

In my lifetime

When Aleqa Hammond, in March 2013, was handed the keys to the Premier's Office on the ninth floor of Nuuk's new mall, the first thing she took note of was that even from this lofty height, she could still make out the faces on the street. Then she took in the view: she could see the fjord, the old colonial harbor and the low, wooden buildings built by the first colonists. To the east, she could see the modern new apartment complexes built on the lower reaches of the "Store Malene" mountain. She could see the hills on the other side of the airport. Behind her desk she had hung an old gold-framed oil painting of a proud Greenlandic hunter stalking birds. Spear raised, dressed in kamiks and polar bear fur pants, he was the epitome of the honorable hunter, forever in harmony with nature. Behind him the mountain of Uummannaq was clearly recognizable, as if to emphasize that Hammond had grown up in the real Greenland: the cold, distant northern part of the country. The rest of the office was furnished with a hypermodern, ash grey sofa set, flowers on the windowsill, candles, a smallish snow-white polar bear carved out of soapstone and polished to a high shine. Everything was carefully thought out, nothing frilly, the office vaguely homely but also businesslike.

A year later, in February 2014, back in Nuuk after a trip that took her to Paris, Brussels, Tromsø in northern Norway and Copenhagen, Hammond, during a two-hour interview in her office, discussed why she had made her vision of Greenlandic independence from Denmark her political trademark. She explained why independence, for her, was about much more than the subsidies from Denmark, and why she insisted that Greenlanders distance themselves from their past as a colony and the 300 years under Danish dominion. "I find it only natural to discuss independence. It's only natural that we want to be independent. It's only natural that our people want to be responsible for all that affect our lives. We want to chart our own course; we – as a people, country, culture and citizens of a globalized world – feel that is the way it should be. About 80 percent of all Greenlanders voted in favor of self-rule in 2008. The people of Greenland voted for greater autonomy and for taking the next step in building our country. I am proud to come from a country where people are not in doubt."

Within a year of getting elected as Greenland's political leader, Hammond had managed to establish herself as Greenland's biggest proponent of independence from Denmark to

date. In November 2013, she told *Information*, a Danish daily: “I think as the leader of an independent nation.” She went on to explain that in her opinion Denmark’s most important contribution to Greenland was the recipe for mincemeat patties, sautéed onions and gravy. She added that she made gravy better than most Danes. “It tastes delicious with whale steaks.”

The headline made it as if Hammond felt that gravy was most important thing Denmark had provided in the course of 300 years. A year later Hammond’s statement was still repeated from north to south by Greenlanders as typical of her ability to distance herself from Denmark, while also embracing the undeniable ties. In one interview after another, she reiterated that her most precious vision was to see Greenland declare its independence in her lifetime. She also, however, maintained that Greenland’s fate would be forever tied to Denmark’s. She was never afraid to address this apparent contradiction. “All my life, Greenland has been a part of another country, and I am very aware of that other country. I don’t look at things just from a Greenlandic perspective. There is a Danish part of me, and there is a Greenlandic part of me. The Danish part of me is not something that I have chosen, but it is still a part of who I am. It wasn’t my choice to learn Danish, I was told to. I couldn’t not take Danish classes in school or choose another language. We have Danish norms, Danish laws, our school calendar follows the Danish school calendar, we have Danish doctor, teachers, and traditions, and our public holidays, our religious holidays are those of Denmark’s. I have no problems interacting with Danes even though I have never lived there. Denmark has an enormous influence here. I am a subject of another country, and that has affected me personally, just as it has affected us as a people.”

Even before she was elected, Hammond used carefully selected elements of her past as the foundation of her political message. She was fond of recalling how she, when she was 12, asked her mother if she could stop using her given Danish name. The vicar in Uummannaq agreed to a name change, and since then she’s only used her Greenlandic name. A symbolic story that she also made sure to bring up the first time she appeared live on Danish television in early 2014.

