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Article abstract

This study on developments in festive clothing is based on clothing and photograph collections in museums, interviews with Tunumiit (East Greenlanders) and participant observation during several months in Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (East Greenland) in 1997, 1998 and 2001. Festive garments for special occasions did not exist in the traditional pre-Christian culture of East Greenland. In this article we investigate what influences affected the development of special clothing for festive occasions. Changes in Kalaallit Nunaata Kitaa (West Greenland) and European influences deeply affected clothing traditions in East Greenland. In the course of this process, some Tunumiit garments came to disappear and others were re-invented and re-shaped using new materials. Preparing animal skins and sewing attire always have been a women's preserve. In the past, sewing qualities were highly valued within Inuit society. Today, sewing skills and designing clothing are paid for but they still reflect women's qualities and sealskin garments shape Kalaallit identity. The development of festive clothing and the continuity in celebrating first events and rites of passage testify to the dynamics and strength of East Greenland culture. East Greenland clothing is part of a vivid cultural tradition and is still "women's magic."

Festive clothing and national costumes in 20th century East Greenland

Cunera Buijs*

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Résumé: Vêtements de fête et costumes nationaux dans le Groenland oriental du 20e siècle

Cette étude sur le développement des vêtements de fête se fonde sur l'analyse de collections muséographiques de vêtements et de photographies, sur des entrevues avec des Tunumiit (est-groenlandais), et sur plusieurs mois d'observation participante au Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (Groenland oriental) en 1997, 1998 et 2001. Le vêtement de fête que l'on réserve pour une occasion spéciale n'existait pas dans la culture traditionnelle préchrétienne du Groenland oriental. Dans cet article, nous explorons ce qui a influencé le développement de vêtements spéciaux portés lors de festivités. Des changements au Kalaallit Nunaata Kitaa (Groenland occidental) et des influences européennes ont fortement affecté les traditions vestimentaires du Groenland oriental. Au cours de ce processus, certains vêtements tunumiit ont fini par disparaître alors que d'autres ont été réinventés et transformés par l'emploi de nouveaux matériaux. Préparer les peaux et coudre les vêtements ont toujours été des activités réservées aux femmes. Par le passé, la société inuit valorisait fortement la qualité des coutures. Aujourd'hui, la compétence des couturières et la conception des vêtements sont rémunérées mais ces savoir-faire reflètent encore le degré d'habileté des femmes, et les vêtements en peaux de phoque forment l'identité kalaallit. Le développement des vêtements de fête, ainsi que les premiers événements et les rites de passage que l'on continue de célébrer, témoignent du dynamisme et de la force de la culture du Groenland oriental. Le vêtement est-groenlandais appartient à une tradition culturelle vivante et représente encore «la magie des femmes».

Abstract: Festive clothing and national costumes in 20th century East Greenland

This study on developments in festive clothing is based on clothing and photograph collections in museums, interviews with Tunumiit (East Greenlanders) and participant observation during several months in Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (East Greenland) in 1997, 1998 and 2001. Festive garments for special occasions did not exist in the traditional pre-Christian culture of East Greenland. In this article we investigate what influences affected the development of special clothing for festive occasions. Changes in Kalaallit Nunaata Kitaa (West Greenland) and European influences deeply affected clothing traditions in East Greenland. In the course of this process, some Tunumiit garments came to disappear and others were re-invented and re-shaped using new materials. Preparing animal skins and sewing attire always have been a women's preserve. In the past, sewing qualities were highly valued within Inuit society. Today, sewing skills and designing clothing are paid for but they still reflect women's qualities and sealskin garments shape Kalaallit identity. The development of festive clothing and the continuity in celebrating first events and rites of passage testify to the dynamics and strength of

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East Greenland culture. East Greenland clothing is part of a vivid cultural tradition and is still “women’s magic.”

Introduction

Festive clothing is connected to special occasions and rituals. It is used to stress the importance of such events for individuals and society. In this article we will briefly examine the festivals or collective rituals in Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (East Greenland) in the 20th century and the clothing and garments worn during these rituals.

Inuit clothing has gained major interest during the last decades. Studies on Arctic clothing, footwear, dress and gender, garments and identity recently have been published both by Euro-American and Inuit scholars (Bahnson in press; Barnes and Eicher 1992; Buijs 1999; Driscoll 1980; Issenman 1997; Martin in press; Meade 1990; Oakes and Riewe 1995; Paukstadt in press; Pharand 1975; Rajagopalan 2003). Clothing exhibitions were held in museums in Edinburgh, St. John’s (Newfoundland), Montreal, Winnipeg, Hull, Nuuk, Leiden, London and in preparation in New York. Nowadays, native clothing is referred to as indigenous knowledge and is part of the cultural heritage of the Inuit. Inuit clothing is connected to ideas of pride and identity. Sewing clothes is a women’s preserve *par excellence*. In traditional Inuit society, the capacities of Inuit women in preparing skins and sewing clothes were highly valued. These skills marked the position of women within their own society. Women who were good seamstresses had better marriage chances. In the modern Inuit societies in which textile ready-made garments are available in the local shops, these sewing duties and abilities are under pressure. Only a few young Inuit women of Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (East Greenland) have learned to scrape sealskins properly or to sew sealskin boots.

Expensive national costumes sewn by Inuit women became prestigious garments and emblems of identity. Festive clothing reflects changes in norms and values in Greenlandic society. What do these changes mean to Greenlandic women for whom the sewing qualities and warm fur outfits have been so important?

In pre-Christian East Greenland, making clothing was highly important, contained cosmological aspects and was related to game and to the spirits of the captured animals. In a sense, sewing and clothing were “women’s magic.” This term was introduced by Valérie Chaussonet in her publication on clothing of Siberia and Northwestern North America:

No being had a single, invariable shape. Garments, like masks, could effect or make reference to spiritual transformation. Cosmological links between humans and the animal world were also evident in the requirements that the clothing be carefully and beautifully made to please the spirits of the animals upon whom the group depended (Chaussonet 1988: 210).

It was though that the soul of a seal was more willing to turn itself over to an East Greenland hunter with perfectly made hunting equipment and clothing. Wearing beautiful garments was not only practical, but had also cosmological or spiritual dimensions and Tunumiit (East Greenlanders) wore their best clothing, newly made garments, at festive or ritually marked events such as at solstice.

