct the narrative of the colonial relationship between Danish and Greenlandic-Inuit culture underlying the journalistic discourse.

Findings

In the summer of 1965, three local newspapers (Aarhus Stiftstidende, Fyens Stiftstidende and Herning Folkeblad) and one national paper (Demokraten) recounted a notification shared by the telegraphic news bureau, Reuters Bureau, about the trial implementation of the coil in Greenland. The short note informed the readers that in the first instance the coil would be offered to women who had given birth several times and it would be made available through the Danish healthcare authorities. The sources on which the notification was built were unspecified and nameless “specialists.” The reasons for introducing the IUD to Greenland was not specified either, although it was introduced in Denmark in years prior. Concerns about the impact of the coil on the spread of the venereal disease gonorrhoea in Greenland were also raised. While the notifications in the three newspapers were identical, Aarhus Stiftstidende and Demokraten added headlines that focused on the potential spread of venereal diseases following the introduction of the coil. Aarhus Stiftstidende moreover added a curious sentence, when attempting to explain the connection between the coil and gonorrhoea. They write: “The coil, *whose mode of operation is yet unknown*, is inserted into the uterus allowing the gonorrhoea bacteria far better chances at entering into places where it may cause irreparable damage” (italics by the authors).³ In this way, Aarhus Stiftstidende brought attention to possible side effects of the coil, while questioning its usefulness as a contraceptive.

Out of control: cultural & racial infantilization

The following year, 1966, an article in the Greenlandic newspaper Grønlandsposten gave rise to two smaller news items in local papers (Aalborg Stiftstidende and Land og Folk). The article in Grønlandsposten was again relayed through Reuters Bureau and reported that the surplus of live births in Greenland was 3.5%, amounting to one of the world’s highest and three times as high as in Denmark. The population of Greenland, in other words, was growing rapidly. In Aalborg Stiftstidende, this information was reported as in Reuters Bureau, but the editor of the communist paper Land og Folk used the information to argue for better living condition for the population in Greenland.

In these articles the need for contraceptives were explicitly coupled with the birth rate for the first time as well as with the Greenlandic people's perceived incapability to care for themselves. The birth rate was seen as a problem because a third of the children were born to single mothers. The birth rate, number of legal and illegal abortions and the number of infant deaths were all compared to the lower numbers in Denmark. The coil was seen as a possible way to solve the problem of the growing population. Other contraceptives were unsuccessful due to lack of medical knowledge and due to cultural and racial factors. For instance, in terms of illegal abortions the editor of *Land og Folk* admits, the comparison to Denmark was unwise because illegal abortions were extremely rare in Greenland since "they necessitate a certain amount of medical knowledge." The editor of *Land og Folk* continues: "Many Greenlandic women are cut off from using a diaphragm, because their pelvic bone structure makes it impossible to fit the diaphragm." Birth control pills likewise were difficult to use, the editorial went on, because they must be taken regularly, and the Greenlandic women won't even take their vitamins daily, he decried. The infantilization of the Inuit women is glaring, as is the racial determinism. Both discourses make the editor's hope for better living conditions in Greenland sound hollow and paternalistic rather than politically progressive.

Taking control: statistics & demographic

An intense focus was directed at the progress of the coil campaign's authorization in 1967. Articles in *Vestjysk Aktuelt*, *Thisted Amts Tidende*, *Silkeborg Avis*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Aktuelt og Aarhus Stiftstidende* all announced the campaign's approval and connected its predicted success with the establishment of a family planning office and home for expectant mothers. Greenlandic-Inuit women were to be educated in family planning and contraception because the "population explosion" and the "world highest population growth" needed to be controlled. The office for family planning and the coil campaign were designed and organized by Danish doctors, midwives and nurses, who in turn would train local nurses to continue the campaign. Both *Thisted Amts Tidende* and *Vestjysk Aktuelt* mentioned the brand name of the coil, Lippe's Loop, and *Thisted Amts Tidende* even predicted that the product's "victory march" would "calm down" [afdæmpe] the "population explosion." Apart from the education discourse, the excitement about the campaign was wrapped in demographic numbers and statistics: "more than 4 women in ten between the ages of 15 and 49 will perform a live birth [in 1965]" (*Aarhus Stiftstidende*), "the Greenlandic population which is currently 40.000 is expected to be 54.000 by 1975 and in 1985 it will have risen to 66.000 [people]" (*Aktuelt*), "this means an increase [in births] of 1.2% in 1965 as opposed to 3.9% and 3.5% in 1964 and 1963 respectively" (*Berlingske Tidende* on the temporary decrease in birth rates in 1965). Moreover, the statistics were underscored by building projects and infrastructure plans to accommodate the population increase: "The population increase will be absorbed by the larger cities . . ." (*Aktuelt*) and "Egmont H. Pedersen's Fond has donated the building for the price of 6 mill., while the Ministry of Greenland has taken upon themselves the operation costs budgeted at 830.000 a year" (*Aarhus Stiftstidende*). Population control was just another policy paper and administration contract.

