

**WHAT IS ARCTIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT? PRESSURING ENERGY
DEVELOPMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCE EXPLOITATION UNDER INUIT SELF-
DETERMINATION IN NUNAVUT AND KALAALLIT NUNAAT**

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Note on positionality

I am not Inuk, nor from the Arctic or North America as a whole. I come from Brittany (France) and Drenthe (the Netherlands). My mother tongue is French, and I am writing this thesis-by-articles in English, both colonial languages to Inuit Nunaat. My personal educational upbringing was spent between state schooling in the Netherlands and French schools in South-East Asia, and the reality of where my family is from, which is at the frontlines of climate change impacts and overall environmental pollution between coastal erosion, soil pollution, and weather changes impacting livelihood opportunities and traditions (Lamy, 2013; Boinot et al., 2025). Due to assimilation policies, my father's mother tongue and my grandmother's (on my mother's side) language – Plattdeutsch and Briton – were not passed down. More generally, this lack of knowledge transmission deeply impacted the ways younger generations relate and understand the land and the sea. While cultural revival efforts certainly exist (Le Pipec, 2014), the reality remains a strong loss of millennia-old environmental knowledge between only a few generations.

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Thesis-by-Articles Abstract

As the media and states have picked up on the narrative of the Arctic as a goldmine for rare earths and minerals and resources, both Nunavut and Greenland are at the centre of international attention. The coming to power of President Trump of the United States of America in 2025 has started with a second heavy push to purchase Greenland from Denmark. Greenlandic officials however have reiterated that the answer to these pressures is not a debate on who would be a better colonizer between Denmark and the USA, but to remain focused on Greenland's self-determination and path towards independence. Meanwhile, in the case of Canada's Arctic, midst the threats to Canadian sovereignty by claiming the country as a 51st state, Inuit officials in Nunavut remain clear on their own path towards self-determination within the Canadian federacy.

This thesis-by-article is situated within this complex social, political and economic ecosystem and asks the fundamental question: **“How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?”** The first article of the thesis-by-articles – published in the *Arctic Yearbook* - dissects the underpinning political dynamics in regional natural resource development and global decarbonization. The main research question for this article is “How are natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshaping environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut, and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability of Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region?” The second article – currently under review with *The Polar Journal* - continues with the topic of natural resource development in line with Inuit self-determination, zooming in in Greenland as an independent state-to-be. It asks “How do Greenland's political-economic choices in resource and energy development shape its pursuit of energy sovereignty?” The third article – published at *The Northern Review* - zooms in on Nunavut at the municipal and territorial governance level and dives deeper in the question of Inuit knowledge advanced by the previous article. The study asks “In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision-making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks?”

The articles each identify key findings for the fields of International Relations and critical political geography in their applicability to Arctic studies. The thesis helps address theoretical gaps of epistemological nature and empirical gaps in this field through a multidisciplinary approach. The main findings of the **first article** point towards an enmeshment of regional securitization with imperatives of environmental (sustainable) governance. Specifically, natural resource development (especially mining) has become a powerful avenue for decolonial and ecological self-determination against the colonial state (Canada and Denmark) and international growing pressures. The main findings of the **second article** are situated at the conceptual refining of the tensions between agency and structure where energy sovereignty, under the ‘post’ of Greenland’s colonial era, is structured by a balancing act between extractivism and ecology. Global interests thereby underscore Greenland’s sustainable development paradigm. The results elaborated on in the **third article** how differences in (i) federal language versus territorial language, in (ii) the theory of centering Inuit knowledge versus its implementation, and in (iii) the theory of community consultation based in the Duty to Consult and the Free, Prior and Informed consent frameworks versus its implementation in federal and territorial policy on resource and energy development. These tensions between the federal, the territorial, and intra-territorial, showcase how Inuit self-determination becomes a maneuver against colonial imposition in defining sustainability.

MAP OF THE THESIS-BY-ARTICLES

Environmental Governance in Greenland and Nunavut: Pressuring Energy Development and Natural Resource Exploitation under Inuit Self-Determination

How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?

Article 1 - DECOLONIZATION IN GREENLAND AND NUNAVUT AND RESOURCE EXPLOITATION FOR A DECARBONIZED WORLD: WHAT DOES AN ARCTIC CENTURY MEAN?

Published at the *Arctic Yearbook*, 2025

Article 2 - NATURAL RESOURCES AND FRAMING KALAALLIT NUNAAT'S INDEPENDENCE: (RE)TELLING EXTRACTIVISM IN THE ARCTIC

Under review at the *Polar Journal*

Article 3: MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN NUNAVUT: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND INUIT KNOWLEDGE

Published at *The Northern Review*, 2026

How are natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshaping environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region?

How do Greenland's political-economic choices in resource and energy development shape its pursuit of energy sovereignty?

In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision-making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks?

Structuration Theory

Post-colonial theory

Decolonial Theory

Qualitative thematic content and discourse analysis

Theoretical Contributions: Critical Arctic Studies and Sustainability

Empirical Contributions: Community Consultation, Inuit Knowledge, and Environmental Governance

CONTEXT CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 A Reality Walk Around Iqaluit

On April 15th, 2024, I took a plane from Ottawa to Iqaluit. After much back-and-forth emailing, ethics clearances, and other technical planning such as hotels and flight tickets, this much anticipated fieldwork was the culmination of years of research. The next day after having arrived, I decided to walk around the snowy town. One of the first recognizable buildings is the high school with its front-facing black exterior wall which later was explained to me to be a passive heat system. The blue building on top of the hill is the town's power station adorned with solar panels on its entire side. As I walk around town, I think about the statistics and media headlines emphasizing the diesel dependency of both the entire territory and the town specifically (Little, 2025). Now in 2025, I also think of the many recent headlines emphasizing the Arctic as the forefront of potential conflict escalation between regional and global superpowers, as well as the many articles framing the diesel dependency as a human and environmental security issue, triggering what sustainability and sustainable development would mean in such a context (McDonald, 2020). Fuel is shipped to the territory during the summer months and stored to be converted into energy for the town's use – the same applies to all of Nunavut's 25 communities. In 2021, a diesel leak contaminated Iqaluit's drinking water. In July 2024, 7000 liters of diesel leaked in Rankin Inlet after an earlier incident in 2020 which saw over 18,000 liters spilled from a tank overflowing into a high school and later into the Hudson Bay (CBC News, 2021, 2024; Nunatsiaq News, 2022) . As I walk around town, these two recent examples of the dangers of diesel stay on my mind, in addition to the impacts of climate change such as seasonal changes and permafrost thaw on infrastructure (Ford et al., 2010), as they show the double-edged sword of fossil fuel use in the territory, in between vital use to keep the lights on and heating running, and recurrent environmental and health disasters.

And yet, walking around town brought to light a much different picture, a picture where both diesel and renewables come to coexist within the same buildings, the same homes, outside of oppositional discourses.

The power plant stands as an allegory of this coexistence, where diesel and solar somehow provide energy together and keep this town alive. I came into this research as a young person concerned for the future of my family, communities, and overall, of people around the world amidst the unfolding of the climate crisis, with a deep commitment to sustainability. The Arctic is estimated to be heating four times the global average (Rantanen et al., 2022) – yet, climate change mitigation and adaptation measures are challenging to implement due to weather, infrastructural, and capacity challenges (Ford et al., 2015, 2021; Vogel & Bullock, 2021). Despite the potential to be alarmist, the story of energy security is anything but. It is a story of careful calculations, hope and enthusiasm, and is a story that will still be unfolding for the many decades to come. Now in 2026, I also see how research on the deployment of renewable energy infrastructure and sustainable development imperatives in the Arctic is instrumental. For example, the research I conducted in Iqaluit is now part of a larger policy initiative by the Government of Nunavut to further support renewable energy development and community consultation practices.

1.1 Research Problem: Inuit Nunaat amidst Big Power Politics and Energy Security

This thesis-by-articles is coming together during troubled times. The coming into power of President Trump of the United States of America has started with a second heavy push to purchase Greenland from Denmark (Debusmann et al., 2026). The presidency also signals the increase in fossil fuel investments – including in the Arctic with the reversal of limitations of oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska – and an overall denial of both climate change and climate justice. The blatant disregard for democracy and the rule of law has direct repercussions for Arctic affairs where the future of the Arctic Council thereby becomes uncertain. The Arctic Council serves as a key platform for circumpolar diplomatic relations and scientific collaborations. Without it, or with its activities hampered, climate change research as well as transparent collaborations between circumpolar entities – including Russia – are greatly fragilized. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 had triggered the halt of circumpolar cooperation which has begun again, holding some virtual meetings. Despite some efforts to restart relations and essential scientific work, the coming into power of Trump and the rising tensions with both Canada and the Nordics

do not bode well for the future of circumpolar relations and peace. Against this bleak backdrop, Inuit governance remains steadfast.

In the case of Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenlandic officials have reiterated that the solution is to debate who is the better colonizer between Denmark and the USA or who Greenland should be colonized by, but to remain focused on Kalaallit Nunaat's self-determination and path towards independence. Meanwhile, in Nunavut's case, amidst the threats to Canadian sovereignty by claiming the country as a 51st state, Inuit officials in Nunavut remain clear on their own path towards self-determination within the Canadian federacy. Inuit Nunaat, the homeland of the Inuit – the people – is an example of bottom-up governance and Indigenous self-determination amidst Big Power Politics and rising international conflicts. In both Greenland and Nunavut, the thesis-by-articles argues that this is a story of resilience and focused advocacy towards self-determination against narratives of small state weakness, using both domestic and international frameworks and institutions to build brick-by-brick the infrastructures towards Inuit self-determination. Fundamentally, the potential supplies of minerals deemed critical for global industrial growth – critical minerals, including for global decarbonization – have shaped a media and diplomatic buzz where the Arctic is seen as potentially becoming the next mining Eldorado as permafrost thaw and sea ice melting opens the region for increases in terrestrial and marine commerce. As the media and states have picked up on this narrative of the Arctic as a goldmine for rare earths and minerals and resources, both Nunavut and Greenland are at the crux of international attention – whether that attention is warranted or not. This thesis-by-article is thereby situated within this complex ecosystem and asks the question: *How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?*

Before diving into the heart of the subject, it bears to remind of the institutional context of both Nunavut and Greenland. In the case of Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenlandic officials have reiterated that the solution is not to debate who is the better colonizer between Denmark and the USA or who Greenland should be colonized by, but to remain focused on Kalaallit Nunaat's self-determination and path towards independence.

Meanwhile, in Nunavut's case, amidst the threats to Canadian sovereignty by claiming the country as a 51st state, Inuit officials in Nunavut remain clear on their own path towards self-determination within the Canadian federacy. Inuit Nunaat, the homeland of the Inuit – the people – is an example of bottom-up governance and Indigenous self-determination amidst Big Power Politics and rising international conflicts. The thesis-by-articles argues that in both Greenland and Nunavut this is a story of resilience and focused advocacy towards self-determination against narratives of small state weakness, using both domestic and international frameworks and institutions to build brick-by-brick the infrastructures towards Inuit self-determination. Fundamentally, the potential supplies of minerals deemed critical for global industrial growth – critical minerals, including for global decarbonization – have shaped a media and diplomatic buzz where the Arctic is seen as potentially becoming the next mining Eldorado as permafrost thaw and sea ice melting opens the region for increases in terrestrial and marine commerce. As the media and states have picked up on this narrative of the Arctic as a goldmine for rare earths and minerals and resources, both Nunavut and Greenland are at the crux of international attention – whether that attention is warranted or not. This thesis-by-article is thereby situated within this complex ecosystem.

1.1.1 The Institutional Context in Nunavut

The colonization of the Eastern part of the Canadian Arctic intensified during and after the Second World War. The Second World War signaled the militarization of the Arctic, where growing conflict with, at the time, the USSR, triggered investments into military infrastructure in the North – Iqaluit's airport for instance was constructed as a military airport (Gagnon, 2002). For the Inuit population of the region, the end of the Second World War marked the start of colonial genocidal policies. Many Inuit children were sent to residential and day schools, and the 1950s Forced Relocation Program displaced populations from Northern Québec – Nunavik – to settlements on Ellesmere Island, where they faced poverty, starvation, and cruel treatment by the Canadian armed forces there (Dunning, 2013; Tassinari, 1995; F. Tester & Kulchyski, 2011). The displacement of Inuit communities to Ellesmere Island was conducted as a response by the federal government to claim sovereign ownership over the Arctic archipelago according to the Law Of The

Sea, where sustained human population under state control justified sovereignty ownership over the land and waters, and crucial in this case, over the Northwest Passage, which the United States of America considered international waters instead (Byers, Lalonde, 2009; Lajeunesse, Lackenbauer, 2023; Dumas, 2023). While the story of Canadian colonial control over what is to become Nunavut is marred in colonial genocidal violence, the incorporation of the territory and the people into the Canadian federation marked the beginning of Inuit sovereign political advocacy by leaders of the time.

The Canadian territory of Nunavut was created through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, signed in 1993 and came into effect in 1999. The 27-year-old territory holds an unconventional governance system rooted in consensus rather than political party affiliations. There are no political parties and the Legislative Assembly has a consensus style of government (Assembly of Nunavut, n.d.). As such, the members of the Legislative Assembly are all elected as independent candidates. While unanimous agreement is not necessary for most motions or legislation (majority rule is for most matters sufficient), this style of governance is considered to be more aligned with Inuit traditional governance and decision-making (ibid.).

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NCLA), a Modern Treaty, thereby laid the ground for transfer of jurisdiction from the federal government to the territorial government in several areas, including energy and natural resources. On energy and natural resources, while the 1993 Agreement laid the grounds for such transfer, it was only concretized in 2024 through the passing of the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement where, instead of receiving royalties, Nunavut now has the ability to make decisions about lands administration, development and resource managements, receive direct royalties on public lands, as well as further benefit from land and resource development (Government of Canada, 2025). The Devolution Agreement officially transfers the responsibilities from the Government of Canada to the Government of Nunavut over lands, resource management and waters. This set of responsibilities is added to the existing territorial responsibilities such as health, education, social services, or housing. The complete transfer of responsibilities is set to come into effect in April 2027 (ibid.).

Under the NCLA of 1993, a complex governance structure was developed to manage the territory. Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) is mandated under the Agreement to represent the rights of Inuit in Nunavut and to implement obligations as described in the Agreement. It also ensures that other parties, such as the Government of Nunavut, meet their obligations under the Agreement (Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., n.d.). The Nunavut Trust manages and invests the yearly installments from the land claims settlement paid by the Government of Canada to Nunavut until 2007. The Board of Directors is composed by 8 members who are elected by Nunavut Inuit 16 years of age or older. The Executive Committee of NTI is composed of the President and Vice-President of NTI as well as the three Presidents of the Regional Inuit Associations – Kitikmeot Inuit Association, Kivalliq Inuit Association, and Qikiqtani Inuit Association (ibid.). Interestingly, NTI's Board also has committees: the Inuit Social and Cultural Development Advisory Committee, the Inuit Wildlife and Environment Advisory Committee, as well as the Makigiaqta Inuit Training Corporation which was established in 2015 following NTI's implementation lawsuit in 2006 (ibid.). In addition to the regional associations, each region also has regional development corporations. Economic development organizations – 6 in total and distinct from regional development corporations – also form part of the complex institutional constellation of Nunavut, as well as do the 5 territorial wildlife organizations. In addition, an Inuit Heritage Trust, responsible for archaeological sites and artifacts, was created through the NCLA.

Importantly for energy and natural resource development, there are 6 institutions of public government: the Nunavut Impact Review Board, the Nunavut Planning Commission, the Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal, the Nunavut Water Board, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, and the Nunavut Marine Council. In addition to the 2024 Devolution Agreement, the Independent Power Producer Program, signed in 2023, allows independent producers outside of the territory's utility company QEC to generate electrical power from renewable systems and sell this power directly to QEC, thereby integrating renewable energy into the grid (Qulliq Energy Corporation, n.d.). As such, the 2024 Devolution Agreement and the 2023 Independent Power Producer Program fundamentally changed the energy and mineral resource development landscape of the territory and prove to be structural policy pillars for the thesis-by-articles as shown in the

three articles of the thesis-by-articles. The two frameworks provided space for energy diversification as well as renewed control over natural resource exploitation and its subsequent revenues.

On energy and environmental policy, Nunavut's 1993 and 2024 Agreements provide guidelines towards energy self-determination (inclusive of natural resources management) as well as environmental prerogatives. The Environmental Impacts and Benefits Assessment protocols in particular form the foundation of any development proposal in the territory. It requires deep consultation protocols with communities and experts to determine the potential impacts of the proposed development plan – positive or negative impacts (Nunavut Impact Review Board, n.d. -a). The Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) is in charge of this process, in collaboration with the other aforementioned public institutions such as the Planning Commission, the Water Board, the Wildlife Management Board, and the Surface Rights Tribunal.

Several legal frameworks guide the approval process of proposed energy development plans, in particular the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act (*ibid.*). The Nunavut Planning Commission first receives proposed projects and, if deemed appropriate, sends them to NIRB, which triggers a consultation protocol with public comments and technical review (Nunavut Impact Review Board, n.d. -b). Similar as stated in the Independent Power Producer Program policy, it is within this consultation protocol with the public and with technical staff that questions of implementation of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit Knowledge) is of particular importance, and where, according to their own Five Year Strategic Plan 2023-2027, the results of a capacity building workshop they organized point towards the need to strengthen and systematize their use of IQ in their operations. Inuit knowledge and environmental governance is thereby not only embedded within the responsibilities of the Government of Nunavut as defined in the Land Claims Agreement of 1993, this governance is also deeply tied to the mandate of operating under Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit.

As such, the institutional context of Nunavut serves as fundamental to the thesis-by-articles subject matter, energy sovereignty and natural resources development. In Article 3, this institutional and legal

context regarding the implementation of community consultation and Inuit Knowledge in (renewable) energy development is what supports the critical analysis of how effective these measures and policies are. In Article 1, this institutional context serves as a foundation for the exploration into environmental governance in relation to both the Canadian federation and to international actors. In Article 1 specifically, this institutional context is elaborated in juxtaposition with Greenland's.

1.1.2 The Institutional Context in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland)

In Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), the journey to self-determination looks much different than Nunavut. This unique context stems from Denmark's unitary governance system and longer colonial legacy. In particular, the Home Rule Act of 1978 (which came into force in 1979), a legal pillar supporting Kalaallit Nunaat's independence, came about as Greenlandic political representation in Danish parliament became possible in 1950s. As such, greater Kalaallit autonomy could henceforth be put on the agenda, responding to the socio-economic impacts of Danish colonial social policies (Ackrén, 2022). Denmark assumed colonial control over Greenland in 1814 after the Danish and Norwegian monarchy broke apart, until then one single kingdom (Olesen, 2025). The colonial period for Greenland is however marked as beginning in 1721, when the priest and missionary Hans Egede sought to reestablish contact with Greenland and convert them to Christianity with the support of the Danish-Norwegian crown (ibid.). The colonial relations between Denmark and Greenland were henceforth called 'paternalistic', a euphemism for brutal and racist colonial violent rule, with the deployment of education, healthcare, and social conditioning programs, including forced removal of Inuit children from their families (Ellekrog, 2024), as well as the forced sterilization of Inuit women starting the 1960s (Sundheds- og kirkeministeriet, 2025). After the Second World War, under international and Greenlandic pressures, Greenland was granted two seats at the Danish Parliament in 1953.

Following the Home Rule Act of 1978, the Self-Government Act of 2008 recognized Greenlanders as "a people according to international law with the right to self-determination (Ackrén, 2022, p.5)" and came into force in 2009. Natural resources and their management were now under the jurisdiction of the

Greenlandic government. Unlike Nunavut, the Greenlandic political landscape has political parties. The government is called Naalakkersuisut and the parliament is called Inatsisartut (consisting of 31 seats) – both self-governing authorities democratically elected. Under the 2008 Act, these authorities now have jurisdiction for instance over justice, the establishment of courts of law, the police, as well as family law, border controls, financial regulations and mineral resource activities (Statsministeriet, n.d.). While not covering defence or security, the authorization arrangement between the Realm of the Danish Kingdom and the Naalakkersuisut enables the latter to conclude international agreements with foreign states and organizations – granted that the arrangement does not cover existing jurisdiction of Denmark nor is signed within an international organization that Denmark is a part of (ibid.).

On the Naalakkersuisut and the Inatsisartut's political landscape, there are 6 political parties in Kalaallit Nunaat: Atassut, Demokratern, Inuit Ataqatigiit, Kattusseqatigiit Partiiat, Qulleq, and Siumut. The recent 2026 elections saw the management of natural resources, economic development, and securing independence as central questions. The elections also saw a change parliamentary composition. The Naalakkersuisut is composed in response to the Inatsisartut's elections. According to the official results available through the Qinersineq voting portal, Demokraatit won the elections with 29.95% of votes, followed by Naleraq with 24.5%, the former incumbent Inuit Ataqatigiit with 21.4%, Siumut with 14.2%, and Qulleq with 4.4% (KIMIK, 2025). No political party was able to secure an outright majority. The results of the March 2025 elections juxtapose two conceptions and approaches to Greenlandic independence: the Demokraatit party leader Jens-Frederik Nielsen, takes a more progressive approach to independence, whereas the runner-up Naleraq seeks a much more rapid approach to independence from Denmark (Lukiv & Kirby, 2025). In terms of resource exploitation, while Naleraq has historically opposed uranium mining, the Greenlandic parliament and government are debating the zero-tolerance policy on uranium mining (Berthelsen, 2025). The different approaches to economic self-determination relating to independence address a key issue in the development of the natural resource exploitation sector. Demokraatit, a social-liberal party, advocates for tax incentives, streamlined regulations and reduced state intervention while

Naleraq remains “deeply skeptical to foreign investment” and advocates that Kalaallit Nunaat “must retain full control over its resources” (Jouan, 2025).

There are several departments and authorities responsible for mineral development in Kalaallit Nunaat. In particular, each of the three phases of development – prospecting, exploration, and exploitation – are strongly framed by government policies. The licences to operate are given by the Naalakkersuisut where the Mineral Licence and Safety Authority is in charge of processing applications for prospecting and exploration. The licence to exploit however must undergo an environmental impact assessment as well as a social impact assessment (The Ministry of Natural Resources, 2020). The Environmental Agency for Mineral Resource Activities under the Ministry of Nature and Environment is responsible for the overseeing of the environmental impact assessment and any further impacts of the mineral resource activities on the environment. In addition, an Impact Benefit Agreement must be signed with the licensee, the relevant authorities, and the Government of Greenland to fulfill a social sustainability and socio-economic agreement under the terms of the exploitation licence (*ibid.*). These licencing regimes also indicate a time-frame under which each stage must be completed: the prospecting licence is given for a maximum term of 5 years, exploration for a maximum term of 10 years, and exploitation for 30 years. Extensions may be given depending on the project (*ibid.*).

In Kalaallit Nunaat, energy and environmental governance is thought as profoundly existential to the sovereignty and self-determination of the autonomous territory. While Nunavut exists within a federal system, Denmark has the specificity of having several autonomous regions within its sovereign territory, with Kalaallit Nunaat seeking independence. As such, any proposed development plan which includes natural resources is strongly legally framed. As is developed in Article 1 and Article 2, in particular, the right to utilize natural resources, regulate its revenues, as well as determine its own economic development is within its jurisdiction since the Self-Government Act of 2009. As such, the Environmental Protection Act and the Mineral Resources Act are the two pillars framing both environmental governance and natural resources development. Similar to Nunavut, environmental impact assessments are conducted by public

institutions. The emphasis, however, in Greenland is not on the use or deployment of specifically Indigenous knowledge. Rather, a focus on the employment and recruitment of Greenlandic labour, as well as the education of local staff, is paramount. Other social impacts are, however, also included, such as preservation of local values and traditions. These areas are of particular importance for the research engaged in Article 1 in relation to Arctic exceptionalism and the deployment of environmental governance in this glocal context, and supporting the territory's energy sovereignty as explored in Article 2.

1.1.3 Contextualizing the research

This aforementioned context on environmental governance in Nunavut and Greenland thereby show different paths towards the assertion of self-determination: while Greenland emphasizes its right to self-govern and economic development, Nunavut adds the need to foreground Inuit Knowledge. As this thesis-by-articles is firmly ingrained in International Relations, the aim is not to provide a systematic comparison of two starkly different cases in institutional and political senses, but rather to showcase diversity and complexity on the topic of natural resource development and energy sovereignty in the Arctic. Indeed, as the three articles showcase, the institutional and political differences of Nunavut and Greenland form a pertinent analytical case in International Relations. Instead of taking the Arctic as a monolithic region, these regional specificities argue for the incorporation of complexity, within IR. In short, the thesis-by-articles makes the argument of bridging global and local dynamics to better understand International Relations as applied here to (critical) Arctic studies and critical political geography. If the Arctic's natural resources are of international interest, then international interests matter for Arctic affairs, and as such, the Arctic's domestic affairs are ingrained within these international relations.

As global superpowers are paying close attention to the Arctic, both from a hard security perspective and from an economic security perspective, by at times seeking to undermine the will of the stewards of the region, Inuit governance in Nunavut and Greenland is seeking to strengthen its path towards decolonization from state colonial powers by navigating both domestic and these international dynamics. While global

media portrays the Arctic as this region rich in resources, particularly minerals, and while global actors such as the USA and China are seeking to establish further control of resource exploitation in the region, Inuit leaders in Nunavut and Greenland are securing development paths aimed to strengthen local economies and resilience against state colonial economic control.

Through the newest Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement of 2024, and through the continuation of Greenland's path towards self-government and independence from Denmark, the rush towards both resource exploitation and decarbonization of energy grids sparks foundational questions pertaining to Inuit governance. Under international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and domestic legal frameworks supporting Indigenous rights, (renewable) resource development sparks conversations pertaining to the place of Inuit knowledge in the crafting of such development policies, Inuit voices in resource development and the rights to consultation of local populations, and capacity in supporting Inuit leadership in the development of human (and energy) security in both territories.

The research problem this thesis-by articles addresses is thereby the dissonance between on the one hand a global rush towards the exploitation of Arctic resources for both the energy transition and growing industrial needs, and on the other hand the self-determination movements in both Greenland and Nunavut, including internal dynamics of both territories regarding this global trend of decarbonization and increased mining. To dig into this dissonance, three areas corresponding to the three articles are developed: the first – **Article 1** - is in reaction to this global turn towards the Arctic as a geopolitical economic field where imperial dynamics are unfolding where this thesis questions the notion of self-determination in resource exploitation. The second area – **Article 2** - developed takes a closer look at Greenland. It details how media has narrowed in on this discourse of rush towards Arctic resources, and it seeks to contrast a mainstream and colonial discourse of a rush to exploit the Arctic's natural resources. It does so through the nuanced and dynamic reality of Greenland by using the concept of sacrificial zone within this larger context of decolonialization from Denmark. The third area – **Article 3** - takes a similar approach and narrows in on Nunavut by looking

into the implementation of the energy transition as a mean towards implementing energy security through social licenses and Inuit knowledge. The three areas together – peace and security in Arctic resource exploitation, colonial media discourses towards Greenland, and Nunavut’s energy security through community consultation – thereby dissect the research problem, the dissonance between an imperial global rush for resource exploitation against Inuit self-determination. This introduction offers an overview of the thesis-by-article, briefly describing the theoretical and methodological approaches of all three articles, which are further developed in the following chapter on theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as the methodological framework. Lastly, this introduction offers insights into the contributions to the scientific literature pertaining Inuit self-determination, environmental governance, and Big Power Politics.

1.2 Structure of the thesis-by-articles

Article 1 grounds the research into Nunavut and Greenland, and it starts from the overarching geopolitical context underpinning energy research in the area, while Articles 2 and 3 seek to draw the similarities and differences between Greenland and Nunavut.

Article 1 of the thesis-by-articles thereby dissects the underpinning political dynamics in regional natural resource development and global decarbonization. The main research question for this article is *How do natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshape environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region?* The first article uses thematic qualitative content analysis as a methodology through government policy documents, laws and agreements, interviews of rights- and stake- holders in Greenland (n=3) and Nunavut (n=17). The response to Article 1’s research question is guided by two sub-research questions:

- How do structure and agency shape power dynamics among local, state, and foreign actors and influence governance outcomes?

- And what does an ecological decolonial approach imply for redefining peace and security in the region?

Article 2 continues with the topic of natural resource development in line with Inuit self-determination, zooming in in Greenland as an independent state-to-be. It asks *How do Greenland's political-economic choices in resource and energy development shape its pursuit of energy sovereignty?* The study uses thematic content analysis of government policies and legal documents in juxtaposition with a critical analysis of the scientific literature on ecology, post-colonial theory to make a theoretical contribution to the field of Arctic and development critical studies. The theoretical contribution – an elaboration and refining of existing paradigms – is thereby structured around the two sub-research questions emanating from Article 2's main research question:

- In what ways do post-colonial inform Greenland's energy-resource policies as it seeks diplomatic and economic legitimacy beyond Denmark?
- And to what extent do global energy-security pressures structure Greenland's path toward energy sovereignty?

Article 3 zooms in on Nunavut at the municipal and territorial governance level and dives deeper in the question of Inuit knowledge advanced by the previous article. The study asks *In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision-making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks?* The study relies on fieldwork conducted in April 2024 in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. Through the thematic content analysis of interview respondents (17), it dissects the underpinning social and political dynamics of renewable energy development in the territory. The article's research question is further divided into two sub-research questions guiding the analysis:

- In what ways do the legal frameworks of the Duty to Consult and Free, Prior and Informed Consent, as well as Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit Societal Values) guide multi-level decision-making for renewable energy in Nunavut?
- How is the government of Nunavut leveraging the energy transition to advance Inuit rights, local livelihoods, and territorial energy security, while addressing structural capacity constraints?

1.4 Theoretical approach

As is further developed in the subsequent chapter, this thesis-by-articles is informed by a theoretical approach that combines post-colonial theory, structuration theory, and decolonial theory. These three theoretical frameworks enable a detailed analysis of the research problem, thereby deepening the understanding of the region's political-geographical complexities. Additionally, these analytical venture points also support the expansion of Arctic studies to International Relations. In particular, decolonial and post-colonial theories relate the Arctic region to global theoretical and action-based movements against colonial and imperial oppression (including of economic nature) (Spivak, 1999; Contretas et al., 2023; Lugones, 2010; Mignolo, 2017; Raina, 2024). Meanwhile, structuration theory, rooted in sociology, similarly broadens the theoretical scope of Arctic studies to incorporate epistemological debates on structure and agency as well as subsequent power relations (including ecological power relations) prevalent in social sciences (Bacon, 2019; Fjellheim, 2023; Keskitalo-Foley et al., 2013; Giddens, 1984; Scott, Smith, 2018). Within Inuit Nunaat, therefore, the theoretical approach confronts the amalgamation of distinct realities as well as empowers the uniqueness of political organizations within the region. It highlights self-determination discourses and trajectories while under the premise of confronting colonial legacy.

The theoretical approach, rooted in the need to understand the research problem while preserving regional complexity, thereby serves as justification for a 'grounded methodology'. Grounded methodology is iterative, responding to data as it is generated (Chun Tie et al., 2019 ; Lejeune, 2019). Grounded methodology thereby enables the continuous adaptation of tools in response to field complexity, designed

precisely to respond to the need to incorporate local perspectives into the analytical framework meaningfully. It uses thematic discourse analysis as a primary method using interviews in addition to policy and legal documents as a data source. Thematic discourse analysis is well suited for a grounded methodology, as the analysis is founded on the uncovering of themes within the generated data, as opposed to fitting the generated data to preconceived categories. The data generates its own conclusions. As such, **post-colonial theory**, foregrounding critiques of the current global neoliberal economic model and foregrounding the imagination of the beyond of colonial violence, enables a better understanding of the governance of resource exploitation and energy in Greenland by acknowledging the jurisdictional nature of self-determination in Greenland which is unique in Inuit Nunangat. **Structuration theory**, which frames structure and agency as co-constitutive, enables the understanding of power in the region as constructed through a jurisdictional and epistemological confrontation between Inuit priorities and big power (geo)politics. Structuration theory enables the theoretical grounding of the research problem in political geography and International Relations. Lastly, **decolonial theory** enables the differentiation of jurisdiction and political reality between Greenland and Nunavut but narrowing in on the self-determination dynamics underscoring renewable energy development in Nunavut. It highlights decolonial efforts while under the Canadian federation. The research at hand is regional and the three theoretical frameworks uncover as such interlocked governance dynamics within Inuit Nunangat and in relation to International Relations. This interlocking analysis is thereby supported by the grounded methodology and thematic discourse analysis.

1.5 Results and contributions

The articles each identify key findings for the fields of International Relations and critical political geography in their applicability to Arctic studies. As is further developed in the following two chapters, the thesis-by-articles helps address theoretical gaps of epistemological nature and empirical gaps in these fields through a multidisciplinary approach.

The main findings of the **Article 1** point towards an enmeshment of regional securitization (pressured by increased interest of international actors) in conjunction with the prioritization of (sustainable) environmental governance by local governments due to the increased attention towards natural resources exploitation potentials identified by both the local governments and by international actors. Natural resource development and governance (especially in mining) becomes the platform supporting local decolonial and ecological self-determination against colonial state intervention (Canada and Denmark) and international growing pressures. Natural resource governance thereby serves as both a platform of local self-determination and as object of international pressure defining regional political and diplomatic relations.

The main findings of the **Article 2** are situated at the conceptual refining of the tensions between agency and structure where energy sovereignty, under the ‘post’ of Greenland’s colonial era, is structured by a balancing act between extractivism and ecology, developing further the findings of Arctic 1. Global interests by state and private actors thereby underscore Greenland’s sustainable development paradigm where the Greenlandic government seeks to instrumentalize this growing interest to further support their economic development - and thus their independence – by defining themselves the economic self-determined road ahead. In between extractivism and ecology, natural resources governance thereby shapes the political and economic nature of development in post-colonial Kalaallit Nunaat.

The results of the discursive and thematic analysis in the **Article 3** of both interviews (17) and policy and legal documents show differences in (i) federal language versus territorial language, in (ii) the theory of centering Inuit knowledge versus its implementation, and in (iii) the theory of community consultation based in the Duty to Consult and the Free, Prior and Informed consent frameworks versus its implementation in federal and territorial policy on resource and energy development. These tensions between the federal, the territorial, and intra-territorial, showcase how Inuit self-determination becomes a maneuver against colonial imposition in defining sustainability.

1.6 Conclusion to the Introductory Chapter

This introductory chapter highlights the research problem as well as the approaches of Article 1, Article 2, and Article 3 in answering the main research question “*How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?*”

Using qualitative research methods, from discourse and content analysis to interviews, each article makes empirical and theoretical contributions to the topics of Indigenous self-determination, governance, and natural resources for the disciplines of International Relations and critical political geography in Arctic studies.

This thesis-by-articles’ main contribution is an empirical contribution to the literature in understanding the dynamics of community consultation and incorporation of Inuit knowledge in local renewable energy development in Nunavut, as well as theoretical contributions through Inuit decolonial ecology against colonial and imperial extractivism in Kalaallit Nunaat, challenging the narrative of Big Power Politics against small Indigenous nations in Arctic geopolitics.

The research problem addressed by the thesis-by-articles – the dissonance between global increased attention for extractivism in the region, Inuit self-determination, and sustainable development – is thereby anchored in critical empirical and theoretical gaps in the scientific literature as will be further developed in the following two chapters reviewing the literature and exposing the theoretical frameworks underpinning each of the articles of this thesis-by-articles.

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CONTEXT CHAPTER 2

REVIEWING THE LITERATURE: MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARCTIC STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND CRITICAL POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

Abstract

The **Context Chapter 2** argues for a multidisciplinary approach to respond to the main research question. Through particular attention to the literature in International Relations and Critical Political Geography and how they intersect in Arctic studies, the literature review highlights the need for further research in how critical Arctic studies approaches small (sub-national) governments and Indigenous Knowledge in their analysis of sustainability and governance. The four areas of the literature review – sustainable development and sustainability; energy sovereignty; Inuit decolonial ecological security; and glocal governance and Arctic exceptionalism – show how critical political geography and International Relations enter in a disciplinary dialogue in Arctic studies. Following the findings of the literature review therefore, the thesis-by-articles addresses conceptual gaps in Arctic governance of natural resources and energy sovereignty in Nunavut and Greenland, specifically, the lack of attention to how discrepancies in understandings of sustainability and development frame economic and political self-determination. Consequently, the thesis-by-articles also addresses the empirical gap of the operationalization of Inuit Knowledge and community consultation in (sustainable) development, particularly renewable energy development. This empirical gap addresses ongoing theoretical gaps in the conceptualization of sustainability in Nunavut. The theoretical gaps and the empirical gap thereby stem from a similar observation in regards to the literature in Arctic studies through the lenses of International Relations and Critical Political Geography: the lack of scrutiny to the operationalization of Inuit Knowledge and its consequences for how environmental governance is enacted in Nunavut and Greenland, and also its consequences in framing their (diplomatic and economic) power relations to the wider global context between agency and structure.

2.0 Thinking Multi-disciplinarity

The understanding of Arctic environmental governance as applied to Greenland and Nunavut is here fundamentally attached to a critical evaluation anchored in political geography. Like the epistemological aim of structuration theory described in the following chapter, this research seeks to build bridges between theoretical perspectives which support cross-disciplinary analysis between political science and (human) geography. This multidisciplinary effort, emblematic in political geography, is not new. In 1951, Gottman retraced the linkages between geography and International Relations (IR) going back to the 19th century and argued that “because the general principles of geology, geophysics, botany, or economics do not apply in the same way throughout the different compartments existing on the earth, geographical studies appeared and were useful, cutting across the abstraction of the topical disciplines and attempting a scientific analysis of regions and their interrelations” (Gottman, 1951, p.153). Similarly, geopolitics has been critically reflected on over the past decades – albeit with controversial periods of time during and closely after the Nazi regime – and has also seen a semantic evaluation over the decades (Dalby, 2001). The fields of strategic studies, political geography, and IR, among others, have grappled with the argument articulated by thinkers such as Gottman, on how to understand regions and their interrelations (see also Agnew, 2001). The return of geography in the core tenets of social sciences in the 1970s and its widespread use in the 1990s, however, saw the emergence of critical geography (Agnew, 2020; Peet, 2000). The story of political geography, geopolitics, and critical geography lies in similar ontological and epistemological contradictions, as further described in the chapter on the theoretical framework of this thesis-by-articles. While positivism remains a core philosophical foundation in mainstream Western political thought, such as realism, this is not the case for critical geographers who denounce this very foundation (Domosh, 1991; Guelke, 1974; Rose, 1993; Shaw et al., 2006; Smith, 1999). This controversy with positivism is situated within the broader historical legacy of the social sciences seeking scientific validation by adopting methodologies (such as quantitative research) from the natural and hard sciences. This existential anxiety within the social sciences thereby led to the self-reflective creation of subfields, such as critical and radical geography, during the postmodern turn (*ibidem*).

Despite such developments, such as the incorporation of Western leftist political tenets into the study of geopolitics (critical geography), critical streams of analysis did not break the glass ceiling of mainstreaming. Indigenous geographies or feminist geographies (especially from the Global South) remain marginal in the study of IR and geopolitics despite forging spaces for radical resistance (hooks, 2000, 2015; Sharp, 2011; Acharya, 2014; Nayak, Selbin, 2010). Instead of being core theoretical components of International Relations, such as realism, they are reduced to a conglomerate of ‘critical theories’. These theories are often considered afterthoughts, whereas the practice and study of IR appear to adhere to the rules of realism and later institutionalism.

As the recent rise of authoritarianism in the West have sparked a return to realist (geo)political analysis, the aim of this research is to resist such temptations and instead look at how critical theoretical frameworks – avoiding simplified conglomeration - can support the explanations of the rise of regional (at)tensions in the Arctic. This resistance to the return of the primacy of the colonial imperial state’s perspective in explaining regional dynamics pertaining to natural resource and energy developments is achieved through a multidisciplinary outlook. Arctic studies as a field is inherently multidisciplinary, encompassing findings from the humanities (such as environmental history), social sciences (such as political science), and natural sciences (such as biology and geology and geography). It draws on this body of knowledge to develop its research corpus. It sits at the boundary between regional studies and IR, whether the focus is internal or external. It looks at both its inner workings and its interrelations with other regions of the globe. It is precisely in this last perspective that the present research situates itself.

As such, critical political geography responds to the need to foreground marginalized perspectives from mainstream frameworks. As such, critical scholars from critical political geography and beyond have highlighted the subversion of principles of justice or sustainability that instead supports the monopoly of power by states (Frandy, 2021; Fjellheim, 2021, 2022; Normann, 2021). This subversion, however, does not account for the range of manoeuvres undertaken by Indigenous nations against it, nor for their instrumentalization of colonial infrastructures to assert their own self-determination, thereby moving

beyond the pitfalls of recognition or assimilation and reframing subversion from the perspective of Indigenous resistance (Coulthard, 2007; Soer, 2023; Rodon et al., 2021; Kuokkanen, 2020, 2021). These studies of colonial subversion foreground the ways colonial and imperial power dynamics continue to shape contemporary economic and political relations, from sustainable development to the international rule of law. Studies on the politics of resistance, however, demonstrate the ways marginalized communities navigate this context of power inequalities and continue to resist against colonial oppression (Palmater, 2019; Tomiak, 2016; Barker, 2015; Borrows, 2016; Paulson, Tomiak, 2022; Coburn, 2019).

In short, Indigenous scholarships highlight the ways power is articulated in historical and contemporary colonial societies. As such, they add to critical political geography by centring Indigenous perspectives in the study of international relations. This, in turn, enables an epistemological re-evaluation of critical political geography through the incorporation of concepts stemming from Indigenous languages and philosophies, which remains a crucial gap in current critical political geography literature. Additionally, the aim of this thesis-by-articles is to challenge the notion of Indigenous as oppressed and to instead critically analyse power relations within these politics of resistance. As the following chapter shows, the theoretical gap of Arctic studies remains at this crucial point of understanding the redefinition of the status of Indigenous peoples as devolution from colonial states to Indigenous nations restructures understandings of power and governance in the Arctic. As will be developed further in the second half of this chapter, core concepts in Arctic studies – such as Arctic Exceptionalism, decolonial and ecological security, sustainability and sovereignty – are re-conceptualized through the lens of Inuit epistemology to support addressing the theoretical gap explained above.

The following section of this literature review focuses on the concepts used in the three articles composing this thesis. These concepts show areas of needed further research in Arctic studies in International Relations and Critical Political Geography as it pertains to energy and natural resources development.

