

The Inuit and Sovereignty: The Case of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and Greenland

Hannes Gerhardt Assistant Professor, PhD, Department of Geosciences, University of West Georgia, 1601 maple Street, Carrollton, GA 30118, Email: hgerhard@westga.edu.

Inuit strategies for greater self determination are taking various approaches to the issue of sovereignty. Whereas the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) seeks to partly transcend the Westphalian imaginary the Greenlandic self rule government is largely embracing it.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the issue of sovereignty in the Arctic has become a topic of increased interest in the last few years as Northern states come to grips with the challenges and opportunities posed by a rapidly warming Arctic region. Processes of state territorialization in the Arctic have, in turn, placed the Inuit, who are the predominant indigenous inhabitants of the Far North, on a defensive footing. This article considers, first, how the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) has responded by issuing a Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty, in which it questions the right of any state to claim privileged status in the Arctic without incorporating the interests and rights of the Inuit people. Interestingly, representatives of the Greenlandic self rule government, which represents the primarily Inuit population of Greenland, has taken a somewhat different tack. The article therefore proceeds to analyze how – although sympathetic to the ICC’s concerns – Greenlandic politicians are taking a much more traditional approach to the issue of sovereignty as they begin to envision the possibility of a future, sovereign “Inuit state”. A rift is hence uncovered in the way that Inuit identity and sovereignty are conceived by the ICC

and the Greenlandic self rule government. The paper concludes by considering the possible impact of an independent Greenland on the future of Inuit self-determination more generally.

Before delving into the differences in the sovereignty positions held by the ICC and the Greenlandic self rule government, it behooves us to understand the theoretical limitations, and the inherent slipperiness, of the very notion of sovereignty itself. Traditionally, the concept of sovereignty can be understood as the territorial organization of political authority, often traced back to the purported roots of nation-state formation, the Treaty of Westphalia (Boucher 1998; Gross 1947; Morgenthau 1985; for a critique see Osiander 2001). Subsequent international relations (IR) theory, particularly the dominant realist school, has maintained the sovereign, territorial state as the unproblematic starting point of any analyses of the world political order. In the case of realism (Bull 1977; Mersheimer 2001; Morgenthau 1985; Waltz 1979) the state is seen as a clearly defined and bounded actor, pursuing specific state interests within an otherwise anarchic world of similar state actors. Despite neoliberal (Keohane 1984; Keohane & Nye 1977) and constructivist (Katzenstein 1996; Onuf 1989; Wendt 1992) attempts to question the reification of the state entity, downplay the assumed anarchic global context, and infuse values into state behavior, there is little doubt that actual statecraft still remains very much gripped by the key assumption that the world is ultimately governed by the dynamics of self interested sovereign states in competition with each other.

Even with the strong presence of realism, however, and hence a heavily leaning Westphalian geographical imaginary, IR theorists and state actors have begun to recognize the many challenges posed to the assumed overlap between political authority and territory by an increasingly interconnected and globalized world (Agnew 1994; Elden 2005; Keohane and Nye 2000; Krasner 2001; Rosenau 1995). Stephen Krasner breaks these concerns down by identifying four different components of sovereignty: 1) the ability to “regulate the movement of goods, capital, people, and ideas” across national borders, 2) the capacity to exert effective domestic control over sovereign territory, 3) the achievement of legal recognition by other states, and 4) the capability to function autonomously, without “authoritative external influences” (Krasner 2001, 2). Krasner’s criteria for territorial sovereignty, however, are becoming ever more problematic.¹ The movement of practically everything is becoming increasingly transnationalized and deregulated; the lack of control over these transnational flows is subsequently leading to compromised “domestic” security, which, in turn, helps fuel the emerging discourse within transnational governmental institutions seeking to develop the concept of “conditional” sovereignty (Elden 2006).

Connected to these nascent limitations on sovereignty, it is practically impossible in this day and age for a state to be able to function truly autonomously; important decisions made at home will be impacted by a whole host of non-state political and economic actors – both domestic and international in origin – that supersede the pure interests and will of the state. It is precisely the actuality of such a compromised autonomy that has led the geographer John Agnew (2005) to propose the existence of non-territorial sovereignty regimes, in which lesser, supposedly “sovereign” states are absorbed into the transborder sovereignty regime of a hegemonic state, such as the U.S., or a supranational entity, such as the E.U. In this sense, the U.S. or the E.U. manage to control the political-economic context within which lesser states function, thereby imposing a pre-given structure within which state decision making must occur. These hegemonic regimes, however, must also be seen as not fully autonomous, as they compete with each other.