During the process of baptism and colonization, Tunumiit changed their wardrobe and adopted West Greenlandic costumes and Euro-American clothing. Specialized festive clothing developed gradually. Nowadays, wearing festive clothing at confirmations and weddings in church still has a cosmological context, but now this context is provided by the Christian faith.

During the new political context of the 1960s and 70s, native garments became reinterpreted as political garments and national costumes came into being. Sewing ateliers throughout Kalaallit Nunaat and firms like Great Greenland in Qaqortoq design sealskin garments and produce fur clothing as modern fashion. Western garments bought in shops prevail and combinations of native clothing combined with European fashion can now be seen. This mixture of clothing in the 21st century expresses mixed cultures within the modern global context. A new Inuit culture is developing.

The central question in this article is: which changes in the social, ritual and religious contexts of East Greenland society led to changes in dress habits and to the development of specialized festive clothing, which was unknown in the past?

Ritual context and festive clothing in the late 19th century

Ritual contexts and ceremonies change over time. At the end of the 19th century, pre-Christian rituals and feasts still played a role despite the Lutheran religion introduced by Danish missionaries. The Danish lieutenant Gustav Holm was the first white explorer to arrive in East Greenland in 1884. Ten years later, the first mission and trading post was established in the new “colony’s” capital, Tasiilaq (Ammassalik)¹. By then, rituals still functioned within a tradition of belief in a world populated by spirits. “First events” were marked socially and ritually. In traditional Tunumiit society a baby received its first garments some time after birth.

¹ Tasiilaq is the native term the Tunumiit use for the district capital Ammassalik. West Greenland’s 150 years of contact with whites, due to its earlier colonization by the clergyman Hans Egede in 1721, resulted in significant differences between West and East Greenland and partly defined later relationships between the two regions.

Receiving the first garment was probably an important event in life. A baby's first anorak was not only a protective garment with amulets to protect against evil spirits and soft furs to keep the baby warm, but it was also a sign that the child had reached a new phase in life. By receiving its first clothing, the child became a social person—an individual with certain names deriving from deceased persons or relatives. The child was welcomed into the society by gifts and thus became part of the community. The mother received the gifts, as the personal identity of the child was still very much connected to that of its mother. The child also became a social partner with whom objects, meat, future wives, clothing, or hunting-cooperation could be exchanged.

Children, thought to be vulnerable, were protected against dangerous spirits, sickness or death by means of amulets or by the use of garments especially made for protection against evil influences. Children in families in which many brothers or sisters had died, especially had to be protected. A loose children's cap (called *piaaqusiaq*), made of seal fur or de-haired seal leather, was made by a mother who had already lost many children. Children were sometimes dressed in an uncommon way, such as wearing two different types of boots (*kamiit*) one made of waterproof leather (used in summer) and the other made of seal fur (used in winter). Another child was dressed in a common anorak of which the front-part was split and completely covered with sewn-on buttons. "Others drag a dog-tail along, that is sewn on the back of their clothing, and some girls are dressed in boy's clothing" (Rosing 1946: 102). Vulnerable children were dressed like this to protect them from death, as Death would not recognize a child dressed this way. Inversions like turning clothing upside down or inside out, or men wearing women's clothing and vice versa, established a relationship with the spirit world.

Pregnancy, (first) menstruation, puberty, marriage status, miscarriages, birth, and death were marked events in Inuit life. These transitions had social and spiritual implications: "The Inuit, just as other primitive people, saw these transitions from one stage to an other as extremely dangerous for the surrounding world—it was in this phase that the 'inua-power' of body or soul could be extremely violently. Therefore, it was required to protect oneself against these strong powers during rites of transition" (Bjørn 1996: 42).

Clothing often marked transitions in social life. Young girls wore their hair loose and started wearing a topknot at puberty. A young woman's topknot indicated that she was ready to find a partner for life. Marriage itself, however, was not ritually marked. Special garments such as festive dress and wedding costumes did not exist.

Tattulat (adult women's coats) were prestigious garments. An expansion of the back was wide and deep enough to carry the child next to the mother and keep it warm and comfortable. The garment was prestigious, since mothers had a more important position than women without children. Two vertical white fur stripes at breast height, indicated the adult status of women and were connected to having offspring. Leather strips hanging from these white stripes facilitated evil spirits to leave the body (Buijs 2004). Holes in the sealskin, caused by removing the eyes of the animal, could be seen at the top of the hood on both sides. These eyeholes probably protected the wearers of

the coat against evil spirits (Robbe 1994). These eyeholes were also present in the hoods of men's anoraks.

In men's clothing of the end of the 19th century, we found fewer details connected to first events and rites of passage than in women's clothing. However, the first warm winter outfit made for a boy (from 10 to 12 years old) who became ready to join his father hunting out in the cold, may have signified a first event. Men's clothing was much more connected to hunting situations and the materials protected against the cold, such as extremely warm polar bear fur. Polar bear garments breathe an atmosphere of prestige (hunting polar bears is dangerous and prestigious) and empowerment (since the souls of polar bears are extremely powerful and sometimes connected to shamans). The mighty spirit referred to as "The Man in the Moon" was dressed in polar bear attire. He punished for transgressions of the taboos by taking away fertility of both humans and the game, resulting in hunger and famine (Rosing 1998: 169-170, Saladin d'Anglure 1994).

Few collective rituals or feasts of the Inuit in Canada and West Greenland were characterized by festive costumes. They were even less common in East Greenland. Kleivan and Sonne stated:

The occasion for the collective ritual was an epoch making event in the life of the individual or the community, or recurrent events in the natural annual cycle. The former were the most frequent occasions, while calendar ceremonies were fewer. The Eskimos of Baffin Island had their Sedna cult in November and the North Labrador Eskimos a similar ceremony in the midwinter. The Iglulik Eskimos and the East Greenlanders shared a tradition of collective mask rituals which could be held at various times of the year, but many indications show they were obligatory during the shortest days of the year (Kleivan and Sonne 1985: 12).

