Autonomy and Place-Making in Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat

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Abstract

Imperial journeys have fuelled claims to the Arctic. Comparing the Canadian Arctic to Kalaallit Nunaat, it is characteristic of both the arrival of Hans Egede in 1721 and Franklin's expedition of 1845-48 that taking "possession" becomes a defining element of what kind of sovereignty came to be established. In its current form, possession keeps the Arctic on the margins of Canada's sovereignty and preserves Denmark's interests in Greenland. This article aims to bridge discussions on postcolonial Greenland with that of postcolonial Canada, or more precisely, the Indigenous peoples of Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat. While these peoples occupy distinct geographical places, there are nonetheless some important connections as to the context in which they are both embedded but also shared ways in regard to what sovereignty might mean to them. This article's primary focus regards how Nunavut as a postcolonial autonomous space relates to Canada and challenges notions of place-making. It will however return to the different levels of autonomy in both places. Analysing two processes of devolution in Nunavut - its independence in 1999 and the more recent process of devolution of Crown lands and natural resources - it argues that devolution fails to transcend a state-centred perspective on decolonisation and remains anchored within a possessive understanding of place. Moving away from a nation-state framework, looking at Nunavut as an autonomous space calls for an appreciation of what sovereignty could mean when defined by people living in a specific locality and the agency they manifest in expressing what sovereignty means for them.

Introduction

The Introduction to this *Kult* issue references its initial departure in the upcoming anniversary of Hans Egede's arrival in Greenland in 1721. I wish to draw an implicit parallel here between the Danish-Greenlandic context and that of "reversed" South-North relations in Canada. I propose that, while being geopolitically remote, they both represent case studies of how "we",

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through a Eurocentric, Westphalian perspective, understand sovereignty and territoriality, a perspective that is in urgent need of deconstruction. This article has two beginnings. It first introduces the inquiry by a bridging discussion on postcolonial Canada with postcolonial Greenland. Second, it furthers the inquiry derived from my MA thesis *From South to North and North to South: Arctic Stories, Inuit Resistance and Decolonial Imagination* (2021) which explored different understandings of decolonisation in Nunavut. While the first beginning offers an explorative discussion on the historical legacies of colonial events, the second grounds the article within a specific sphere of knowledge regimes. Both sections are thus essential in situating the discussion on autonomy and territoriality in the Arctic.

Before moving on to any further discussion, I wish to clarify central aspects of South-North relations in Canada. While referring to geographical denominators, the South-North axis is also emblematic of a constellation of power relations. From a Wallersteinian global perspective, North and South have referred to the former as the core (the centre), economically dominant and exploiting the latter (semi) periphery for both human and raw material resources. Following this logic, the centre remains the place where "activity" mainly takes place while the periphery is regarded by the centre as remote and thus open for exploitation. In the Canadian context, these denominators have been reversed but also take place within the same "national boundaries". So the South is understood as the place where economic and political activity unravels with the North as the remote but nevertheless *Canadian* Arctic. What I suggest here is that South-North relations in Canada refer to a system ceaselessly fueled by the seizing of land from Indigenous peoples for extractivist purposes. South and North thus refer to the inconsistency between the idea of a shared national terrain and the reality of an unequal relationship founded on the ideals of one and the exploitation of the other. This last argument points to a tendency that too often roots the discussions on these relations within a centre perspective. However, unsettling centre-periphery relations is not only about identifying their asymmetrical nature, but also to recognise how the centre politically, socially and economically forces itself upon the periphery. There is thus an incentive here to look from the periphery or that which is seen by the centre as remote to expose the hypocrisy of the centre's discourse on national unity and challenge taken for granted notions of Westphalian derived sovereignty discourse. To look from the "periphery" as not the periphery but as an autonomous space - a self-defined place in its own right. I begin here by inviting a shifting of perspective in the way that South-North or centre-periphery relations are conceived to challenge current discourses on sovereignty and territoriality and invite for a redefinition of what Canada is.