The above mentioned conditions facing the institution of sovereignty have encouraged new and different ways of conceptualizing political authority more generally, for instance, postulating such authority as being inherently shared (and hence constructed), intertwined or rhizomatic (based on the work of Deleuze & Guatarri 1987), diffused (for instance within governmentality approaches inspired by Foucault 1991), and less top-down or non-scalar (for instance Marston et al 2005). A par-

ticularly interesting contribution in this regard has been the work of Jessica Shadian (2010), who has proposed a non-state form of sovereignty based on the case of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) (also see Shaw 2008; Zellen 2008). Shadian writes, “Inuit sovereignty is not ‘located’ in the form of a territorially bound state or even in local Inuit governments ... Rather, sovereignty is located in the processes ... such as relations between Inuit physical ties to the Arctic land and the role of the ICC in the international community (2010, 494-495). Shadian hence is suggesting the emergence of new political spaces, brought about through intensive institutional interactions, that are leading to real non-state power, and thus “sovereignty”. Shadian goes on to argue that the emergence of non-state sovereignty in the Arctic is predicated on a suprastate Inuit nationalism that gains its legitimacy via a mythically grounded idea of the Inuit as indigenous stewards of the circumpolar region they call home (also see Beier 2009; Loukacheva 2007).

The rest of this paper will seek to further explore this question of Inuit sovereignty and identity. Following the discourse of the ICC, it will be argued that, in line with Shadian, the mobilization and direction of the ICC represents a departure from traditional concepts of territorial, state based sovereignty. Nevertheless, I also contend that the ICC is not declaring an all out attack on the still very present Westphalian imaginary held by key state actors. Indeed, the ICC is seen here as strategically placing itself both inside and outside of this dominant imaginary. The paper further parts ways with the vision of a unified Inuit strategy to rethink the classic concept of a state-based territorial sovereignty when considering the case of Greenland. It will be argued that the self rule government of Greenland, unlike the ICC, is much more focused on a bounded Greenlandic nation as opposed to a suprastate Inuit one (see Nuttall 2008 for a related argument). Directly linked to this divergent focus, the Greenlandic government must be recognized as maintaining a more traditional Westphalian approach to the issue of Arctic governance as it attempts to translate its perceived right to exercise full control over its future to the actual power to do so.

The ICC and sovereignty

In the last few years Northern states have been quick to shift their foreign policy imperatives to more fully address Arctic governance issues. The coastal Arctic states – Russia, Canada, the United States, Norway, and Denmark – have taken a particularly keen interest in the region, seeking to expand their sovereign reach by using the provisions of the U.N. Law of the Sea to make territorial claims beyond the 200 nautical miles of their coastline.

Accompanying the cumbersome process of proving such claims, these states, often referred to as the Arctic Five, have also begun to engage in a range of practices and discourses intended to solidify their position in the region (Anderson 2009; Byers 2009). These activities include an increase in military maneuvers, fast-tracking heavily funded Polar research, and holding summits and other meetings in which a discursive framework is created that seeks to solidify the preeminent position of the Arctic Five within the polar North.

The first summit to be held by the Arctic Five occurred in 2008, in Ilulissat Greenland. At this gathering the five Arctic coastal states officially declared their own particular relevance for Arctic governance, based primarily on their legally sedimented land/water claims in the region. The Ilulissat declaration was immediately viewed with skepticism by non-invited Arctic stakeholders such as the ICC and non-coastal Nordic states. It is in response to this meeting that the ICC issued its own Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic (ICC 2009). In this document the ICC does not engage in a full fledged dismissal of the concept and institution of state sovereignty, but it does question the simplicity and matter of factness that is often assumed when issues of sovereignty emerge. The ICC's main objective in this critical stance is ultimately to insert the Inuit people as an integral component of any possible sovereignty arrangement in the Arctic. Key ICC demands have thus included entitlement claims to greater autonomy by creating indigenously controlled local and regional political institutions; the right to participate in national decision making as it pertains to both the development and, increasingly, the foreign affairs relevant to the region; and, lastly, the right to own and control the land/water and the resources on which the Inuit reside.