2.1 Arctic Studies in Keywords: Exceptionalism, Sustainability, and Decolonization

2.1.1 Glocal Governance and Arctic exceptionalism

Glocal governance is a junction of “local governance” and “global governance”; it argues that global geopolitical and economic governance influences local governance, and vice-versa (Giddens, 1984; Mihr, 2022a; Roudometof, 2015). Similar to structuration theory, the concept sees governance through a multi-level analysis and sees processes instead of mutually exclusive categories (ibidem). As such, glocal governance calls for the incorporation of both global processes and interests and local processes and interests – including the diverse constellation of actors – in the understanding of governance (Crowley, 1998; Mihr, 2022b; Kütting, Cerny, 2015). For the case of environmental governance in an Arctic context, glocal governance thereby recognises both locally engrained processes – such as Indigenous self-determination and epistemologies, jurisdictions, or public consultations – and international processes – big power politics, or economic interests in the region such as for fisheries and mining (Soer, 2025). Understanding environmental governance through the lens of glocal governance thereby inscribes the Arctic into international relations and multi-scale analysis: the Arctic is both considered as a geographical region, a region with distinct Indigenous peoples, with specificities, as well as a region which is not opaque to international eco-political dynamics. Glocal governance thereby opposes the supposed opacity between regional studies and International Relations (Crowley, 1998; Mihr 2022a).

The concept of glocal governance becomes useful to understand the phenomenon of environmental governance of energy and natural resources in the Arctic. It ties the threads of relations between actors, it also ties the threads of relations between areas. Greenland and Nunavut are areas of the Inuit Nunangat/Nunaat (the Inuit Homeland) but still maintain their distinctions – such as jurisdictions (Loukacheva, 2007) – and glocal governance is here conceptually useful to understand the ways this regional framing of Inuit Nunangat reflects in local politics, vice-versa, and how international politics also shape the ways Inuit Nunangat/Nunaat and local politics come into effect. It does not consider these realms of jurisdiction and political identities as isolated phenomena but instead as co-constructed.

Glocal governance also aligns with the holistic nature of Inuit Knowledge (Tagalik et al., 2018; Inutiq et al., 2024; Wenzel, 2004). It follows a similar pattern of the interconnected nature of society and the natural world. It recognises the ways social and societal dynamics are not opaque to one another but instead are co-constructed on a multi-scale lens. However, I do not claim that glocal governance sits at an equal epistemological footing as Inuit knowledge. Glocal governance, in the context of Western epistemology at a Western educational institution, serves as a conceptual framework to bridge the epistemologically complex multi-scale governance dynamics of actors in the Arctic. It serves as a framework to bring into conversation both environmental governance clashes and reconciliations between the rightsholders and the stakeholders – between local communities, local governments, regional governments, national governments, Arctic private sector and civil society actors, regional and global institutions, non-Arctic governments and non-Arctic private sector and civil society actors. It enables us to map realms of influences and critically assess said influences. The threads that the concept of glocal governance brings together can thereby be both entangled and disentangled: similarities and dissimilarities, clashes and reconciliations, can be both brought forward in depth through the concept to describe the phenomenon of environmental governance in the Arctic of energy and natural resources.

Arctic exceptionalism is used in the first article as the first commonly used conceptual framework describing Arctic governance and relations that glocal governance displaces (Soer, 2025). Arctic exceptionalism – different from U.S. exceptionalism – describes how the region was the ground for peaceful cooperation and collective environmental management through scientific collaborations (Zellen, 2022; Young, 1992). The Arctic Council was thereby established as an institution to steward such collaborations in the spirit of peace between the Arctic states – Greenland (Denmark), Canada, the U.S.A., Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland (Zellen, 2022). Arctic exceptionalism is also used as a way to describe the pristine ecological state of the region (Young, 1992). However, while Arctic exceptionalism certainly brings forward the groundwork done to promote circumpolar relations, describing the Arctic as “peaceful” hinders the conceptual inclusion of colonial violence into how circumpolar governance is enacted and framed (Soer,

2025). As such, glocal governance displaces the notion of Arctic exceptionalism from peace towards instead multi-scale governance under an international Westphalian sovereignty system, that is being challenged by Indigenous actors seeking greater devolution of jurisdiction or independence (in the case of Greenland for instance) (Zellen, 2022; Tagalik et al., 2023; Ackrén, 2022).

While Arctic exceptionalism – circumpolar peaceful cooperation – served to describe the institutionalisation of the region under the Arctic Council, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the subsequent halt of Arctic Council activities forced the reconsideration of such peaceful cooperation as an accurate descriptor of the region. Also, prior to such forced reconsideration, critical perspectives into International Relations also bring forward the need to include colonial heritage and contemporary power relations into Arctic studies (Gricius, 2021, 2024).

In summary, glocal governance serves as a conceptual foundation for the elaboration of critical perspectives into Arctic studies, seen under three different but interrelated topics in the first, second, and third articles of this thesis. Glocal governance is used sporadically in Arctic studies. It is at times named as a larger research project on climate inequalities but is not applied to the North American Arctic (Toivanen, 2016). It had been used sporadically in the study of Arctic cities and sustainability (Soroudi et al., 2025; Suopajarvi et al., 2022; Paglia, 2020). Glocal governance, however, has not been used to describe the governance of natural resources and energy in Greenland and Nunavut, nor has it been used as a conceptual counterpoint to Arctic Exceptionalism.

2.1.2 Inuit decolonial ecological security

Decolonial security can be argued to encompass ecological matters – such as environmental governance. However, while decolonial *theory* includes – and arguably centers – ecological and environmental governance under the concept of decolonial ecology (Ferdinand, 2021; Ghosh, 2021), not further defining decolonial security as a *concept* by assuming that it includes ecological security contributes to a lack of

conceptual clarity and boundaries. Similarly, assuming that ecological security in an Inuit context falls necessarily within decolonial paradigms contributes to the creation of an all-encompassing concept, thereby lacking clear conceptual boundaries and defining power. As such, the concept of **Inuit decolonial ecological security** explicitly links decolonial security and ecological security in natural resource governance and is developed in **Article 1**.

Inuit decolonial ecological security is thereby a concept constructed through the combination of decolonial security and ecological security. Critical security studies have incorporated feminist and decolonial perspectives into the study of security and as such have redefined the conceptual boundaries of both hard and human security by incorporating different interests and perspectives. From the feminist critical analysis of the military (Cohn, 1987) to challenging the hegemony of the security paradigm in international relations as inherently colonial (Barkawi, Laffey, 2006; Gomes, Marques, 2021; Hendershot, Mutimer, 2018), to challenging the securitization of minerals (Le Billon et al., 2025; Raspotnik et al., 2024), critical security studies have displaced mainstream conceptions of security towards the foregrounding of marginalized perspectives instead. Decolonial security encompasses a wide range of lived realities: as a concept, it seeks to destabilize the notion of security as neutral and global, instead reckoning with its imperial and colonial violent roots in the implementation of security policies (Gricius, 2021; Gomes, Marques, 2021; Lottholz, 2019). Decolonial security is crucially tied to black studies, where police and state violence are cores in the implementation of ‘security’ against marginalized communities (Chandler, Chipato, 2021; Behera et al., 2021). In other words, decolonial security seeks to redefine security by centring and foregrounding the dismantling of state (institutional and infrastructural) violence (Fanon, 2004). The implementation of decolonial security is not uniform: while some argue for the end of carceral state, others argue for economic justice, and others for social and cultural liberation from the colonial oppressor, and sometimes all of the above combined (Cunneen, 2023; Maynard, 2020; Táíwò, 2022; Davis, 2019; Opie, Roberts, 2017).

As such, decolonial security and decolonial justice in environmental governance are linked as two sides of the same coin: the reconfiguration of the social contract outside of the perimeters of imperial colonial (epistemic) violence (Pulido, De Lara, 2018; Wilkens, Datchoua-Tirvaudey, 2022; Datta, 2025; Rodriguez, 2020). As such, decolonial security is grounded in a holistic understanding of the concept of security and crucially, displaces epistemic hegemony from the colonial oppressor. This holistic understanding is both in terms of practical implementation of security – such as food security, healthcare security, housing security- and in terms of representation of who is secure and how. Gender, race, ethnicity, ability, age, and economic background to only name a few, become key components of the conceptual definition of decolonial security. The “colonial” hegemonic security is enacted in this “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” that decolonial security challenges (hooks, 2000).

Ecological security builds on many similar components as decolonial security but foregrounds ecological considerations. As such, ecological security challenges extractivist conceptualizations of economic security or development (Dunlap et al., 2024; Dunlap, 2023; Gürcan, 2019; Hanaček et al., 2024). It also challenges the notion of growth as well as the ontological separation of Human versus Nature, or Mankind versus Nature (Salmón, 2000). Unlike environmental security, ecological security is similarly to decolonial security holistic in its conceptual definition. It posits the place of the human as part of nature, as an element of the overall ecology – the human cannot be dissected from the ecological whole it is part of and therefore the security of the human – its survival understood broadly – it cannot be separated from the existence of Nature. Therefore, ecological security is deeply tied to Indigenous rights movements seeking protection and rights over their lands being destroyed by extractivist enterprises (Clark, 2002; Youdelis et al., 2021; Sanabria-Rangel, 2023). It is estimated that 80% of the globe’s biodiversity is under Indigenous territory and Indigenous protection. Indigenous communities are also at increased risk from climate change impacts, from loss of territory to food insecurity (Redvers et al., 2023; Reyes-Garcia et al., 2024; Lansbury, Crosby, 2022). Indigenous communities are also at unique risk from state (colonial) violence and hence,

carry a double burden from both climate change and colonial violence leading to loss of territory (Whyte, 2016, 2017).

As alluded to, ecological security is intimately tied to the ability to live on the land. As such ecological security responds to (global) geopolitical dynamics from climate change to land expropriation by actors from the private sector to the state. In an Inuit context therefore, ecological security is directly related to having jurisdiction – power – over decisions made about Inuit Nunangat (in the Canadian context) and Inuit Nunaat (in the Greenlandic context). To echo the Greenlandic foreign affairs policy, Inuit ecological security is shaped by the logic of “Nothing About Us Without Us” in response to colonial land expropriation and other forms of violence. However, the devolution of jurisdiction does not necessarily lead to decolonial dynamics between the state and the Inuit government as highlighted by the failure of the politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2014). Hence, the conceptual framework developed here combines ecological security and decolonial security to form the concept of Inuit decolonial ecological security, thereby naming and conceptualizing the phenomena of environmental governance in Nunavut and Greenland, and uniquely contributing to the critical geography and IR literature in Arctic Studies.

2.1.3 Energy sovereignty

Foregrounding **energy sovereignty** has been sporadically addressed in the Arctic studies literature, with a notable example in Nunavik (Rodon et al., 2021). While multiple scientific publications do link energy with sovereignty in Greenland, they do not conceptualize it as such (Gad, 2014; Mazza, 2015; Berthelsen, Justinussen, 2015; Jacobsen, 2018 to only name a few). Instead, they see energy as a tool for sovereignty from Denmark. The concept of energy sovereignty in Greenland is argued in **Article 2** specifically to be created through a balancing act of extractivism and ecology which are themselves the results of the process of energy securitization. Energy securitization triggers the co-construction of extractivism and ecology not as polar opposites but as conceptual currents shaping and defining energy sovereignty in Greenland. As such, energy sovereignty in Greenland is a key example of glocal governance in practice, shaped by domestic and international governance dynamics governing energy production and consumption. Energy

sovereignty, as the name suggests, is deeply tied to the devolution of jurisdiction from Denmark to Greenland and is fundamental in the political imagination of the post-independence, the post-colonial. Energy sovereignty as such is not understood as a tool for sovereignty from Denmark, but as a central area of Greenland's shaping as a sovereign state.

The idea of sovereignty under the Westphalian model, juxtaposed to Greenland's independence from Denmark as a colony, triggered a large seminal literature on definitional conflicts in how to understand the concept as applied to Greenland (Kuokkanen, 2021; Jacobsen, 2020; Kristensen, Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2017; Olsen, Shadian, 2017; Shadian, 2010). Indeed, Greenland's government has been publicly explicit about the lack of military defense capacity of the island which is not under its current jurisdiction and poses an issue for its future independence, thereby rendering cooperation with other nations mandatory for the insurance of the island's military security (Arctic Circle, 2025). This capacity issue poses a first challenge to the applicability of the concept of sovereignty to Greenland. Secondly however, in terms of human security, the ability to control and decide economic paths – such as energy production and consumption – shapes an understanding of sovereignty outside of the confines of the Westphalian model geared towards the monopoly of the means of violence (see Weber, 1919). Here instead, energy sovereignty shapes the conversation towards human security, towards understanding sovereignty in socio-economic terms as well as institutional terms and linked to what Shadian coins as the Inuit Myth (2010) (see also Østergaard, Arnaut, 2023).

Energy sovereignty is tied to the aforementioned concepts of decolonial and ecological security. Indeed, the ability to decide how to produce energy and how to consume energy is a matter of resource allocation and land use as the second article argues. This land use is the core issue presented in the article: as global forces pressure towards natural resource exploitation, the government of Greenland operates a balancing act between taking economic advantage of increase interests and composing with local imperatives of environmental preservation and conservation in line with local Inuit epistemologies. Energy sovereignty is precisely formed by these dynamics between extractivism, ecology, and securitization.

Extractivism, ecology, and securitization are not treated as conceptual cores of the study but as explanatory components of the concept of energy sovereignty as applied to Greenland. Extractivism – the “socio-ecologically destructive processes of subjugation, depletion, and non-reciprocal relations, occurring at all levels of practices (Chagnon et al., 2022, p.762)” – is thereby contrasted to ecology – both biophysical ecology and cultural and political ecology (Walker, 2005). As the article argues however, the Greenlandic context nuances the opposition and tries to frame natural resource exploitation along an axis of sustainability and tries to reconcile global demands and economic structures with local imperatives and epistemologies. Thereby, extractivism and ecology are defined along this axis. Both dynamics however fall under the phenomenon of energy securitization where both the state and non-state actors become influencers in the securitization of the energy development chain and infrastructures: “energy is taken out of the ‘agenda of normal politics’, and the ‘breaking of the established rules of the game’ [following the first energy crisis in 1973] have been justified to prevent any danger posed if no prevention had been taken. (Özcan, 2013, p.65, brackets added)” Greenland is thereby responding to energy securitization by arguing for its own energy sovereignty as a negotiation and balancing act between extractivism and ecology.

2.1.4 Sustainable Development and Sustainability

Sustainable development and **sustainability**, while playing a minor role in both Articles 1 and 2, form the main conceptual elements of Article 3, articulated through decolonial theory. Sustainable development and especially the green transition, under the premise of decolonial theory, is thereby articulated as a continuation of colonial imposition of power, as a reinvention of colonialism (Banerjee, 2002, 2003). Sustainable development responds to global dynamics supported by several international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals where development is reframed as needing to respond to a realm of priorities (17) ranging from democratic institutions to housing to education to clean water and clean energy (Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015). While sustainable development therefore is engrained in technocratic and bureaucratic processes and is institutionalised, sustainability as a concept confronts epistemological conceptions of what it means to live

in one's environment (Datta et al., 2024; Frandy, 2021). In an Inuit context therefore, sustainability is understood as deeply relational and holistic under Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit or Inuit Societal Values (Hunt, 2025; Peter et al., 2002; Wenzel, 2004). Also called Traditional Knowledge, sustainability here applied is being reconceptualized through locally engrained epistemology and ontology. The idea of linking sustainability to values changes the framework from institutionalised under sustainable development to one of relationality and positionality – it shifts from globally institutionalised to locally geographically ingrained.

What sustainability means in Inuit Nunangat is thereby shaped by Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit under 8 principles: Inuuqatigiitsiarniq (Respecting others, relationships and caring for people), Tunnganarniq (Fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive.), Pijitsirniq (Serving and providing for family and/or community), Aajiiqatigiinni (Decision making through discussion and consensus), Pilimmaksarniq (Development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort), Ikajuqtiigiinni (Working together for a common cause), Qanuqtuurniq (Being innovative and resourceful), and Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq (Respect and care for the land, animals and the environment). The UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals are replaced by the 8 principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit instead to shape the definition of sustainability.

As Article 3 argues, sustainability and sustainable development are enacted in Nunavut through a process of community consultation and incorporation of Inuit Knowledge adding to the current literature on the subject which forefronts capacity and policy building (see for instance McDonald, Pearce, 2012). However, similarly to the story of energy sovereignty in Greenland, the story of renewable energy development in Nunavut composes with federal imposition and local agency, between cooptation of sustainability and self-determination. Sustainability thereby, while defined by Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in the Nunavut context, composes with the institutionalization of sustainable development by state powers, undergoing a process of what Banerjee coins as a reinvention of colonialism (2003). As such, the context of Nunavut showcases an epistemological clash between the paradigm of sustainable development and the paradigm of sustainability, between institutionalization and decolonization. This theoretical finding

contributes to filling the knowledge gap on renewable energy development, sustainability, and community consultation in Nunavut as well as filling the theoretical gap in critical political geography relating to the incorporation of Inuit knowledge in sustainability and renewable energy development.

2.2 Identifying the Research Gaps: International Relations, Critical Political Geography, Arctic Studies and Epistemology

The four areas of the literature review – sustainable development and sustainability; energy sovereignty; Inuit decolonial ecological security; and glocal governance and Arctic exceptionalism – show how critical political geography and International Relations enter in a disciplinary dialogue in Arctic studies. As such, by focusing on confronting epistemological understandings of sustainability and its governance in the Arctic, this Context Chapter 2 highlights ongoing theoretical gaps in the critical political geography and IR literature as applied to the Arctic.

Following the findings of the literature review therefore, the thesis-by-articles addresses conceptual gaps in the ways Arctic governance of natural resources and energy sovereignty in Nunavut and Greenland have been framed, specifically, the lack of attention to how discrepancies in understandings of sustainability and development frame economic and political self-determination. Consequently, the thesis-by-articles also addresses the empirical gap of the operationalization of Inuit Knowledge and community consultation in (sustainable) development, particularly renewable energy development.

The theoretical gaps and the empirical gap thereby stem from a similar observation in regards to the literature in Arctic studies through the lenses of International Relations and Critical Political Geography: the lack of scrutiny to the operationalization of Inuit Knowledge and its consequences for how environmental governance is enacted in Nunavut and Greenland, and also its consequences in framing their (diplomatic and economic) power relations to the wider global context between agency and structure.

2.3 Conclusion to Context Chapter 2

The **Context Chapter 2** argues for a multidisciplinary approach to respond to the main research question. Through particular attention to the literature in International Relations and Critical Political Geography and how they intersect in Arctic studies, the literature review highlights the need for further research in how critical Arctic studies approaches small (sub-national) governments and Indigenous Knowledge in their analysis of sustainability and governance.

The following Context Chapter thereby responds to these findings by developing the theoretical framework approaches of the three articles composing this thesis-by-articles, mainly structuration theory, post-colonial theory, and decolonial theory. The following chapter also continues by detailing the methodological approaches of the three articles – Grounded Methodology – in order to respond to these empirical and theoretical gaps.

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CONTEXT CHAPTER 3

THINKING THEORY AND ITS METHODOLOGICAL RESPONSE: COMPOSING WITH EPISTEMOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY

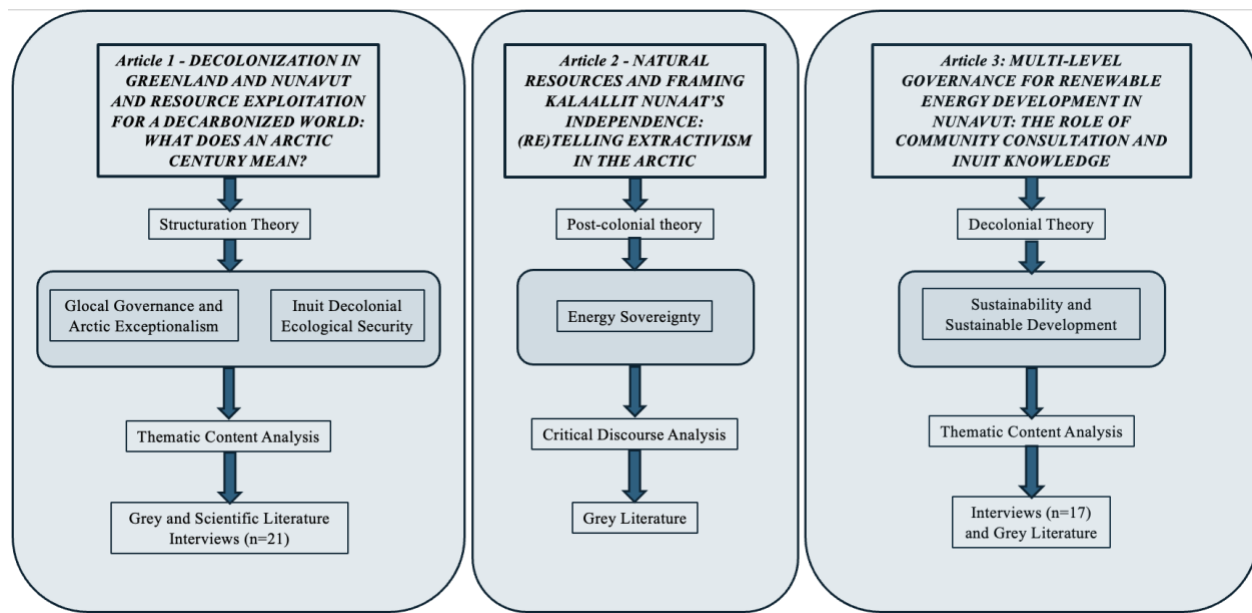
Abstract

The Context Chapter 3 addresses the theoretical frameworks underpinning the three articles composing this thesis-by-articles. **Article 1** thereby foregrounds structuration theory, **Article 2** post-colonial theory, and **Article 3** decolonial theory. This complexity responds to the aforementioned need in Context Chapter 2 to align with the multidisciplinary nature of critical Arctic studies and to explore how these theoretical frameworks may address the identified theoretical and empirical gaps in International Relations and Critical Political Geography. These three theoretical approaches also respond to the aforementioned context of the plurality of lived realities in environmental governance and energy development as well as operationalization of Inuit Knowledge in government policies and practices in Nunavut and Greenland, thereby requiring different approaches to respond to the research questions of each article. The methodological approach – Grounded Methodology – frames the research methods, semi-structured interviews conducted virtually and in Iqaluit in 2024 and qualitative content and discourse analysis of grey literature. This methodological approach is consistent with the ethical requirements of the Nunavut Research licence to engage in meaningful partnership with interviewees and communities, including the continuous sharing of research results with respondents.

3.0. Introduction

This thesis-by-articles seeks to better understand Arctic regional energy development and environmental governance by zooming in on Inuit self-determination and governance amidst growing international pressures towards natural resource development. The main research question asks *How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?* The thesis-by-articles comprises three stand-alone articles, each addressing an aspect of the main research question. The thesis-by-articles starts from the premise of the study - the recent geopolitical increase in interest in natural resource extraction in Inuit lands in tandem with global decarbonization efforts (Article 1)– to dive deeper into the local governance in Greenland and Nunavut pertaining to natural resource extraction (Article 2) and decarbonization and community consultation (Article 3). The study uses content analysis in various forms (further developed below) and refines existing theoretical frameworks by applying them to a case study of Inuit self-determination in Nunavut and Greenland. The contributions of the thesis are both theoretical and empirical. The following chapter specifies the methodological and theoretical approaches of the thesis-by-articles. The first section seeks to define the theoretical patchwork developed to respond to the main research question. The second section similarly dives into the conceptual patchwork framework stemming from the overarching theoretical framework. Finally, the third section details the methodological approach underpinning the thematic content analysis.

Owing to the three distinct articles with distinct research questions, the thesis-by-articles uses theoretical and methodological approaches to support the arguments of each article and to support the main overall findings. Each article will also reiterate the theoretical and methodological approached used. The chapter thus details and justifies each approach in relationship with the others so to sustain the overall conversation between each article and how they each answer in their own unique – yet connected – ways the main research question *How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?*



Theoretical and Methodological Map of the Thesis-By-Articles

3.1 Theoretical synthesizing and refining existing theoretical frameworks

Article 1, “Decolonization in Greenland and Nunavut and Resource Exploitation for a Decarbonized World” – uses **structuration theory** to support its analysis of power relations defining the Arctic region under an ecological decolonial approach. **Article 2**– “Natural Resources and Framing Greenland’s Independence” – uses post-colonial theory to dissect the ways energy sovereignty is articulated within the Greenlandic context. Finally, **Article 3** – “Community Consultation and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit” – uses decolonial theory to better understand community consultation as a tool for Inuit self-determination in Nunavut in the energy sector.

As such, the theoretical frameworks of this thesis draw on **structuration theory**, **post-colonial theory**, and **decolonial theory** to support the analysis of environmental governance in energy-transition resource exploitation. As is further developed in the following sections, each theory serves the understanding of natural resources and energy governance in Nunavut and Greenland from distinct venture points. Each theory also responds to ongoing debates in International Relations and critical political geography developed in the previous chapter. They serve a multidisciplinary approach which is consistent with Arctic studies. As

such, structuration theory, post-colonial theory, and decolonial theory approach the questions of self-determination in environmental governance from the ground up – meaning that they each enable an analysis that composes with regional complexity in levels of jurisdiction and post-colonial envisioning. They each reckon with relations of power in unique ways, with structuration theory serving to flip the narratives of colonial dominance which then supports both the applicability of post-colonial theory in Greenland and the applicability of decolonial theory in Nunavut. While structuration theory structures the epistemological foundation of the thesis, post-colonial theory as well as decolonial theory refine this epistemological foundation through a grounding in Inuit Knowledge.

3.1.1 Structuration theory

Structuration theory was developed by Anthony Giddens (1984) to bridge the theoretical assumptions of not only the separation of agency and structure, but also their opacity between each other. In other words, structuration theory posits the influences that structure plays on agency and the influences that agency plays on structure, thereby operating a continuum cycle of influence between agency and structure. Structure shapes and is shaped by agency, and vice versa. This explanatory idea of society posited by structuration theory is anchored in a turning point of ontological research, strongly questioning the positivism of structures and instead looking into the subjects of said structures. In this opposition between positivism and interpretivism – opposition between structures and subjects – structuration theory builds a bridge between the two philosophical currents and instead details the duality of structure (Cohen, 1989; Giddens, 1984; Wight, 2006). Structuration thereby becomes the process of the making of structures, a making through individual and collective agency, a continuum between structures and subjects.

Structuration theory thereby goes beyond the oppositional discourse of large economic-political powers against small states. It instead questions the ways that both small states and large powers co-construct regional governance and how each player shapes the chessboard in different ways, as well as how the chessboard itself shapes how actors engage in it. Arctic environmental governance is thereby no longer seen

through a realist lens – looking at the primacy of states and maximisation of self-interests – but is instead seen as a construction of a constellation of actors each enacting governance under both a self-maximising framework and a collective regional self-determination framework (Essex, 2024; Montes Martinez, 2025; Landriault et al., 2019; Landriault et al., 2021). Under structuration theory thereby, the macro- and the micro- levels of analysis are joined to form the understanding of the Arctic environmental governance as applied to the two regions of Greenland and Nunavut.

The geography of the Arctic understood as structure shapes how both stakeholders and rightsholders interact and how this geography shapes decision-making: the environmental impacts of climate change, such as the potential opening of the Northwest Passage as well as permafrost thaw, influence the economic possibility of further growth of natural resource exploitation sectors in the area (Streletskiy, 2023; Huebert, 2011; Byers, Lalonde, 2009; Dawson et al., 2018; Dawson et al., 2014). The geographical position of Greenland in between large powers strongly influenced for instance U.S. presence on the island for defence and security imperatives during the Cold War, which in turn influences current U.S. position on Greenlandic domestic affairs (Gagnon, 2002; Ackrén, 2022). Similarly, the geographical position of Nunavut in relation to the Northwest Passage strongly shaped Canadian federal colonial incentives in the Arctic during the Cold War (Byers, Lalonde, 2009; Lajeunesse, Lackenbaurer, 2023; Hudson, 2012; Dumas, 2023). Furthermore, the geological estimate of mineral reserves in both Greenland and Nunavut similarly shape the mind frame of economic potential of the region (Bird et al., 2008; Ackrén, 2024). In other words, the geography and geology of the region strongly play into the ways the Arctic is shaped as a region of potentials – both positively (economic potentials) and negatively (potential zone of conflict) – by domestic, regional, and international actors. On epistemology, the environmental context of the Arctic strongly shaped Inuit epistemology: Inuit worldviews are anchored in a holistic understanding of ecology which permeates Inuit contemporary culture, language, and hence the ways in which environmental governance resonates with the local population (Tagalik et al., 2018; Inutiq et al., 2024; Nuttall, 2021; Wenzel, 2004). This resonance of environmental governance through Inuit epistemology thereby shapes public policies as well as overall

attitudes towards regional and international relations as applied to natural resource exploitation and energy production (Nuttall, 2021).

As such, the application of structuration theory in this research is supported by this cross-disciplinary approach. It seeks to go beyond either realist or constructivist approaches to international and regional relations; it instead seeks to better understand how these theoretical currents form the continuum structure-agency as enacted by the actors. Using structuration theory for Article 1 of the thesis-by-articles, on decolonization of resource exploitation in Greenland and Nunavut, not only sets the scene for the theoretical assumptions supporting the research, but also responds to the first sub-research question asked: *How do natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshape environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region?* Under the premises of structuration theory, the environmental governance of natural resources underpinning global energy transition is argued as being shaped by an Inuit decolonial ecological security framework – thereby refining the concept of Arctic exceptionalism beyond oppositions between realist and idealist frameworks.

Article 1 argues that Nunavut and Greenlandic environmental governance is adapting the global paradigm of sustainable development through its own decolonial economic and political agency. This adaptation thereby informs the development of natural resource exploitation amid increasing international and regional pressures and rising diplomatic tensions that threaten regional institutional cooperation. Structuration theory, hence, shapes the problematization of the research problem by narrowing in on reconfiguring ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ in Arctic studies. It reconfigures the boundaries of power between structure and agency and refines understandings of environmental governance under decolonial and ecological paradigms. As such, structuration theory shapes the thematic content analysis, of the article under grounded methodology, through which these very boundaries of power emerge in policymaking.

3.1.2 Post-colonial theory and development

Article 2 dissects the ways post-colonial theory can support the analysis of how Greenland's *political-economic choices in resource and energy development shape its pursuit of energy sovereignty*. In an effort of emancipation from Danish colonial imposition, Greenland's energy sovereignty path is thereby constructed within the crux of addressing both structural constraints regarding quality of life and ecological concerns regarding large infrastructural projects involving natural resources – from its mining sector to hydroelectricity. Post-colonial theory thereby supports the reconceptualization of development, the adaptation of the *sustainable* development paradigm, to better understand global and local governance structures and how they intersect in shaping Greenlandic energy sovereignty.

Post-colonial theory helps explain how Greenland is not only shaping its own independence but also its own prosperity beyond its independence from Denmark. Post-colonial theory thereby shifts the focus away from the deconstruction of colonial structures towards the (re)building of what happens after independence (Coulthard 2014; Giroux 2020; Cambou 2020; Cambou and Poelzer 2021; McCauley et al. 2016).

Thus, post-colonial theory supports the answers to the article's sub-research questions by examining how the post-independence imaginary shapes the state-to-be is framing of its international legitimacy and domestic energy-resource policies. This imaginary is fundamentally anchored in Inuit epistemology (and thus geography); the article thereby juxtaposes the potential confrontations between this Inuit epistemology under an international economic framework geared towards extractivism and Westphalian sovereignty.

Enmeshing post-colonial theory within a critical evaluation of development links this theoretical framework with another, post-development theory, stemming from Global South's critiques of neo-imperial development (Escobar 1995; 2014; Ziai 2007; 2016). It formed a critical evaluation of the economic premises of neo-liberalism and capitalism (ibidem). It also critically evaluated the power dynamics underscoring relations between the Global North and the Global South and instead strived to form a theory of development anchored in the multiplicity of local realities and aspirations in the Global South

(Habermann, Ziai, 2007). Hence, post-development theory posits the need to look beyond the confines of development to not only better understand the multiple socio-economic dynamics in the Global South, but to also frame alternatives to development for Global South emancipation (Habermann, Ziai, 2007).

Post-development theory also seeks to destabilize the very notions of First World, Second World, and Third World, and to go beyond confines of geography to instead offer perspectives within a multiplicity of contexts – including in the Arctic (Escobar 1995; 2014; Habermann, Ziai, 2007), where the literature from post-development theory as applied to post-colonial theory is here particularly pertinent. In the Arctic, critiques of development in the recent years have mostly been articulated along the lack of consultation and engagement on development projects as well as overall lack of consideration in government policies enacted in capital cities not located in the Arctic while having strong consequences in the North (Bjørst 2022; Christiansen 2022; Gronholt-Pedersen, 2021; Vold, 2021; Graugaard, 2020; Peter et al., 2002; Rodger, Ingram, 2019). These critiques of development have also reached projects anchored in sustainable development, such as windmill construction projects in Scandinavia (Normann 2021a; 2021b; Frandy, 2021). In Greenland, while overall standards of living are subpar compared to Denmark, critiques of development have taken the form of concerns regarding natural resources exploitation and its ecological impacts on subsistence hunting and overall safety of nearby communities, as well as concerns of lack of support by colonial powers regarding healthcare, education and costs of living (specifically housing and food) (Christensen et al., 2024; Statistics Greenland, 2020). Enmeshing the rebuttals to the imposition of imperial development – even within sustainable development – defined by scholars in the post-development literature with the aim of this thesis-by-articles to contribute to (post-colonial) critical Arctic studies is pertinent in the ability of this enmeshment to operate within the multidisciplinary nature of Arctic studies.

Post-colonial theory thereby serves as a theoretical anchor to reconceptualize sovereignty under the Greenlandic context as linked to both environmental governance and economic security. The use of the theory, also enriched with scholarship from critical development studies, also engages in a de-isolation of Arctic studies from regional studies and instead towards international relations (Østhagen, 2024). The aim

is to also engage in a refining of critical Arctic studies through the inclusion of Inuit epistemology and the specific cases (lived realities) of Greenland in how this theory applies to and explains environmental governance in the region. The theoretical framework of the second article thereby engages the thesis's theoretical contribution on two fronts: both a refining of existing theories, and a refining of the understanding of Greenlandic environmental governance.

3.1.3 Decolonial theory

Article 3 takes on a different approach from the second article as it pertains to understanding colonial power relations between Nunavut and the federal Canadian government, framing Nunavut as part of the Canadian federation rather than under a premise of independence from the Canadian federation. Instead of narrowing in on independence, the third article instead defines the decolonial dynamics underpinning environmental governance in Nunavut. Decolonial theory focusses on the process of deconstruction of colonial structures of power and violence (Bhambra, 2014; Fanon, 2004; Lugones, 2008; Mendoza, 2020; Mignolo, 2007; Rodney, 2018; Tuck, Yang, 2012). It seeks justice, reparation, and looks at inner and outer reconstruction of what colonial violence sought to destroy – it is not a metaphor (Tuck, Yang, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; McCaslin, 2005). Self-determination thereby, under decolonial theory, is first a repatriation of power towards the colonial subject.

The self-determination movement taken on by the Inuit of Nunavut sits at an interesting junction of decolonization: while it seeks greater devolution of jurisdiction from federal power to the territorial government, it does not seek cessation from the Canadian federacy (Soer, 2023). Instead, it seeks recognition of self-determination rights under section 35 of the 1982 Constitution that recognises self-determination and self-government of Indigenous nations (Loukacheva, 2007). It seeks, through Land Claim Agreements, to restore jurisdiction over lands, waters, and resources to territorial governing powers. It seeks a repatriation of power over the homeland to the Inuit and thereby redefine relations with the federal state. Yet, this decolonial movement sits at the point of the colonial state's recognition of the colonial subject (Lajoie-

O'Malley et al., 2023; Coulthard, 2014). The colonial subject thereby remains under the federation of the colonizer.

The Nunavut context thereby triggers important questions of environmental governance within dynamics of decolonization in so-called Canada: as energy diversification is pushed in Nunavut to respond to the growing insecurity caused by outdated and damaging diesel infrastructures, *in what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision-making in Nunavut? How effective is their incorporation in multi-level public policy?* Decolonization theory is thereby here applied to better understand how local decision-making is effectively incorporated in environmental stewardship in this context of renewable energy development. The incorporation of community consultation in decision-making confronts the colonial legacy of assumed ownership over Indigenous lands and resources (Moore et al., 2017; McDonald, Pearce, 2013; Baker, Westman, 2018). It confronts also the colonial legacy of the primacy of resource development over other concerns such as environmental concerns and socio-cultural concerns. It challenges the idea of development itself by redefining areas of priorities outside of the economic imperative. Inuit epistemology therefore plays an important role in the effective incorporation of multi-level public policy on environmental governance: it triggers a holistic outlook on the costs-benefits assessment (environmental impacts assessment) (Dahl, Hansen, 2019; Peletz et al., 2020; Christensen et al., 2007; Karvinen, Rantakallio, 2019). Decolonization theory serves as a framework to understand the incorporation of this holistic outlook into decision-making.

The decolonization of Inuit epistemology in this topic of community consultation and devolution agreements goes through a process of reclaiming agency over the colonial structure. Decolonization as a process critically assesses consultation: who consults and who is consulted, on what and how, shape the ongoing power dynamic that the third article dissects. The theoretical contribution of Article 3, in addition to empirical contributions further detailed below in this chapter on methodological approaches, are two-fold. Firstly, using decolonial theory to frame the development of renewable energy infrastructures enables the critical assessment of community consultation as a tool for environmental governance and thereby a tool of

self-determination. Secondly, the use of decolonial theory also enables a critical assessment of territorial-federal relations as it pertains to energy development. The theory serves as a framework to answer the two sub-questions of the article: *In what ways do the legal frameworks of the Duty to Consult and Free, Prior and Informed Consent, as well as Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit Societal Values) guide multi-level decision-making for renewable energy in Nunavut? And how is the government of Nunavut leveraging the energy transition to advance Inuit rights, local livelihoods, and territorial energy security, while addressing structural capacity constraints?* It does so through a reevaluation of the governance dynamics describing territorial-state relations and of local perceptions regarding devolution and the overall decolonial imaginary.

This theoretical framework is thereby instrumental in problematizing the research problem in Article 3. Decolonial theory informed the fieldwork methodological and analytical process in Iqaluit, Nunavut, as is further discussed in the article itself. First, decolonial theory prompted me to question my positionality as a student at a Southern institution in relation to participatory research. While funding did not permit multiple trips to Iqaluit, a middle ground was reached through ongoing communication and feedback with research participants before and after the fieldwork. Second, decolonial theory prompted a shift in perspective regarding environmental governance: rather than starting from Western English concepts, the research focused on Inuit concepts and their meaningful incorporation into environmental governance. Third, decolonial theory informed the analysis of relations between the federal government and the Government of Nunavut by questioning the jurisdictional frameworks of subordination between the territorial and federal governments. Instead, power relations were seen as being negotiated rather than imposed, and questions of capacity and meaningful incorporation of Inuit Knowledge are seen as structural and evolving. In short, decolonial theory enables a shift in perspective, beginning with grounded realities in Nunavut – including those of local inhabitants rather than only government decision-makers – rather than with the realities of federal policy frameworks. Following this last point, the article's format is geared toward science communication, with results that are operationalizable by territorial practitioners and accessible to local inhabitants of Nunavut.

The theoretical frameworks of the thesis-by-articles contribute to the understanding of governance in the Arctic. The three articles critically explore self-determination through a multi-level analysis: global, regional, and municipal governance. The first theoretical framework, structuration theory, featured in the first article of the thesis, lays the ground for a critical analysis of agency and structure shaping environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and poses the groundwork for exploring how glocal governance – further explored in the section below on the conceptual framework - intervenes in environmental governance. The second theoretical framework builds on this reflection on agency and structure by examining the post-colonial within the Greenlandic context: this framework permits the critical evaluation of epistemology in environmental governance and permits the redefinition of Arctic environmental governance as a concept. The third theoretical framework brings the level of analysis to the local, municipal level, and brings in local inhabitants in the conversation. It allows to uncover the decolonial processes and political imaginary shaping environmental governance on the ground. As such, the three theoretical frameworks are here used to uncover the multiple layers of environmental governance, from a regional/global perspective to the state perspective and to the local perspective. It enables a critical evaluation of the complexity of environmental governance without sacrificing clarity or depth.

3.2 Methodological approach: Where to go from there?

3.2.1 Grounded Methodology Approach

The methodology supporting this research relies on Grounded Methodology and thus a qualitative iterative research process (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The research is further supported by interviews conducted in Iqaluit in April 2024 and virtually, and policy thematic analysis, following a mixed-methods approach (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The research also relies on critical literature analysis of research on the topic produced so far. Following the framework of Christophe Lejeune (2019), an iterative research model seeks a parallel organization of the research: problematizing, collecting, analyzing, and writing are done in parallel and no longer sequentially. Grounded theory methodology seeks “to produce theories based on empirical material” (personal translation, Lejeune, 2019, p.7). This research project utilizes multiple theories (post-

colonial theory, decolonial theory, and structuration theory) which seek the support the analysis of the produced material by the policies and interviews.

Following Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021), to tell the story well and right requires humility and also honesty and respect. To "bring forward Indigenous epistemic approaches, philosophies and methodologies (p.xiii)", the tools given by the grounded methods support the analysis from the ground up in a thematic approach to the content of the interviews and the policies produced by Indigenous governments. Importantly, the purpose of this research's methodological approach, however, is not the appropriation of concepts created by Indigenous Knowledge, but rather the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge into the understanding of energy and natural resource development in both Nunavut and Greenland.

As bell hooks remarks, love is forged in honesty and choice as a radical contradiction to patriarchal, racial, and capitalist violence. Love is also a radical act in research ethics (hooks, 2000). Recent Greenlandic and Nunavut ethics protocols regarding Northern and Indigenous research emphasize the need for collaborative and data sovereignty protocols (ICC, 2022; see Lavoie et al., 2022, for a circumpolar analysis on ethical research guidelines). Among those data sovereignty protocols for research in Nunavut, research findings communication is paramount. Additionally, centering Inuit voices within the larger framework of Nothing About Us Without Us reinforces collaborative research ethics. An iterative research methodology also allows for the taking into account of the complex web of actors involved in energy development and sustainable development in Nunavut and Greenland where, outside of institutional maps, respondents draw on their lived experiences in how and with who they interact. **Iterative methodology** thereby allows me to draw better understanding of the effective web of actors involved in renewable energy development. An iterative research process also allows me to engage with the research matter with not only adequate ethics protocols as stipulated by Nunavut's research ethics approval processes, but also in regards to my own positionality in this research topic. Using an iterative research method allows me to engage as a foreigner respecting individuals' voices and perspectives. An iterative research process also allows me to respect Inuit cultural codes where listening and learning from Elders and other knowledge holders holds a very high place

in cultural codes of conduct. This research process is thereby informed and influenced by the need for cultural literacy when engaging in fieldwork with Inuit communities – once again echoing Nunavut and Greenlandic research ethics protocols which stipulate the inclusion of Inuit Societal Values and Knowledge (Lavoie et al., Ortenzi et al., 2025; Hayward et al., 2021; ICC, 2022).

Thus, starting from Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit traditional knowledge) enabled Inuit epistemic approaches and methodologies – fundamentally grounded and iterative - to guide the research project. Thematic discourse analysis is used to support the qualitative analysis. Firstly, the data consists of oral and written documents: interviews of rights- and stakeholders, public policies, laws and legal documents (court hearings and verdicts), and reports (from the private sector, the public sector, and civil society) pertaining to the energy development and natural resources development. The sampling of respondents and actors will be delved into in the following section of this methodology chapter.

