

# Postcolonial Gaslighting and Greenland: When Post-Truth Gets in the Way of Independence

Written by Emil Sondaj Hansen

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EMIL SONDAJ HANSEN, OCT 4 2022

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When deciding what a colony is, it is often assumed that one can look to international law for a definitive answer. Others find the definition directly measurable from the level of extracted natural resources determining the colonial status. The case of Greenland's independence struggle shows that determining what a colony is much more complex and can take place in a realm where discourse is determined more by emotion, belief and distortion than by facts – to borrow the definition of post-truth given by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2016. After achieving 'Home Rule' in 1979, the Greenlandic government achieved 'Self-Rule' in 2009, allowing the island to declare independence from Denmark, should it want to. With an electoral majority for independence, and with Denmark concerned about its reputation as a 'model citizen' of international society (Sharman 2013, 190), something appears to be delaying the prospect of independence. This chapter proposes the theoretical concept of postcolonial gaslighting to make sense of this puzzle and analyse subtle and implicit forms of colonialism and domination.

Postcolonial gaslighting captures a variety of techniques and mechanisms to make one doubt a particular version of reality and subsequently be chastised for being responsible for one's circumstances. The argument is that the debate about independence consists of competing conceptions of reality and understandings of concepts grounded in emotion and belief, that is, operating in a post-truth manner. When there is no objective way to resolve competing claims about the inherent value of independence or the extent of Danish postcolonial responsibility, the competing claims must be resolved in a different way. The concept of postcolonial gaslighting shows that one vision of reality is portrayed as less legitimate than the other. This destabilising challenge to Greenlandic experiences of the reality of the relationship contributes to ontological insecurity and prevents agentic action to be taken towards the realisation of independence. The past structures the future possibilities, so when the past is challenged in the realm of post-truth, it limits the scope of future action. The chapter thus shows that the effects of post-truth can prolong hierarchical relationships in global politics by using Greenland as a case study.

I analyse competing visions of the relationship between Denmark and Greenland by drawing on two exchanges in the Danish parliament. The format of the debate provides a means of analysing competing visions and highlights the tension between these in a formalised setting. After outlining the concept of postcolonial gaslighting and its relation to the ontological security literature, I examine the exchange between Greenlandic MP Aki- Matilda Høegh-Dam and Danish MP Morten Messerschmidt at the opening parliamentary debate in 2019. This exchange illustrates how accounts of Greenland's colonial past are denied and dismissed through invoking gendered stereotypes. I then examine the competing visions underpinning this exchange about what a colony is by looking at the reactions to Høegh-Dam's speech in the Danish media. This shows that there are two competing visions of reality, but one is portrayed as more legitimate through the tools of postcolonial gaslighting. The next section examines an exchange between former Greenlandic prime minister Aleqa Hammond and former Danish prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen about hidden American military activities in Greenland. This highlights how the debate about independence consists of two competing visions of the value of independence, one highlighting material factors and one privileging the intrinsic worth of independence for postcolonial peoples. One vision is however portrayed as less

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legitimate through the deployment of stereotypes of Greenlandic incompetency. The last section examines how postcolonial gaslighting allows Danish elites to blame Greenland for the failure to live up to the criteria of statehood.

## Postcolonial gaslighting and ontological insecurity

Key to my understanding of post-truth is competition and struggle over truth claims without any legitimate arbiter to adjudicate such competing claims. Rather than exclusively denoting Trumpian-styled lying, I find the concept of post-truth a helpful framework for making sense of the political effects of clashes between two competing experiences of reality. As Bailey points out, there is no 'epistemic terra firma' (2020, 667), so epistemology and knowledge are always political and subject to contestation. Post-truth as an analytic frame thereby foregrounds epistemic competition, which according to Sismondo, 'is as much about choosing which truths can be considered salient and important as about which claims can be considered true and false' (2017: 4). Such choices have important effects, as they in Fuller's terms 'epitomize the struggle for "modal power"', that is 'control over what is possible' (2018, 8).

