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Joëlle Robert-Lamblin

**“Various aspects of a long-term anthropological survey in Ammassalik (East Greenland). Changes in demographical structure and way of life.”**

Un article publié dans la revue ***Historical and cultural problems of northern countries and regions***, no 4, 2008, pp. 51-75. Komi: Russian Federation.

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la collection “Peuples autochtones”

Fondée et dirigée
par
Jean Benoist

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**“Various aspects
of a long-term anthropological survey
in Ammassalik (East Greenland).
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Table des matières

[Abstract](#Various_aspects_abstract)

[Research question](#Various_aspects_1)

[Methodology](#Various_aspects_2)

[The demographic analysis and results](#Various_aspects_3)

*- Population growth and demographic explosion*

- *Trend in birth and death rates*

- *The drop in births : introduction of birth control*

- *The age pyramid of the Ammassalik population, at 1st January 2007*

[The socio-economic evolution](#Various_aspects_4)

*- Sedentarization*

- *Changes in activities, resources and lifestyles*

*- Urbanization process*

- *The impact of an accelerated evolution*

[Conclusions](#Various_aspects_conclusions)

[Bibliography](#Various_aspects_biblio)

[Figure legends](#Various_aspects_fig_legends)

[Appendix](#Various_aspects_appendix). *Study on women and families* Inquiry among East-Greenlandic women providing the following information

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

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Abstract

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

This article outlines the evolution of the Ammassalik population over a century, since its discovery by the Danes in 1884, until today as global warming is starting affect human activities. The Ammassalimiit Inuit ethnic group living on the east coast of Greenland remained in isolation for a long time, until recently. In her presentation of the ethno-history of this former isolate now open to the outside world, the author has focused on demographic aspects, in which she was able to track changes during repeated field trips between 1967 and 2007. In Ammassalik, as in most indigenous communities in the Arctic, the process of demographic transition has been accompanied by other socio-economic and cultural changes considered in this article.

Research question

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

Why focus on demography as a main approach in Arctic studies ? Because anthropo-demographic analysis is one of the means to estimate the adaptation of a human group to its environment, by its ability to survive in it and to reproduce.

Eastern Greenland, where I carried out a long-term, or longitudinal, study with regular field trips, remains my reference work. The Ammassalimiit ethnic group, although constituting a small human group (currently, in 2007, 3,350 inhabitants in total for the Ammassalik and Ittoqqortoomiit regions), is of particular interest for three main reasons :

- this small community of sea-mammal hunters was discovered late by Westerners : in 1884. Thus, at the beginning of the 20th century it represented, in a way, a survival of "prehistory" ;

- at the end of the route of Eskimo migrations from Asia, it could be a conservatory of traditions lost elsewhere ;

- lastly, until the 20th century, by its geographic isolation it constituted a "perfect" model of an isolate as defined by demographers and geneticians : an endogamic group, inside which members find their mate.

In the continuation of the research undertaken in this region as early as 1934-37 by Robert Gessain (who was a medical doctor as well as an anthropologist), and Paul-Emile Victor (an ethnographer), I conducted a long-term survey, including several field trips between 1967 and 1994. In September 2007 I was additionally able to collect some new data on my way to Nuuk University. I could say that my work is situated at a meeting point between cultural and biological anthropology, in which I use a quantitative as well as qualitative approach.

Methodology

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

After having established a precise and complete genealogical and demographic data base for the entire population for a century, it was possible to reconstruct and analyze the past when contact between these nomadic hunters and the Western world was still very limited. I was then able to follow, with minute accuracy, the evolution of the population throughout the 20th century. The analytical methods used are close to those of historical demography and anthropological demography.

My on-going research on the evolution of the Ammassalik population allowed me to study their three major transitions : demographic ; socio-economic ; and cultural.

Because of their long isolation, the Ammassalimiit represented an original human group, with a specific biological and socio-cultural background, while still fundamentally being part of the same Eskimo culture which had developed from the Bering Straits, along the northern coasts of Alaska and Canada, and through into Greenland.

The 413 Ammassalimiit discovered and listed by the Dane Gustav Holm were, so to speak, the only occupants of the immense east coast of Greenland. There was no longer any Eskimo population north of their region and towards the south, several hundred kilometers from Ammassalik, the last remnants of an Eskimo group was found. During the 19th century it had gradually emigrated towards the colonies on the south-western coast.

From what we can gather, contact between Ammassalimiit and South-East Eskimos was very rare ; it involved long and dangerous expeditions carried out by a few hunters and their families for bartering.