3.2.2 Thematic content analysis approach

Thematic content analysis enables the extraction of key themes and epistemological threads in the multiple sources of data generated by the study. Interviews (n=17) and written documents – policies, legal documents, reports – are analysed according to a thematic content analysis approach. All documents and interviews are thereby dissected where key words and vocabulary realms are extracted so to form the basis for the answers provided by all three articles to their respective sub-research questions and to the main research question. Thematic content analysis is also coherent with the methodological approach under Grounded Theory Methodology where the iterative process is followed by starting from the interviews and documents themselves and the analysis is continuously revised according to the extracted data (Lejeune, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

The fieldwork in Iqaluit spanned over the last two weeks of April 2024. The operationalization of the iterative approach was achieved in several ways. Firstly, the interviewees (n=17) were selected in their professional capacities for the most part, as well as a few for their quality as civilian inhabitants in Iqaluit.

A few interviewees (n=3) were also contacted to offer additional information specifically for Kalaallit Nunaat, before fieldwork in Aasiaat and Nuuk was cancelled due to lack of funds.

A note on the number of interviews in Nunavut: While 18 individuals have been recorded, there was an instance of a joint interview whose participants decided to be considered as one interview; hence the discrepancy in number between a total of 20 interviews being referenced as such compared to 21 interviews being conducted in total. In total, 6 community members responded to requests for interviews; 3 respondents were affiliated with the federal government of Canada; 4 were affiliated with Nunavut and Inuit organizations; and 5 were affiliated with the Government of Nunavut and the municipal government. Respondents were identified in their professional qualities related to decision-making: as such, decision-makers in various professional roles were approached for interview requests. The number of interviewees and their roles were chosen taking into account the phenomenon of general engagement fatigue in Nunavut as was shared to me by several research experts and locals prior to fieldwork. Engagement fatigue is fueled by several factors: the sheer number of research projects in Nunavut seeking communities' or individuals' expert input which creates a burden for local communities, a lack of perceived relevancy of the research by local communities, or lack of ethical and proper communication of fundings which creates distrust between respondents and researchers, among other factors contributing to engagement fatigue in Nunavut. As such, securing interviews was difficult due to this, and it needed to be approached with ethical considerations and appreciation.

The individuals approached for interviews voiced interest in reading the results of the research projects. A key part of the iterative approach is its attention to ethical considerations. Therefore, representatives and directors of all relevant ministries and organizations were approached for interview requests, and all responded positively. One limitation of such approach is its lack of vertical, hierarchical, consideration. While decision-makers were interviewed, field workers - such as electricians, administrators, energy plant engineers among others – were not, with the exception of municipal civil servants.

Secondly, the operationalization of the iterative approach was achieved through participation at a workshop organized by the Arctic Remote Energy Networks Academy (December 2024), where the research results were communicated to interview participants as well as other members of the public. The Arctic Remote Energy Networks Academy is a knowledge-sharing program where Northern and Arctic professionals in the energy sector meet and share best practices and knowledge. It is co-led by the United States, Canada, and Iceland, and it is supported by the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group. Research results were directly communicated to interested respondents in the Government of Nunavut where the research results were communicated once more, as well as future research potential. The abstract of Article 3 was also translated into Inuktitut to facilitate the communication of the findings to Inuktitut speakers, in line with territorial and federal language policies. These exchanges were opportunities to go beyond the framework of the initial interview guideline (Appendix C) and to therefore to gain more insight relevant to the research object. Prior to publication, a draft of the article was also communicated to respondents who could add, modify, or retract their statements. Anonymity was respected throughout the process. All respondents were thereby sent a draft of the article. However, only 5 respondents came back with feedback on the results, from federal government representatives to territorial government representatives to civilians. The discrepancy between the total number of respondents and the number of respondents who came back with feedback was disappointing but consistent with reports of engagement fatigue. Those who did however share feedback enthusiastically did, which led to further discussions with the Government of Nunavut on those research results and what this means for their own internal policy recommendations. The discrepancy also shaped the iterative approach as it felt incomplete in the spirit of reciprocal research ethics. As is further developed in the conclusion of the thesis-by-articles, the discrepancy also indicates a need for further research and deeper collaboration with interested communities.

As per the interview guide available in the Appendix C, the interviews were conducting following a set of questions pertaining to the research question of Article 3: In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision-making in Nunavut, and how

effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? The sets of questions were adapted to either the status of the respondent – representative or civilian – and to the position held by the representative (their professional expertise). For representatives, the questions pertained primarily to the incorporation of (i) Inuit Knowledge, (ii) community consultation, (iii) federal and territorial development frameworks, (iv) corporate social responsibility, and the (v) role of renewables in territorial energy development into their professional practice. On community consultation, the respondents are also asked about (vi) whether gender is included as a policy variable and (vii) whether capacity constraints play a role in community consultation protocols. The interview guide is available as Appendix C.

While a marginally larger sample size was hoped for this research project before fieldwork, the reality of a shorter timeline in the North due to financial constraints resulted in a smaller sample size. Multiple travel destinations were first planned: Sanikiluaq, Iqaluit, Nuuk and Aasiaat (Kalaallit Nunaat). However, sudden changes in flight routes' frequencies to Sanikiluaq and the negative results of grant applications forced a methodological re-evaluation of the research project, focusing the fieldwork instead on Iqaluit and virtual interviews.

The sample size is small, in part due to time constraints in Iqaluit, but also importantly because the aim was not to establish or elucidate “the proportionate relationships among [its constituents]”, but to “scrutinize the dynamic qualities of a situation (Crouch, McKenzie, 2006, p.489)”. The aim of this iterative, grounded approach was not to determine representability but to scrutinize, among decision-makers, the dynamics underpinning the research subject. Data saturation, despite the small sample size, was achieved, as most respondents echoed one another in several ways regarding community consultation dynamics and energy diversification. New insights or themes were thereby sparse by the 20th interview. Qualitative interviews remain “performative interventions (Baker et al., 2012, p.6)” and as such, are narrow windows into the complexity of the inter-related world of Iqaluit and its inhabitants. Despite the narrow window, interviews allowed the research to gain personal insights from decision-makers and enabled the research to be conducted with ethical considerations.

Participants and actors chosen for this research project are organised in four sections: public officials, civil society actors, private actors, and affected civilians. Organising respondents and actors as such allows for a better representation of responsibility of each: Who is responsible for what in the development of energy infrastructure and natural resource exploitation infrastructures? Who is in charge of capacity and resource allocations? In Iqaluit, the actors interviewed for this research ranged from private sector representatives (including Inuit-owned private sector) to municipal and territorial government representatives, and federal government representatives. Their exact affiliations are kept confidential so to align with confidentiality agreements signed with both respondents and the Nunavut Research Institute.

Recruitment was made using two methods: direct recruitment and snow-ball recruitment. For the first, respondents were directly reached out to via email or social media. This particularly applies for the representatives of civil society organizations, representatives of government offices and municipalities, and representatives of private enterprises. The second, snow-ball recruitment was particularly applied to the recruitment of local civilians. For both representatives and local civilians, most interviews were secured while on site rather than ahead of time.

The ethics clearance certificates of both the University of Ottawa and of the Nunavut Research Institute are available in the **Appendix (A and B)**. All respondents had the opportunity to add any topic they think is important to the conversation. The interview process followed more of an unstructured process for civilian respondents, where most participants took the initial conversation to their own lived experiences in Iqaluit as well as their own professional lives. Semi-structured interviews are indeed not always the most preferred type of communication as it can come across as strict and extracting (Zhang, Wildemuth, 2009). Unstructured interviews, where the fluid, spontaneous conversation leads, is also part of the interviewing methods (ibidem). Both styles were offered so to accommodate to personal preferences. Unstructured interviews offer deep insight into a person's views on a particular subject, it follows natural conversation and therefore can elicit a sense of trust through listening (Chauhan, 2022; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Listening is indeed an important aspect of Inuit cultural codes of communication. By following the

respondent's narration, new themes and perspectives are bound to emerge – which might not emerge using a semi-structure style of interviewing. Offering both unstructured and semi-structured interview options however allows for the respondent to choose depending on their availability and desire to participate. Community consultation is therefore central to this research project and considers the community as holistic – including actors from all sectors as previously detailed.

The interviews sought to provide answers to the two sub-research questions of Article 2 and provide overall insight into the main research question of the thesis-by-articles. The interviews therefore centered a few relevant topics, but the subsequent analysis was grounded in an iterative research process where extraction and analysis were done simultaneously. The writing of the thesis-by-articles, the three articles and the theoretical and methodological chapter as well as the introduction and the conclusion, thereby similarly was iteratively done.

For all articles, the documents for the analysis were chosen based on their relevance to natural resource and energy development, community involvement (for article 3 in particular), and devolution processes. Such documents are federal, territorial, local, and national. Nunavut and Greenland are not treated as two separate cases but as two elements part of the case study of Inuit governance. They are not analyzed under a comparative studies approach but under a regional and international relations approach. The documents are in English and Danish and involve a wide range of actors from federal actors to territorial rightsholders in Nunavut, national actors in Greenland, as well as international organizations' declarations, and private sector and civil society reports for both. The documents are public policies, reports, and legal documents.

3.3 Chapter Conclusion

This theoretical and methodological chapter details the theoretical and methodological choices guiding the analysis of the research problem. The theoretical frameworks include post-colonial theory, structuration theory, and decolonial theory. The conceptual frameworks include energy sovereignty, Inuit decolonial

ecological security, glocal governance, Arctic exceptionalism, and sustainable development and sustainability as core concepts, which were developed in Chapter 2.. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks is therefore complex, which prompted the choice of a thesis-by-article approach, which enabled the articulation of stand-alone articles that together form the responses to the main research question *How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?* Similarly, the mixed-methods approach between interviews and document analysis both dissected under a Grounded Theory Methodology and thematic content analysis enables the study to dive deeper into the multi-scale nature of energy development and natural resource exploitation from the state-level to the individual civilian level. The mixed methods approach thereby follows the theoretical aim of anchoring the reflections in understanding networks as space, similarly multi-scalar.

The theoretical frameworks enabled the uncovering of dynamics underpinning the main research question and the subsequent sub-research questions by allowing for theoretical complexity, by allowing the answers to be grounded in not one perspective, but a multitude that showcase the reality of energy and resource exploitation in Greenland and Nunavut: a reality that is grounded in multiple explanatory frameworks responding to the different motivations and contexts of rightsholders and stakeholders. The study therefore made the choice of espousing complexity instead of simplification. It drew a connecting thread between all three articles by foregrounding multi-scalar analysis that shows through the conceptual thread of glocal governance and theoretical thread of critical studies seeking to insert Arctic Studies in International Relations as well as seeking to mainstream critical studies in energy and governance studies.

The contributions of the thesis are thereby twofold. The first contribution is empirical through the particular attention to community consultation in renewable energy development in Nunavut. The second contribution is theoretical with the better conceptualisation of decolonial security and ecological security now combined as explanatory of the phenomenon of environmental governance in Greenland. The theoretical contribution also showcases the multi-scalar nature of environmental governance in Nunavut and Greenland and bridges

disciplinary approaches – such as the use of structuration theory and glocal governance applied to Arctic studies - to better understand the dynamics underpinning the answers to the main and sub- research questions. The study thereby makes a theoretical contribution by redefining concepts used to define governance in the Arctic and by redefining theoretical frameworks to apply them to the context of Inuit governance in Nunavut and Greenland. Especially, it challenges the notion of critical frameworks as marginalised and instead mainstreams them into the respective fields of energy studies, governance studies, and regional (Arctic) studies.

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ARTICLE 1

DECOLONIZATION IN GREENLAND AND NUNAVUT AND RESOURCE EXPLOITATION FOR A DECARBONIZED WORLD: WHAT DOES AN ARCTIC CENTURY MEAN?*

** This article is a reprint of the article published in the Arctic Yearbook available at https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2025/Scholarly_Papers/10SP_AY2025_Soer.pdf. This version is slightly revised to help with language clarity for the thesis-by-articles through the explicit addition of the research question and sub-questions. The copy of the published article is available at Appendix D.*

Abstract

The Arctic is again at the crux of global attention. While several regions globally are facing intensified interest for their natural resources, Greenland has similarly faced recent rising attention from regional Arctic actors, such as the United States of America, and globally, such as China. Greenland is appearing to be referred to as the 21st Century Kingmaker by some policy commentators. What does this Arctic century mean and for whom? Specifically, how do natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshape environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region? The mining of minerals is rising to support a global energy transition and industrial needs, sparking geopolitical battles of influence and interests where global powers such as the US and China are entering in competition to secure these resources. While global attention is veering towards the mineral-rich Arctic, especially Greenland and Nunavut, some dynamics – such as the purchase proposal of Greenland made by President Trump – clash with regional dynamics of self-determination from state colonial powers. As the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement came into effect in January 2024, and as Greenland is continuing its

course to secure independence from Denmark, regional self-governance is confronted by strategic imperial maneuvering by global powers. Global energy transition goals, as supported by the United Nations SDGs, while under the banner of sustainable development, thereby spark foundational discussions pertaining to “glocal” governance and human security in a decarbonized world. Echoing Saami critiques of green colonialism, this study aims to question the notion of peace and security through resource exploitation in Greenland and Nunavut as global powers seek to secure their interests in the region, sparking the Arctic Century. Thereby, in order to answer the main research question, the study delves into two sub-research questions: How do structure and agency shape power dynamics among local, state, and foreign actors and influence governance outcomes? And what does an ecological decolonial approach imply for redefining peace and security in the region? This study is supported by qualitative content analysis of policy documents, media articles, and interviews with key Greenlandic and Nunavummiut stake- and rights- holders conducted in 2024. The study contributes to the study of Arctic security through the development of Arctic decolonial ecological security shaping natural resources development in Nunavut and Greenland.

1.0 Introduction

As U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance left Greenland after a whirlwind of statements late March and early April 2025, the threat of U.S. invasion – whether through military, economic, or political control, or a mixture of all of the above – rang alarm bells among Greenlanders and the Danish government (Edvardsen & Hansen, 2025; Livesay et al., 2025). President Trump has “to have Greenland” and Vice President Vance warns that the world can’t “bury our heads in the sand – or in this case the snow” (ibidem).

These explicit threats confront how the Arctic was once referred to as Exceptional – a region framed within a paradigm of peace and cooperation separate from outside geopolitical tensions. Despite a media tendency to portray Arctic Peoples and governments as almost powerless against the titans of the global community – such as the U.S. and China – Arctic peoples and their governments have, over the past decades, built up their resilience and self-determination law-by-law (Loukacheva, 2007a; Soer, 2025). The creation of the Territory of Nunavut in 1999 following the Nunavut Act of 1993, and the signing of Greenland’s

Home Rule Act in 1978 and the Self-Government Act in 2008, forged into law a current of regional Inuit self-determination in response to colonial state violence. As Greenland and Nunavut continue to enact their governance and self-determination, international frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Sustainable Development Goals have shaped dynamics towards sustainable development and environmental justice within domestic legal frameworks. However, this dynamic is facing contestation from industry pressures and international state actors. As the Arctic Ocean may become ice-free in the summer by 2050, these prospects open economic speculations on the increase of the shipping industry in the region – including tourism and other commercial sectors such as fisheries (Dawson et al., 2014; Dawson, 2018; van Luijk et al., 2021). While offshore oil and gas drilling has been banned under Canadian law since 2019 under the Order Prohibiting Certain Activities in Arctic Offshore Waters, and similarly banned under Greenlandic law since 2021, the Trump presidency and the opening of Norwegian Arctic waters in the Barents Sea for exploration mark rising interests towards Arctic resources, where the region is estimated to hold 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids. These estimates were drawn by the United States Geological Survey in 2008 (Bird et al., 2008). 84% of these undiscovered Arctic resources are estimated to be offshore.

Similar dynamics underpin the development of the mining industry. Greenland and Nunavut are estimated to hold significant mineral resources. While Canada has some of the largest reserves of Rare Earth Elements worldwide, Canada is not a commercial producer with all projects still in exploratory or processing phases (Natural Resources Canada, 2025). Greenland is seeking to further develop its resource exploitation sector as its Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029 indicates. Nunavut, while also considering the mining sector as an important vector for the territory's economy and livelihood opportunities, has restricted its commercial and mining land use under its new 2025 Land Use Plan.

Against this rush towards resource exploitation, the reality is much more nuanced. Qualified high-skilled labour is currently lacking in both Greenland and Nunavut, as well as infrastructures such as roads and overall connectivity just to name these two. Additionally, environmental impacts assessment regulations

and local ecological epistemologies further frame the development of the sector. The Arctic century is thereby framed at the crux between resource exploitation and its global geopolitical repercussions within great power politics convening at the regional level. As such, this study seeks to question the framing of both peace (cooperation) and security (hard and human) amidst this crux between regional natural resources development and international relations. Oran Young, in his seminal work on the study of Arctic politics, links Arctic Exceptionalism to environmental management of common resources, with the addition of Indigenous self-determination (1992, p.11-18). These linkages are here analyzed as well, amidst growing regional tensions, renewed interests in natural resource development, and Inuit self-governance. As such, while domestic and global pressures appear to be rising in the region to push towards intensified natural resource exploitation, the sector is nonetheless shaped by the confrontation of both domestic ecological concerns shaped by Inuit epistemologies (ecological security), local capacity constraints, and these international economic and political pressures – thereby inscribing Arctic environmental management within the analysis of regional security dynamics.

As resource exploitation in this context of global energy transition goals is reaching the realm of national critical security, and as the Arctic is gaining global momentum for this exploitation, governance becomes a balancing act of interests between state sovereignty, local decision-making powers of Arctic Peoples, global economic development, and foreign states' Arctic investments. These interconnections between local and global dynamics form a glocal governance, where it is precisely these continuous interconnections that shape both local and global governance as applied to the Arctic region.

The main research question of this article is how do natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshape environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region? The puzzle of Arctic environmental governance as seen through the two cases of Nunavut and Greenland is reaching a fracturing point. As some are claiming that the 21st century will be an Arctic Century with Greenland as its Kingmaker (Menenez, 2025), this study seeks to re-evaluate the notion of peace and

security (Exceptionalism) through the lens of resource exploitation (environmental governance) in Greenland and Nunavut in juxtaposition with Indigenous self-determination as global powers aim to secure their interests in the region (regional security dynamics). The three key themes – environmental governance, exceptionalism, and security – are thereby shaped by a complex web of interconnected concepts – power and sustainability, the resource curse, and decolonial ecological security – seen here through structuration theory, which highlights the interconnectedness.

This article is divided in two sections, each answering the main research question through two sub-research questions. The first section seeks to answer the main research questions by asking how do structure and agency shape power dynamics among local, state, and foreign actors and influence governance outcomes? This section is divided into three subsections: (i) a critical assessment of the notion of Arctic Exceptionalism; (ii) a re-evaluation of capacity constraints in Nunavut and Greenland; and (iii) an analysis of power dynamics under structuration theory. Using the analysis on power dynamics under the framework of structuration theory, the second section delves into the ideological crossroads of sustainable natural resource development by asking what does an ecological decolonial approach imply for redefining peace and security in the region? This section is supported by four phases: (i) an inquiry in Inuit development juxtaposed to colonial development frameworks, (ii) the juxtaposition of (human) rights and sovereignty in resource development, (iii) the confrontation of the resource curse with global energy transition, and (iv) a theoretical reflection on Arctic decolonial ecology as security. These areas of inquiry offer insights into what this Arctic Century might entail. The analysis of the two sections is supported by qualitative thematic content analysis of policy documents, legal Acts and Agreement, scientific publications, and interviews with key Greenlandic (3) and Nunavummiut (18) stake- and rights- holders conducted in 2024. The interviews conducted primarily in Nunavut (18), with the addition of key political and economic stakeholders in Greenland (3), are utilized under a thematic content analysis framework, from which the key themes extracted and juxtaposed to the wider scientific literature on the subject and to government public policies. The interviews, conducted with local inhabitants and representatives from the private energy sector and the

public sector (both territorial government and municipal government), touched on several topics related to incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in public policy on energy development, and to the public-private collaborative potential in the Arctic region. The government policies and Acts and Agreements analyzed for this study, both Canadian and Greenlandic, relate directly to natural resources development (such as devolution agreements, the Nunavut Wildlife Act, or the Critical Minerals Strategy), and to consultation (such as the Canadian Duty to Consult framework, and economic development frameworks such as the ESG Framework). Thematic content analysis serves to extract tendencies, operative frameworks, and epistemological conceptualizations surrounding how security and peace are shaped by environmental management of natural resources.

1.1 Arctic Exceptionalism: Between Myth and Hope for a Better World

Arctic Exceptionalism has been used repeatedly to describe Arctic relations by both experts of the region and by the media – first developed by Oran Young in his landmark seminal work on conflict and cooperation to describe a region unique in common resources management (1992). Amidst global tensions between states, the Arctic has been portrayed as an area of peace and scientific cooperation where animosity has been kept outside its borders (Devyatkin, 2023; Gerhardt, et al., 2010; Lackenbauer, Kikkert, 2009; Olesen, 2020; Volquardsen, 2025; Young, 1992). With the Arctic Council at its center, Arctic Exceptionalism remained viable with the Council standing as a model of cross-border scientific cooperation, bridging fields and languages. Governance in several areas, including environmental governance, has been spearheaded by the 8 Arctic member states, 6 Permanent Participants representing the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic, and 38 observers, implementing work through the 6 working groups on contaminants, monitoring and assessment, conservation of flora and fauna, emergency prevention and preparedness and response, marine environment protection, and sustainable development. Since the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996, the organization has seen many Chairs and has provided an important venue for the negotiation of three international agreements on cooperation on aeronautical and marine search and rescue in 2011, cooperation on marine oil pollution preparedness and response in 2013, and enhancing international Arctic scientific cooperation

in 2017. Anchored in the legacy of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy established in 1991, the Arctic Council has been representative of what it means for the Arctic to be a “region of peace, stability and constructive cooperation, that is a vibrant, prosperous, sustainable and secure home for all its inhabitants, including Indigenous Peoples, and where their rights and wellbeing are respected. (Arctic Council, n.d.)”

Against the reality of scientific cooperation, the Arctic has also been central in military preparedness. Several U.S. military bases were constructed in Greenland during the Cold War, and the DEW Line – Distant Early Warning Line – established from 1957 until 1993, was set to detect an air attack from the Soviet Union. Iqaluit’s airport was first established as a military airport and is now also used as an operating base by the Royal Canadian Air Force (Gagnon, 2002). The fall of the USSR signaled a different era for the Arctic, but the underlying military preparedness never disappeared. This first section asks how do structure and agency shape power dynamics among local, state, and foreign actors and influence governance outcomes? The section seeks to question this notion of Exceptionalism, confronting it with Indigenous voices and perspectives, debate about capacity, and through an inquiry into the theoretical framework supporting this confrontation using structuration theory. This section serves as a foundation for the second half of this study, which delves specifically into the sustainability debate – environmental protection and governance which as developed above supported Arctic exceptionalism and the creation of the Arctic Council.

1.1.1 Genesis of Exceptionalism in the Arctic: Indigenous Voices

While the Arctic Council was established in 1996, the Inuit Circumpolar Council was established in 1977 and represents the Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka. Canada’s attention towards the Arctic included the enforcement of colonial violence. From forced relocations, forced sedentarisation, project surname, and residential schools, the Inuit of Canada have experienced the worst of the country’s colonial legacy as the federal government of Canada aimed to secure its sovereignty claims over its Arctic territory against competing interests from regional actors such as the U.S. (Dunning, 2013; Tassinari, 1995; F. Tester & Kulchyski, 2011). Danish involvement in Greenland has a longer history, but the colonial violence is similar with forced sterilisation of Inuit girls and women, theft of Inuit children put into Danish

families, as well as forced sedentarisation (Bryant, 2024; Olsen, 2024). From either side of the Baffin Sea, the rush towards the Arctic during and after the Second World War meant the continuation and increase of colonial violence, disregard for Inuit life, and disregard for ecosystems as well. The creation of the ICC came about to strengthen Inuit resilience against this colonial wave. The ICC represents an adaptation to western legal and institutional frameworks in order to anchor self-determination strategies in Westphalian terms and is an act of cultural revival for Inuit governance (Ackrén, 2022; Soer, 2023; Tagalik et al., 2023).

Inuit self-determination was fought for by Inuit leaders and communities, aided by international (Indigenous) movements towards human rights and Indigenous rights. The Universal Declaration of the Human Rights in 1948, human security as defined by the UNDP's Human Development Report of 1994, and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, paved the way for the institutional and legal support of both Greenland's and Nunavut's rights against colonial violence and in favor of self-determination. Greenland and Nunavut, as well as the many other Indigenous nations worldwide, served as precursors for the adoption of some of these international frameworks (Assembly of First Nations, 2017; Cambou, 2020; Government of Canada, 2021; United Nations, 1948, 1994). The Nunavut Act of 1993 utilized the existing governance framework of Canada – federalism – to position themselves accordingly in negotiation strategies. Similarly, Greenland's Home Rule Act of 1978 utilized the existing governance frameworks of Denmark – keen to be seen as the 'good colonizer' as well as using the political representation in parliament developments of the 1970s – to position themselves with the Danish state (Ackrén, 2022, 2024).

For Greenland, the Second World War meant an ambivalent status as a U.S. protectorate in 1941 during the Nazi invasion of Denmark – a protectorate status sparked by plans of other powers such as the UK and Canada to take control over certain parts of the island – and remained under Danish control after the war. The establishment of U.S. military bases and diplomatic relations during that time propelled Greenland into imperial circumpolar diplomacy by incorporating the island in global security concerns amidst the Second World War and Cold War (Ackrén, 2022).

Inuit leadership in Nunavut anchored their claims in the modern treaty process – also known as comprehensive land claims agreements – started by the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement of 1975 led by the Cree, Inuit, and Naskapi. Leadership by the Kalaallit and Nunavummiut supported Inuit self-determination and self-government, enabled by both domestic frameworks and international frameworks, and supported the stabilization of the Arctic region and further contributes to global environmental management (Zellen, 2022; Osakada, 2022).

As such, the notion of exceptionalism – understood as a zone of institutionalized diplomacy and scientific collaboration in environmental management and governance – becomes more nuanced when Indigenous perspectives are included and foregrounded. Colonial violence and disregard of Inuit interests has shaped contemporary dynamics in Nunavut and Greenland, a violence also enacted by the private sector (Bellehumeur, 2020; M. Hansen, 2025; Jørgensen, 2025; Pauktutit, Inuit Women of Canada et al., 2014). Despite the devolution agreement signed in 1993, it required the passing of the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement in 2024 for Nunavut to gain the ability to administer lands, development and resource management, receive royalties on public lands, and has the opportunity to “continue strengthening education, employment and other northern-led investments in land and resource development” (CIRNAC, 2024). It took 32 years after the signing of the 1993 Nunavut Agreement for the transfer of responsibilities over public lands, natural resources, and water rights – in other words, key areas of environmental governance - to be made from the Federal Government of Canada to the Government of Nunavut. On Greenland’s side, the Home Rule Act of 1978 and the Self-Government Act of 2008 came about as Greenlandic political representation in Danish parliament became possible in 1970s where greater Kalaallit autonomy could be put on the agenda also in retaliation of colonial social policies, once again through Kalaallit advocacy (Ackrén, 2022).

The Self-Government Act recognized Greenlanders as “a people according to international law with the right to self-determination” (Ackrén, 2022, p.5) and natural resources and their management were now under the jurisdiction of the Greenlandic government. Despite greater control, some mining activities, such as

shown in the 2025 documentary “Greenland’s White Gold” [Grønlands Hvide Guld], have continued to undermine communities’ development and wellbeing through lack of environmental and workers’ rights oversight (Hansen, 2025; Hansen, Johnstone, 2019; Hubbard, 2013; Nuttall, 2012; Larsen, Ingimundarson, 2023; Larsen, Huskey, 2020; Stefánsdóttir, 2014). From the perspective of human security, therefore, intrinsically linked to environmental management, Arctic Exceptionalism did not extend to the rights of Indigenous Peoples in every capacity.

While Inuit leadership and Inuit rights have been carved into circumpolar institutional frameworks and international law, the reality on the ground remains a discrepancy in power and governance, albeit with different manifestations in Nunavut and Greenland. In Nunavut, the Devolution over Lands and Resources Agreement was signed in 2024, while control over resources was devolved to Greenland following the Act on Greenland Self-Government, which came into force in 2009. The discrepancy in the timeline pertaining to the control over natural resources development between the territory and the autonomous region impacted the economic self-determination of the two Arctic regions, with conversation on mining development only just being part of the jurisdiction of the Government of Nunavut compared to Greenland. However, the greater control exercised by Greenland before Nunavut, and its overall jurisdiction over domestic matters, enabled the autonomous region to pursue an economic development path that the territory of Nunavut could not. On other justice matters, Canada implemented UNDRIP in 2021 and released its Action Plan in 2023. Denmark apologized in 2022 for the removal of Greenlandic children from their parents, and the forced sterilization campaign of the 1960s and 70s is still under investigation for compensation (Olsen, 2024). While indeed there was no active military conflict in the Arctic and states had open diplomatic channels, the emphasis on diplomatic and scientific activity and peaceful cooperation disregards the different ways colonial violence and (economic) paternalism affected the Inuit in Nunavut and Greenland in their ability to lead environmental management on their lands. Nonetheless, while the notion may have been imperfect, its institutional support by organizations like the Arctic Council pushed for greater circumpolar cooperation amidst the threats of climate change and anthropogenic pollution.

1.1.2 The Capacity Debate Revisited in Nunavut and Greenland

As the notion of Arctic Exceptionalism is now fading from mainstream discourse, whose future is uncertain since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Dyck, 2024; Lackenbauer, Dean, 2020; Smith, 2022) , the subsequent halt of Arctic Council activities (which have partially resumed) and the threats of U.S. imperialism on Canada and Greenland (Olesen, 2020), have led to a temptation in the media to frame Greenland as almost powerless against the superpowers (Soer, 2025).

While this realist perspective certainly allows for an understanding of Great Power competition, it erodes and eludes local powers as well as institutional powers. The capacity for smaller (territorial) governments to act on the regional and international political scene is complex and differs based on jurisdictional powers. Greenland and Nunavut do not have similar jurisdictional powers regarding international relations nor regional relations. The devolution agreement of Nunavut and the devolution agreement of Greenland are not comparable in terms of international relations where Greenland has a larger room of maneuver than Nunavut (Loukacheva, 2007b; Home Rule, 1978; Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act, 1993). While Greenland does not have military power, it can establish international diplomatic relations and has its own Foreign, Security and Defence Policy “Nothing About Us Without Us” published in 2024. Greenland is represented by Denmark in Canada, but Canada does have an honorary consulate in Nuuk which opened in 2024. The U.S. also has a consulate in Nuuk which opened in 2020. The capacity debate to defend Greenland’s and Nunavut’s interests both domestically and internationally is anchored in multiple areas and deeply shape the ways both actors anchor their claims pertaining to their own economic development.

In resource exploitation, capacity limitations are often cited by both scientific analysis and by the interview respondents as the core difficulties behind the development of the sector in Nunavut and Greenland (Rosa et al., 2023; interview respondent - Greenlandic representative, economic development, private sector). The lack of local qualified personnel and the lack of connectivity, such as roads which participates in the difficulties faced by the remoteness of both locations, render the establishment of resource

exploitation infrastructures costly and lengthy – relying on foreign labour and importation of materials via flight or shipping (AMAP, 2018; Holroyd, 2024; Thaarup et al., 2020). While these limited capacities in terms of labour and infrastructure add constraints on the development of the mining sector, its development has always been a long-term projection. The infrastructural and labour constraints add layer of difficulty, and as such, the political discourses of reaching economic independence in Greenland and enhanced economic health in Nunavut through the mining sector is a long-term investment rather than an immediate return investment (interview respondents – Nunavut and Greenland government representatives and private sector representatives). Therefore, while the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement of 2024 enables greater control by the government of Nunavut over its resources, it remains a long-term development strategy to invest in the mining sector.

The 2025 Greenlandic elections saw the management of natural resource development, the need for economic development, and securing independence from Denmark as central questions. The results of the March 2025 elections juxtaposes two conceptions and approaches to Greenlandic independence: the Demokraatit party leader Jens-Frederik Nielsen, takes a more progressive approach to independence, whereas the runner-up Naleraq seeks a much more rapid approach to independence from Denmark (Lukiv & Kirby, 2025). In terms of resource exploitation, while Naleraq has historically opposed uranium mining, the Greenlandic parliament and government are debating the zero-tolerance policy on uranium mining (Berthelsen, 2025). The different approaches to economic self-determination relating to independence address a key issue in the development of the natural resource exploitation sector. Demokraatit, a social-liberal party, advocates for tax incentives, streamlined regulations and reduced state intervention while Naleraq remains “deeply skeptical to foreign investment” and “must retain full control over its resources” (Jouan, 2025). How environmental regulations are implemented is linked to how independence is envisioned. Similarly, how foreign investments are to be regulated is deeply tied to how independence is envisioned. The new coalition and their subsequent economic policies are thereby central in understanding regional

economic projections – giving substance or not to the remark that Greenland will be the Kingmaker of the Arctic Century (Menenez, 2025).

In Nunavut, this capacity debate also touches on institutional capacity in both the government and Inuit organisations. With chronic understaffing and frequent turnovers, as well as global and domestic attention towards the territory – including from the scientific research sector – engagement fatigue is an issue faced by public employees and employees from Inuit organisations (Greenlandic and Nunavummiut interview respondents, public sector and private sector). With the new 2024 Agreement, it remains to be seen how capacity reinforcement – for instance local labour force against Southern labour force, or attractiveness of skilled labour in government positions long-term – will take place to accompany the territory's greater responsibilities in resource exploitation.

Under Canadian federation, the status of Nunavut as a territory and as a modern treaty complicates the debate on capacity and sparks foundational questions on Inuit governance under a western legal and government system. Certain critiques of development oversight frameworks, such as the Environment Social Governance Framework or public consultation laws, argue that these inhibit development as they impose regulations which further increase the lengthy development process and thereby increase costs associated with development in the North (Exner-Pirot, 2024; Exner-Pirot & Gullo, 2025). The capacity debate therefore here, instead of touching directly on increasing labour capacity, touches on institutional capacity and its responsibilities in structuring development in the territory.

These areas of the capacity debate, in addition to the realist perspective described earlier, highlights a legal-institutional perspective which defines space to maneuver in environmental management and economic development for both Greenland and Nunavut. They frame both concerns and trajectories. Framing the capacity debate in terms of questioning development trajectories places emphasis on the potential of both Greenland and Nunavut in this growing attention towards Arctic resource exploitation. It frames the conditions of resource exploitation back into Inuit leadership instead of voiding it de-facto of agency and power. Capacity framed under these terms respond to the regional need for peace and security

in order to advance development. Human security and Inuit self-determination supported both under domestic and international legal frameworks bring the conversation from Big Power Politics to a “glocal” perspective on regional politics – the multi-scale interconnection between local and global governance in shaping regional leadership (Mihr, 2022; Roudometof, 2015). This glocal perspective allows for a more complex and nuanced conversation on the place of Inuit leadership in international politics which, as will be developed in the second section below, impacts environmental regulatory frameworks.

1.1.3 Agency vs Structure: Structuration Theory in Big Power Politics and Peace

The two previous sub-sections on capacity and on Arctic Exceptionalism both view in different ways the agency of the Inuit against the structure of western imperialism and global economy pertaining to environmental and economic governance. This tension between agency and structure has grappled social scientists and forms a fundamental piece of inquiry in what moves societies, what instills change (Giddens, 1984). Structuration theory bridges both agency and structure and recognizes the power of agency (individual and collective) in shaping the structure as well as the power of the structure to shape the individual and the collective. We are products of our society, of our times, as much as our times and our society are products of our making (ibidem). Placing this continuous dialogue between agency and structure gives a path in understanding this Arctic century as a *mélange* instead of an opposition between forces.

As this section argues, reframing big power politics in structuration theory gives another voice to medium and small powers as well as nuances the role of states by incorporating regional governments such as Nunavut and Greenland. Reframing big power politics (BPP) as well as great power competition (GPC) through structuration theory opens up the conversation to the inclusion of Inuit governments and leadership in regional circumpolar dynamics, specifically in environmental and economic governance. From an institutionalist perspective, international frameworks supported by international bodies such as UNDRIP give Indigenous rights a legally-binding standing in international law for the signatories, which Denmark and Canada are. Placing Greenland in a position of power is interesting from the viewpoint of structuration theory: Greenland becomes both the ‘structure’ and the ‘agency’ of the equation by being both the

Kingmaker and on the receiving end of global imperialism thereby breaking the separated duality of structure vs agency - exemplifying the argument of structuration theory.

Arctic politics would thereby enter a form of governmentality: in response to global imperial rush towards itself, Arctic powers would frame their actions according to those global dynamics; in response to imperial pressure, it reacts by adopting the mainstream; in reaction to sovereignty threats, it reacts by adopting a sovereignty discourse. It is thereby argued here that entering global politics through established international frameworks and Great Power Competition would require a discursive negotiation strategy in the maintenance of sovereignty. It becomes a balancing act between self-determination with global forces – once again composed by both agency and structure, entering a governmentality dynamic in diplomacy. An independent Greenland relies however on the willingness of these Big Powers to respect the international status quo and international law. Should the U.S. choose to invade Greenland or Canada (and Nunavut by proxy), they would lose their agency.

So, how do structure and agency shape power dynamics among local, state, and foreign actors and influence governance outcomes? Structuration theory thereby touches on the abiding of international law by all actors. Should some lose agency in whatever capacity, then the balancing act becomes skewed. Today however, Nunavut continues the upholding of its 1993 Agreement and the devolution of powers, and Greenland remains focused on asserting independence from Denmark and on its own economic development path. In today's context, the threats of an imbalance between agency and structure spark further energy towards ensuring Inuit sovereignty and self-determination as the recent Greenlandic elections show. The Arctic Century as a *mélange* instead of confrontational however shifts the conceptualization of peace towards effective long-term stability instead of only conceptualized against conflict. Structuration theory thereby here serves as a theoretical path to understanding what peace and security entail for the Arctic: a peace and security which foregrounds human security - including Indigenous rights and international (imperial) actors in sustainable economic development.

1.3 Shaping Development through Natural Resources: An Ideological Crossroads

Structuration theory as shown previously enables a nuanced conversation about responsibility and power in circumpolar relations according to both domestic frameworks, regional frameworks, and international frameworks. It allows also for a conversation on the meaning behind policies and trajectories pertaining to development. It enables a conversation on power anchored in space – both physical and imagined. The development of natural resources in Nunavut and Greenland is strongly anchored in environmental and ecological considerations both through government policies (environmental impacts assessments and laws) and Inuit epistemologies. As such, natural resources development and sustainable development enter in political and economic discussion informing government trajectories on building local economic resilience (see the results of the recent Greenlandic elections discussed below). Hence, on natural resources management, Arctic Exceptionalism through Inuit perspectives both informs and is informed by environmental management.

“Nothing About Us Without Us”, as the Greenlandic government proclaims, echoes beyond the realm of defence and foreign affairs and evokes also the need to frame Arctic policies according to Inuit knowledge and Inuit perspectives. An Arctic by and for the Arctic Peoples. As such, sustainable development has been at the ideological crossroads between capitalist productivism, growth, environmental preservation and conservation, and local voices and conceptions of *being* in an ecosystem, *being* in a society.

The idea of development post-Industrial Revolution has evolved and is lived differently by peoples based on lived experiences both historically and contemporarily. The idea of development, while intrinsically linked to colonial expropriation under a global capitalist system (Ghosh, 2021; Good, 1976; Larrain, 2013), thereby requires nuance when applied to describe the relationship of peoples and their leadership with both local and global economies. Sustainable development as defined by the United Nations’ homonymous framework seeks to bridge economic imperatives with environmental concerns and human security concerns. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals seek to address the different realms of human security combined with environmental sustainability. As such, poverty, education, health, hunger, gender

equality, reduced inequalities, peace and justice, strong institutions and industry, decent work and economic growth, are coupled with clean water, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, the safeguarding of life below water and on land, affordable and clean energy, as well as the need for partnership to achieve the aforementioned goals (United Nations, n.d.). In such a framework, sustainable development does not negate the need for development – or for growth – but negates the equivalency placed between development and negative environmental impacts and seeks an alternative technocratic path (Adamowicz, 2022; Katz-Rosene, 2025; Morse, 2008; Ziai, 2016). This second section asks what does an ecological decolonial approach imply for redefining peace and security in the region? The section seeks to dive deeper into sustainability against a colonial framework, looking specifically into the idea of decolonial ecological security – seeking thereby to qualify Inuit development within this larger glocal questioning of peace and security amidst resource development and big power politics.

1.3.1 Inuit Development vs. Colonial Frameworks: Sustainable Development in Nunavut and Greenland

The operationalization of sustainability in Nunavut and Greenland is anchored in global discourses on sustainability as well as locally framed understandings of what sustainability entails (Amanor & Moyo, 2008; Escobar 1995, 2014; Ghosh, 2021; Morse, 2008; Ziai, 2016). However, analysis of power dynamics within the Global North, including in the Arctic, bring such critiques internally: these analyses as related to the climate crisis are often focused on environmental inequality – mainly environmental racism – where the effects of the climate crisis are shown to disproportionately impact marginalized communities (Gutschow et al., 2021; Sealey-Huggins, 2018; Whyte, 2018).

Sensitive to the lived realities in the Arctic, here focused on the North American Arctic, works by various scholars (Bellehumeur, 2020; Dowsley et al., 2010; Kafarowski, 2005, 2009; Krupnik et al., 2010; Kuokkanen, 2009; Pedersen, 2003; Quintal-Marineau, 2017; Somby, 2016) have highlighted the differentiated impact of climate change on Inuit women and other Arctic Indigenous women as well as the specific sets of environmental knowledge they possess, offering a comprehensive perspective on the effects

of climate change (Dowsley et al., 2010). Tester and Irniq (2009) argue that the confrontation between the imperatives of sovereign control over the land by the state and the decolonial struggle for Inuit knowledge affirmation results in the subversion of sustainability and Inuit knowledge by the state to serve its own interest (F. J. Tester & Irniq, 2009, p.50). In an Arctic context, notions of sustainability are oftentimes developed through specific perspectives – hunting and cultural rights, (economic) self-determination rights, and quality of life rights such as housing and heating – thereby highlighting the difficulty in applying concepts such as sustainability to sub-regions such as the North American Arctic.

This newest phase of development – sustainable development – has thereby provided a new outlet for the reproduction of traditional colonial dynamics between the state and Indigenous peoples (Fjellheim, 2022, 2023; Normann, 2021). The asymmetrical power dynamics between the national governments and the Nunavut and Greenlandic governments are echoed in the economic and social realities of the territories. The Territory of Nunavut has the lowest life expectancy of Canada and is facing systemic food insecurity as well as lower educational levels. Additionally, housing shortage, healthcare discrepancies, domestic violence, and alcoholism impact opportunities for livelihood opportunities development and overall social cohesion (Department of Family Services, 2024; ITK, 2019; Lee et al., 2022).

