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## Connecting Atlantic and Pacific: Theorizing the Arctic

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### ABSTRACT

This essay sets out to theorize the “new” Arctic Ocean as a pivot from which our standard map of the world is currently being reconceptualized. Drawing on theories from the fields of Atlantic and Pacific studies, I argue that the changing Arctic, characterized by melting ice and increased accessibility, must be understood both as a space of transit that connects Atlantic and Pacific worlds in unprecedented ways, and as an oceanic world and contact zone in its own right. I examine both functions of the Arctic via a reading of the dispute over the Northwest Passage (which emphasizes the Arctic as a space of transit) and the contemporary assessment of new models of sovereignty in the Arctic region (which concentrates on the circumpolar Arctic as an oceanic world). However, both of these debates frequently exclude indigenous positions on the Arctic. By reading Canadian Inuit theories on the Arctic alongside the more prominent debates, I argue for a decolonizing reading of the Arctic inspired by Inuit articulations of the “Inuit Sea.” In such a reading, Inuit conceptions provide crucial interventions into theorizing the Arctic. They also, in turn, contribute to discussions on indigeneity, sovereignty, and archipelagic theory in Atlantic and Pacific studies.

### KEYWORDS

Atlantic studies; Pacific studies; Arctic studies; Northwest Passage; indigeneity; sovereignty; archipelagic theory

In the inaugural volume of *Atlantic Studies*, William Boelhower argues that the way in which early European Atlantic travelers conceptualized the “stunningly ‘new’ hemisphere” of the Americas amounted to nothing less than a revision of European conceptions of the world.<sup>1</sup> As a central part of this conception, the Atlantic world emerged as a “new oceanic order” whose “elemental grammar” was constituted, in Boelhower’s observation, by ships and maps.<sup>2</sup> Serving not only as material objects but also, in a cultural studies sense, as structuring devices, ships and maps literally broke out of their accustomed frames in ways that would have global repercussions. As Boelhower points out, the new maps produced by Europeans both constructed the Atlantic as a dynamic space of fluidity, of “transit and communication and cargo,” and as a site of fixed ownership, “a possible world ripe for colonization.”<sup>3</sup>

In his discussion of the work of Olaudah Equiano, Boelhower begins to envision how European conceptions of the Atlantic began to tangle with other mental maps of the same contested terrain. The fact that Boelhower’s essay discusses both Equiano’s

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enslavement and his complicated agency alerts us to the often brutal quality of the Atlantic as a transnational space of material and epistemological conflict, an insight formulated most poignantly by Paul Gilroy. Boelhower's call to contemporary scholars of the Atlantic to cultivate a "crisscrossing perspectivism" and a "shuttling mind" in a constant struggle to avoid fixing, defining, and re-colonizing the space they study is an attempt to set the various mental maps of the Atlantic in a relation that avoids perpetuating the violence of Atlantic history.<sup>4</sup> As Boelhower observes:

we come back to the question of learning how to flow, for studying the Atlantic world means above all attending to its uniquely extended heuristic space; which, in the beginning, unfolded as dialectic between ship and map and the new order these represented. Although we now live in a globalized world, that same order still holds today.<sup>5</sup>

This essay attempts to take a closer look at a contemporary shift in the globalized order invoked by Boelhower, a shift which, although connected to a different ocean, displays many of the characteristics he observes in the historical formation of the Atlantic world. In recent years, a large number of voices have rather urgently suggested that, once again, the standard map of our world is in serious disarray as we witness the emergence of a "new ocean" in the Arctic region. A striking example of this discourse is provided by Charles M. Perry and Bobby Andersen's *New Strategic Dynamics in the Arctic Region*. In the introduction, the authors evoke a "new" Arctic ocean, a space undergoing rapid change in the wake of global warming:

As the polar ice cap continues to melt, giving way to new and ever larger waterways in the Arctic, the world is witnessing nothing less than the opening of a new ocean, something that has not occurred on Earth since the end of the Ice Age. As if its creation were not newsworthy enough, this new, fifth ocean – which will essentially be an expanded and more navigable version of the Arctic Ocean that now exists – holds out the promise as well of new seaways linking Europe and Asia via the High North that could, in the view of numerous maritime experts, substantially reduce travel distances, transit times, and overall transportation costs [...]. Adding to the Arctic's importance [...] is the prospective extraction of significant strategic mineral supplies from the northernmost territories [...]. Indeed, for this reason alone, the Arctic Five have quickened their efforts to extend their sovereignty over extended continental shelves [...] where some of the most promising deposits are believed to be located, while other countries with a strong interest (but no territorial claim) in the Arctic and its resource riches [...] do their best to retain access to the Arctic and to avoid being marginalized in policy debates over its future.<sup>6</sup>

