Toward a new research ethic for Greenland[*]

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Ethics are not a problem of knowledge but a call of relationship.
Gayatri Spivak (1993: 32)

At present neither the Greenland Self Government nor any research body in Greenland has formulated a code of ethics, or guidelines for the ethical and responsible conduct of research in Greenland. In this paper we discuss the hazards of this lack and propose possible opportunities for moving forward. We consider the development of such codes to be an integral part of the development of science policy by the Self Government in Greenland.

Ever-increasing international interest in climate change has meant a sharpened focus on life and the environment in the Arctic and, with it, an increasing foreign presence in Greenland over the last few decades. The nature of this interest falls into two basic categories: research and resource development. The research includes polar science (climate change, glaciology, snow studies) conducted in areas removed from human populations, such as at the summit of the Greenland ice sheet; social science research focusing on the very nature of life (health and social conditions) of the human population; and humanistic research considering the arts and humanities in Greenlandic society. We argue that *all* areas of research are of central concern to Greenland and its government, and *all* should be conducted ethically. As researchers ourselves (an anthropologist, a linguist, and an ecosystem ecologist), in the present paper we focus on the need for a research ethic, drawing upon our own experiences of working in Greenland and with Greenlanders, from both the perspective of foreign researchers and from inside the community. We argue that the need for an established code of regulations and policies for ethical development from Greenland's Self Government is essential to guarantee the well-being of its citizens and its

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territory. We see the establishment of a research ethic as a central part of this process. In what follows we map out the policies in some other nations. None of these scenarios is an exact match for Greenland which, due to a combination of historical, political and geographic reasons, is without comparison in the world today. Yet until Greenland establishes its own research ethics, external researchers will rely on the ethics of their own country or professional organization, and may often be only self-regulating. An important aspect of the model we are advocating here is that research conduct be monitored in some way to guarantee that a Greenlandic code of ethics is followed at all times.

1. Who oversees ethical research?

At present, there is little regulation over research ethics (or norms of conduct) at a local (Greenlandic) level. Such regulation does occur at an external level. In many countries, ethical standards are established and regulated by essentially two different groups: federal governments and professional organizations. In the US, for example, the model is that ethical standards are established by the federal government through its funding agencies, which in turn oversee compliance both within the agency but also, and more directly, by passing the responsibility on to the university or organization which administers the funds. Since universities found not in compliance with federal regulations on a particular project are at risk of losing all federal funding, there is very strong motivation to follow them. Thus universities in the United States have Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), which oversee the process of approving research plans and monitoring conduct.

Universities in the US and Canada have a set of human subjects protocols which must guarantee that any research conducted on human populations poses no more than minimal risks or, if it poses greater than minimal risks, that the subjects understand the risks and possible benefits. Such projects could range from participation in a drug trial to cure a disease to answering a social science survey about human influence on climate. An important part of this process is the principle of informed consent, which requires that subjects receive full, clear information about the potential hazards and benefits of any research, as well as information about who is responsible for answering any of their questions. In Canada the National Research Council Canada/Conseil national de recherches Canada) (NRC-CNRC) has its own Research Ethics Board (REB) which reviews applications for all research involving human subjects and serves as a resource for learning about and applying ethical principles in the conduct of research involving

human subjects (http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/ethics/research-ethics-board.html, accessed 18 October 2010).

The Commission for Scientific Research in Greenland (KVUG, or Kommissionen for Videnskabelige Undersøgelser i Grønland) http://en.fi.dk/the-agency is an advisory body to both the Danish and the Greenland Self-Government's Minister of Research; its role is to support and promote Danish-Greenlandic research, with this support including financial aid. We do not, however, see that they have any binding guidelines and procedures to ensure ethical research of the kind that we are advocating here, although this is a natural home for such guidelines.