Only two articles, in *Aarhus Stiftstidende* and *Berlingske Tidende*, made mentions of the Greenlandic population's reception of all the plans and campaigns organized by the

Danish administration. Both mentionings figure at the end of longer articles: “The problem is then if the Greenlandic people share this understanding [of the need for family planning]” (Aarhus Stiftstidende) and “Currently, work is being done to introduce the coil to Greenland, but this is not something the Greenlandic women in general have interest in using” (Berlingske Tidende). While the women were culturally and racially infantilized in previous years and under Danish tutelage by necessity, in 1967 the Danish administration and journalistic representation of the colonial relationship exhibited a narrative of taking demographically control over Greenland and the Greenlandic-Inuit women seemed now to be absorbed in plans of general building, organization and policy construction.

Victory lap: explosion implosion

By the early 1970s, the combination of the introduction of the coil as a successful battle against the so-called population explosion was a common trait in articles on Greenland’s demographic development and infrastructural plans. Greenlandic-Inuit women were even seen to “accept the coil” (Bornholms Tidende, Demokraten) and the doctor who launched the campaign in Greenland was asked to launch a similar campaign in Uganda (Fredericia Dagblad). Indeed, articles were now focused on how the infrastructural and building plans for the major cities in Greenland would fit the stagnated population’s needs (Aktuelt, Berlingske, Jyllands-Posten) referred to as “a coil in the works” [en spiral i hjulet] (Bornholms Tidende, Lolland Falster Folketidende).⁴ One article stands out slightly. Lolland Falster Folketidende writes a short opinion piece about the infrastructural uncertainties arising from the fall in live births. A section is worth repeating at length:

To the uncertainty factors that are always present in Greenland, where wind and the weather and the ice and other variables control a lot, the uncertainties about the population prognosis is now added. Something has put a coil in the works. In 1966 an experiment was implemented on the *down low* that introduced the coil as birth control in Greenland. In 1968 the doctors *were ordered* to offer every Greenlandic woman information about contraceptives after giving birth – and within less than a year and a half what amounts to a quarter of all Greenlandic women between the ages of 15 and 49 have had a coil inserted. (Italics by the authors)

Leaving aside the strange decision of the writer to include Greenlandic-Inuit people in the same category as wind, weather and ice, the article suggested that the coil campaign was not well known despite the journalistic coverage. Moreover, the article suggested that doctors were ordered to offer Greenlandic women the coil, rather than by request from the women. This slightly critical article was joined by Jyllands-Posten, which writes critically about the infrastructural plans that do not meet the demands of the Greenlandic population due to the stagnation of population growth. Wind, weather and now people acted in unpredictable ways, which made the administration of the colony difficult.

Yet again, the actual women are missing from the narrative. The overwhelming number of sources in the articles belonged to the medical profession, only briefly interrupted by the odd politicians during the 80s and 90s (Jyllands-Posten, Information). Throughout the 70s the Greenlandic and Inuit voices remained silent. The newspapers presented news of gonorrhoea outbreaks due to IUDs and claims of promiscuity: “The same increase in numbers is known in this country [Denmark]. In Greenland the relatively high

number may be due to the fact that up there it is sometimes difficult to find all the infected and all who are infectious, because they often don't know the name of the person they have been with" (Dagbladet, see also Frederiksborg Amts Avis, Herning Folkeblad); the changing demographic due to fewer births and fewer Danes (Jyllands-Posten, Vestkysten) and the odd mentioning in relation to general Danish information about contraceptives. For instance, a doctor explains in an interview about the success of the coil in comparison to the contraceptive pill: "As a curious oddity, I can tell you that Greenland is the place on earth where the coil has been most successful. So much so, that the birth rate has decreased from 1960 from 52 per 1000 inhabitants to 22 per 1000 inhabitants in 1972" (Skive Folkeblad). The Greenlandic-Inuit population was conflated with infrastructure, healthcare and building policies. They became part of the modernization strategies in the journalistic narratives, having no more of a say on the issue than a new road or a high-rise building might have. They were incorporated in statistics and stereotypes. The cultural, racial and medical challenges faced on account of the Greenlandic culture identified by Danish journalists in the articles in the early 60s were handled by being ignored or encompassed into the general administration of the post-colonial space. The depersonalization of the Greenlandic-Inuit voice, then, is palpable in this coverage.