In an article in this *Kult* issue, Lars Jensen argues that Egede embodies sovereignty issues between Greenland and Denmark. He is a symbolic figure of Denmark's ongoing sovereignty over Greenland wherein Danish geostrategic and economic interests, among others, are protected and maintained. In the Canadian context, I argue Franklin's "lost" expedition of 1845-1848 embodies similar symbolic value. Drawing a parallel between the Egede and Franklin's stories frames this article both as a kind of "Canadian" response to the relations between Denmark and Kalaallit Nunaat but also as an investigation in its own right. I am singling out the Franklin expedition for the mythology around the unfolding of events and for its influence on the way Canada claims its right to the Arctic. Although the lost expedition was found with the help of Indigenous observations, the expedition continued to be referred to as "lost" – a metaphor for its failure as a colonial undertaking, but also a metaphor operating as a legacy discourse preserving a mystic sense of "national bounds" with the North. The Franklin expedition had as its explicit mission the traversing of the last unnavigated part of the Northwest Passage. As such, the expedition represented triumphant British imperialism and the quest for a high-yielding economic route. But within Canada, the Franklin expedition became a determining nationalist element of South-North relations in Canada. In the words of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the "expedition laid the foundations of Canada's Arctic sovereignty" (CBC News 2014). Thus, the British imperial adventure contributed to delineating the Canadian Arctic and rendered the Canadian colonies as beneficiaries of the imperial journey. The paradox is, then, how something so remote to where the overwhelming majority of Canadians lived could become such a central feature of the British empire upon whom they relied, and how it could become inscribed as core material for Canadian nation-building? Here again the mythology of the expedition is prevalent and gives rise to a self-assertive Canadian nationalist narrative that contributes to closing the porousness of the Far North. The expedition laid a sovereignty claim to the Arctic and became central in shaping future narratives on Southern-Northern relations in Canada. While the colonies were about settlements, British imperial interests reinforced the settlers' claim to the territory and paved the way for ongoing Canadian interests in the Arctic as a resource and a trade route.

While there is much to challenge from the centre's nationalist discourse and the imperial journey settler colonialism is derived from, there is also agency in engaging with these colonial stories and exposing their mechanism of power. Emilie Cameron in *Far Off Metal River* (2015) investigates explorer Samuel Hearne's account of the Bloody Falls massacre of 1771 where an encampment of twenty Inuit were allegedly killed by some Dene people. As Cameron explains,

Hearne's description of the massacre portrays a story in which white people are innocent witnesses to the predicament of northern Indigenous peoples. This framing encouraged a narrative wherein white people could maintain ongoing colonisation and resource extraction of the North because they were described as innocent witnesses and therefore their actions (self-)legitimised as benevolent. It additionally justified the implementation of settler politics in the region and put in motion a specific claim to the history of the Arctic (Cameron 2015: 9). Similar to the Franklin expedition, what Cameron shows through the Bloody Falls massacre is how stories matter. Stories are political and carry an agenda. As Cameron writes, "colonial texts and the imaginative geographies they help constitute may be partial, constructed, and misleading, but they are nevertheless materially consequential" (Cameron 2015: 23). Stories shape "geographic imagination" and thus play a central role in laying sovereignty claims (Hunt 2014: 29). It is tales like those of the Bloody Falls massacre, the Franklin expedition and Egede's arrival in Greenland that fuel settler colonial claims and ongoing relations to the Arctic while also enabling "strong emotional responses" (Rud 2017: 1).

So on the one hand there is the perceptible effect these stories had in historically legitimising claims to the Arctic. On the other hand, there is also continuity in how these stories' settler colonial dynamics are manifested in the present time. Holding on to the Arctic, or that which is seen as the periphery, is illustrative of a continuous extractivist logic wherein the current neoliberal pursuit of the world's diminishing resources inserts the Arctic into the centre of global geopolitics, but without transferring power to the locals (Andersen et al. 2016: 94). Once again, this reinforces a paradox of the Canadian Arctic perceived as "periphery" connecting the chase and exercising sovereignty over the Northwest Passage in the mid-1800s to contemporary logics of neoliberal exploitation. There is thus a continuity between the then (British) imperial adventure and the current (Canadian) extractivist logic and in both instances the peoples of the Arctic are bystanders to their environment's exploitation. Comparing the Canadian Arctic to Kalaallit Nunaat, it is characteristic of both the arrival of Egede in Greenland and Franklin's expedition that taking "possession" becomes a defining element of what kind of sovereignty came to be established. In the Canadian Arctic and Kalaallit Nunaat, nation-states came to hold sovereignty over territories situated thousands of kilometres from the seat of government and administered by alien settler colonial authorities. In its current form, possession keeps the Arctic on the margins of Canada's sovereignty and preserves Denmark's interests in Greenland. However, to merely consider what sovereignty means in a superimposed nation-imperial logic restrains an appreciation of what it could mean when defined by people

living in a specific locality and the agency they manifest in expressing what sovereignty means for them.

