

Sovereignty as a Social Issue: The Case of Inuit

Nunangat

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Abstract

Inuit Nunangat, the name for the vast Inuit homeland in Arctic Canada includes sea ice as territory. Whereas modernist concepts of sovereignty typically invoke the fixity of land as the territorial *a priori*, this paper considers the ways in which the spatial and temporal flux of sea ice, thought as the territorial *a priori*, could offer understandings of sovereignty that would further Inuit self-determination in different ways in different contexts. The paper proceeds by examining the different understandings of sovereignty articulated in *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty in the Arctic* and the Government of Canada's argument that Inuit use and occupancy of the north supports Canadian claims of Arctic sovereignty. While Inuit understandings of sovereignty expand its definition to include social and environmental security, two examples related to the interpretation of land claims settlement agreements complicate the effort to ascribe any one single definition to sovereignty. Inuit experiences of sea ice as territory can offer a way of thinking the multiple ways sovereignty is brought into being in different contexts and circumstances for different purposes.

Introduction

Both Inuit living in the Canadian Arctic and scientists have observed a reduction in the extent and thickness of sea ice over the past several decades (Drobot *et al.* 2008; Ford *et al.* 2009; Goosse *et al.* 2007; Stroeve *et al.* 2011). Compared to the variability of sea ice over the past several thousand years, the present decline in sea ice loss is thought by many earth-scientists to be remarkable for its "magnitude, wide geographic distribution and abruptness" (Polyak *et al.* 2010: 1773). While Canadian claims to sovereignty in the Arctic have a long history, the recent reduction in sea ice has spurred reinvigorated interest from many different parties, including politicians, academics and journalists. One response within this

diversity of priorities and interests has been to pay increased attention to how Inuit declarations and understandings of sovereignty trouble those made by Western actors in both practice and theory (Shadian 2010). For the purpose of this article, I focus on a limited range of claims and circumstances related to, on one hand, the Government of Canada's claim that Inuit use and occupancy of the high Arctic strengthen Canada's claim to Arctic sovereignty (Government of Canada 2009) and, on the other, *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty in the Arctic* (Inuit Circumpolar Council 2009). However, because these two specific claims to sovereignty are situated within the context of other claims and practices, this article first briefly outlines this broader nexus.

As is well known, one of the ways in which nation-states are responding to reduced sea ice is to lay claim to areas of the Arctic that are currently in international waters where, according to the US Geological Survey, a significant amount of the world's known remaining known fossil fuels are thought to exist (Johnston 2010). Under the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), nation-states have rights to an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that extends 200 nautical miles off their respective coastlines in which they have sole authority to extract fossil fuels from the sea floor. Article 76 of UNCLOS allows a nation-state to extend its EEZ if it demonstrates that the continental shelf on which it sits extends past the 200 nautical mile limit. The five countries that have coastlines on the Arctic (Russia, the United States, Denmark, Norway, and Canada) are currently preparing to make precisely this claim. If successful, much of the fossil fuel that is currently at an accessible depth in international Arctic waters would almost all fall under the technical jurisdiction of one or another nation-state. Rather than openly compete with one another over claims for the sea floor, the five Arctic coastline countries agreed in the 2008 *Ilulissat Declaration*, to cooperatively pursue claims through UNCLOS. The stated bases on which claims for an expanded EEZ will be considered as valid by UNCLOS are scientific. That is, nation-states must demonstrate through science that their continental shelf extends beyond the 200 nautical mile limit (Huebert 2009: 95-8; Macnab 2009). Canada set aside \$40 million to be spent from 2008 to 2013, the deadline for Canada's submission to UNCLOS, to scientifically map the sea floor to demonstrate the extent of its continental shelf (Abele *et al.* 2009: 588). Canada is cooperating with the two nations it shares Arctic borders with, the United States and Denmark

(via Greenland), to map the seafloor in the Beaufort Sea and off Greenland (Huebert 2009: 100; Byers 2009).