In its breathless intensity, this quote contains in miniature almost all the issues that scholars are currently raising about the Arctic: the remapping of our world by the "opening of a new ocean," the newly passable waterways envisioned between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and the local and global struggle over sovereignty and resources. I argue that Boelhower's observations on the Atlantic serve as a useful starting-point in theorizing the Arctic as a changing space and as a pivot from which our current map of the world is, once again, being redrawn. Like the Atlantic Ocean, the Arctic Ocean is giving rise to an oceanic order with global repercussions. In addition, Boelhower's identification of the dual impulses of the Atlantic world – the embracing of fluid, oceanic movement and the desire for sovereignty, exploration, and control – seems equally pertinent for analyzing the Arctic, and his suggestion that these two impulses frequently intermingled also describes the dominant discourse on the Arctic, with its simultaneous emphasis on fluidity

and exploitation. Finally, like the Atlantic processes described by Boelhower, the conceptualization of the Arctic is linked to ships and maps, both in a material sense and with an array of symbolic implications. Quite obviously, there exist various contesting ways of mapping the Arctic, and they need to be related in ways reminiscent of Boelhower's "criss-crossing perspectivism."

It is not only Atlantic studies, however, that seems to offer useful insights for thinking about the "new" Arctic. After all, one of the most spectacular geographic aspects of Arctic change is that the increasingly passable waterways of the Arctic are imagined as a link between the Atlantic and the Pacific. As Charles Emerson writes:

In the twenty-first century, things are beginning to look up for Arctic shipping, not least because one of the expected consequences of global climate change is that the Arctic will become relatively ice free (for part of the year) within a matter of years. Long before it is totally ice free in summer, the ice may have reduced sufficiently to make an ice-free shipping passage between the Pacific and the Atlantic.<sup>7</sup>

Increased shipping would connect Atlantic and Pacific worlds in new ways, resulting in novel forms of economic, political, military, and cultural exchange and conflict, as well as in the possible migration of pollutants, microorganisms, and marine life.<sup>8</sup>

One of the envisioned waterways through the Arctic is the Northwest Passage, whose function as a potential link and space of transit between the Atlantic and the Pacific has resulted in a dispute over sovereignty between the USA and Canada. Using this dispute as the focus of my analysis, my reading of the Northwest Passage as connecting Atlantic and Pacific relies on a geographical/theoretical double move that draws on conceptions from Atlantic and Pacific studies to understand the Arctic as a space of connection. In addition, conceptions drawn from the field of Atlantic and Pacific studies can help to understand how this new space of connection is simultaneously a site of imperialist desire. While most discourses about the consequences of global warming sound an apprehensive note, the environmental changes currently taking place in the Arctic have produced a celebratory neo-colonial language of shipboard travel and exploitation, accompanying what some commentators have called the "scramble for the Arctic."<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, it is exactly these radical shifts in current attempts to map the Arctic that also point to the limits of a simple transfer of Atlantic and Pacific theory to Arctic space. Most observers agree that the contemporary "race for the Arctic" is unique in various ways: it is a "slow" process dependent on the non-linear ecological transformation that hinges on the notoriously unpredictable factors of climate change and melting ice,<sup>10</sup> making the Arctic into a highly special and often unclassifiable terrain. In addition, these processes are taking place against the backdrop of a fairly new international governance regime. Thus, if the Arctic functions both as a geographic and a theoretical connection between Atlantic and Pacific, it must nevertheless also be read on its own terms. This insight serves to drive home a crucial point: in addition to functioning as a link or space of transit between two oceanic worlds, the Arctic is also an oceanic world and contact zone in its own right. Unlike the Panama Canal, which also constitutes a connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific, the Arctic can be seen as a vast transnational oceanic world, connecting various indigenous peoples (including Greenland, with its persistent but loosening colonial attachment to Denmark), as well as the nation-states of Russia, the USA, Canada, and Norway. If we widen the view from the coastal states to

the Arctic circle, this “world” encompasses even more peoples and nation-states. A view of the Arctic centered on the North Pole thus reveals a circumpolar space characterized by potential transnational and transcultural contact, competition, extraction, surveillance, and exchange that tends to intensify as its ice melts.