These struggles in the realm of post-truth are not always fought innocently, and the Oxford English Dictionary's emphasis on distortion is key here. Danish elites actively distort Greenlandic experiences of the relationship through postcolonial gaslighting. Drawing on psychological and sociological work on gaslighting, I highlight how the mechanisms of postcolonial gaslighting destabilise perceptions of reality and thereby impede agency. Important work has been done on gaslighting in sociology (Sweet 2019), and the concept has achieved attention in the Trump years regarding disinformation (Stern 2018), but it has yet to be utilised in IR. Stern notes that gaslighting requires a level of intimacy between the abuser and abused (2018). The case of Denmark and Greenland is therefore appropriate, given the supposed intimacy of the Community of the Realm (The term describing Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland) evidenced by the repeated use of family metaphors by Danish politicians to describe the relation between Denmark and Greenland (Gad 2008).

Disaggregating the concept, gaslighting has three main effects:

1. causing someone to doubt the validity of one's beliefs, thoughts and feelings
2. making someone feel confused or anxious
3. distorting one's sense of reality, ultimately with the effect of achieving control over someone. It falls short of being explicitly coercive, but rather consists of 'small strategies of control and confusion' (Sweet 2019, 862).

It is exercised through specific processes identified via the following levels:

- Withholding and refusing to engage in a conversation about certain things.
- Trivialising, belittling and disregarding someone's feelings and beliefs.
- Diverting and removing focus and challenging the credibility of the person.
- Invoking stereotypes, particularly racialised and gendered, to delegitimise the victim's account of reality.
- Denial or offering an alternative account, that directly contradicts the
- victim's experience of reality. The invoking of stereotypes illustrates the incentive to push a struggle into the realm of post-truth for those with power in gendered and racialised hierarchies.

I conceptualise it as a distinct kind of 'postcolonial' gaslighting since it concerns the nature of Greenland's colonial status. It is important that I do not use the term 'postcolonial' as a periodisation implying that colonialism is a thing of the past that has now been transcended and overcome. On the contrary, I agree with Seth (2011, 174) that the term 'postcolonial' 'signifies the claim that conquest, colonialism and empire are not a footnote or episode in a larger story ... but are in fact a central part of that story and are constitutive of it'.

To examine the effects of this, I draw on the theoretical framework of ontological security. Ontological security is a way of making sense of how different experiences of truth impede agency, as the theoretical branch recognises that feelings of security are not always material. First coined by Laing, ontological security was then picked up by Giddens and later introduced to IR by Huysmans, spurring a wide-reaching literature. Huysmans (1998, 242) defined

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ontological security as a 'strategy of managing the limits of reflexivity – death as the undetermined – by fixing social relations into a symbolic and institutional order' with the purpose of 'making life intelligible'. The term essentially describes the security 'not of the body, but of the self' (Mitzen 2006, 344). The key assumption is that states, and crucially other units in the international system, desire a 'consistent sense of self' (Zarakol 2010, 3) based upon the basic need to experience oneself as a continuous entity in time (Mitzen 2006, 342). Steele (2008), for instance, explains why Belgium decided to fight against Germany during the Second World War, despite having no chance of success by reference to the desire for a consistent autobiographical narrative of bravery.

Key to the argument of this chapter is ontological security's emphasis on agency. Mitzen (2006, 344) highlights how a subjective sense of the self is what 'enables and motivates action and choice'. Subotic and Zarakol (2012, 917) further argue that 'agency is not possible without a concept of the self'. Agency requires a clear continuous understanding of the self's past, present and future. I argue that the contestation over the 'truth' of the colonial status of Greenland through postcolonial gaslighting contributes to ontological insecurity and anxiety, preventing Greenlandic elites exercising agency to allow independence to materialise. The case of Greenland diverges from the cases discussed in the established literature of ontological security. Firstly, the literature discusses relatively bounded and established entities, namely states. Greenland offers a different kind of challenge, since it is transitional – on the path to statehood. The ontological security needs of Greenland are therefore complicated since the very ontological status of Greenland is in flux. In this sense, I embrace Yu Untalan's call for a postcolonial approach to ontological security that avoids the 'normalizing logics of the Westphalian nation-state system' (2019, 43). Yu Untalan takes issue with the self-regarding nature of ontological security literature, that has seen the Other as a source of insecurity, rather than a possible source of ontological security. However, I argue that a first step to achieving the 'creative, non-destructive ways of confronting ontological insecurities' that Yu Untalan calls for and to view 'the postcolonial Other as a learning source for the Self' is to properly expose and understand the mechanisms of distortion and power currently at play in the relationship between Denmark and Greenland (2019, 40).