In addition to governmental agencies, professional organizations in many countries have their own code of ethics. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) has long had a code of ethics and is currently in the process of reviewing and revising that code.[1] A foundational tenet of the AAA code is "do no harm," although what, exactly, constitutes "harm" is a matter of some debate. Quite recently (May 2009), the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) adopted its own code of ethics.[2] These are well-developed in Australia for working with aboriginal societies. These codes establish guidelines for individual researchers who do or do not follow them as a matter of personal choice. For this reason, in its current review process the AAA is considering the question of whether the behavior of researchers should be monitored and if sanctions should (or could) be imposed for failure to follow the guidelines. We suspect this will be hard to implement, except perhaps in the most egregious cases. But the bottom line is that these professional codes are based on a principle of self-regulation and rely on the education of researchers on the need for and the benefits of participation. Both the AAA's and the LSA's codes of ethics include a statement about the anthropologist's or linguist's responsibility to the public, namely to make the findings of their research available and accessible to the general public, including non-specialists, and AAA specifies making results available to policy and decision makers.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) largely relegates ethics to the scientific societies; see the AAAS report, *The Role and Activities of Scientific Societies in Promoting Research Integrity* [http://www.aaas.org/spp/sfrl/projects/report.pdf; accessed 10 October 2010]. Page 3 of this report has a useful summary of a survey (conducted in 1999) of codes of ethics among scientific societies. At that time, 74% (or 34 societies) reported having a code of ethics. These included the following provisions: authorship determination

[1] A potential revision of AAA code of ethics is currently under open discussion. October 2010

[2] http://www.lsadc.org/info/pdf_files/Ethics_Statement.pdf

(30%), reporting misconduct procedures (26%), plagiarism (26%), duplicate publication (24%), obligation to report misconduct (24%), data retention (22%), mentoring/supervising roles (20%), responsibility of authors (20%), timely/complete reporting of data (17%), and order of authors (9%). This is not the kind of ethics we have in mind here, although we would agree that these are all important aspects of appropriate scientific conduct, a precursor for the broader definition of ethical research that we suggest for Greenland.

In sum, there a number of external controls on ethical research; many of these focus on research which concerns human subjects. We argue that (1) all research—not just research on human subjects—should be ethically conducted and regulated; and (2) Greenland's Self-Government has an open opportunity to see that such is the case, and the "ethical conduct" should be defined in Greenland's own terms, with specific regard to the cultural, historical and long-term potential and real impacts of the research on the country.

2. Ethical conduct redefined

The transition to Self Government opens new opportunities and challenges. We consider it to be the responsibility of the Government to develop ethical standards for research, to establish them as public policy, and to enforce them. In larger nation states, these roles and responsibilities are often spread across multiple bodies, but the final legal authority resides with the government. Thus in many countries, as we have seen, it is common for state funding bodies to exert control, which is in turn managed at a local level by universities or research centers.[3] This is problematic since most funding for research in Greenland comes from Danish and EU sources, the US and Canada. The context for conducting a discussion around research ethics in Greenland must be based within the unique circumstances of Greenland's history as a colonial state, its transitional governmental structures and Greenlanders who identify as part of the pan-Inuit community represented by organizations such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).

Guidelines for ethical conduct should not be left to external research bodies or governments alone. Ethical conduct in Greenland needs to be defined in Greenland's own terms, with specific regard to local values and concerns, and long-term goals and considerations. Leaving this to external bodies not only relinquishes local control, but it allows external, foreign entities to define what is ethical and what is not, from their own perspective. Greenland's

[3] It is not the case that all countries have ethical standards or codes of conduct; this is one major problem for researchers working in many countries.

perspective is almost certain to differ in some critical ways, due to its unique history, the unique cultural makeup of its peoples, and its unique geographic position.

2.1 The scope of ethical standards

In a complex, rapidly changing world, ethical standards need to extend beyond research on human subjects, although a code of ethics must necessarily include such research. A new research ethic would incorporate guidelines for active local participation and for sharing results more broadly, within the scientific community and with the public.