Moving on from the archives, my intention with this initial reflection is to bridge discussions on postcolonial Greenland with that of postcolonial Canada, or more precisely, the Indigenous peoples of Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat. Whereas these peoples occupy distinct geographical places, there are nonetheless some important connections as to the context in which they are both embedded - that is, settler colonialism - but also shared ways in regard to what sovereignty might mean to them. An understanding of sovereignty conceived in similar ways of relating to their environment and how it shapes notions of selfhood and nationhood. While I primarily focus on how Nunavut as a postcolonial autonomous space relates to Canada and challenges settler colonial notions of place-making, I return to the levels of difference in autonomy between Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat in the end of this piece. This article works on several levels: on the level of autonomous spaces and how they challenge the ontology of possession; on the level of decoloniality as decolonising knowledge production (Quijano 2007); and on the level of my positionality as a Qallunaat and its implications. Departing from the process of devolution, I argue it fails to go beyond a state-vested perspective on decolonisation and, as such, remains anchored within a possessive understanding of place.[2] Within the parameters of devolution all focus is almost exclusively on developing resource extraction and thereby portrays economic prosperity as the only kind of prosperity. A logic that disregards environmental challenges linked to resource extraction and thereby threatens the well-being of Indigenous peoples whose understanding of selfhood is directly related to the environment (Pongérard 2017; Simpson 2004). Moreover, I explore the tensions between "Southern" and "Northern" thoughts on devolution to illustrate counter-strategies found in "alternative" devolution thoughts.

Research Positionality and Settler Colonialism

In my MA thesis (Cossette-Laneville, 2021) I discussed at length the need to be wary of the type of knowledge produced when doing research. Particularly so when non-Indigenous

[2] Devolution in this article refers to the transfer of power from the federal government to the government of Nunavut.

researchers engage with matters that directly relate to and impact Indigenous communities. My father was a great inspiration for my decision to undertake research on the Canadian Arctic. Through his stories and experience, I began questioning the implications of my positioning as a Southern Canadian vis-à-vis the North. I revisit my thesis' opening story on my father's time spent in the Canadian Arctic as I argue it still holds great illustrative value for the inquiry of this article. Working as a construction worker, he travelled multiple times from Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) to Iqaluit in Nunavut and Salluit in Nunavik. My father recounts a moment where he approached a group of Inuit workers in Iqaluit and, memorising an Inuktut sentence, told them to their amusement "Nanuminiqtulauqsimanngittunga" [I have never eaten polar bears]. He explains how words in Inuktut are not limited to their definitions but rather embody actions. The way these actions are reported in a sentence further depends upon the enunciator's view on the situation:

> "The combination of the word 'nanu' (polar bears) and 'miniq' being a past state for something that already lived forms the word 'polar bears meat'. Similarly, the act of eating - 'tu(q)' - means something that we 'often do'." (Cossette-Laneville 2021: 6)

In Inuktut, "Inuk" refers to people or a person while "tut" means "like". Hence, the action of speaking Inuktut literally means "like people" or "who expresses themselves like people". This practice of word formation is thus embedded in relationality. Words acquire meaning by being networked, in their combination with other chunks of words. This understanding of word formation is a move away from a vocabulary of possession, from associating sovereignty with geographic locality that is characteristic of the South-North and Danish-Greenlandic relationships. It is within this relational logic that I position myself as a "Qallunaat": a term that not only refers to the different position I hold as a non-Inuit individual or as a Southern Canadian but recognises the "multiple colonial entanglements" I am located in (Graugaard 2020: 47). My position is thus collectively defined in relation to Inuit peoples (Cameron 2015: xviii), building on past and present understandings of our shared history. This relational logic further points to the locating power of words and the need to be wary of the context from which I conduct my analysis.

Part of the work of disengaging from "possession" is to recognise its context. Canada is a settler colonial society ruled by successors of European migrants. Inspired by the work of Peruvian scholar Aníbal Quijano (2007), I engage with the framework of coloniality that anchors the beginning of imperialism in the fifteenth century with the conquest of the Americas and traces