In West Greenland and probably also in East Greenland, the appearance of two or three stars (Altair and Tarazed, for example) was the signal for mid-winter celebrations². People dressed in their very best clothes, and in East Greenland, mothers dressed their eldest child in new clothes. About a week later *innertaarneq*³ (the new fire) took place. Their lamps were extinguished and then relit (Rasmussen 1924: 339-341; Rosing 1963; Robert Petersen, pers. comm. 1999).

Uajaerneq (*Mitaarneq* in West Greenland language) was a ritual or festive occasion for which special clothing was worn, or everyday clothing was used in an abnormal manner. Two men would dress up in women's clothes, or in a mixture of male and female clothes, and disguise their heads with feathers and soot so they would not be recognized. They roamed around the village, visiting the houses and frightening people by beating them up, making sexual gestures and making the audience laugh.

² Among Canadian Inuit, the appearance of Altair and Tarazed marked the start of the winter celebrations called *tivajut*. According to Betty Issenman (pers. comm. 2002) and MacDonald (1993), the festivities began when people put on their best clothes.

³ Indigenous terms in this article are spelled according to the official East Greenlandic orthography. Sometimes there is no difference between the East and West Greenlandic orthography as is the case here with the term *innertaarneq*.

Uajaernej players appeared especially during the dark winter-months. Rosing (1957) provided an excellent account of the celebrations at the beginning of the twentieth century. He described several actors in the “game” in East Greenland, who were addressed by various names. Rosing witnessed as a child a game in which a man was dressed up as an ugly woman, *Nalikkatseq*, who made a barking sound while wearing a dog skin around the lower part of his body. Moreover, a dog's head dangled between the man's legs. It was related that *Nalikkatseq* was:

[...] a hideous old woman whom the shaman has to pass when he visits the Man in the Moon. She sings so delightfully that he cannot avoid stopping, but if he lets slip the least smile, she will flay the lungs from him and eat them. She is often depicted with a drum and a hide or dog's head between her legs (Franceschi *et al.* 2001)

There were other characters such as the comical dressed up *Uniarpua* (“I drag my hunting game home”), a player acting as a caricature of a hunter. The dancer dragged a bundle around on slippery ice. A seal stuck in the breathing hole made the hunter fall, etc. The *Uajaernej* festivity had strong connections to clothing. The actors disguised themselves using normal clothing in comical ways. They used the clothing technique of inversion, for instance wearing a man's seal fur boot on the left and a woman's long boot on the right. Masks could be used as part of the disguise:

Each [actor] had his or her own favorite role, usually a humoristic caricature of everyday types. They performed either dressed up or naked, though the women wore short trousers. Some wore masks, others were blackened with soot, and sometimes the faces were distorted by being bound up with thongs and by small pegs inserted in the mouth (Kleivan 1960: 12).

According to Rosing (1957), Kleivan (1960) and Gessain (1984), *Uajaernej* is a remnant of a ritual event connected to game and fertility. Gessain, who did research in East Greenland in 1934, writes:

In the East Greenlandic language the word for mask is translated *kiappa*, (*kiak*: face; *pa*: upon), but there is a similar word, *kiappâk* (*kiak*: face; *pâk*: big). This “big face” sometimes appeared at the winter house window and did frighten both children and adults [...]. The big face is, in my opinion, that of a mythical being, a cephalopod also known, for instance, among the Canadian Inuit. This linguistic confusion was maintained by the Ammassalimiut to protect themselves from the intransigence of the first missionary Rüttel (Gessain 1984: 83).

Another type of collective ritual in East Greenland was the “drum dance” or “song duel.” Song partners took turns in dancing and in singing songs of their own composition to the rhythm of their drums. Many song duels were held during the *aasiviit*, the gatherings of the population in summer, but they could also spontaneously occur during summer and winter. Frequently, they were held to prevent or resolve a crisis between two rivals or two conflicting families (Kleivan and Sonne 1985: 12).

The players in the drum dance did not wear specialized festive clothing, although they did wear their best clothing. The male song partners wore regular trousers, whereas the upper part of the body was sometimes naked. The spectators probably also dressed in their very best clothes or in new clothing (Robert Petersen, pers. comm).

1999). For women, the *amaatit* (mother coats with broad back panel to carry an infant) decorated with bead-strings would have been suitable and for men the *storfangerskasket* (a cap for great hunters) and beaded decorative headbands. Around the turn of the 19th to 20th century, people started to dress in newly-obtained European clothes and materials.

We cannot mention here shamans clothing as clothing for special occasions, since it was lacking in East Greenland. Shamans used normal dress and often performed séances with the upper part of their body naked.

Festive clothing within a changing ritual context

In 1884, the West Greenland catechist Johannes Hansen (Hanseeraq) was the first Lutheran clergyman who preached among the “heathen” Tunumiit. He was a voluntary member of the women’s boat expedition of Gustav Holm. In 1894, the Danish missionary Frederik Rüttel was appointed in the area (Eistrup 1989: 97; Lidegaard 1993: 158-160). He baptized the first East Greenlanders, three women and five children, five years later. On this occasion, he took a photograph of the newly baptized (Figure 1). They were dressed in their very best clothes, some of West Greenlandic origin. Newly obtained materials, such as European textiles, were by then already incorporated into their dress.

Different types of trousers existed in East Greenland at the end of the 19th century. A special type of undecorated short trousers was typical of East Greenland in that period. They were probably worn more by girls before puberty than by adult females (Buijs 2004). The decorated trousers seen on Rüttel’s photograph may have been preferred on special occasions or at *aasiviit*. Adults were portrayed with undecorated and decorated short trousers both at special occasions and on ordinary days⁴.

By the turn of the century, under influences from both Europe and West Greenland, the West Greenlandic breeches (*seeqqiniit*) had gained preference, and when pastor Rüttel baptized the first East Greenlanders, women as well as some girls were wearing the long West Greenlandic breeches with white and dark contrasting decoration at the legs⁵. East Greenlandic women had extended the legs of their trousers, influenced by ideals of modesty propagated by the Lutheran missionaries. Traditional East Greenlandic trousers were very short and did not reach the upper edge of the long boots. The clergy took offence at the bare thighs of the women and urged them to cover them (Buijs 1999: 163). The photograph of the first baptized East Greenlanders shows that only the girls still had bare thighs (Figure 1).

⁴ See photos from the Arctic Institute in Copenhagen: AI 43.915 and AI 21.490 in Christensen and Ebbenes (1985: 10,14) and Holm (1914: Fig. 25).