When Hammond was young, the population of Uummannaq was less than 800. Her father, a hunter, died at sea when she was seven. Her key constituents were those in the tiny hamlets and small villages of Greenland’s western coast, not the modern cosmopolitans in Nuuk, the capital. She spoke of the women and hunters who fish with a long-line, and who knew their

halibut, their whales and their seals and how to butcher them. It was these people who gave Hammond and her political allies their convincing political victory. An electoral avalanche, witty observers called it. Hammond received 6,818 votes, far more than any other Greenlandic candidate ever had. Her party's second biggest vote getter, Hans Enoksen, himself a former premier, received just 632. The opposition leader, Kuupik Kleist, 4,369. Greenland's urban elite, who by and large had supported Kleist and his cadre of educated candidates, barely knew what had hit them, but Hammond herself saw her victory as a mandate to push Greenland further down the independence path. "My mother grew up at a time when all the important decisions were made in the Greenland Ministry, in Copenhagen. Her schooling, her work and her place in society. I, on the other hand, grew up at a time when we had our own parliament and our own government. Today, we are shaping a society based on our own ambitions and norms. We dare to do more, and we want to do more. We demand more of ourselves. I like that. I am part of a movement, of a people on the move. We no longer need to live on fishing and hunting alone. We focus on education, diversity, working together with other countries, greater responsibility, taking responsibility for more areas of public administration. Greenland is setting the agenda, both at home and abroad, and people are becoming more politically aware. I am not the leader of this movement; I am a part of it. I am just the first premier who has dared to be so open about it."

As the new head of Naalakkersuisut, Greenland's cabinet, Hammond quickly waded into controversy. Her critics felt she was hideously populist and she divided Greenlandic opinion far more sharply than it had ever been parted before. She pursued her goals with a fervor that bordered on the brutal, and when she formed her first coalition government with Atassut and Partii Inuit, a newly formed protest party, their common manifesto included a controversial promise to address the traumas of the colonial era: "In order to distance ourselves from the colonization of our country, we must engage in a process of reconciliation and forgiveness. An action plan to accomplish this will be drawn up." A few months later, her coalition put forward a budget that included financing for a Reconciliation Commission. Hammond told Sermitsiaq, Greenland's most widely held newspaper, that it would include a historian, a psychologist, an anthropologist, a sociologist and quite possibly a church official, and that their job would be to "address the issues that were preventing basic reconciliation with the colonial period, the relationship between Denmark and Greenland and our people".

The precise aim was not perfectly clear, and for many the Commission was as irritating as a bug in the ear. Hammond's critics accused her of demonizing the Danes in order to win electoral support. Others feared that she was comparing Greenland's colonial past with Apartheid in South Africa. Among these was Uffe Elleman-Jensen, a former Danish foreign minister: "You'd think that Greenland had an abysmal past on par with Apartheid. But it was never like that. Why don't we come back to reality? A reconciliation commission is something you set up after years upon years of abuses and you really have something you need to need to address. That's just not the case here." Mogens Lykketoft, another former foreign minister, and the current president of the Danish parliament, was also bearish on the idea. "I have a different point of view than Aleqa Hammond. It is correct that mistakes were made in the past – by both Danes and others. But, the people of Greenland were never intentionally mistreated. You'll find few examples of colonial powers that have had less of an interest in profiting from or a greater interest in developing their colony. As far back as I can see – at least as far back as the 1920s – Denmark's distinct aim has been to raise Greenlandic living standards to the same level as in Denmark. Denmark might have been overly paternalistic, but everything was always done with the best of intentions."

Lykketoft's and Elleman-Jensen's statements were typical Danish reactions to Hammond's plans for reconciliation. Both are considered close friends of Greenland, sympathetic to many of Greenland's aspirations, but during a March 2014 interview, Lykketoft disagreed with Hammond's opinion that a majority in Greenland supported independence. "We've intermarried and formed families for 400 years. A lot of Greenlanders have ties with Denmark – not just mentally, but also personally. There are a lot of Greenlanders down here, and there are very few pureblooded Inuit in Greenland anymore. That's why I don't think you are going to see a firm majority for dissolving the kingdom for the foreseeable future. You might see a temporary majority every once and a while – just like we've seen it in the Faroe Islands – but when it comes right down to it, the majority isn't there. Personally, I'm happy about that. Being three countries together in a single kingdom enriches us all."