The *Ilulissat Declaration* signalled a notable shift in Arctic geopolitics (Koivurova *et al.* 2009). The five signatories also sit on the Arctic Council along with Sweden, Finland and Iceland. In addition to these eight nation-states, the Arctic Council, which was formed in 1996, has observer states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and six Aboriginal organizations permanent participants, including the Inuit Circumpolar Council. The council, which has consensually authored environmental protection strategies, is often seen as example of post-Cold War regional cooperation in the Arctic (Heininen 2010: 279-81). Pursuing issues outside of the Arctic Council, and given the interest other putatively Non-arctic States have in the region, the *Ilulissat Declaration* could be interpreted as a strategic alliance of sorts premised on the vision of the inevitable militarization and eventual conflict over resources in the Arctic. However salient this concern might be to the long-term future of the Arctic, it is another implication that has immediate relevance for this paper, which is that the *Ilulissat Declaration* denied Arctic indigenous peoples the opportunity to have a say in the exercise of sovereignty in the Arctic (Nicol 2010).

Powel (2010) argues that the UNCLOS procedure pursued by the five Arctic nation-states amounts to a performance of sovereignty that depends upon the authority of science to transform the earth into zones to be managed for the purpose of resource extraction. The technical specifications in Article 76 must necessarily be interpreted within a political space; using science to adjudicate the extent of continental shelves is not a value-free or neutral endeavour (Lalonde 2011; Powell 2010). In this particular instance, then, science and state sovereignty mutually enact, or “coproduce”, authoritative understandings of what the world is and how it should be acted upon (Jassanof 2004; Irwin 2008). This particular coproduction privileges nation-states and science, while systematically deleting input from Arctic indigenous peoples. Mapping the sea floor is one way the Canadian state is exercising sovereignty; however, the strategy that is the central focus of this paper is the government’s argument that Inuit use and occupancy of the north bolsters the government’s claim to Arctic sovereignty. Before outlining this claim, I first explore sea ice and sovereignty from Inuit perspectives.

Sea Ice and Sovereignty: Inuit Perspectives

Sea ice forms a significant part of the terrain that the Inuit traditionally lived and hunted on. Indeed, the Inuktitut name “Inuit Nunangat” for the vast Inuit territory that stretches from Labrador to Alaska, through Northern Quebec, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, refers to sea ice as well as to land (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2011a). For their territory, the inclusion of sea ice in the Inuktitut name is not accidental or peripheral – sea ice is central to entire ways of life. Igloos were traditionally built on sea ice to take advantage of the fact that the ocean is warmer than the land. Sea ice also provides essential hunting, trapping transportation routes (Aporta 2009, 2011). The loss of sea ice directly impacts the health and wellbeing of the Inuit in many ways, not only through loss of traditional hunting grounds, but also through the profound cognitive and affective disruptions associated with the literal disappearance of home ground underfoot (Ford *et al.* 2009; Laidler *et al.* 2009; Pearce *et al.* 2010; Wenzel 2009). However, as a significant body of ethnographic, interview, focus group, and participant observation data gathered in the Canadian Arctic over the past several years make clear, it would be a vast mistake to position the Inuit simply as victims of environmental change and modernity, despite the significant social, economic, and health challenges with which they are currently dealing (Ford *et al.* 2010). And as made evident in *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty in the Arctic* adopted by the Inuit Circumpolar Council (2009), Inuit organizations are actively advocating for understandings of sovereignty from which they would benefit.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) includes Inuit groups from Russia, Alaska, Greenland and Canada and has “permanent participant” status in the Arctic Council. The ICC includes representatives from the Canadian organizations who represent the beneficiaries of the four land claims settlement areas through which all land claims have been settled between Inuit groups and the Government of Canada.¹ The *Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty* was written

¹ In contrast to the history of aboriginal relations in southern Canada, there were no treaties signed between the government and Inuit groups until 1975. Since that time, all Inuit land claims in Canada have been settled within four agreements. These four areas, which together comprise Inuit Nunangat, are: “the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec), and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador)” (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2011b). Each of the four agreements contains different governance structures and different agreements regarding rights to subsurface minerals, the provision of health, education and social services, and policing. The Territory of Nunavut, for example, has a public, not ethnically based, government, but one which institutionalizes the use of traditional Inuit knowledge. The Nunavut Trust and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated manage treaty settlement monies, royalties, and investments, on behalf of