its legacies to this day. Quijano helps to articulate the power dynamics of dispossession and oppression constitutive of coloniality as well as its temporal aspects, all essential elements in comprehending the Canadian case. Employing the framework of coloniality illustrates how Canada cannot be simply registered as a nation with a colonial history but as a settler colony. It is a society wherein colonial practices and ideals lie at the core of its institutions and relations. Settler societies are spaces where the colonisers never left; spaces where the division between "metropole and colony" is imperceptible (Tuck and Yang 2012: 5). Settler colonialism is thus "a structure not an event" (Wolfe 2006: 388). Complementing Quijano is Indigenous Australian scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's notion of settler states' "possessive logic": a way of thinking that is invested "in reproducing and reaffirming the state's ownership, control and domination" (2011: 647). Moreton-Robinson challenges state-centred understandings of "rights" and "sovereignty" as forming the basis for the legitimacy to govern, and redirects the focus to "rights" as a method of subjugation (Moreton-Robinson 2006: 390). By continuously following a state-vested understanding of right and sovereignty, it creates a regime of truth that centres a settler's logic and thereby delimits Indigenous sovereignty (Moreton-Robinson 2006: 389). To remain within these settler colonial arrangements restricts the prospects of genuine considerations on decolonisation. While part of the incentives of the article aims to highlight and understand Canada's settler colonial context, it also intends to show how we, as Qallunaat or "white" people, can partake in the decolonising effort. It is a reflection on the implications of my positionality within the field of research and an invitation for people in a similar position to engage in critically rethinking what sovereignty could mean when it is defined on Indigenous terms. Not all decolonial work should be conducted by Indigenous peoples. "White" people have to participate in the decolonial effort to really begin to challenge colonial legacies. Elizabeth Comack cautions against the homogenising discourse present within the settler colonial logic as it reproduces the dichotomy of coloniser/colonised (2018: 457). This dichotomy promotes an understanding where all non-Indigenous people are categorised as settlers and restricts potential for Indigenous and non-Indigenous alliances in dislocating settler-colonial relations (Woolford and Benvenuto 2015 in Comack 2018: 457). Canada is a highly diverse society consisting of descendants of settlers and Indigenous peoples but also of generations of migrants. As such, the discussion around sovereignty in Canada cannot solely remain between Indigenous and white Anglo-French-Canadians as it would, on the one hand, reinforce binaries and, on the other hand, prevent collective participation in articulating something that goes beyond the monopolising discourse of settler colonialism. Jensen in an upcoming book, *Remotely Australian*, writes that settlers and migrants are a false dichotomy.

He argues migrants should not be positioned as mere spectators to the discussion because there are also significant alliances to be created among Indigenous and "migrant" communities who have both experienced marginalisation as a result of these oppressive discourses. In the same vein, if, in the context of Nunavut, the entirety of the decolonial effort rested on Inuit peoples' shoulders they might arrive at a more autonomous version of their territory but would probably not challenge Canada's Westphalian take on sovereignty. How can Canada be reimagined as a national space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups alike form alliances? A space where "white" settlers also partake in the effort as opposed to leaving room for Indigenous sovereignty with passivity. Drawing on Jensen (this issue), I wish to continue the discussion on postcolonial sovereignty that is concerned with recognising and speaking out against white settler colonialism while also leaving room for Indigenous sovereignty to be defined on its own terms. A discussion in which my father's story represents one way to reflect on settler colonial relations and to recognise that he is on their land. And a discussion that recognises the Franklin expedition as a reinforcing agent of white settler colonialism. Both stories are nevertheless journeys onto Inuit land and their implications are what we need to continuously ponder.

Devolution in Nunavut

Devolution in Nunavut captures the above discussions, both in regard to Canada's settler colonial take on territoriality and how it restricts Indigenous sovereignty. Thus, inquiring into Nunavut's journey towards independence cannot dismiss the key role devolution played. However, I contend there is also an ambivalent dimension to the devolution discourse as it is instrumentalist and framed within policy-making, even as it also reflects a loosely defined political process arising from the culmination of years of struggles challenging the constraints of instrumentality. In seeking to grasp Nunavut as an autonomous space, I wish to draw attention to how devolution embodies the limitations of state-centred initiatives by placing independent territories such as Nunavut within a nation-state framework and thus as never fully autonomous. These initiatives are another example of the possessive logic which impedes Inuit defined sovereignty. In this section, I discuss two procedures of devolution in Nunavut: its independence in 1999 and the more recent devolution of Crown lands and natural resources.

Nunavut, formerly a part of the Northwest Territories became an independent territory in 1999, marking a big advancement in Canada for Inuit struggles towards self-determination. The creation of the territory was driven by the incentive to establish a government that would not

only be elected by Inuit peoples, but determined and driven by Inuit cultural principles (Whites 2009: 58). In addition, such a political body would increase Inuit representation both in Canada and globally, making Nunavut a leader in such territorial arrangements (Légaré 1998: 291). However, in attempting "to undo some of the mistakes of the past" (Billson 2001: 2), the creation of the territory very much embodied the ambivalent divide between instrumentalist policies and a genuine Indigenous governmentality. Whereas Nunavut appears to be a leap forward in terms of Inuit rights to their ancestral lands, it is also, as André Légaré suggests, performative in that it embellishes Canada's image abroad while asserting its sovereignty over the Northwest Passage (1998: 293). Financial dependency has remained a sensitive issue discouraging the federal government from prior recognition of the territory as independent. With limited industries and its natural resources under the jurisdiction of the Crown, Nunavut is almost fully reliant on federal support. Canada's "attempt to undo the mistake of the past" has largely disregarded the impact the relocation of many Inuit families in the 1950s (Penikett and Goldenberg 2013: 58) had on the "legacy of dependency" from which Nunavut is trying to become dissociated (Billson 2001: 9). Dependency arises from Canada's possessive approach to the territory: attempting to keep the "Far North" within its reach by using Inuit peoples as means to an end by locating them on its periphery. This focus on financial dependency limits the potential Nunavut has as an autonomous space, seeing economic prosperity as the only way towards autonomy. Looking back, Canada's perceived genuine governmentality can be challenged. Already in the 1960s, Inuit peoples had gained voting rights. In the 1970s, struggles for a land claim agreement had begun but were brought to a halt because the federal government was already invested in a quarrel with Québec over its desire for independence (Légaré 1998: 274). These previous efforts point to the necessity of acknowledging how political developments regarding Inuit peoples' rights are the culmination of years of constant struggles and not the result of altruistic gestures from the state. What efforts in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrate is that at most the federal government merely allowed a path forward on its terms defined by a settler's logic of possession: defining what can move in and out of its geopolitical understanding.