These mechanisms of distortion have largely been absent from the established ontological security literature. The gaslighting metaphor thus fills an important gap in the literature by introducing such mechanisms of contestation and distortion to feelings of ontological insecurity. It works well within the ontological security framework, as it highlights how barriers to agency can be deliberately constructed. It contributes to ontological insecurity by destabilising realities (Sweet 2019, 855) and preventing the stable sense of Self that is necessary for agency.

## The indigenous Miss Denmark

This section offers empirical illustrations of the contestation over Greenland's colonial status, and shows how postcolonial gaslighting works in practice. I present the case of Aki-Matilda Høegh-Dam, a young Greenlandic MP who called for an open discussion of Greenland's colonial past, only to be met by fierce resistance from Danish politicians and public intellectuals. On this basis, I probe the different worldviews and conceptions of colonialism that underpin the tension between Høegh-Dam and her challengers to show how they are grounded in different conceptions of reality, that is, operating according to post-truth logics. When Aki-Matilda Høegh-Dam was elected to the Danish parliament for the Greenlandic party, Siumut in June 2019, she took the debate about Greenland's colonial past to an intensity not seen since prime minister Aleqa Hammond's calls for a reconciliation commission in 2014. Aged just 22, she stood as an impressive figure in the ceremonial opening debate of the Danish parliament, opening the lid on a Danish colonial past in her first speech as an elected representative:

I as a young Greenlander and now as an MP experience the lag of the colonial era. We are for better or worse a product of the colonial era. Because, even though it was not me who was stateless like my brother's father, when he was born, and even though it was me who was part of the first cohort not to go segregated schools like my parents, my siblings, yes, my entire family, I have still grown up with the lasting effects of the colonial era. No matter how much you deny the past, it still shapes our future (Folketinget 2019).

She argued that common trust between Denmark and Greenland rests upon a 'recognition of our common past' (Folketinget 2019). This trust was crucial for 'the ones who have experienced being hurt by the colonial mentality, through damage to family relations, increased violence, alcohol and substance abuse, that unfortunately has been

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brought on to next generations, to us' (Folketinget 2019).

Morten Messerschmidt from the Danish People's Party (DPP), a popular figure who still holds the record for most personal votes at a European Parliamentary election in Denmark, made two comments in response that represent the crux of postcolonial gaslighting:

I am certain that Ms. Høegh-Dam knows the old Kierkegaard quotation: that life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards. And this is how it is often is with a country's, with a people's history: When you look back with the glasses of the present, there have been mistakes and unreasonableness. This is the case for women, who first received the right to vote in 1907 for municipal elections and in 1915 for parliamentary elections; for religious minorities who in Denmark just after the end of the Middle Ages also did not have the same privileges as Christians. So there are injustices that we will not repeat today. (Folketinget 2019).

Here we see several patterns of postcolonial gaslighting. It is noteworthy that Messerschmidt sees the need to first rebuke Høegh-Dam with an old Kierkegaard quotation, asserting that she surely must be familiar with one of the most important Danish philosophers, implicitly questioning whether or not she in fact is. There is also an element of trivialising the colonial experience by juxtaposing it with all other past injustices. This temporal move, that clearly separates the colonial from the postcolonial period, clearly denies the possibility of Høegh-Dam's subjective experience of the lasting effects of the 'colonial mentality'. Messerschmidt then proceeds:

But what I don't understand about Ms. Høegh-Dam's speech is why she is using the past to deprive future generations of Greenlanders the privileges, that she herself has enjoyed. As I understand it, Ms. Høegh-Dam is born in Hillerød, has studied at the University of Copenhagen, has competed in a competition by the name of Miss Denmark, that is, enjoyed that which is Denmark. If Ms. Høegh-Dam, is incarnated about wanting Greenlandic independence, how can that be compatible with the fact that she has enjoyed the fruits that is Denmark? And why can that generation, which she shall put into the world, and the generations thereafter, also not enjoy these same fruits?