Reading the Arctic not simply as a space of connection and transit, but as an oceanic world, necessitates reading the Arctic as the homeland of various indigenous peoples. It is symptomatic that my initial quote by Perry and Andersen omits indigenous perspectives on the Arctic, despite the fact that indigenous theorists, activists, and politicians have clearly articulated their claims of use and occupancy, have developed specific conceptions of sovereignty, and draw on a long history of Arctic stewardship. While indigenous theorists show themselves highly aware of the global debates on Arctic sovereignty and frequently attempt to connect indigenous and non-indigenous positions, too many non-indigenous writers relegate indigenous voices to the margins of the conversation. In the words of Inuit writer Rosemary Kuptana, the Arctic is “once again discussed in Canada and in the global community in the context of sovereignty and security and in the absence of Inuit.”<sup>11</sup> Although there are many indigenous communities in the circumpolar Arctic, my paper will trace one strand of indigenous conceptions of the Arctic by placing my focus particularly on the speech and writing of a small group of contemporary Canadian Inuit writers, theorists, and politicians in Nunavut. I will outline the specific conceptions of sovereignty that Inuit have built around the changeable and changing terrain of the so-called Canadian Arctic Archipelago, the space that constitutes the main body of the Northwest Passage. Even such a limited analysis, as I want to show, serves to identify the contours of two different debates on sovereignty in the Arctic that urgently need to be related. My attempt to connect these debates will also build on recent work by scholars such as Natalia Loukacheva and Jessica Shadian, whose research in the interstices between indigenous and non-indigenous conceptions of Arctic sovereignty is characterized precisely by what Boelhower calls a “crisscrossing perspectivism.”

Drawing on and interrelating Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic conceptions and theories to read the Arctic both as a space of connection and as an oceanic world, my analysis will proceed in several steps: First, I will analyze non-indigenous Canadian, US-American, and global conceptions of the Arctic both as a contested space of transit – connecting Atlantic and Pacific waters – and as an oceanic world in its own right, characterized by new forms of “overlapping sovereignty.” In an interlude, I will trace debates in Atlantic and Pacific studies which speak to the challenges of remapping Arctic sovereignty. Next, I will show how Canadian Inuit conceptualize the Arctic both as a space of transit and as an Arctic world. Inuit conceptions of indigeneity and sovereignty, I want to show, outline the Arctic as a circumpolar Inuit land and sea, an oceanic world in which any future forms of transit must be envisioned in Inuit terms. My reading is intended to produce a conversation between Inuit and non-Inuit conceptions of sovereignty, but also between concepts and theories of Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic paradigms that, finally, also constitutes an Arctic intervention into current debates in Atlantic and Pacific studies.

### **Sovereignty and transit: The “new” Northwest Passage**

The changes occurring in the Arctic have led to international debates about sovereignty and conflicting claims on land and oceanic space. Many of these debates remained

theoretical – and unresolved – while layers of ice made both exploitation and shipping difficult and costly. The idea of melting ice has given them a new urgency. As one of the nation-states at the center of the debate, Canada has made these issues a particular national priority.

In the context of the debate over Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, scholars have defined sovereignty as “the ability of the state to exercise recognized rights of exclusive jurisdiction within a territorially delimited space.”<sup>12</sup> Jon Carlson et al. argue that while various definitions of sovereignty exist, “each definition centers upon internal political order and an external demarcation via borders.”<sup>13</sup> As Robert Dufresne observes, sovereignty is frequently linked to the nation-state and can only function under the premise that other states do not claim the same territory. In addition, sovereignty can be acquired by cession or occupation, as well as through histories of local self-rule.<sup>14</sup> As many of these critics have remarked, Canadian claims to the Canadian North rest on the transfer of sovereignty from England in 1870 and, in an effort to secure the Arctic Archipelago for Canada, the British government’s Order-in-Council of 1880.<sup>15</sup>

