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Conclusions

In this study I have examined the relationship between clothing and identity in East Greenland from the end of the nineteenth century up to the modern era. I have connected my study to the extensive research on Arctic clothing conducted in the 1980s and 1990s. (Eicher (1995), Oakes (1991), Oakes and Riewe (1997), Issenman (1997), Bahnson (1997, at press), Sonne (2001, at press), Paukstad (at press), Petersen (1990, 1995, 2001) and others in their studies of Greenland clothing.)

My study has focussed on indigenous or emic perspectives, and sheds light on the choices, motivations, and intrinsic values of the East Greenlandic people with regard to clothing. Economic, social, political and religious aspects of clothing were studied, as well as the functional and spiritual ideas connected to it.

The aim of this research was to explore which identities were important to the Tunumiit (East Greenlanders), how they were expressed in their dress and how the developments in clothing reflected new identities in East Greenland. To examine this problem I divided the period under study into three main periods: the end of the nineteenth century, the first half of the twentieth century, and the second half of the twentieth century. I will present my main conclusions within this temporal framework.

The nineteenth-century clothing

Today, the clothing of East Greenlanders worn at the end of the nineteenth century is preserved only in museums in Greenland and elsewhere in the world. Garments of that period were almost exclusively made of animal furs and leather. The technical and aesthetic quality of the design, sewing, and composition is striking where both form and colour are concerned. The East Greenlandic clothing of the late nineteenth century was embedded in a complex field of relationships between the natural environment, and the social and religious aspects of Inuit culture.

Function

In the nineteenth century, men’s clothing was much better adapted than women’s clothing to variations in the natural environment. Men spent much more time than women outside the community. Clothing for both genders was adapted to the socio-economic roles of men and women. Women’s activities, such as child care, cooking, scraping hides or sewing, were performed in or around the houses within the encampment, and their clothing was adapted to this work and to life at the campsite or indoors. Specific garments, such as the women’s coats, *tattulat* and *amaarngit*, were suited to carrying children. The position of the sleeves was adapted to women’s work, such as scraping hides, gathering berries or mussels, and fishing. Male clothing was adapted to the hunters’ activities, and was oriented towards specific Arctic environments and seasons. This resulted in a great variation in men’s garments suited to summer or winter activities, or adapted to land or sea hunting. Adequate male clothing provided outdoor mobility, and was essential during hunting trips in kayaks or travelling on the ice. In winter, clothing such as polar-bear fur was preferred because of its warmth and insulating qualities. Gutskin and seal leather were the materials preferred for making summer boots and kayak anoraks, clothing that needed to be watertight during spring, summer or autumn.
Capacity and success
Garments expressed the sewing skills of the women who made them, and reflected the skills of the hunters. A successful hunter would provide his family with plenty of food and with a large quantity of high-quality animal furs and skins. His relatives could use the most beautiful skins for clothing, and could afford new clothing frequently. If the women were expert seamstresses their relatives would be clothed in beautiful garments. Thus differences between successful and poor hunters’ families were reflected in their clothing. Strong levelling mechanisms within East Greenlandic culture related to the distribution of meat and skins, prevented the differences from becoming excessive. Families were probably characterized by distinctive patterns handed down by the seamstresses to their daughters and other relatives.

Rites of passage
Clothing played an important role in the socialization of an individual. First events were never an individual affair, but always a social one. An individual should become a social person, able to receive as well as to give, someone with whom an exchange relationship could be created. Thus the baby’s reception of its first anorak was an important event in life, a rite of passage, an occasion on which the mother received presents. First events ensured the continuity of relationships and of the sequence of life. A young woman’s first menstruation and a boy’s first catch were stressed as important moments in one’s life, connected with gifts. Sometimes the importance of these first events was expressed by means of clothing, for instance the receipt of one’s first naatsit after a first menstruation. First events could also be celebrated by an exchange of gifts, such as meat sharing when a boy returned home with his first seal. First events in life were not only important because of the relational aspects involved, but also in terms of religious implications, taboos, and other prescriptions. Magic chants were often sung on these occasions, and some kind of conjuration might take place.

