

GREENLAND

UNNATURAL SELECTION

by Emanuela Colombo





Nuuk (Greenland) Nana Lybeth currently works as a psychologist and specializes in the treatment of trauma.

As part of her specialization a few years ago, she received training in overcoming trauma and this brought to the fore the enormous drama that she and thousands of other Inuit girls had undergone during their youth.

Naja was subjected to the forced and non-consensual insertion of an IUD at the age of 12, when she was still a virgin. She hadn't been aware of what had happened when she and all the girls in her class were taken from school to a doctor's office for what was supposed to be a routine visit. Not only that, she felt ashamed to talk about it even with her parents, and so Naja endured the pain caused by the IUD that was too big for a girl of her age. She subconsciously suppressed the memory of the cause of that pain. Many years later, when she tried unsuccessfully to get pregnant and consulted a gynecologist, the IUD was removed. However, she was still unable to talk about her "shame" with anyone. Only after her psychological training did she start to face reality and talk about it, discovering that many other women had also undergone "forced contraception."

Naja brought these women together and now they are asking the Danish government about the reason for this great injustice and are seeking compensation for all their years of suffering.

FORCED CONTRACEPTION IN GREENLAND

In the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of ethnic Inuit girls of childbearing age (12 and upwards) in Greenland were implanted with IUDs. This was on the orders of the Danish government as part of its Danish Coil Campaign for birth control.

Nobody explained to the girls what was happening and their parents were never asked for their consent. In a short time, the measure led to the halving of the birth rate on the world's largest island, a former Danish colony which was granted autonomy in 1979. Many of these young girls grew up suffering from serious health and fertility problems.

The first woman to describe this terrible experience was Naja Lybert, who now works as a psychologist specializing in the treatment of trauma.

A few years ago, as part of her specialization, she received training that brought to light the enormous drama to which she and many other girls had been subjected during their youth. In Naja's case an IUD was inserted without her consent when she was 12 and still a virgin. She didn't understand what was happening when she and all the girls in her class were taken by the school to a doctor's office for what was supposed to be a routine examination. Not only that, she felt too ashamed to talk about it, even with her parents. Naja thus endured the pain caused by an IUD which was too big for her and she suppressed the memory of the causes of that pain.

Much later in life, when she tried to have children and consulted a gynecologist because she was unable to do so, the contraceptive IUD was removed. However, she still could not talk about her "shame" with anyone.

It was only after psychological treatment that Naja was able to come to terms with the abuse and to begin to talk about it. She also discovered that many other women of about the same age had also been subjected to "forced contraception". Naja brought these women together and they are now demanding that the Danish government explains the reason for this great injustice. They are also seeking compensation for all the years of suffering they have endured.

Nuuk (Greenland). Today many of the girls who were subjected to the Danish Coil Campaign in Greenland in the 1960s and 1970s are no longer with us. In many cases they died of natural causes but in numerous others their deaths were due to the serious infections of the uterus with which they had to struggle all their lives.



Nuuk (Greenland). Holga Platou underwent IUD insertion without consent at the age of 13. She was picked up from school together with her classmates and taken to a Danish doctor who inserted the IUDs without explaining anything to them and without asking for their parents' consent. Out of shame and fear, Holga didn't talk to anyone about what had happened to her. She managed to suppress the memory of the event despite the continuous pain during her menstrual cycle. Holga was unable to have children and despite many medical check-ups, no doctor could identify the spiral which had probably been absorbed by her uterus during the many years it remained there. In 2018, after constant bleeding and infections, Holga had a hysterectomy.





Nuuk (Greenland). Since the 1950s, Greenland has undergone major changes due to modernization imposed by Denmark. The Inuit people have been forced to move from their villages to urban areas and government-provided public housing. The introduction of commercial hunting and fishing methods has undermined the traditional activities of the population, many of whose members have lost their jobs. The psychological effects of these dramatic changes have been devastating with an increase in depression, suicide and abortion. Indeed, Greenland currently has the world's highest suicide rate. It increased fourfold between the 1970s and 1980s and today an average of 400 inhabitants per 100,000 take their own lives.