Technically speaking, the section of the Northwest Passage under dispute links the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans and constitutes a series of navigable routes weaving through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. The Canadian government has highlighted its role in providing military security in and environmental stewardship of the archipelago in order to bolster Canadian control over the Passage.<sup>16</sup> This has resulted in increased but often incomplete Canadian efforts at proving a *de facto* ability to police and protect the area.<sup>17</sup> David Meren and Bora Plumptre have pointed out that under the guise of international environmental stewardship, the Canadian government has greatly expanded its claims to national sovereignty in the North: “The harnessing of environmentalism to nationalist concerns contributed to a *de facto* (and massive) expansion of Canadian territory [and] to the (re)assertion of Ottawa’s authority over Canada’s Arctic periphery [...]”<sup>18</sup> Meren and Plumptre describe the Canadian policy under the government of Pierre Trudeau as an “environmentalism of convenience” which argued that “international recognition of Canada’s position would follow if the country could demonstrate that Canada’s northern presence, and in particular its custodial oversight of the Northwest Passage, was both necessary and desirable from a pragmatic perspective.”<sup>19</sup> Canadians also successfully negotiated Article 234 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a convention concluded in 1982 and signed by Canada in 2003, “which allows coastal states to enact laws against maritime pollution out to 200 nautical miles when almost year-round ice creates exceptional navigational hazards.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, Canada announced in 1985 that it was drawing straight baselines around its Arctic Archipelago, marking the Passage as internal waters.<sup>21</sup>

While the US government does not dispute Canadian sovereignty over the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, it considers the waters of the Passage to be an international strait.<sup>22</sup> According to the International Court of Justice’s ruling in the *Corfu Channel Case* of 1949, an international strait connects two bodies of the high sea and functions as a space of international transit.<sup>23</sup> In view of the melting ice, increased shipping through the Passage could serve to strengthen the US-American position, making it impossible for Canada to legally control and profit from the transit route.<sup>24</sup> In addition, melting ice could end Canada’s right to special environmental protection of the strait, since Article 234 of UNCLOS is specifically designed to protect ice-covered waters.<sup>25</sup>

Given the many unresolved claims in the Arctic, some scholars and strategists argue that “Softening of ice demands hardening of law,” calling for a comprehensive legal solution in the form of an Arctic treaty.<sup>26</sup> Others have pointed out that international law and the work of fora such as the Arctic Council suffice to tackle the issues. Most important among these instruments is UNCLOS, which privileges coastal states by creating layers of sovereignty and rights moving outward from a nation’s coast, from territorial sea to contiguous zone, Exclusive Economic Zone, and other spaces of extended claims.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, UNCLOS both nationalizes and internationalizes the sea. Detecting a “creeping nationalization” of the ocean, Christoph Humrich observes: “The Arctic rim states expand their jurisdiction both in a spatial and regulatory sense by using – and sometimes stretching – their rights under UNCLOS to the greatest extent.”<sup>28</sup> As Alec Crawford, Arthur Hanson, and David Runnalls have pointed out,

UNCLOS also contains a provision to enable countries to apply to extend their maritime boundaries beyond the 200-mile limit if the edge of the continental shelf can be proven to extend further. [...] This crucial provision has led to a flurry of mapping exercises across the Arctic by littoral countries keen to lay claim over the significant natural resources and shipping routes that lie throughout the region.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, as Carlson et al. point out, “UNCLOS fundamentally changes the exclusive nature of territorial sovereignty, because it defines multiple spheres of overlapping rights, responsibilities, and political authority.”<sup>30</sup> The authors argue that

the concept of “layered sovereignty” is supplanting the traditional understanding of sovereignty as predicated on exclusion and political monopoly. Multiple states can have overlapping claims; the international community has rights in zones that can also be regulated by shoreward states; and organizations like the United Nations are then left to arbitrate.<sup>31</sup>

Critics thus hold that the Arctic is exemplary for a new kind of sovereignty, which exists as a flexible “bundle of rights”<sup>32</sup> negotiated not just among Arctic states, but also with non-regional states, companies, and organizations claiming various forms of access to and control over Arctic space.<sup>33</sup>

It is clear that we are in the midst of a legal and political global debate about mapping the Arctic not only as a space of transit, but as an oceanic world governed and negotiated by a new regime of national, international, and transnational “hard” and “soft” law. Besides UNCLOS, the new “Arctic governance architecture”<sup>34</sup> prominently includes the Arctic Council, a non-governmental forum for cooperation on issues such as Arctic security or environmental protection. The Council encompasses the so-called Arctic Five (the oceanic rim states of Canada, the USA, Russia, Denmark, and Norway) as well as the non-coastal Arctic states (Finland, Iceland, and Sweden). Observer status has been granted to several nation-states across the globe, as well as to various non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations.