partly in response to being excluded by the *Ilulissat Declaration* that, as discussed above, was perceived by many as denying indigenous peoples in the Arctic a voice in issues of Arctic sovereignty (Young 2009). The *Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty* (Inuit Circumpolar Council 2009) puts the case for rethinking sovereignty bluntly: “Old ideas of sovereignty are breaking down as different governance models, such as the European Union, evolve. Sovereignities overlap and are frequently divided within federations in creative ways to recognize the right of peoples” (section 2.1). The *Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty* explicitly argues that Inuit rights to self-determination, as a group of people living in Canada, the United States, Russia and Greenland, trumps concepts of sovereignty that limit it to the territory occupied by nation-states. Modern nation-states take their form within and recursively constitute the system of states, and within this dynamic (in which individual political subjectivity is also a constitutive part) some discursive claims for the authority of sovereignty privilege the sovereignty of the individual nation-state while others privilege the sovereignty of the system of states (Walker 2006). The *Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty* (Inuit Circumpolar Council 2009) argues both the sovereignty of the state and the sovereignty of the system of nation-states are ways of lodging claims for self-determination: “The actions of Arctic peoples and states, the interactions between them, and the conduct of international relations must give primary respect to the need for global environmental security, the need for peaceful resolution of disputes, and the inextricable linkages between issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic and issues of self-determination” (Section 3.2). What is important to note here is that rather than the authority of the nation-state or system of states, it is “global environmental security [and] the need for peaceful resolution of disputes” that are privileged.

The view that sovereignty must necessarily involve the well-being of Arctic indigenous peoples and the environment upon which they depend is cogently argued by several Inuit leaders, including Mary Simon (2009), president of Inuit Taparit Kantami. In response to the increased attention given to Arctic sovereignty by the Canadian Government, Simon (2009) argues that the exercise of sovereignty entails more than “just ports, training facilities, and military exercises” (p. 252). Rather, the “pursuit of resources through an agenda of Arctic

the beneficiaries of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the Inuit of Nunavut, who comprise approximately 85% of the territory’s population.

sovereignty must involve a co-ordinated Arctic strategy to ensure that the Arctic has viable and healthy communities, sound civil administration, and responsible environmental management” (Simon 2009: 252). This is in pointed contrast to public articulations of Arctic sovereignty made by the Government of Canada. It remains a pertinent theoretical question, however, to ask if Inuit understandings of sovereignty are sufficiently different from western modernist concepts of sovereignty so as to not be co-opted by them.

Sovereignty from Inuit and Canadian State Perspectives

The argument that Inuit presence in the Canadian Arctic increases legitimacy of the Canadian government’s claim to sovereignty has a long history overshadowed by the trauma of forced relocations (Tester & Kulchyski 1994; Grant 2010). For an argument the Canadian Rangers promote a practice, in the name of sovereignty, from which both Inuit and the Canadian state benefit, see Lackenbauer [2007]. Tester and Kulchyski (1994) argue, based on extensive historical analysis, that while concerns with sovereignty were not among the official reasons for the relocation of several families to the high Arctic in the early 1950s, lower-level government staff, RCMP officers and Hudson Bay Company personnel working in the Arctic promoted the relocations as a way of establishing Canadian presence in the north. The legal and constitutional standing of the Inuit vis-a-vis the federal government is similarly complex. In 1939, the Canadian Supreme Court decided in favour of the Province of Quebec’s argument that the federal government should be responsible for the cost of relief for Inuit living in Northern Quebec and that “Eskimos” should therefore be included as “Indians” in the *Indian Act*. The Government of Canada removed the Inuit from the *Act* in 1951 (Tester & Kulchyski 1994: 7). Tester and Kulchyski (1994) argue that the federal government did not want to include Inuit in the *Indian Act* for fear of encouraging a “culture of dependency” that, from the government’s colonial standpoint, characterized the relations between the state and aboriginal groups of southern Canada who were included in the *Act*. This is important to note here because knowledge of the history of the government’s colonial relations, characterized by long periods of neglect, makes the movement to Inuit self-determination which began in the early 1970s all the more remarkable (Grant 2010). Inuit articulations of sovereignty should be understood, then, as ways of addressing the

legacies of colonialism that are manifested in social and economic inequalities as well as changes in the environment upon which traditional ways of life depend.