While the Canadian federal government continues to invest in the decarbonization of energy, this decarbonization parallels ongoing structural difficulties faced by Nunavummiut and hence, instead of creating a binary opposition between renewable energy development and development of basic infrastructures, the fundamental question of setting priorities and paths towards just and equitable development offers a realm of possibilities against what former Minister Aminata Dramante Traoré calls the “rape of the imaginary” (Traoré, 2002). An Inuit decolonial sustainable development is hence informed by complex structural needs (housing, economic opportunities, healthcare, education) in which sustainability plays a central role in ensuring cultural, identity, and resource priorities. These complex structural needs are embedded in a holistic, ecological, cultural and linguistic realm for which cultural revitalization – such as language revitalization – is fundamental (Kelly et al., 2024; Levesque, 2002; Peter

et al., 2002; Watt-Cloutier, 2016; Whyte, 2017). Hence, Inuit decolonialism, while not necessarily unique in some respects, stands apart as a junction of practical implementation of self-determination, structural needs, and cultural revitalization supporting Inuit knowledge. Sustainable development then, contrary to oppositional discourses between neoliberal capitalist development and post-growth, takes on a more nuanced and complex approach. As such, this sub-section argues that this specificity of Inuit decolonialism structures how regional and domestic development are framed by both actors - Nunavut and Greenland - within their respective jurisdiction. This structuring of economic development is deeply anchored in environmental considerations, themselves responding to global and regional political and economic dynamics - as detailed in the first section.

1.3.2 Rights and Sovereignty: Interests and Rights on Resource Development

While the environmental impacts of military development in the circumpolar Arctic is beyond the scope of this article, both hard and human security imperatives have incorporated resource development as a core element (Barnes, 2019; Exner-Pirot, 2023; Hoogensen Gjørsv et al., 2020). As the Canadian federal government released its Critical Minerals Strategy in 2022, the Environment-Social-Governance standards, Indigenous partnerships, and global security concerns are highlighted as key forces guiding the development of the sector (p.1, p.5, p.13, p.33). The Strategy holds six (6) focus areas and initiatives: exploration, research, development and innovation; accelerating responsible project development; building sustainable infrastructure; advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples; growing a diverse workforce and prosperous communities; and strengthening global leadership and security (Government of Canada, 2022).

The Government of Canada thereby positions itself on two fronts. On one side, Canada is positioning itself as a global reserve of critical minerals, a country rich in resources that can be used for a sustainable global good foregrounding human rights and environmental imperatives. On the other side, Canada is also positioning itself in a strategic security chessboard, against the monopolization of these resources by a few key actors. China is not mentioned once in the document but holds the vast majority of global production

of minerals (Weihuan, 2024). The federal government is thereby joining sustainable imperatives with human rights – in line with the SDGs – with security imperatives.

This combination of axis echoes the earlier critiques made by sustainable development critical authors of the cooptation of sustainability by imperial actors (Banerjee, 2003; Escobar, 2014; Normann, 2021; Ziai, 2016). While the Canadian government advocates for partnership with Indigenous peoples regarding mineral production and high environmental standards, tensions and violences such as for the TC Pipeline in Wet'suwet'en territory case or the Mount Polley disaster – and continued gold mining activities in the region - have showcased a different picture of the state of resource exploitation in the country. According to the Grid Arendal and UNEP report (2017), Canada was ranked second in worst mining record globally, just behind China. Abroad, 60% of the world's mining companies are Canadian and with it comes a well-documented trail of environmental and human rights abuses and crimes, especially in South America and Africa (CBC, 2023; Coumans, 2023; Roche et al., 2017). Therefore, while the government advocates for the further domestic development of the sector, its international track-record shows discrepancies between the focus areas and initiatives of the Strategy and its implementation thereby questioning the effective implementation of sustainable development (also understood as including the advancement of reconciliation with Indigenous nations) as a framework.

Despite rampant abuse, modern treaties and domestic and international frameworks, such as UNDRIP or Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, give legal and jurisdictional support to Indigenous Nations in safeguarding their interests in the resource exploitation sector through mining royalties and other arrangements. The Nunavut Agreement and the Devolution agreement of 2024 thereby act as strong safeguarding measures for the interests of the Inuit of Nunavut. In Greenland, UNDRIP similarly applies and it remains to be seen how the new coalition enacts laws regarding the streamlining of natural resource development and environmental protection measures. Greenland recently published its Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029 and emphasizes four (4) target areas: sustainability and society; attractive investment frameworks; critical minerals; and geological mapping and geodata. The first focus areas foregrounds

population census as well as the implementation of the ESG framework – it also includes gender equality campaigns and analysis. (table 1). These two strategic policy documents establish roadmaps in the partnerships between the several layers of local and international governance bodies. In the case of Canada, this refers to the partnerships between the federal government, the territorial government, and international “allies” (objective 5, table 1). In the case of Greenland, this refers to the government of Greenland and the international community including the government of Denmark. These two documents, understood as roadmaps, thereby anchor yet again the tension between agency and structure of the Arctic Century in glocal governance as they emphasize domestic agency in shaping the future of resource exploitation in the region in relation with the global community.

Table 1. Comparative overview of the focus and target areas, and objectives and initiatives of Greenland’s Mineral Resources Strategy and the Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy.

Greenland Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029	The Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy 2022
Focus area 1: Sustainability and society Societal benefits Value creation in all parts of the lifecycle of a mine Climate and environment Education and workforce The gender diversified industry Digital presence	Objectives Objective 1: Support economic growth and competitiveness. Objective 2: Promote climate action and strong environmental management. Objective 3: Advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Objective 4: Foster diverse and inclusive workforces and communities. Objective 5: Enhance global security and partnership with allies.
Focus area 2: Attractive investment frameworks Investments Permits and requirements Administration and case management Organizational structure Local anchoring	Focus Area and Initiative 1: Driving Exploration, Research & Development, and Innovation
Focus area 3: Critical Minerals	Focus Area and Initiative 2: Accelerating Responsible Project Development

Target area 4: Geological mapping and geodata Mapping Geophysics and Remote Sensing Landslides and surveillance Data generation and sharing Carbon Capture and Storage Drill core storage	Focus Area and Initiative 3: Building Sustainable Infrastructure
	Focus Area and Initiative 4: Advancing Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples
	Focus Area and Initiative 5: Growing a Diverse Workforce and Prosperous Communities
	Focus Area and Initiative 6: Strengthening Global Leadership and Security

1.3.3 Global Energy Transition: Confronting the Resource Curse

Arctic institutions and organizations such as the Arctic Council, Nunavut and Greenland's governments, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, or even the Arctic Economic Council, have different levels of jurisdiction and enforcement powers but all seek to contribute in meaningful ways to the development and well-being of Arctic societies and peoples. They seek to advocate for the rights of local communities and for sustainable business practices (Arctic Council, n.d.; Arctic Council & Sustainable Development Working Group, 2021; Canadian Association of Native Development Officers et al., 2022; Naalakkersuisut, 2025). As respondents from both Greenland and Nunavut have emphasized, responsible relationship building is essential to conducting business in the Arctic (interview respondents). Public consultations, in Nunavut under the larger Duty to Consult law for instance, have become staples in the establishment of business relations in the region.

The cryolite mine in Greenland is an important example of both lack of public consultation and lack of due diligence in supporting regional and local development (M. Hansen, 2025). As the 2014 Pauktuutit report also highlights, the mining industry has shown elevated rates of sexual violence and gender-based discrimination specifically targeting Inuit women. The edited volume by Southcott et al. (2019) on *Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic* has sought to answer the most grappling questions of

sustainable development: “How can resource extraction be best used to create successful societies? What are the best ways to avoid the staples trap/resource curse? How can resource extraction best contribute to the well-being of producing regions and communities? What institutions best ensure that producing regions and communities benefit from resource extraction?” (Huskey, Southcott, 2019, p.158). As the authors emphasize, this resource curse – where the large presence of natural resources paradoxically can result in decreased development possibilities for a community (p.3) – is not a doomed destiny but an outcome that can be avoided with effective and adequate institutions (p.3, p.145, p.167) – joining here the argument of Young on the importance of institutional arrangements or regimes to support sustainable development beyond domestic frameworks (Young, 1992, p.228). Recent developments in ensuring local consultations, local approval, and due diligence in economic returns for the local community have served as structural walls safeguarding from the pitfalls of resource development: as the aforementioned authors highlight, effective institutional structures are fundamental to avoid a resource curse (Ostrom, 2008).

On energy transition and its snowball effect on the mining industry, UNCLOS delineates responsibilities and rights over sovereign territories: both Nunavut and Greenland have legal frameworks in place which explicitly requires the safeguarding of the environment (biodiversity included) for mining projects to go forward, both on land and offshore. Despite the media attention towards a hypothetical rush towards Arctic resources, and despite potential political movements in favour of streamlining the development of natural resources exploitation, these legal frameworks offer a very different perspective on the structuring of Arctic resource exploitation. On the contrary, what these legal and institutional frameworks show is a circumpolar willingness towards safeguarding resources and willingness to avoid direct confrontation between states.

On renewable energy infrastructure, the new hydroelectric dam in Iqaluit has reached community consensus supporting its construction. This consensus was achieved after years of negotiation and community consultation where the community always retained the right to refuse (Sarkisian, 2025). The results of the recent elections in Greenland, while dominated by questions of independence, were also due

to public dissatisfaction towards the new fishing laws restricting commercial fishing – one of the largest economic sectors of the country (Lukiv & Kirby, 2025).

These two contrasting cases exemplify the importance of community consultation and information on sustainability practices. To reflect on the words of Dr. Abele (2019), “thinking about healthy northern economic and social development in regional terms is intuitively appealing. It requires, though, that regions be identified purposefully, to make it possible to respect the reality of the communities in which people choose to live, while understanding change and formulating choices with appropriate territories and institutions in mind” (p.177). The institutional and legal framing of development along sustainability requires both cross-border collaboration and local consultation enabling local decision-making powers. This approach to “authoritative decision-making and political debate” (ibidem) on a range of scales from international collaborations to domestic laws offers a path forward outside of threats of conflicts in development. The approach thereby offers a different perspective from the realist concerns towards increased conflict in the Arctic and offers a vision anchored in the effectiveness of multi-scale (and glocal) environmental management, especially in Greenland and Nunavut.

1.3.4 Arctic Decolonial Ecology as Security

Development in Nunavut and Greenland is structured by a complex web of interconnected imperatives shaping how sustainability is operationalized by the two regions, and how sustainable thereby shapes the concepts of peace and security. As Peter et al. (2002) emphasize, the relational importance towards the non-human and the whole ecosystem – where each individual has a spirit (“tarniq”) which flows across species – guides understandings of what it means to be living sustainably in the Arctic. Inuit identity is deeply intertwined with the natural world and as such, the mainstreaming of sustainability as a development paradigm by states leads to a dynamical confrontation with Inuit self-determination and way of life both conceptually and in law.

Similarly, Mary Simon (2009) exposes the need to combine climate action with Inuit self-determination and reconciliation. Pitseolak Pfeifer (2020) highlights the need for Inuit leadership in climate change

adaptation and mitigation research and policy, marking “a different way of investing research resources and of thinking through the complexity of the Arctic ecosystem: land, water, animals, and people. (p.268)”. In Greenland, Sara Olsvig confronts the irony and absurdity of political state tensions after Trump’s push towards purchasing Greenland by reminding that Greenlandic people have agency and self-determination rights. As these authors and thinkers expose Inuit perspectives on what sustainability and ecology mean up in the Arctic, they expose deep contradictions between neo-liberal and capitalist needs for development and what development means for Inuit. As such, sustainable development becomes a linguistic confrontation between epistemological realms.

These epistemological realms, infused by vastly different living conditions, reflect the ongoing tensions present in what it means to govern Nunavut and Greenland. In the Wildlife Act (2003) and in the First Annual report of the Inuit Qaujimajatuqanginnut (IQ) Task Force (2002), Inuit epistemological worldviews are made explicit from the very first sentence of the Wildlife Act, where “comprehensive” management understands the interconnectedness of plants, animals, and humans, as well as explicitly calls for the implementation of the guiding principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (S.Nu. 2003, c.26, p.1). While the Nunavut Agreement of 1993 and Greenland Home Rule of 1978 were the foundational blocks for both Inuit homelands, these efforts were framed to remain readable and compose with state power in an acute understanding that without state support – and therefore the need to politically compromise from an Inuit standpoint – a devolution agreement would never have seen the light of day (Soer, 2023). This dynamic of political readability is not to undermine Inuit agency and resilience but to recognize asymmetrical power relations that continue to shape Inuit-state relations with for instance the Nunavut devolution on resources and revenues only having been signed in 2024, 31 years after the 1993 Agreement.

Inuit ecological security is supported greatly by Inuit knowledge (Carter et al., 2025; Dawson et al., 2020; Pearce et al., 2015; Peter et al., 2002). From wildlife conservation to sea-ice knowledge, ecological security has served as a fundamental basis in the establishment of Nunavut’s and Greenland’s self-determination: self-determination through the management and development of resources according to

ecological knowledge (Wildlife Act - c.26 | Legislation, 2003). Additionally, in a Canadian context, Inuit ecological knowledge supports the deployment of the military in the Arctic through the Canadian Rangers – of which the vast majority are Indigenous. Their deep knowledge of the land is essential in missions and thereby supports Canadian sovereignty over the North (Kikkert & Lackenbauer, 2021).

Greenlandic resource development has evolved through a juxtaposition of ecological imperatives and economic imperatives – a juxtaposition supporting independence. While the Nunavut Agreement talks about conservation and management, IQ talks about *avatittinnik kamatsiarniq* – respect and care for the land, animals, and the environment. While the Agreement frames human use of the land as “requirements”, “priorities”, “optimum protection”, IQ frames use of land within a relationship which brings about responsibilities and an ethics of care. Specifically, IQ anchors the conceptualization of ecological security outside of realist, state-centric understandings of security to incorporate critical constructivist perspectives. Such conceptual perspectives, thereby decenter the colonial from security towards instead a decolonial ecological conceptualization of security. Following thereby the decentering approaches of the critiques to development, decolonial ecology operates a similar push towards reframing power dynamics in shaping development discourses. Natural resource development under the premise of decolonial ecological security thereby serves both self-government and the re-evaluation of the substance of self-determination outside of colonial frames of extractivist economic development. Zacharias Kunuk’s documentary series on mining and its environmental impacts shared on IsumaTV, shows how relationality to both environment and community underpins identity formation and underpins epistemological discursive creations (Kunuk, 2019).

So, what does an ecological decolonial approach imply for redefining peace and security in the region? As Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is divided and explained in 8 principles, a worldview comes to light against which the administrative frameworks of sustainability, from the Environment Social Governance framework to the SDGs, seems to clash in both linguistics and substance. Ecology has thereby been a strong vector for Inuit self-determination and continues to be a guiding force in not only circumpolar development but in global advocacy and governance efforts as well – the President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. Aluki Kotierk is

serving as Chair for the 2025 United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues. Her opening speech highlights the importance of Indigenous leadership on “our lands, territories, cultures, and the future of our communities” which they are too often excluded from. In this vein, an Arctic century thereby foregrounds Inuit leadership in environmental governance through decolonial ecological security where “individual and collective rights are non-negotiable” (Kotierk, 2025). Decolonial ecological security thereby conceptually frames the shaping of (environmental) governance and development as applied to Nunavut and Greenland.

1.4 Conclusion

How do natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshape environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region? The study sought to answer this research question by making the case that Arctic peace and security are deeply intertwined with Inuit environmental governance. As Greenland holds significant weight in the future of the circumpolar Arctic through its strategic geographical positioning and through its natural resource potential, cross-border Inuit leadership resonates regionally and internationally. While Nunavut and Greenland fall under different governance systems and enjoy different jurisdictional powers, under the framework of structuration theory, the two regions see the confrontation of several dynamics: Inuit epistemologies, modern economic development incentives, and great power competition and pressures. The re-evaluation undertaken of the notion of peace and security in the Arctic further develops the conceptual framework of Inuit decolonial ecological security to inform Arctic security studies. It reevaluates the triad Arctic exceptionalism – environmental governance – Inuit self-determination through the prism of both decolonial security and ecological security joined under a single conceptual framework. As such, Nunavut and Greenlandic environmental governance is adapting the global paradigm of sustainable development through its own decolonial economic and political agency. This adaptation thereby informs the development of natural resources exploitation, under increasing international and regional pressures and rising diplomatic tensions threatening regional institutional cooperation.

The 21st century is seeing the results of decades of self-determination advocacy by Inuit leaders and communities, leading to effective Inuit governance structures generating and in turn supported by international legal frameworks such as UNDRIP. While it remains unclear how this leadership will evolve in light of the recent tensions with the US. and Russia, the Inuit leadership footprint has shaped circumpolar dynamics. Against rising tensions and challenges to democratic rule of law, the Arctic century will thereby be shaped along this crux in between Inuit self-determination and imperial power coopting global sustainable development and decarbonization. Resource development forms the site of contestation in this crux. Inuit decolonial ecology has thereby grown its roots within resource development governance by shaping circumpolar cooperative dynamics through legally binding treaties.

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ARTICLE 2

NATURAL RESOURCES AND FRAMING KALAALLIT NUNAAT'S INDEPENDENCE: (RE)TELLING EXTRACTIVISM IN THE ARCTIC*

* This is a verbatim copy from the manuscript sent to *The Polar Journal*, including the Chicago referencing style in order to maintain transparency with the version being considered in peer-review.

Abstract

As nations worldwide unveil critical mineral strategies and renewable energy expands its share of the global energy mix, Greenland (Kalaallit Nunaat) finds itself at a crossroads - wedged in between neo-Imperial pressures from Great Powers, and its own attempts to gain further independence from Denmark. While the operational mining potential of Kalaallit Nunaat is debated by experts in the mining sector, the combination of regional security and mining as a securitization strategy by foreign powers reshapes the island's significance globally. This study thus asks: What are the politico-economic trajectories guiding Kalaallit Nunaat's pursuit of energy sovereignty and the development of its mineral resources? Using critical discourse analysis of strategic government documents, this study argues that Greenland's energy sovereignty, in moving beyond the Danish colonial era shaping its resource development policies, must be structured by a balancing act between extractivism and ecology. While operating under a sustainable development paradigm, the control over Kalaallit Nunaat's own energy development is undergoing a growing securitization process, pressured by mounting imperial interests, potentially redesigning regional alliances. As such, the place of nature and Indigenous Knowledge define the democratic exercise of self-government and subsequent sustainable economic development, resisting stronger assaults on its right to self-determination. This conceptual article supported by a case study contributes to the field of critical Arctic

studies through its novel critical analysis of Kalaallit Nunaat's sustainable development efforts, amid growing imperial focus and global attention toward its natural resources, while centering its post-colonial sovereignty.

“We need Greenland for international safety and security. We need it. We have to have it.” – US President Donald Trump¹

2.0 Introduction

Following the 1970s oil crash, Kalaallit Nunaat drew international attention for its potential oil reserves and its strategic Cold War positioning between major global powers². Today, however, its consideration in International Relations and development steadily evolved from oil reserves to its mineral reserve potential³. Countries globally are announcing their critical minerals acts and strategies, and renewable and clean energy sources are gaining shares of the global energy mix⁴. And as the prologue quote by US President Donald Trump suggests, Kalaallit Nunaat's position in holding significant mineral resources potentially anchors the autonomous territory in between both international pressure and domestic opportunity towards economic independence from Denmark.

Resource development in Kalaallit Nunaat, as seen through the prism of global renewable energy development and industrialization (including for the digital development such as data centers), is however framed in the media as a fait-accompli, inevitable amidst big power politics where a small government like the Naalakkersuisut has little counter-power⁵. U.S. President Donald Trump's declaration sets the tone for an Arctic geopolitical era where Kalaallit Nunaat's resources and geographical location are critical, teetering between global energy securitization and regional self-determination. U.S. influence and pressure following

¹ Nguyen, “We Have to Have It.”

² Jacobsen et al., *Greenland in Arctic Security; Oil and Gas Exploration in Greenland: Resources, Economy and Environmental Issues Related to Greenland's Future Hydrocarbon Policy*.

³ Jacobsen et al., *Greenland in Arctic Security*; Nuttall, “Greenland and the Geopolitics of Critical Minerals”; Vidal, “L'extractivisme en Arctique.”

⁴ Yolcan, “World Energy Outlook and State of Renewable Energy.”

⁵ Soer, “Ressources naturelles et indépendance du Groenland.”

the President's statements have been unilaterally criticized by both the Kalaallit Nunaat's government (Naalakkersuisut), the Danish government, as well as by other EU actors and Canada⁶. The threats of annexation have propelled governments and European institutions to demonstrate stronger commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their allies and partners, Denmark and Kalaallit Nunaat⁷. The neo-colonial dynamics underpinning the political discourse held by U.S. President Trump and his administration is however not unique to Kalaallit Nunaat. Globally, green colonialism – or even the resource curse – has been used to describe dynamics where imperial expropriation of Indigenous land underpins natural resource exploitation.

As Kalaallit Nunaat is seeking to secure independence from Denmark by establishing both diplomatic and economic legitimacy regionally and globally, the aim of this study is to address research gaps in critical Arctic studies on post-colonialism in Kalaallit Nunaat by understanding the territory's resource and energy development trajectories within a wider reflection on the applicability of post-colonial theory. The paper seeks to address the question of what are Kalaallit Nunaat's contemporary politico-economic trajectories guiding its energy sovereignty? To answer this conceptual question, the first section seek to define an appropriate theoretical framework in critical Arctic studies for understanding Kalaallit Nunaat's energy sovereignty as securitized, while also seeking to understand how the logics of growth and development are then supported in the 'post' of Kalaallit Nunaat's independence from Denmark. After describing the methodological approach, I then define this trajectory through the analysis of policies published by the Naalakkersuisut and parliamentary acts, which position itself within extractivist and ecological interests. Finally, in the discussion section, I argue that energy sovereignty, under the 'post' of Kalaallit Nunaat's colonial era shaping its resource development policies, is structured by a balancing act between extractivism

⁶ Brezar, "Greenland Prime Minister Says 'enough' after Latest Trump Threat"; CBC, "U.S. Putting 'Unacceptable Pressure' on Greenland with Unsolicited Visit, Says Danish PM"; Armangau, "Europeans Show Solidarity with Denmark after Trump's Greenland Threat"; Robertson, "Canada Backs Greenland's Security as U.S. Talks of Annexation - National | Globalnews.Ca."

⁷ European Council, "Joint Statement by President Costa and by President von Der Leyen on Greenland"; Gouvernement de France, "Déclaration conjointe sur le Groenland."; Regeringskansliet, "Joint Statement by the Nordic Foreign Ministers on Greenland."

and ecology. This balancing act responds to the sustainable development paradigm espoused by the Naalakkersuisut, which is informed by an energy securitization underscored by imperial interests redefining Arctic relations.

2.1 Critical Arctic Studies: re-Telling the Story of Energy Sovereignty

This study contributes to the growing literature in critical Arctic studies, here specifically addressed through a contribution to the extractivism literature⁸ and post-colonial Indigenous governance literature⁹ and their research gaps as applied to Kalaallit Nunaat. While the Global South and the Global North frame critiques of imperial and colonial development under different terms – buen vivir or degrowth being two examples – the turn of the century marked a hegemonic end for the unilateral imposition of development, where imaginaries now grow to shape a different world outside of the confines of either growth or capitalism¹⁰. As responses to such colonial expropriations, post-colonial currents of thought have sought to redefine sovereignty and development outside of the growth paradigm, pushing away from colonial expropriation¹¹.

In an Arctic context, critiques of colonial impositions of development have been articulated mainly along contestations to the resource extraction industry and to environmental preservation movements. For instance, Nordic renewable energy and resource development, such as mining, have both been described as examples of “green colonialism” by Sámi representatives¹². Additionally, Inuit communities and leaders strongly fought back against wildlife protection activism by Western NGOs such as Greenpeace or WWF,

⁸ See for instance

⁹ See for instance Bjørst, *To Live Up to Our Name “Greenland”: Politics of Comparison in Greenland’s Green Transition*; Dingman, *Greenlandic Independence: The Dilemma of Natural Resource Extraction*; Vold, “Belysning af muligheder og udfordringer i krydsfeltet mellem forskning om Grønland og det grønlandske samfund – refleksion og analyse af det visuelle materiale.”

¹⁰ Escobar, *Encountering Development*; Escobar, “DEVELOPMENT, CRITIQUES OF”; Ziai, *Exploring Post-Development*; Ziai, *Development Discourse and Global History*.

¹¹ Banerjee, “Who Sustains Whose Development?”; Escobar, “DEVELOPMENT, CRITIQUES OF”; Ziai, *Exploring Post-Development*.

¹² Fjellheim, “Through Our Stories We Resist: Decolonial Perspectives on South Saami History, Indigeneity and Rights”; Kuokkanen, “The Deatnu Agreement”; Kuokkanen, “Self-Determination and Indigenous Women – “Whose Voice Is It We Hear in the Sámi Parliament?”

which undermined certain subsistence hunting practices - seal and whale hunting – and any economic potential stemming from the practice¹³. Today still, the ban on seal-derived products imports to the European Union remains a crucial point of tension between Arctic nations and the EU¹⁴. Additionally, ecological concerns surrounding the mining and resource extraction industry, such as among others uranium mining¹⁵, also formed a core contestation against extractivist-based development models, which undermined local communities' abilities to pursue traditional subsistence practices¹⁶.

Despite such critiques, however, the perspective held by the Naalakkersuisut seeks to ensure economic stability and growth while maintaining ecological concerns as core in domestic development. They seek to address access to widespread economic development as highlighted in their 2025-2029 mineral resources strategy: “The global need for minerals can create jobs and growth locally and nationally, contributing to a more sustainable and robust economic development for us all.”¹⁷ In such a context, a Kalaallit Nunaat post-colonial era is articulated under the premise of both economic opportunities – and growth (see p.11 of the 2025-2029 mineral resources strategy) – while maintaining the argument of ecological conservation – a locally engrained conceptualization of sustainable development. Such a perspective of the mining industry, a hope for economic development confronted to the disruption of wilderness, is reminiscent of the Fennoscandian case, which continues to fuel discontent and opposition¹⁸. Seeking to address such critiques and discontent, the 2025-2029 mineral resources strategy development model is shaped by the intersection

¹³ Graugaard, “‘A Sense of Seal’ in Greenland”; Rodgers and Ingram, *Decolonizing Environmentalism in the Arctic? Greenpeace, Complicity and Negotiating the Contradictions of Solidarity in the Inuit Nunangat*; Peter et al., “The Seal.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nuttall, “Zero-Tolerance, Uranium and Greenland’s Mining Future.”

¹⁶ Bjørst, *To Live Up to Our Name “Greenland”: Politics of Comparison in Greenland’s Green Transition*; Dingman, *Greenlandic Independence: The Dilemma of Natural Resource Extraction*; Nuttall, “Arctic Ecology, Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Governance”; Vold, “Belysning af muligheder og udfordringer i krydsfeltet mellem forskning om Grønland og det grønlandske samfund – refleksion og analyse af det visuelle materiale.”

¹⁷ Naalakkersuisut, *GREENLAND MINERAL RESOURCES STRATEGY 2025-2029: A Sustainable Mineral Resources Sector*, 1. see also 6, 9, 10.

¹⁸ Komu, “Dreams of Treasures and Dreams of Wilderness – Engaging with the beyond-the-Rational in Extractive Industries in Northern Fennoscandia.”

of social, economic, and environmental sustainability¹⁹. However, while the Naalakkersuisut supports mining as a viable economic opportunity, it remains far from being unanimous across the political landscape and within the population²⁰.

The rejection of the colonial state is confronted to the violence of repression and asymmetrical power dynamics. As Kalaallit Nunaat's population organized to contest this colonial violence, securing key legal grounds in pursuing independence, now comes the challenge of imagining the 'post' of post-colonial independence. There are as many post-colonial imaginaries and paths as there are colonized. North American post-colonial theories have articulated a general rejection of the federal colonial state, a rejection of the Eye of the Master²¹. From Indigenous constitutionalism²² to Indigenous feminism²³, the imagining of the 'post' starts at the realization of justice²⁴. As such, in the context of natural resource extraction to support local and global energy demands, the post-colonial framework where the Naalakkersuisut situates itself goes against what was described in the neighbouring Fennoscandian Arctic as 'green colonialism'²⁵. Instead of supporting sustainability, the rise of green energy technologies and infrastructures instead reinforced existing power imbalances, reinforced the expropriation of land from Indigenous communities²⁶. Sustainable development is enacted in a subversion of the principles of sustainability, instrumentalizing

¹⁹ Naalakkersuisut, *GREENLAND MINERAL RESOURCES STRATEGY 2025-2029: A Sustainable Mineral Resources Sector*, 10.

²⁰ Ackrén, "The Natural Resource Management in Nunavut and Greenland – a Perspective through Historical Institutionalism."

²¹ Coulthard, "Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition"; Giroux, *L'œil du maître*.

²² Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism*.

²³ Kuokkanen, "Self-Determination and Indigenous Women – "Whose Voice Is It We Hear in the Sámi Parliament?"

²⁴ Cambou, "Disentangling the Conundrum of Self-Determination and Its Implications in Greenland"; Cambou and Poelzer, "Enhancing Energy Justice in the Arctic: An Appraisal of the Participation of Arctic Indigenous Peoples in the Transition to Renewable Energy"; McCauley et al., "Energy Justice in the Arctic."

²⁵ Normann, "Green Colonialism in the Nordic Context."

²⁶ Normann, "'Wake up Humanity; There Is No More Time': Lived Experiences and Meaning-Making of Green Colonialism in Three Indigenous Contexts. A Decolonial Approach."; Normann, "Green Colonialism in the Nordic Context."

climate change adaptation and mitigation to instead reinforce Elite colonial control²⁷. There emerges a gap in the analysis of Kalaallit Nunaat's instrumentalization of its natural resources both domestically and internationally: while the feasibility of mining as an economy of scale is questioned, the interlocking of international and domestic pressures redefine the ways sustainability is understood locally and regionally.

The study responds to this conceptual gap through a critical discourse analysis of key public policies, dissecting the post-colonial dynamics underpinning energy sovereignty. Specifically, the study argues that this Elite capture²⁸ of sustainability pushed the narrative of natural resources and global energy development into two camps: a political negotiation between extractivism and ecology, this negotiation shaping the foundations of the post-colonial imaginary.

As colonialism has been analysed as fundamentally tied to land and resource expropriation and exploitation²⁹, post-colonial theory serves as an exploratory foundation into Indigenous futurisms, Indigenous forms of liberation from colonial dogmas. It challenges colonial structures, such as economic and developmental, to reconceptualize self-determination. As such, in this study, post-colonial theory is articulated in tandem with critical theories on development, growth, and environmental sustainability.

The post-colonial of natural resource and energy development³⁰ orbits around the imperative of energy sovereignty and its securitization in Kalaallit Nunaat. Securitization, as developed following the Second World War by the Copenhagen School³¹, strongly influenced the study of the Arctic as an

²⁷ Banerjee, "Who Sustains Whose Development?"; Frandy, "“Mas Amas Diehtá Maid Oarri Borrá?”"; Gamboa, "RARE-EARTH MINING AND SOVEREIGN STATEHOOD IN GREENLAND: 'SUSTAINABLE ENGAGEMENT' WITH EXTRACTIVISM AT KVANEFJELD."; Táíwò, *Elite Capture*.

²⁸ Táíwò, *Elite Capture*.

²⁹ Borrows, "The Durability of Terra Nullius"; Thomas and Coburn, *Capitalism and Dispossession: Corporate Canada at Home and Abroad*.

³⁰ Skorstad, "Sacrifice Zones"; Vidal, "L'extractivisme en Arctique"; Vold, "Belysning af muligheder og udfordringer i krydsfeltet mellem forskning om Grønland og det grønlandske samfund – refleksion og analyse af det visuelle materiale."

³¹ See for instance the seminal works of Buzan, "Peace, Power, and Security"; Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century"; Buzan et al., *Security*; Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization"; Wæver, "Peace and Security."

international region. From this perspective, both the State and non-state actors become influencers in the securitization of the energy development chain – from natural resource development to renewable energy infrastructures and fossil fuel infrastructures: “Global actors started to securitize the issue of energy following the first energy crisis in 1973, and thus it has become a part of high politics. Consequently, energy is taken out of the ‘agenda of normal politics’, and the ‘breaking of the established rules of the game’ have been justified to prevent any danger posed if no prevention had been taken³²”.

In the Kalaallit Nunaat context, the securitization of global energy supplies has taken multiple forms, from the creation of ‘critical’ minerals to long-standing geological surveys of resources, to energy as a path towards self-sufficiency, to recent threats against its sovereignty. The securitization of energy in Kalaallit Nunaat in this sense enmeshed in both global pressures and domestic interests: the securitization of the Arctic has been framed in terms of climate change securitization³³ or in terms of the Arctic as a strategic frontier³⁴. Energy securitization studies as applied to the energy transition is emerging in a Fennoscandian context³⁵. The securitization of energy in Kalaallit Nunaat is thereby deeply enmeshed with its path towards securing sovereignty as recognized by the international community and legal order. Kalaallit Nunaat energy sovereignty, therefore, is emerging out of a continuous negotiation between extractivism and ecology, a negotiation articulated within a global dynamic of energy securitization. Extractivism and ecology are thereby two halves of energy sovereignty, where the Naalakkersuisut seeks to go beyond strict opposition by integrating mineral resources exploitation, growth, and sustainability in a single development framework³⁶. This question of energy sovereignty, whether it is domestic energy sovereignty or international energy sovereignty, thereby sits at the center of global interest in the territory.

³² Özcan, *SECURITIZATION OF ENERGY THROUGH THE LENSES OF COPENHAGEN SCHOOL*.p.65

³³ Mazurier et al., “The Meta-Tragedy of the Commons. Climate Change and the Securitization of the Arctic Region”; Palosaari and Tynkkynen, “Arctic Securitization and Climate Change.”

³⁴ Fakhoury, “Peoples, States, and the Arctic”; Nuttall, “Imagining and Governing the Greenlandic Resource Frontier.”

³⁵ Sivonen and Kivimaa, “Securitization of Energy Transitions in Estonia, Finland and Norway.”

³⁶ Naalakkersuisut, *GREENLAND MINERAL RESOURCES STRATEGY 2025-2029: A Sustainable Mineral Resources Sector*.

Post-colonial theory serves as the exploratory foundation into the imaginaries of this energy sovereignty, of its articulation in tandem with extractivism and ecology, in tandem with global energy securitization. The post-colonial serves as the foundation for which Kalaallit Nunaat's decision-making institutions articulate their visions for the future. Post-colonial theory is thereby the lens through which public policies are analyzed in this study, enabling a better understanding of this imaginary into the independent future.

2.2 Methodological Approach: Critical discourse analysis

The methodological approach used to answer the research question - What are the politico-economic trajectories guiding Kalaallit Nunaat's pursuit of energy sovereignty and the development of its mineral resources? – is critical discourse analysis of government strategic documents and parliamentary acts defining the territory's mineral and energy approach. Original documents in Danish have been translated by the author.

The key domestic policy and legal documents – the Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029³⁷, Parliament Act on Mineral Activities³⁸, Parliament Act no. 5 on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy³⁹, and the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy⁴⁰ – are analyzed under a critical discourse analysis⁴¹ in order to frame government narratives on extractivism and ecology shaping its post-independence trajectory. Each document is juxtaposed along the axis ecology and extractivism by isolating its key messages in order to better understand the government's attitude regarding development for the post-independence era. These documents have been chosen as they legally and politically shape the territory's development of and attitude towards the mining industry and its energy production.

³⁷ Naalakkersuisut, *GREENLAND MINERAL RESOURCES STRATEGY 2025-2029: A Sustainable Mineral Resources Sector*.

³⁸ Mining Act.

³⁹ Parliament Act No. 5 on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy.

⁴⁰ Naalakkersuisoqarfik, Departemented for Landbrug, Selvforsyning, Energi og Miljø, *2030-MUT KALAALLIT NUNAANNI UUMASSUSILLIT ASSIGIINNGISSITAARNERINUT PERIUSISSIAQ - GRØNLANDS BIODIVERSITETSSTRATEGI 2030*.

⁴¹ Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis"; Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis."

Critical discourse analysis, as described by Fairclough, contributes to critical social analysis by focusing on relations between discourses and social dynamics such as power relations and institutions⁴². Importantly, Fairclough uses critical discourse analysis as a trans-disciplinary research methodology, which for the purpose of this study, bridges the different approaches present in critical Arctic studies – from geography, to political sciences and the humanities. As such, the study at hand, following the properties described by Van Dijk⁴³, sees in a transdisciplinary way the political issues behind the discourse structures offered by the Naalakkersuisut and subsequent Parliamentary Acts. Text is analysed in mediation with the political context and the (multi)disciplinary context of critical Arctic studies. The study makes conceptual contributions to the literature on Kalaallit Nunaat's development of mineral resources and energy sovereignty within the wider field of critical Arctic studies.

2.3 Results: A Domestic and Diplomatic Balancing Act Shaping Development for the ‘Post’ Era

“Locally and globally, it is important that the development of the mineral resource industry is carried out in an environmentally and socially responsible way⁴⁴” The words of Honourable Nathanielsen, Minister of Business, Trade, Mineral Resources, Justice, and Gender Equality, anchor the conversation on resource development within a paradigm of (corporate) social and environmental responsibility (see p.15), striving for a balance – non-sacrificing? – under four focus areas, goals and initiatives: Sustainability and society; Attractive frames for investment; Critical minerals; Geological mapping and geodata, which all support several UN Sustainable Development Goals (see p.4) and follow the binding 2016 Paris Agreement calling for limiting temperature increase under 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This green growth⁴⁵ perspective under a larger international paradigm of sustainable development underlines the narrative frame

⁴² Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis, 1.”

⁴³ Van Dijk, “Critical Discourse Analysis, 467.”

⁴⁴ Honourable Naaja H. Nathanielsen, quoted in Naalakkersuisut, *GREENLAND MINERAL RESOURCES STRATEGY 2025-2029: A Sustainable Mineral Resources Sector*, 1.

⁴⁵ Katz-Rosene, *The Growth–Environment Debate*.

of Kalaallit Nunaat's path towards economic development in the natural resources sector. Furthermore, the mineral sector can only be further developed if “green” energy capacity is ensured:

“The Paris Agreement requires a global need for minerals for the green transition. For example, the batteries in the globally increasing electric car production and the magnets in wind turbines are dependent on mineral resources found in the Greenlandic mountains, but it is important that minerals are extracted sustainably, because without access to hydropower or other green forms of energy, establishment of more mines contributes significantly to Greenland's CO₂ emissions. [...] The Government of Greenland will therefore, in collaboration with the industry, work for initiatives that make it attractive and possible to implement diverse, green solutions within energy-efficient infrastructure, such as hydro and wind power⁴⁶”

In a similar vein, the **Parliament Act on Mineral Activities**⁴⁷ states the importance of “the health of the population [...] safety, environmental protection, resource exploitation and social sustainability⁴⁸” as fundamental to the purpose of the Act. As such, the Act set the tone for the overall mineral development strategy, one aligning social and environmental sustainability – thereby echoing the UN Sustainable Goals. Under such premise, resource exploitation is not framed as an opposite of sustainability (whether social or environmental) but as a manner to achieve effective decarbonization and as a tool for economic development for the autonomous territory. However, contrary to the idea proposed by market ecology that free markets “can be more successful than governments” in addressing environmental issues⁴⁹, this approach remains strongly anchored in government oversight. In that sense, their economic approach takes more from the Keynesian political economy approach⁵⁰ but still positing itself at the crux between the demand-side and the

⁴⁶ Naalakkersuisut, *GREENLAND MINERAL RESOURCES STRATEGY 2025-2029: A Sustainable Mineral Resources Sector*.15

⁴⁷ Mining Act.

⁴⁸ Mining Act, 1.

⁴⁹ Katz-Rosene, *The Growth–Environment Debate*, 32.

⁵⁰ Katz-Rosene, *The Growth–Environment Debate*, 40.

(neoliberal) supply-side⁵¹ of the global economic chain as it applies to mineral exploitation. Furthermore, the provisions of the Act on Mineral Activities are also seen as extending to “the protection of climate and nature⁵²” as a whole. Public consultation on environmental and social impact(s) assessment is seen as the responsibility of both the Naalakkersuisut and the exploitation license applicant⁵³ but what these public consultations entail is not specified⁵⁴.

As mentioned in the **Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029**⁵⁵, the development of green energy such as hydro or wind is considered vital for the continuation of mineral exploitation – on the same side of the coin. Similar as to the Mineral Activities Act, the revisions on the **Act on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy**⁵⁶ starts by acknowledging that “Activities falling within the scope of this Greenland Parliament Act must be performed safely with due regard to health, safety, environment, resource utilisation and social sustainability⁵⁷”. Climate change is directly named as key in shaping a strategy for future energy supply⁵⁸ and the new Act tackles some key issues under the earlier 2014 Act in order to facilitate prospecting and avoid “socio-economic waste⁵⁹” as tied to the mineral exploitation sector. Consultation processes are also not explicitly detailed⁶⁰. The 2018 revisions to the Act enshrine the interconnection between the hydropower sector and the mining sector which gave legal grounds for the policy perspective put forward recently by the 2025-2030 Strategy. As Kalaallit Nunaat halted any future

⁵¹ Katz-Rosene, *The Growth–Environment Debate*, 42.

⁵² Mining Act, 3.

⁵³ Mining Act, 12, 15, 40-41.

⁵⁴ See also Dahl and Hansen, *Does Indigenous Knowledge Occur in and Influence Impact Assessment Reports?*; Nuttall, *The Shaping of Greenland’s Resource Spaces*.

⁵⁵ Naalakkersuisut, *GREENLAND MINERAL RESOURCES STRATEGY 2025-2029: A Sustainable Mineral Resources Sector*.

⁵⁶ Parliament Act No. 5 on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy.

⁵⁷ Parliament Act No. 5 on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy, 2.

⁵⁸ Parliament Act No. 5 on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy, 12.

⁵⁹ Parliament Act No. 5 on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy, 13.

⁶⁰ Parliament Act No. 5 on Exploitation of Hydropower for the Production of Energy, 8.

petroleum exploration, NunaOil became NunaGreen and sparked an increased interest in hydroelectric development – now in tandem with the island’s mining sector⁶¹.

Natural resources are mentioned three times in the **2030 Biodiversity Strategy**, as being part of a range of “disturbances⁶²” on nature, and as being legally framed (p.19) and its exploitation scientifically informed⁶³. While the Strategy falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, Self-sufficiency, Energy and Environment, energy is not mentioned in the document. The stance however of the document on natural resource exploitation frames the sector in direct opposition to efforts on sustainability. The document however adopts the definition of sustainability according to the UN framework where:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” which “means that in managing nature, we must ensure ecological sustainability while taking into account social and socio-economic needs. This is in line with our view of nature, where we take good care of our nature, ensure everyone’s access to and right to use nature and its resources, and at the same time ensure that future generations have the opportunity to meet their needs.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Olsen, “Udvidelsen af vandkraftværket i Utoqqarmiut Kangerluarsunnguut nærmer sig en afgørende fase.”