The status quo thus both suggests new forms of sovereignty as well as an ongoing process of struggle and negotiation among various states and groups. Christoph Humrich argues that this architecture “displays a relatively benign degree of cooperative fragmentation” and claims that the Arctic has already been established as a space of joint effort, where “the realization of one’s own sovereignty is possible only together with the other sovereigns and their positive recognition of one’s claims.”<sup>35</sup> Other critics point to the development of hierarchies and the exclusion of indigenous peoples from



many negotiations. Charles Emerson envisions the Arctic both as “a zone of global cooperation, a focus for scientific research and environmental stewardship” and “as a battleground, fought over not just by states but by the different economic and political interests which are jostling for their part of the Arctic future, trying either to develop its economic potential or to protect its environment.” He concludes: “A battleground does not mean war, but it does mean conflict and competition: political, economic, cultural and diplomatic.”<sup>36</sup>

While it is becoming clear that the changing Arctic is envisioned as a space of relationality, the question remains what kind of relationality we are talking about. Given the large amount of literature from legal studies, sociology, and political science concerned with the new Arctic regime, it seems crucial to explore what a cultural studies analysis along the lines of Atlantic and Pacific studies paradigms can contribute to the current theorization of the Arctic both as a space of transit and as a new oceanic world of layered sovereignty. I argue that the contribution is twofold: first, both Atlantic and Pacific studies have provided theories which focus on asymmetrical relations of power in oceanic and archipelagic space. Second, especially in Native Pacific studies, the question of indigenous sovereignty in oceanic space has generated a crucial body of theory and practice. For this reason, the specific kind of Atlantic studies approach I draw on is comprised of the work of Caribbean writers such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo, whose focus on Caribbean island spaces and their Atlantic and global reverberations has led him to argue that “the Atlantic is the Atlantic [...] because it was the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean.”<sup>37</sup> In Benítez-Rojo’s assessment, the Caribbean with its histories of violent colonization and slavery and its cultural manifestations of syncretism has functioned as a “meta-archipelago” which generated the Atlantic world.<sup>38</sup> In Pacific studies, I will concentrate specifically on theorists of Native Pacific studies, whose focus on archipelagic space and indigeneity connects both with Atlantic theories of island spaces and with Native American theories of sovereignty. I will pursue the contributions of these specific branches of Atlantic and Pacific studies in turn and proceed to relate them to the way in which Canadian Inuit are envisioning the Arctic as the “Inuit Sea.”

### **Interlude: Atlantic and Pacific visions of “archipelagraphy,” sovereignty, and indigeneity**

Atlantic and Pacific studies seem to equip us well for the negotiation of spaces theorized as both fluid and territorial, both relational and sovereign. In this respect, theorists of island spaces have made large contributions to what critics are currently advocating as a new form of “archipelagic thinking.” Caribbean theorist Edouard Glissant famously states:

Caribbeanness [...] tears us free from the intolerable alternative of the need for nationalism and introduces us to the cross-cultural process that modifies but does not undermine the latter. What is the Caribbean in fact? A multiple series of relationships. [...] In this context, insularity takes on another meaning. Ordinarily, insularity is treated as a form of isolation, a neurotic reaction to place. However, in the Caribbean each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining.<sup>39</sup>

Building on this work, Antonio Benítez-Rojo has theorized the Caribbean in archipelagic terms as a constellation of islands forming a “discontinuous conjunction” of land, sea, organisms, peoples, histories, and sign systems that became the Atlantic world’s generating space, a “meta-archipelago” which, having “neither a boundary nor a center,” extends its influences and connections across the globe.<sup>40</sup> Benítez-Rojo claims that both colonial attempts at understanding the Caribbean and the anticolonial nationalism of Caribbean elites provide only a “first reading” of the Caribbean that creates synthesis instead of syncretism and origin instead of “originatings.”<sup>41</sup> Benítez-Rojo’s own “second reading,” in contrast, understands the inhabitants of the Caribbean as “Peoples of the Sea”<sup>42</sup> and highlights Caribbean cultures’ transnational, transcultural, and global originatings as well as the syncretic, transformative power of Caribbean culture thus conceived.