The Inuit via the ICC have pursued these aims differently within the different state systems in which they live (see Loukacheva). In Greenland the Inuit have succeeded in establishing a self-rule government, which has given them a great deal of political autonomy from Denmark, full control over their resources, and international recognition. In Canada and the U.S. the Inuit have entered into significant land claim agreements that serve as the "key building blocks" for furthering Inuit rights (ICC 2009). In these areas, however, indigenously run institutions, which have adopted Western models, are still not fully developed and empowered (see, for example, Légaré); control over resources is still contested; and federal laws, as well as foreign policy, continue to impact these Inuit lands with restricted input from the Inuit leadership. Finally, the Inuit of Chukotka, Russia have made only minimal gains in terms of establishing greater

autonomy and self-governance, although their cause is now on the political radar in Moscow.

In dealing with the above challenges the ICC tends to present the Inuit multifariously as a people with universal human rights, as citizens with defined state sponsored rights, and as an indigenous people with specific rights within these states. It is the emphasis on the Inuit as a distinct people, over and beyond their status as citizens, that places the ICC at potential odds with the state (Corntassel & Primeau 1995). Resorting to language present in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, to an even larger degree, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the ICC repeatedly has made claims to the Inuit's right to "self determination", which includes the assertion of the Inuit's right to claim their own "political status". For the most part, however, the ICC has shied away from making any claims that directly refute the sovereignty of the state in which they reside. In this sense, self determination is largely presented as the right to cultural integrity and empowerment linked to the specific demands mentioned above (Corntassel & Primeau 1995; Shadian 2010; Loukacheva 2007).

With regard to the issue of state sovereignty, then, the ICC's Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic ends up taking a dual approach, on the one hand questioning its contemporary authority, and on the other, pointing to the integral role that the Inuit play in its execution in the polar North. Hence, the Declaration proceeds to point to the "contested nature" of the concept of sovereignty and to highlight the lack of any fixed meaning that the term may hold. Furthermore, the Declaration points to overlapping and federally divided sovereignties as well as alternative "models of governance". I suggest that the ICC is here overtly problematizing a hierarchically organized scalar understanding of sovereignty in which sovereign authority is seen as vested in scales via an assortment of institutionalized apparatuses. In pushing back against such a view the ICC emphasizes a way of being in the world that reflects what Marston et al. (2005) refer to as a "flat" ontology in which the scalar political organization of territory is seen as a dubious trope that hides the reality of a complex, ever-changing interaction of intertwined sites. Hence, by positioning themselves as integrally fused with the Arctic's land, sea and ice, the Inuit indirectly question the privileged status of distant capitals to exert their power over the Arctic region.

In this sense, the Inuit are working to establish themselves as having rights and claims that exist over and beyond what they indirectly present as the synthetic construct of sovereignty. Or, alternatively, as Jessica Shadian

(2010) argues, the Inuit are embodying a different, non-state form of sovereignty. Following Shadian (2010), the Inuit via the ICC are essentially attempting a shift in consciousness in which the territorial, state-based conception of sovereignty is fundamentally rethought. The ICC is here seen as working towards such an aim by fostering a more cooperative and embracing form of governance that supersedes the Westphalian state-centered approach.

In this regard the Arctic Council becomes an important model as the Inuit are given nearly equal representation to that of the key Arctic states, maintaining the status of permanent participants.² Beyond this international work, however, the ICC is also seeking a more significant place at the table within national decision making, including the realm of foreign affairs. Using the Draft Nordic Saami Convention as a model, the demand for local actors to have a substantive say in foreign affairs decisions is a direct challenge to the clear hierarchical top-down imaginary of autonomous sovereignty (Koivurova 2010). Hence, both internationally and domestically, the ICC has been able to position itself as an integral actor in the Arctic, significantly contributing to the discourses employed in the ongoing decision making processes that are shaping the Arctic region's future.