Without excluding the possibility of an ancient admixture of the Ammassalimiit with a few European castaways (Norsemen or European whale or seal hunters), we can consider the Ammassalik population, at the time of its discovery, as a real endogamous area, inside of which marriages occurred. This is the very definition of an isolate.

With the advent of European colonization, started in 1894, and the development of communications between that area and the outside world after the Second World War, did the Ammassalimiit keep their singularity or lose their biological and cultural specificity ?

I chose to study the changes through demographic analysis, for two major reasons :

- the analysis of demographic phenomena covers a very wide field in the history of individuals and their social life : births, diseases, deaths, marriage, reproduction, migrations, occupation of territory, habitat, etc.

- and, in the particular case of the Ammassalimiit, the demographic changes happened from the very beginning of colonization. They were spectacular, and induced numerous transformations in social and economic life. Thus, I studied the interaction between numbers and structures, in the evolution of this small group of Arctic hunters who, in a few decades went, as Ejnar Mikkelsen wrote, "from Stone Age to atomic age".

This paper represents only the tip of the iceberg, but the rest is huge : it consists of a considerable quantity of carefully collected, verified, crosschecked, corrected and completed data. For me, this long process began in Paris in 1962 with Prof. Robert Gessain, by sorting demographic and genealogical documents collected by him among the Ammassalimiit from 1934 onwards. I continued this work in Copenhagen, beginning in 1966, and in Eastern Greenland, from 1967 to 2007.

This study of demographic change was thus undertaken after the gathering of data provided by numerous household censuses, parish registers, administrative and medical documents, information collected by Robert Gessain and, more particularly, an inquiry on women's fertility carried out with the help of the East-Greenlandic midwife Sofia Jorgensen in the 1960s and 1970s (see the Appendix below), as well as by my own fieldwork.

As far as hunter-gatherer populations go, the Ammassalimiit are probably unique. The analysis is rich and detailed, but difficulties encountered along the way should not be minimized. Nor should the limitations of such a micro-approach, where the small size of the samples under consideration can lead sometimes to insignificant or hazardous results.

As far as socio-economic and cultural data are concerned, I gathered them myself, primarily during my field trips. During each stay in the field I made an effort to collect, in an identical fashion and in all inhabited settlements of the district, including small summer camps, a certain number of data which would allow me to comprehend social and economic change, as well as its diversity in relation to place of residence. This information concerns both material life, including hunting activities and newly-developed occupations, and social, cultural and religious life, including education, etc.

I compared it with older data, known from the publications of researchers or personalities having studied or administered this region, such as Gustav Holm, Knud Rasmussen, William Thalbitzer (Thalbitzer 1914, 1923 and 1941), Johan Petersen, Ejnar Mikkelsen (Mikkelsen 1944), Arne Hoygaard and Robert Gessain.

In my work there has thus been a part of direct observation, through my own stays among the population, and a part of reconstruction of the past with the help of all that could be gathered from testimonies, archives and numerous publications on the area.

The demographic analysis and results

- Population growth and demographic explosion

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

When Holm, having spent the winter in the Ammassalik area, left for the south in 1885, he set off an important phase of emigration. Between a fifth and a quarter of the Ammassalik population left in successive waves in search of the European goods whose existence they had just discovered.

The number of individuals who remained in Ammassalik between 1885 and 1895 was low. During his summer expedition in 1892, Ryder only found 293 persons scattered throughout the district in small groups. Ryder attempted to stop the movement towards the south, which was depopulating Ammassalik, by announcing the forthcoming opening of a trading post in the area ; but departures went on, and in 1894 only 235 individuals were left in the district. This explains the drop in the population figures, lasting until 1896, when the emigrants and their descendants returned home. However, they had lost many people in epidemics in the Cape Farewell area.

Although some decided to stay in the South, the setting-up of a trading post and a small Lutheran mission at Tasiilaq, in 1894, induced many of those who had emigrated to return to their native region. In 1896, 120 of them came back.

The growth of the Ammassalik population that began within the first few years of colonization was spectacular, despite the heavy death toll from diseases introduced by foreigners, against which the indigenous population had no immunity. Administrators were already thinking in terms of overpopulation - the population had doubled in 30 years -when, in 1925, part of the population (70 individuals, i.e. 10%) was transported some 1,000 km further north. There, along with some West-Greenlandic families, they were to found the colony of Scoresbysund (Ittoqqortoormiit). Ejnar Mikkelsen's establishment of a new settlement on the East coast had two objectives : to alleviate the population problems of the Ammassalik district and, more particularly, to further the Danish cause in the conflict with Norway over the sovereignty of East Greenland. Because of the difficulty of access to these areas there would be no contact between these two related populations in Ammassalik and Ittoqqortoormiit, except for a few isolated occurrences.

