

Greenland is not for sale: A lesson to Trump (and Denmark) on colonialism

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Another day, another Trump tweet. Sad! This time the president of the United States, Donald Trump, attacked the Prime Minister of Denmark, Mette Frederiksen, for not wanting to sell him Greenland. Describing the ‘offer’ as “absurd”, Frederiksen joined Trump’s list of ‘nasty women’ as he swiftly cancelled his upcoming state visit to Denmark as a result.

We, the Danes, laughed as we shared cartoons of the Danish queen struggling with a temperamental baby Trump on social media. And we got angry as we tweeted ‘how dare he take OUR land!’. We were perplexed to say the least. Centre-right Liberal’s Greenland spokesperson Marcus Knuth said “we have worked closely with the US on security policy in the Arctic, but to air the idea of buying Greenland is completely over the top”.

But here’s the thing: Greenland isn’t Denmark’s to sell. And Marcus Knuth: your comparison between Lolland (a small Danish island) and Greenland is frankly just as outrageous – you are erasing Greenland’s long and devastating history of colonialism under Danish rule.

So to Trump, Knuth and so many others, here’s a two paragraph history lesson: The colonial period for Greenland began in 1721, when it became placed under joint control of the Dano-Norwegian monarchy. In 1815 it became a sole colony under Denmark and was fully integrated in the Danish state in 1953 under the [Constitution of Denmark](#). May I add, all of this without any consultation with Greenlanders.

Thankfully that changed. The [Greenland Home Rule Act](#) in 1979 was a step towards autonomy, establishing Greenland’s own parliament. And in 2008, Greenlanders [voted](#) in favor of the Self-Government Act, which meant that more power was transferred from the [Danish government](#) to the [Greenlandic government](#). Greenland’s foreign policy, security and international agreements are still, however, under Danish control. But yes, in essence, Greenland belongs to about 50,000 Greenlanders.

Now let’s give credit where credit is due. The Danish Prime Minister did respond to Trump’s ridiculous tweets saying: “Greenland is not for sale. Greenland is not Danish. Greenland belongs to Greenland, ” which of course is my point. But here’s my second point: It’s not enough to denounce Trump’s neocolonialism while ignoring your own.

Danish neocolonialism takes many forms. In essence, the so-called modernisation period after 1953, also known as “Danization”, forced through concentration and resettlement programmes which tore communities and cultures apart. It made Greenland more dependant on Denmark than ever before. Discriminatory privileges were given to Danes such as higher wages and better housing opportunities. Greenland’s dependency on Danish block grants today should be understood in the light of these historical events. The continual socio-economic inequalities and the racism endured by

Greenlanders as a result of decades of Danish rule has had devastating consequences. This is the Danish colonial legacy.

It might be hard to accept but perhaps we *can* use Trump's tantrums for something: to have a good long hard look in the mirror and make time for some long overdue self-reflection. Perhaps this is our chance to talk seriously about Danish colonialism and adequate reparations for Greenland.

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