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# G INNER Greenlandic PERSPECTIVES

A life between two opposing cultures, a colonial trauma, realisation and coping. The opportunities are great and the basic values are intact. Cultural ballast could prove to be a powerful ally in the meeting with the future.

Text: Amalia Lynge Pedersen, MSc in Psychology

Greenland's Arctic nature is powerful. It can be cold and tough with violent storms, where the heavens open and the seas churn. At the same time, it is beautiful and rewarding – a larder. And yet... Greenland is first and foremost the land of the people. In harmony and balance with nature, the Inuit culture has developed throughout generations. The individual balance, the social balance and the collective balance have been decisive for the survival of the community. The harmony and balance of the individual, of society and of nature were all necessary requirements for ensuring survival in the Arctic. To ensure the survival of everyone, conflicts and disharmony were managed using mental, physical and spiritual means.

Greenlanders have experienced radical changes over recent generations, from a traditional hunting society to a western society – both in form and lifestyle. Society is to a high degree set up as a copy of the original colonial power's system – although perhaps inferior to the original. Various aspects of cultural assimilation have influenced the political agenda.

The lifestyle is in many areas modern and Western and this is further magni-

fied in pace with increasing globalization.

### Affects on health

Greenlanders are indigenous people who, like many other indigenous people, have suffered the effects of external colonization. Significant changes have taken place with limited respect for indigenous values and self-determination.

Removal of self-determination and the option to influence your own fate affects self-esteem and health. Indigenous people experience a great deal of stress as a result of colonization, Western lifestyle and bureaucratic control. High suicide rates, self-harming, use of alcohol, tobacco and hash which results in violence and other forms of abuse indicate harmful effects on health, both physical and psychosocial. Effects are seen in generations as a social inheritance. In addition, there is also an increase in lifestyle illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, stress and depression etc.

These problems are also evident in Greenland. In addition to commonly recognized health factors such as income, education etc., there is also a definite effect resulting from colonization and deculturalization.

### A need to find the balance again

Today, Greenland is experiencing increasing polarisation and imbalance in society, both for individuals and on a regional basis. The rich are getting richer and even more are becoming poorer. Many have no clear opportunities to influence their own situation.

Greenland experiences a great deal of administration, where Western values are prevalent. Despite the fact that most of the population speak Greenlandic, the former colonial power's language is still dominant.

Immigrants still only learn Greenlandic to a limited degree. This limits opportunities for insight into the Greenlandic culture and understanding and also limits development, instead of introducing innovation and starting over. Resources are lost in this process.

Some Greenlanders live today in a schism between two diametrical opposite cultures and so are alienated in their own country. The original values; living in harmony with nature, with each other and with oneself, respect for the wisdom of the elders, sharing worldly goods, working for the community are all in contrast to the Western culture, with domination of

nature, rationalization of feelings, working for personal gain and competing with the rest of the community.

Greenland as a society and its individuals need to find the balance again. There is a need for healing, mentally and physically.

### Psychological aspects

The many prejudices about Greenlanders being a certain way – for example drunken and incapable of holding a job – must be changed. It is essential to separate the problem from the individual. It is not the individual who is the problem; it is not the Greenlandic who is the problem. The problem is the problem. Once the problem has been identified, there is also a solution and then there is a chance for healing. The social and health systems have to a great extent helped to »teach people helplessness«, rather than focusing on the resources that can be found in the person, the person's network and in the community. The psychological aspects of colonization are complex and profound and this must be reflected in the solutions. Some people need individual, personal assistance to overcome the post-colonial pain, but society also needs a more radical

healing. The processing of postcolonial complexes must be based on the original values rather than a constant attempt to solve problems in the context of a foreign culture.

It is essential that the colonial story is told, listened to and acknowledged, both in a historic perspective and in a modern perspective. There is a long tradition for telling and for listening among the Inuit. There is a genuine interest for each other – who they are and where they come from. There is a high degree of openness and willingness to adapt. An openness which, seen from an outside point of view, could perhaps be perceived as being naive. This can be used in the telling and understanding of the different stories that make up the past; both those that are traumatic and painful and those that give accounts of the good times. It is possible to cultivate and build on the alternative stories and accounts that can contribute to creating new, inner land-scapes, new ways of thinking, new understandings and a release from the postcolonial traumas, enabling personal and communal growth.

#### A chance to move on

In contrast to many other indigenous peoples, Greenlanders form the majority of the population in Greenland. The Greenlandic language is spoken and Greenland has achieved a degree of self-governance and independence. This provides the opportunity for greater and necessary

cultural, economic and psychological independence and therefore the opportunity to surmount the consequences of colonization. In many ways, Greenlanders stand strong and united and it is clear that growth is taking place these years. The generation has, in its own way, paid the price and gone through emotional pain. However, some of the pain has been coped with successfully and society has adapted, making it possible to move on. Especially the young show the way forward in many ways, with creativity and artistic expression, where the individual's standpoint and influence are used to re-develop and find new roads. Many of them educate themselves and contribute actively to the development of society.

Independent of the colonial trauma, they create their own histories where self-esteem and confidence build pride about being a Greenlander in a globalised and harmonized world. Identity and standpoint become clearer and purer and also unique. The inner landscapes – our own stories, our perception of ourselves, our own experiences – also hold many new and unknown roads. There are many opportunities and challenges in finding new destinations and alternative routes.

The cultural ballast, the ability to survive, to overcome a colonial trauma and to find a Greenlandic way forward could prove to be strength, both for the individual and for society in a world with increasing globalisation and harmonisation.



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Head office: ISSORTARFIMMUT 13, P.O. BOX 1024,  
DK 3900 NUUK / Phone: +299 34 37 00 / [www.inuplan.gl](http://www.inuplan.gl)