Whereas male clothing was specialized more with regard to different environments, women’s clothing tended to express different stages in life.

Spirituality and protection
Clothing could be used as a protection against harmful influences from spirits or evil people. Thus a child had to be protected if many brothers or sisters had died before it was born. Such a child received a special protective seal fur cap from its parents. Amulets would be sewn onto the clothing as protection, or a special garment would serve as an amulet; for example one’s first dress during infancy was a powerful amulet. A woman who was menstruating, or who had suffered a miscarriage, would cover her head with the hood of her coat to protect herself and her relatives. Clothing and skins were closely linked with a person, and had to be washed or removed from the house after a person died. The removal of clothing and skins was part of a separation ritual, when the removal of the deceased from the community was at stake.
Spirituality and exchange relationships
A close connection between clothing and the animal or spiritual world was of great importance at the end of the nineteenth century. There was a homology between the way the animals were protected by their pelts, and the way in which humans used furs for their clothing. The fur of the upper part of the polar bear was used for coats, the fur from its loins was used for trousers, while the leg fur was used for making boots. The animal’s fur was used as a second skin for a human being. The animal skin, transformed into clothes, enabled a person to survive in the Arctic climate. It was assumed that the animal gave its life, so that the human being could survive by means of its meat and fur. There continued to be a relationship between a human being and the seal that gave its skin. This was often expressed in an idiom of kinship or identity, and a ritual exchange between man and animal was a prerequisite for killing the animal.

Within Inuit society exchange relationships between individuals and family groups were, and still are, of great significance. Examples are the meat-sharing relationships, the naming of newborn children after their deceased relatives, and exchanges of presents on the occasion of different social or religious events in life. There was also an exchange relationship between the hunter who provided his family with food and skins, and his wife, who prepared the food, skins and clothing. By respecting the animals, by being properly dressed and using high-quality hunting equipment, and by observing the relevant taboos, the hunter and his wife showed respect towards the game and towards the animals living outside the campsite. Processes of life and death, including menstruation and childbearing, as well as cultural activities such as sewing, could directly affect the results of the hunt.

Several contrasts and features in the use of clothing deserve our attention: for example, winter and summer clothing; dressing and undressing; getting dressed properly, or using garments upside down; boys dressing as girls or girls dressing as boys (cross-dressing); a wrong combination of garments; clothing as disguise; and so on. These aspects were strongly represented in Uaajeerneq (or Mitaarneq in West Greenland). This atypical use of clothing is the only clear example found of festive dress or festive costumes at the end of the nineteenth century. Comically dressed actors sang, performed drum dances, beat the audience, made explicit sexual gestures, wore masks, or blackened their faces with soot. Uaajeerneq was probably rooted in an ancient religious fertility ceremony, but the religious connotations of the festival had already been lost by the end of the nineteenth century. Uaajeerneq was held during the dark winter months. The winter solstice was ritually marked; on the shortest day of the year, new clothes were made for the eldest child, and festivities were held. New clothes might also be made, to ensure continuity and repetition.

Clothing was used to modify and express the relationship between human beings and the spiritual world, examples being the removal of clothing from the house after a birth or death, the use of garments as amulets against dangers, or dressing in an anorak back to front when making a tupilak. Turning garments inside out or upside down, cross-dressing, blackening the face with soot, or using feathers or wings in one’s dress, established and expressed the relationships with the spirits.
The nineteenth-century clothing reflected the important identities of a hunting society. The relationships to animals, expressed in the materials, the style, the ornaments and amulets, as well as the stages of life of a person such as married status or old age were expressed in clothing. Distinctions in quality of materials or design reflected different relationships between the hunter and the game. Only a good relationship between the hunter and his wife on one side and the spirits and animals on the other would result in the perfect materials and elegant designs that distinguished the successful hunter and his family from other Inuit.