Nevertheless, regardless of whether state sovereignty is viewed as an ontological fiction or not, there is no doubt that it does still exist in the minds of statesmen and members of critical international institutions such as the U.N. Hence, borders are drawn, jurisdictions are mapped out, and power is subsequently projected on the basis of these constructions. Furthermore, the political imaginaries that the ICC favors, sedimented in a number of U.N. Declarations and other Conventions, has until now been largely questioned if not flatly rejected by a number of powerful states, much to the dismay of the ICC. The United States, for instance, has yet to ratify the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Canada has only just recently signed it. It is with regard to this reality that the ICC has also woven into its Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic a further layer of meaning that seeks to sediment the import of the Inuit people within a more traditional, state-centered and hierarchical system of territorial sovereignty.

It is particularly with regard to Krasner's second point on sovereignty, the ability to exert effective control over a territory, that the ICC positions the Inuit as integral players within any state-centered approach to claiming sovereign rights over the Arctic. Having a history of being used as pawns in state sovereignty claims that have hinged on sufficient occupation of land (Tester & Kulchyski 1994, also see Shadian 2007), the ICC has

carefully crafted its unique position into a demand for greater representation within any state centric approaches to Arctic decision making. As the ICC Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic states, "The foundation, projection and enjoyment of Arctic sovereignty and sovereign rights all require healthy and sustainable communities in the Arctic. In this sense, 'sovereignty begins at home'" (ICC 2009). In other words, the ICC is making clear that any state based sovereignty claims that may be made ultimately depend on the presence of functioning habitation in these regions, and this habitation is provided first and foremost by the Inuit. Furthermore, to make this habitation successful, and to enable it as a foundational pillar of sovereignty claims, it needs to be supported through effective governance.

Hence, with regard to preexisting and stubborn conceptions of territorial, state based sovereignty, the ICC's central point is that state based sovereign control of the far flung territories of the Arctic can only occur with the incorporation and respect of the Inuit's customs and their region-specific knowledge (Loukacheva 2007; Beier 2009). In this way, even if the more radical departures from the traditional Westphalian state-centered system are circumvented by the Arctic rim states in their scramble to lay claim on the Arctic, the ICC still manages to place the Inuit people as pivotal and integral players in this process. (see Shadian 2010 for a similar conclusion).³

The Greenlandic vision of an "Inuit State"

The issue of Inuit sovereignty takes on a rather different form from that offered by the ICC when considering the case of Greenland. Greenland achieved home rule from Denmark in 1979, which, for the time, provided significant autonomy to the Greenlanders, the large majority of whom are Inuit. Yet, in 2008, Greenland voted in a referendum to expand the autonomy laid out in the home rule regime. The subsequent Act on Greenland Self Rule essentially achieves the aims of self determination as outlined in the ICC's Declaration on Sovereignty, however, with a significant difference; in the case of Greenland, self rule is squarely placed on the Greenlandic people, who in no way are defined on the basis of their ethnic or indigenous character. The Act includes 1) the recognition of Greenlanders as a distinct people under international law; 2) the further empowerment of a Greenlandic government, both executive and legislative, with expanded jurisdiction over the Greenlandic police and courts; 3) full rights over the soil and subsoil; and 4) expanded power both to conduct foreign affairs that fall fully within the Greenlandic government's competence (i.e. jurisdiction) and to be kept abreast with critical Danish foreign policy

decision-making that may have repercussions for Greenland.

Despite these achievements, which have been much admired by fellow Inuit in the U.S., Canada, and Russia, the predominately Inuit leadership in Greenland has fixed its gaze on a further, though still distant goal: full independence. This attitude was often repeated in interviews I conducted with Greenlandic government officials and other Greenlandic political actors in the summer of 2010.⁴ Interestingly, in embracing this position the political role of the ICC is also seen as significantly diminished. According to one official in the Greenlandic executive, for instance, the ICC's significance for Greenland is essentially that of being an international advocacy group responsible for Inuit cultural preservation. Yet, it is the Greenlandic government, according to this official, that must strive to achieve greater sovereignty for the Inuit of Greenland through the establishment of an independent Greenlandic nation-state. This view was often repeated in various forms in my interviews.