Greenland's 2014 budget set aside 9.6 million kroner to fund the Reconciliation Commission for the next four years. *Weekendavisen*, a Danish weekly, calculated that if Denmark were to set aside the same amount of money per capita, the budget would be over a billion

kroner. Put another way, it was half of the 20 million kroner Greenland had set aside to bring down cancer rates. Nevertheless, Hammond defended the budget's size. In her new year's address, she said: "We've progressed so far that we Greenlanders are now recognized as a people with the right to self-determination. This recognition is a right the Greenlandic people are granted according to international law and the UN. But as we have taken steps to develop our country and ourselves as a people, we have neglected to discuss what was happening. I dare say that some of the biggest taboos in our society have emerged as a result of our history and the relations between the various groups in our population. We must break these taboos and make people more aware of the relationships that exist between them. We must also be ready to make a change if we come across something that is unjust. There were situations where people's feelings were hurt. These sentiments need to be addressed, and reconciliation is the next logical step. We must reconcile ourselves with the past, as well as with different population groups and with ourselves. We must take responsibility for our own country and take the next step forward as a people, and in so doing give more people the chance to take responsibility for their own lives and to contribute to our society."

It wasn't immediately clear whether Hammond and her staff would let Greenlanders who wanted to make claims for wrongs suffered at the hands of the colonial authority be able to do so as individuals, or whether it was the nation of Greenland as a whole that, like so many other former colonies before it, felt the need to write its own history. The Danish government, though, rejected the whole Commission out of hand.

Ulrik Pram Gad, a University of Copenhagen political scientist, summed up the debate in *Europa*, an on-line magazine: "The constant refrain repeated by Danish lawmakers about a 'kingdom of equals', has always rung hollow in Greenlandic ears. New generations of Danish politicians can have all the best intentions to speak and act politically correct, but it's not clear in what respect the relationship is equal, or how far that equality extends. Greenlanders can point out any number of incidents from both the past and present in which Copenhagen has said one thing but done another. They can also relate examples of how equality was something they had to fight for."

For many Greenlanders, it remained unclear what Hammond expected the commission to achieve. But during the interview at her office, she readily explained her thoughts. She aim was not to blame Danes or to get Denmark or the Danish state to apologies for the past. “I’m not trying to make anyone responsible. I can’t ignore that Denmark is a part of Greenland’s history. But this isn’t about getting rid of Denmark; it is about us moving on as a people.” Hammond wasn’t out for an apology. Instead, what she envisioned was historians and others identifying what wrongs Greenlanders feel were done to them and then taking a look at what actually happened. “Denmark and Greenland did not agree on everything. If you believe that you’re lying to yourself. We didn’t make thousands of Greenlandic children legally fatherless together. We didn’t decide together that the Thule people in the north of the country should be forcibly relocated overnight just so someone could build an airbase. We didn’t decide together that the mining town of Qullissat should be shut and its people moved. All these events are a part of our experience as subjects of the kingdom. We need to reconcile ourselves with that history, before we can move on. There is a lot that we can’t talk about today, but I find it natural to discuss something that is such a big part of who I am.” Hammond described how she expected that the colonial past would be dredged up by the reconciliation commission in public meetings, in televised debates or in radio broadcasts, and that this would lay the foundation for reconciliation. The process, she felt, would give many Greenlanders the peace of mind they need in order for them to be able to begin the arduous task of preparing the country for its independence – be it in the mental, political or economic sense. “We know this works. It isn’t the first time a former colonial power and the people it colonized have sought to reconcile with each other.”

One Danish prime minister had already once issued a formal apology on behalf of the Danish state. In 1953, 116 people living near Thule were forcibly relocated after the US military insisted that they were in the way of an extension to its airbase at Thule. The Danish state stealthily organized their relocation to Qaanaaq, some 150 kilometers further north. In the decades that followed, Copenhagen reiterated on multiple occasions that the relocation was voluntary, but their claims failed to hold water once an official inquiry was launched. And when a Danish court, in 1999, found that the relocation had been unlawful, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the prime minister at the time, was forced to pay the group 1.7 million kroner in compensation and issue a formal, measured apology – in Greenlandic. “In the spirit of the kingdom, and out of

respect for the people of Greenland and the people of Thule, the Danish government, on behalf of the Danish state, apologizes – utoqqatserpugut – to Inughuit, the people of Thule and the entire nation of Greenland for the manner in which the relocation was decided and carried out.”