In the nineteenth century, multiple identities combining social, spiritual and economic features were expressed in the clothing. In clothing East Greenlanders articulated their cultural identities in relation to important values within their social communities.

The clothing of the first half of the twentieth century

In the first decades of the twentieth century, western clothing became available at the trading posts in the area. It was integrated rapidly into the indigenous clothing habits. In the same period, clothing from West Greenland was also adopted. Religious, economic and political changes contributed to the transformations in East Greenlandic clothing in the first half of the last century.

Economic development and its influence on clothing

When the Danes arrived in East Greenland, the economy of the Greenlanders was self-sufficient, and was based on hunting, fishing and gathering activities. Social organization was primarily based on kinship, and men and women cooperated within family structures. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the area was seriously affected by western whaling activities. European and especially Norse whaling had reduced the whale population and devastated the large seal population off the coast of East Greenland, contributing to, or even causing the periods of starvation experienced in the nineteenth century. Several East Greenlandic families settled near the trading post, gradually abandoning their semi-nomadic lifestyle. The first relatively large settlements were established in East Greenland in the first decades of the twentieth century. Barter with Europeans developed, but European goods were expensive. Since these goods were highly valued and popular, the East Greenlanders were willing to pay relatively high prices. As time passed by, Greenlanders became increasingly accustomed to bartering goods with Europeans, and better prices were negotiated. The Danish protective, and somewhat paternalistic policy toward the East Greenland colony, stimulated better yields of hides and pelts.

Due to a shortage of large sealskins in the 1920s and 1930s, the East Greenlanders began to lack the large skins necessary for covering tents, kayaks and umiaks, and for sewing the soles of their boots and making other items of clothing. Indigenous skin clothing thus began to disappear. Cloth became a welcome supplementary material for sewing indigenous garments, and for imitating European garments. Ready-made European garments were increasingly bought in the shop.
A new religion and new clothing

Permanent settlement of Greenlandic families close to the newly built church facilitated conversion to Christianity. Angakkit were baptized, and shamanism and indigenous healing practices went underground. The ministers prohibited drum dances, song duels, and striking-the-lamp games.

The first baptized East Greenlanders were women and children. The new Christians had to surrender their amulets to the minister, and they each received a new Christian name. Men voluntarily cut their hair short, and cut off the tailored edges of their coats. Women were expected to cover their bare thighs between their short pants and long boots. The abandonment of ‘heathen’ clothing habits, and the adoption of textile clothing indoors, fitted the new ideas about modesty.

Rites of passage and first events were incorporated into the new Lutheran rituals. These transitions were partly expressed by clothing such as christening dresses for infants on the occasion of their baptism in church. Gradually, Sunday dress developed out of West Greenlandic garments combined with European textiles. Women wore cloth anoraks (without hoods) that would be decorated with bead collars in a later period. They combined these garments with seal-fur trousers of West Greenlandic shape, decorated with strips of painted sealskin and dog fur. The long festive boots were sometimes made of sealskin painted red, violet or black. The men dressed in cloth anoraks, ordinary trousers of seal fur or cloth trousers, and decorated seal-leather boots of West Greenlandic shape. In the 1930s, white cloth anoraks for festive occasions were adopted from West Greenland. The Lutheran ministers introduced previously unknown religious garments: the long black gown with a white pleated collar of the palasi (minister), and black anoraks combined with white bands during services, for the ajerit (Greenlandic catechists).

Social and political implications, change and continuity in clothing

East Greenlanders rapidly adopted West Greenlandic types of dress. The West Greenlanders’ own social categories were represented visually in their clothing. Thus differently coloured hair ribbons around the women’s topknots indicated their marital status. Traditional East Greenlandic nineteenth-century clothing indicated social categories such as puberty, marriage, or motherhood. These social categories were much more strongly articulated in female clothing than in the wardrobe of males.

East Greenlanders adopted the social marks connected with the West Greenlandic type of clothing, but they were not applied with great strictness. Flexibility and personal choice dominated, and exceptions to ‘the rule’ could frequently be seen.