The second case of devolution in Nunavut I address constitutes a similar story. In 2019, the *Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement-in-Principle* was signed, officially kick-starting the procedures. However, already back in 2004 discussions around the possible devolution of Crown lands and nonrenewable resources were taking place but were dismissed by the federal government due to elections in 2005 and the Mayer report of 2007 assessing that

Nunavut was not ready to uphold such responsibilities (Cameron and Campbell 2009: 216). This devolution process entailed that all resources found on Crown lands were until 2019 under the jurisdiction of the federal government and any royalties made from resource extraction given to the same agent. Again, while devolution allows a certain political autonomy to the government of Nunavut (gaining full jurisdiction over their land and acquiring the opportunity to build a financial safety net with revenue made from mining royalties), Ottawa remains in charge of settling the terms of the agreement. That is, the terms are anchored in an understanding wherein Nunavut's independence can solely be achieved with financial stability, financial means that are determined by neoliberal principles of economic prosperity. Devolution does not present a challenge to neoliberal economics as it promotes a Southern Canadian type of investment and economic development. As Larson et al. argue, "territorial titling has led to a set of institutional arrangements that largely allowed the state to set the terms of debate" (2016: 323). Devolution conceals locality within the confines of a territoriality that cannot be separated from state sovereignty, and thus, from an understanding wherein the nation-state remains the structuring principle of any discussions on locality. To remain within state-centred initiatives to decolonisation impedes a move beyond political pragmatism and continues to be oblivious to what Nunavut as an autonomous space means for Inuit peoples.

Autonomous Space

Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton (2006) developed the notion of "autonomous geographies" as a theoretical vocabulary for spaces that aim at unsettling dominant laws and social norms through resistance and creation. They understand autonomy as contextual and relational, defined by the constellation of social struggles in which it is inserted (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 743). Central to their conceptualisation is a move away from an interpretation of autonomy as solely legislative and dependent on governmental recognition. They aim to challenge a neoliberal individual autonomy that focuses, among other things, on reinserting "the market into community structures" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 733). Devolution in Nunavut is one such example; seeking to make corporations and legislation more accountable to the local population by delegating power from the bureaucratic centre (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). There are however some inherent limitations within the parameters of devolution. Taking the recently signed *Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement-in-Principle* as a case illustration, the agreement stipulates how devolution should "mirror"

existing federal legislation regarding the management of non-renewable resources (Northern Affairs 2019: 28, 29). Hence, whereas devolution is promoted as Nunavut reaching a new level of autonomy, a postcolonial sovereignty approach starts by defining Canada's interests beyond its benevolent gestures (Jensen, this issue). Acknowledging that regardless of the extent of devolution, it remains within an understanding of autonomy that focuses on market-oriented reform policies that equates Inuit sovereignty with economic development. Rather, following Pickerill and Chatterton, I advocate for a collective approach to autonomy. Whereas their approach promotes collective self-rule through the freedom of and equal participation in its institutions, it also stresses how autonomy is a relational endeavour. It takes place in reciprocity; in "mutually agreed relations with others" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 732). It recognises that everyone needs to partake in the autonomy project and that, in this collectivity, negotiations and conflicts might arise as an inherent element of the project.

It is within this frame that I ground my understanding of autonomy and wish to draw attention to the specificities of Nunavut as an autonomous space. Nunavut is a space of negotiations, of innovations and of continuous questioning of the way it relates to Canada's nation-state framework. Considering the acquisition of voting rights in the 1960s, the struggles for land cession in the 1970s and the processes of devolution, hegemony is not monolithic. Whenever a certain form of autonomy is acquired, there is a need to remain aware of the risk of the meaning of this autonomy becoming subsumed within a settler colonial understanding. According to Pickerill and Chatterton "autonomy does not mean an absence of structure or order, but the rejection of a government that demands obedience" (2006: 738). Whenever new rights are acquired as a result of ongoing struggles and are incorporated as new policies by the government of Canada, they run the risk of eventually serving the state's interests rather than those of Inuit peoples. Following this logic, Nunavut must pursue its ongoing questioning to avoid the trap where the terms of debate are already established by the "hegemonic partner in the relationship" (Coulthard 2014: 15). As a result, negotiations and conflicts remain a central part of the autonomy project by continuously highlighting its relational aspect. Autonomy is an assemblage of power dynamics. Like Inuktut, it is networked. It is thus something to understand in "connection" to other processes and not only defined in terms of a threshold that determines when autonomy is achieved (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 737). In other words, autonomous spaces are fluid spaces. They are localised, yet not fixed, and can be achieved via many trajectories. To conceive autonomous spaces as relational challenges the logic of possession and the type of governmentality taking place in the Arctic since the logic of