⁶² Naalakkersuisoqarfik, Departementet for Landbrug, Selvforsyning, Energi og Miljø, 2030-MUT KALAALLIT NUNAANNI UUMASSUSILLIT ASSIGIINNGISSITAARNERINUT PERIUSISSIAQ - GRØNLANDS BIODIVERSITETSSTRATEGI 2030, 19.

⁶³ Naalakkersuisoqarfik, Departementet for Landbrug, Selvforsyning, Energi og Miljø, 2030-MUT KALAALLIT NUNAANNI UUMASSUSILLIT ASSIGIINNGISSITAARNERINUT PERIUSISSIAQ - GRØNLANDS BIODIVERSITETSSTRATEGI 2030, 56.

⁶⁴ Naalakkersuisoqarfik, Departementet for Landbrug, Selvforsyning, Energi og Miljø, 2030-MUT KALAALLIT NUNAANNI UUMASSUSILLIT ASSIGIINNGISSITAARNERINUT PERIUSISSIAQ - GRØNLANDS BIODIVERSITETSSTRATEGI 2030, 21.

In this vein, the **2030 Biodiversity Strategy** falls in line with the **Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029**, advocating for an economic perspective anchored on sustainable development, or green growth, with special attention to climate change mitigation measures⁶⁵.

Public policies and legal frameworks in Kalaallit Nunaat pertaining to energy and natural resource development showcase an economic choice geared towards sustainable development and green growth. This economic vision clashes with ecological critiques made by its civil society⁶⁶. This epistemological clash illustrates the glocal dynamics under which energy sovereignty in Kalaallit Nunaat evolves: while global market and governments pressures aim to influence its natural resources development policies, the Naalakkersuisut responds to such pressures by trying to find a middle ground with ecological concerns pressing for its domestic population. This balancing act between extractivism and ecology, influenced by global energy securitization, shape the ‘post’ of the post-colonial era to come for the to-be-independent country.

Kalaallit Nunaat published its petroleum 2020-2024 strategy in 2020 only to suspend it one year later shortly after a new government was formed following elections. From seeing significant interest in the early 2010s, technological and administrative limitations coupled with domestic industries at potential odds with petroleum drillings and strict regulations saw however the general decline of the industry, reaching its halt in 2021⁶⁷. As emphasized in recent policies, the development of hydropower coupled with increased interest in the mining sector seem to have replaced the oil sector in its promises for employment and economic independence from Denmark. Foreign investment, for instance from potentially adversarial countries such

⁶⁵ Naalakkersuisoqarfik, Departementet for Landbrug, Selvforsyning, Energi og Miljø, *2030-MUT KALAALLIT NUNAANNI UUMASSUSILLIT ASSIGIINNGISSITAARNERINUT PERIUSISSIAQ - GRØNLANDS BIODIVERSITETSSTRATEGI 2030*, 23.

⁶⁶ Vold, “Belysning af muligheder og udfordringer i krydsfeltet mellem forskning om Grønland og det grønlandske samfund – refleksion og analyse af det visuelle materiale”; *In the Shadow of the Tugtupite - Award Winning Short Film about Extractive Mining in Greenland*.

⁶⁷ Ackrén, “The Natural Resource Management in Nunavut and Greenland – a Perspective through Historical Institutionalism”; Christiansen, “Greenland Mineral Exploration History”; Christiansen et al., “Drilling History of Greenland – Exploration for Minerals and Petroleum, and Scientific Projects.”

as China, into its economy however raise concerns, and debates are rife⁶⁸. From benefitting the local population to attracting foreign capital, the mineral resources strategy, while criticized, tries yet again to reach a point of equilibrium between interests and epistemological visions on what the economy should look like. In this vein, Kalaallit Nunaat's post-colonial future composes with international pressures while maintaining sovereignty.

As the Arctic faces immense structural difficulties ranging from poor economic indicators or poor general wellbeing indicators, the logics of growth are confronted to several linguistic-epistemological visions that don't necessarily align with non-Kalaallit ecological or extractivist movements (see section on sealing and uranium mining). Under such premises, the logics of growth and development under the post-colonial era will evolve under an exercise of democratic debates on the relevance of the Naalakkersuisut within the overarching existential security threat of climate change.

Decolonisation seems less about rejecting the norms and structures of the colonial world than carving itself a path and spot within this global arena. While the politics of recognition face multiple pitfalls⁶⁹, Kalaallit Nunaat is entering the global chessboard as an upcoming power and is thereby forced to compose with its demands, responding to those demands through a careful balancing act of pushbacks and alliances. Despite threats against its sovereignty made by U.S. President Donald Trump, Kalaallit Nunaat continues to pursue diplomatic relations with its neighbour, seeking to establish legitimacy and networks of alliances. Circumpolar relations through both state diplomatic channels and Indigenous organizations – Kalaallit Nunaat is represented in the Inuit Circumpolar Council, its president Sara Olsvig – have come under duress since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the subsequent halt of much of the Arctic Council activities. Decolonisation is not an exercise of rejection and re-design of what politics and the economy are,

⁶⁸ Kristensen, "Grønlands økonomiske Råd opfordrer."

⁶⁹ Coulthard, "Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition."

but rather an exercise in joining the international community as a sovereign nation in a dialogue between agency and structure⁷⁰.

2.4 Discussion: Translating Ecology for the Post-Colonial Independence

Defining ecology and extractivism goes through an exercise of translation from a Kalaallit to an English epistemo-linguistic knowledge. This is here engaged through an analysis of government policies and domestic laws. Understanding ecology through a Kalaallit lens is an epistemological confrontation against anthropocentric colonial visions⁷¹. As some argue that Kalaallit Nunaat's independence poses a case of rebuff against a hegemonical western Westphalian sovereignty model⁷², revisiting the case of ecology and extractivism through the two theoretical frameworks thereby looks at their conceptualization within a non-anthropocentric world view. Ecology as non-anthropocentric sees "Land as pedagogy"⁷³, it challenges epistemological assumptions. As Inuk Jørgensen⁷⁴ describes the impacts of the mining industry on identity and on belonging, he does so through the stories of the people that lived and continue to live on these carved lands through 'spiritual sovereignty': "People have always told stories. I wonder what stories will people tell about us?"⁷⁵ Sila means both the weather and everything within the environment; it is also the internal Sila – the mind⁷⁶ where animistic energy or power, Inua, informs the knowledge system at play. Naming ecology 'Sila' refers thereby to a system of knowledge where knowledge is transmitted in a geo-culturally inscribed way: "You recognize that the way you get knowledge is an essential form of knowledge that is

⁷⁰ Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*; Østergaard and Arnaut, "Inuit Myth and the Remaking of Greenland's Postcolonial Governance."

⁷¹ Roepstorff, "Clashing Cosmologies. Contrasting Knowledges in the Greenlandic Fishery"; Sejersen, "The Predicament of Sustainability"; Todd, "Fish Pluralities"; Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene."

⁷² Østergaard and Arnaut, "Inuit Myth and the Remaking of Greenland's Postcolonial Governance."

⁷³ Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation"; Betasamosake Simpson, *A We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*.

⁷⁴ *In the Shadow of the Tugtupite - Award Winning Short Film about Extractive Mining in Greenland*.

⁷⁵ *In the Shadow of the Tugtupite - Award Winning Short Film about Extractive Mining in Greenland*, 05:30.

⁷⁶ Vold, "Belysning af muligheder og udfordringer i krydsfeltet mellem forskning om Grønland og det grønlandske samfund – refleksion og analyse af det visuelle materiale."51. Translated from Danish.

directly connected to the land and the environment you live on.⁷⁷” The decolonization of ‘ecological’ knowledge is thereby an effort of translation where energy securitization pushes the global arena into Kalaallit Nunaat energy sovereignty.

The incorporation of Kalaallit Indigenous Knowledge in the gradient extractivism-ecology, informing energy sovereignty and being informed by energy securitization, similarly influences the substance of the post-colonial era. Indigenous nations globally, in ontological standing of interconnectedness, have argued for the recognition of legal personhood for nature. In Canada, Muteshekau-shipu was granted legal personhood in 2021 after longstanding advocacy by the Innu of Ekuanitshit after the river became threatened by hydroelectric infrastructure development⁷⁸. Ecuador recognizes la Pachamama has a legal entity under its “Rights of Nature” chapter of its Constitution⁷⁹. In Canada, Aluki Kotierk, NTI’s former President, called for the establishment of a new Inuit self-government as the “Government of Nunavut has been failing Inuit⁸⁰”. While the Naalakkersuisut strives to find a balance between domestic (cultural) interests and international market and state pressures, these examples show what awaits the Naalakkersuisut should its bet on mineral resource extraction and hydropower and its balancing act not deliver on its promises.

As several authors describe Kalaallit Nunaat as a “resource frontier” or even an “extractive frontier”⁸¹, extractivism in Kalaallit Nunaat further enmeshes the island into “[...] transnational practices and networks that are established, and the patterns of global consumption extraction depends upon have an

⁷⁷ Vold, “Belysning af muligheder og udfordringer i krydsfeltet mellem forskning om Grønland og det grønlandske samfund – refleksion og analyse af det visuelle materiale.” 51. Translated from Danish.

⁷⁸ Benner, “This Pristine Canadian River Has Legal Personhood, a New Approach to Conserving Nature | CBC Documentaries”; Townsend et al., “First River to Become Legal Person in Canada Is Boon for Indigenous Rights.”

⁷⁹ Eisenstadt and West, “Indigenous Belief Systems, Science, and Resource Extraction”; Eisenstadt and West, *Who Speaks for Nature?*

⁸⁰ Howitt, “NTI’s Push for Inuit Self-Government ‘the Right Thing,’ Says Idlout.”

⁸¹ Bennett, “Discursive, Material, Vertical, and Extensive Dimensions of Post-Cold War Arctic Resource Extraction”; Blanchard, “Unearthing Greenland’s Resource Frontier”; Dodds and Nuttall, “Materialising Greenland within a Critical Arctic Geopolitics”; Nuttall, “Imagining and Governing the Greenlandic Resource Frontier.”

environmental and social impact beyond that of the extraction of the resource⁸²”. Kalaallit Nunaat becomes a cog within this global planetary mine⁸³, whose resources become an instrument to an end, supplying global demands, under “growth-oriented imaginaries⁸⁴”. These imaginaries confront Indigenous knowledge as described above and its incorporation into environmental impact assessments remain difficult to implement⁸⁵. While international frameworks promote the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into resource development, the legal framework of the autonomous territory does not refer to Indigenous knowledge directly nor is this incorporation (or even consultation as a whole) standardized as opposed to other contexts where the Free, Prior and Informed Consent framework is enforced by Indigenous nations (albeit to various degrees of success, see for instance Lajoie-O’Malley et al 2023 or Bjørst and Rodon 2022 for a Canadian comparative perspective⁸⁶)⁸⁷. As such, this notion of extractive frontier as described by Nuttall sees the dilemma of composing with sacrificial zones⁸⁸ alongside domestic values and opposition⁸⁹ (Jørgensen, 2021; Vold, 2021) shown in domestic media discourses surrounding assertion of sovereignty within a global context of resource extraction (economic) pressures⁹⁰.

Extractivism and ecology are within this paradigm not two camps forever at odds but co-occupy the same politico-geographical space. Through the lens of post-colonial theory, the extractivism-ecology gradient returns to the fundamental question of what is the post of the colonial. Against an essentialist return

⁸² Nuttall, *The Shaping of Greenland’s Resource Spaces*, 128.

⁸³ Nuttall, *The Shaping of Greenland’s Resource Spaces*, 128.

⁸⁴ Nuttall, *The Shaping of Greenland’s Resource Spaces*, 140.

⁸⁵ Dahl and Hansen, *Does Indigenous Knowledge Occur in and Influence Impact Assessment Reports?*

⁸⁶ Lajoie-O’Malley et al., “‘Consent’ as Epistemic Recognition”; Bjørst and Rodon, “Progress Stories and the Contested Making of Minerals in Greenland and Northern Québec.”

⁸⁷ Dahl, “Indigenous Knowledge as a Resource in Environmental Assessments”; Dahl and Hansen, *Does Indigenous Knowledge Occur in and Influence Impact Assessment Reports?*; Nuttall, “Arctic Ecology, Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Governance”; Nuttall, *The Shaping of Greenland’s Resource Spaces*.

⁸⁸ Karam and Shokrgozar, “‘We Have Been Invaded’”; Scott and Smith, “‘Sacrifice Zones’ in the Green Energy Economy.”

⁸⁹ *In the Shadow of the Tugtupite - Award Winning Short Film about Extractive Mining in Greenland.*; Vold, “Belysning af muligheder og udfordringer i krydsfeltet mellem forskning om Grønland og det grønlandske samfund – refleksion og analyse af det visuelle materiale.”

⁹⁰ Soer, “Ressources naturelles et indépendance du Groenland.”

to the ‘pre’ era⁹¹, the case of Kalaallit Nunaat shows a crux between aspirations and influences – a redefinition of codes - within a glocal dynamic. Research on the resource extractive industry, as described above, in Kalaallit Nunaat shows how the government looks at resource development for the purpose of economic development.

The sustainable development bet made by the Naalakkersuisut thereby seeks legitimacy on several fronts. The first is an anchoring in global values of social responsibility, international laws and treaties, supported by global organizations such as the United Nations, thereby growing international legitimacy within that framework. The second, as developed in the study, is a balancing act between domestic ecological concerns, domestic needs for economic development, and international interests. And the third, subsequently from this balancing act, the Naalakkersuisut – newly elected - is also establishing democratic legitimacy, both as an internal dialogue as well as a dialogue including the third actor, the international community. Nonetheless, the international examples given from Canada or Ecuador show the limits of the politics of recognition and the need to meaningfully include the epistemological realm of the governed population. As such, the question of energy sovereignty and the future of development in Kalaallit Nunaat following independence remains to be seen with how energy sovereignty will compose with the three legitimacy fronts.

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude, the capitalization of Nature by the sustainable development paradigm leads to neo-colonialism under an international market system and state relations founded upon domination⁹². Several eco-political frameworks from the Global South have emerged out of direct opposition to the continuation of colonial extractivist oppression⁹³. While responding to specific geographical lived realities, as

⁹¹ Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism*; Borrows, “HEROES, TRICKSTERS, MONSTERS, AND CARETAKERS: INDIGENOUS LAW AND LEGAL EDUCATION”; Snyder et al., *GENDER AND VIOLENCE: DRAWING ON INDIGENOUS LEGAL RESOURCES*.

⁹² Contreras et al., “Energy Colonialism”; Fjellheim, ““You Can Kill Us with Dialogue””; Frandy, ““Mas Amas Diehtá Maid Oarri Borrá?””; Kårtveit, “Green Colonialism.”

⁹³ Kothari et al., “Buen Vivir, Degrowth, and Ecological Swaraj.”

contestation against mineral resources extraction remains constant in Kalaallit Nunaat, ecological conceptions such as Sila informs another vision of the post-colonial era than its current sustainable development form. As Kalaallit Nunaat is being pushed at the center of global big power politics as an ambiguous action space between competing global actors⁹⁴, it is being situated at potential inflexion point. As structural criticism remains concerning domestic capacity building, foreign investments, population wellbeing, and environmental protection measures, the responses by the Naalakkersuisut will inform its democratic adequacy in light of epistemological confrontations between Indigenous knowledge – which remains under-included in policy making – and incorporation into the global eco-political chessboard. Between some political parties preferring short-term independence at all costs while others prefer economic independence before political independence, and between different levels of reluctance or enthusiasm for natural resource exploitation, the Naalakkersuisut sits at a critical point in its exercise of democracy leading up to its full independence from Denmark.

As such, what are Kalaallit Nunaat's contemporary politico-economic trajectories guiding its energy sovereignty? Post-colonial theory informs how energy sovereignty in Kalaallit Nunaat is articulated along the gradient extractivism-ecology as influenced by global energy securitization. The 'post' of Kalaallit Nunaat's colonial era is shaped by a balancing act between agency and structure, between domestic interests and international interests, between epistemological realms, questioning the how and the why of its current policies informed by a sustainable development paradigm. The place of Nature and Kalaallit knowledge will define the democratic exercise of self-government and subsequent economic development. As Sara Olsvig claimed, "there is no such thing as the better colonizer⁹⁵". The colonizer - whether a singular actor, a consortium of actors, or a system or systems – however shaped the contemporary state of Kalaallit Nunaat and continues to shape its independence trajectories. The pragmatic approach taken by the Naalakkersuisut of instrumentalizing international pressures for its natural resources to serve its own domestic interests in

⁹⁴ Olsvig, "Greenland's Ambiguous Action Space."

⁹⁵ Olsvig, "There Is No Such Thing as The Better Colonizer."

economic development is however a game where the autonomous region can also lose: the remarks by U.S. President Trump of purchasing or annexing Kalaallit Nunaat are neither naïve nor ill-informed but a show of longstanding imperial and colonial power that the country has yielded⁹⁶. While many in the international community have rebuffed the remark as a blatant disrespect of international laws and sovereignty, the annexation threat remains looming over the future of Kalaallit Nunaat's regional diplomatic relations.

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⁹⁶ See Aikau, "Centering Hawai'i" on Hawai'i; Grandin, *Empire's Workshop on Latin America*; Gruening, "Colonialism in Alaska" and Haycox, *Alaska, on Alaska*; Hendricks, "The Negative Effects of U.S. Imperialism in Central America" on Central America; and Fouskas and Gókay, *The New American Imperialism*, and Kaplan and Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism on oil and cultures of US imperialism*.

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ARTICLE 3

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN NUNAVUT: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND INUIT KNOWLEDGE*

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Abstract

This study pertains to the governance of renewable energy development in Nunavut. Despite the strong environmental and security risks posed by diesel use and dependency, the development of renewable energy in the territory is slow. As domestic, regional, and international actors are moving toward decarbonizing energy infrastructure, the energy transition of Nunavut is facing structural obstacles ranging from the costs associated with modernizing and decarbonizing the energy grid, to human capacity constraints. In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable energy decision making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? As global attention is veering towards the Arctic, with strong emphasis on mining potential, the global energy transition becomes an opportunity for Inuit rights holders to develop local economies and livelihood opportunities, as well as invest in their own energy security needs. Since the signing of the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement in 2024, the cascading security threats of diesel dependency have become intertwined with needs to develop industries supporting the territory's energy transition. As such,

through a qualitative content analysis of grey literature and seventeen interviews with key stakeholders and rights holders in Nunavut, this study offers insight into the governance of renewable energy infrastructure development in Nunavut.

3.0 Introduction

As global attention is veering towards the Arctic, with strong emphasis on mining potential, the global energy transition becomes an opportunity for Inuit rights holders to develop local economies and livelihood opportunities as well as invest in their own energy security needs. Indeed, diesel generators are increasingly obsolete, and frequent oil spills as well as blackouts strongly threaten the energy and environmental security (thereby also food security) of Nunavut. Since the signing of the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement in 2024 (which devolved Crown lands and resources to the Government of Nunavut), the cascading security threats of diesel dependency have become intertwined with the need to develop industries capable of supporting the territory's energy transition. As regional, national, and international actors move to decarbonize energy infrastructure, including the development of renewable energy for their grids, the energy transition in Nunavut is facing structural obstacles that range from costs associated with modernizing and decarbonizing the grid, to human capacity constraints. This study pertains to the governance of renewable energy development in Nunavut. In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable energy decision-making in Nunavut? How effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? The study aims to better understand the operationalization of (i) Canadian frameworks for community consultation, Inuit Knowledge, and energy development; (ii) Nunavut-based frameworks supporting Inuit-led and Inuit-owned development; and (iii) international legal and policy frameworks related to the rights of Indigenous Peoples and sustainable development. The goal of the article is not to offer a roadmap on how to include Inuit Knowledge, but to reflect on the instrumentalization of Inuit Knowledge by organizations that highlight Inuit Knowledge as a key value and way of doing. This research involved thematic content analysis of interviews with seventeen

Nunavut stakeholders and right holders, and of relevant grey literature. The results show differences in (i) federal language versus territorial language; (ii) the stated policy of centring Inuit Knowledge versus its implementation; and (iii) the theory of community consultation based on the duty to consult and the free, prior and informed consent frameworks versus its implementation in federal and territorial policy on resource and energy development. These tensions between the federal, the territorial, and intra-territorial, showcase how pockets of Inuit self-determination in energy security and development become tools of resistance against colonial imposition.

3.1 Literature Review

Cherniak et al. (2015) examine the development of renewable energy solutions in northern and Arctic Canada and, through analysis of several projects, they suggest that the success of new technology deployment is tied to community consultation. The authors recommend further research (Cherniak et al., 2015, p. 129, 146; see also Simon, 2009; Arctic Council, 2021), specifically on community consultation that was missing for the 2016 federal moratorium on offshore oil and gas licensing in Arctic waters, and the European Union seal-product import ban (Peter et al., 2002). Literature is emerging on the topic of community involvement and the renewable energy industry in Nunavut; however, a strong focus remains on analyzing the industry in terms of energy security and climate change mitigation (Cambou & Poelzer, 2021; Hansen & Moe, 2022; Höysniemi, 2022; McDonald & Pearce, 2013; Trembath et al., 2022).

While extensive literature reviews and research on pan-Indigenous leadership in renewable energy development exist (Datta et al., 2024; Hoicka et al., 2021; Société Makivik, 2021; The Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council, 2024), since renewable energy development in Nunavut is relatively new, there is little such analysis for the Arctic. However, McDonald and Pearce (2013) highlight Nunavut communities' support for the development of several renewable energy technologies in their communities (while opposing hydroelectricity), and the authors suggest stronger community consultation policies to bridge perceived gaps

in the public's knowledge about these technologies. Now, twelve years after the publication of this research, community consultation policies implemented by Inuit-owned private enterprises, such as the Nunavut Nukkiksautiit Corporation (NNC), are in agreement with not only McDonald and Pearce's findings, but also with territorial and federal law and policies on community involvement. However, a lack of conceptual clarity emerges when defining community involvement: what it is, what it entails, and how it is operationalized.

The term "consultation" describes activities where a local population's input is sought or required before a development project is approved to move forward. However, in the case of NNC the consultation process instead involves an "engagement" process, where NNC not only seeks insights from the community on a proposed project or issue, but gives decision-making powers to the community for the project's approval (Nunavut Nukkiksautiit Corporation, 2022).

The concept of consultation has received criticism for not offering fundamental change, but rather only a seat at the back of the table—this is in contrast with engagement processes that include co-design and co-production, which are embedded in the larger processes of reconciliation as well as the devolution of decision-making powers and redefining the narrative on Indigenous self-determination and development (Arnstein, 1969; Baker & Westman, 2018; Lajoie-O'Malley et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2017; Slay & Penny, 2014). Indigenous self-determination is here understood within the framework of Nunavut's devolution agreement with the federal government, as well in the anchoring of Inuit values and knowledge in energy development. Community consultation, in the context of energy development, becomes a tool for the realization of self-determination, redefining power relations in decision-making processes.

Defining sustainability in an Arctic context requires foregrounding an Inuit vision of how sustainability is articulated within this context. Echoing Banerjee's critique of sustainable development as a reinvention of

colonialism (2002, 2003), and Frandy's (2021) and Normann's (2021) critiques of its application within a Sámi context, the concept of "sustainability" carries with it a colonial legacy. Within an ethics of relationality in reassigning Inuit self-determination to the forefront of territorial energy development, existing academic and grey literature suggest there is a further need to establish conceptual clarity on not only community involvement but also on the effective incorporation of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) (Inuit values, knowledge, behaviour, perceptions, and expectations) into renewable energy development processes (Nunavut Culture and Heritage, n.d.; Nunavut Impact Review Board, n.d.). On a similar note, more attention is needed to the nuances and applicability of the energy transition in Nunavut as well as to how communities have the capacity and opportunity to determine the shape of this energy transition—if it is even applicable at all. It is in this space that the dynamics of energy transition and diversification, combined with community engagement processes and the centring of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, appear to be a critical knowledge gap in current Arctic energy research.

Indeed, while great emphasis is put on the energy transition—the green transition—as a fundamental piece of climate change mitigation action as well as environmental and health safeguarding in the Canadian Arctic, the green transition has received scathing critiques with Sámi leaders criticizing the imposition of renewable energy infrastructure on their lands as "green colonialism" (Fjellheim, 2023; Frandy, 2021; Normann, 2021).

In Canada, the energy transition has been federally incentivized, as previously highlighted. An energy transition in Nunavut, however, remains critically combined with concerns of reliability and affordability (Nunavut, 2025; Pepa, 2016; Pinto & Gates, 2022). As such, in response to those concerns of reliability and affordability, a more nuanced approach of energy diversification—instead of transition—is being advocated as a realistic path forward for the territory (Barnes, 2023; Byrne, 2018; Cambou & Poelzer, 2021; Soer, 2024).

Economically, oil and gas production in Nunavut is not seen as a promising industry, despite the territory holding estimates of 18 billion barrels of oil and 181 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, due to prohibitively high costs of infrastructural development—both in terms of human capacity and physical infrastructure including the lack of accessibility since there are no roads in Nunavut (Canada Energy Regulator, 2024; Nunavut Economic Development and Transportation, 2017; Pinto & Gates, 2022; Soer, 2024).

The mining industry—including for the critical minerals necessary for renewable energy infrastructure—is confronted with similar issues of human capacity and accessibility constraints, putting a damper on the mining potential of the territory (Ritsema, 2014). Nunavut has four operational mines producing gold and iron, and three critical mineral exploration projects in the Kitikmeot and Kivalliq regions looking to develop the mining of zinc, copper, silver, lead, gold, nickel, palladium, platinum, and cobalt (CIRNAC et al., 2024; NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, 2021). The Nunavut land use plan will determine the realization of critical minerals mining.

Environmental concerns have been paramount for local communities. As such, according to the 2021 Draft Nunavut Land Use Plan and the 2023 Recommended Nunavut Land Use Plan, 19% of land is under limited use (up from the 15% of the 2016 draft land use plan), meaning that there are year-round limitations and prohibitions on one or more types of land use; 12% is under conditional use with seasonal prohibitions on particular activities; and mixed use comprises 65% of the land, which means no prohibited uses or conformity requirements (Nunavut Planning Commission, 2021, 2023; Tranter, 2023; Venn, 2021). This draft plan would therefore mean that 22% of Nunavut would not be open to mining or other resource development. For the long-term development of renewable energy, this further pushes back the development potential of homegrown industries in the energy sector (Antunes, 2023; NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, 2021). While the mining sector has received a lot of opposition and criticism regarding its detrimental environmental impacts and at times violent social impacts (Kunuk, 2019; Pauktuutit et al., 2014), Nunavut

Member of Parliament Lori Idlout’s comment for the Nunatsiaq News regarding the Land Use Plan draft exemplifies the growing tensions in the territory between environmental protection and economic viability: “I’m leaning towards becoming anti-mining, but I know how important critical minerals are for the functioning of our societies” (Antunes, 2023).

The development of renewable energy in the Arctic is thereby at the crux of the interplay between domestic and global forces (including international actors from foreign states to the private sector), which are placing Nunavut into this enmeshment of interests. Yet, while the mining industry—critical for the energy sector for both fossil fuels and renewables—is heavily criticized in Nunavut by Nunavummiut, renewable energy solutions are increasing in popularity among the same general population. This duality anchors Nunavut again in the larger critique of green growth, as seen above, where the vast majority of mineral production will not be for domestic use, yet the territory will bear the brunt of its environmental and human impacts.

The literature on renewable energy development in Nunavut and elsewhere in the Arctic focuses largely on energy security and the green transition. However, the interconnection with the mining sector, and the reality of continued fossil fuel use for the foreseeable future pointing towards energy diversification, take a back seat and seem to operate in separate realms of research. It is within this complex insular literature on resource development that the triad of energy transition and diversification, community involvement processes, and the application of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is here explored. In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit embedded in renewable energy decision making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks?

3.2 Research Design and Methods

This study involved content analysis of interviews with seventeen stakeholders and rights holders, as well as content analysis of grey literature. Thematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2016)

dives into key themes that are extracted from interviews and the literature to form the foundation of the analysis: In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? The literature was chosen based on relevancy. The government policy documents and legislation were chosen based on their applicability and relevancy for the context of energy development in Nunavut. The interviews were conducted in Iqaluit and virtually during the spring of 2024, and ranged between unstructured and semi-structured. Respondents included employees and representatives from circumpolar development organizations Inuit organizations, Inuit territorial and local governments, and federal government and northern agencies; scholars on Arctic affairs; and local residents. The individuals were chosen based on their professional capacity or, in the case of local residents, based on consumer interest in renewable energy development in their community. The diverse pool of respondents enabled a comprehensive view on energy development in the territory. While the interviews were mostly conducted in Iqaluit, the professionals responded to the interests of the whole territory and were not limited to their jurisdiction or to Iqaluit. An exception was a local government representative who brought in the municipal perspective. The questionnaires were adapted based on the individuals, as well as their responses to the conversation. This allowed adding modifying questions to better reflect the ongoing conversation.

For community members, the core questions were formulated as such: What do you think about renewable energy in general? What do you think about renewables for your community? And do you feel that you are heard or that you have a say in the energy policy of the town? These three questions were formulated to leave plenty of space for the respondent to take the conversation in multiple directions. These questions aimed to juxtapose local residents' perceptions of renewable energy with how they imagine their own community's energy future as well as how they relate to local decision makers regarding energy development. These questions aimed to highlight either continuity or discrepancy in respondents' perceptions of renewables both in a hypothetical larger context and in the specific context of their

community. The questions also aimed to spark conversation on governance proximity between local residents and local/territorial and federal decision makers.

For individuals interviewed in their professional capacity, the questionnaires were adapted to the individual's position. However, key themes remained: application of both the law and of development policies whether territorial, federal, or international; inclusion or foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge and community consultation; relations between the public sector and the private sector; capacity constraints including engagement fatigue and staffing issues; as well as other social inclusion markers, such as gender, in energy development. These questions aimed to provide insight by highlighting multi-level governance within the territory and in relation with the federal government using domestic and international frameworks; in relations between sectors and the local population; and in the dynamics of inclusion in community consultation. This methodology allowed for direct insights into the perspectives of decision makers and rights holders through a multi-scale approach. Choosing both interview methodology and content analysis of relevant policy documents enabled confronting policy with the lived realities of decision makers and rights holders. The methodology also enabled insights into the lived realities, especially on the meaningful incorporation of Inuit Knowledge.

The thematic analysis of the interviews and literature was conducted manually by extracting recurrent vocabulary or recurrent remarks within their context. It is logical that a question on engagement fatigue, for instance, would spark an answer containing the term engagement fatigue many times throughout the conversation. This does not mean that engagement fatigue is a determinant factor in shaping operationalization of energy development policies. This thematic analysis hence used a qualitative approach that both contextualized the content and provided informative insights into respondents' perceptions and understandings of renewable energy development in Nunavut.

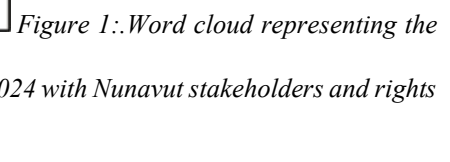
The results of this analysis are shown using word clouds (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The choice of word clouds responds to two imperatives. The first is that the visualization of word clouds enables a clearer understanding of key words as an ensemble. In short, word clouds enable a context, a landscape, to emerge out of textual analysis, that a simple table would not necessarily allow. In this regard, the word cloud supports the content analysis by offering a clear contextual visualization of the data. Second, the simplicity of a word cloud enables a clearer communication of research findings. Indeed, this study was conducted with respect for communicating results in a plain language format to the community members who participated in the research. Word clouds enable, in a clear and succinct way, the communication of research findings in a fun and interactive way (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014; Henderson & Segal, 2013).

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Thematic Content Analysis of Interviews

The interviews indicated a prevalence of interlinkages between people and their community, work, and development, as well as climate change in the Arctic and knowledge production (see word cloud of most prevalent terms in Figure 1). “Climate change” appeared 38 times, “community” 98 times (its plural appeared 65 times), and “work” and “development” 72 and 64 times respectively. “Knowledge” appeared 73 times and “people” 131 times. “Inuit” appeared 97 times. Given that the topic of the study was community engagement and the inclusion of Inuit Knowledge in renewable energy development, the results for community, energy, Inuit, and knowledge are not surprising. The Qulliq Energy Corporation (QEC) appeared 51 times, as a main actor responsible for energy development in the territory, as it is responsible for the grid. The Government of Nunavut (GN) appeared 24 times.

Respondents correlated the topic of renewable energy development with wider conversations on climate change and energy diversification. Energy diversification was, however, preferred over energy transition. As one respondent working for an Inuit organization remarked, “Don’t force anybody to stop driving a fuel



On policy and intergovernmental relations, one respondent working for an Inuit organization described the flow of information and policy making as a “top-down funnel of information” where “Southerners” come into the Nunavut energy landscape lacking insider knowledge and look to include Inuit Knowledge after the fact: “Don’t add in IQ [Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit], use IQ” (Inuit organization respondent).

On energy transition, decaying infrastructure was mentioned repeatedly. One respondent from the federal government recognized the challenges the energy corporation QEC faces in the maintenance of old generators, as they “can’t keep technicians.” One community member reminded about the dependency on generators: “We can’t totally go to renewables, because the sun sets and wind stops. We still need generators but we can be more economical in how much diesel we use.” A respondent from the energy sector responded by acknowledging the risks posed by an aging infrastructure: “We are continually preoccupied keeping the lights on. There are 25 communities with aging diesel generators,” which incentivizes the development of “ways to lower carbon footprint.” Relations with the federal government were here once again highlighted: “Everyone wants to get away from diesel. But newer generation diesel [generator] is much cleaner in terms of noise pollution and amount of energy per litre of fuels. We’re trying to communicate that to federal partners.” “Appropriate balance,” as mentioned by this respondent, was a running theme where virtually all respondents were not yet considering full energy transition. While the cabin program, which subsidizes the installation of solar panels on hunting and fishing cabins on the land, is very popular and mentioned by many respondents who engage in hunting, a full transition away from fossil fuels was not considered by the respondents: “You can’t just switch a generator out. You need electricity at all times” (federal government respondent). As such, key barriers to local and territorial adoption were framed according to structural capacity constraints: the need for qualified labour and the need for reliable and affordable energy formed the key criticisms against widespread adoption of renewable energy solutions.

On community consultation and consultation dynamics, some respondents highlighted the lack of consultation by actors in Nunavut, as one federal government respondent mentioned: “QEC hasn’t engaged well with communities. [They face] challenges with infrastructure, old generators [...] QEC could do a lot

better” (federal government respondent). Virtually all respondents highlighted the importance of “community needs and preferences” (Inuit organization respondent) where “regional Inuit organizations have that connection to their communities and responsibility for their communities” as opposed to the federal government, which is not often at the table “going deep in with the communities” (Inuit organization respondent). Local residents also remarked on the need for better consultation from the government: “The government does consultation once in a while but there’s not enough consultation I don’t think so. I haven’t seen environmental impact assessments. It’s going very slowly, I wish it was faster” (community member). Many respondents highlighted the apparent disconnect between southern Canadian and federal imperatives, and northern realities: “If I’m coming to the community with something that is southern, I get a southern response. When I do something that is northern, I get a northern response” (local government respondent).

Community consultation was often linked with the use and foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge, which, however, was confronted with a polarized reception, between instrumentalization and decolonization. Inuit Knowledge was described variously as a “buzzword” with “good intentions” (federal government respondent), as a “priority” (federal government respondent), as “more than simple statements” and “informing” institutional workings (Inuit organization respondent), or even as “red tape” where the more senior the position, the less it may or may not be incorporated (local government respondent). Inuit Knowledge was also described as a way to serve teamwork in combating engagement fatigue and capacity issues (local government respondent). The issue of passing knowledge from Elders to youth amidst climate change was mentioned, where the ancestral knowledge “being passed may no longer be applicable” (territorial government respondent).

The use of Inuit Knowledge, or Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, also varies conceptually where respondents used the terms “local knowledge” and “traditional knowledge” interchangeably. While the incorporation of “traditional local knowledge” was seen as “tricky,” a federal government respondent raised questions: “where does the boundary lie?” between traditional local knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge, especially in the context of circumpolar collaborations? Local knowledge was also used by community members to

highlight the importance of local engagement in territorial development (local community respondent). Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit was seen as a tool for “local mapping of impacts” used for future development (Inuit organization respondent).

Specifically on community consultation, gender was mentioned 30 times by the respondents. The inclusion of gender on the topic of renewable energy development ranged from non-existent (the Inuit organization respondent and the local government respondent), to its inclusion at the administrative level, but not at the project level (the Inuit-owned energy sector respondent), to its inclusion at the discursive level but not at the project level (another Inuit-owned energy sector respondent). On gender, some respondents highlighted that current priorities lie more on the “better inclusion of Inuit perspective, IQ, and how do we adapt the way we work with culturally appropriate manners?” (territorial government respondent). This inclusion of Inuit perspectives related directly to larger dynamics of high turnover (circumpolar development sector respondent, community member respondent) and engagement fatigue (Inuit organization respondent, local government respondent, territorial government respondent), which was also described as “over-engagement” (local government respondent). While engagement fatigue, as described either as a result of high turnover or over-engagement, is prominently recognized by most respondents, a local government respondent and a circumpolar development sector respondent challenged the notion of engagement fatigue, observing that “Anywhere in the world you have vacant positions. It doesn’t matter if you have 100 or 20 staff, as long as you have the environmental situation where it is calm, happy, and [where you] like what you are doing and get work done (local government respondent).” The other respondent also challenged the notion as “fatigue is not giving agency to people. It’s more an issue of capacity, or the turnover. It’s going back to the issue of education” (circumpolar development sector respondent).

Overall, interview respondents gave critical insights into the state of the inclusion of Inuit Knowledge, into community consultation dynamics, and into the reception of renewable energy at the federal–territorial relations level, at the territorial level, and at the local municipal level by both professionals and community members. While responses ranged, there was some consensus on the possibilities of energy diversification

as well as the importance of incorporating local Inuit Knowledge into regional development, despite the recognition that it is not necessarily meaningfully done.

3.3.2 Thematic Content Analysis of Grey Literature

The grey literature documents were chosen for their ability to show the vertical and horizontal governance dynamics between actors relevant to energy development in Nunavut—the federal government, the Nunavut territorial government, the energy sector, international frameworks and institutions, and Inuit rights organizations. This analysis of vertical and horizontal governance serves to uncover the dynamics behind the framing and operationalization of renewable energy development in Nunavut under local, federal, and international policy frameworks. The documents analyzed included the following:

- Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement, co-signed by the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, and the Government of Canada (Canada et al., 2024);
 - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan (UNDA), which sets out how Canada will implement the federal United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Justice Canada, 2023);
 - United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015);
 - Inuit Nunangat Policy (Inuit–Crown Partnership Committee, 2022)
 - Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (CIRNAC, 2019)
 - Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor, 2019);
 - Wildlife Act, 2003;
 - the Arctic Energy Fund (under the Canada–Nunavut Integrated Bilateral Agreement signed in 2018);
- and

- Kinship and Prosperity: Proven Solutions for a Clean Energy Landscape Report (Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council, 2024).

The term “Indigenous” appeared 1,335 times across the legal and policy documents, “Arctic” appeared 719 times, “wildlife” appeared 583 times, “development” appeared 578 times, “peoples” 562 times, “sustainable” 337 times, “respect” 540 times, and “rights” 468 times. The term “public” appeared 263 times across all documents. See word cloud of most prevalent terms in Figure 2. Each document, however, through the central vocabulary utilized, emphasizes different themes. Across documents, there is some continuity in the emphasis on development. As several documents pertain to agreements made between the federal government and the territorial government, the notion of partnership is equally present. Similarly, documents relating to northern development such as the Inuit Nunangat Policy and the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework emphasize self-determination, treaty rights, and Indigenous rights. Territorial documents such as the Wildlife Act (2003) similarly lay down the importance of Inuit harvesting rights: “wildlife management should be an effective system that complements Inuit harvesting rights and priorities, recognizes Inuit systems of wildlife management that contribute to the conservation of wildlife and protection of habitat, and recognizes the need for an effective role for Inuit in all aspects of wildlife management” (Wildlife Act, 2003, s. 1(2)(m)).

The centring of the Inuit way of life, world view, and knowledge is echoed across the corpus, albeit in different ways depending on jurisdiction and intent. While the Wildlife Act, the Bilateral Agreement, the UNDRIP Action Plan (UNDA), and the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement are law—thereby utilizing legal terminology—the other documents (the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, the Kinship and Prosperity recommendations, the Inuit Nunangat Policy, and CanNor’s Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy) serve as indicators of policy intent and engage the responsibilities of parties involved in taking these recommendations and roadmaps to enactment either through programs or through law. The Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council’s Kinship and Prosperity recommendations report (KPR) is supported by the legal framework of UNDA, itself based on the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



terms found through content analysis of all selected grey literature. Source: Author.

While the Wildlife Act and the Kinship and Prosperity Report (KPR) foreground Indigenous self-determination and Treaty rights, the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework repeatedly emphasizes the partnership with Indigenous Peoples and the priorities of Indigenous Peoples through a nationalizing discourse of “our Arctic”: “Building on these new partnerships, the ANPF provides a long term foundation for transformative change, benefiting our Arctic, its Indigenous peoples, northern residents and all Canadians” (Canada, 2019, p. 8). Thereby, federal and territorial jurisdictional powers are clarified throughout the policies: while the sovereignty of the federal state is emphasized and reinforced, partnerships with Indigenous nations and communities are encouraged. Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) and Nunavut’s Wildlife Act, while serving very different purposes in different contexts, showcase the continuous balancing act of power dynamics between territorial self-determination and federal jurisdiction, where the verticalization of power—meaning the reinforcement of colonial power dynamics through policy—is challenged through horizontal legal channels in bilateral and territorial agreements. Documents written through Indigenous priorities and documents written through government administrative priorities thereby differ in their emphasis despite federal documents reiterating federal–Indigenous partnerships. Another difference in approach is the centring of Indigenous Knowledge—including language—in the Wildlife Act and the Kinship and Prosperity Report. As the KPR document emphasizes just transition through the free, prior and informed consent framework and through Indigenous leadership including Indigenous Knowledge, “which cannot, ever, be licenced or owned by the Government of Canada” (Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council, 2024, p. 2), the Wildlife Act highlights Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit 13 times throughout the statute.

This foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge in the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement is not present. Instead “Traditional Knowledge” is only mentioned once (Canada, Nunavut & NTI, 2024, p. 46); “Indigenous Knowledge” is also mentioned once (p. 59) where consultation with communities also appears, as well as once before (p. 41). Community consultation is only mentioned twice (p. 41, 59) in the document. The term gender only appears within a Canadian context in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework

(Canada, 2019, p. 39 in relation to sustainable development, pp. 47, 57, 60, 61, 65) and once in the KPR document (p. 3). The language difference between the Wildlife Act and the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement showcase the epistemological disparities between an Act written by and for the Inuit and an Agreement written for the federal government. This was corroborated by an interview respondent from the local government: “[We] wanted to put in a place that Inuit Knowledge has to be in the [Wildlife] Act. Which of [that] knowledge can we include in the Act? We [...] took the 8 guiding principles to work for other departments and took [the principles] into the government system. [It] was only supposed to be for the Wildlife Act but [they] took it for all.”