Differentiation in age and gender was also expressed in European clothing. Young women often wore cloth dresses or skirts, and woollen tights. They arranged their hair in a modern European fashion, and abandoned the traditional topknot as a social mark of the married woman. New social markings, such as wedding rings, were introduced along with European types of dress. The East Greenlanders gradually adopted these social differentiations as expressed by European clothing.

Skirts and dresses were used exclusively by women and girls, and replaced the older traditional East Greenland female clothing. There were changes in form, shape, and type of
garment. The notion of gender-specific clothing was continuous; femininity and age continued to be expressed, but the markings of fertility and sexual maturity, so clear in the nineteenth-century female garments, disappeared from the clothing.

At the end of the nineteenth century there were no different status groups, but the quality of the furs and sewing were indirect indications of social status and wealth of individual families.

When West Greenlanders and Danes settled in East Greenland in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Danes occupied the ‘modern’ key positions: merchants, ministers, political managers and medical staff, for example. Other outsiders were sailors, researchers, and a few travellers. West Greenlanders were employed as catechists, as ministers, as employees at the trading posts, and many of them brought their families with them to East Greenland. They hired East Greenlanders for temporary jobs. This meant the beginning of an occupational specialization and (a new) social stratification. West Greenlanders and Danes played dominant roles within a colonial setting, expressed by European types of clothing such as suits and jackets, hoods and caps. Sometimes professional clothing, such as the white clothing worn by medical personnel, could also be seen among Europeans.

Access to money became of increasing importance in the daily life of the East Greenlanders. Those who obtained paid jobs were in a favourable position for earning money, but if they were mediocre hunters they still gained less respect than successful hunters. Traditional values lingered on, and hunting remained the main source of income in East Greenland.

In the first half of the twentieth century relations were not solely determined by relationships to game, but also by relationships to the Danes and West Greenlanders. Integration of West Greenlandic and Danish garments expressed that a person was successful in dealing with these outside influences. The availability of money created a new status hierarchy in Greenlandic society that expressed itself in clothing materials and styles. External influences stimulated the articulation of new identities in clothing, such as regional and ethnic identities. Social, religious and economic features continued to be expressed in garments, but these features themselves changed as the Lutheran faith replaced shamanic beliefs and practices and the increasing influence of trade and a cash economy affected social and economic relations between the East Greenlanders.

The clothing of the second half of the twentieth century

During the second half of the twentieth century, traditional East Greenlandic fur clothing disappeared almost completely from the material culture. European clothing was rapidly incorporated into the life of East Greenlandic men, women and children. This development in clothing took place during the ‘Danization period’. During the modernization of Greenland (1945-1960), Danish ideas and values were dominant. The relationships between Greenlanders and Danes have developed, moving from Danish dominance, via antagonism and polarization during the ‘Greenlandization period’,
towards increasing cooperation and equality between Greenlanders and Danes at the turn of the millenium.

During the second half of the twentieth century, clothing in East Greenland began to follow Euro-American fashions. Increasing social and economic differentiation in the population now began to be expressed in clothing. But even today, when Inuit dress in modern fashions and new materials, traditional values continue to play an important part.

Age, fashion and status
Today, many East Greenlanders dress in western casual wear, comparable to that of Europeans living in northern areas. Differences in dress between older people and youngsters can be seen. Older people tend to wear the type of dress they were used to in their youth, whereas youngsters follow the latest Euro-American fashion. New fur products designed and produced by the sewing workshop Skæven, are highly appreciated by young women. Sometimes fur mittens, bags, and house shoes are copied at home, and clothes designed by Skæven stimulate and change fashion in East Greenland. Only East Greenlanders or West Greenlanders and Danes with well-paid jobs can afford expensive fur coats designed by the sewing workshop or by the firm Great Greenland.

Work clothing with the colours or emblems of firms operating in East Greenland were introduced in the second half of the twentieth century. Employees dress in these clothes, expressing an identity derived from the firm for which they work. Professional identities were introduced and expressed in clothing, a good example being the religious professional clothing, including the catechists’ black anoraks, deriving from West Greenland.