Nuuk (Greenland). The Danish Coil Campaign birth control campaign, which was implemented by the Danish government on Greenland's Inuit female population in the 1960s and 1970s, was largely successful. In a short time, it led to the halving of the birth rate on the world's largest island, a former Danish colony which was granted autonomy in 1979.



Nuuk (Greenland). When Jacobine Berthelsen was 11, doctors inserted an IUD without any explanation and without informing her parents. Her body rejected it and she suffered from infection. The same treatment was inflicted on her four times. Shortly thereafter her mother passed away and she was cared for by an aunt before being sent for adoption in Denmark. Jacobine never told her Danish adoptive parents about the IUD out of modesty and shame.

Jacobine returned to Greenland at the age of 19 and subsequently had three daughters. The fourth pregnancy was terminated on account of health problems and during the abortion the gynecologist tied her tubes without her consent. She was no longer able to have children after that.



Nuuk (Greenland).

Arnaq Johansen had a spiral inserted at the age of 12. The instrument damaged her uterus to such an extent that, even though it was removed when she was 19, she was unable to have children. She never had the courage to talk to anyone about the fact that she was subjected to forced contraception treatment at such a young age, not even her husband for whom she was unable to bear the children he desired. Even today this remains her greatest regret.

It was only after reading Naja's story that she began to talk about her sense of "shame." This helped her to discover that she was not the only person with this pain and that she was not to blame for it.





Nuuk (Greenland). These large circular objects connect Nuuk and Greenland to the global communications network.



Nuuk (Greenland). Qassiarsuk horses have adapted over the centuries to Greenland's harsh weather.



Nuuk (Greenland). When Dina Tobiassen turned 13 her mother was told she had to take her to the hospital for a check-up. Dina was taken into a room alone and the doctor inserted an IUD. At that time she didn't understand what was happening to her, nor did the doctors explain to her or her mother the real purpose of the visit. Dina vividly remembers the pain, the fear, the bleeding and the infections that followed, but she was never aware of having an IUD inside her. When she was 20 the hospital summoned her and told her that it was time to remove the IUD... which she didn't even know she had. Dina managed to have a baby but lost two more because of ectopic pregnancies on account of the damage to the cervix caused by the IUD.



Nuuk (Greenland).The old hospital in Nuuk . During the 1960s and 1970s, Inuit girls of childbearing age were brought here and subjected to the forced insertion of IUDs by Danish doctors as part of the Danish Coil Campaign. This birth control campaign was conducted without the girls' consent.

Nuuk (Greenland).

Magdalene Larsen was in Nuuk attending high school when she was told she had to go to the doctor for a check-up. The year was 1975. Magdalene doesn't remember what happened in the operating theatre but she vividly remembers the pain and the bleeding which lasted for weeks. At the age of 20 severe abdominal pain prompted her to go and see a doctor who found and removed the IUD. The pain never stopped completely and Magdalene had two miscarriages on account of ectopic pregnancies. They were probably caused by damage to the cervix by the IUD. She was eventually able to give birth to her only child, a daughter.





Nuuk (Greenland). Arnaq Knudsen Frederiksen is 42 years old. She accidentally got pregnant at the age of 14 and decided to have an abortion. During the operation, the surgeons inserted an IUD without asking for her or her parents' consent. At 21, Arnaq got engaged and tried unsuccessfully to get pregnant. She went to a doctor to try and find out why, only to discover that she had had an IUD for seven years, without knowing it. Since then Arnaq has had several abortions on account of ectopic pregnancies. Apparently, they are due to damage to the cervix caused by the IUD, she has never been able to have children of her own.

Nuuk (Greenland). Nuuk is the capital and main port of Greenland. The modern city dates back to 1721, when Hans Egede, a Norwegian missionary, founded a colony here with the name "Godthab," which means "Good Hope" in Danish. Today the city has just over 20,000 inhabitants, almost a third of Greenland's total population.





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