Messerschmidt draws on Høegh-Dam's gender here to delegitimise her account of the relationship between Denmark and Greenland, and the colonial past. He insinuates that her account of the colonial past and her desire for independence is less valid, because she has competed in Miss Denmark. This is a clear attempt to divert focus by challenging the credibility of Høegh-Dam. He also takes a step further by linking Høegh-Dam's womanhood and reproductive capability to her opinions about independence. Assuming that her capacity for 'putting generations into the world' demands a certain responsibility about the future of Greenland that necessitates staying in the relationship with Denmark, and thereby requires a different presentation of the past than Høegh-Dam presents. This brings to mind abusers asking partners to stay in an unhealthy relationship for the sake of the children.

He also seeks to delegitimise her representativeness as a voice of Greenland by highlighting her relationship to Denmark, thus undermining her claim to be an indigenous Inuit. Strandsbjerg notes that Greenlandic identity consists of a territorially bounded political identity, and an ethnically defined Inuit identity (2014, 264). The indigenous foundations of Greenlandic identity are often largely dismissed with the former finance minister and president of the United Nations General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft, going so far as to say that 'there are no longer any full-blooded Eskimos left in Greenland' (Breum 2014, 35). It also has to be noted that the word 'Greenland' in fact has no root in the Inuit language (Kleist 2004, 114). So, when Høegh-Dam in her speech at the opening parliamentary debate, used the Inuit name 'Kalaallit Nunaat' meaning 'Land of the Greenlandic Inuit' (Folketinget 2020, 20), she participated in a broader debate about the indigenous aspect of Greenland's identity.

The exchange between Høegh-Dam and Messerschmidt represents a case where two different conceptions of reality clash. It also mounts to a case of post-truth, since the validity of the accounts are not reconciled through any objective or agreed-upon metric, but rather rests upon emotions and feelings. However, these emotions are manipulated and contested by the deployment of the 'small strategies of control and confusion' of gaslighting (Sweet 2019, 862).

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This case of postcolonial gaslighting is grounded in two different conceptions of what a colony is and thereby the standard by which to measure the past. Høegh-Dam's account of the colonial effects prompted fierce reactions. Public intellectual and theologian Katrine Winkel Holm accused Høegh-Dam of 'distorting Greenland's past' (2020). She took issue with Høegh-Dam's characterisation of the 'evil Danes that cold-heartedly exploited the Greenlanders', instead arguing that past Greenlanders were themselves 'the most eager advocates of the complete opening towards Denmark' (Winkel Holm 2020). Examining the motivations behind the 1953 incorporation and the practice of the referendum reveals a different picture. It is widely agreed that Denmark incorporated Greenland as a region to prevent the UN from supervising its decolonisation (Janussen 2019, 12) in a referendum that Greenlanders themselves did not participate in (Gad 2020, 34). Winkel Holm proceeds to argue that 'the starting point for Aki-Maltida Høegh-Dam is the tired myth that Greenland throughout all the years was a Danish colony just like Hans Egede was a 'cruel colonizer. The claim does not become more true by being repeated' (2020). She backs this up with the claim that the 'indigenous population in Greenland was not the Inuits, but the Norse who arrived in the 900s' (Winkel Holm 2020).