Developments in festive clothing
Out of the indigenous garments influenced by West Greenlanders, festive costumes developed. Nowadays, festive clothing is used within the private context of personal rites of passage, which continue to be important and meaningful to East Greenlandic families. A child’s first school-day is celebrated, as is the confirmation of teenagers. On such occasions, European festive clothing is worn side by side with Greenlandic festive costumes. The national Greenlandic costumes express social identities, which function within the boundaries of kinship and family life.

In different contexts however, festive garments - especially the East Greenlandic variants such as the cotton amaait and East Greenlandic type of anoraks composing the national costume - can express regional identities. Simultaneously with the nation-building process and the development of an overall Greenlandic identity, national symbols such as the national costume came into existence, in relationship to the outside world. A fixed image of ‘traditional Greenland culture’ develops, is valorized, and retains new significance within the modern Greenland society. Elements of traditional material culture, such as the national costume, are kept in Greenland museums. They become static and can no longer be changed.

A few key figures within the East Greenlandic community and the Tasiilaq Museum play an active role in stimulating the process of consciousness raising about the (re)invention and revitalization of East Greenlandic material culture and clothing. This slightly elitist
movement, with a background of acculturation, feels it has a mission to preserve East Greenland (material) culture but in doing so, its members construct a new East Greenland identity. When the singing choirs held competitions and were broadcast on Danish and Greenlandic television, then East Greenlandic variants of Greenland’s festive costumes were not only worn because of this festive occasion and their beautiful appearance, but also because they express regional identities. The same garments express Greenlandic national identity, when worn on 21 June, during the celebrations of Greenland’s National Day. Festive costumes worn by politicians in the Home Rule parliament, or abroad during political meetings, may also express national identity. Clothing with the logo of the political parties has been developed, and is used within the country, especially during the elections. This ‘political clothing’ expresses political affiliations and political preferences rather than Greenlandic national identity.

Clothing and identity

_Uaajeerneq_ or _Mitaarneq_, the tradition of disguising oneself, is still preserved, but its context has changed, and it must be evaluated differently in Greenland today. Performances by disguised players within a local East Greenland community take place on several festive occasions, varying from Three Kings on 6 January to Greenland’s National Day and International Women’s Day in March. Performances by disguised actors inspired by traditional _Uaajeerneq_ games are adopted by Greenlandic theatre groups, and occasionally they are broadcast on Greenland’s television. They can sometimes be seen abroad on special occasions. In this national or international context, _Uaajeerneq_ or _Mitaarneq_ are valued as ‘Greenlandic culture’ and for their importance to the development of a Greenlandic identity.

East Greenland clothing can be seen on Greenland’s television during festivities such as the choir, or dance competitions. The clothing worn acquires a regional connotation, and contrasts with garments typical of other regions within Greenland. This ‘regional clothing’ is recognized everywhere in Greenland, thus standing for East Greenlandic regional culture and identity.

New identities have emerged, and are expressed in newly introduced, developed or reinvented clothing, related to new and ever-changing cultural, economic and political contexts. Often these contexts are connected with semi-European settings, for example umiak rowing in ‘traditional’ costumes in the context of Greenland’s National Day celebrations. Here a traditional Greenlandic activity which had disappeared out of daily life is (re)invented and performed during a political Greenlandic celebration, which is based on new European political structures. Greater uniformity and increasing diversity, a mixed population and a mingling of cultures, continuity and change, go hand in hand in Greenland. The developments of clothing and identity point to a vital, creative and living East Greenlandic culture, developing new identities within the framework of ever-changing contexts.