There are two aspects in this push for independence that are particularly relevant. First, the Greenlandic government must be recognized as pursuing a nationalism, or Greenlandization, that is distinct, although not necessarily exclusionary of, a broader suprastate Inuit nationalism (see Nuttall 1994; 2008). Sejersen, for instance, remarks, that this Greenlandization is grounded on the basis of Greenlanders "claiming their right as political agents to determine their own future rather than on the basis of a well-defined cultural agenda" (quoted in Nuttall 2008). Hence, very much opposed to the mythically grounded Inuit nationalism described by Shadian, Greenlandic self rule and future independence is based on a discourse of public government with no mention made of the Greenlandic Inuit's traditional connection to the land and sea. In this sense, Greenland is not officially recognized as a specifically "Inuit" region and thus, although an independent Greenland would be a *de facto* Inuit state, its legal path to, and recognition of, such a status would not actually be based on an Inuit identity as such.

The second and related aspect of a Greenlandic move towards independence is that the Greenlandic government's approach to the issue of sovereignty is ultimately grounded on an acceptance, even an unquestioned assumption, of the validity of a Westphalian political ontology. This is not to say that the Greenlandic authorities do not recognize how the ICC's tactics of a circumpolar Inuit strategy have helped the Inuit in their respective areas promote greater autonomy, yet the idea and the subsequent practice of sovereignty persists as an ideal, and it does so via the scalar construct of the nation-state.

Hence, the desire for full sovereignty on the part of the Greenlanders can be understood as grounded on a realist inspired belief that full sovereignty means possessing complete command over the laws and rules that are instituted, including, it should be noted their exception, hence calling forth the Schmittian understanding of sovereignty as the power to determine the state of exception (Schmitt 1996).

Consider, for instance, the Thule Air Force Base, which was built by the United States after WWII in western Greenland, incidentally forcing the local Inughuit off of their land. Faced with Inuit concerns the Danes maintained an official policy of making the island a nuclear free zone. Yet clandestinely, in cooperation with the U.S., the Danish government condoned using Thule as a transit and storage hub for nuclear weapons (DUPI 1997). This decision was, essentially, the calling of a state of exception in which the state usurped its own decree. Subsequently, in 1968, long after Greenland had become an integral part of the Danish Kingdom, a B-52 bomber carrying 5 hydrogen bombs crashed just outside of the Thule base, severely contaminating the area. The state of exception, executed from Copenhagen on the basis of a scaled sovereignty, clearly demonstrates the limits of Inuit power within the larger organization of a nation-state in which the Inuit remain a clear minority. I contend that it is largely with respect to such a realization that the Inuit of Greenland seem to deeply crave full independence – to be the masters of their own rules and laws.

Yet the undying drive for greater sovereign control is not just rooted in history, it is also based on the still dominant political imaginary of a scaled sovereignty that is apparent in the scramble to territorialize the Arctic today. Not only has state posturing and grandstanding increased, for example in the form of augmented military maneuvers in the region, but discourses have appeared that make a conscious run-around the so called "mosaic of cooperation" (Young 2005) that has been meticulously built up over the last two decades. The Ilulissat Declaration is seen by many as embodying such a move. Interestingly, however, deliberations between the Arctic Five in Ilulissat and subsequent summits have included representatives from Greenland. This is a point that Greenlandic officials frequently drove home in the interviews I conducted with them, as well as their frustration at occasionally being left out of the photo ops. Thus, although sympathetic to the ICC's critique of the Ilulissat Declaration, it appears that the Greenlandic government has taken its own interest in the sovereignty claims issue as formulated by the Arctic Five based on its own potential

future as a sovereign state with claims to the continental shelf that extends from its shores.

Yet, there are a number of critiques that can be made of the Greenlandic approach. One is that the adoption of the Western political-spatial ontology on which the marriage between sovereignty and territory are based, only serves to further cement Western power structures and dominance (see Boldt & Long 1985). Certainly, the quest for a Greenlandic sovereignty that is squarely grounded on a territorially bounded land and culture flies in the face of Shadian's depiction of an ICC striving to transcend the Westphalian model via a vision of the world in which societies are not viewed as clearly contained within a strictly bordered, politically scaled unit. Furthermore, it could be argued that the utilization or acceptance of such an overly scalar (hierarchical) framework for understanding and executing power, as is found in the Westphalian imaginary, can lead to misdirected and ineffective resistance strategies to that power (Marston et al. 2005).