The intellectual ammunition for this argument is supplied by historian Thorkild Kjærgaard. Kjærgaard denies that Greenland was ever a colony, claiming that the Norse arrived in Greenland at the end of the 900s and were there before the Inuit, whom he labels an 'invasive people' (Kjærgaard 2019, 139). For Kjærgaard, Danish sovereignty over Greenland was thus never broken and Greenland has thereby never been colonised (Breum 2018, 41). He instead refers to Greenland as a 'Nordic sister-nation' (Kjærgaard 2021) to avoid the 'deluge of negative connotations' brought about by the 'colonial paradigm' (Kjærgaard 2019, 141, 149). Note here the depoliticising effects of presenting Greenland in gendered terms as a sister, implying a certain kind of equality. This conception of colonialism is grounded in a particular emphasis on sovereignty, but the idea of the 'negative connotations', implies that asserting what a colony is must be a comparative issue. Conservative MP Rasmus Jarlov more explicitly embraces this comparative focus in his rejection of Greenlandic colonial status by claiming that it is 'debatable' whether Greenland was a colony (Jørgensen and Stampe 2019). He argues that Greenland has not been sufficiently oppressed to qualify as a colony. Pushed by journalists on the validity of his statement, Jarlov refuses to be situated in the post-truth realm, by asserting that he builds his claim on 'facts, based on where Greenland's geographical location is... It was an area that was within Denmark-Norway's natural sphere of activity, and therefore I do not believe that it fits within the definition of a colony' (Jørgensen and Stampe 2019). The naturalisation of power and influence as a replacement of colonial status is noteworthy. He proceeds to argue that the colonial term, 'comes with misleading associations in relation to Greenlandic history. It gives an impression that Greenland has been oppressed to a degree which is not true' (Jørgensen and Stampe 2019). This allows him to later argue that it is in fact 'Denmark's merit that Greenland can even speak about independence today' (Jarlov 2021).

There are thus two competing visions of what it means to be a colony at play here. For Høegh-Dam it is a feeling and a mentality that transcends any specific periodisation of 'post' colonial times. For the Danish elites examined in this section, colonialism is in essence, something other states do. Wrapped up in explanations of Norse sovereignty, the explanation boils down to Greenland not being sufficiently oppressed to qualify as a colony amongst other colonies of the world. The tension between accepting postcolonial responsibility and Danish ontological security based on the identity as a 'model citizen of international society' (Sharman 2013, 190) prevents any serious attempt at reconciling these different accounts of the colonial history. Instead Høegh-Dam's account is trivialised and discarded through post-colonial gaslighting.

## **A tale of two prime ministers: The value of independence and the room of confidentiality**

Just as the definition of a colony is contested through postcolonial gaslighting, so is the value of independence. An exchange between former Greenlandic Prime Minister Aleqa Hammond and former Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen illustrates not only how Greenlandic feelings of injustice are dismissed through the mechanisms of postcolonial gaslighting, but also how discussions of independence operate with contradictory and contrasting visions of the value of independence. Aleqa Hammond did more than any other prime minister to bring the issue of the colonial past to the fore. In her 2014 New Year's speech, she called for a reconciliation commission and argued that reconciliation with painful taboos was necessary for citizens to 'take the power over their own life and contribute positively to society' (Hammond 2014, 8). Here, a lack of clarity about the past stands in the way of exercising

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agency over the future. It is thus not possible to achieve a continuous experience of the Self if the past traumas are unresolved. Yet, Danish elites have not accommodated this wish for clarity about the past. They have met it by withholding and a refusal to enter a conversation. Former Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning Schmidt rejected the proposed reconciliation commission in 2014, reasoning that there was nothing to be reconciled (Breum 2018, 109).

While representing her party, Siumut in the Danish Parliament, Aleqa Hammond asked former Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen about the responsibility for cleaning the radioactive waste left by Americans at Camp Century in Greenland. She highlighted the painful memories of the colonial past where Denmark did not inform Greenland of American nuclear activities on Greenlandic soil (Folketinget 2018a). Rasmussen responded: 'I cannot take away from Ms. Hammond, if Ms. Hammond thinks that there has been a series of unfortunate events' proceeding to highlight the economic benefits of American presence in Greenland (Folketinget 2018a). It is interesting here how Rasmussen does not deny Hammond's experience of history, yet he does not accept nor embrace it. He simply juxtaposes her experience with the economic benefits of an American presence.