⁵ See photo AI 50 in Christensen and Ebbenes (1985: 28). This holds true also for the years 1900 (AI 58 and 150 in *ibid.*), 1901 (AI 52 and AI 145, in *ibid.*: 35, 36), 1902 (AI 42 in *ibid.*: 38).

The use of cloth in the dress of the first baptized women and children is obvious. All anoraks and blouses were made of textiles. The women's textile blouses were made very short in order to keep the white textile under the blouses visible. The women were proud that they could afford these cotton undergarments. Two types of boots were used. The long boots with bracket-shaped incisions and white dog-fur trimmings at the upper edges were characteristic of East Greenland. Other Greenland Inuit did not use them in that period.

Only one boy, as portrayed on Rüttel's photograph, was among the first group baptized in Tasiilaq. This boy was Kaarali Andreassen, the son of the mighty *angakkeq* (shaman) Mitsuarnianna (later baptized Andreas) and Piseerajik. Later on, this boy became East Greenland's most famous artist and the assistant of Knud Rasmussen (Lidegaard 1993: 158, 164, 170). His attire at his baptism shows the ordinary male winter trousers made of seal fur, and dehaired sealskin boots. He was wearing a patterned cloth anorak. He wore his hood for this special religious occasion. Covering the head protected a person against evil spirits and had a ritual connotation within the pre-Christian East Greenlandic society (Holm 1914: 78; Kaalund 1979: 139; Thalbitzer 1914: 590). Later on, all garments depicted on Rüttel's photograph became part of the Sunday costume. The clothing of the women and children baptized in 1899 developed into the Greenland festive costumes. In 1899, the clothing, especially prestigious, was already deeply influenced by Danes and West Greenlanders.

Seal fur *tattulat* (outer *amaatit*) heavily decorated with about 10 cm long (white, red and blue) bead strings hanging on the lower edges of the garment were prestigious garments for women (Figure 2). The large amounts of beads needed for the decoration were expensive and valuable. In Figure 2, two white dog fur stripes at breast height indicated the married or adult status of the woman. As the coat was made to carry an infant or small child on her back, a woman's success in having offspring was connected to the *tattulaq* as well. Women wore these garments during daily life, but they were also suitable for special occasions such as drum dances, due to their prestigious character and esthetic qualities⁶.

About 1900, men started to wear various types of West Greenlandic boots on a daily basis, as well as for baptisms and other festive occasions. They still used seal fur trousers, but textile trousers gradually came into use. Also, textile anoraks on top of woolen jerseys came to be worn frequently instead of the traditional sealskin garments of the 19th century.

Festive clothing and Christian holidays

The transition to Christianity was one of the major factors of change in Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (East Greenland) during the first decades of the 20th century. The Danish missionary Rüttel started his missionary work in Tasiilaq in 1894 and was

⁶ Other garments expressing the sewing capacities and status of women were decorated sealskin boots, top knots, and decorated trousers. Amulets and protective devices against dangers were integrated in these garments.



Figure 1. First baptized East Greenlanders by pastor Rüttel in Tasiilaq in April 1899 (photo by Frederik Rüttel, no. AI 50, Danish Polar Center, Copenhagen).



Figure 2. Three mothers, probably Akitukujuoq, Louise and Qivi in East Greenland in 1908. (photo by Johan Petersen, no. AI 30.201 [= 43.41], Danish Polar Center, Copenhagen).

succeeded by the Kitaamiut (West Greenlandic) minister Christian Rosing in 1904. In the early phases of colonization, the missionary activities included not only medical services but also education. Missionaries taught reading and writing to the Kalaallit who wanted to be baptized, so they could read the Bible and Christian psalms (Eistrup 1989; Lidegaard 1993; Ostermann 1929; Rüttel 1917).

Missionary activities and the establishment of a Lutheran church in Tasiilaq changed the rituals and the garments worn in ritual contexts. The new religion introduced Christian rituals on Sundays and Christian holidays. Traditional rituals connected to birth and death, as well as rituals and taboos connected to game and the solstice were incorporated into a Christian context or were practiced covertly.

In the first decades of the 20th century a pronounced change in clothing occurred through the adoption of West Greenlandic decorated clothes. Coloured textiles and beads were added and developed into a blouse with an extended bead collar. The technique of dyeing sealskin was applied to dressmaking. Following Kitaamiut's (West Greenland's) lead, it resulted in the development of festive clothing, probably in the 1920s and 1930s. Sunday services and Christian holidays had by then become part of the life of the Tunumiit, especially in those settlements where a catechist had settled. During the 1920s and 1930s, these beautiful decorated garments were also worn in daily life (Mikkelsen 1960: 96; Gessain 1970: 94f).

From the start of the mission station, Danish and Kallallit ministers and catechists celebrated Sunday services in church. Some of the church visitors were dressed in festive clothing, but others wore ordinary dress. Special clothing was also worn during Lutheran baptisms, weddings and funeral ceremonies. Ejnar Mikkelsen, the Inspector of East Greenland, provides an anecdotic description with rather condescending overtones, of the use of festive clothing in East Greenland in the 1930s:

Frida, who cleaned the church [probably in 1937], lived in some sort of self-built place of worship with a small cross above the door. When Frida was appointed by the ministry as a cleaning woman, she felt the need to represent the church and bring the Holy Word to the small neighbouring huts. She was not completely normal, this Frida, who felt obliged in her job to serve the church and to serve God, to get dressed as nicely as possible when she came to the service. One Sunday, Frida came in all her splendor: a nightgown, which Sara [Helms] had discarded, but Frida had begged to have it. Naturally, she received it, put it on over her normal day's clothes, which were not particularly elegant, and tied a strip of bunting around her body. Radiant with joy, she went to church on the next Sunday; now she was so beautiful, envied by most of the Greenland women, and [she was] sure that all could see that she was one of the few chosen (Mikkelsen 1960: 90-91).⁷

The excerpt demonstrates that apparently it was desirable to dress up for a Sunday service. In addition, "envied by most of the Greenlandic women" suggests that a European type of dress was popular among East Greenlandic women. Even a European nightgown was a desired garment.

⁷ All quotations in Danish and statements of Tunumiit in the East Greenland language were translated into English by the authors.