possession is exclusive and hence exclusionary of Indigenous peoples. Further, by rejecting "obedience", the collective approach to autonomy challenges the bordered conception of territoriality and aims to reach an understanding that goes beyond a Westphalian take on sovereignty. As Larson et al. write, "people, relationships built on solidarity are what affirms rights, not territory. The territory is only one part of the struggle" (2016: 335). As such, autonomous spaces are about unsettling and proposing a decolonial "elsewhere" (Tuck and Yang 2012: 36).

There are several aspects concerning autonomy I wish to address. These aspects are not all encompassing but they are some I consider important to tackle in light of my previous discussions. The first addresses the notion of "territory", a term peculiar to the case of Nunavut. The second looks into autonomy as a "praxis" and the third examines autonomy as a "temporal strategy" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006).

Nunavut is a territory that the constitution of Canada grants different - and more circumscribed - rights than the other ten provinces. Whereas provinces can exercise constitutional power, the territories of Canada (Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut) are being delegated power from Ottawa. That is, following the logic of devolution, they are more directly tied to and under the influence of the federal government of Canada. However, Nunavut as a territory has by now, after continuous struggles, achieved an extensive level of autonomy with its land claim agreement and the more recent devolution of Crown lands. While concerns remain as to Nunavut's territorial status in that it positions the territory in a more "dependent" relation to the Canadian government, Cameron and Campbell argue that Nunavut should not aim to adopt a provincial type of jurisdiction. If Nunavut was to join the "provincial club", it would place the territory in a rather subordinate position vis-à-vis the other provinces and would constitute a step back from the unique status it has achieved (Cameron and Campbell 2014: 200, 201). Nunavut, in its effort to challenge notions of place-making, has to grapple with the nation-state framework of Canada. This, in turn invites a reflection over the meaning of terms like "territory" that are so deeply embedded in colonial connotations. Language and the way we name things is central in attempting to challenge settler colonial legacies. There are thus incentives to be aware of the language we employ and of the power words carry. The latter raises a question as to whether one can use the language of the oppressor to talk about resistance. Whether geographical terms such as "territory", that are emblematic of an obsession over a bordered understanding of sovereignty, are useful in the decolonial effort. I propose to ask *how* to challenge the language of the oppressor to talk about resistance and overcome the

dichotomy of coloniser/colonised. The way the territory/province dichotomy is often thought of is restrictive to the potential Nunavut has as an autonomous space and to what the space means for Inuit peoples. As Cameron and Campbell argue, the different status Nunavut has achieved leaves room for agency and counter-strategies to settler colonial politics.

The second aspect follows Pickerill and Chatterton's notion of autonomy as praxis. They understand autonomy as "a commitment to the revolution of the everyday" (2006: 732). In this sense, practices produce reality. Hence challenging through everyday practices becomes central in understanding what sovereignty might mean in an Inuit context and how this contributes to a sense of place-making. By continuously questioning the way it relates to Canada's nation-state framework, the Inuit peoples of Nunavut engage in everyday practices that promote a sense of place on their terms. They are thus not limited to the meaning terms such as territory/province carry, and their restrictive colonial connotations that delimit Nunavut's potential. Rather Inuit peoples commit to creating a sense of place from within, in relation to their land through ongoing struggles to acquire their legitimate rights (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 742). Nunavut, meaning "our land", illustrates the key role the practice of naming played in the territory's journey towards independence. Alia in her study of (political) onomastics inquires into the Inuit naming system based on *sauniq*. The latter represents a form of name commemoration and reincarnation (2009: 27). The names, chosen in remembrance of a deceased person, are seen as a way to continue and immortalise a person's existence and name on earth (Saladin d'Anglure 1977 in Alia 2009: 20). Following this logic, the practice of naming is one embedded in relationality and challenges a Westphalian take on naming as means of taking possession. *Sauniq*, also meaning "bones" or "shell", is therefore the structure of everything. Naming is about the power of deciding what forms the core of the autonomous space. For Nunavut, the core is its peoples. "Our land" is thus perhaps also an invitation to surpass settler colonial dichotomies in regard to what Nunavut means as a territory and an invitation for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike to participate in reimagining Canada through everyday practices.