In the second half of the twentieth century professional identities developed that were reflected in clothing. People began to orient themselves to global fashions and the need
Conclusion

for a specific Greenlandic identity was reflected by the development of a national costume. The wish for regional identities created regional variants of the costume. The process of globalization is continuing and Inuit will orient themselves more and more to global fashions, but the need for a Greenlandic identity remains strong and new institutions such as the Skaeven workshop provide models of fashion that enable new elites to connect their global orientation to a newly constructed Greenlandic or national identity. A greater pluriformity in regional variants and Western fashions on one side and an increasing uniformity, in the national dress, can be observed. These trends are connected to processes of globalization and localization in the clothing developments in East Greenland. In the late 19th century, clothing and identities in East Greenland were marked by social, spiritual and cultural identities. The confrontation with West Greenlanders and Danes triggered the development of regional and ethnic identities and political notions of regional and national identity.

Changing relationships

Today, the modern clothing bought in shops seems to have little in common with the traditional fur clothing. Most modern clothing comes from outside, illustrating the importance of the impact of western culture on Inuit society. People, who can afford it, dress in expensive clothing from fashion houses or the Skaeven Atelier. Yet Greenlandic society has a strong egalitarian streak, and people are not encouraged to show off too much. Whereas in the past the successful hunters would be the best-dressed people in the community, today people with the highest income can afford the best clothing. There is no doubt that clothing, in the past and in the present, expressed success and prestige, but what do these categories mean in the context of Greenlandic society?

In the past, success in hunting depended on good relationships with the spirits and the game. Those who respected the game and honoured the spirits would be successful. A cosmological component was involved here: hunting was an exchange between cosmological agencies and human beings, and dressing well was a way of honouring the game and the spirits. Social identities were defined in cosmological as well as social terms. Thus clothing did not only express internal status differentiation, but also relations to outside cosmological agencies, and dressing well is a way of maintaining relationships with these. When the Danes and West Greenlanders arrived in East Greenland, the East Greenlanders adopted many features of their clothing. In doing so they established relationships with these outside agencies, who came to exercise a large degree of control over their lives. East Greenlanders continued to adopt western clothing and lifestyles up to the present day, but this does not imply that they also identified with West Greenlanders and Danes. To a large extent they adopted these things just because they regarded them as different, as representing the outside agencies. By adopting the outsiders’ types of dress, an (exchange) relationship with them is established and expressed, for outsiders are important to the local communities. They are comparable to the animals and spirits in that they provide people with the means to survive, but a strong sense of ‘otherness’ is also involved, and these outsiders remain strangers.

Considering the cosmological significance of clothing, one would expect religious cloth-
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ing to acquire a special significance in Greenlandic society, and this is exactly what happened. At the end of the nineteenth century, cosmology and ritual were embedded in the daily practice of hunting, notably the killing of the animal, and the preparation of meat and skins. There was no special religious clothing, but with the arrival of Christianity, Sunday and other religious feast days were distinguished from the daily routine of life. Greenlanders developed special festive clothing for these special occasions in order to express their relationship with God. Today this festive clothing has greatly influenced the modern national costumes, expressing modern Greenlandic identities. The importance of outside agencies in clothing is still evident in modern clothing. Modern fashion, including Nikes and 'MTV dress', especially popular among young people, is also related to the outside world. Modern music and the trendy outfits acquired through postal catalogues or the internet, or in other words: “everything you always dreamed of”, come from outside.

Clothing has always represented an interface between outside and inside, and in this respect nothing has changed. Greenlanders have never given up the essentials of their culture; they still conceive of themselves as hunters, sharing and exchange are still central values within the East Greenlandic society, and are still widely practiced. Traditional values continue to shape hunters identities, but even though Greenlanders conceive of themselves as hunters, they know that they cannot go back to the past. They are conscious of the fact that they need the relationships with outsiders, knowing that today outside agencies change the society of East Greenland. We must not make the mistake to think that East Greenlanders want to become like these outsiders. They are intent on retaining and reshaping their own cultural traditions. Thus there may be a partially negative image of the outsiders and the outside world, but what exists outside is also desired and needed: it is exchanged and shared.

Clothing and identities represent relationships that are continually designed, shaped and reshaped. Garments continue to be tangible identities, representing choices in relationships. Modern furs and fabrics constitute transformations, rather than a break with the past.