The period from the very end of the 19th century through to the beginning of the 1970s was thus marked by a spectacular demographic expansion : despite severe epidemics of hitherto unknown diseases, the population increased sevenfold, with all the consequences this can have on economic and social life in such an environment where resources are scarce, with little variety.

- Trend in birth and death rates

The gap between birth and death rates was already accentuated. When medical assistance became more readily available, population growth accelerated even more, reaching an annual average of over 3% and even 4% during the 1960s. In the 20 years between 1945 and 1965 the Ammassalik population had once more doubled, without immigration and despite a sizeable emigration. Up until 1970, the annual birth rate rarely fell below 40%.

The first half of the 20th century showed strong variations in the mortality rate, due to epidemics brought on by contact with outsiders. These included the common cold, influenza, whooping cough, measels, poliomyelitis and smallpox, and they had a dramatic impact on this population who had no immunity to such diseases (Robert-Lamblin, 1986 : 36).

After 1950 death rate variations were lowered by medical help, vaccination, and antibiotics. The overall death rate decreased from more than 30% at the end of 19th century, to less than 20% in the middle of the 20th century. It is now closer (12%, Fig.1) to that of Western countries (8.9% in Denmark, in 2005), but we must bear in mind that the Ammassalik population has a young age structure, with a third of its population under 15.

A new type of mortality appeared in Ammassalik during the 1960s and has become increasingly prevalent : violent death due to alcohol abuse. Recent statistics show that violent deaths (by accident, homicide and suicide) make up 38% of all deaths, mostly among the male population [[2]](#footnote-2).

The decrease in infant mortality has been spectacular : it started at the beginning of the 20th century, even before the presence of a permanent nurse - in 1932 - or a Danish doctor- in 1946. This decrease was essentially due to improved hygiene during child-delivery, and post-natal care, owing to the presence of one and then several Greenlandic midwives trained in western Greenland or Denmark, like Sofia Jorgensen who contributed to the French research.

At the beginning of the 20th century, more than one Ammassalimeeq child in four died before the age of one ; in 1962-1966 this figure had dropped to 1 in 7, and in 1972-76 to 1 in 12. Infant mortality thus showed a sharp decrease (from 300% at the end of the 19th century, to 84% in 1972-76) which has continued, to reach its present level of 32% (Fig.1). However, this rate still remains high, specifically in this part of Greenland [[3]](#footnote-3).

- The drop in births : introduction of birth control

As mentioned above, the birth rate showed a spectacular increase during the 20th century. The high birth rate, rarely under 40%, and often over 60%, even up to 70%, was due to the population's youth and the women's high fertility. From the data I gathered, the various factors which increased the fertility of Ammassalik's women could have been : the increased stability of marriages after the introduction of Christianization, improved hygiene during childbirth, a lower reproduction age, a shorter breast-feeding period, a more regular diet, and so on.

Worried by the high birth rate in Greenland and all the related problems, the Danish authorities started to develop a birth control policy in Greenland in 1968 (1969 for Ammassalik). As early as 1971, a sizeable decrease in the birth rate for Ammassalik, almost reduced by half, showed the impact of health services on the population and revealed that the women, particularly married women, were receptive to it.

Thus, the changes over the past thirty-five years within the East Greenlandic family have been considerable. Most births occur later and women's last deliveries are earlier than in the past, while the number of children per women has dropped from 7.2 in the 1960s, to 2.86 in 2005 [[4]](#footnote-4). Fertility is sometimes stopped for several years and then resumed for one or several pregnancies and for precise reasons : often the desire to give the name of a deceased parent to a baby, following the ancestral custom (Robert-Lamblin, 1986 and 1988).

To summarize, in the evolution of women's fertility, three different phases can thus be distinguished : a period of natural fertility corresponding to the "prehistorical" period of the group ; another non-Malthusian period, but during which certain changes appeared, linked to colonization ; and, finally, a Malthusian period when, from 1969, women realized that they could manage their own fertility by refusing a pregnancy through abortion or use of contraception, or by postponing it and deciding on the ideal size of the family, etc.