With respect to energy, while the term does not appear in the Inuit Nunangat Policy, it does appear in the federal Arctic and Northern Policy Framework and Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy. Specifically, on energy diversification and transition, the two documents use the terms “green,” “clean,” “renewable,” “alternative,” and “bio-energy.” The Arctic and Northern Policy Framework emphasizes non-fossil fuel energy while the strategy recognizes the economic weight and structural dependence on fossil fuel (p. 14). The two documents use the term “diversification” only in relation to economic diversification. While energy diversification or even transition is not explicitly mentioned, the development of “green,” “clean,” “renewable,” or “alternative” energy sources is emphasized in both documents: “While the mining sector remains the cornerstone of territorial economies, new opportunities for growth are emerging across a diverse range of sectors including tourism, renewable energy, northern food sectors, commercial fisheries, and cultural and traditional sectors” (CanNor, 2019, p. 3); and “we will champion a number of circumpolar initiatives that support the development and deployment of green energy in Arctic and Northern communities, including initiatives related to exchanging knowledge and expertise on renewable and alternative energy technologies” (Canada, 2019, p. 69).

Notably, the ANPF calls to “Achieve energy security and sustainability in all communities and improve access to reliable, affordable and clean energy solutions” (p. 44). Such a call is consistent with international frameworks such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015). Under the

Agenda, partnerships and prosperity are centred through the need to foreground the interests of people so as “to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment” (UN, 2015, p. 2). Strong economic foundations (article 27); safety, resilience, and sustainability (article 7); or urban infrastructure development (article 15) form the core behind the Goal 7 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Goal 7, “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” (p. 14), recalls closely the imperatives stated by Nunavut’s power utility Qulliq Energy Corporation (QEC) and by the Government of Nunavut. Reliability and affordability specifically form central concerns. As such, there is a noticeable continuity in key themes between Canadian and international frameworks.

The domestic policy documents the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework and the Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy, written by the federal government, both envision the future of the Canadian Arctic and North, and both outline economic visions for the territories while maintaining jurisdictional boundaries—the Yukon and the Northwest Territories both have jurisdiction over their lands and resources at the time of publication of both documents. As such, while the specific terms of “energy diversification” or “energy transition” are not mentioned in the documents, non-fossil fuel energy is emphasized by language by the federal government. The CanNor Strategy document also mentions bio-energy as an alternative to diesel use in specific cases (p. 14). The Arctic Energy Fund (AEF) as stipulated under the Bilateral Agreement, however, explicitly calls for transition:

“A.4 Rural and Northern Communities Infrastructure

a) Objective

- i. The rural and northern communities infrastructure stream will support Projects that improve the quality of life in rural and northern communities by responding to rural- and northern-specific needs.

ii. This stream includes the Arctic Energy Fund, which will focus primarily on improving energy security through upgrading or replacing fossil fuel-based community energy systems and enhancing diesel transportation and supply in communities where connection to an electricity grid or relying solely on renewables as a source of energy is not a feasible solution. Finally, the Arctic Energy Fund will also support the transfer, in whole or in part, from fossil fuel-based systems to renewables. (Canada–Nunavut, 2018, p. 22)”

Additionally, eligible AEF projects “must meet or exceed any applicable energy efficiency standards for buildings outlined in the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change” (p. 7). The document uses both “renewable” and “clean” to define qualifying energy types under the Fund (p. 17). The Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement addresses the development, conservation, and management of non-renewable natural resources (Canada, Nunavut & NTI, 2024, p. 26). On renewable energy development, QEC’s Independent Power Producer Program enables “Integrating renewable energy systems in the territory’s energy grid [and] helps decrease Nunavut’s dependency on diesel fuel, enabling the corporation to reduce carbon emissions and promote energy self-reliance” (QEC, n.d.); it was previously not within the mandate of QEC to be able to integrate independently produced energy into its grids. While the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework mentions energy security once (p. 44), as does the Canada, Nunavut, and NTI Bilateral Agreement (p. 22), the Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy does not.

The thematic content analysis of the documents, juxtaposed with the thematic content analysis of the interviews, shows governance and policy trajectory dynamics between the territory and the federal government. While interview respondents emphasized the importance of community consultation and foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge—despite some difficulties therein—this emphasis does not appear in similar ways in the selected documents. The legal documents pertaining to energy development do not centre community consultation or Inuit Knowledge, but centre administrative processes pertaining to its management. Community consultation or Inuit Knowledge are only very rarely linked to the question of energy development. The policy documents also showcase a dissimilar discursive trend between federal

documents and territorial documents—where federal documents highlight partnership and certain “buzzwords” like gender or renewable energy, and northern documents emphasize self-determination and Treaty rights, even when referring to energy. This analysis thereby demonstrates discursive realities constructing relations between the territorial government and the federal government as well as responding to international frameworks: one where priorities are struggling to find a common discourse, despite some alignment with international framing of energy as affordable, resilient, and sustainable.

3.4 Discussion

The thematic content analysis of the interview respondents and the selected grey literature both show a discrepancy between federal perceptions and priorities and territorial perceptions and priorities. The discrepancy between the Wildlife Act and the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement illustrates the differences between the territorial government and the federal government, where Inuit Knowledge and community knowledge are foregrounded in starkly different ways. One aims at management for and by the Nunavummiut, while the other serves as guidelines in relation with the federal government. One is an Act, the other an Agreement. The interlinkages between community consultation and development, which were highlighted by the interview respondents, are not reflected in the documents with similar emphasis.

The disconnect, however, between the theory of foregrounding Inuit Knowledge—as acknowledged as essential by respondents and certain legal and policy documents—and its implementation, is apparent through the insights of the respondents. Describing Inuit Knowledge as “red tape,” and the inability of several respondents to clearly articulate examples of the application of IQ within projects, demonstrates a gap between policy and practice. This gap demonstrates the tension between shaping a territory according to Inuit identity, values, customs, and knowledge, and being a territory with a federal—colonial—system.

In this vein, the members of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) passed a resolution in 2021 directing NTI to pursue Inuit self-government, criticizing the Government of Nunavut for absurdly defending “colonial policies, programs and services” through a “focus on the non-Inuit minority” (NTI, 2021). Former

NTI President Aluki Kotierk defended the Nunavut Agreement and “the hope and dreams that was originally envisioned for Inuit and their future generations” (NTI, 2021), which entails a renewed conversation on self-government within a colonial paradigm.

Against a state-centric approach, the results point toward an ongoing power negotiation between federal imperatives and jurisdiction, and territorial self-determination and jurisdiction. In this, IQ and community consultation, to achieve social license, act as performative. In order to achieve the public’s acceptance of energy development trajectories, both for non-renewable and renewable energy, the apparent foregrounding of consent and IQ act as tools to craft an image akin to reconciliation between the federal government and the territorial government, as well as an image of democratic Inuit-focused efforts between the territorial government and the general population under the territory’s Nunavut Act obligations.

Yet, it remains important to nuance the failure of effective operationalization of IQ and community consultation, as this would also, to repeat the words of one respondent critical of engagement fatigue, not be “giving agency to people.” Dismissing community consultation and IQ just as tools under colonialism would strip these of any agency and their further potential for achieving self-determination. Neither would it correspond to the complex landscape of energy development in Nunavut where some companies, such as NNC, an Inuit-owned company, develop in-depth tools to support meaningful engagement. Neither would it show the ways that civil society is serving to protect Inuit interests in Nunavut through the work of organizations such as NTI, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. In short, while Aluki Kotierk and the interview respondents highlight the co-optation of certain “buzzwords” and institutions meant to protect and serve Inuit communities, this does not flatten the complex landscape of energy development in the territory—it co-exists with pockets of agency. It could be argued that it is precisely this co-optation, the continuous danger of colonial erasure, that forces the existence of streams of resistance, of other ways of doing.

The operationalization of Canadian frameworks, including domestic legal frameworks, supporting Nunavut's self-determination, coupled with international policies, is thereby dual: while consultation and IQ are co-opted and meaningful implementation is lacking structurally, streams of agency in self-determination are finding ways to produce meaningful impact. The energy corporation's Independent Power Producer Program, for instance, is the result of long-standing advocacy by Inuit-owned businesses such as Nunavut Nukkiqsautiit Corporation to diversify the energy landscape of Nunavut while maintaining Inuit interests. In short, the renewable energy landscape of Nunavut, as seen through community consultation and IQ, is developing in tandem with both self-determination and continuous institutional colonial oppression. As such, this study provides research on renewable energy development in relation to community involvement processes and meaningful incorporation of Inuit Knowledge. It also highlights the lack of conceptual clarity of community involvement processes and therefore also shows the difficulties faced in meaningful implementation of Inuit Knowledge.

The Government of Nunavut and Inuit rights organizations Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, have co-developed collaboration strategies to address security in general. Under the Nunavut Arctic Sovereignty and Security Strategy, released in September 2025 by the government and NTI, energy security is explicitly named as a key area for empowered decision making, especially in regard to critical mineral exploitation and the green energy transition (Nunavut & NTI, 2025, p. 3). Replacing diesel dependence is also highlighted by ITK as a key strategy with the federal government's Major Projects Office as announced in November 2025 (ITK, 2025).

The strategies espoused by the Government of Nunavut, NTI, and ITK align under the premise of securing energy as a tool for self-determination to ensure that, "In this time of growing geopolitical interest in the Arctic, we must ensure that sovereignty is not only asserted—but lived, secured, and shared in full partnership with those who call this land home" (Nunavut & NTI, 2025, p. 3). The emphasis on full partnership links strongly with the foregrounding of the duty to consult and the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Additionally, the Sovereignty and Security strategy addresses the importance of

foregrounding IQ, and specifically “Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq—our deep respect for the environment—and calls for action that protects both sovereignty and sustainability” (p. 4). It sees the inclusion of Inuit Knowledge as a “strategic advantage” (p. 20) and as part of a “fundamental shift” towards Inuit-led approaches and “partnership based on respect for Inuit rights, recognition of Inuit knowledge and leadership, and commitment to sustainable development that serves communities first while contributing to national goals” (p. 27).

The frameworks of the duty to consult and free, prior and informed consent, in conjunction with Inuit Qaujjimajatuqangit, seek to guide energy-related decision-making processes between federal and territorial powers. However, their implementation remains asymmetrical between actors, where co-optation and the lack of meaningful incorporation thereby arise, resulting in engagement fatigue and overall discontent as reported by multiple respondents. It is within this navigation of power with the federal government that the Government of Nunavut similarly navigates priorities and interests within the territory. While Inuit organizations have criticized the Government of Nunavut as essentially reproducing colonial violence, the government’s obligations remain explicit under the Nunavut Act to secure services for its constituents, despite facing ongoing structural challenges. In this sense, community consultation and IQ become tools used by Inuit civil society and the private sector, as well as by some departments within the Government of Nunavut, to engage the territorial government in fulfilling its obligations.

3.5 Conclusion

The ways that governments, civil society, community, and the private sector are implementing community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge in renewable energy decision making in Nunavut, and their effectiveness, have been explored using thematic content analysis, to identify how interview respondents talk about, and how domestic and international policy and legal documents write about, these issues. Renewable energy development operates within a wider realm of resource development in Nunavut, which in turn is influenced by natural resource exploitation in the Arctic and self-determination dynamics under devolution.

Concerns of human and environmental sustainability domestically are echoed in international frameworks concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, here analyzed under the Canadian UNDA), and sustainable development (the UN 2030 Agenda). Through conversations on sustainability, renewable energy development is anchored in larger restructuring efforts for how business is conducted and how relations with the federal government are framed in the Arctic. These larger restructuring efforts bring about conversations on community consultation, the place of Inuit Knowledge, and the operationalization of these policies calling for sustainable development.

The results of the thematic content analysis of both interviews and policy and legal documents have shown differences in (i) federal language versus territorial language, in (ii) the theory of centering Inuit Knowledge versus its implementation, and in (iii) the theory of community consultation, based in the duty to consult and the principle of free, prior and informed consent, versus its implementation in federal and territorial policies regarding resource and energy development. These tensions between the federal and the territorial—including discord within the territory—evolve within the context of colonial power dynamics between the actors. Energy self-determination becomes a tool of resistance against colonial imposition. The latest Arctic Security and Sovereignty Strategy published in 2025 by the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated highlights the need for the foregrounding of local needs and Inuit leadership in northern development, especially as applied to energy development, including the energy transition. As such, while momentum is building in favour of local self-determination, the discrepancy experienced on the ground as well as the discursive differences between federal interests and territorial interests need to be addressed to build meaningful relevance to enact truly sustainable change.

These findings add to the existing literature on community consultation in the Arctic and offer insight on the complex landscape of renewable energy development in Nunavut. The case of renewable energy development shows the complex ways the federal system—through devolution—influences the ways that development plays out locally. The devolution process influences the ways through which colonial imposition and Inuit agency compose with one another—between co-optation and self-determination.

Positionality: The author is originally from Brittany (France) and the Netherlands, and has lived in Canada since 2021.

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CONTEXT CHAPTER 4

THESIS-BY-ARTICLES CONCLUSION

Abstract

Content Chapter 4 marks the conclusion of the thesis-by-articles. This concluding chapter summarizes each of the three articles as well as responds to the main research question How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut? It continues by detailing the theoretical and empirical contributions of the thesis-by-articles, and ends with the implications, next steps for the research, and limitations. The three articles thereby enter in a conversation with each other. The three sub-research questions form a whole that responds the main research question. Global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Kalaallit Nunaat and Nunavut by both contesting sovereignty and challenging ecological imperatives under Inuit epistemology. Governments of both Kalaallit Nunaat and Nunavut thereby operate a balancing act between composing with economic development imperatives under a neoliberal global framework and with domestic epistemological framework grounded in holistic ecological knowledge. The next steps for the research engage with the global context, aligned with International Relations and Critical Political Geography, to seek comparative analysis and to situate the Arctic into the global sphere. The limitations of the study thereby respond to this need to globalize the research the topic as well as engage with a wider range of communities in order to reflect global and local diversity. The concluding thoughts of this overarching concluding chapter end with reflections on the ethics of meaningful engagement for the future of critical Arctic studies and to combat disinformation.

4.0 Responding to the research question

The three articles in this thesis-by-articles sought each in their own ways to answer the main research question *How do global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut?*

The three articles thereby enter in a conversation with each other. The three sub-research questions form a whole that responds the main research question. Global and national energy-transition resource exploitation pressures reconfigure environmental governance in Kalaallit Nunaat and Nunavut by both contesting sovereignty and challenging ecological imperatives under Inuit epistemology. Governments of both Kalaallit Nunaat and Nunavut thereby operate a balancing act between composing with economic development imperatives under a neoliberal global framework and with domestic epistemological framework grounded in holistic ecological knowledge.

Article 1, “Decolonization In Greenland And Nunavut And Resource Exploitation For A Decarbonized World: What Does An Arctic Century Mean?” dives into the geopolitics of resource exploitation and Inuit decolonial ecological security as the answer for the first sub-research question guiding the response to the main research question, How do natural resource exploitation pressures during the global energy transition reshape environmental governance in Greenland and Nunavut and what do these dynamics reveal about the applicability Arctic Exceptionalism as a defining concept for the region? As such, the first article develops the concept of Inuit decolonial ecological security as a response to the phenomenon of enmeshment between regional securitization and environmental governance. It sees resource development as a site of self-determination against colonial imposition while the site being simultaneously also a site of colonial imposition. Natural resource exploitation and geopolitics thereby become a dual site of confrontation between Inuit self-determination versus colonial states, each seeking to ensure their interests.

Article 2, “Natural Resources And Framing Kalaallit Nunaat’s Independence: (Re)Telling Extractivism In The Arctic” zooms in on Kalaallit Nunaat and seeks to answer the research question How do Kalaallit

Nunaat's political-economic choices in resource and energy development shape its pursuit of energy sovereignty? The study undertaken in the second article points towards a conceptual refining of energy sovereignty, operating as a balancing act between extractivism and ecology, under a sustainable development paradigm informed by energy securitization. These findings showcase the circular nature of natural resource development and energy sovereignty where domestic sovereignty becomes shaped by both domestic interests and worldviews as well as global governance frameworks and big power politics.

Finally, the findings pertaining to **Article 3's** research question – In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision-making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? – show an empirical contribution on community consultation in the implementation of renewable energy infrastructure development. While community engagement is increasingly incorporated in development protocols, the perceptions of local Nunavummiut and officials show that meaningful incorporation of both Inuit Knowledge or Inuit Societal Values and community consultation protocols remains lacking. The discrepancy between policy and implementation showcased by the research thereby points towards the difficult reconciliation of federal economic policy with Inuit epistemology and consultation protocols.

4.1 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The contributions of the thesis-by-articles are thereby twofold: theoretical and empirical. Both the theoretical and empirical contributions are geared towards a better understanding of environmental governance in Nunavut and Greenland as applied to energy production and natural resource exploitation. This environmental governance is thereby understood through a theoretical assemblage – post-colonial theory, decolonial theory, and structuration theory – which underpins the conceptual framework where glocal governance forms a common thread that shapes energy sovereignty and sustainable development under Inuit decolonial ecological security. Environmental governance in Nunavut and Greenland is thereby shaped by political and economic dynamics of glocal governance. Inuit decolonial ecological security also thereby shapes how energy sovereignty and sustainable development are enacted by government actors,

private sector actors, civil society actors, and local inhabitants as a continuous dialogue between economic and ecological imperatives within an overarching global neoliberal economic system.

The theoretical contribution of this thesis-by-articles is thereby strongly situated within the critical political geography and International Relations lenses as applied to critical Arctic studies. Firstly, through the arguments developed in all three articles, the thesis-by-articles highlights similitudes and uniqueness within Inuit Nunaat, showing decolonial and post-colonial dynamics underscoring energy and natural resources development in Nunavut and Greenland. Specifically, the thesis-by-articles argues in response to the research question that environmental governance in Nunavut and Greenland is a response-continuum between international and domestic pressures without entering political discourses undermining local agency against global large powers. In **Article 1**, through Inuit decolonial ecological security, the thesis-by-articles makes the theoretical contribution to critical Arctic studies of aligning ecology, security and decolonial imperatives under a specific Inuit epistemology. Secondly, another theoretical contribution of the thesis-by-articles, in **Article 2**, is the re-evaluation of the substance and implementation of sustainability in Greenland as a balancing act between extractivism and ecology, contributing here specifically to the growing body of literature in Arctic studies as a whole on development in the Arctic, specifically Greenland. Similarly as to what is also argued in **Article 3**, and responding to the multi-disciplinary aspect of critical Arctic studies as developed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the thesis-by-articles contributes to further the literature in this field by highlighting the complexity of agency and structure – while opposing domination discourses - in energy and natural resources development in Inuit Nunaat through Kalaallit Nunaat and Nunavut.

The empirical contributions of **Article 3** of this thesis-by-articles are the dynamics underscoring community consultation and the use of Inuit Knowledge in the implementation of renewable energy infrastructure development. The analysis of Article 3 thereby highlights the discrepancy between official policy and the reality of systematic community consultation and implementation of Inuit Knowledge, which are criticized as being ideal theoretically but difficult to concretize. Specifically, while Inuit Knowledge is

foregrounded as essential in policy implementation in Nunavut, its application remains vague with doubts as to what constitutes Inuit Knowledge in practice. Additionally, while civilian respondents voiced concerns around lack of community participation in energy policy development, Inuit-owned private companies and organizations however emphasize their community consultation practices as robust. Despite these uncertainties, nonetheless, across sectors, renewable energy development and sustainability as seen as strong and important tools for regional self-determination and the study thereby identifies these as tools used to renegotiate power relations between territorial and federal powers. As such, the empirical contribution of **Article 3** for critical Arctic studies as seen through the lenses of critical political geography and International Relations are situation at the re-evaluation of power dynamics between the territorial and the federal governments through energy governance – a re-evaluation which includes the meaningful foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge in sustainable development.

4.2 Further Notes on the Conceptual and Theoretical Contributions

As such, as seen through these empirical and theoretical contributions, environmental governance in Kalaallit Nunaat and Nunavut is operating on a duality between structure and agency, between global pressures and national interests and sovereignty, where both sides are not configured in isolation but in response to one another. Global pressures respond to national interests within international institutional and legal frameworks guiding international relations as well as Indigenous rights. While some actors are actively threatening the sovereignty of both, Nunavut (through the Canadian federation) and Kalaallit Nunaat respond through diplomacy and leverage to secure economic and political interests in asserting (economic) self-determination. Power dynamics are thereby configured along this dual axis where the ecological decolonial approach serves as a site of epistemological confrontation defining these power relations in shaping regional security. How one governs – in between extractivism and ecology - is a response to this epistemological confrontation.

Energy sovereignty thereby becomes the crux of this confrontation, redefining sovereignty under the Westphalian regime by challenging jurisdiction over land and resources. Sustainability therefore, under

this epistemological confrontation and imperatives of energy sovereignty, is squeezed in a confrontation of power for self-determination and colonial control in this multi-scalar context. Big power politics is juxtaposed to local politics where domestic consultation frameworks paint a different story of power, where local inhabitants become part of the equation – challenging a realist and institutionalist framework anchored in either big power politics or international institutional law and infrastructures. Once again however, sustainability is similarly anchored in this duality between structure and agency, anchored in glocal governance. Despite local policy frameworks calling for meaningful incorporation of Inuit Societal Values and Knowledge and of community consultation measures, the reality showcases the difficulty in implementing meaningful consultation amidst industry and federal pressures – administrative hurdles and the reality of industry timeline thereby clash with Inuit epistemological timeline required for meaningful community consultation. In other words, it takes time and resources to meaningfully incorporate community consultation under the institutional Duty to Consult framework and Free, Prior and Informed Consent framework. The energy transition thereby advances energy resilience and economic development in Nunavut, but struggles with the incorporation of local consultation and Inuit Knowledge despite the legal and policy frameworks in place.

Environmental governance in Nunavut and Greenland as it pertains to energy and natural resources is thereby a story of forming relations – at times conflictual, at times reconciling, going through a cyclical dynamic of (re)determining power structures. The story of the energy transition confronts the ideal of peace and Arctic exceptionalism and instead brings about a duality in local and regional agency against imperial and colonial reflexes. This thesis-by-articles has shown the importance of de-regionalizing (critical) Arctic studies, enlarging its study to the scope of International Relations, as well as dissecting the self-determination dynamics undergoing rapid transformation in Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat, Inuit homeland.

The thesis-by-articles also challenges ongoing conceptions of sustainability as they relate to land use and Indigenous Knowledge. Against either romanticization or instrumentalization, the research has instead shown multiplicity in the application of Indigenous Knowledge in what it means to think of energy and land

use in a sustainable way: Indigenous Knowledge is a framework against which resilience to neo-imperial political-economic impositions is being tested. Indigenous Knowledge is an epistemological and ontological framework shaping adaptation and mitigation against imperial and colonial violence while advocating self-determination. As such, the research has challenged critical Arctic studies through three prisms: structuration theory, decolonial theory, and post-colonial theory. Through the lenses offered by these prisms, the findings of the articles have highlighted not only interdependency between actors from the community-level to the territorial-level to the state-level but also (Indigenous) resilience through negotiation within this glocal interdependency.

In continuation of the theoretical contributions, the thesis-by-articles has engaged with literature from the Global South to the Global North, from Schools to the margins, and has, instead of retrenching into boxes, sought to establish dialogues between thoughts and lived realities. In this sense, the contributions of the thesis-by-articles are situated both in this re-understanding of sustainability in the Arctic as seen in Nunavut and Greenland, as well as in this fundamental global scholarly dialogue. Critical Arctic Studies as a field is thereby also a thread within global stories. Governing nature is as much a story about the environment as it is a story about people, and this research has contributed to the better understanding of the nuances in applied Indigenous Knowledge and self-determination in Inuit Nunaat.

The theoretical contributions of the thesis-by-articles thereby lie in the aforementioned epistemological confrontations supporting the duality of agency and structure in securing sovereignty: environmental governance in Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat is glocally existential.

4.3 Implications and Next Steps in the Research

The implications of the research developed in this thesis-by-articles is two-fold: the first relates to the ways critical Arctic studies engage with concepts of sustainability and development across Indigenous homelands, and the second relates to the **Article 3** and the need for further expanded research on community consultation.

Firstly, the contributions of Article 1, 2, and 3 exposed in the previous section highlight the need for critical Arctic studies to expand research on how sustainability and development are operationalized throughout Indigenous homelands in the Arctic, including and critically in Russia (Ksenofontov, Petrov, 2024). This need for further research on this operationalization opens however a Pandora's box: in this age of climate change, the boundaries of Arctic and sub-Arctic regions are being challenged. Rising temperatures, thawing permafrost, shrubification and changes in the tree line (Zhang et al., 2013), challenges the field's geographical boundaries and its meaningfulness for research. It is in this aspect that collaboration with Indigenous nations in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions becomes critical: as will be highlighted in the limitations further, the next steps for research lie in a circumpolar assessment of how environmental governance is experienced by Nations. Particularly, self-determination infrastructures – from jurisdiction to government models to economic treaties to only name a few – vary strongly across the circumpolar North from Nation to Nation (Jakobsen et al., 2024; Nuttall, 2018). A next step for this area of research is therefore to engage with this complexity – an overarching theme of this thesis-by-articles – throughout the circumpolar.

Secondly, the geographical scope of the research in **Article 3** was limited to fieldwork in Iqaluit and interview with decision-makers who had territorial-wide insights. However, interviews with civilians were limited to Iqaluit. A next step therefore is to expand the interviews of civilians to other hamlets and settlements in order to draw a more comprehensive understanding of how civilians respond to community engagement initiatives regarding energy development. While interviews with decision-makers were comprehensive, a next step is to continue this work to better reflect other communities. On this topic of operationalization of Inuit Knowledge and community consultation, a next step for this research is to expand it to other Nations in the circumpolar North – from Sámi to Gwich'in to Nenets to only name a few – and see how locally engrained specific Indigenous Knowledge is operationalized.

As such, the implications of this research and the subsequent next steps both engage with how this research can find relevance throughout the circumpolar Arctic. As mentioned in the opening anecdote of the

thesis-by-articles, the Government of Nunavut has been using the findings of **Article 3** for their internal report and policy advisory to further community consultation initiatives in relation to the meaningful foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge in order to support sustainable development. This is proof of the importance and relevance of this research and the need to expand this research topic to, first of all, the territory of Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat as a whole, and secondly to the other Nations in the circumpolar Arctic.

As a final note, while this goes beyond the scope of critical Arctic studies, in the spirit of International Relations and critical political geography, a potential next step for this research area is to expand to other Indigenous (and settler colonial) contexts in the world, for instance Aotearoa or South America, in order to better understand environmental Indigenous governance globally and what lessons critical Arctic studies can learn from other global contexts – in line also with the glocal analysis of the thesis-by-articles (Fisher, Parsons, 2020; Galvao, Mancilla, 2020; Magallanes, 2018).

4.4 Limitations

The limitations of this thesis-by-articles were mentioned in the section above. Particularly the need for the research to include civilian perspectives from more communities in Nunavut (and in Greenland, which was beyond the scope of **Article 1** and **Article 2** and therefore would be included in the need for next steps for the research).

As also mentioned in the above section, collaboration with Indigenous Nations is critical and here forms a limitation of the research: I do not speak Kalaallisut nor Inuktitut. How would the findings and contributions of the thesis-by-articles change if it had been written in Kalaallisut or Inuktitut, if it had been written by an Inuk? While the methodology and theoretical frameworks of this research strongly engaged with Inuit customs and linguistics, it remains that I am not Inuk. A limitation therefore, and what I consider here to be a necessary next step, would be to engage further on this topic with local communities directly in

Kalaallisut and Inuktitut in order to enhance relevance of the research topic for local communities and governments.

The limitations thereby, rather than devalue the research, trigger and respond to the next steps in the research mentioned in the section above. These limitations instead support and justify the need for critical Arctic studies, through the lenses of International Relations and critical political geography, to engage with Indigenous methodologies and languages, to engage with other (Indigenous) contexts and cases throughout the world, and to engage with different scales of analysis from local individuals to territories to states and international organizations.

4.5 Concluding remarks

This conclusion has highlighted both the empirical and theoretical contributions of the thesis-by-articles as well as its limitations which reinforce the need for further research as also mentioned in this conclusion. I will end this thesis-by-articles by highlighted what a respondent told me during an interview: “Researchers the eyes of the world. If I were to come down South and take a picture of a skinny cow, would the world believe that all cows are skinny?” (Interview respondent, Inuit organization, April 2024) I want to highlight this quote to offer some final thoughts about the importance of meaningful and ethical research. Researchers are indeed the eyes of the world, and in a world where disinformation and cuts to education are rampant, where threats of large-scale conflicts seem to hold us collectively hostage once more, how important it is to keep the focus on our research ethics, to keep on meaningfully engage with people on the ground, to keep our critical thinking skills, and to keep on building a better world.

4.6 References

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Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Approval – University of Ottawa

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

18/08/2025

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-05-23-8653

Titre du projet / Project Title

Avatittinnik kamatsiarniq and
Tumit: Renewable energy and
Green Colonialism in the
Canadian and Greenlandic
Arctic.

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Renouvelé / Renewed

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

17/07/2023

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

16/07/2026

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher Affiliation

Role

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LICENSE NUMBER 01 010 24N-A

ISSUED TO: Anna Soer
School of Political Studies
University of Ottawa

TEAM MEMBERS: R.K-Rosene

TITLE: Avatittinnik kamatsiarniq and Tumit: Renewable energy and Green Colonialism in the Canadian and Greenlandic Arctic

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH:

The research objectives are to understand the consultation dynamics and methods used to generate support and/or community input in designing and implementing renewable energy projects. The development of renewable energy projects in the circumpolar Arctic is not always well received and is the terrain for frequent Indigenous rights violations – such as in Fennoscandia against Saami rights. This research project aims therefor to draw an understanding of best practices in Nunavut and Greenland – where Inuit leadership is strong – so to develop larger applicable policy frameworks to incorporate in renewable energy development both in Canada and in the circumpolar Arctic.

DATA COLLECTION IN NU:

DATES: March 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024

LOCATION: Iqaluit, Sanikiluaq

Scientific Research License 01 010 24N-A expires on December 31,2024

Issued at Iqaluit, NU on January 12, 2024

Per

Jamal Shirley
Science Advisor



Appendix C – Interview Guide

C.1 Consent Forms

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

Consent Form – Elected Officials and Representatives

Title of the study: *Avatittinnik kamatsiarniq and Birgejupmi: Renewable energy and Green Colonialism in the Canadian and Norwegian Arctic.*

Name of Principal Investigator: Anna Soer	Name of Supervisor: Ryan Katz-Rosene
Affiliation: Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Political Studies	Affiliation: Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Political Studies
Email address:	Email address:
	Telephone number:

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Anna Soer. This research study is conducted in the framework of a Doctoral Thesis.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to understand the economic and social impacts of the development of renewable energy infrastructures in your community among households and the private and public sectors. Its objectives are to understand how Indigenous decision-making power is included or excluded from the development of these infrastructures, as well as how households respond to the inclusion of a different source of energy away from diesel fuel.

Participation: My participation will consist of a short – maximum one hour– interview. During this interview, I will be asked to provide my insight on how the building of the renewable energy infrastructure has included community participation, has included Indigenous knowledge, has included Indigenous participation, and has included concerns relating to the impacts of these infrastructures of cultural practices (such as hunting and fishing).

Acceptance: By selecting the consent statement below, I agree to have my interview recorded.

- ☐ Yes, I accept my interview being recorded.
☐ No, I do not accept my interview being recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I discuss topics related to my professional insights when relevant in relation with the development of this new source of renewable energy. This includes potential topics related to workplace environment when relevant, as well as democratic participation in community consultation. I have received the option from the researchers to refuse to participate or withdraw my participation. Identities will also not be revealed upon request. Resources to mental health services have also provided.

Benefits: My participation in this study will enable the better understanding of the process of Indigenous consultation and power in decision-making in the development of renewable energy infrastructures in the Canadian Arctic.

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This object of study lacks insight from community members and my participation will enable to bridge this gap in knowledge.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the purpose of the research study. I understand that my identity cannot be fully protected due to the small scale of my community and that word-to-mouth can spread about my participation in this research within my community. The risks include potentially being identified by other community members. I have the option of having my name not appear in the study and my statements instead be referred to as “statement made by participant from Sanikiluaq” and will include my professional title (“representative”).

Conservation of Data: The data collected – audio recording of interview when applicable, the transcript of the interview, the notes taken during the interview, and consent form – will be kept in a secure manner by keeping it in a locked computer folder protected by password. Only the researcher – Anna Soer – will have access to the anonymized raw data and it will be securely kept in order to allow for subsequent research articles to go through the review process and be published. This also allows for potential questions to be answered where I would need access to the data to respond to adequately. After the completion of the study, all anonymized data is kept indefinitely using the UOttawa repository (<https://ruor.uottawa.ca/>). All researchers seeking to access and use RUOR deposited data will need to undergo due ethical approval from the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity of the University of Ottawa.

Compensation: There is no compensation for the participation in the study.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be removed from the dataset and not used in the study. In addition, I may withdraw part or all of my interview responses at any time, including after publication. If my responses are withdrawn after the publication, my data will be destroyed.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email (ethics@uottawa.ca) or telephone (613-562-5387). It is recommended that I (keep/print/save) a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By selecting the consent statement below, I agree to participate in this research study.

☐ Yes, I want to participate. Name: _____

Email/Telephone number: _____

☐ No, I do not want to participate.

Signature

Date

Consent Form - Civilians

Title of the study: *Avatittinnik kamatsiarniq and Birgejupmi: Renewable energy and Green Colonialism in the Canadian and Norwegian Arctic.*

Name of Principal Investigator: Anna Soer	Name of Supervisor: Ryan Katz-Rosene
Affiliation: Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Political Studies	Affiliation: Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Political Studies
Email address:	Email address:
	Telephone number:

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Anna Soer. This research study is conducted in the framework of a Doctoral Thesis.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to understand the economic and social impacts of the development of renewable energy infrastructures in your community among households. Its objectives are to understand how Indigenous decision-making power is included or excluded from the development of these infrastructures, as well as how households respond to the inclusion of a different source of energy away from diesel fuel.

Participation: My participation will consist of a short – maximum one hour– interview. During this interview, I will be asked to provide my insight on how the building of the renewable energy infrastructure has impacted my ability to continue my activities such as fishing and hunting, has impacted my household's daily activities such as cooking, has impacted my revenues for income, and has impacted my overall quality of life however I define this.

Acceptance: By selecting the consent statement below, I agree to have my interview recorded.

- ☐ Yes, I accept my interview being recorded.
☐ No, I do not accept my interview being recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I discuss topics related to my daily life when relevant in relation with the development of this new source of renewable energy. This includes potential topics related to workplace environment when relevant, as well as democratic participation in community consultation. This may impact my emotional wellbeing during the duration of the interview. On this risk, I have received assurance from the researchers that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by having the option to refuse to participate or withdraw my participation. Identities will also not be revealed upon request. Resources to mental health services have also provided.

Benefits: My participation in this study will enable the better understanding of the process of Indigenous consultation and power in decision-making in the development of renewable energy infrastructures in the Canadian Arctic. This object of study lacks insight from community members and my participation will enable to bridge this gap in knowledge.

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Confidentiality and Privacy: I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the purpose of the research study. I understand that my identity cannot be fully protected due to the small scale of my community and that word-to-mouth can spread about my participation in this research within my community. The risks include potentially being identified by other community members. However, my name will not appear in the study and my statements will instead be referred to as “statement made by participant from Sanikiluaq”.

Conservation of Data: The data collected – audio recording of interview when applicable, the transcript of the interview, the notes taken during the interview, and consent form – will be kept in a secure manner by keeping it in a locked computer folder protected by password. Only the researcher – Anna Soer – will have access to the anonymized raw data and it will be securely kept in order to allow for subsequent research articles to go through the review process and be published. This also allows for potential questions to be answered where I would need access to the data to respond to adequately. After the completion of the study, all anonymized data is kept indefinitely using the UOttawa repository (<https://ruor.uottawa.ca/>). All researchers seeking to access and use RUOR deposited data will need to undergo due ethical approval from the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity of the University of Ottawa.

Compensation: There is a compensation of 50 Canadian dollars or 410 Norwegian krone. If I choose to withdraw from the study, I will still receive this compensation.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be removed from the dataset and not used in the study. In addition, I may withdraw part or all of my interview responses at any time, including after publication. If my responses are withdrawn after the publication, my data will be destroyed.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email (ethics@uottawa.ca) or telephone (613-562-5387). It is recommended that I (keep/print/save) a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By selecting the consent statement below, I agree to participate in this research study.

☐ Yes, I want to participate.

☐ No, I do not want to participate.

Signature

Date

C.2 Interview Questionnaires

C.2.1 Interview Questionnaire – Civilians

The questionnaire followed these general questions and each interview expanded beyond these questions based on the conversations and insights from respondents.

Q1: What do you think about renewable energy in general?

Q2: What do you think about renewables for your community?

Q3: Do you feel that you are heard or that you have a say in the energy policy of the town?

C.2.2 Interview Questionnaire – Professionals and Representatives

The questionnaire followed general themes and each interview expanded beyond these themes and were adapted to each professional mandate and insights of respondents.

Q1: How do you navigate this playing field with all these [government and private] actors? What is your relationship with the layers of government and with other private actors in Nunavut?

Q2: Community consultation processes, like included in the Environment Social Governance Framework, have been at the forefront of most discussions about development in the North - Nothing About Us Without Us - both in positive terms and in negative terms. The ESG framework has for instance been criticised for 'slowing things down' How do you see the ESG framework from the perspective of doing work at [organization]?

Q3: On gender, there is substantial research on energy as a whole and gendered impacts - from health, to employment, to work cultures. Does [organization] include gender as a variable, as a perspective in its development policy and projects ?

Q4: IQ and Inuit philosophy in general sits very high among the cultural revitalisation priorities and it permeates most political statements made. ON the environment, avatittinnik kamatsiarniq seems to be a guiding principle in how to think of development in relation with environmental impacts. How do you understand the place of IQ and avatittinnik kamatsiarniq in the work of [organization] ?

Appendix D – Copy of Article 1: Soer, A. (2025) Decolonization in Greenland and Nunavut and Resource Exploitation for a Decarbonized World: What does an Arctic Century mean? *Arctic Yearbook* 2025.

Decolonization in Greenland and Nunavut and Resource Exploitation for a Decarbonized World: What does an Arctic Century Mean?

Anna Soer

The Arctic is again at the crux of global attention. While several regions globally are facing intensified interest for their natural resources, Greenland has similarly faced recent rising attention from regional Arctic actors, such as the United States of America, and globally, such as China. Greenland is appearing to be referred to as the 21st Century Kingmaker by some policy commentators. What does this Arctic century mean and for whom? The mining of minerals is rising to support a global energy transition and industrial needs, sparking geopolitical battles of influence and interests where global powers such as the US and China are entering in competition to secure these resources. While global attention is veering towards the mineral-rich Arctic, especially Greenland and Nunavut, some dynamics – such as the purchase proposal of Greenland made by President Trump – clash with regional dynamics of self-determination from state colonial powers. As the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement came into effect in January 2024, and as Greenland is continuing its course to secure independence from Denmark, regional self-governance is confronted by strategic imperial maneuvering by global powers. Global energy transition goals, as supported by the United Nations SDGs, while under the banner of sustainable development, thereby spark foundational discussions pertaining to “glocal” governance and human security in a decarbonized world. Echoing Saami critiques of green colonialism, this study aims to question the notion of peace and security through resource exploitation in Greenland and Nunavut as global powers seek to secure their interests in the region, sparking the Arctic Century. This study is supported by qualitative content analysis of policy documents, media articles, and interviews with key Greenlandic and Nunavummiut stake- and rights- holders conducted in 2024. The study contributes to the study of Arctic security through the development of Arctic decolonial ecological security shaping natural resources development in Nunavut and Greenland.

Introduction

As U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance left Greenland after a whirlwind of statements late March and early April 2025, the threat of U.S. invasion – whether through military, economic, or political control, or a mixture of all of the above – rang alarm bells among Greenlanders and the Danish government (Edvardsen & Hansen, 2025; Livesay et al., 2025). President Trump has “to have

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Greenland” and Vice President Vance warns that the world can’t “bury our heads in the sand – or in this case the snow” (*ibidem*).

These explicit threats confront how the Arctic was once referred to as Exceptional – a region framed within a paradigm of peace and cooperation separate from outside geopolitical tensions. Despite a media tendency to portray Arctic Peoples and governments as almost powerless against the titans of the global community – such as the U.S. and China – Arctic peoples and their governments have, over the past decades, built up their resilience and self-determination law-by-law (Loukacheva, 2007a; Soer, 2025). The creation of the Territory of Nunavut in 1999 following the Nunavut Act of 1993, and the signing of Greenland’s Home Rule Act in 1978 and the Self-Government Act in 2008, forged into law a current of regional Inuit self-determination in response to colonial state violence. As Greenland and Nunavut continue to enact their governance and self-determination, international frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Sustainable Development Goals have shaped dynamics towards sustainable development and environmental justice within domestic legal frameworks. However, this dynamic is facing contestation from industry pressures and international state actors. As the Arctic Ocean may become ice-free in the summer by 2050, these prospects open economic speculations on the increase of the shipping industry in the region – including tourism and other commercial sectors such as fisheries (Dawson et al., 2014; Dawson, 2018; van Luijk et al., 2021). While offshore oil and gas drilling has been banned under Canadian law since 2019 under the Order Prohibiting Certain Activities in Arctic Offshore Waters, and similarly banned under Greenlandic law since 2021, the Trump presidency and the opening of Norwegian Arctic waters in the Barents Sea for exploration mark rising interests towards Arctic resources, where the region is estimated to hold 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids. These estimates were drawn by the United States Geological Survey in 2008 (Bird et al., 2008). 84% of these undiscovered Arctic resources are estimated to be offshore.

Similar dynamics underpin the development of the mining industry. Greenland and Nunavut are estimated to hold significant mineral resources. While Canada has some of the largest reserves of Rare Earth Elements worldwide, Canada is not a commercial producer with all projects still in exploratory or processing phases (Natural Resources Canada, 2025). Greenland is seeking to further develop its resource exploitation sector as its Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029 indicates. Nunavut, while also considering the mining sector as an important vector for the territory’s economy and livelihood opportunities, has restricted its commercial and mining land use under its new 2025 Land Use Plan.