In Native Pacific studies, scholars have pointed out that the Pacific has often been assessed through its imperial frame, leaving out the island cultures in its midst. In a seminal contribution, Epeli Hau’ofa argued in “Our Sea of Islands” that people who live on continents tend to conceptualize island spaces as small and constricted. People in Oceania, however,

did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions. Their universe comprised not only land surfaces but also the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their way across the seas.<sup>43</sup>

Europeans and Americans colonized this space by drawing “imaginary lines across the sea, making the colonial boundaries that confined ocean peoples into tiny spaces for the first time.” Against this colonization, Hau’ofa sets the cultures of “the peoples from the sea,” created with “the underlying assumption that the sea is home.”<sup>44</sup> In his work on “Oceanizing American Studies,” Greg Dvorak builds on Hau’ofa’s conception of Pacific Islander seafaring cultures to advocate “a shift from continental to oceanic thinking.”<sup>45</sup>

Such a shift is currently underway in scholarship from various fields. In a 2001 publication, Elizabeth DeLoughrey analyzes European colonizers’ erasure of the interconnections which Caribbean and Pacific Islander cultures had envisioned and lived between island spaces, an erasure which created an “ideological segregation of archipelagos into isolated islands.”<sup>46</sup> Building on DeLoughrey’s work, Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Stephens have recently argued that post-exceptionalist studies of American imperialism frequently fail to understand the island spaces occupied or dominated by the USA through the lens of archipelagic theory, holding on instead to an older definition of insularity as “fixed,” “self-enclosed,” “nationalist” isolation.<sup>47</sup> They argue that colonialist perceptions of island spaces have given rise to “two seemingly contradictory discourses”: a discourse that contrasts continental superiority to island boundedness and insularity, “thereby rationalizing Euro-American domination of island-spaces,” and a discourse that takes the island’s boundedness as the quintessential metaphor for the sovereign nation-state, evoking “the island in terms particularly useful to imperial nationalism and the politics of sovereignty.”<sup>48</sup> Roberts and Stephens argue that while post-exceptionalist scholars have critiqued the implications of extending American sovereignty across the world via imperialism and globalization, they still remain heir to the discourse that identifies the island with insularity and limitation.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast to the logic of islands as spaces of isolation, scholars have recently privileged the envisioning of island spaces, and ultimately the entire globe, as sites of “archipelagic relationality.”<sup>50</sup> In a passage reminiscent of Boelhower’s pondering of early Atlantic maps, DeLoughrey points out that remapping the Caribbean and the Pacific along archipelagic lines is a crucial method of decolonization: “If geography is the first site of colonial rupture – the material space where colonization takes place – then the process of decolonization must begin with revised cartographies,” a process she calls “archipelagraphy.”<sup>51</sup>

Other critics have extended this “archipelagraphy” into a call for an “archipelagic American Studies”<sup>52</sup> and a re-reading of the world as archipelagic space.<sup>53</sup> Roberts and Stephens advocate “a truly de-centered and unbounded, meta-archipelagic vision” of “the wider planetary archipelago” and conclude:

The idea of a non-sovereign Caribbean, and the use of such a frame as a category of historical and geo-political analysis, suggests precisely the kind of contemporary turn an archipelagic studies also represents – a turn away from the trajectories of postcolonial studies as offering the only language for understanding present and contemporary political formations not culminating in the expected narrative of national sovereignty, as merely holding onto the relations of dependency that characterized the colonial past. And from the Antillean perspective, where the island becomes the space for the breaking of the naturalized connection between insularity and sovereignty, new definitions of a non-sovereign subject can also emerge that offer literary and cultural opportunities for the further unfolding of a re-imagined, transnational American Studies.<sup>54</sup>

Scholars argue that such an approach can help to deconstruct dominant notions of the USA as a coherent continental space, thereby revealing, in the words of Craig Santos Perez, the “discontiguous American Empire” as a “global archipelago” of military bases, embassies, and island possessions.<sup>55</sup> In this way, archipelagic thought serves to make visible the imperialist functions of sovereignty. At the same time, theorists and activists both in the Caribbean and in the Pacific have developed archipelagic thinking in order to reconceptualize their own structures of governance against such imperialism, thinking not only beyond European notions of sovereignty, but also beyond traditional notions of the nation-state.<sup>56</sup> Critic Hōkūlani Aikau, for example, asks her readers to envision futures “that do not require the nation-state as the only legitimate and intelligible governing entity for the enactment of a peoples’ sovereignty.”<sup>57</sup>