For the most recent period, Figure 2 shows that the ages of the mothers of children born between 1997 and 2006 lie mainly in three age groups : 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, i.e. 73% of the births ; and that the 20-24 age-group presents a clear peak for the most recent years (2002-2006). In contrast to the generations of older women (Robert-Lamblin 1988 : 278-282), young mothers under 20 are numerous (one woman out of 4 who gave birth), while late pregnancies over the age of 40 are rare. The number of legal abortions, which is increasing - particularly among young women aged 15 to 24 -, exceeded the total number of children born during the years 2003-2006. This explains the declining birth rate in the period 2002-2006 (Fig. 1). Families of three children are the rule ; they rarely exceed four.

These two demographic phenomena, mortality and fertility, were purposely analyzed extensively in my work. The study of mortality trends, as well as the causes of death according to age and sex, are good markers of the level of a population's physical and mental health. The study of birth rate and fertility shows changes in behavior and customs, the couple and the family, including its organization, and the genetic pool (through admixture with other Greenlanders or with Westerners, Americans or Europeans).

- The age pyramid of the Ammassalik population,
at 1st January 2007

Despite the long existence of birth-control practices in this country (almost 40 years since its introduction) and the high incidence of legal abortions, especially in recent years, the present age pyramid remains wide at its base and very narrow at the top, displaying the youth of the population. In January 2007, 33.3% of the Ammassalik population born in Greenland was under 15 (compared to 26% for the whole Greenlandic population of Greenland, and to 19% for the Danish population of Denmark) ; and only 7% was over 60 (10% in the whole of Greenland and 21% in Denmark ; see also Bogoyavlensky and Siggner, 2004 : 27 and 37). This age distribution has interfered at the social level, since the youth has favored the accelerated introduction of changes, while the comparatively few elderly persons have been unable to ensure the continuity and transmission of traditional ancestral values. In the middle of the pyramid we observe the strong decrease in births occurring in the years 1970-1975 (and affecting the generation of 30-35 year-olds). However, this sharp drop in births did not last very long (Fig. 3).

The socio-economic evolution

- Sedentarization

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

The second part of my work related to the transformations in the lifestyle of Ammassalik's population, i.e. its rapid evolution and urbanization process.

The first important turning-point in the recent history of the Ammassalik population was the Second World War. In the late 1930s few transformations could be observed in material culture, family, social life and religion, but the population was then still being shielded from too much contact with the outside world by the strict control of the Danish authorities. They wanted to protect this small community, vulnerable as it was in many ways, particularly biologically due to a lack of immunity to disease from the outside, and socioeconomically, because of the risks involved in abandoning its traditional way of life.

Protectionism and isolationism could no longer be maintained during the Second World War. East Greenland, cut off from all ties with Denmark and the rest of the country, was directly dependent on the United States for a period of five years. An American radio-meteorological station was set up at Tasiilaq in 1941, and in 1942 a military base was built in the heart of the Ammassalik district, at Ikkatteq, so that planes circulating between Europe and the US could refuel in emergencies : up to 800 Americans were based there. The East Greenlanders then discovered an astonishing new material culture and technology, until then totally alien to their world.

The second decisive turning-point in the evolution of the Ammassalimmiit towards Western civilization was the period that began in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This inaugurated a new era of profound transformations and an opening-up to the outside world. The major events were : beginning in 1955, the modernization of the small regional capital, Tasiilaq, and the Danish influx to this settlement, which has greatly increased since then ; the regrouping and increasing concentration of the scattered population into larger villages better equipped for trade and medical, educational and religious services ; the setting-up of facilities for developing commercial cod fishing at Kuummiit in 1958 ; the construction, in 1957, of a radar base for the American D.E.W. Line, and then of an airstrip on Kulusuk island ; and the beginning of commercial aviation in the early 1960s, permitting increased communication with the outside world and the development of summer tourism.

This new phase in the evolution towards "Westernization" among the Ammassalimiit was to continue throughout the following years, encouraged by educational policies tending to integrate the young into Danish society.

Traditionally, the geographic distribution of the ethnic group was characterized by dispersed and isolated family groups (patriarchal family) and by winter as well as summer nomadism. The changing of winter quarters every two or three years to exploit other hunting grounds and let the sea mammals settle back near the abandoned place, was no longer practiced. The population settled permanently in villages, although summer migration for a few days or weeks was still largely followed.

There was a spontaneous tendency in the population to converge towards the trading post of Tasiilaq and the religious missions of Tasiilaq, Kuummiit and Kulusuk. But, from the end of the 1950s onwards, the deliberate policy of the Danish central government was to favor the concentration of the Greenlandic population around medical and educational establishments, close to trading posts and technical facilities set up to process and commercialize cod.