As discussed above, the Government of Canada is asserting its presence in the Arctic through the mapping of the sea floor. In addition to extending claims of sovereignty via UNCLOS, the government of Canada has increased military presence and public spending in the North and publicly pronounced upon the importance of Arctic sovereignty (Lackenbauer 2008). Within this ensemble of claims and practices, the Canadian government argues as part of its *Northern Strategy* (Government of Canada 2009) that because Inuit have lived in the Arctic from time immemorial, and because Inuit living in Canada are Canadians, the territory they live on is properly thought of as Canadian.² A clear statement of this logic of sovereignty can be read on the Ministry of the Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada, (2011) website: “The Government is firmly exercising our sovereignty over our Arctic lands and waters – sovereignty that is long-standing, well-established and based on historic title, international law and the presence of Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples for thousands of years.”

From the perspective of international legal precedent, Byers (2009: 119-122) argues that while Inuit use and occupancy potentially provides a strong and legitimate basis for the government’s claims of Arctic sovereignty in an international context, their argument is jeopardized by the government’s failure to fulfil obligations specified in the land claims settlement agreement. Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the corporation who manages the land claims settlement agreement on behalf of the Inuit in Nunavut, launched a lawsuit in 2006 against the Government of Canada for not fulfilling treaty obligations. At issue is a condition of the treaty, which came into effect in 1999, that the percentage of Inuit working in the Nunavut Territory public service should be proportional to the percentage of beneficiaries in the population as a whole, approximately 85%. The federal government was to assist in reaching this target but, according to reports by Justice Thomas Berger (2006), who also authored the 1977 report suggesting the moratorium of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, and the Auditor General of Canada (2010), it has systematically failed. Both Berger (2006) and

² In fact, it was Inuit negotiators who, in 1993, persuaded government officials to include the assertion that “Canada’s sovereignty over the waters of the Arctic archipelago is supported by Inuit use and occupancy” into the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (Byers 2009: 112).

the Auditor General (2010) cite well-established pedagogical research that shows educational development is severely restricted if it is not provided in children's native languages. In Nunavut, the federal government provides education in both English and Inuktitut until Grade 4, after which time it is provided in English only. This abrupt transition from Inuktitut to English is thought to be a factor in the high school completion rate of only 25% and the consequent lack of qualified civil servants (Berger 2006; Auditor General 2010). Byers (2009) argues that because the Inuit in Nunavut freely ceded sovereignty to the Government of Canada, the government's failure to fulfil treaty conditions give other nation-states good reason to claim that the government's claim of sovereignty over the Arctic archipelago, on the basis of Inuit use and occupancy, is null (p. 112-4, 119-22).

The Government of Canada might find its claims in the Arctic troubled from another direction. As is well known, Canada and the United States dispute the precise location of their shared border in the Beaufort Sea. The dispute, which is premised upon interpretations of agreements signed between Russia and the United Kingdom in 1825 and between Russia and the United States in 1867, is particularly salient because of the known fossil fuel deposits in the area of the disputed border (Byers 2009: 97-102). The Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) includes provisions regarding the rights to sea floor resources in the area close to that being disputed (Byers 2009: 102; Manley-Casimir 2011). As Manly-Casimir (2011) states, "It is important to note that the IFA gives the Inuvialuit the right to participate in decision making related to conservation and economic development in the Beaufort Sea since the sea is within the settlement region" (p. 30). And as Loukacheva (2009) suggests in relation to Nunavut Territory, from an international legal standpoint, Nunavut can advance its argument for self-determination by representing own interests in international contexts. Assuming this principle holds for the Inuvialuit Land Claim Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories, UNCLOS could offer ways for Inuvialuit to lodge formal interventions into claims to sovereignty made by nation-states.

Discussion

At the outset of this paper, it appeared that different understandings of sovereignty are being articulated by Inuit groups and the Government of Canada. In the former articulation,