2.2 How should ethical standards be developed?

Developing useful, well-rounded ethical standards requires input from multiple perspectives and multiple bodies. There are models for ethical standards from other groups in the Arctic. First, there are models which are geopolitically based, such as the Alaska Native Science Commission which posts ethics and protocols on its website at http://www.nativescience.org/communities/code.htm [accessed 20 October 2010]. Specifically, these are (1) the *Code of Research Ethics* from the Kahnawà:ke Schools Diabetes Prevention Program; (2) the Alaska Native Knowledge Network's *Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge*; and (3) the National Science Foundation's *Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic*. The founding principle of NSF's guide for conduct is that:

> *All* scientific investigations in the Arctic should be assessed in terms of potential human impact and interest. Social science research, particularly studies of human subjects, requires special consideration, as do studies of resources of economic, and social value to Native people. In all instances it is the responsibility of the principal investigator on each project to implement the following recommendations.
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> http://www.nsf.gov/od/opp/arctic/conduct.jsp [20 October 2010]

Thus the National Science Foundation endorses our understanding of the scope of ethical research in that all research should be assessed in terms of impact, but at the same times does not go far enough in encouraging US scientists to partner with Greenlanders, to share their research in Greenland with local stakeholders, and to assist Greenland in building literacy in the sciences and other disciplines.

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network's *Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge* [http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/publications/knowledge.html] are aimed specifically at documenting,

representing and using cultural knowledge, integrating it into the school system with other kinds of knowledge, and explicitly discuss the role of various participants (such as Elders, pedagogues and researchers) in this process. These guidelines differ from the codes of ethics and human subject protocols discussed earlier in this paper in specifying that researchers work with indigenous scholars and directly involve communities in their work.

2.3 What is the role of NGOs?

The role of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in this process is twofold. NGOs are central to any free society in that they constitute an independent voice, independent of electorate votes and government funding and control. NGOs are critical in providing independent points of view. They are not always unbiased, and in fact they typically have specific positions to advocate or services to provide—such as environmental watch groups, or animal rights groups—but they are (at least in theory) independent in terms of political processes. Thus, their input is valuable in determining the full nature of ethical standards and what elements are crucial for workable guidelines. Second, they have special value in a watchdog role: they can monitor the bodies who are charged with enforcing these codes.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council is uniquely situated in this process because it is at once pan-Arctic and pan-Inuit. ICC, by virtue of not being an agent of any national government, can represent a circumpolar pan-Inuit perspective. Moreover, it is an Inuit-based organization, run *by* and *for* Inuit, and thus has the responsibility of establishing ethics based on Inuit values and standards that cross national boundaries and speak to the values of communities engaged in subsistence activities. The ICC brings a human rights perspective to issues of information sharing and power sharing and collaboration. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007 [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html] provides a rich framework for defining research ethics and for seeking a more integrated approach to drawing together nations with interests in the circumpolar world and its peoples.

3. Case study: Research on the Greenland ice sheet

How is scientific research currently in Greenland? Who does it, how do they get permission, what does that permission involve, what obligations are imposed, and how is any of this enforced?

The importance of climate change and rapid environmental change in the Arctic has created an influx of foreign scientists, research teams and equipment in unprecedented numbers. Kangerlussuaq, and more specifically, Kangerlussuaq International Science Support (KISS),

functions as the base site for science logistics, and the starting point for expeditions to the Greenland ice sheet or Summit Camp, for example. In the past, in order to receive permission to do this work, foreign scientists filed requests for research permits from the Danish Polar Centre. Only recently has this process been assumed by the Greenland Self Government, its Ministry of Domestic Affairs, Nature and Environment. The permit process requires little or limited communication of results to the Self Government or to the broader public; rather it is largely concerned with issues of safety, collection of biological and mineral samples and preservation of sites of archaeological importance. For example, the reporting requirement for the "survey license for collection and/or acquisition of biological resources for research purpose" requires that researchers "state when publications or access to results of the survey are expected" and does not ask for copies of data and/or publications resulting from the research.