In the 1960s and 1970s the district of Ammassalik emerged from its isolation, as the East Greenlanders were encouraged and helped, like their fellow compatriots in the West, to become real Northern Danes (Gessain 1969). The district was modernized, communications were developed, and a great effort in schooling and vocational training was designed to transform this population into a European-type society.

- Changes in activities, resources and lifestyles

Seal-hunting was the ancestral occupation which up to fairly recently supplied the East Greenlanders with everything they needed to live (Victor and Robert-Lamblin, 1989 and 1993). It is still practised by part of the population. However, it underwent major changes in the course of the twentieth century, and today most young people are no longer attracted by it. The dramatic drop in sealskin prices on the international market has moreover tended to hasten the end of this type of activity, since no one today can escape the absolute need for monetary resources to achieve a level of relative modernity in the home, clothing, transport, tools, food and leisure. Hunting is consequently being abandoned as a main occupation.

In the 1960s commercial cod-fishing grew spectacularly, particularly in Kuummiit. It triggered a regrouping of the population near the technical and commercial buildings of the KGH, the creation of some wage-earning activities, the acquisition of motor boats, etc.

This economic redevelopment led to important social changes. However, the great hopes resulting from the yields in the 1960s were not confirmed. In the years 1972-1976 cod production declined sharply, followed by an influx of salmon and halibut.

Finally, wage-earning activities really came into being after the Second World War, with the development of tertiary industries. Most employment in housing, health, trade, education, telecommunications and technical services went to Danes or West Greenlanders, leaving less important jobs for the local population. To fight this proletarianization, a professional training program was intensified in the 1970s. The results were rewarding since a certain number of positions in Tasiilaq, previously held by persons foreign to the district, were taken over by Ammassalimiit.

With its move into modernity, Ammassalik society has seen the emergence and development of socioeconomic classes whose lifestyles differ greatly from traditional models : fishermen, wage-earners, and those who receive public assistance. Craftsmen do not form a special category, since very few of them make a living from handicrafts, and they combine this activity with hunting, fishing or wage-earning employment.

- Urbanization process

In 1990 the population was distributed among four types of residence. Nearly a half (48%) lived "in town" (Tasiilaq) ; 28% was settled in two villages with several hundred inhabitants (Kuummiit and Kulusuk) ; 21% lived in three villages with fewer than 200 inhabitants (Tiileqilaaq, Sermiligaaq and Isortoq), and only 3% had remained in small settlements with very low population densities (Qernertivartivit, Ikkatteq or temporary migration places) (Fig.4). Thus, there was a wide diversity of lifestyles among the Ammassalimmiit, depending on their place of residence or main occupation. On the one hand, there were family groups which still lived basically like their ancestors, in tiny settlements, often of fewer than ten hunters. On the other hand, there were stable wage-earners living mainly in Tasiilaq, whose lifestyle was very close to that of Westerners. Between these two extremes there were numerous intermediate categories, and a social stratification was developing. There were already the makings of a bourgeois class of salaried East Greenlanders with well-paid positions of responsability.

Nowadays, i.e. in 2007, of the Greenlandic population inhabiting the Ammassalik region (2,871 persons born in Greenland [[5]](#footnote-5)), more than 60% live in the small capital of Tasiilaq, which has expanded tremendously and modernized ; 23% are found in the two large settlements of Kuummiit and Kulusuk ; and 16% in three "medium size" villages : Tiileqilaaq, Sermiligaaq and Isortoq. The number of villagers in Tiileqilaaq and Isortoq has declined considerably, whereas the Sermiligaaq population has increased. Very small settlements like Qernertivartivit or Ikkatteq have been abandoned as a permanent residence, their inhabitants, like many others in that region, having converged towards the town of Tasiilaq.

- The impact of an accelerated evolution

With the detailed examination of the impact of an accelerated evolution, my studies have focused on the social disorders it has brought about.

The great psychological problems experienced by the Ammassalimiit having to adapt to this rapid change, which have affected all aspects and values of their existence - culture, religion, family, society, economy or life-style - have been expressed in various ways and have sometimes created tragic situations. All generations have in fact been affected, but to various degrees.