In reality, the apology wasn't just a Danish apology. It was a joint Danish-Greenlandic apology, co-signed by Jonathan Motzfeldt, the head of the Greenlandic Home Rule government at the time, thus signaling just how difficult it often is to draw a clear line between what Danish lawmakers were responsible for and what their Greenlandic counterparts were responsible for.

Later, other members of Rasmussen's Social Democrats were promising more apologies; the idea was not alien to the Danes – even if Hammond said more apologies wasn't what she was looking for. When *Jyllands-Posten*, a Danish daily, ran on its front page in the spring of 2014 a feature article about her plans to set up the reconciliation commission, Trine Christensen, the deputy secretary-general of the Danish chapter of Amnesty International, welcomed the prospect of further apologies. “History isn't something that we can just put on the shelf. We need to identify what actually happened and then we need to follow up with appropriate action, such as an official apology for the past wrongs that still affect Greenland today.” During the interview at her Nuuk office, Hammond mentioned that the Canadian state had long since apologized for forcibly removing tens of thousands of Inuit children from their biological parents. The Sami of Norway and Sweden have been apologized to by Oslo and Stockholm for past transgressions, just like Australia's Aborigines got an apology, but the idea never gained traction in government circles in Copenhagen. Astrid Nonbo Andersen, a historian at Denmark's Aarhus University, explanation that Denmark, ever since it lost Norway, its German territories and its Indian and African colonies, had sought to live up to a self-image of a small, homogenous, Danish-speaking nation with humanitarian outlook. For that reason, Denmark apparently had a particular need to maintain an idealized image of its colonial period. Andersen at this time had just polished off a doctoral dissertation that explored how residents of the West Indies, which Denmark sold to the US in 1917, were immediately rebuffed by Copenhagen in much the same way Greenlanders were, when they wanted to write their own history and asked Copenhagen to be part of the process. Her research into the West Indies experience left her wondering why Copenhagen was rejecting the Greenlandic request, since Denmark's role in the development of Greenlandic society and its extensive social problems is so well documented. She reckoned that the government's

decision not to assist the reconciliation commission was influenced by two factors: firstly, the government believed that Danish colonialism wasn't nearly as brutal as British or French colonialism, and that it didn't have any harmful effects, and, secondly, because they feared the Commission would lead to hefty Greenlandic claims. The government likely feared that agreeing to take part in an attempt to re-write Greenlandic history would be interpreted as an admission that Denmark made real mistakes, which in turn could lead to new, and costly, reparation claims.

The parties making up the governing coalition in Copenhagen did not admit to these sentiments. Christian Friis Bach, a spokesperson for the Social Liberals, explained the decision to reject the commission in *Jyllands-Posten*, a Danish daily: "We've never been at war with Greenland or in a conflict with them. We've co-operated with them, for better and for worse. Of course there were things we should have done differently, but there's no point in apologizing for what was done in a different time and by different people living in a different situation." Søren Espersen, of the Danish People's Party, accused Hammond of having delusions of being an Arctic Nelson Mandela. Only *Weekendavisen* went against the stream in Copenhagen. In an editorial, the paper's editor-in-chief wrote that the reconciliation commission was a good idea. "It is high time that we find out what the Danes who were involved can be accused of – and, conversely, what they can't be accused of. Were there scandals? What kind of wrongs do people feel were committed? Who was hurt? Who was at fault? Let's bring it out into the light!" Knudsen urged Thorning-Schmidt's government to work whole-heartedly with the self-rule government in Nuuk on the commission, but by then the lines had already been drawn.

In Nuuk, the setting up of the commission continued. An administrative head was found, and a number of professionals offered to assist as experts. Among them, Jens Heinrich, a Greenlandic historian, whose 2012 doctoral dissertation examined the political development of modern Greenland. He found Aleqa Hammonds initiative promising: "We know that many of the unfortunate circumstances we see in Greenland today can be traced back to the errors of the past. If we confront modern Greenlandic history, it will allow us to move forward more confidently and quite possibly debunk some of the myths of Greenlandic history. One of the things that it will be particularly important to look at will be to what extent Greenland's lawmakers have been

responsible for what happened.” Speaking with *Jyllands-Posten*, he lashed out at the Danish refusal to take part in the process. “A people needs to know and write its own history. That is how we must see the reconciliation commission. It is not an attack on Denmark and Danes or an attempt to get an apology out of them.” Shortly afterwards, Heinrich was appointed as one of the five permanent members of the commission.