This exchange highlights how Hammond and Rasmussen operate with two different conceptions of what independence means. In the interaction, Rasmussen does not recognise or embrace the Greenlandic sense of injustice but instead portrays it as something that can be directly measured against material benefits. Rasmussen is then implicitly operating with the same conflation of self-determination and material provisions, as Rezvani in his study of non-sovereignty: 'Full independence is therefore not the ultimate fulfilment of national self-determination if it does not fulfil a population's economic, political, and security self-interest' (2014, 4-5). Former Danish finance minister, Claus Hjort Frederiksen, articulates this vision as follows: 'If you do not have your economy in order, what is your independence then really, if you have to go around with your hat and get funding all the time' (Turnowsky 2019b). In contrast, Hammond's vision of self-determination and independence is more akin to Inayatullah's observation that sovereignty has a distinct value of its own that transcends material concerns, particularly for formerly colonised people (1996, 73). Former Greenlandic prime minister Kim Kielsen echoed this when he claimed that 'independence is not only about economy. Independence is also about identity and freedom' (2018, 1).

This second vision of independence is not often taken seriously but instead dismissed through postcolonial gaslighting. Hammond asked Rasmussen whether 'Denmark is ready to take on the full responsibility for the cleaning after military activities in Greenland, in light of the UN's human rights report on Greenland?' (Folketinget 2018b) – specifically referring to the radioactive waste at Camp Century, mentioned by a UN special rapporteur. Rasmussen responded by highlighting that the UN rapporteur had been approached by a minister in the Greenlandic government who subsequently had to step down and the request had been withdrawn (Folketinget 2018b). Rasmussen thereby deflected the potential postcolonial embarrassment that surrounds the question of American military activity (Olesen 2018) by drawing on the stereotype of incompetency and scandal in domestic Greenlandic politics. This is the gaslighting trick of invoking stereotypes to delegitimise a person's account of reality. Yet there is no *a priori* connection between Denmark's past actions and scandals in Greenlandic politics. By making such a connection,

Rasmussen perpetuates the discursive image of an incompetent Greenland that needs the competent Denmark to manage its affairs. Hammond further challenged Rasmussen on how Greenland has historically been in the dark about American affairs, most notably nuclear activities, saying that 'it is a very limited knowledge, we in Greenland have about the American's presence in our country' (Folketinget 2018b). Rasmussen again deflects through the language of competence. He argues that Hammond's point is why 'I spend a lot of energy on ... how we can create this room of confidentiality, which has to be there, if we are to handle some of these questions that Ms. Aleqa Hammond is raising here' (Folketinget 2018b). Here, Rasmussen insinuates that Greenlandic politicians in the past have been unable to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate for this 'room of confidentiality'. Involvement in Danish foreign policy regarding American activities on Greenland apparently has to be deserved. The logic behind this 'room of confidentiality' is similar to that of Greenland's independence more generally. Entrance into the society of states is conditional, and as Bartelsson points out, sovereignty has developed into something 'granted, contingent upon its responsible exercise' (2014, 1). By portraying Greenlandic politicians as incompetent and incapable of managing Greenland's affairs, Danish elites limit the possibility of Greenland living up to this responsible exercise.

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## Playing the Blame Game

Gaslighting does not only involve making the victim doubt its conception of reality. It also entails blaming the victim for this confusion. In her study of gaslighting victims, Sweet notes that abusers would construct a particular reality and then chastise the victim for the conditions to remove their autonomy (2019, 868). This captures the function of the postcolonial gaslighting. By delegitimising and removing focus from the Danish colonial responsibility, Danish elites are able to conceptually separate discussions about a future independent Greenland from questions of the colonial legacy. This blaming takes place particularly when the debate turns to the economy. The major argument is that Greenland is not sufficiently developed to be free of the annual Danish block grant of approximately 3.6 billion crowns. This narrows the debate about possible political alternatives to dependence on Denmark, anchored in a conception of sovereignty as capacity, echoing Jackson's analysis of 'quasi-states' (1990). While there are genuine challenges to be addressed on the path towards independence, the conversation about economic development is discursively separated from the colonial foundations of Greenland's contemporary problems. The emphasis on economic capacity must thus be seen in relation to the refusal to recognise Greenland's colonial past and the destabilising challenges to its postcolonial identity. The 'gaslighting' metaphor thus captures how Greenland is often chastised for failing to live up to certain criteria for statehood.