The fragility of social order which we observe can be attributed to several factors :

- a weakening of family education, of the moral authority represented by the "old ones" or by tradition, and of the prestige of the elderly in the eyes of the young ;

- the emergence of relatively well-off new social classes, made up of wage-earning employees who share little : they save, accumulate goods and riches, and often hold positions of command. The mechanisms to reduce inequalities which existed in traditional society, such as sharing or gift-giving, are tending now to disappear, and this new situation can generate conflict ;

- a decrease of social integration of individuals in today's life, leading sometimes to suicide (see below, Note 2). In recent years, two out of three suicides were by young people aged 13 to 29, mostly men ;

- a peaceful way to settle conflicts, like the traditional song-contest with drums, no longer exists and nothing has taken its place. One of the effects sought in drinking too much might be the freeing of inhibitions, as drunkeness breaks one's reserve, allowing one to express that which, normally, is hidden or held back. Fairly recent in this area, alcohol with all the ills it brings in its wake, has tended to reveal the tensions, rivalries and jealousies which have no other way out of being expressed ;

- finally, a weakening of the influence of religious leaders might be apparent through the fact that homicide and suicide are reappearing, after having been forcefully fought by the clergymen and almost eradicated during the first half of the century. In September 2007 an old man - over 70 - from Tasiilaq mentioned to me how regrettable it was that there were no chamans any more. He said : "Chamans were real teachers in our society".

Conclusions

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

Let us come back to the question mentioned at the beginning : over a century after its first contact with the Western world, has the Ammassalik isolate disappeared or somehow maintained itself ? To conclude, I will highlight certain observations. First, the analysis of marriages and fertility has revealed that a strong endogamy was maintained up to the Second World War, and that since then there has been a change in morals. Illegitimate births, greatly disapproved of in the past, have become more and more numerous, and are the rule nowadays. Among these, the increasing number of individuals of mixed parentage reveals exogamous tendencies, particularly among Ammassalimiit women.

The East-Greenlanders' biological background has been modified by the introduction of genes from the outside, of various origins : a few West-Greenlanders have married Ammassalimiit and been assimilated into the East-Greenlandic population, but the most important genetic admixture is due to the arrival, since the Second World War, of a relatively large number of Westerners - Europeans and Americans -, who have left descendants behind or married Ammassalik women.

I was able to trace the evolution of the Ammassalik population's composition according to ascendents' origins by drawing on the numerous genealogical data gathered up to the end of the 197 0 s. Of the Ammassalimiit listed in December 1976, 89.3% had all their ascendants originating from that region, despite the fact that there were increasing numbers of mixed-blood births. This could be explained by the emigration (or death) of a fairly large percentage of individuals of mixed parentage (Robert-Lamblin, 1986 : 46).

At that stage the Ammassalimiit genetic isolate was still largely intact. But the migratory movement between Ammassalik and the outside, and the population's exogamous tendencies which have increased since then, have created an increasing inter-mixture between Ammassalimiit and non-Ammassalimiit, leading to a greater heterogeneity of this ethnic group's genetic pool.

As regards socio-cultural factors, it appears that the transformation of social structures, along with cultural changes, came earlier and, at the time of my observations, were more important and wider than the modifications in the genotype.

However, the Ammassalimiit have not lost all cultural identity. Their specificity now lies first of all in the persistence of their own dialect, even if some transformations followed the influence of the official West Greenlandic language (Tersis 2008).

The most essential parts of certain ancestral social rules have survived, despite some modifications, for instance family solidarity, the "reincarnation" in newborns of the name of deceased relatives, with the particular education system attached to it, and the practice of adoption.

Traditional customs and techniques have been best preserved among those who remained the most attached to hunting activities. In these families one observes a persistence of communal sharing of game, of traditional dietary habits and ancestral technology (dog sledges and various tools), and a remaining attachment to mobility and summer nomadism. But are the younger generations ready to take on the transmission and continuity of their cultural heritage ?

Nowadays, most young people show a lack of interest in hunting, which can lead to it being abandoned as a main activity. In 2007 the mean age of the 126 "professional hunters", i.e. men officially registered at the Ammassalik municipality as living mainly from this resource [[6]](#footnote-6), was 43, ranging from 19 to 68 (and 8% are 60 or over). In proportion to the local male population, they are more numerous in the village of Sermiligaaq than in other places. But, for most men, hunting and fishing has become a leisure-time activity, in addition to their wage-earning activities.

Global warming, noticeable in this Arctic region for nearly ten years, is disrupting hunting activities. Marine mammal hunters need to adapt their practices to the modified behavior of their game [[7]](#footnote-7). Conditions of transport to the hunting grounds have moreover changed : due to the glaciation of fjords appearing later and lasting for shorter periods during the year, and to the melting of the coastal glaciers, there are fewer opportunities for men and dog-sledges to travel during the winter period, and security is reduced.