In Qaqortoq, in southern Greenland, Christian “Pablo” Poulsen, one of Greenland’s most respected journalists, was voicing a similar opinion, if somewhat more vociferously. As a regular in the Greenlandic media, Poulsen was well known to the public. He was also known, in political circles, as one of the founders of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, a transnational Inuit NGO, in the 1970s, as a union boss and as co-founder of Nammineq, Greenland’s first separatist movement. “The time for a reconciliation commission has come,” he said, suggesting that its work begin with the arrival of Hans Egede, a Danish-Norwegian missionary who established a colony near modern-day Nuuk in 1721. “Egede was a great proponent of colonialism. His philosophy was ‘to preach is to colonies’. He persecuted our shamans because he knew that they bound our communities together. Many Danes say that they haven’t done any harm to Greenlanders, that they didn’t wage any wars or carry out any massacres. But, a psychological massacre is just as painful as a physical massacre. And that’s what has happened here.”

The plans to set up a reconciliation commission were highly divisive. One of those energetically opposing Hammond’s proposal was Finn Lynge, a major voice in Greenlandic society and like Christian “Pablo” Poulsen also a resident of Qaqorotq until his death in April 2014. “She makes people think in ways that are just despicable and terrible. It’s as if the relationship between Denmark and Greenland could be compared with Belgium and Congo. But Greenland is much different. Greenland was the only colony anywhere where no one was ever executed in the name of the king. That wasn’t even case with the Sami in Norway and Sweden. Those who study realpolitik will tell you that the greatest enemy is a successful person who spreads nonsense. Should the queen apologize to Aleqa Hammond on Denmark’s behalf? Should the prime minister? Should we apologies for something done in a particular historical context? That is nonsense.”

Lynge, in the 1970s, was the head of KNR, Greenland's public broadcaster. He also served for five years as an MEP and played a crucial role in the establishment of Greenland's representative offices in Brussels and Copenhagen. He held an honorary doctorate from the University of Greenland and was known well beyond the country's borders for his books about Greenlandic politics and culture. He saw Hammond's reconciliation commission and her vision of an independent Greenland as two sides of the same coin. "I have no idea what she is talking about. Independence from what? The dollar exchange rate? What is she talking about? Will that mean that the Danish navy will withdraw its fleet? Who's going to enforce our territorial sovereignty at sea or keep foreign fishing boats out of our waters? It just doesn't make any sense. The woman is full of hot air – and you can quote me for that!"

For Hammond the issue was a hornet's nest. When the debate over reconciliation and Danish colonialism started to gather speed in 2013, she found herself under fire for raising a divisive public discussion about who is a 'real' Greenlander when she linked her quest independence to a wish to strengthen the Greenlandic language, culture and tradition.

Many Greenlanders with Danish blood felt as if they were being made inferior to "full blooded" Greenlanders, or, worse, that they were somehow suspicious if they didn't fully support Hammond's positions on independence, culture or reconciliation. Hammond, as always, brushed the criticism aside. "I am not a nationalist," she told *Kristeligt Dagblad*, a Danish daily. "Wanting to strengthen Greenlandic culture should not be seen as a nationalistic project. It should be seen as a natural desire to strengthen Greenlandic identity."

Before the first year of Hammond's term had passed criticism of her governing style was intractable. According to one former politician, the message of Hammond's speeches abroad and what she was telling voters at home were far from the same. "She's saying something totally different here at home. She started going on about independence while she was in Denmark and in other places before we had the chance to come to any sort of consensus here. It's a discussion we've never had here. What does she mean when she says 'in my lifetime'? How does she plan on doing it? We don't know. It might well be possible, but it would be appropriate if she talked to us about how the unemployed and students can take part in the process, and what role they would have in an independent Greenland."

Kuupik Kleist, Hammond's predecessor as premier and leader of the opposition until March 2014, found it hard to express his frustration in diplomatic terms: "The political climate isn't very good for the time being. She uses independence as an excuse for avoiding political discussions about more down-to-earth issues. At the first sign of resistance, she bristles and takes it as sign that you are anti-independence."