sovereignty is seen as a way to ensure the well-being of people and the environment upon which they depend. In the latter, sovereignty is seen as a way to exert control over space. However, a closer examination shows that, in practice, this binary distinction between control over space and betterment of social conditions breaks down into multiple claims and practices. In the first example discussed above, domestic policies regarding the language of instruction in public education have a direct consequence on the legitimacy of claims made in an international context. This could lend credence to the view that states only retain legitimate authority if they ensure their citizens are well cared for, in which case there is no necessary reason why Inuit and Canadian Government understandings of sovereignty should contradict one another: the beneficent sovereign could disperse social goods – education, and social security in the face of changing environmental conditions – to subjects while protecting them from hostile outsiders. However, this example also suggests that if subjects express their dissatisfaction with social conditions, and if this expression of dissatisfaction is recognized by other nation-states in the state system, then the ability of states to act with authority over geographic territory, in this case Canada, can be threatened. At a minimum, then, this example shows that sovereignty is not a static phenomenon but is socially contestable. However, it also appears that there is nothing essential to the claim sovereignty should include social and environmental security that would prevent it from being enfolded within the argument that sovereignty is the exercise of control over a certain space. The second example discussed above could be interpreted as a matter of deciding how various legal instruments and agreements contravene or do not contravene one another. However, as Manley-Casimir (2011: 38) argues, it is more fundamentally a question of interpreting how the principle of reconciliation should be applied. The principle of reconciliation is important to note here not only because it signals the possibility that the Canadian state can be made to consider different ethical bases for action over time, but also because it indicates the importance of paying attention to the ways social groups do - or do not - become deemed as legitimately codified actors in legal decisions and agreements. After all, one of the issues at play in the second example involves historical agreements first signed between Britain and Russia before Canada itself became a nation-state. Sovereignty is not automatically bestowed upon groups of people as soon as they meet a universal set of criteria. Rather, sovereignty is a politically contestable and changeable phenomenon. But does this mean that Inuit understandings of sovereignty are different from those that have

prevailed through western modernity, and if so, how? A more specific way of asking this question is: should the Inuvialuit Final Agreement offer a route for the Inuvialuit to intervene in UNCLOS, thereby increasing claims to self-determination in an international context, would the sovereignty thus manifested be of a different character or kind than the form of sovereignty that would promote the social and environmental security highlighted by the *Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty*? Clearly, the assumptions that one holds of sovereignty will change how one views the possible answers to these issues. This gives rise to another question: what theoretical assumptions need to be made of sovereignty not only to analyze the contemporary situation but also allow it to exist as it does in the first place?

As has been well documented, several competing theories of sovereignty exist. For example, Max Weber defined sovereignty as the legitimate exercise of violence in a given geographic area, and Carl Schmidt defined it, within the modern liberal nation-state, as the capacity of the executive to make the decision to suspend the constitution and to impose the law by acting outside of the juridical order (Agnew 2009; Walker 2010). Despite the various ways sovereignty has been conceptualized, however, territory has typically been configured as its necessary precondition (Agnew 2009; Larkins 2010). Such territorial assumptions are made evident in claims made in the popular press by politicians, including the Canadian prime minister, that appear to invoke a Schmitian logic of sovereignty (the Canadian state declaring itself the decider of the law in the putative absence of juridical order that the shrinking sea ice unveils), or a Weberian logic (the state as capable of deploying legitimate violence in the form of the military and coast guard in the Arctic). The assumption that Canada could come under military threat, which informs both of these narratives, has been cogently critiqued by (Lackenbauer 2008), who argues populist appeals to Arctic sovereignty made by politicians detract from an understanding of the actual dynamics through which Canada and other Arctic nations are responding to various issues. However, while Lackenbauer (2008) might be correct in his analysis, he doesn't treat sovereignty itself as a mode of political thought. Such a critique is launched, however, from a point of view that draws on constructivist insights.

Broadhead (2010) argues Inuit declarations of sovereignty can be used to rewrite the colonialist "mental maps" through which the Arctic is often thought. Similarly, Vaninni *et al.* (2009) draw from Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) metaphor of modernity as liquid to argue that

we need to re-imagine the Canadian Arctic archipelago as a flux of mobility, rather than think of it as a rigid space that is an empty container waiting to be filled with the action of modernist politics imported from southern Canada. These critiques, which assert that the difficulties of responding to environmental changes in the Arctic through categories of political thought bequeathed by colonialism should not be ignored, are taken up by Gerhardt *et al.* (2010) who argue that the limitations of making strict delineations between ocean and land, as seen in modernist conceptions of sovereignty, are being demonstrated by the response to melting sea ice. This, together with Inuit declarations of sovereignty, they argue, can lead to configuring the world differently than dividing it between territorially-based sovereign nation-states and international oceans; the changing Arctic can be figured as a “fluid space of crossings [in which] new systems of governance can be employed that push the limits of the state form and enable new possibilities for cooperation and inclusion within and across state borders” (Gerhardt *et al.* 2010: 999). Similarly, in their critique of Arctic geopolitics, Dittmer *et al.* (2011) argue that both neo-realist political discourses (which regard the Arctic as a site inevitably decided upon by nation-states acting in their own self interest within an anarchic space) and liberal discourses (which regard the Arctic as a region best governed by international cooperation between nation-states, indigenous organizations, and established institutions and governance structures) are beholden to the modern and masculine conceits that the nation-state and science are superior ways of knowing and ordering space. They argue instead for an Arctic politics that emphasizes the perceptions and understandings of Arctic inhabitants (Dittmer *et al.* 2011). It is this experience of territory, as a place experienced by Inuit that I want to pursue as a way of refiguring the territorial *a priori* of sovereignty.