Epistemological gaps in journalism

In late 1978 the newspaper Information produced a series of articles about Greenland from Greenland. Two of the articles dealt with reproductive rights and gender politics in the postcolonial space. The two articles warrant a closer reading due to their marked difference from everything else published on the issue in the Danish press and because they lend an ear to Greenlandic politicians and activists.

The first article was based on an interview with politician, Miké Siegstad, from the Greenlandic independence movement, Inuit Ataqatigiit, following the group's annual meeting. Two things were of interest to the journalist: Firstly, at this meeting, the group had decided to define the racial boundaries of the Greenlandic people stating that a Greenlandic person, carrying citizens' rights, would have at least one Greenlandic parent. A definition based on blood relations, which would take away immigrants from Denmark's rights to vote, for instance. According to the first lines of the article, "the charges of racism ha[d] been swirling in the Greenlandic winter air" since the meeting. However, who had actually made the accusations remained unsaid. Secondly, the group had decided against the use of birth control and abortions to mobilize an increase in Greenlandic population growth, which had drastically fallen since the introduction of the IUD and the legalization of medical abortions. Siegstad made clear that the reason for the decline in live births were due to the birth control pills and IUD, the coil, which—he added "today, it too often happens that women are fitted with a coil without their consent." The reporter follows up with the question "can you prove that women have had coils inserted without their consent?" To which Siegstad explained that many women have had difficulties conceiving only to find out that they were carrying the IUD without their knowledge. "How many women?" asked the reporter. And Siegstad must admit that perhaps not so many women, however he said:

[I]t cannot be ruled out that the women had been formally informed [about the procedure], but that they had not understood the question. It is clear, that the doctors use their authority and the language barrier – consciously or subconsciously – to fit the women with the coil. And what other choice do the women have.

Siegstad continued to explain the power structure between Danes and Greenlanders to the reporter, who again tried to chip away at the unfamiliar narrative confronting him by opposing it with the Danish narrative of his own: “But has it not been the point that too many children could lead to social catastrophes for children and mothers alike?” he asked. When Siegstad remained focused on the need for social policies to sustain the increase in population rather than to limit the growth, the journalist’s questions pivot toward the case for male chauvinism, and he asked Siegstad who in the household he believed the extra work of child rearing would fall upon. This, Siegstad contended, had not yet been discussed at the meeting.

We have referenced this exchange at length because it reveals an epistemological gap between the Danish journalistic frame and the Greenlandic case for independence. While, to our knowledge, this is the first time the possibility of involuntary fitting with IUDs in Greenland is reported on in the Danish press, this is not the lead of the article. Rather, the charge of racism is the lead, although, there are no sources of the accusation present in the article. When confronted with this claim that Greenlandic women were involuntarily enrolled in the Danish medical campaign to limit Greenlandic population growth—at its core a strategy of eugenics—the journalist countered the claim with critical reflection and asked for proof. Despite the reasonable reply given, he then tried to justify the campaign by reenacting the Danish discourse of social problems found in previous articles about Greenland, i.e., single mothers and housing infrastructure. When the mainstream political discourse did not help him get the answer he wanted or which was intelligible to him, he finally presented a Western feminist discourse. Read against the grain, the journalist’s mode of posing questions reveals his cultural background as much as the answers reveal the political program of Siegstad. The journalist continued to test Siegstad’s arguments using Denmark and Danish cultural and political orientations as reference points from journalistic practices to colonial policies to feminist discourse. Doing this, he cemented the culturally dominant (colonial) perspective. Western women’s feminist narrative, then, is positioned awkwardly as an argument for the necessity of controlling Greenlandic-Inuit women’s bodies and reproductive options. However, neither the journalist nor Miké Siegstad broached the issue of intersectional oppression of Greenlandic-Inuit women. That changes in the second article of interest here in the series.