Against this rush towards resource exploitation, the reality is much more nuanced. Qualified high-skilled labour is currently lacking in both Greenland and Nunavut, as well as infrastructures such as roads and overall connectivity just to name these two. Additionally, environmental impacts assessment regulations and local ecological epistemologies further frame the development of the sector. The Arctic century is thereby framed at the crux between resource exploitation and its global geopolitical repercussions within great power politics convening at the regional level. As such, this study seeks to question the framing of both peace (cooperation) and security (hard and human) amidst this crux between regional natural resources development and international relations. Oran Young, in his seminal work on the study of Arctic politics, links Arctic Exceptionalism to environmental management of common resources, with the addition of Indigenous self-

determination (1992, p.11-18). These linkages are here analyzed as well, amidst growing regional tensions, renewed interests in natural resource development, and Inuit self-governance. As such, while domestic and global pressures appear to be rising in the region to push towards intensified natural resource exploitation, the sector is nonetheless shaped by the confrontation of both domestic ecological concerns shaped by Inuit epistemologies (ecological security), local capacity constraints, and these international economic and political pressures – thereby inscribing Arctic environmental management within the analysis of regional security dynamics.

As resource exploitation in this context of global energy transition goals is reaching the realm of national critical security, and as the Arctic is gaining global momentum for this exploitation, governance becomes a balancing act of interests between state sovereignty, local decision-making powers of Arctic Peoples, global economic development, and foreign states' Arctic investments. These interconnections between local and global dynamics form a glocal governance, where it is precisely these continuous interconnections that shape both local and global governance as applied to the Arctic region. The puzzle of Arctic environmental governance as seen through the two cases of Nunavut and Greenland is reaching a fracturing point. As some are claiming that the 21st-century will be an Arctic Century with Greenland as its Kingmaker (Menenez, 2025), this study seeks to re-evaluate the notion of peace and security (Exceptionalism) through the lens of resource exploitation (environmental governance) in Greenland and Nunavut in juxtaposition with Indigenous self-determination as global powers aim to secure their interests in the region (regional security dynamics). The three key themes – environmental governance, exceptionalism, and security – are thereby shaped by a complex web of interconnected concepts – power and sustainability, the resource curse, and decolonial ecological security – seen here through structuration theory, which highlights the interconnectedness.

This article is divided in two sections. The first section is divided into three subsections: (i) a critical assessment of the notion of Arctic Exceptionalism; (ii) a re-evaluation of capacity constraints in Nunavut and Greenland; and (iii) an analysis of power dynamics under structuration theory. Using the analysis on power dynamics under the framework of structuration theory, the second section delves into the ideological crossroads of sustainable natural resource development. This section is supported by four phases: (i) an inquiry in Inuit development juxtaposed to colonial development frameworks, (ii) the juxtaposition of (human) rights and sovereignty in resource development, (iii) the confrontation of the resource curse with global energy transition, and (iv) a theoretical reflection on Arctic decolonial ecology as security. These areas of inquiry offer insights into what this Arctic Century might entail. The analysis of the two sections is supported by qualitative thematic content analysis of policy documents, legal Acts and Agreement, scientific publications, and interviews with key Greenlandic (3) and Nunavummiut (18) stake- and rights- holders conducted in 2024. The interviews conducted primarily in Nunavut (18), with the addition of key political and economic stakeholders in Greenland (3), are utilized under a thematic content analysis framework, from which the key themes extracted and juxtaposed to the wider scientific literature on the subject and to government public policies. The interviews, conducted with local inhabitants and representatives from the private energy sector and the public sector (both territorial government and municipal government), touched on several topics related to incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in public policy on energy development, and to the public-private collaborative potential in the Arctic region. The government policies and Acts and Agreements analyzed for this study, both Canadian and Greenlandic, relate directly to natural resources

development (such as devolution agreements, the Nunavut Wildlife Act, or the Critical Minerals Strategy), and to consultation (such as the Canadian Duty to Consult framework, and economic development frameworks such as the ESG Framework). Thematic content analysis serves to extract tendencies, operative frameworks, and epistemological conceptualizations surrounding how security and peace are shaped by environmental management of natural resources.

Arctic Exceptionalism: Between Myth and Hope for a Better World

Arctic Exceptionalism has been used repeatedly to describe Arctic relations by both experts of the region and by the media – first developed by Oran Young in his landmark seminal work on conflict and cooperation to describe a region unique in common resources management (1992). Amidst global tensions between states, the Arctic has been portrayed as an area of peace and scientific cooperation where animosity has been kept outside its borders (Devyatkin, 2023; Gerhardt, et al., 2010; Lackenbauer, Kikkert, 2009; Olesen, 2020; Volquardsen, 2025; Young, 1992). With the Arctic Council at its center, Arctic Exceptionalism remained viable with the Council standing as a model of cross-border scientific cooperation, bridging fields and languages. Governance in several areas, including environmental governance, has been spearheaded by the 8 Arctic member states, 6 Permanent Participants representing the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic, and 38 observers, implementing work through the 6 working groups on contaminants, monitoring and assessment, conservation of flora and fauna, emergency prevention and preparedness and response, marine environment protection, and sustainable development. Since the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996, the organization has seen many Chairs and has provided an important venue for the negotiation of three international agreements on cooperation on aeronautical and marine search and rescue in 2011, cooperation on marine oil pollution preparedness and response in 2013, and enhancing international Arctic scientific cooperation in 2017. Anchored in the legacy of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy established in 1991, the Arctic Council has been representative of what it means for the Arctic to be a “region of peace, stability and constructive cooperation, that is a vibrant, prosperous, sustainable and secure home for all its inhabitants, including Indigenous Peoples, and where their rights and wellbeing are respected. (Arctic Council, n.d.)”

Against the reality of scientific cooperation, the Arctic has also been central in military preparedness. Several U.S. military bases were constructed in Greenland during the Cold War, and the DEW Line – Distant Early Warning Line – established from 1957 until 1993, was set to detect an air attack from the Soviet Union. Iqaluit’s airport was first established as a military airport and is now also used as an operating base by the Royal Canadian Air Force (Gagnon, 2002). The fall of the USSR signaled a different era for the Arctic, but the underlying military preparedness never disappeared. This first section seeks to question this notion of Exceptionalism, confronting it with Indigenous voices and perspectives, debate about capacity, and through an inquiry into the theoretical framework supporting this confrontation using structuration theory. This section serves as a foundation for the second half of this study, which delves specifically into the sustainability debate – environmental protection and governance which as developed above supported Arctic exceptionalism and the creation of the Arctic Council.

Genesis of Exceptionalism in the Arctic: Indigenous Voices

While the Arctic Council was established in 1996, the Inuit Circumpolar Council was established in 1977 and represents the Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka. Canada’s attention towards the Arctic included the enforcement of colonial violence. From forced relocations, forced

sedentarisation, project surname, and residential schools, the Inuit of Canada have experienced the worst of the country's colonial legacy as the federal government of Canada aimed to secure its sovereignty claims over its Arctic territory against competing interests from regional actors such as the U.S. (Dunning, 2013; Tassinari, 1995; F. Tester & Kulchyski, 2011). Danish involvement in Greenland has a longer history, but the colonial violence is similar with forced sterilisation of Inuit girls and women, theft of Inuit children put into Danish families, as well as forced sedentarisation (Bryant, 2024; Olsen, 2024). From either side of the Baffin Sea, the rush towards the Arctic during and after the Second World War meant the continuation and increase of colonial violence, disregard for Inuit life, and disregard for ecosystems as well. The creation of the ICC came about to strengthen Inuit resilience against this colonial wave. The ICC represents an adaptation to western legal and institutional frameworks in order to anchor self-determination strategies in Westphalian terms and is an act of cultural revival for Inuit governance (Ackrén, 2022; Soer, 2023; Tagalik et al., 2023).

Inuit self-determination was fought for by Inuit leaders and communities, aided by international (Indigenous) movements towards human rights and Indigenous rights. The Universal Declaration of the Human Rights in 1948, human security as defined by the UNDP's Human Development Report of 1994, and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, paved the way for the institutional and legal support of both Greenland's and Nunavut's rights against colonial violence and in favor of self-determination. Greenland and Nunavut, as well as the many other Indigenous nations worldwide, served as precursors for the adoption of some of these international frameworks (Assembly of First Nations, 2017; Cambon, 2020; Government of Canada, 2021; United Nations, 1948, 1994). The Nunavut Act of 1993 utilized the existing governance framework of Canada – federalism – to position themselves accordingly in negotiation strategies. Similarly, Greenland's Home Rule Act of 1978 utilized the existing governance frameworks of Denmark – keen to be seen as the 'good colonizer' as well as using the political representation in parliament developments of the 1970s – to position themselves with the Danish state (Ackrén, 2022, 2024).

For Greenland, the Second World War meant an ambivalent status as a U.S. protectorate in 1941 during the Nazi invasion of Denmark – a protectorate status sparked by plans of other powers such as the UK and Canada to take control over certain parts of the island – and remained under Danish control after the war. The establishment of U.S. military bases and diplomatic relations during that time propelled Greenland into imperial circumpolar diplomacy by incorporating the island in global security concerns amidst the Second World War and Cold War (Ackrén, 2022).

Inuit leadership in Nunavut anchored their claims in the modern treaty process – also known as comprehensive land claims agreements – started by the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement of 1975 led by the Cree, Inuit, and Naskapi. Leadership by the Kalaallit and Nunavummiut supported Inuit self-determination and self-government, enabled by both domestic frameworks and international frameworks, and supported the stabilization of the Arctic region and further contributes to global environmental management (Zellen, 2022; Osakada, 2022).

As such, the notion of exceptionalism – understood as a zone of institutionalized diplomacy and scientific collaboration in environmental management and governance – becomes more nuanced when Indigenous perspectives are included and foregrounded. Colonial violence and disregard of Inuit interests has shaped contemporary dynamics in Nunavut and Greenland, a violence also

enacted by the private sector (Bellehumeur, 2020; M. Hansen, 2025; Jørgensen, 2025; Panktuntit, Inuit Women of Canada et al., 2014). Despite the devolution agreement signed in 1993, it required the passing of the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement in 2024 for Nunavut to gain the ability to administer lands, development and resource management, receive royalties on public lands, and has the opportunity to “continue strengthening education, employment and other northern-led investments in land and resource development” (CIRNAC, 2024). It took 32 years after the signing of the 1993 Nunavut Agreement for the transfer of responsibilities over public lands, natural resources, and water rights – in other words, key areas of environmental governance – to be made from the Federal Government of Canada to the Government of Nunavut. On Greenland’s side, the Home Rule Act of 1978 and the Self-Government Act of 2008 came about as Greenlandic political representation in Danish parliament became possible in 1970s where greater Kalaallit autonomy could be put on the agenda also in retaliation of colonial social policies, once again through Kalaallit advocacy (Ackrén, 2022).

The Self-Government Act recognized Greenlanders as “a people according to international law with the right to self-determination” (Ackrén, 2022, p.5) and natural resources and their management were now under the jurisdiction of the Greenlandic government. Despite greater control, some mining activities, such as shown in the 2025 documentary “Greenland’s White Gold” [Grønlands Hvide Guld], have continued to undermine communities’ development and wellbeing through lack of environmental and workers’ rights oversight (Hansen, 2025; Hansen, Johnstone, 2019; Hubbard, 2013; Nuttall, 2012; Larsen, Ingimundarson, 2023; Larsen, Huskey, 2020; Stefánsdóttir, 2014). From the perspective of human security, therefore, intrinsically linked to environmental management, Arctic Exceptionalism did not extend to the rights of Indigenous Peoples in every capacity.

While Inuit leadership and Inuit rights have been carved into circumpolar institutional frameworks and international law, the reality on the ground remains a discrepancy in power and governance, albeit with different manifestations in Nunavut and Greenland. In Nunavut, the Devolution over Lands and Resources Agreement was signed in 2024, while control over resources was devolved to Greenland following the Act on Greenland Self-Government, which came into force in 2009. The discrepancy in the timeline pertaining to the control over natural resources development between the territory and the autonomous region impacted the economic self-determination of the two Arctic regions, with conversation on mining development only just being part of the jurisdiction of the Government of Nunavut compared to Greenland. However, the greater control exercised by Greenland before Nunavut, and its overall jurisdiction over domestic matters, enabled the autonomous region to pursue an economic development path that the territory of Nunavut could not. On other justice matters, Canada implemented UNDRIP in 2021 and released its Action Plan in 2023. Denmark apologized in 2022 for the removal of Greenlandic children from their parents, and the forced sterilization campaign of the 1960s and 70s is still under investigation for compensation (Olsen, 2024). While indeed there was no active military conflict in the Arctic and states had open diplomatic channels, the emphasis on diplomatic and scientific activity and peaceful cooperation disregards the different ways colonial violence and (economic) paternalism affected the Inuit in Nunavut and Greenland in their ability to lead environmental management on their lands. Nonetheless, while the notion may have been imperfect, its institutional support by organizations like the Arctic Council pushed for greater circumpolar cooperation amidst the threats of climate change and anthropogenic pollution.

The Capacity Debate Revisited in Nunavut and Greenland

As the notion of Arctic Exceptionalism is now fading from mainstream discourse, whose future is uncertain since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Dyck, 2024; Lackenbauer, Dean, 2020; Smith, 2022), the subsequent halt of Arctic Council activities (which have partially resumed) and the threats of U.S. imperialism on Canada and Greenland (Olesen, 2020), have led to a temptation in the media to frame Greenland as almost powerless against the superpowers (Soer, 2025).

While this realist perspective certainly allows for an understanding of Great Power competition, it erodes and eludes local powers as well as institutional powers. The capacity for smaller (territorial) governments to act on the regional and international political scene is complex and differs based on jurisdictional powers. Greenland and Nunavut do not have similar jurisdictional powers regarding international relations nor regional relations. The devolution agreement of Nunavut and the devolution agreement of Greenland are not comparable in terms of international relations where Greenland has a larger room of maneuver than Nunavut (Loukacheva, 2007b; Home Rule, 1978; Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act, 1993). While Greenland does not have military power, it can establish international diplomatic relations and has its own Foreign, Security and Defence Policy “Nothing About Us Without Us” published in 2024. Greenland is represented by Denmark in Canada, but Canada does have an honorary consulate in Narsarsuaq which opened in 2024. The U.S. also has a consulate in Narsarsuaq which opened in 2020. The capacity debate to defend Greenland’s and Nunavut’s interests both domestically and internationally is anchored in multiple areas and deeply shape the ways both actors anchor their claims pertaining to their own economic development.

In resource exploitation, capacity limitations are often cited by both scientific analysis and by the interview respondents as the core difficulties behind the development of the sector in Nunavut and Greenland (Rosa et al., 2023; interview respondent - Greenlandic representative, economic development, private sector). The lack of local qualified personnel and the lack of connectivity, such as roads which participates in the difficulties faced by the remoteness of both locations, render the establishment of resource exploitation infrastructures costly and lengthy – relying on foreign labour and importation of materials via flight or shipping (AMAP, 2018; Holroyd, 2024; Thaarup et al., 2020). While these limited capacities in terms of labour and infrastructure add constraints on the development of the mining sector, its development has always been a long-term projection. The infrastructural and labour constraints add layer of difficulty, and as such, the political discourses of reaching economic independence in Greenland and enhanced economic health in Nunavut through the mining sector is a long-term investment rather than an immediate return investment (interview respondents – Nunavut and Greenland government representatives and private sector representatives). Therefore, while the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement of 2024 enables greater control by the government of Nunavut over its resources, it remains a long-term development strategy to invest in the mining sector.

The 2025 Greenlandic elections saw the management of natural resource development, the need for economic development, and securing independence from Denmark as central questions. The results of the March 2025 elections juxtaposes two conceptions and approaches to Greenlandic independence: the Demokraatit party leader Jens-Frederik Nielsen, takes a more progressive approach to independence, whereas the runner-up Naleraq seeks a much more rapid approach to independence from Denmark (Lukiv & Kirby, 2025). In terms of resource exploitation, while

Naleraq has historically opposed uranium mining, the Greenlandic parliament and government are debating the zero-tolerance policy on uranium mining (Berthelsen, 2025). The different approaches to economic self-determination relating to independence address a key issue in the development of the natural resource exploitation sector. Demokraatit, a social-liberal party, advocates for tax incentives, streamlined regulations and reduced state intervention while Naleraq remains “deeply skeptical to foreign investment” and “must retain full control over its resources” (Jonan, 2025). How environmental regulations are implemented is linked to how independence is envisioned. Similarly, how foreign investments are to be regulated is deeply tied to how independence is envisioned. The new coalition and their subsequent economic policies are thereby central in understanding regional economic projections – giving substance or not to the remark that Greenland will be the Kingmaker of the Arctic Century (Menenez, 2025).

In Nunavut, this capacity debate also touches on institutional capacity in both the government and Inuit organisations. With chronic understaffing and frequent turnovers, as well as global and domestic attention towards the territory – including from the scientific research sector – engagement fatigue is an issue faced by public employees and employees from Inuit organisations (Greenlandic and Nunavummiut interview respondents, public sector and private sector). With the new 2024 Agreement, it remains to be seen how capacity reinforcement – for instance local labour force against Southern labour force, or attractiveness of skilled labour in government positions long-term – will take place to accompany the territory’s greater responsibilities in resource exploitation.

Under Canadian federation, the status of Nunavut as a territory and as a modern treaty complicates the debate on capacity and sparks foundational questions on Inuit governance under a western legal and government system. Certain critiques of development oversight frameworks, such as the Environment Social Governance Framework or public consultation laws, argue that these inhibit development as they impose regulations which further increase the lengthy development process and thereby increase costs associated with development in the North (Exner-Pirot, 2024; Exner-Pirot & Gullo, 2025). The capacity debate therefore here, instead of touching directly on increasing labour capacity, touches on institutional capacity and its responsibilities in structuring development in the territory.

These areas of the capacity debate, in addition to the realist perspective described earlier, highlights a legal-institutional perspective which defines space to maneuver in environmental management and economic development for both Greenland and Nunavut. They frame both concerns and trajectories. Framing the capacity debate in terms of questioning development trajectories places emphasis on the potential of both Greenland and Nunavut in this growing attention towards Arctic resource exploitation. It frames the conditions of resource exploitation back into Inuit leadership instead of voiding it de-facto of agency and power. Capacity framed under these terms respond to the regional need for peace and security in order to advance development. Human security and Inuit self-determination supported both under domestic and international legal frameworks bring the conversation from Big Power Politics to a “glocal” perspective on regional politics – the multi-scale interconnection between local and global governance in shaping regional leadership (Mihr, 2022; Roundometof, 2015). This glocal perspective allows for a more complex and nuanced conversation on the place of Inuit leadership in international politics which, as will be developed in the second section below, impacts environmental regulatory frameworks.

Agency vs Structure: Structuration Theory in Big Power Politics and Peace

The two previous sub-sections on capacity and on Arctic Exceptionalism both view in different ways the agency of the Inuit against the structure of western imperialism and global economy pertaining to environmental and economic governance. This tension between agency and structure has grappled social scientists and forms a fundamental piece of inquiry in what moves societies, what instills change (Giddens, 1984). Structuration theory bridges both agency and structure and recognizes the power of agency (individual and collective) in shaping the structure as well as the power of the structure to shape the individual and the collective. We are products of our society, of our times, as much as our times and our society are products of our making (*ibidem*). Placing this continuous dialogue between agency and structure gives a path in understanding this Arctic century as a *mélange* instead of an opposition between forces.

As this section will argue, reframing big power politics in structuration theory gives another voice to medium and small powers as well as nuances the role of states by incorporating regional governments such as Nunavut and Greenland. Reframing big power politics (BPP) as well as great power competition (GPC) through structuration theory opens up the conversation to the inclusion of Inuit governments and leadership in regional circumpolar dynamics, specifically in environmental and economic governance. From an institutionalist perspective, international frameworks supported by international bodies such as UNDRIP give Indigenous rights a legally-binding standing in international law for the signatories, which Denmark and Canada are. Placing Greenland in a position of power is interesting from the viewpoint of structuration theory: Greenland becomes both the 'structure' and the 'agency' of the equation by being both the Kingmaker and on the receiving end of global imperialism thereby breaking the separated duality of structure vs agency - exemplifying the argument of structuration theory.

Arctic politics would thereby enter a form of governmentality: in response to global imperial rush towards itself, Arctic powers would frame their actions according to those global dynamics; in response to imperial pressure, it reacts by adopting the mainstream; in reaction to sovereignty threats, it reacts by adopting a sovereignty discourse. It is thereby argued here that entering global politics through established international frameworks and Great Power Competition would require a discursive negotiation strategy in the maintenance of sovereignty. It becomes a balancing act between self-determination with global forces – once again composed by both agency and structure, entering a governmentality dynamic in diplomacy. An independent Greenland relies however on the willingness of these Big Powers to respect the international status quo and international law. Should the U.S. choose to invade Greenland or Canada (and Nunavut by proxy), they would lose their agency.

Structuration theory thereby here touches on the abiding of international law by all actors. Should some lose agency in whatever capacity, then the balancing act becomes skewed. Today however, Nunavut continues the upholding of its 1993 Agreement and the devolution of powers, and Greenland remains focused on asserting independence from Denmark and on its own economic development path. In today's context, the threats of an imbalance between agency and structure spark further energy towards ensuring Inuit sovereignty and self-determination as the recent Greenlandic elections show. The Arctic Century as a *mélange* instead of confrontational however shifts the conceptualization of peace towards effective long-term stability instead of only conceptualized against conflict. Structuration theory thereby here serves as a theoretical path to

understanding what peace and security entail for the Arctic: a peace and security which foregrounds human security - including Indigenous rights and international (imperial) actors in sustainable economic development.

Shaping Development through Natural Resources: An Ideological Crossroads

Structuration theory as shown previously enables a nuanced conversation about responsibility and power in circumpolar relations according to both domestic frameworks, regional frameworks, and international frameworks. It allows also for a conversation on the meaning behind policies and trajectories pertaining to development. It enables a conversation on power anchored in space – both physical and imagined. The development of natural resources in Nunavut and Greenland is strongly anchored in environmental and ecological considerations both through government policies (environmental impacts assessments and laws) and Inuit epistemologies. As such, natural resources development and sustainable development enter in political and economic discussion informing government trajectories on building local economic resilience (see the results of the recent Greenlandic elections discussed below). Hence, on natural resources management, Arctic Exceptionalism through Inuit perspectives both informs and is informed by environmental management.

“Nothing About Us Without Us”, as the Greenlandic government proclaims, echoes beyond the realm of defence and foreign affairs and evokes also the need to frame Arctic policies according to Inuit knowledge and Inuit perspectives. An Arctic by and for the Arctic Peoples. As such, sustainable development has been at the ideological crossroads between capitalist productivism, growth, environmental preservation and conservation, and local voices and conceptions of *being* in an ecosystem, *being* in a society.

The idea of development post-Industrial Revolution has evolved and is lived differently by peoples based on lived experiences both historically and contemporarily. The idea of development, while intrinsically linked to colonial expropriation under a global capitalist system (Ghosh, 2021; Good, 1976; Larrain, 2013), thereby requires nuance when applied to describe the relationship of peoples and their leadership with both local and global economies. Sustainable development as defined by the United Nations’ homonymous framework seeks to bridge economic imperatives with environmental concerns and human security concerns. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals seek to address the different realms of human security combined with environmental sustainability. As such, poverty, education, health, hunger, gender equality, reduced inequalities, peace and justice, strong institutions and industry, decent work and economic growth, are coupled with clean water, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, the safeguarding of life below water and on land, affordable and clean energy, as well as the need for partnership to achieve the aforementioned goals (United Nations, n.d.). In such a framework, sustainable development does not negate the need for development – or for growth – but negates the equivalency placed between development and negative environmental impacts and seeks an alternative technocratic path (Adamowicz, 2022; Katz-Rosene, 2025; Morse, 2008; Ziai, 2016). This second section seeks to dive deeper into sustainability against a colonial framework, looking specifically into the idea of decolonial ecological security – seeking thereby to qualify Inuit development within this larger global questioning of peace and security amidst resource development and big power politics.

Inuit Development vs. Colonial Frameworks: Sustainable Development in Nunavut and Greenland

The operationalization of sustainability in Nunavut and Greenland is anchored in global discourses on sustainability as well as locally framed understandings of what sustainability entails (Amanor & Moyo, 2008; Escobar 1995, 2014; Ghosh, 2021; Morse, 2008; Ziai, 2016). However, analysis of power dynamics within the Global North, including in the Arctic, bring such critiques internally: these analyses as related to the climate crisis are often focused on environmental inequality – mainly environmental racism – where the effects of the climate crisis are shown to disproportionately impact marginalized communities (Gutschow et al., 2021; Sealey-Huggins, 2018; Whyte, 2018).

Sensitive to the lived realities in the Arctic, here focused on the North American Arctic, works by various scholars (Bellehumeur, 2020; Dowsley et al., 2010; Kafarowski, 2005, 2009; Krupnik et al., 2010; Knokkanen, 2009; Pedersen, 2003; Quintal-Marineau, 2017; Somby, 2016) have highlighted the differentiated impact of climate change on Inuit women and other Arctic Indigenous women as well as the specific sets of environmental knowledge they possess, offering a comprehensive perspective on the effects of climate change (Dowsley et al., 2010). Tester and Irniq (2009) argue that the confrontation between the imperatives of sovereign control over the land by the state and the decolonial struggle for Inuit knowledge affirmation results in the subversion of sustainability and Inuit knowledge by the state to serve its own interest (F. J. Tester & Irniq, 2009, p.50). In an Arctic context, notions of sustainability are oftentimes developed through specific perspectives – hunting and cultural rights, (economic) self-determination rights, and quality of life rights such as housing and heating – thereby highlighting the difficulty in applying concepts such as sustainability to sub-regions such as the North American Arctic.

This newest phase of development – sustainable development – has thereby provided a new outlet for the reproduction of traditional colonial dynamics between the state and Indigenous peoples (Fjellheim, 2022, 2023; Normann, 2021). The asymmetrical power dynamics between the national governments and the Nunavut and Greenlandic governments are echoed in the economic and social realities of the territories. The Territory of Nunavut has the lowest life expectancy of Canada and is facing systemic food insecurity as well as lower educational levels. Additionally, housing shortage, healthcare discrepancies, domestic violence, and alcoholism impact opportunities for livelihood opportunities development and overall social cohesion (Department of Family Services, 2024; ITK, 2019; Lee et al., 2022).

While the Canadian federal government continues to invest in the decarbonization of energy, this decarbonization parallels ongoing structural difficulties faced by Nunavummiut and hence, instead of creating a binary opposition between renewable energy development and development of basic infrastructures, the fundamental question of setting priorities and paths towards just and equitable development offers a realm of possibilities against what former Minister Aminata Dramante Traoré calls the “rape of the imaginary” (Traoré, 2002). An Inuit decolonial sustainable development is hence informed by complex structural needs (housing, economic opportunities, healthcare, education) in which sustainability plays a central role in ensuring cultural, identity, and resource priorities. These complex structural needs are embedded in a holistic, ecological, cultural and linguistic realm for which cultural revitalization – such as language revitalization – is fundamental (Kelly et al., 2024; Levesque, 2002; Peter et al., 2002; Watt-Clontier, 2016; Whyte, 2017). Hence, Inuit decolonialism, while not necessarily unique in some respects, stands apart as a junction of

practical implementation of self-determination, structural needs, and cultural revitalization supporting Inuit knowledge. Sustainable development then, contrary to oppositional discourses between neoliberal capitalist development and post-growth, takes on a more nuanced and complex approach. As such, this sub-section argues that this specificity of Inuit decolonialism structures how regional and domestic development are framed by both actors - Nunavut and Greenland - within their respective jurisdiction. This structuring of economic development is deeply anchored in environmental considerations, themselves responding to global and regional political and economic dynamics - as detailed in the first section.

Rights and Sovereignty: Interests and Rights on Resource Development

While the environmental impacts of military development in the circumpolar Arctic is beyond the scope of this article, both hard and human security imperatives have incorporated resource development as a core element (Barnes, 2019; Exner-Pirot, 2023; Hoogensen Gjørsv et al., 2020). As the Canadian federal government released its Critical Minerals Strategy in 2022, the Environment-Social-Governance standards, Indigenous partnerships, and global security concerns are highlighted as key forces guiding the development of the sector (p.1, p.5, p.13, p.33). The Strategy holds six (6) focus areas and initiatives: exploration, research, development and innovation; accelerating responsible project development; building sustainable infrastructure; advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples; growing a diverse workforce and prosperous communities; and strengthening global leadership and security (Government of Canada, 2022).

The Government of Canada thereby positions itself on two fronts. On one side, Canada is positioning itself as a global reserve of critical minerals, a country rich in resources that can be used for a sustainable global good foregrounding human rights and environmental imperatives. On the other side, Canada is also positioning itself in a strategic security chessboard, against the monopolization of these resources by a few key actors. China is not mentioned once in the document but holds the vast majority of global production of minerals (Weihuan, 2024). The federal government is thereby joining sustainable imperatives with human rights – in line with the SDGs – with security imperatives.

This combination of axis echoes the earlier critiques made by sustainable development critical authors of the cooptation of sustainability by imperial actors (Banerjee, 2003; Escobar, 2014; Normann, 2021; Ziai, 2016). While the Canadian government advocates for partnership with Indigenous peoples regarding mineral production and high environmental standards, tensions and violences such as for the TC Pipeline in Wet'suwet'en territory case or the Mount Polley disaster – and continued gold mining activities in the region - have showcased a different picture of the state of resource exploitation in the country. According to the Grid Arendal and UNEP report (2017), Canada was ranked second in worst mining record globally, just behind China. Abroad, 60% of the world's mining companies are Canadian and with it comes a well-documented trail of environmental and human rights abuses and crimes, especially in South America and Africa (CBC, 2023; Coumans, 2023; Roche et al., 2017). Therefore, while the government advocates for the further domestic development of the sector, its international track-record shows discrepancies between the focus areas and initiatives of the Strategy and its implementation thereby questioning the effective implementation of sustainable development (also understood as including the advancement of reconciliation with Indigenous nations) as a framework.

Despite rampant abuse, modern treaties and domestic and international frameworks, such as UNDRIP or Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, give legal and jurisdictional support to Indigenous Nations in safeguarding their interests in the resource exploitation sector through mining royalties and other arrangements. The Nunavut Agreement and the Devolution agreement of 2024 thereby act as strong safeguarding measures for the interests of the Inuit of Nunavut. In Greenland, UNDRIP similarly applies and it remains to be seen how the new coalition enacts laws regarding the streamlining of natural resource development and environmental protection measures. Greenland recently published its Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029 and emphasizes four (4) target areas: sustainability and society; attractive investment frameworks; critical minerals; and geological mapping and geodata. The first focus areas foregrounds population census as well as the implementation of the ESG framework – it also includes gender equality campaigns and analysis. (table 1). These two strategic policy documents establish roadmaps in the partnerships between the several layers of local and international governance bodies. In the case of Canada, this refers to the partnerships between the federal government, the territorial government, and international “allies” (objective 5, table 1). In the case of Greenland, this refers to the government of Greenland and the international community including the government of Denmark. These two documents, understood as roadmaps, thereby anchor yet again the tension between agency and structure of the Arctic Century in global governance as they emphasize domestic agency in shaping the future of resource exploitation in the region in relation with the global community.

Table 1. Comparative overview of the focus and target areas, and objectives and initiatives of Greenland's Mineral Resources Strategy and the Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy.

Greenland Mineral Resources Strategy 2025-2029	The Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy 2022
Focus area 1: Sustainability and society Societal benefits Value creation in all parts of the lifecycle of a mine Climate and environment Education and workforce The gender diversified industry Digital presence	Objectives Objective 1: Support economic growth and competitiveness. Objective 2: Promote climate action and strong environmental management. Objective 3: Advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Objective 4: Foster diverse and inclusive workforces and communities. Objective 5: Enhance global security and partnership with allies.
Focus area 2: Attractive investment frameworks Investments Permits and requirements Administration and case management Organizational structure Local anchoring	Focus Area and Initiative 1: Driving Exploration, Research & Development, and Innovation
Focus area 3: Critical Minerals	Focus Area and Initiative 2: Accelerating Responsible Project Development
Target area 4: Geological mapping and geodata Mapping	Focus Area and Initiative 3: Building Sustainable Infrastructure

Geophysics and Remote Sensing Landslides and surveillance Data generation and sharing Carbon Capture and Storage Drill core storage	
	Focus Area and Initiative 4: Advancing Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples
	Focus Area and Initiative 5: Growing a Diverse Workforce and Prosperous Communities
	Focus Area and Initiative 6: Strengthening Global Leadership and Security

Global Energy Transition: Confronting the Resource Curse

Arctic institutions and organizations such as the Arctic Council, Nunavut and Greenland's governments, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, or even the Arctic Economic Council, have different levels of jurisdiction and enforcement powers but all seek to contribute in meaningful ways to the development and well-being of Arctic societies and peoples. They seek to advocate for the rights of local communities and for sustainable business practices (Arctic Council, n.d.; Arctic Council & Sustainable Development Working Group, 2021; Canadian Association of Native Development Officers et al., 2022; Naalakkersuisut, 2025). As respondents from both Greenland and Nunavut have emphasized, responsible relationship building is essential to conducting business in the Arctic (interview respondents). Public consultations, in Nunavut under the larger Duty to Consult law for instance, have become staples in the establishment of business relations in the region.

The cryolite mine in Greenland is an important example of both lack of public consultation and lack of due diligence in supporting regional and local development (M. Hansen, 2025). As the 2014 Pauktutit report also highlights, the mining industry has shown elevated rates of sexual violence and gender-based discrimination specifically targeting Inuit women. The edited volume by Southcott et al. (2019) on *Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic* has sought to answer the most grappling questions of sustainable development: "How can resource extraction be best used to create successful societies? What are the best ways to avoid the staples trap/resource curse? How can resource extraction best contribute to the well-being of producing regions and communities? What institutions best ensure that producing regions and communities benefit from resource extraction?" (Huskey, Southcott, 2019, p.158). As the authors emphasize, this resource curse – where the large presence of natural resources paradoxically can result in decreased development possibilities for a community (p.3) – is not a doomed destiny but an outcome that can be avoided with effective and adequate institutions (p.3, p.145, p.167) – joining here the argument of Young on the importance of institutional arrangements or regimes to support sustainable development beyond domestic frameworks (Young, 1992, p.228). Recent developments in ensuring local consultations, local approval, and due diligence in economic returns for the local community have served as structural walls safeguarding from the pitfalls of resource development: as the aforementioned authors highlight, effective institutional structures are fundamental to avoid a resource curse (Ostrom, 2008).

On energy transition and its snowball effect on the mining industry, UNCLOS delineates responsibilities and rights over sovereign territories: both Nunavut and Greenland have legal frameworks in place which explicitly requires the safeguarding of the environment (biodiversity included) for mining projects to go forward, both on land and offshore. Despite the media attention towards a hypothetical rush towards Arctic resources, and despite potential political movements in favour of streamlining the development of natural resources exploitation, these legal frameworks offer a very different perspective on the structuring of Arctic resource exploitation. On the contrary, what these legal and institutional frameworks show is a circumpolar willingness towards safeguarding resources and willingness to avoid direct confrontation between states.

On renewable energy infrastructure, the new hydroelectric dam in Iqaluit has reached community consensus supporting its construction. This consensus was achieved after years of negotiation and community consultation where the community always retained the right to refuse (Sarkisian, 2025). The results of the recent elections in Greenland, while dominated by questions of independence, were also due to public dissatisfaction towards the new fishing laws restricting commercial fishing – one of the largest economic sectors of the country (Lukiv & Kirby, 2025).

These two contrasting cases exemplify the importance of community consultation and information on sustainability practices. To reflect on the words of Dr. Abele (2019), “thinking about healthy northern economic and social development in regional terms is intuitively appealing. It requires, though, that regions be identified purposefully, to make it possible to respect the reality of the communities in which people choose to live, while understanding change and formulating choices with appropriate territories and institutions in mind” (p.177). The institutional and legal framing of development along sustainability requires both cross-border collaboration and local consultation enabling local decision-making powers. This approach to “authoritative decision-making and political debate” (ibidem) on a range of scales from international collaborations to domestic laws offers a path forward outside of threats of conflicts in development. The approach thereby offers a different perspective from the realist concerns towards increased conflict in the Arctic and offers a vision anchored in the effectiveness of multi-scale (and glocal) environmental management, especially in Greenland and Nunavut.

Arctic Decolonial Ecology as Security

Development in Nunavut and Greenland is structured by a complex web of interconnected imperatives shaping how sustainability is operationalized by the two regions, and how sustainable thereby shapes the concepts of peace and security. As Peter et al. (2002) emphasize, the relational importance towards the non-human and the whole ecosystem – where each individual has a spirit (“tarniq”) which flows across species – guides understandings of what it means to be living sustainably in the Arctic. Inuit identity is deeply intertwined with the natural world and as such, the mainstreaming of sustainability as a development paradigm by states leads to a dynamical confrontation with Inuit self-determination and way of life both conceptually and in law.

Similarly, Mary Simon (2009) exposes the need to combine climate action with Inuit self-determination and reconciliation. Pitseolak Pfeifer (2020) highlights the need for Inuit leadership in climate change adaptation and mitigation research and policy, marking “a different way of investing research resources and of thinking through the complexity of the Arctic ecosystem: land, water, animals, and people. (p.268)”. In Greenland, Sara Olsvig confronts the irony and absurdity of political state tensions after Trump’s push towards purchasing Greenland by reminding that

Greenlandic people have agency and self-determination rights. As these authors and thinkers expose Inuit perspectives on what sustainability and ecology mean up in the Arctic, they expose deep contradictions between neo-liberal and capitalist needs for development and what development means for Inuit. As such, sustainable development becomes a linguistic confrontation between epistemological realms.

These epistemological realms, infused by vastly different living conditions, reflect the ongoing tensions present in what it means to govern Nunavut and Greenland. In the Wildlife Act (2003) and in the First Annual report of the Inuit Qaujimajatuqanginnut (IQ) Task Force (2002), Inuit epistemological worldviews are made explicit from the very first sentence of the Wildlife Act, where “comprehensive” management understands the interconnectedness of plants, animals, and humans, as well as explicitly calls for the implementation of the guiding principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (S.Nu. 2003, c.26, p.1). While the Nunavut Agreement of 1993 and Greenland Home Rule of 1978 were the foundational blocks for both Inuit homelands, these efforts were framed to remain readable and compose with state power in an acute understanding that without state support – and therefore the need to politically compromise from an Inuit standpoint – a devolution agreement would never have seen the light of day (Soer, 2023). This dynamic of political readability is not to undermine Inuit agency and resilience but to recognize asymmetrical power relations that continue to shape Inuit-state relations with for instance the Nunavut devolution on resources and revenues only having been signed in 2024, 31 years after the 1993 Agreement.

Inuit ecological security is supported greatly by Inuit knowledge (Carter et al., 2025; Dawson et al., 2020; Pearce et al., 2015; Peter et al., 2002). From wildlife conservation to sea-ice knowledge, ecological security has served as a fundamental basis in the establishment of Nunavut’s and Greenland’s self-determination: self-determination through the management and development of resources according to ecological knowledge (Wildlife Act - c.26 | Legislation, 2003). Additionally, in a Canadian context, Inuit ecological knowledge supports the deployment of the military in the Arctic through the Canadian Rangers – of which the vast majority are Indigenous. Their deep knowledge of the land is essential in missions and thereby supports Canadian sovereignty over the North (Kikkert & Lackenbauer, 2021).

Greenlandic resource development has evolved through a juxtaposition of ecological imperatives and economic imperatives – a juxtaposition supporting independence. While the Nunavut Agreement talks about conservation and management, IQ talks about *avatittinnik kamatsiarniq* – respect and care for the land, animals, and the environment. While the Agreement frames human use of the land as “requirements”, “priorities”, “optimum protection”, IQ frames use of land within a relationship which brings about responsibilities and an ethics of care. Specifically, IQ anchors the conceptualization of ecological security outside of realist, state-centric understandings of security to incorporate critical constructivist perspectives. Such conceptual perspectives, thereby decenter the colonial from security towards instead a decolonial ecological conceptualization of security. Following thereby the decentering approaches of the critiques to development, decolonial ecology operates a similar push towards reframing power dynamics in shaping development discourses. Natural resource development under the premise of decolonial ecological security thereby serves both self-government and the re-evaluation of the substance of self-determination outside of colonial frames of extractivist economic development. Zacharias Kunuk’s documentary series on mining and its environmental impacts shared on IsumaTV, shows how relationality to both

environment and community underpins identity formation and underpins epistemological discursive creations (Kunnuk, 2019).

As Inuit Qanijimajatuqangit is divided and explained in 8 principles, a worldview comes to light against which the administrative frameworks of sustainability, from the Environment Social Governance framework to the SDGs, seems to clash in both linguistics and substance. Ecology has thereby been a strong vector for Inuit self-determination and continues to be a guiding force in not only circumpolar development but in global advocacy and governance efforts as well – the President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. Aluki Kotierk is serving as Chair for the 2025 United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues. Her opening speech highlights the importance of Indigenous leadership on “our lands, territories, cultures, and the future of our communities” which they are too often excluded from. In this vein, an Arctic century thereby foregrounds Inuit leadership in environmental governance through decolonial ecological security where “individual and collective rights are non-negotiable” (Kotierk, 2025). Decolonial ecological security thereby conceptually frames the shaping of (environmental) governance and development as applied to Nunavut and Greenland.

Conclusion

Arctic peace and security are deeply intertwined with Inuit environmental governance. As Greenland holds significant weight in the future of the circumpolar Arctic through its strategic geographical positioning and through its natural resource potential, cross-border Inuit leadership resonates regionally and internationally. While Nunavut and Greenland fall under different governance systems and enjoy different jurisdictional powers, under the framework of structuration theory, the two regions see the confrontation of several dynamics: Inuit epistemologies, modern economic development incentives, and great power competition and pressures. The re-evaluation undertaken of the notion of peace and security in the Arctic further develops the conceptual framework of Inuit decolonial ecological security to inform Arctic security studies. It reevaluates the triad Arctic exceptionalism – environmental governance – Inuit self-determination through the prism of both decolonial security and ecological security joined under a single conceptual framework. As such, Nunavut and Greenlandic environmental governance is adapting the global paradigm of sustainable development through its own decolonial economic and political agency. This adaptation thereby informs the development of natural resources exploitation, under increasing international and regional pressures and rising diplomatic tensions threatening regional institutional cooperation.

The 21st century is seeing the results of decades of self-determination advocacy by Inuit leaders and communities, leading to effective Inuit governance structures generating and in turn supported by international legal frameworks such as UNDRIP. While it remains unclear how this leadership will evolve in light of the recent tensions with the US. and Russia, the Inuit leadership footprint has shaped circumpolar dynamics. Against rising tensions and challenges to democratic rule of law, the Arctic century will thereby be shaped along this crux in between Inuit self-determination and imperial power coopting global sustainable development and decarbonization. Resource development forms the site of contestation in this crux. Inuit decolonial ecology has thereby grown its roots within resource development governance by shaping circumpolar cooperative dynamics through legally binding treaties.

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Appendix E - Soer, A. (2026). Multi-Level Governance for Renewable Energy Development in Nunavut: The Role of Community Consultation and Inuit Knowledge. *Northern Review*, (59), 87-114.