At that time, Kleist still maintained that he had no intentions to step down as the leader of IA, the main opposition party. One of his party's main objectives was independence, but he cared little for Hammond's approach. "My party is a pro-independence party, but I have always maintained that we need to build up a country that can stand on its own two feet first. If you say that we can become independent by your 70th birthday or before you die, then you risk creating a society that lack in areas like democracy, economics and foreign affairs. Independence might be feasible in the next 40 or 50 years, but right now nothing is happening because of the rotten political climate and the long list of disagreements between Greenland and Denmark that Aleqa Hammond has caused."

Not long after Kleist announced his own resignation as party leader. During the press conference, he explained that it was time for a new generation to step in and get ready to take on the challenges that awaited them – including the next election. The week before, *Berlingske*, a Danish daily, had reported that Kleist and Ove Karl Berthelsen, a former mining minister, were setting up a consultancy, advising foreign mining and oil firms seeking to do business in Greenland. Anders Meilvang, the chairman of the Greenland chapter of Transparency International, accused Kleist of misusing his political position for private gains. Even if he stopped as a lawmaker, he would still face a number of ethical dilemmas, Meilvang found: "Morally, it would be a problem if he stated making money as a consultant because he would be able to use his connections to get influence the decision-making process in a direction that wasn't for Greenland's best."

In reality, said Steen Rønsholdt, a professor of public administration at the University of Copenhagen, only a handful of people will be deciding over Greenland's copious natural resources. "That is why all these conflict of interests are cropping up. The country's economic affairs are determined by a very small number of legislators. That goes to show how vulnerable the situation

is when you have a country as large as Greenland but a population of only 57,000.” Kleist didn’t seek to hide his commercial interests. When *Sermitsiaq* asked whether his decision to step down was caused by the media’s revelation that he was building a consulting firm, he categorically denied any connection. “No, not at all. I’m not employed by a mining company. Our firm is to offer consultancies and we’ve barely done business with anyone yet. Things are dead right now.”

His resignation as leader of the opposition benefitted Hammond position, but there was dissent among her own ranks. Hans Enoksen, a former premier and a former Siumut leader, quit the party in January 2014 and set up Partii Naleraq (the guidepost), which stood in direct competition with Siumut. It was a serious blow for Hammond. She was down to a single vote majority in Inatsisartut, and Enoksen’s new party was expected to erode her voter base among fishermen and hunters, her key constituents.

In the government headquarters, in the office directly under Hammonds, her environment minister, Kim Kielsen, explained that he, in principle, was behind the premier’s political project, but that he personally felt it was unrealistic that independence was conceivable in his own lifetime. “We’re all passionate about independence,” he said, thumping his chest. “We should be able to decide over ourselves in Greenland, but we have different points of view internally in our party. I would like to see the next generation get better educated so that they can decide for themselves if they are ready for independence or not.”

Hammond was as cool about internal dissent as she was when she took the rostrum during international gatherings. Critics predicted her government would be short-lived, but her supporters believed that her sheer will and charisma would allow her to hold on for many years to come. During the interview at her office she spoke fervently about ending Denmark’s domination and making room for a unique Greenlandic identity.

In Uummannaq, she learned English before she learned Danish. She wrote in English to her pen pals and her childhood friends still remembered how she travelled abroad as a 15-year-old to improve her English. While Danish was a second language for most other Greenlanders, for Hammond it was her third. In Uummannaq, her Danish teacher spoke enough Greenlandic that she could get away with not speaking Danish to him. She learned Danish in fits and starts over the years. As a student at Arctic College in Nunavut, she learned Inuktitut, which is related to

Greenlandic. At one point she was married to a German and changed her name to Gemander. She lived in Europe, where she became proficient in German and learned passable French. When she moved back to Greenland, she changed her name back to Hammond and became the head of tourism for Qaqortoq, in southern Greenland. In 2004, she married again, this time with the curator of the town's museum (a Dane). After a niece was born with a hearing impairment, she learned sign language. Hammond is a polyglot, but when she became premier, she had to accept that Danish is still a dominant language in Greenland. In Nuuk's main library, it was Danish cookery books and biographies of Danes. In schools from Illorqortoormiit in the northeast to Nanortalik in the southwest, Danish teachers teach in Danish. Flowers flown in from Denmark are marketed in Danish. Each day, the news on KNR, the national public broadcaster, is diligently translated from Greenlandic to Danish and broadcast to Danish speakers during prime time. Civil servants, including her own permanent secretary, prefer Danish to Greenlandic.