Fishing for fish such as Greenland halibut, redfish, and the Atlantic wolf-fish is however proving more fruitful than before. There are some trading opportunities for these products in Kuummiit, where fish for export is now only salted, but they are mainly used for consumption of fishermen's families or the local population. This is particularly the case of cod.

The Home Rule Government authorities, which in Nuuk (capital of Greenland) plan the economic future of Eastern Greenland, rely primarily on the development of tourism. Facing such limited prospects, one may wonder how the Ammassalimiit will be able to overcome their socio-economic difficulties while maintaining their own cultural identity of "real" free men of the Arctic, that is to say *Inuit.*

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[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

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Figure legends

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

**Fig. 1. - Birth and death rates among Ammassalik population, in 1997-2006**

1/ In the first period (1997-2001), there were 251 legal abortions for 358 births, i.e. 701 per thousand births ; and in the second period (2002-2006), 320 abortions for 313 births, i.e. 1,019 per thousand births. In fact, annual abortions became more numerous than births during the years 2003-2006.

2/ Men's over-mortality is noticeable : 56% of all deaths for the first period, and 61% for the second. The average age at death in the two periods shows a very small increase for men : from 46.4 in the first period to 47.0 in the second (if we count only the deaths after the first year of life). On the other hand, the average age at death for females has increased considerably : from 53.1 to 59.3 in these periods (discounting infant mortality).

3/ In order to reduce perinatal mortality, mothers at risk during their pregnancies are now sent to the Dronning Ingrids Hospital in Nuuk to give birth.

*Sources : Data from Ammassalik municipality's files (courtesy Johannes Kalia and Laurits Bloch) and from the Chief Medical Officer in Greenland (courtesy Jytte Hey).*

**Fig. 2. - Distribution of women's age at the birth of Greenlandic children born in Ammassalik, in 1997-2006**

First period : 1997-2001 : 358 births ; mean age of the women : 25.4 ;

Second period : 2002-2006 : 313 births ; mean age of the women : 24.9 ;

Total period : 1997-2006 : 671 births ; mean age of the women : 25.2. *Sources : Data from Ammassalik municipality's files*

**Fig. 3. - Age pyramid of Ammassalik population (born in Greenland), at January 1st 2007**

Total population born in Greenland = 2871 individuals.

*Sources : Data from Ammassalik municipality's files and Statistics Greenland's documentation.*

**Fig. 4. - Distribution of the Greenlandic population of Ammassalik municipality, in 1976,1990 and 2007, according to place of residence**

*Sources : For the years 1976 and 1990 : Robert-Lamblin 1999 :45.*

*For the year 2007 : Ammassalik municipality's files and Statistics Greenland's documentation.*

Appendix

*Study on women and families*Inquiry among East-Greenlandic women [[8]](#footnote-8)\*
providing the following information

[Retour à la table des matières](#tdm)

**- Data on women :**

• 1st menstruations, age at marriage, 1st childbirth, last childbirth, menopause,

• contraception use, abortion,

• childbirth techniques, if traditional,

• infant feeding,

• educational level and work of the woman.

**- Data on children :**

• number of births, spacing,

• fetal mortality,

• neonatal and infant mortality,

• interbreeding,

• person bringing up the child, adoption.

**- Data on couples :**

• ethnic origin and choice of the mate,

• degree of kinship between spouses,

• age difference.

**- Data on families :**

• parents living together, or not,

• marital status,

• single-parent family,

• grandparents role.

**- Other collected data :**

• migration history of individuals and families

• difference of behavior between generations of women

• differences between geographical areas or between ethnic groups.

**- Analysis of collected data :**

• data coding, preserving confidentiality,

• data-processing and statistical treatment.

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Fig.1 - Birth and death rates among Ammassalik population,
in 1997-2006

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Populationborn in Greenland | Birth rate 1 | Death rate 2 | Infant mortality rate 3*(per thousand births)* |
| Period 1997-2001*mean population = 2757* | 25.8% | 13.8% | 33.8% |
| Period 2002-2006*mean population = 2825* | 22.3% | 11.7% | 31.8% |

1. In the first period (1997-2001), there were 251 legal abortions for 358 births, i.e. 701 per thousand births ; and in the second period (2002-2006), 320 abortions for 313 births, i.e. 1,019 per thousand births. In fact, annual abortions became more numerous than births during the years 2003-2006.