Conclusion

To my mind, the fact that “Inuit Nunangat” signifies sea ice as a constitutive part of Inuit territory as experienced in everyday life, together with the fact that sea ice is melting, presents a set of conditions that calls for ethical responses. The response I advocate here involves questioning the ways territory, political authority and sovereignty have often been thought together in Western political theory. As Shadian (2010) argues, Inuit forms of governance create the space and opportunity to reconceptualise Western practices of

governance and the theories that support them. I want to further this effort by considering what an ethical response is to the situation in which we find ourselves, which is that the material signified by Inuit signifiers of territory is disappearing. It seems to me that if territory, in different ways, has been configured as the necessary precondition of sovereignty (Larkins 2010; Agnew 2005, 2009), and if territory has been conceived as fixed land to be bought, sold, mapped for military and strategic purposes and subjected to legal and technical definitions (Elden 2010), then an ethical response necessarily involves rethinking sovereignty without premising it upon fixed territory – land – as a basis. The concept of I am arguing for here does not treat sovereignty as a condition that pre-exists the constitution of societies, but rather as a relational phenomena. That is, while sovereignty has a material component, and as such is in the world in a concrete way, it is brought into being and enacted, materially and discursively, by actors in the name of sovereignty (Agnew 2009: 104-6). This view does not foreclose the potential actions and networks of assemblages through which Inuit groups can and are, in concrete ways, advancing understandings and practices of sovereignty that are more beneficial to themselves. This is an important point to note because constructivist critiques of modernist conceptions of sovereignty run the risk of inadvertently consigning Inuit groups to a mode of politics that is irrevocably local rather than seeing how existing structures and agencies could be used to exert Inuit self-determination. As Walker (2010) suggests, moving from configuring the world as sovereign nation-states operating within a system of states to a reordering of inter- and intra state actors may not be so easy as sometimes presumed, even if it is acknowledged that different actors and entities in different scales are operating in complex heterogeneous fields. The issue here is thinking about the possibilities for politics that are both sustained and foreclosed by centering an account of politics in terms of the dualism of the presence-absence of the modern state system and individual nation states (Walker 2010: 198). Rethinking the territorial *a priori* as the spatial and temporal flux of sea ice, rather than the rigid fixity of land, supports a vision of politics that is attuned to how sovereignty, as a heterogeneous phenomenon, is invoked and implicated in different ways in different contexts. In this way, it could potentially support both the argument that Inuvialuit should participate in decisions regarding Beaufort Sea fossil fuels *and* that the interests of the Canadian state should not trump the vision expressed in *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration of Sovereignty in the Arctic* (Inuit Circumpolar Council 2009). Crucially, however, this would

depend upon reworking the broader cultural ethos through which individuals are implicated in sovereignty. It thus extends the ethic of rethinking sovereignty, for example through the principle of reconciliation, to the population of southern Canada, instead of leaving Inuit understandings of sovereignty as an issue that is exclusive to local Arctic populations and their lived experiences. This follows Connolly's (2007) argument that: "in democratic constitutionalism, sovereignty circulates uncertainly between the multitude, the traditions it embodies, constitutionally sanctioned authorities, and, where operative, the written constitution that the authorities interpret. The relative weight of each element can be specified more closely, although never completely, according to need and context" (Connolly 2007: 33).

Although this article is focused on sea ice reduction, there are other changes in the Arctic environment such as sea level rise and permafrost thaw that have profound social and political implications across different temporal and spatial scales. Rather than maintain a conception of social and political action that remains irrevocably bound to concepts of sovereignty that maintain a fixed basis, thinking the flux of sea ice as a basis for social and political life might provide the basis to meet challenging conditions with care; it might provide the basis for thinking sovereignty as a social issue.

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