The third aspect regards autonomy as a temporal strategy. Autonomy is "a struggle against amnesia", of not forgetting a history of dispossession and oppression, and of celebrating the success of past struggles (Featherstone 2005 in Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 735). Archiving and nourishing collective memories of past struggles is a driving force of autonomy. History has long been used as tools of representation to maintain settler colonial states' authority and domination over Indigenous peoples and their knowledge. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith

writes that "history is about power" (1999: 34). I began this article by demonstrating how stories like the Franklin expedition can be employed to lay sovereignty claims on particular geographical places but also their history. Autonomy is thus the ability to control the kind of (spatial) memories constituting Nunavut. It is the ability to decide what makes up the space and what forms its body. The temporal aspect of autonomy is key to speaking out against white settler colonialism and contributes to reinserting a sense of Inuit knowledge and selfhood within Nunavut's effort to challenge notions of place-making.

Autonomous spaces reflect a hyphenated existence between the world Inuit peoples "are struggling against and the one they are trying to achieve" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 737). It is a living between worlds, navigating between the Southern and Northern culture in trying to establish a sense of place that is not dictated by the settler's way of life. In this sense, autonomous spaces are characterised by mobility as they continuously need to move in the manner in which they relate to the nation-state framework if they are to remain autonomous. Mobility is thus central to conceptualising decolonisation and autonomous spaces, as it is by moving we can escape and unsettle hegemonic understandings of decolonisation that are rendered as fixed and therefore as non-challengeable. Autonomous spaces such as Nunavut are contentious spaces, characterised by relationality rather than possession.

Comparing autonomy in Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat

In contemporary Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat, legacies of settler colonialism are manifested in similar but also distinct ways. Whereas in both contexts resource extraction is arguably seen as the main method towards development and autonomy, it has however become so through different processes. In Canada, Bernauer (2020) argues exploration activities in the 1970s and 1980s became the catalyst for the ongoing extractivist logic. In the 1970s, seismic oil and gas surveys were conducted in the Arctic seabed despite resistance from Inuit communities. The exploration represented a threat to the Inuit harvesting economy just as they eventually proved to be very damaging for wildlife. Inuit peoples reacted with petitions and letters but, similar to the case of pipeline construction, their concerns were cast as "technical problems" while resource extraction was understood as "an acceptable use of the land" (Bernauer 2020: 491). Eventually, an environmental assessment (EA) process addressed Inuit complaints and offered a series of concessions such as a preferential hiring of Inuit, reducing the extent of extractive projects and turning down particularly controversial offshore drilling projects. The above, with

the collapse of the sealskin market in the 1980s due to protests by environmental organisations, created the conditions that led Inuit peoples to support gas and oil extraction in the Arctic. As Bernauer argues, these events facilitated the amplification of capitalism and settler colonial politics in the Eastern Arctic by also preventing Inuit peoples from collecting royalties on resource extraction revenues and to have a say at the negotiation table. In Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenlandic protests in the first half of the twentieth century focused on "equality between Danes and Greenlanders" (Rud 2017: 125). The Danish response to these protests post-1945 was to propose modernisation as the way towards equality. However, resurgence of interest in regard to Inuit tradition emerged during the 1970s, calling for a recentering of Inuit culture within Kalaallit Nunaat's identity. Rud writes that Knud Rasmussen's 1920 fifth Thule Expedition greatly influenced the source of this identity. The ethnographic work helped recognise the cultural ties that linked Inuit communities to the broader circumpolar area. The impact of this urge for culture preservation has been recently manifested in a 2014 report titled *Til gavn for Grønland* [For the Benefit of Greenland] stressing the detriments a boom of the extractive industry would cause to Greenlandic culture and governance (Rud 2017: 135). The report caused a break with the paradigm of the modernisation logic and was a blow to hopes of becoming economically independent from Denmark. Modernisation was originally presented by the Danes as a strategy where Greenlanders could be seen as equal once modernised. The return to Inuit-based identity post-1970 was thus a by-product and a direct consequence of modernisation processes as many Greenlanders were struggling with the impacts of a fast-changing world and feelings of alienation (Nuttall 2017: 11). Characteristic of both the push for modernisation and the return to "Inuitness" is how Denmark reaffirms its right and authority over Kalaallit Nunaat. As previously discussed, Moreton-Robinson (2011) argues settler states' possessive logic is a way of thinking that reproduces and reaffirms the state's ownership, control and domination. Consequently, in both instances we remain within a perspective wherein the state of Denmark is portrayed as the rightful owner and sovereign ruler over Kalaallit Nunaat. According to Rud, "the tension between development and culture preservation speaks of the differences of the historical trajectories for the Inuit communities in Greenland and the other Inuit groups in the Arctic" (2017: 136). In Canada settler colonial legacies are thus manifested in Ottawa's push for resource extraction, seeing independence in Nunavut as a possibility on the condition that it follows a Southern neoliberal logic of extraction. A logic that ultimately ends up benefiting the federal government as Nunavut has to abide by its terms of agreement. In Kalaallit Nunaat, Denmark maintains a self-contradictory

paternalistic attitude, wary of the consequences a rapid industrialisation it kick-started would cause, not least the loss of Danish influence and the compromising of Danish sovereignty.