Yet, the question then becomes whether the Greenlandic self rule government sees itself as being in the process of resisting external dominance, or whether they believe, instead, that this dominance can fully be overcome once they have joined the privileged club of sovereign nations. To throw light on this question we must again consider Krasner's criteria of sovereignty and ask whether this coveted status, and all of its perceived rewards, can actually be achieved with an independent Greenland. Notwithstanding the general limitations to sovereignty outlined at the outset of this paper, Greenland does at first appear relatively well positioned to claim sovereign control with independence. The outside world, for instance, has no reason not to recognize Greenland as an independent state, as long as the Danish parliament approves it, which it appears it would do if that were the Greenlanders will. In terms of the movement of goods, capital, people, and ideas Greenland already exerts significant power, as evidenced by their decision not to be a party to EU rules and regulations despite Denmark's membership. Similarly, Greenland has been working to impose its own distinctive immigration rules intended to specifically meet the needs of Greenland's labor market.⁵ Clearly, with independence, the Greenlandic government's ability to execute such decisions would only be enhanced. Finally, domestic control over Greenland is primarily challenged by the cost of dealing with the distance between its remote inhabited enclaves, yet it also has the distinct advantage of maintaining a largely homogenous population that offers very little resistance to the legitimacy of the Greenlandic government.

Nevertheless, it is Krasner's fourth point that is most problematic, namely the ability of the state to function autonomously. Like any state, Greenland's ability to rule over its territory is hampered by the inevitable compromises made in the process of plugging the national economy into the global flow of goods and capital. Yet in Greenland this compromise is exacerbated by its very small population and the underlying weakness of its economy. It is explicitly clear to the Greenland self rule government that any independence from Denmark is predicated on the discovery and subsequent extraction of oil and gas off of the Greenlandic coast. In this respect Nutall (2008) has offered the poignant commentary of a Greenlandic government that is paradoxically viewing global warming as a boon to its development chances, and hence independence, by gaining easier access to carbon producing resources that are largely blamed for this warming to begin with.

Yet, becoming an oil and gas exporting nation would mean a massive restructuring of Greenland's economy and society and this restructuring would be largely driven by external competence, norms, and interests. Foreign oil companies and the states in which they are headquartered would likely gain an increasing stake, and subsequent influence, in Greenlandic affairs. As a result, the region would undoubtedly gain significantly in geopolitical importance and Greenland, with its small population, would have to rely almost completely on foreign states for security and search and rescue operations. The U.S. Air Force base in Thule would likely gain renewed strategic importance and may be accompanied by further U.S. military installations. Finally, the influx of petrodollars would plug Greenland into the financial circuit of capital centered on the United States and may even bring pressure on Greenland to adopt the Dollar as the country's official currency.

Given that a possible oil and gas based economy in Greenland would be at least fifteen years in the future, the above scenario remains hypothetical and obviously cannot fully take into account the many global political, economic, and ecological changes that may take place in this time. Yet the point of these considerations is to highlight the compromised autonomy that Greenland faces even with full independence. In this sense John Agnew's point of conceiving sovereignty as non-territorial and rather as regimes of power that traverse state boundaries is quite helpful. From this perspective Greenland as an independent state would not necessarily be fully sovereign, rather it would likely fall between the competing sovereignty regimes of the U.S.' globalist hegemony and the supranational project of the EU.

In the future, Greenland would likely seek the maximum amount of benefits within these power regimes and, in the process, would be forced to make decisions that will bring about monumental societal transformations. In practice such a predicament would mean an effort to concentrate Inuit populations within towns close to the oil and gas infrastructure, while still allowing for significant immigration to provide the labor and competence to effectively run a sophisticated resource extraction economy. The possible consequences of such a transformation would be that the Inuit would not only be significantly diluted as a percentage of the Greenlandic population, but their traditional native culture, based on remote living and subsistence hunting, would become significantly more difficult to sustain than it already is today. In other words, an “Inuit” petrostate and the transformation needed to bring it about would in all likelihood lead very far away from the cultural integrity that is largely at the root of the aims of the ICC and its conception of the Inuit’s position with regard to sovereignty.

Conclusion

How are we then to understand these divergent political visions and trajectories in which the Inuit are implicated? I suggest viewing the Greenlandic Inuit leadership as pragmatists seeking to maximize their self-determination by playing the dominant political game, which, in the end, means adopting its spatial ontology. Thus, as a state-centric Westphalian model continues to assert, or reassert, itself in the Arctic, the Greenlandic Inuit are positioning themselves for a full independence that makes the most of this powerful, and arguably overriding political imaginary. It is possible that the process of establishing a Greenlandic state will, as a consequence, work to obstruct more counter-hegemonic Inuit strategies inspired by a non-Western, indigenous political ontology. But such an obstruction is not a given. The ICC, for instance, will continue to be skeptical of the ontological value of institutionalized state-based sovereignty and they will undoubtedly find support from Greenland in their demand that Arctic governance requires the weighty input of the Inuit who are residing there.