The East Greenlanders started to attend church not only on Sundays, but also on Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Mikkelsen observes that at Easter the church in Tasiilaq was filled with Greenlanders from the neighbourhood as well as from remote areas (Mikkelsen 1960: 138). The visitors came to Tasiilaq not only to celebrate Easter, but also to visit their families and to barter at the trading post.

Christmas was celebrated in church, but also at home (Figure 3). The festivities started on Christmas Eve, or a few days earlier, when Christmas greetings were announced on the radio from relatives from the West Coast of Greenland. Mikkelsen (1960: 92-94) connects the importance of Christmas in Greenland to vanquish the period of darkness and to celebrate the expected return of the sun. Traditionally, the winter solstice was often marked by rituals. Mikkelsen describes in detail a Christmas service in church, probably in 1937:

The East Greenlanders and Danes walk in the dark through the white snow to the church bringing lighted candles with them. The illuminated church is full of properly washed and beautifully adorned Greenlanders; all men and boys in white anoraks, and almost all women and girls in radiant coloured attire, which now can be seen only on important Holidays, but was weekday's clothing in the past. After the Christmas service, the church celebrates the feast of Christmas, with a small Christmas tree for the smallest children, another for the bigger ones, and a third Christmas tree for the grown-ups, but it is every time the same tree! They dance slowly around the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree will be remembered for a long time as a revelation of beauty (Mikkelsen 1960: 96-97).

After this celebration, Christmas presents sent from Denmark to the priests by the *Grønlandske Missionselskab* (the Greenlandic Mission Society) were distributed among the Greenlandic guests. Mikkelsen provides a description of a gift from Denmark that the priest gave to a 15 year-old East Greenlandic hunter-to-be. The present turned out to be “[...] a pair of ladies pajamas, substantially worn, and not too well washed!” (Mikkelsen 1960: 97).

Dressing up for baptism

Women in particular were eager to be baptized, as they had to observe strong and time consuming birth and death taboos. It was believed that children needed protection against evil spirits and *ilisiinneq* (“black magic”) to keep them healthy, and the mothers of deceased children strove to secure their place in heaven (Lidegaard 1993: 163; Rosing 1946). Christianity provided new forms of protection.

Baptism was a turning point for adults and their children. Newly baptized adults in East Greenland chose new Christian names, as they had heard this was the custom in West Greenland. They believed that a Christian name held a special power to protect them. Frederik Rüttel and, later on, Christian Rosing had both chosen Christian names easy to pronounce in the Greenlandic language (Lidegaard 1993: 164). Newly born children also received Christian names and they continued to be named after deceased relatives. East Greenland children received several Christian names which had native equivalents in the past. Traditional naming habits as well as the spiritual ideas and

social customs connected with them, continued to play an important role in East Greenland. At baptism, amulets were handed over to the missionaries, as they were no longer thought to be necessary after baptism. A Christian name and God would provide adequate protection. Christian Rosing wrote: “God's word will provide them protection against all evil” (Rosing 1946: 74). Old traditions pertaining to infant clothing were abandoned. The special clothing or unusual clothing of children whose brothers or sisters had died (*piaaqquasiat*)—to protect them from death—gradually disappeared, whereas white christening dresses were introduced for the baptism of infants.

Gender was expressed in the festive clothing of girls at a very young age. The decoration of the hood of a white textile anorak (a masculine clothing item) with bead strings hanging loose on the child's forehead, was a gender-specific element of the female dress. The small seal fur trousers (now part of the national costume) conformed to the West Greenlandic type, decorated with red dyed sealskin and sealskin embroidery (*avittaarneq*) in the middle. At the beginning of the 20th century, the East Greenlandic type of long boots for girls was apparently no longer worn. It was replaced by long coloured and decorated boots, especially in the colours white and red, indicating female gender. Short red and white boots, as well as decorated long boots were worn by women and girls. Small girls started to wear these decorated boots at the age of 4 or 5 years. Later, these boots came to be worn as festive garments. Girls less frequently wore undecorated short brown leather boots for daily use.

During the first decades of the 20th century, not only the West Greenland type of dress began to prevail, but on Christian holidays European dresses could be seen as well. Long skirts, worn on festival days as well as in daily life, were combined with short white and red boots edged with a broad black fur band on top. Tights were often worn under the long dresses. This combination of garments prevailed among older girls and young women.

Marriages in church

When Christianity was introduced in the first decades of the 20th century, ministers would visit the small settlements where a church was not yet established to baptize newborn children, to consecrate marriages and possibly to take care of burials. East Greenlanders in remote settlements buried their dead without the ritual assistance of a priest. Marriages were also still conducted without rituals, but often were consecrated by a minister afterwards. During their visits a priest might consecrate several marriages. The couple and their families would dress in their very best clothing for the consecration of a marriage in church. The wedding was more informal when a priest consecrated marriages in a small settlement. There was no obligation to dress in proper church clothing or festive costumes.

Festive garments and “Sunday dress”

The festive clothing for women, men, and children during church services and Christian feasts in Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua in the first half of the 20th century consisted of the following garments. Women wore long white, red or blue-black coloured boots, matched to beautiful decorated seal fur trousers and textile anoraks. Older women tended to wear long red, black or violet boots more often than younger women. These boots were worn on a daily basis as well as during weddings and baptisms. European dresses were combined with short white or red seal leather boots. The European type of festive dress was more popular among younger women. The men wore cotton or linen anoraks, made of patterned or bright plain (un-patterned) cloth, combined with textile trousers (white and light coloured at the turn of the century, and dark coloured after 1930) or seal fur trousers. Two types of decorated festive boots existed for men, made of black dyed sealskin. Richly decorated indigenous garments and European types of dresses were also used during baptism, wedding and funeral ceremonies in the church of Tasiilaq in the period 1930 to 1950. The use of these festive clothing was not prescribed by the church, nor by the Greenlandic community. But the clergy stimulated wearing nice clothing to the Sunday service; the “Sunday dress.”