Hammond, like many other Greenlanders, is strongly put off by this linguistic dilemma and just days after her interview for this book, the on-line editor of KNR, the broadcaster, a Danish journalist who'd been working for KNR for two years, breathed new life into the belief that Danish-speakers forms a dominant elite in Greenland. The nation's three main media outlets, KNR and the two newspapers *Sermitsiaq* and *Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten*, have all had Danish managing directors and editors-in-chief for as far back as anyone can remember. Then, in February 2014, KNR's on-line editor received a press release from Nikku Olsen, a Hammond supporter and chairman of the small party *Partii Inuit*. The press release explained that the party had elected a new executive committee. Since the 2013 election, Olsen had been a vociferous opponent of Danish domination, and a defender of Greenlandic language and culture. He had a conviction for domestic violence, and lacked polish as a politician, but Olsen was hailed by many for saying what others didn't dare to. After reading the press release, the editor sent out an e-mail intended only for his closets workmates: "Looks like Adolf has got himself a new executive committee. Let's run something about it so people can see for themselves what kind of loser he and his party are." For the editor, it was to be the start of a very embarrassing chain of events. Instead of forwarding the e-mail, the Hitler reference and all, to his closet colleagues as intended, he had replied to Olsen's original message.

The next day the editor was fired. Nick Nielsen, Hammond's culture minister, demanded a report from KNR and the broadcaster's managing director issued a formal. Critics, who for years were suspicious that all the media had a Danish bias, saw the episode as confirmation of their worst fears.

When it came to the economy, Hammond, almost from the start of her term, found herself at odds with many economists, who found it was wholly unrealistic that the independent Greenland she dreamt of would be able to support itself any time soon. During the interview at her office, however, her rhetoric took on a less immediate tone. "It's not as if we're saying that we want to break away right now. Before we can do that we need to wean ourselves off the block grant. The Self-Rule Act lists 32 administrative areas that we need to overtake before we can get that far. Only when that's done can we negotiate what needs to happen in order for Greenland to become independent. When we reach that point, on the other hand, is up to us."

She crossed her arms, clearly expecting the usual follow-up question. Anyone in Greenlandic politics knew about 'the jaws of death': a prediction by Greenland's council of economic advisors, and by the government-seated Tax and Welfare Committee, showing a colossal gap between expected income and the forecasted rise in expenses brought on by a rapid increase in the number of pensioners and a similar decline in the working-age population. If the two trends continue unabated until 2030, the shortfall will be a billion kroner annually. Given this prospect of consistent deficits, Hammond's talk of independence, many analysts said, couldn't be anything but politicking. Her critics found it difficult to believe that she was ignorant of the fact that the money an independent Greenland would need to live off were not likely to materialize. Describing the situation, Claes Kanstholt, a columnist for *Berlingske*, commented on her dream of independence and invoked the Danish stereotype of Hammond's countrymen: "In reality, an independent Greenland is just an alcoholic's dream." Other critics accused Hammond of selling Greenlanders a vision of the future that she herself didn't believe.

She smiled when the follow-up question finally appeared. "You know what? In 1979, when Home Rule was established, I didn't know that a Greenlander could become a pilot or a doctor or an executive. Today, I can hire a Greenlandic solicitor if I want. I can go to a Greenlandic

doctor or specialist. When I fly on an Air Greenland flight to Copenhagen, the pilot speaks Greenlandic. It's fantastic what we've been able to accomplish in the span of just 30 years. No other indigenous group anywhere has been able to accomplish so much. Our educational level is still too low, and, I admit that we face major economic challenges; in 20 years there will be twice as many pensioners as there are today, and that we're going to be facing a billion kroner deficit each year. Foreign economists and experts say this constantly, but they aren't telling us anything we don't already know. That's exactly why we are trying to do something about it. I'm up-beat and I am optimistic – about the future of our people and of our economy.”