Postcolonial feminist critique in the news

The second article published in *Information* in 1978 was based on an interview with schoolteacher and actor Makka Kleist, who had attended the annual Greenland gathering, *Aussivik*.⁵ Kleist was also active in the Greenlandic independence movement and defended the resolution to define Greenlandic citizenship by race. Indeed, she argued, Danish left-winged politicians were afraid of race, but “everyone can see I am Greenlandic. Or at least everyone can see I belong to another race than the white.” Kleist had at *Aussivik* been part of forming a women’s group. Kleist was asked about

the group's work and ambitions, and she laid out the problem of gendered trenches and women's groups which were based on the needs of the middleclass. The women's group she was heading by contrast was for working-class women and was a political fight against capitalism and colonialism. Although she recognized the double oppression of Greenlandic-Inuit women, in order to build an equal society, Kleist found it important to stand together—Greenlandic-Inuit men and women—against the asymmetrical power relationship with the Danish administration. The women's group, therefore, engaged with men to create a new Greenland. "It is the false and forced opposition we want to leave behind," she said. When asked about the call to end legalized abortion and birth control as suggested by the independence movement, Kleist said:

I understand the starting point [for the discussion] was that Greenlandic women had been fitted with the coil without knowing it. I think that is a reasonable discussion to have. It happens all the time in the daily lives of Greenlanders that we are not properly informed. In general, the authorities and their representatives have no respect for the personal integrity of the Greenlanders.

When asked for a comment on the call for more babies to be born in Greenland, Kleist again declared her agreement with the general independence movement's standpoint: "Underscoring the need for more children to be born doesn't mean that all Greenlandic women rip out their coil and start having babies. That is not the point of the resolution [about limits on abortions and contraception] either. It is about women having a say." By reframing the feminist debate within the postcolonial context, Kleist repositioned female agency as a postcolonial agent of resistance against the asymmetrical power structure. She insisted on the specific postcolonial positioning of Greenlandic-Inuit women in relation to Danish women and men and in relation to Greenlandic-Inuit men and the project for independence. Greenlandic-Inuit women positionings could not and should not be merged with those of Danish women.

The connections forged between imperial power and resistance; money and sexuality; race and gender foretold by McClintock (1995) are crystal clear. The battle over female sexuality and reproduction goes hand in hand with power to determine who should be allowed civic rights and form the future of Greenland. Returning to Greenlandic cultural roots such as *Aussivik*, moreover play into the construction of the Greenlandic independence movement. At the center sits the female body once again as a substitute for the contested colonial space.

While the journalist—like in the case of the interview with Siegstad—presented Kleist with Danish perspectives and discourses on gendered relations and feminist discourses forged through decades of Danish journalism, Kleist was clearly prepared for the arguments and offered in their place a positioned narrative from the perspective of Greenlandic-Inuit working-class women, who were well aware of the industrialization's irreversible impact on their culture and in particular on their intersectional position as Greenlandic-Inuit women.

Discussion

Podcasting and the vindication of journalism

44 years after the articles in the newspaper *Information* first presented the Danish readers with Greenlandic women's involuntary participation in the Danish administration's population control policies, the podcast *Spiralkampagnen* [the coil campaign] was broadcast by the Danish broadcasting corporation, DR. Based on an article published in a Greenlandic women's magazine, a handful of Greenlandic women testify to the practice of Danish doctors inserting IUDs in very young schoolgirls all over Greenland without their consent. Indeed, they talk of how they felt they had no choice. The podcast heartbreakingly displays the extent of the physical and emotional implications of the assault using Greenlandic witnesses and voices. It also draws extensively on the doctors, who performed the medical interventions, their doubts and their justifications. The podcast expertly shows the intricate mesh of intimately personal lives and the postcolonial political strategies.

But what is particularly interesting to the argument made in this article is the position of the journalists researching, organizing and broadcasting the story this time around. The journalists reveal the political and personal history of the coil campaign as detectives through time and coloniality. The editing underscores the ongoing research phase by keeping sound checks and small talk in the final podcast product, and the journalists speak to each other, explaining the reasoning and guiding the listeners' imagination, while discovering medical charts and political speeches and documents. While the Greenlandic-Inuit witnesses' heart-wrenching experiences are at the center of the story, the question of why the campaign happened is the red thread pulling the story forward. The answer to that question is slowly unfolded through the journalists' digging detective work. In this way, the ethos of the narrative—the reason we believe the story and feel indignation and sorrow—is not only due to the Greenlandic-Inuit women's testimonies or the medical staff's expert knowledge, but because we follow the journalists in their endeavor to uncover the truth. Although, the podcast levels harsh criticism at the official Denmark as a postcolonial power, it is still journalism that produces a common “we” as listeners, because we follow in the objective and standardized practice of journalism that honors the pact with us, the public.

Arguably, journalism has not changed much since the 60s. It is still a practice which constructs a “we” against a “them.” Rather, just as social understanding of women's perspectives changed in Denmark in the 70s bringing with it new perspectives on the Greenlandic-Inuit other, postcolonial critique has changed the social understanding of Danish colonial rule and its implications in recent years. This latter change has made it possible for journalists to re-tell the story of the coil campaign to a Danish audience of today – 44 years after Siegstad and Kleist told us. If journalism is the first draft of history, as suggested in the introduction to this article, it is a draft based on the work by social and political movements and critical scholars and activists. It is moreover up to us—critical thinkers of all walks of life and occupations—to keep these progresses from ending up on the chippy-counter.