The tensions present in the different views and journeys towards resource extraction also play a part in each place's inclusion of Inuit values in governance. With the creation of the territory of Nunavut, the principle of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ), generally understood as "traditional knowledge", was developed to ensure Inuit customs and values would play a central part in politics. This change was seen as essential considering the new public government is constituted by both Inuit and non-Inuit (Alia 2009: 30). In Kalaallit Nunaat, explicit desires to include Inuit values in the governance mechanism were not manifested due to mainly two reasons. First, because of the important role Inuit Greenlanders played in creating the self-government agreement and second, due to Greenlanders' enormous support of the agreement during a referendum (Kuokkanen 2017: 184). Moreover, it appears the inclusion of Inuit values in the government of Nunavut hold a more central position due to Nunavut being a territory amid a settler colonial country-system whereas Kalaallit Nunaat is a country with Danish "settlers" but dominated by Inuit peoples and geographically detached from the imperial motherland. Notwithstanding that, in Kalaallit Nunaat Danes occupy central roles in the public administration and private enterprise (Kuokkanen 2017: 190), while in Nunavut Southern Canadians also fill in central functions in the territorial government and mainly inhabit the capital of Iqaluit. Additionally, in contrast to Nunavut, Kalaallit Nunaat also had to meet ongoing paternalistic attitudes from Denmark in regard to the preservation of Inuit culture and the delimitation of its autonomy; and, perhaps, Denmark's desire to keep its central role as an Arctic power (Kočí & Baar 2021: 199) with the accompanying attention of Washington.

Conclusion

Pressures to adopt the capitalist model and the fall of the sealskin market pushed Nunavut to adopt resource extraction as one of the main paths to development and autonomy. This is reflective of "a combination of persuasion and coercion" that ultimately led the territory to adopt a "system of compromises between Inuit and extractive industries" (Bernauer 2020: 498, 499). In Kalaallit Nunaat, resource extraction is seen as the precondition for development and expansion of its self-government (Kuokkanen 2017: 188). Shattering the bond of dependency with settler colonial states holds in both places a central function to the unravelling of their means of governance. Sovereignty therefore remains in part under the influence of settler

colonialism, a legacy continuously hovering over the decisions regarding the unfolding of autonomy. Yet, the challenge of finding one's development path is now more than ever difficult in light of climate change and how the Arctic embodies the plight of the climate crisis.

A Westphalian take on sovereignty understands the state as holding exclusive sovereignty over its territory. In Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat, the Canadian and Danish states stridently reaffirmed their right to the land through modernisation mechanisms, whether related to resource extraction or culture preservation. These different strategies encouraged certain ways of relating to the land, founded in principles of control, ownership and possession. Autonomy on these terms is therefore solely understood in relation to exclusive sovereignty over a territory, a sovereignty only achievable through financial independence. Westphalian sovereignty is an epistemology of the land, of territoriality and locality. It shapes not only understanding of geographical places but also what forms the space. The view on wildlife preservation concerning the sealskin market in Nunavut also reflects a certain epistemology of the land. It is a conception of place wherein a Western epistemology of nature prevails, understood as some things needing preservation while others are up for grabs; a compartmentalised understanding of the environment that attempts to define autonomy within its parameters. However, what the cases of Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat show is that autonomy and sovereignty can be understood outside of a Westphalian discourse. This article's discussion on autonomous spaces invited us to observe both places as unsettling dominant laws and social norms through ongoing resistance and creation. Where we see an imposed settler colonial nation state framework, there is also always agency and resistance. By engaging with autonomous spaces I aimed to facilitate a shifting of perspective: to not look at Nunavut or Kalaallit Nunaat from a "Southern" sovereignty gaze but, following postcolonial sovereignty, to appreciate an understanding of locality on Inuit peoples' terms. An understanding that insists on the possibility of change outside the parameters defined by the non-Arctic nation-states of Canada and Denmark. A space that recognises the transnational solidarity of the circumpolar Arctic, continuously manifesting agency and resistance in its becoming of a decolonial "elsewhere" (Tuck and Yang 2012).

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