This western research model for science imposes certain disadvantages and problems. The large-scale international science conducted in Greenland takes place away from population centers and is typically invisible to them. Foreign scientists fly into and out of Kangerlussuaq. They may remain there or, more frequently, head off to remote field stations such as Summit Camp, Thule, or remote sites in east Greenland, and therefore have little to no contact with the Greenland population. This model produces high-quality international science with findings which may be relevant to Greenland and could be extremely useful in making policy decisions. But unfortunately the end results of this research are not packaged in such a way as to be widely accessible to Greenlanders; more often than not, they are published in specialist journals, e.g. *Nature*, *Science* or *Polar Science*. Although such publications are technically in the public domain, in open journals, they are difficult to understand for readers who are not themselves specialists in the field. Difficulties in reading these articles are compounded by the fact that the population of Greenland by and large knows English as a *third* language. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that there are few Greenlandic polar scientists, and the University of Greenland, located in the capital Nuuk, does not have a science faculty who can share the results of this work with the public and in the schools

As a result, the Greenland Government does not have easy access to these results and supporting data. Rather, Greenland must work with the data reporting rules of the nation conducting the research. In the US, the National Science Foundation requires scientists to share their data within 2 years of collection. NSF-funded scientists working in Greenland are under no specific obligations to present data and findings directly to Greenland or even to inform local agencies of publications.

The vast majority of scientists welcome open access to data and see the importance of working with the public to improve science literacy. At the same time, scientists lack information on what Greenland wants from scientists. Furthermore, although there is a rich literature on the ethics of working with indigenous communities, this literature is targeted at social scientists and may not be framed in ways that engage natural scientists in the problems. At a minimum, there is a fragmented and poorly understood ethic among scientists in the North.

We would suggest that relying on regulatory bodies to establish (and enforce) a code of ethics is not sufficient to change research paradigms, although it is a necessary first step. For the longer term, we educators need to rethink the way we train scientists to work in the Arctic. As the title of Aqqaluk Lynge's keynote address at the sixth meeting of the International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS VI, August 2008) meeting states, "Scientists need to do more." Innovative, interdisciplinary graduate training programs such as the Polar Environmental Change Program (supported by a grant from NSF's Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship, or IGERT, program) at Dartmouth College provide hope for a new generation of researchers who are more aware of the ethical dimensions of their environmental research, the need to form local partnerships, and have a commitment to sharing their work in Greenland with Greenlanders.

Greenland has an opportunity to reshape leadership in the Arctic. Greenland is a role model for Arctic governments and now the Self Government has a unique opportunity to shape its own policy. Because so much climate change research is now focused on Greenland, Greenland is in a position of remarkable influence to shape the science, how it is conducted, what research questions are asked, and how the results are disseminated.

4. Recommendations

In conclusion, we would like to propose several practical steps:

(1) The Self Government should immediately begin the consultation process for establishing a code of ethics. We recommend consultation and collaboration with Arctic agencies which already have established ethical guidelines. We further advocate broad and comprehensive protocols which extend beyond human subject research to encompass all forms of research in Greenland.

(2) We propose that the Joint Committee formed in 2004 to increase cooperation between the US, Greenland and Denmark be a forum for a dialogue on a new research ethic for Greenland. The Joint Committee meets biannually, but its working groups facilitate more frequent interaction between government, academic, and private institutions in the United States, Greenland, and Denmark to advance common projects and encourage cooperation across a diverse range of policy areas: environment, science, health, technology, trade, tourism, education, and culture.

(3) Finally, to return to the opening quote from Spivak, we believe the ethical research should be truly *collaborative*. Cameron et al. (1992) distinguish *ethical research, advocacy research,* and *empowering research*: ethical research is concerned with "minimizing damage to subjects"; it is fundamentally research *on* social subjects; advocacy research is *on* and *for* subjects, where the researcher serves as a (cultural or political) advocate for the concerns of the subjects; and finally empowering research, which is research *on, for,* and *with* subjects. Empowering research (or community-based research) is a model to strive for, and we would hope that guidelines for ethical research would foster its development such that it would become the norm in Greenland and elsewhere.

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