The special use of white men’s anoraks was initiated at the Seminar and Teacher’s Training College in Nuuk, Kalaallit Nunaata Kitaa. The young catechists at the seminar could not afford the expensive black silk anoraks, the proper dress for catechists, and began in the 1920s to wear white anoraks instead (Robert Petersen, pers. comm. 1995 and 1999). The white cotton anorak was rapidly adopted as part of the male festive costume. Elderly Kitaamiut men still generally wore black anoraks in the 1920s. By the 1930s, though, only a few elderly men still dressed in black anoraks on special occasions. Black anoraks disappeared almost completely out of daily life in the 1940s, but remained in use exclusively by catechists. Since Tunumiit hunters adopted the Kitaamiut festive anorak in the 1920s and 1930s, they never wore black anoraks as festive garments, since they were by then already falling out of use in West Greenland. White anoraks had become part of the common festive dress for men in East and West Greenland in the second half of the twentieth century (Robert Petersen, pers. comm. 1995, 1999, 2000).

From festive garments to national costumes

It was not until the second half of the 20th century that the Kalaallit national costume became part of Tunumiit material culture, a development that first occurred in West Greenland but was followed in short time by East Greenland. During the so-called Danization period, roughly speaking between 1945 and 1970, festive costumes were mainly seen in church, at Sunday services and on Christian holidays (Petersen 1995: 121). In this period, Danish employees were attracted to Kalaallit Nunaat Greenland to develop and modernize the country. Danes, and to some extent the Danish standard of living, became an example for Greenlanders.

When Greenland achieved the status of a Province of Denmark in 1953, movements for independence and home rule intensified. After Home Rule (autonomous local governance) was established in 1979, a period of Greenlandization began (Jenness 1967; Nooter 1976; Petersen 1995; Robert-Lamblin 1986). Greenlandic norms and values became guiding principles. During the process of nation-building, people looked for new symbols of Greenlandic identity. The festive garments of Kalaallit Nunaat served that purpose and became ethnic and national emblems or costumes. Festive costumes that originally functioned within the domain of the church became part of the political arena.

From the very start of the introduction of the festive costume in East Greenland, considerable freedom of choice existed and not all church members attended services in festive costumes. Moreover, not all Tunumiit owned such clothes, and those who did, did not wear festive costumes in church at all occasions. Tunumiit often preferred to wear European skirts and dresses, European suits and other types of Euro-American festive garments in church.

Nowadays, although many Tunumiit consider Kalaallit (native) festive dress the proper clothing to wear on Greenland's National Day on 21 June, in fact only a small minority of the Tunumiit actually wear the national costumes to the celebration of the National Day (Figure 4). Few people wear national costumes in church in Tiileqilaaq (Tiniteqilaaq) and in Tasiilaq. During Easter, Pentecost, and other Christian holidays, almost no national costumes were to be seen. Christmas seems to be the only holiday on which even a minority of the attendants at church still wear the national costume.

More and more, fine European clothes, suits and dresses are worn, even in church. In 2001, nobody appeared in church on Maundy Thursday in national costumes, except for Lars and Thomasine Tarkisimat. They told Buijs (2004) after the service that it was their wedding anniversary and Lars' birthday. At the baptism of a newborn child, the first school day of 6 year-old children, confirmations and marriages in church, national costumes are often chosen by the next of kin as the proper wear, especially in church. During the celebrations at home after the church service, East Greenlanders usually dress in fine European clothing, but boys and men can dress in the national costume. The white cotton anorak and black textile trousers are comfortable indoors and are therefore suitable festival garments at home as well as in church. But they often prefer European festive dress because, as explains Thomasine Tarkisimat: "We are sometimes tired of the *Kalaallisuut*. Sometimes, we do want something different to wear. Every time we wear our *Kalaallisuut* it is the same identical costume" (in Buijs 2004).

Thomasine Tarkisimat indicates that European garments can express different personal and collective identities more easily. Only slight changes are made to a national costume after it has been completed. The bead collars are repaired and small bands of extra beads are added when a new colour or new types of gleaming beads become available in stores. A new type of lace, embroidery or *paarilit* (knitted wristbands) can be added, but it remains the same costume. European festive dresses are easy to change or to combine with other garments and different types of footwear.



Figure 3. The celebration of Christmas, 25 December 1933 (photo by Jacob van Zuylen, no. AF.77, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden).



Figure 4. Anna Kuitse, a drum-dance leader and teacher from Kulusuk, and some of her pupils, performing drum dances in traditional East Greenland dress in Tasiilaq, 21 June 2001 (photo by Cunera Buijs, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden).

European dresses and fancy shoes are less expensive than the highly expensive national costume for women. A complete costume with a bead collar costs between 3000 and 3500 Euros at a sewing atelier.

Reinventing East Greenland type of festive costumes

At Greenland's National Day celebrations in 1999, the Choir of Tasiilaq sang Christian songs while Greenland's flag was hoisted. Afterwards, the mayor of the Tasiilaq municipality gave a speech. The male choir-members were all dressed in white cotton anoraks and black trousers and most of them wore black festive *kamiit* (sealskin boots). The majority of the women choir-members wore the West Greenlandic type of national costume and a few of them the East Greenland variant, a white cotton festive *amaat*. One of the female singers was dressed in seal fur *tattulaq* (*amaat*), trousers and long seal fur boots, all in traditional East Greenlandic style. She had borrowed the costume from the Tasiilaq Museum. Two of these costumes were made for the museum in 1984, on the occasion of the centenary of the founding of the city of Tasiilaq. The costumes, including two for males, are the property of the Tasiilaq Museum. According to some informants, the East Greenlandic woman who borrowed them was an actor: "She is used to dressing up and being beautiful, and probably does not have a national costume to wear during the performance of the choir" (Buijs 2004).

Nowadays, an increasing number of females can be seen wearing a decorated white cotton festive *amaat* during festivities. Nooter (1976) found during research in the 1960s and 1970s that the *amaat* was not yet part of the festive dress. It was still used in daily life, but only by a small minority of the women in East Greenland. During the 1970s, only the few women who carried their children or grandchildren on their backs wore the cotton *amaatit*. In these families, young girls sometimes wore small white cotton *amaatit*, not decorated with beads, in which they carried their dolls.