Conclusion

With what postcolonial and feminist discursive implications did Danish newspapers cover the rolling out and continued practice of fitting the female Greenlandic-Inuit population with IUDs—i.e., the coil campaign—from its inception in the 60s to the 90s? The newspaper articles displayed two clear discourses, each grounded in a Danish self-definition as superior, and each defined by structures of coloniality. The role of feminist politics of the 70s produced a shift in colonial representation.

Classic colonial discourses in journalism of modernization

The first journalistic discourse on the coil campaign followed traditional colonial tracks: From the racial, cultural and medical-biological claims of inferiority as justifications for taking control over the population growth in Greenland to the narrative of having to carry the administrative burden of an uncontrollable overflow of Greenlandic-Inuit, infrastructural developments, and investment statistics—reducing people to numbers on a spreadsheet. In the case of the coil campaign medical discourse could be assumed to take centerstage. However, this is not the case. Because of the conflation of people and populations with infrastructure and administrative plans, and because the reporting is often in the form of short notifications in the beginning of the coverage in the 60s, the human aspect of this campaign is not followed up by the journalists. Arguably, the case may be suffering a double whammy of dealing with both postcolonial population and female reproduction simultaneously. While Danish journalistic discourse slowly incorporated female perspectives—however stereotypical they may have been—during the 60s, the female reproductive organs were by and large a mystery. The curious admission of not knowing how the coil works in the newspaper of Aarhus *Stiftstidende* in 1965, attests to this awkwardness accompanying female issues in mainstream newspapers. Moreover, the case presents Greenlandic-Inuit women, i.e., another category of sources largely unknown to mainstream Denmark.

However, we would argue that in these early articles, Greenlandic-Inuit women in the reproductive age are not viewed considering their femaleness, in particular. Rather they are constructed in the journalistic discourses as gates through which the torrent of population is flowing; they are floodgates, which the Danish administration aims to lock in order to avoid overflow. They are seen as part of infrastructures that needs to be in place and stabilized to develop a modern welfare society. While the newspapers do not use this metaphor of flooding, they are using one of explosions, which are to be quelled to achieve victory over the population growth and possibly by extension over the unknowable female sexuality.

The discursive shock of speaking to greenlanders

In the second postcolonial discourse emerging in the late 70s, by contrast, the feminist social debates seemingly have impacted Danish journalistic discourses. The Danish self-definition as a progressive, feminist nation is tested in the meeting with Greenlandic-Inuit activists and politicians. Racism and sexism become an issue only when the charge can be levelled against Greenlandic-Inuit people. While the early colonial trajectory underscored

a natural, paternalistic attitude of sense of superiority, the late 70s articles reveal this supposed superiority to live in the progressive politics, the Danish cultural and civilizational development beyond that of the Greenlandic-Inuit sources, it is suggested. The discourse addressed in the two articles from *Information* in 1978 show the precarious claiming of feminist discourse and political agenda for the purpose of nationalist self-definition.

In the articles, the journalist explicitly aims to challenge the Greenlandic-Inuit politician and activist by presenting them with Danish national narratives. His line of questioning has two goals. Firstly, he seeks to appear critical and reflexive, speaking to and for the Danish public to whom he is writing. Secondly, the journalist is constructing a national “we” against an “other” through his questions and reporting. The journalist produces not only the progressive Danish identity, which refers to feminist discourse, but also a “backwards,” colonial subject position for the Greenlandic-Inuit by contrast—even though their reflections and arguments are far more progressive and ahead of even Danish scholarship by decades. Arguably, journalism does not have room for nuances and often goes for reporting the binary construction for clarity of argument. However, in this case the implications of such a strategy are coloniality—a reproduction and maintenance of colonial power structures beyond the colonial administration.

Notes

1. The first draft of a Greenlandic constitution was authored in 2023.
2. While we searched the archive for articles published on the topic during the period between 1965–2022, the topic disappeared from public and journalistic consciousness in the 90s.
3. All translations by the authors.
4. The sentence draws on the idiom “throwing a spanner—or a wrench—in the works, or in Danish in the wheel, exchanging the spanner or wrench with the coil.
5. *Aussivik* is a traditional gathering in Inuit culture which had been revived in a contemporary form two years prior. The Greenlandic independence movement was an actor in the organization of the two days festival of debates, creativity and mobilization.

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