When asked about the dependency on the block grant, Aleqa Hammond responded 'we did not ask Demark to colonise us and come here to plant the flag. But what about the damn 3.6 billion crowns? Can we not just develop something ourselves? Yes, but it is not quite as easy' (Jensen 2013). However, Danish politicians do not take this historical dimension of Greenland's problems into account when drawing on metaphors of greedy teenagers (Gad 2008) and portraying the block grant as a prize to be won. Hammond argued that 'we still do too much harm to ourselves if we are to compare ourselves to other non-colonised people' (2013, 19) highlighting the implied inferiority present in Danish discussions of economic independence. Former Greenlandic Prime Minister Hans Enoksen previously challenged these constructed barriers to independence, declaring that 'we are neither blind nor in denial towards our problems – our social issues shall not be a hindrance to the development of our self-determination' (2007, 2).

The move of blaming Greenland for its own problems allows Danish politicians to reject any future support for an independent Greenland. Denmark has historically been one of the most generous donors of foreign aid in the world – would it not be appropriate to support and provide aid to its former colony? When asked about financially supporting an independent Greenland, former foreign minister Martin Lidegaard responded that Danish financial support post-independence would not be 'fair or an expression of mutual respect' (Breum 2018, 55). This highlights that debates about the colonial past have very real effects in how they structure future possibilities. In Fuller's terms, the debate about the colonial past is thus a struggle for modal power – 'control over what is possible' (2018, 8).

## Conclusion: Post-truth and polarisation

This chapter has shown that the framework of post-truth allows us to make sense of the debate about Greenland's colonial past and its possible future. The challenges to Greenland's autobiographical self, in terms of its colonial past, destabilises perceptions of reality and prevent the possibility of agency in the future. The theoretical tool of postcolonial gaslighting shows how contested realities in the realm of post-truth are distorted and manipulated by Danish elites. The problem is not so much that there are entirely different understandings of reality. The problem is that one is presented as more legitimate than the other through the subtle strategies of coercion inherent in postcolonial gaslighting. We have seen how Høegh-Dam's account of the colonial mentality was dismissed through gendered stereotypes. Hammond's challenge to being left in the dark about American military activities in Greenland was rejected based on stereotypes of incompetency. Rejecting the colonial experience ultimately provides the conceptual foundations for putting the blame for the current issues and obstacles on the path towards statehood with the Greenlandic people.

Post-truth and postcolonial gaslighting allow us to make sense of subtle forms of colonialism in the contemporary era. But what are the effects of such post-truth discussions of the colonial past? Staying clear of any clear-cut predictions, there are signs that the debate is becoming increasingly polarised. Pele Broberg was forced to step

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down as Greenlandic Foreign Minister in September 2021 after declaring that only those with Inuit heritage should be able to vote in a referendum about Greenland's future (Brøns 2021). When the discussion on colonial heritage is being held in the realm of post-truth and postcolonial gaslighting, such quasi-racialised demarcations are allowed to emerge through frustrations about the lack of recognition of the reality of Greenland's colonial past. The Greenlandic national anthem reads – Impossibly now to remain calm; Kalaallit, towards great goals we embark, As freeborn people we will in the country live; Begin to believe in your own abilities (Højskolesangbogen 2021). Suspended in the transition towards statehood, Greenland is unable to remain calm. Its ontological insecurities prevent agency. Trapped between Danish efforts to neglect the colonial past and its postcolonial burden. Yet still, the desire for independence continues. Kalaallit Nunaat continues on the path towards 'great goals' – perhaps indefinitely.

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