Gradually, the decorated white cotton *amaatit* in the typical East Greenlandic shape evolved into a festive garment. This garment's shape is inspired by the 19th century coats (Figure 2) but it is made out of white cotton. Red decoration bands are sewn onto the edges of the garment. On these red bands, white and blue beads in series of three are sewn onto the red decoration bands and on the lower edges, bead strings are fasted to the garment. It has a broad hood and no bead collar. In the late 1990s, the *amaat* was popular among some teenage girls to wear at their confirmation. The costumes with bead collars are still predominantly used, but gradually more and more *amaatit* can be seen. The *amaatit* are combined with decorated seal fur trousers and with long white seal leather boots, as well as long black or red dyed seal leather boots.

The first anoraks in a typical East Greenland shape for boys and men developed in the 1990s. They were made of white cotton with vertical decorative stitching resembling the white *ikkiat*, gutskin (strips of seal intestines) anoraks, of East Greenland's past. Eliza Kunak, supervised by the Tasiilaq Museum, sewed such an

anorak for her husband in 1996. It was part of a training course related to her job at the municipal office. Eliza Kunak wrote in her paper:

There is also another type of anorak, which is more East Greenlandic and I have asked why it is different from the regular white anorak, as it is shaped today. This East Greenlandic anorak was made out of gut skin of bearded seal in the past. [...] The pattern is very beautifully designed. I want to point out that the anorak today cannot be sewed as in the past. You can easily sew it out of textile, regular anorak textile. They did not have textile in that period, therefore they sewed it out of bearded seal (Kunak 1996: 15).

The newly introduced anoraks are made out of white cotton and decorated with line-stitching, hand-made on a sewing machine. The decorative stitching, with 8 to 10 cm distances, resembles the vertical lines of the traditional gut skin anoraks, a design dating back to East Greenland's ancient material culture and philosophy (see Buijs 2004). A few East Greenlanders introduced East Greenlandic types of clothing intentionally. Eliza Kunak formulated her motivation for an East Greenlandic shape as follows:

I have chosen to engage myself in East Greenland culture, because I think that it is vanishing. I can see myself, as a fellow citizen of Tasiilaq that our culture is disappearing. I think this is caused by the fact that too small numbers of fellow people are still interested in this culture. Personally, I believe that our culture is very important to preserve and it is meaningful to children and the youth to understand their past. Therefore, I believe that we citizens can cooperate to preserve that culture and transfer it to the young, so we can be sure that we still have it in our next generation (Kunak 1996: 3).

There are a few Tunumiit, most of them middle aged, who play a leading role in the growing awareness of the importance of East Greenland's unique culture. Ole G. Jensen, the director of the Tasiilaq Museum, and his wife Buuti Petersen, a Greenland artist herself, are part of this small community and play an active role in this development.

The reinvention of Tunumiit variants of *amaatit* as festive garments for women dates back to the 1980s. Again, Eliza Kunak and her husband Morton Kunak were involved. In 1987, the Choir of Tasiilaq was going on tour to Europe. During a meeting, the choir members decided it was important to have a costume characteristic of East Greenland. This East Greenlandic costume should be suitable to wear during choir competitions and meetings in West Greenland and Denmark. The Tasiilaq choir chose to have a white cotton festive *amaat* for women and a white cotton anorak with East Greenlandic stitch decoration for men. Members were free to wear either the West or East Greenlandic type of festive costumes and their variants, because "the Kitaamiut type festive costume is for all of us Kalaallit" (Tunumiit informant in Buijs 2004: 187). When members of the choirs of different regions in Greenland meet, they can easily be recognized by the colour or shape of their costumes. For example, Sisimiut in Kalaallit Nunaata Kitaa opted for deep blue men's anoraks with a white line decoration in the form of a woman's knife. Kalaallit choirs appeared on Greenlandic and Danish television on special occasions such as the North Atlantic Christmas concert in Copenhagen on 2 December 2000. There were on that occasion two Kalaallit choirs, as well as one choir from the Farøerne and two Icelandic choirs

(Helene Risager, pers. comm. 2000). Obviously, this process of cooperation and competition stimulates the articulation of regional cultures.

Tunumiit variants of festive costumes are worn on other occasions. Boas Jonathansen, the head catechist of Tiileqilaaq (Tiniteqilaaq), showed a photograph of his granddaughter receiving her school diploma in Nuuk. Among her schoolmates were young women dressed in the Kitaamiut (West Greenlandic) type of festive costume with bead collars, and one young woman wearing her white cotton festive *amaat* of Tunumiit (East Greenlandic) design, combined with a *nuisarnqaq* (bead necklace) and *pikkivat* (topknot) with red textile and beads hanging loose on her forehead.

Tunumiit festive *amaatit* are also worn at dance competitions, for example in Qaqortoq in August 1997, broadcast on Kalaallit Nunaat's television. Pairs of young men and women in national costume competed to be chosen as Kalaallit Nunaat's very best. Two of the six women were wearing a white cotton festive *amaat*, and one of them combined her *amaat* with long brown seal leather boots in typical Tunumiit shape. Obviously, these two pairs came from Greenland's East Coast.

Regional variants of clothing are also seen in a tourist setting. White cotton festive *amaatit* are sometimes part of the dress of drum dance performers in the hotels of Tasiilaq (Hotel Ammassalik, Hotel Nansen and the 'Red House' Hotel). Tasiilaq's local museum's traditional stone house is occasionally the decor for story telling and drum dance performances in East Greenland costumes. The costume also appears on postcards and leaflets from Greenland Tourism. It will probably appear on tourist web sites in the near future as well.

The aesthetics of the national costume⁸

East Greenlanders seem to prefer the colours white and red (and blue to a lesser extent), and in almost all parts of the national costume these colours are present. Often these light and bright colours are contrasted by blue/black or black boots for men and women. Black trousers for men contrast with their white anoraks. The darker brown colours of short seal fur trousers and the dark fur edgings of white *kamiit* and the bead-collar blouses also provide contrast. There is a wide range of additional colours matched with the three dominant colours. This colour preference is expressed in all types of materials, varying from dyed seal leather, beads, to textiles. The colours, composition, motifs and materials used are more or less standardized, especially in the design of the national costumes for both men and women. Although there is great freedom of choice, variation seems to play a minor role in the design and composition of the national costume. The notion of continuity is overriding.