Furthermore, Greenlanders may come to recognize that statehood does not necessarily equal full sovereignty. Over time the Inuit of Greenland will have to come to terms with the realization that even with full independence, a Greenlandic state will be squeezed by powerful sovereignty regimes that will not only constrain their decision-making powers, but potentially also trump their laws. Such realizations may, in turn, lead to a Greenlandic state that becomes a dominant voice in the push

towards a greater openness to multilateral forms of governance in the Arctic, and around the world.

In the meantime, however, there is little doubt that the independence that Greenland seeks, and the subsequent economic and societal transformations that this process would call forth would irrevocably alter the Greenlandic Inuit’s identity and culture. Such a development could be bemoaned as an empowerment of the Western-dominated Westphalian political structure that is deeply implicated in the contemporary and historical challenge to the Inuit’s cultural preservation. Indeed, the ICC’s struggle over the years for self-determination is very much a struggle against the hierarchical power structure that has been imposed on them. Yet, I contend, that the political path taken by the Greenlandic indigenous people is not something that we, as outsiders, can or should judge.

Greenland was a colony, and even after the institution of self-rule, has long served as Denmark’s, and Northern Europe’s, “other”, a position that the Greenlandic Inuit believe can be rectified by achieving independence. Interestingly, the depiction of the Greenlandic Inuit, largely facilitated through Knud Rasmussen’s expeditions and books, has shifted from one of being a noble savage that must be incorporated into the West’s inevitable path towards progress to being a noble native under siege, who is in touch with a deeper though endangered spirituality and morality that evades the West. This latter, contemporary trope, as elicited in Peter Hoeg’s well-known novel *Smilla’s Sense for Snow*, is, it should be recognized, also a form of othering, which, we should note, primarily serves to help understand and make sense of ourselves rather than the Inuit (Thisted 2002).

It is in light of such a post-colonial insight that we ought to be wary of critiquing Greenland’s embrace for sovereign statehood. As this process unfolds it will be very interesting to see how Greenland’s and the ICC’s ambitions evolve and influence each other. There will undoubtedly be intense discussions and debates as the Inuit people continue to define and defend themselves in the lands and waters they call home. And for us in the South, with an eye to the North, there will certainly be much to learn from this exchange.

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Notes

1. It should be noted that Krasner has himself been an important critic of the traditional understanding of sovereignty.
2. Although the Arctic Council maintains mostly a policy shaping rather than a policy making function, it nonetheless is noteworthy that the ICC, along with a number of other Inuit organizations, are given the status of permanent participants. Although this status does not offer voting rights within the consensus based Arctic Council, it nonetheless puts the ICC on nearly equal footing to Arctic states in terms of, for example, addressing Arctic Council meetings; raising points of order; proposing projects, and being consulted on agendas (Arctic Council 2011).
3. An example of this influence could be gleaned during one of the latest Arctic Rim states meetings in Ottawa, 2010, in which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton surprised her hosts by insisting on greater participation by, and cooperation with, the Inuit (Zellen 2010).

4. Interviews were conducted in the summer of 2010. These included half a dozen formal interviews of government officials, both in the executive and legislative branches, and a dozen informal interviews of Greenlandic participants and observers at the ICC's General Assembly in Nuuk. I also spoke to several local Nuuk residents. The selection process was based on prior research into key policy making actors and a subsequent snow ball method based on initial interviews and contacts at the ICC's General Assembly. The vast majority of those interviewed were Inuit.
5. On the one hand, one of the *raison d'être* of the Home Rule since 1979 has been to limit the import of Danish – and later other – short term workers to avoid a situation where 'Greenlanders are bystanders to their own development', as a frequently used phrase has it. On the other hand, Greenland has simultaneously been seeking to recruit skilled workers and academics to fill vacant positions. This issue has been high on the Greenlandic government's agenda (see Jan 7, 2009 article in *Politiken*).