2. Men's over-mortality is noticeable : 56% of all deaths for the first period, and 61% for the second. The average age at death in the two periods shows a very small increase for men : from 46.4 years in the first period to 47.0 in the second (if we count only the deaths after the first year of life). On the other hand, the average age at death for females has increased considerably : from 53.1 years to 59.3 in these periods (discounting infant mortality).

3. In order to reduce perinatal mortality, mothers at risk during their pregnancies are now sent to the Dronning Ingrids Hospital in Nuuk to give birth.

*Sources : Data from Ammassalik municipality's files (courtesy Johannes Kalia and Laurits Bloch), and from the Chief Medical Officer in Greenland (courtesy Jytte Hey).*

Fig. 2 - Distribution of women's age at the birth of the Greenlandic children born in Ammassalik, in 1997-2006



First period : 1997-2001 : 358 births ; mean age of the women : 25.4 ;

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Fig. 3 - Age pyramid of Ammassalik population
(born in Greenland), at January 1st 2007



Total population born in Greenland = 2871 individuals.

*Sources : Data from Ammassalik municipality's files and Statistics Greenland's documentation.*

Fig. 4 - Distribution of the Greenlandic population of Ammassalik municipality, in 1976,1990 and 2007, according to its place of residence

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **1976**[[9]](#footnote-9)\* |
| Place of residence | Nb Greenlandicinhabitants | Regrouping by type of location |
| Tasiilaq | 826 | town36% |
|  |  |
| Kuummiit | 461 | large settlements37%medium size settlements24% |
| Kulusuk | 401 |
| Tiileqilaaq | 201 |
| Isertoq | 190 |
| Sermiligaaq | 169 |
| Ikkatteq | 42 | small settlements3% |
| Qernertivartivit | 21 |
| Pikiiti | - |
| Of no fixed abode | 14 |
| Total population | 2325 |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **1990**[[10]](#footnote-10)\*\* |
| Place of residence | Nb Greenlandicinhabitants | Regrouping by type of location |
| Tasiilaq | 1273 | town 48% |
| Kuummiit  | 436 | large settlements28% |
| Kulusuk | 324 |
| IileqilaaqIsertoqSermiligaaq | 192187174 | medium size settlements21% |
| IkkatteqQernertivartivitPikiitiOf no fixed abode | 28102018 | small settlements3% |
| Total population | 2662 |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **2007 [[11]](#footnote-11)\*\*\*** |
| Place of residence | Nb Greenlandicinhabitants | Regrouping bytype of location |
| Tasiilaq | 1732 | town60,3% |
| Kuummiit | 377 | large settlements23,4%medium size settlements16,2% |
| Kulusuk | 296 |
| Tiileqilaaq | 136 |
| Isertoq | 100 |
| Sermiligaaq | 230 |
| Ikkatteq | - | small settlements\_ |
| Qernertivartivit | - |
| Pikiiti | - |
| Of no fixed abode | - |
| Total population | 2871 |  |

*Sources : For the years 1976 and 1990 : Robert-Lamblin 1999 :45.*

*For the year 2007 : Ammassalik municipality's files and Statistics Greenland's documentation.*

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1. E-mail : joelle.robert-lamblin@evolhum.cnrs.fr [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Demographic data provided by the Chief Medical Officer in Greenland show that the causes of the 473 deaths (281 men and 192 women) in the Ammassalik population between 1994 and 2006, were as follows : 61.5% by natural death (148 men and 143 women) ; 12.3% by accident (43 men and 15 women) ; 22% by suicide (79 men and 25 women) ; 4% by homicide (10 men and 9 women) ; and 0.2% by an unknown cause (1 man). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For the whole Greenlandic population, the infant mortality rate varied from 7.9 to 15.4% during the years 2002 to 2006. In Denmark, infant mortality reached 3.8% in 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. During the same period, the average number of children per women was 2.36 for the whole of Greenland (information given in summer 2007 by Susanne Houd, midwife at the Tasiilaq hospital). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The population born out of Greenland, mainly of Danish origin, counts 198 individuals (136 men and 62 women) ; 163 live in Tasiilaq ; 26 in Kulusuk ; 7 in Kuummiit ; and 2 in Tiileqilaaq. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In order to obtain a full-time hunting license, at least 50% of one's total gross income has to be from hunting and fishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Seals in particular are present where there is ice floe. As they say : "No ice, no seal !". [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. \* *This inquiry was carried out later on by me, in Aleutian Islands, Northern Yakutia and Kamchatka* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. \* 31/12/1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. \*\* 31/07/1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. \*\*\* 01/01/2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)