Many women stated that they preferred to make the lower edgings of the bead-collar blouse of the traditional check-patterned cloth, instead of the flower-patterned

⁸ The information for this section was gathered through interviews and participant observation in East Greenland (see Buijs 2004).

textiles introduced later. This silk check-patterned cloth was available until 1970, but then it was no longer supplied and disappeared from the local stores. Women often made great efforts to obtain the preferred type of cloth and sometimes ordered it through relatives working or studying abroad. It was even ordered in European countries other than Denmark. But in the end, seamstresses were obliged to turn to flower-patterned cloth as a substitute. Even today, many women stated that they preferred the check-patterned edgings above the flower design.

In the 1970s, flower-patterned decorative bands became available in the shops, and women started to use it to decorate edgings. This decorative band, only 2 to 3 cm wide, was far too narrow to cover entirely the edges of festive blouses. Therefore, the seamstresses had to use two rows of the decorative ribbon twice, one above each other. This repetition is considered less beautiful than the use of one piece of cloth at the edges and is dictated by the limitations of the materials available. This preference is not age related. Although some few women preferred floral fabrics, most informants of all ages preferred check-patterned silk cloth. The use of checkered cloth does not indicate the age of the wearer, but it may indicate the age of the garment itself, as made between 1940 and 1970.

When women's long white festive boots were introduced, lace and cotton or silk-thread embroidery were added. This embroidery was done in cross-stitch. Later, floral embroidery was introduced, and nowadays this flower-patterned embroidery is considered more beautiful than the older type of embroidery. The type of embroidery is an indication of the age of the garment, not of that of the wearer.

The shiny texture of silk cloth seems to be preferred and is considered particularly beautiful by the women in Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (East Greenland). In the southern part of Kalaallit Nunaat, where cow skin is available, women prefer to make the black edgings of the costume of black cow skin. The white fur lines of the short women's trousers are preferably made out of white calfskin and in many places sheepskin is used. But in Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua, women prefer to use black dyed sealskin and white clipped dog fur. If dog fur is not available, seamstresses sometimes buy white fox fur or sheepskin from a sewing atelier. The fur is clipped the same way as with dog fur—evenly, to a length of about 1 cm from the skin.

Women generally prefer hand-made lace above machine-made lace. A costume is considered to be more beautiful, then, if the proper materials are used. When Buijs asked what it was that made a national costume beautiful in their perception, they all answered that: "It is beautiful because it is well made; if the sewing is of high quality and the stitches are regular and small" (Buijs 2004).

Today, there are custom made national costumes in East Greenland, as well as copies. Especially bead collars, skin embroidery (*avittarneq*) and the thread embroidery of the seal leather boots are copied. Different reasons for copying parts of the festive costumes were mentioned. Some skillful older women repeated, as grandmothers or mothers the patterns of their own costumes for their granddaughters or daughters. Some women reduced the patterns of the older relatives to make clothes

for the children. These women often copied systematically all parts of the costume, even the knitted red wristbands (*paarilit*) including a bigger and smaller pattern of the white beads as decoration sewn on top. Other women stated that they preferred unique costumes and considered them more skillfully made, because of their uniqueness. They mentioned that young inexperienced seamstresses tend to copy parts of already existing clothing in order to have a model. They considered copying as less skillful.

Conclusion

Festive garments for special occasions did not exist in the traditional pre-Christian culture of Kalaallit Nunaata Tunua (East Greenland). Beautiful new garments made out of fine skins and valuable foreign materials were worn in daily life, as well as during drum dances, *aasiviit*, solstice and baptisms. First events, often connected with social transitions in life, were marked by various rituals.

Sewing and designing clothes were a woman's preserve but also "women's magic," since spirits were involved with sewing and garments. Sewing and clothing were not only practical matters. The materials used were also associated with animal spirits. The holes in beads were the passageway for spirits leaving or entering⁹. Skillful seamstresses earned respect and prestige within their communities. Sewing abilities resulted in beautiful, protective and empowered garments made of animal pelts. It is not surprising that high-quality sewing and perfectly made garments were highly valued.

During the processes of baptism and colonization, Kalaallit Nunaata Kitaa (West Greenland) and European clothing were adopted. The Lutheran church ceremonies replaced pre-Christian rituals as clothing habits disappeared or were incorporated within the context of the Lutheran church. Nowadays, festive clothing is used within the context of personal rites of passage, which continue to be important and meaningful to Tunumiit families. A child's first school day and confirmations of teenagers are celebrated, and on such occasions European attire can be seen next to Kalaallit festive costumes. Festive clothing is also bought in shops. Fewer women are able to prepare sealskins and to sew sealskin garments. Inuit women have obtained employment outside their homes leaving them less time for traditional tasks. However, a few Tunumiit seamstresses are still producing beautifully and perfectly made garments. These women sell their expensive products and produce garments on request from customers on the west coast. They sometimes work in sewing ateliers. Seamstresses are nowadays paid for their special skills.

A few Tunumiit key figures, the Tasiilaq Museum and also the tourist branch—in its own way—play an active role in stimulating the consciousness-raising, reinventing and revitalizing of Tunumiit material culture and clothing. When the choirs hold competitions, often broadcast on Danish and Kalaallit television, Tunumiit variants of

⁹ According to Sheila Romalis (in Issenman 1997: 194), the opening in the net pattern of the bead collar allowed the spirits through to be in contact with the person. In our research in East Greenland, we found evidence for the holes in the beads themselves being the passage way for spirits, which comes close to the concept of Romalis (see Buijs 2004).

Greenland's festive costumes are not only worn because of this festive occasion and their beautiful appearance, but also because they express regional or ethnic identities.

Festive garments (especially Tunumiit variants such as cotton *amaatit* and Tunumiit types of anoraks) constituting the national costume, may express ethnic or regional identity as well as Kalaallit Nunaat's national identity, especially on June 21 during the celebrations of Kalaallit Nunaat's National Day. Festival costumes worn by politicians in the Home Rule or abroad during political meetings also express national identity.

Traditional garments have disappeared and foreign clothing was adopted, but local sewing traditions continued, and today seamstresses still wield the thread and needle using their skills within new contexts. Sewing skills and designing clothing still reflect important women's qualities and now women are paid for their work. Tunumiit clothing is part of a vivid cultural tradition. Garments are made and worn as different layers of meaning and shaped by "women's magic."

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