She was equally unconcerned about Greenland's dependency on the block grant: “I see us gradually moving out of its shadow. In 1979, before I could vote, the block grant made up an outrageously large part of the budget. Look it up yourself. When we moved to self-rule in 2009, the block grant's proportion of our national income was far less. As we educate ourselves more, our reliance on it decreases. The importance of the block grant will decrease over time.” She would not let pessimism keep her from pursuing her political goals. She and her allies acknowledged that there were challenges, but they chose to focus on the opportunities and do exactly what was necessary to pursue them.

There was no shortage of obstacles. Hammond's first year as Premier was dogged by a number of scandals. First were the revelations that Nikku Olsen, the Partii Inuit founder that were compared with Hitler, had been convicted of domestic violence, which meant he was ineligible to stand for election and needed to be replaced. Around the same time, it emerged that Julie Rademacher, Hammond's young special advisor, had been hired without the position being publicly advertised and that she was working without a contract. Such transgressions are far from unheard of in Greenland, but it became a major issue and when Rademacher, just a few weeks after Hammond's government took office, decided to resign, the media was all over it. Then, Hammond's staff sought to head off all the negative press by withholding official information and when the government's legal advisor questioned the legality of their actions, he was promptly fired.

Svend Hardenberg, Hammond's permanent secretary, quickly became a lightning rod for controversy. Before being hired by Hammond, Hardenberg, long known as one of her political

allies, was the chief public official in Qaasuitsup, the country's northernmost municipality. In Nuuk, Hardenberg got involved in the nomination of the Finance Ministry's permanent secretary, who turned out to be under investigations for financial crimes in Denmark and – despite Hardenberg's support – far from suitable for the job. The stream of bad news continued when *Berlingske* reported that Hardenberg, while serving as executive for Nukissiorfiit, the national power company, had received a warning for claiming travel expenses while also driving a company car. Hardenberg accused Hammond's adversaries of running a politically motivated campaign against him and he remained Hammond's top civil servant.

Nine months into her term in office, all but two of the permanent secretaries leading government ministries had either quit or been fired. The situation reached a climax in January 2014, when Tom Osterman, Hammond's domestic partner and a former police officer, was hired as special advisor for Karl Lyberth, the fishing and hunting minister and a member of Siumut. The media claimed that hiring Osterman was a blatant example of nepotism. Osterman was let go after three days, and not long after Lyberth was gone too. Hammond appeared as incompetent leader and her staff badly lacking. The criticism stung, but Hammond, as in the past, gathered her bearings and moved forward unfazed. A year into her term, even her opponents were forced to admit that she seemed to thrive on adversity and not snobbish. At her office she discussed recent meetings in Copenhagen with PM Thorning-Schmidt and Queen Margrethe. Danes often claim that Greenlanders are heartfelt supporters of the monarchy, but Hammond exercised her typical coolness. "The monarchy's importance changes from generation to generation," she said, smiling. "I think the monarchy will keep its ties to Greenland for as long as it exists in Denmark. My grandmother always got two biscuits and a half a pound of coffee from the Royal Greenlandic Trading Company each year on the king's birthday. For us the monarchy has always been something comforting and generous. But, whether it remains a part of Greenland after independence is something that Greenlanders will need to decide for themselves."

Her comments on the queen's relationship with Greenland were blunt. "She has to visit us, whether she wants to or not, because she needs to keep an eye out for the state's interests in Greenland and the Faroe Islands." During their meeting, Hammond said the queen expressed concern about Greenland's industrial development. Hammond also pointed out how the decision to give Prince Vincent and Princess Josephine, the youngest children of Prince

Frederik, the heir apparent, Greenlandic middle names, should be interpreted two ways. She was enthused about Prince Frederik's interest in Greenland, but giving the children Greenlandic names – Minik and Ivalo – probably also carried an ulterior message, she said. The royal family, she found, was also using the Greenlandic names as part of an effort to strengthen the bonds between Denmark and Greenland. "These two names haven't been chosen at random. They are using the monarchy to show that Greenland is important to Denmark. The monarchy has a Greenland policy."

The royal name game was not without precedent. In 1940, when Queen Margrethe was to be christened, Iceland, at that time a Danish colony, was close to declaring its independence. Her father, who later became King Frederik IX, gave her the Icelandic name Thorhildur.