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Research Article

Multi-Level Governance for Renewable Energy Development in Nunavut: The Role of Community Consultation and Inuit Knowledge

Anna Soer*

Abstract: This study pertains to the governance of renewable energy development in Nunavut. Despite the strong environmental and security risks posed by diesel use and dependency, the development of renewable energy in the territory is slow. As domestic, regional, and international actors are moving toward decarbonizing energy infrastructure, the energy transition of Nunavut is facing structural obstacles ranging from the costs associated with modernizing and decarbonizing the energy grid, to human capacity constraints. In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable energy decision making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? As global attention is veering towards the Arctic, with strong emphasis on mining potential, the global energy transition becomes an opportunity for Inuit rights holders to develop local economies and livelihood opportunities, as well as invest in their own energy security needs. Since the signing of the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement in 2024, the cascading security threats of diesel dependency have become intertwined with needs to develop industries supporting the territory's energy transition. As such, through a qualitative content analysis of grey literature and seventeen interviews with key stakeholders and rights holders in Nunavut, this study offers insight into the governance of renewable energy infrastructure development in Nunavut.

Article de Recherche

Gouvernance multi-niveaux pour le développement des énergies renouvelables au Nunavut: Le rôle de la consultation publique et des savoirs inuits

Anna Soer*

Résumé : Cette étude porte sur la gouvernance du développement des énergies renouvelables au Nunavut, au Canada. Malgré les risques environnementaux et sécuritaires graves liés à l'utilisation et à la dépendance au gazole, la transition vers les énergies renouvelables dans le territoire progresse lentement. Alors que les acteurs internationaux, régionaux et nationaux s'orientent vers la décarbonation des infrastructures énergétiques, la transition énergétique du Nunavut se heurte à des obstacles majeurs : coûts élevés de modernisation et de décarbonation des réseaux électriques, ainsi que des contraintes de capacité. Dans quelle mesure les pratiques de consultation communautaire et le savoir inuit (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit) sont-ils intégrés dans la prise de décision concernant les énergies renouvelables au Nunavut, et quel est leur degré d'efficacité au sein des réseaux nunavummiut, canadiens et internationaux ? Alors que l'attention internationale se porte sur l'Arctique, notamment sur son potentiel minier, la transition énergétique mondiale offre aux Inuits titulaires de droits territoriaux une occasion unique de développer les opportunités économiques locales et les moyens de subsistance, tout en répondant à leurs propres besoins en sécurité énergétique. Depuis la ratification de l'Entente sur le transfert des responsabilités liées aux terres et aux ressources du Nunavut en 2024, les menaces sécuritaires découlant de la dépendance au gazole s'entrelacent avec les besoins de développement d'industries soutenant la transition énergétique du territoire. À travers une analyse qualitative du contenu de documents politiques, d'articles médiatiques et de dix-sept entrevues menées auprès des principales parties prenantes et personnes titulaires de droits, cette étude examine la gouvernance du développement des infrastructures d'énergies renouvelables au Nunavut.

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Introduction

As global attention is veering towards the Arctic, with strong emphasis on mining potential, the global energy transition becomes an opportunity for Inuit rights holders to develop local economies and livelihood opportunities as well as invest in their own energy security needs. Indeed, diesel generators are increasingly obsolete, and frequent oil spills as well as blackouts strongly threaten the energy and environmental security (thereby also food security) of Nunavut. Since the signing of the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement in 2024 (which devolved Crown lands and resources to the Government of Nunavut), the cascading security threats of diesel dependency have become intertwined with the need to develop industries capable of supporting the territory's energy transition. As regional, national, and international actors move to decarbonize energy infrastructure, including the development of renewable energy for their grids, the energy transition in Nunavut is facing structural obstacles that range from costs associated with modernizing and decarbonizing the grid, to human capacity constraints.

This study pertains to the governance of renewable energy development in Nunavut. In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable energy decision making in Nunavut? How effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? The study aims to better understand the operationalization of (i) Canadian frameworks for community consultation, Inuit Knowledge, and energy development; (ii) Nunavut-based frameworks supporting Inuit-led and Inuit-owned development; and (iii) international legal and policy frameworks related to the rights of Indigenous Peoples and sustainable development. The goal of the article is not to offer a roadmap on how to include Inuit Knowledge, but to reflect on the instrumentalization of Inuit Knowledge by organizations that highlight Inuit Knowledge as a key value and way of doing.

This research involved thematic content analysis of interviews with seventeen Nunavut stakeholders and right holders, and of relevant grey literature. The results show differences in (i) federal language versus territorial language; (ii) the stated policy of centring Inuit Knowledge versus its implementation; and (iii) the theory of community consultation based on the duty to consult and the free, prior and informed consent frameworks versus its implementation in federal and territorial policy on resource and energy development. These tensions between the federal, the territorial, and intra-territorial, showcase how pockets of Inuit self-determination in energy security and development become tools of resistance against colonial imposition.

Literature Review

Cherniak et al. (2015) examine the development of renewable energy solutions in northern and Arctic Canada and, through analysis of several projects, they suggest that the success of new technology deployment is tied to community consultation. The authors recommend further research (Cherniak et al., 2015, p. 129, 146; see also Simon, 2009; Arctic Council, 2021), specifically on community consultation that was missing for the 2016 federal moratorium on offshore oil and gas licensing in Arctic waters, and the European Union seal-product import ban (Peter et al., 2002). Literature is emerging on the topic of community involvement and the renewable energy industry in Nunavut; however, a strong focus remains on analyzing the industry in terms of energy security and climate change mitigation (Cambou & Poelzer, 2021; Hansen & Moe, 2022; Höysniemi, 2022; McDonald & Pearce, 2013; Trembath et al., 2022).

While extensive literature reviews and research on pan-Indigenous leadership in renewable energy development exist (Datta et al., 2024; Hoicka et al., 2021; Société Makivik, 2021; The Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council, 2024), since renewable energy development in Nunavut is relatively new, there is little such analysis for the Arctic. However, McDonald and Pearce (2013) highlight Nunavut communities' support for the development of several renewable energy technologies in their communities (while opposing hydroelectricity), and the authors suggest stronger community consultation policies to bridge perceived gaps in the public's knowledge about these technologies. Now, twelve years after the publication of this research, community consultation policies implemented by Inuit-owned private enterprises, such as the Nunavut Nukkiksautiit Corporation (NNC), are in agreement with not only McDonald and Pearce's findings, but also with territorial and federal law and policies on community involvement. However, a lack of conceptual clarity emerges when defining community involvement: what it is, what it entails, and how it is operationalized.

The term "consultation" describes activities where a local population's input is sought or required before a development project is approved to move forward. However, in the case of NNC the consultation process instead involves an "engagement" process, where NNC not only seeks insights from the community on a proposed project or issue, but gives decision-making powers to the community for the project's approval (Nunavut Nukkiksautiit Corporation, 2022).

The concept of consultation has received criticism for not offering fundamental change, but rather only a seat at the back of the table—this is in contrast with engagement processes that include co-design and co-production, which are embedded in the larger processes of reconciliation as well as the

devolution of decision-making powers and redefining the narrative on Indigenous self-determination and development (Arnstein, 1969; Baker & Westman, 2018; Lajoie-O'Malley et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2017; Slay & Penny, 2014). Indigenous self-determination is here understood within the framework of Nunavut's devolution agreement with the federal government, as well in the anchoring of Inuit values and knowledge in energy development. Community consultation, in the context of energy development, becomes a tool for the realization of self-determination, redefining power relations in decision-making processes.

Defining sustainability in an Arctic context requires foregrounding an Inuit vision of how sustainability is articulated within this context. Echoing Banerjee's critique of sustainable development as a reinvention of colonialism (2002, 2003), and Frandy's (2021) and Normann's (2021) critiques of its application within a Sámi context, the concept of "sustainability" carries with it a colonial legacy. Within an ethics of relationality in reassigning Inuit self-determination to the forefront of territorial energy development, existing academic and grey literature suggest there is a further need to establish conceptual clarity on not only community involvement but also on the effective incorporation of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) (Inuit values, knowledge, behaviour, perceptions, and expectations) into renewable energy development processes (Nunavut Culture and Heritage, n.d.; Nunavut Impact Review Board, n.d.). On a similar note, more attention is needed to the nuances and applicability of the energy transition in Nunavut as well as to how communities have the capacity and opportunity to determine the shape of this energy transition—if it is even applicable at all. It is in this space that the dynamics of energy transition and diversification, combined with community engagement processes and the centring of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, appear to be a critical knowledge gap in current Arctic energy research.

Indeed, while great emphasis is put on the energy transition—the green transition—as a fundamental piece of climate change mitigation action as well as environmental and health safeguarding in the Canadian Arctic, the green transition has received scathing critiques with Sámi leaders criticizing the imposition of renewable energy infrastructure on their lands as "green colonialism" (Fjellheim, 2022; Frandy, 2021; Normann, 2021).

In Canada, the energy transition has been federally incentivized, as previously highlighted. An energy transition in Nunavut, however, remains critically combined with concerns of reliability and affordability (Nunavut, 2025; Pepa, 2016; Pinto & Gates, 2022). As such, in response to those concerns of reliability and affordability, a more nuanced approach of energy diversification—instead of transition—is being advocated as a realistic path forward for the territory (Barnes, 2023; Byrne, 2018; Cambou & Poelzer, 2021; Soer, 2024).

Economically, oil and gas production in Nunavut is not seen as a promising industry, despite the territory holding estimates of 18 billion barrels of oil and 181 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, due to prohibitively high costs of infrastructural development—both in terms of human capacity and physical infrastructure including the lack of accessibility since there are no roads in Nunavut (Canada Energy Regulator, 2024; Nunavut Economic Development and Transportation, 2017; Pinto & Gates, 2022; Soer, 2024).

The mining industry—including for the critical minerals necessary for renewable energy infrastructure—is confronted with similar issues of human capacity and accessibility constraints, putting a damper on the mining potential of the territory (Ritsema, 2014). Nunavut has four operational mines producing gold and iron, and three critical mineral exploration projects in the Kitikmeot and Kivalliq regions looking to develop the mining of zinc, copper, silver, lead, gold, nickel, palladium, platinum, and cobalt (CIRNAC et al., 2024; NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, 2021). The Nunavut land use plan will determine the realization of critical minerals mining.

Environmental concerns have been paramount for local communities. As such, according to the 2021 Draft Nunavut Land Use Plan and the 2023 Recommended Nunavut Land Use Plan, 19% of land is under limited use (up from the 15% of the 2016 draft land use plan), meaning that there are year-round limitations and prohibitions on one or more types of land use; 12% is under conditional use with seasonal prohibitions on particular activities; and mixed use comprises 65% of the land, which means no prohibited uses or conformity requirements (Nunavut Planning Commission, 2021, 2023; Tranter, 2023; Venn, 2021). This draft plan would therefore mean that 22% of Nunavut would not be open to mining or other resource development. For the long-term development of renewable energy, this further pushes back the development potential of homegrown industries in the energy sector (Antunes, 2023; NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, 2021). While the mining sector has received a lot of opposition and criticism regarding its detrimental environmental impacts and at times violent social impacts (Kunuk, 2019; Pauktuutit et al., 2014), Nunavut Member of Parliament Lori Idlout's comment for the *Nunatsiag News* regarding the Land Use Plan draft exemplifies the growing tensions in the territory between environmental protection and economic viability: "I'm leaning towards becoming anti-mining, but I know how important critical minerals are for the functioning of our societies" (Antunes, 2023).

The development of renewable energy in the Arctic is thereby at the crux of the interplay between domestic and global forces (including international actors from foreign states to the private sector), which are placing Nunavut into this enmeshment of interests. Yet, while the mining industry—critical for the energy

sector for both fossil fuels and renewables—is heavily criticized in Nunavut by Nunavummiut, renewable energy solutions are increasing in popularity among the same general population. This duality anchors Nunavut again in the larger critique of green growth, as seen above, where the vast majority of mineral production will not be for domestic use, yet the territory will bear the brunt of its environmental and human impacts.

The literature on renewable energy development in Nunavut and elsewhere in the Arctic focuses largely on energy security and the green transition. However, the interconnection with the mining sector, and the reality of continued fossil fuel use for the foreseeable future pointing towards energy diversification, take a back seat and seem to operate in separate realms of research. It is within this complex insular literature on resource development that the triad of energy transition and diversification, community involvement processes, and the application of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is here explored. In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit embedded in renewable energy decision making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks?

Research Design and Methods

This study involved content analysis of interviews with seventeen stakeholders and rights holders, as well as content analysis of grey literature. Thematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2016) dives into key themes that are extracted from interviews and the literature to form the foundation of the analysis: In what ways are community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge embedded in renewable-energy decision making in Nunavut, and how effective are they under Nunavut, Canadian, and international frameworks? The literature was chosen based on relevancy. The government policy documents and legislation were chosen based on their applicability and relevancy for the context of energy development in Nunavut. The interviews were conducted in Iqaluit and virtually during the spring of 2024, and ranged between unstructured and semi-structured. Respondents included employees and representatives from circumpolar development organizations Inuit organizations, Inuit territorial and local governments, and federal government and northern agencies; scholars on Arctic affairs; and local residents. The individuals were chosen based on their professional capacity or, in the case of local residents, based on consumer interest in renewable energy development in their community. The diverse pool of respondents enabled a comprehensive view on energy development in the territory. While the interviews were mostly conducted in Iqaluit, the professionals responded to the interests of the whole territory and were not limited to their jurisdiction or to Iqaluit. An

exception was a local government representative who brought in the municipal perspective. The questionnaires were adapted based on the individuals, as well as their responses to the conversation. This allowed adding modifying questions to better reflect the ongoing conversation.

For community members, the core questions were formulated as such: What do you think about renewable energy in general? What do you think about renewables for your community? And do you feel that you are heard or that you have a say in the energy policy of the town? These three questions were formulated to leave plenty of space for the respondent to take the conversation in multiple directions. These questions aimed to juxtapose local residents' perceptions of renewable energy with how they imagine their own community's energy future as well as how they relate to local decision makers regarding energy development. These questions aimed to highlight either continuity or discrepancy in respondents' perceptions of renewables both in a hypothetical larger context and in the specific context of their community. The questions also aimed to spark conversation on governance proximity between local residents and local/territorial and federal decision makers.

For individuals interviewed in their professional capacity, the questionnaires were adapted to the individual's position. However, key themes remained: application of both the law and of development policies whether territorial, federal, or international; inclusion or foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge and community consultation; relations between the public sector and the private sector; capacity constraints including engagement fatigue and staffing issues; as well as other social inclusion markers, such as gender, in energy development. These questions aimed to provide insight by highlighting multi-level governance within the territory and in relation with the federal government using domestic and international frameworks; in relations between sectors and the local population; and in the dynamics of inclusion in community consultation. This methodology allowed for direct insights into the perspectives of decision makers and rights holders through a multi-scale approach. Choosing both interview methodology and content analysis of relevant policy documents enabled confronting policy with the lived realities of decision makers and rights holders. The methodology also enabled insights into the lived realities, especially on the meaningful incorporation of Inuit Knowledge.

The thematic analysis of the interviews and literature was conducted manually by extracting recurrent vocabulary or recurrent remarks within their context. It is logical that a question on engagement fatigue, for instance, would spark an answer containing the term engagement fatigue many times throughout the conversation. This does not mean that engagement fatigue is a determinant factor in shaping

operationalization of energy development policies. This thematic analysis hence used a qualitative approach that both contextualized the content and provided informative insights into respondents' perceptions and understandings of renewable energy development in Nunavut.

The results of this analysis are shown using word clouds (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The choice of word clouds responds to two imperatives. The first is that the visualization of word clouds enables a clearer understanding of key words as an ensemble. In short, word clouds enable a context, a landscape, to emerge out of textual analysis, that a simple table would not necessarily allow. In this regard, the word cloud supports the content analysis by offering a clear contextual visualization of the data. Second, the simplicity of a word cloud enables a clearer communication of research findings. Indeed, this study was conducted with respect for communicating results in a plain language format to the community members who participated in the research. Word clouds enable, in a clear and succinct way, the communication of research findings in a fun and interactive way (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014; Henderson & Segal, 2013).

Results

Thematic Content Analysis of Interviews

The interviews indicated a prevalence of interlinkages between people and their community, work, and development, as well as climate change in the Arctic and knowledge production (see word cloud of most prevalent terms in Figure 1). "Climate change" appeared 38 times, "community" 98 times (its plural appeared 65 times), and "work" and "development" 72 and 64 times respectively. "Knowledge" appeared 73 times and "people" 131 times. "Inuit" appeared 97 times. Given that the topic of the study was community engagement and the inclusion of Inuit Knowledge in renewable energy development, the results for community, energy, Inuit, and knowledge are not surprising. The Qulliq Energy Corporation (QEC) appeared 51 times, as a main actor responsible for energy development in the territory, as it is responsible for the grid. The Government of Nunavut (GN) appeared 24 times.

Respondents correlated the topic of renewable energy development with wider conversations on climate change and energy diversification. Energy diversification was, however, preferred over energy transition. As one respondent working for an Inuit organization remarked, "Don't force anybody to stop driving a fuel car. [...] I support anybody who wants solar and windmill, but for all the community to rely on solar, wind, tidal ... don't force anybody into

that.” However, another respondent from the federal government highlighted the need for better public education on energy diversification and renewable energy technologies: “There is no literacy on windmills and solar, the opportunities for misunderstandings are high. These are very new concepts. [...] How do we transition? What are the tools in our toolbox and meet the needs of the community?”

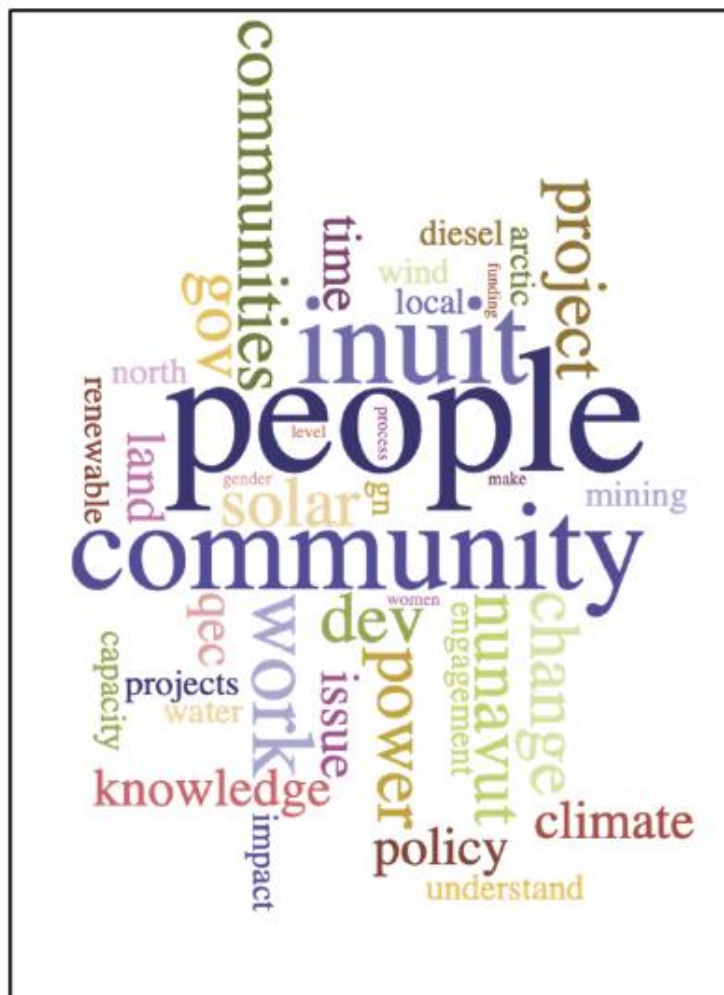


Figure 1. Word cloud representing the 40 most prevalent words in a content analysis of 17 interviews conducted in 2024 with Nunavut stakeholders and rights holders discussing renewable energy. Source: Author.

On policy and intergovernmental relations, one respondent working for an Inuit organization described the flow of information and policy making as a “top-down funnel of information” where “Southerners” come into the Nunavut energy landscape lacking insider knowledge and look to include Inuit Knowledge after the fact: “Don’t add in IQ [Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit], use IQ” (Inuit organization respondent).

On energy transition, decaying infrastructure was mentioned repeatedly. One respondent from the federal government recognized the challenges the energy corporation QEC faces in the maintenance of old generators, as they “can’t keep technicians.” One community member reminded about the dependency on generators: “We can’t totally go to renewables, because the sun sets and wind stops. We still need generators but we can be more economical in how much diesel we use.” A respondent from the energy sector responded by acknowledging the risks posed by an aging infrastructure: “We are continually preoccupied keeping the lights on. There are 25 communities with aging diesel generators,” which incentivizes the development of “ways to lower carbon footprint.” Relations with the federal government were here once again highlighted: “Everyone wants to get away from diesel. But newer generation diesel [generator] is much cleaner in terms of noise pollution and amount of energy per litre of fuels. We’re trying to communicate that to federal partners.” “Appropriate balance,” as mentioned by this respondent, was a running theme where virtually all respondents were not yet considering full energy transition. While the cabin program, which subsidizes the installation of solar panels on hunting and fishing cabins on the land, is very popular and mentioned by many respondents who engage in hunting, a full transition away from fossil fuels was not considered by the respondents: “You can’t just switch a generator out. You need electricity at all times” (federal government respondent). As such, key barriers to local and territorial adoption were framed according to structural capacity constraints: the need for qualified labour and the need for reliable and affordable energy formed the key criticisms against widespread adoption of renewable energy solutions.

On community consultation and consultation dynamics, some respondents highlighted the lack of consultation by actors in Nunavut, as one federal government respondent mentioned: “QEC hasn’t engaged well with communities. [They face] challenges with infrastructure, old generators [...] QEC could do a lot better” (federal government respondent). Virtually all respondents highlighted the importance of “community needs and preferences” (Inuit organization respondent) where “regional Inuit organizations have that connection to their communities and responsibility for their communities” as opposed to the federal government, which is not often at the table “going deep in with the communities” (Inuit organization respondent). Local residents also remarked on the need for

better consultation from the government: “The government does consultation once in a while but there’s not enough consultation I don’t think so. I haven’t seen environmental impact assessments. It’s going very slowly, I wish it was faster” (community member). Many respondents highlighted the apparent disconnect between southern Canadian and federal imperatives, and northern realities: “If I’m coming to the community with something that is southern, I get a southern response. When I do something that is northern, I get a northern response” (local government respondent).

Community consultation was often linked with the use and foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge, which, however, was confronted with a polarized reception, between instrumentalization and decolonization. Inuit Knowledge was described variously as a “buzzword” with “good intentions” (federal government respondent), as a “priority” (federal government respondent), as “more than simple statements” and “informing” institutional workings (Inuit organization respondent), or even as “red tape” where the more senior the position, the less it may or may not be incorporated (local government respondent). Inuit Knowledge was also described as a way to serve teamwork in combating engagement fatigue and capacity issues (local government respondent). The issue of passing knowledge from Elders to youth amidst climate change was mentioned, where the ancestral knowledge “being passed may no longer be applicable” (territorial government respondent).

The use of Inuit Knowledge, or Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, also varies conceptually where respondents used the terms “local knowledge” and “traditional knowledge” interchangeably. While the incorporation of “traditional local knowledge” was seen as “tricky,” a federal government respondent raised questions: “where does the boundary lie?” between traditional local knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge, especially in the context of circumpolar collaborations? Local knowledge was also used by community members to highlight the importance of local engagement in territorial development (local community respondent). Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit was seen as a tool for “local mapping of impacts” used for future development (Inuit organization respondent).

Specifically on community consultation, gender was mentioned 30 times by the respondents. The inclusion of gender on the topic of renewable energy development ranged from non-existent (the Inuit organization respondent and the local government respondent), to its inclusion at the administrative level, but not at the project level (the Inuit-owned energy sector respondent), to its inclusion at the discursive level but not at the project level (another Inuit-owned energy sector respondent). On gender, some respondents highlighted that current priorities lie more on the “better inclusion of Inuit perspective, IQ, and how do we adapt the way we work with culturally appropriate manners?” (territorial government respondent). This inclusion of Inuit perspectives related directly to

larger dynamics of high turnover (circumpolar development sector respondent, community member respondent) and engagement fatigue (Inuit organization respondent, local government respondent, territorial government respondent), which was also described as “over-engagement” (local government respondent). While engagement fatigue, as described either as a result of high turnover or over-engagement, is prominently recognized by most respondents, a local government respondent and a circumpolar development sector respondent challenged the notion of engagement fatigue, observing that “Anywhere in the world you have vacant positions. It doesn’t matter if you have 100 or 20 staff, as long as you have the environmental situation where it is calm, happy, and [where you] like what you are doing and get work done (local government respondent).” The other respondent also challenged the notion as “fatigue is not giving agency to people. It’s more an issue of capacity, or the turnover. It’s going back to the issue of education” (circumpolar development sector respondent).

Overall, interview respondents gave critical insights into the state of the inclusion of Inuit Knowledge, into community consultation dynamics, and into the reception of renewable energy at the federal–territorial relations level, at the territorial level, and at the local municipal level by both professionals and community members. While responses ranged, there was some consensus on the possibilities of energy diversification as well as the importance of incorporating local Inuit Knowledge into regional development, despite the recognition that it is not necessarily meaningfully done.

Thematic Content Analysis of Grey Literature

The grey literature documents were chosen for their ability to show the vertical and horizontal governance dynamics between actors relevant to energy development in Nunavut—the federal government, the Nunavut territorial government, the energy sector, international frameworks and institutions, and Inuit rights organizations. This analysis of vertical and horizontal governance serves to uncover the dynamics behind the framing and operationalization of renewable energy development in Nunavut under local, federal, and international policy frameworks. The documents analyzed included the following:

- Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement, co-signed by the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, and the Government of Canada (Canada et al., 2024);
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan (UNDA), which sets out how Canada will implement the federal United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Justice Canada, 2023);

- United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015);
- Inuit Nunangat Policy (Inuit–Crown Partnership Committee, 2022)
- Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (CIRNAC, 2019)
- Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor, 2019);
- Wildlife Act, 2003;
- the Arctic Energy Fund (under the Canada–Nunavut Integrated Bilateral Agreement signed in 2018); and
- Kinship and Prosperity: Proven Solutions for a Clean Energy Landscape Report (Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council, 2024).

The term “Indigenous” appeared 1,335 times across the legal and policy documents, “Arctic” appeared 719 times, “wildlife” appeared 583 times, “development” appeared 578 times, “peoples” 562 times, “sustainable” 337 times, “respect” 540 times, and “rights” 468 times. The term “public” appeared 263 times across all documents. See word cloud of most prevalent terms in Figure 2. Each document, however, through the central vocabulary utilized, emphasizes different themes. Across documents, there is some continuity in the emphasis on development. As several documents pertain to agreements made between the federal government and the territorial government, the notion of partnership is equally present. Similarly, documents relating to northern development such as the Inuit Nunangat Policy and the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework emphasize self-determination, treaty rights, and Indigenous rights. Territorial documents such as the Wildlife Act (2003) similarly lay down the importance of Inuit harvesting rights: “wildlife management should be an effective system that complements Inuit harvesting rights and priorities, recognizes Inuit systems of wildlife management that contribute to the conservation of wildlife and protection of habitat, and recognizes the need for an effective role for Inuit in all aspects of wildlife management” (Wildlife Act, 2003, s. 1(2)(m)).

The centring of the Inuit way of life, world view, and knowledge is echoed across the corpus, albeit in different ways depending on jurisdiction and intent. While the Wildlife Act, the Bilateral Agreement, the UNDRIP Action Plan (UNDA), and the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement are law—thereby utilizing legal terminology—the other documents (the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, the Kinship and Prosperity recommendations, the Inuit Nunangat Policy, and CanNor’s Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy) serve as indicators of policy intent and engage the responsibilities of parties involved in taking these recommendations and roadmaps to enactment either through programs or through law. The Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council’s Kinship and Prosperity recommendations report (KPR) is supported by the legal framework of UNDA, itself based on the United

While the Wildlife Act and the Kinship and Prosperity Report (KPR) foreground Indigenous self-determination and Treaty rights, the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework repeatedly emphasizes the partnership with Indigenous Peoples and the priorities of Indigenous Peoples through a nationalizing discourse of “our Arctic”: “Building on these new partnerships, the ANPF provides a long term foundation for transformative change, benefiting our Arctic, its Indigenous peoples, northern residents and all Canadians” (Canada, 2019, p. 8). Thereby, federal and territorial jurisdictional powers are clarified throughout the policies: while the sovereignty of the federal state is emphasized and reinforced, partnerships with Indigenous nations and communities are encouraged. Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) and Nunavut’s Wildlife Act, while serving very different purposes in different contexts, showcase the continuous balancing act of power dynamics between territorial self-determination and federal jurisdiction, where the verticalization of power—meaning the reinforcement of colonial power dynamics through policy—is challenged through horizontal legal channels in bilateral and territorial agreements. Documents written through Indigenous priorities and documents written through government administrative priorities thereby differ in their emphasis despite federal documents reiterating federal-Indigenous partnerships. Another difference in approach is the centring of Indigenous Knowledge—including language—in the Wildlife Act and the Kinship and Prosperity Report. As the KPR document emphasizes just transition through the free, prior and informed consent framework and through Indigenous leadership including Indigenous Knowledge, “which cannot, ever, be licenced or owned by the Government of Canada” (Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council, 2024, p. 2), the Wildlife Act highlights Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit 13 times throughout the statute.

This foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge in the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement is not present. Instead “Traditional Knowledge” is only mentioned once (Canada, Nunavut & NTI, 2024, p. 46); “Indigenous Knowledge” is also mentioned once (p. 59) where consultation with communities also appears, as well as once before (p. 41). Community consultation is only mentioned twice (p. 41, 59) in the document. The term gender only appears within a Canadian context in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (Canada, 2019, p. 39 in relation to sustainable development, pp. 47, 57, 60, 61, 65) and once in the KPR document (p. 3). The language difference between the Wildlife Act and the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement showcase the epistemological disparities between an Act written by and for the Inuit and an Agreement written for the federal government. This was corroborated by an interview respondent from the local government: “[We] wanted to put in a place that Inuit Knowledge has to be in the [Wildlife] Act. Which of those knowledge can we include in the Act?

We [...] took the 8 guiding principles to work for other departments and took [the principles] into the government system. [It] was only supposed to be for the Wildlife Act but [they] took it for all.”

With respect to energy, while the term does not appear in the Inuit Nunangat Policy, it does appear in the federal Arctic and Northern Policy Framework and Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy. Specifically, on energy diversification and transition, the two documents use the terms “green,” “clean,” “renewable,” “alternative,” and “bio-energy.” The Arctic and Northern Policy Framework emphasizes non-fossil fuel energy while the strategy recognizes the economic weight and structural dependence on fossil fuel (p. 14). The two documents use the term “diversification” only in relation to economic diversification. While energy diversification or even transition is not explicitly mentioned, the development of “green,” “clean,” “renewable,” or “alternative” energy sources is emphasized in both documents: “While the mining sector remains the cornerstone of territorial economies, new opportunities for growth are emerging across a diverse range of sectors including tourism, renewable energy, northern food sectors, commercial fisheries, and cultural and traditional sectors” (CanNor, 2019, p. 3); and “we will champion a number of circumpolar initiatives that support the development and deployment of green energy in Arctic and Northern communities, including initiatives related to exchanging knowledge and expertise on renewable and alternative energy technologies” (Canada, 2019, p. 69).

Notably, the ANPF calls to “Achieve energy security and sustainability in all communities and improve access to reliable, affordable and clean energy solutions” (p. 44). Such a call is consistent with international frameworks such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015). Under the Agenda, partnerships and prosperity are centred through the need to foreground the interests of people so as “to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment” (UN, 2015, p. 2). Strong economic foundations (article 27); safety, resilience, and sustainability (article 7); or urban infrastructure development (article 15) form the core behind the Goal 7 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Goal 7, “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” (p. 14), recalls closely the imperatives stated by Nunavut’s power utility Qulliq Energy Corporation (QEC) and by the Government of Nunavut. Reliability and affordability specifically form central concerns. As such, there is a noticeable continuity in key themes between Canadian and international frameworks.

The domestic policy documents the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework and the Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy, written by the federal government, both envision the future of the Canadian Arctic and North, and both outline economic visions for the territories while maintaining jurisdictional boundaries—the Yukon

and the Northwest Territories both have jurisdiction over their lands and resources at the time of publication of both documents. As such, while the specific terms of “energy diversification” or “energy transition” are not mentioned in the documents, non-fossil fuel energy is emphasized by language by the federal government. The CanNor Strategy document also mentions bio-energy as an alternative to diesel use in specific cases (p. 14). The Arctic Energy Fund (AEF) as stipulated under the Bilateral Agreement, however, explicitly calls for transition:

A.4 Rural and Northern Communities Infrastructure

a) Objective

i. The rural and northern communities infrastructure stream will support Projects that improve the quality of life in rural and northern communities by responding to rural- and northern-specific needs.

ii. This stream includes the Arctic Energy Fund, which will focus primarily on improving energy security through upgrading or replacing fossil fuel-based community energy systems and enhancing diesel transportation and supply in communities where connection to an electricity grid or relying solely on renewables as a source of energy is not a feasible solution. Finally, the Arctic Energy Fund will also support the transfer, in whole or in part, from fossil fuel-based systems to renewables.

(Canada–Nunavut, 2018, p. 22)

Additionally, eligible AEF projects “must meet or exceed any applicable energy efficiency standards for buildings outlined in the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change” (p. 7). The document uses both “renewable” and “clean” to define qualifying energy types under the Fund (p. 17). The Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement addresses the development, conservation, and management of non-renewable natural resources (Canada, Nunavut & NTI, 2024, p. 26). On renewable energy development, QEC’s Independent Power Producer Program enables “Integrating renewable energy systems in the territory’s energy grid [and] helps decrease Nunavut’s dependency on diesel fuel, enabling the corporation to reduce carbon emissions and promote energy self-reliance” (QEC, n.d.); it was previously not within the mandate of QEC to be able to integrate independently produced energy into its grids. While the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework mentions energy security once (p. 44), as does the Canada, Nunavut, and NTI Bilateral Agreement (p. 22), the Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy does not.

The thematic content analysis of the documents, juxtaposed with the thematic content analysis of the interviews, shows governance and policy trajectory dynamics between the territory and the federal government. While interview respondents emphasized the importance of community consultation and foregrounding of Inuit Knowledge—despite some difficulties therein—this emphasis does not appear in similar ways in the selected documents. The legal documents pertaining to energy development do not centre community consultation or Inuit Knowledge, but centre administrative processes pertaining to its management. Community consultation or Inuit Knowledge are only very rarely linked to the question of energy development. The policy documents also showcase a dissimilar discursive trend between federal documents and territorial documents—where federal documents highlight partnership and certain “buzzwords” like gender or renewable energy, and northern documents emphasize self-determination and Treaty rights, even when referring to energy. This analysis thereby demonstrates discursive realities constructing relations between the territorial government and the federal government as well as responding to international frameworks: one where priorities are struggling to find a common discourse, despite some alignment with international framing of energy as affordable, resilient, and sustainable.

Discussion

The thematic content analysis of the interview respondents and the selected grey literature both show a discrepancy between federal perceptions and priorities and territorial perceptions and priorities. The discrepancy between the Wildlife Act and the Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement illustrates the differences between the territorial government and the federal government, where Inuit Knowledge and community knowledge are foregrounded in starkly different ways. One aims at management for and by the Nunavummiut, while the other serves as guidelines in relation with the federal government. One is an Act, the other an Agreement. The interlinkages between community consultation and development, which were highlighted by the interview respondents, are not reflected in the documents with similar emphasis.

The disconnect, however, between the theory of foregrounding Inuit Knowledge—as acknowledged as essential by respondents and certain legal and policy documents—and its implementation, is apparent through the insights of the respondents. Describing Inuit Knowledge as “red tape,” and the inability of several respondents to clearly articulate examples of the application of IQ within projects, demonstrates a gap between policy and practice. This gap demonstrates the tension between shaping a territory according to Inuit identity, values, customs, and knowledge, and being a territory with a federal—colonial—system.

In this vein, the members of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) passed a resolution in 2021 directing NTI to pursue Inuit self-government, criticizing the Government of Nunavut for absurdly defending “colonial policies, programs and services” through a “focus on the non-Inuit minority” (NTI, 2021). Former NTI President Aluki Kotierk defended the Nunavut Agreement and “the hope and dreams that was originally envisioned for Inuit and their future generations” (NTI, 2021), which entails a renewed conversation on self-government within a colonial paradigm.

Against a state-centric approach, the results point toward an ongoing power negotiation between federal imperatives and jurisdiction, and territorial self-determination and jurisdiction. In this, IQ and community consultation, to achieve social licence, act as performative. In order to achieve the public’s acceptance of energy development trajectories, both for non-renewable and renewable energy, the apparent foregrounding of consent and IQ act as tools to craft an image akin to reconciliation between the federal government and the territorial government, as well as an image of democratic Inuit-focused efforts between the territorial government and the general population under the territory’s Nunavut Act obligations.

Yet, it remains important to nuance the failure of effective operationalization of IQ and community consultation, as this would also, to repeat the words of one respondent critical of engagement fatigue, not be “giving agency to people.” Dismissing community consultation and IQ just as tools under colonialism would strip these of any agency and their further potential for achieving self-determination. Neither would it correspond to the complex landscape of energy development in Nunavut where some companies, such as NNC, an Inuit-owned company, develop in-depth tools to support meaningful engagement. Neither would it show the ways that civil society is serving to protect Inuit interests in Nunavut through the work of organizations such as NTI, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. In short, while Aluki Kotierk and the interview respondents highlight the co-optation of certain “buzzwords” and institutions meant to protect and serve Inuit communities, this does not flatten the complex landscape of energy development in the territory—it co-exists with pockets of agency. It could be argued that it is precisely this co-optation, the continuous danger of colonial erasure, that forces the existence of streams of resistance, of other ways of doing.

The operationalization of Canadian frameworks, including domestic legal frameworks, supporting Nunavut’s self-determination, coupled with international policies, is thereby dual: while consultation and IQ are co-opted and meaningful implementation is lacking structurally, streams of agency in self-determination are finding ways to produce meaningful impact. The energy corporation’s Independent

Power Producer Program, for instance, is the result of long-standing advocacy by Inuit-owned businesses such as Nunavut Nukkiqsautiit Corporation to diversify the energy landscape of Nunavut while maintaining Inuit interests. In short, the renewable energy landscape of Nunavut, as seen through community consultation and IQ, is developing in tandem with both self-determination and continuous institutional colonial oppression. As such, this study provides research on renewable energy development in relation to community involvement processes and meaningful incorporation of Inuit Knowledge. It also highlights the lack of conceptual clarity of community involvement processes and therefore also shows the difficulties faced in meaningful implementation of Inuit Knowledge.

The Government of Nunavut and Inuit rights organizations Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, have co-developed collaboration strategies to address security in general. Under the Nunavut Arctic Sovereignty and Security Strategy, released in September 2025 by the government and NTI, energy security is explicitly named as a key area for empowered decision making, especially in regard to critical mineral exploitation and the green energy transition (Nunavut & NTI, 2025, p. 3). Replacing diesel dependence is also highlighted by ITK as a key strategy with the federal government's Major Projects Office as announced in November 2025 (ITK, 2025).

The strategies espoused by the Government of Nunavut, NTI, and ITK align under the premise of securing energy as a tool for self-determination to ensure that, "In this time of growing geopolitical interest in the Arctic, we must ensure that sovereignty is not only asserted—but lived, secured, and shared in full partnership with those who call this land home" (Nunavut & NTI, 2025, p. 3). The emphasis on full partnership links strongly with the foregrounding of the duty to consult and the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Additionally, the Sovereignty and Security strategy addresses the importance of foregrounding IQ, and specifically "Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq—our deep respect for the environment—and calls for action that protects both sovereignty and sustainability" (p. 4). It sees the inclusion of Inuit Knowledge as a "strategic advantage" (p. 20) and as part of a "fundamental shift" towards Inuit-led approaches and "partnership based on respect for Inuit rights, recognition of Inuit knowledge and leadership, and commitment to sustainable development that serves communities first while contributing to national goals" (p. 27).

The frameworks of the duty to consult and free, prior and informed consent, in conjunction with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, seek to guide energy-related decision-making processes between federal and territorial powers. However, their implementation remains asymmetrical between actors, where co-optation and the lack of meaningful incorporation thereby arise, resulting in engagement fatigue and overall discontent as reported by multiple respondents. It is within

this navigation of power with the federal government that the Government of Nunavut similarly navigates priorities and interests within the territory. While Inuit organizations have criticized the Government of Nunavut as essentially reproducing colonial violence, the government's obligations remain explicit under the Nunavut Act to secure services for its constituents, despite facing ongoing structural challenges. In this sense, community consultation and IQ become tools used by Inuit civil society and the private sector, as well as by some departments within the Government of Nunavut, to engage the territorial government in fulfilling its obligations.

Conclusion

The ways that governments, civil society, community, and the private sector are implementing community consultation practices and Inuit Knowledge in renewable energy decision making in Nunavut, and their effectiveness, have been explored using thematic content analysis, to identify how interview respondents talk about, and how domestic and international policy and legal documents write about, these issues. Renewable energy development operates within a wider realm of resource development in Nunavut, which in turn is influenced by natural resource exploitation in the Arctic and self-determination dynamics under devolution.

Concerns of human and environmental sustainability domestically are echoed in international frameworks concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, here analyzed under the Canadian UNDA), and sustainable development (the UN 2030 Agenda). Through conversations on sustainability, renewable energy development is anchored in larger restructuring efforts for how business is conducted and how relations with the federal government are framed in the Arctic. These larger restructuring efforts bring about conversations on community consultation, the place of Inuit Knowledge, and the operationalization of these policies calling for sustainable development.

The results of the thematic content analysis of both interviews and policy and legal documents have shown differences in (i) federal language versus territorial language, in (ii) the theory of centring Inuit Knowledge versus its implementation, and in (iii) the theory of community consultation, based in the duty to consult and the principle of free, prior and informed consent, versus its implementation in federal and territorial policies regarding resource and energy development. These tensions between the federal and the territorial—including discord within the territory—evolve within the context of colonial power dynamics between the actors. Energy self-determination becomes a tool of resistance against colonial imposition. The latest Arctic Security and Sovereignty Strategy published in 2025 by the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated highlight the need for the foregrounding of local needs and Inuit leadership in

northern development, especially as applied to energy development, including the energy transition. As such, while momentum is building in favour of local self-determination, the discrepancy experienced on the ground as well as the discursive differences between federal interests and territorial interests need to be addressed to build meaningful relevance to enact truly sustainable change.

These findings add to the existing literature on community consultation in the Arctic and offer insight on the complex landscape of renewable energy development in Nunavut. The case of renewable energy development shows the complex ways the federal system—through devolution—influences the ways that development plays out locally. The devolution process influences the ways through which colonial imposition and Inuit agency compose with one another—between co-optation and self-determination.

Positionality: The author is originally from Brittany (France) and the Netherlands, and has lived in Canada since 2021.

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