Despite the dynamicism of these developments, however, we need to remember that neither Glissant nor Benítez-Rojo fully discard nationalist readings: Glissant argues that Caribbeanness “modifies, but does not undermine” anticolonial nationalism, and Benítez-Rojo takes pains to assert that his “second reading” does not negate the first, nationalist version.<sup>58</sup> In line with this argument, both DeLoughrey and Stratford et al. have pointed out that the idea of the archipelago is not an “innocent” concept.<sup>59</sup> Atlantic and Pacific scholars, among others, have shown that entirely giving up nationhood and sovereignty discourses can lead to the exposure of populations and environments to imperialist and neo-imperialist exploitation or surveillance. While encouraging a critique of the nation-state, Aikau has argued that transnational or postnational frameworks alone cannot end colonization or occupation.<sup>60</sup> In this vein, DeLoughrey points out:

Given the high rate of migrancy in the Caribbean region, which is often determined by corporate and neo-imperial capitalism, the ‘Peoples of the Sea’ have circumscribed patterns of

migration that are more defined by exploitative labour initiatives than by romantic adventure or quests for regional unity.<sup>61</sup>

DeLoughrey observes that “The Pacific Island responses to Hau’ofa’s ‘Our Sea of Islands’ also point to important material, cultural, and economic ellipses in his idealistic vision of Oceania.”<sup>62</sup>

The impasse between an anticolonial insistence on sovereignty as a strategy against colonization and the alternative vision of non-sovereign orders may necessitate a different take. If colonialism, as Roberts and Stephens argue, can utilize seemingly contradictory discourses simultaneously in the name of domination, perhaps decolonial thinking must likewise link seemingly contradictory lines of thought. DeLoughrey thus argues that we need to see island spaces as both autonomous *and* interconnected: “marine routes cannot be divorced from their associated national territories.”<sup>63</sup> Despite the fact that this insight has been voiced both in Atlantic and Pacific studies, the archipelagic debate has also produced some differences in orientation. In scholarship on the Caribbean, both anticolonial nationalism and archipelagic thinking are frequently connected to the idea of creolization. However, as critics have recently (and controversially) argued, the privileging of creolization may also re-enact an “erasure of the indigenous that facilitates the indigenization of the creole self.”<sup>64</sup> In this way, the early colonial near-erasure of indigenous populations in the Caribbean would translate into a troubling near-erasure of the indigenous in theorizing the Caribbean. In Native Pacific studies, where indigenous populations and cultures survived colonization differently, positions on sovereignty are more strongly refracted through the lens of indigeneity. Aikau, for example, combines her critique of transnationalism’s potential dangers to colonized populations with a call to “move toward material decolonization that relies on Indigenous ontologies” potentially enabling “the possibility for a trans-Indigenous and settler futurity that does not include state governmentality.”<sup>65</sup>

Indigeneity thus theorized is likewise a crucial issue in the Arctic, where the “fluid,” often transnational setting has the potential to both strengthen and damage indigenous communities. I will proceed by pointing to the usefulness of Atlantic and Pacific conceptions for theorizing the Arctic and to the ways in which Canadian Inuit have created specifically Arctic versions of archipelagraphy, sovereignty, and indigeneity in their conception of the “Inuit sea.”

### **Indigeneity and mobility: The “Inuit Sea”**

In Nunavut, the territory which encompasses a large part of the so-called Canadian Arctic Archipelago, archipelagic thinking refracted through indigeneity may provide an alternative to the sovereignty claims both of the Canadian government and of foreign nations and organizations. Such thinking could even, in turn, help to revise Canadian nationhood itself. Phillip Vannini et al. have argued that the melting ice in the Arctic enables us to envision Canada anew via its Arctic Archipelago.<sup>66</sup> This proposed vision comes quite close to theorizing the Arctic as an oceanic world:

the archipelago concept allows us to better articulate networks of ice flows, islands and oceans – and thus to redefine the continental identity of North America and the nation-state definition of Canada as a dominant mainland, while at the same time to include in the same network Arctic and Polar regions that “belong” to continents other than North America.<sup>67</sup>

The authors point out that both in early explorers' writing and in indigenous storytelling, the North was originally conceptualized in island terms: "in Inuit cosmology, as in that of First Nations further to the South, the space of the planet was conceived as a series of nested islands."<sup>68</sup> Thus, the potential opening of the Northwest Passage is deemed crucial for the attempts to "re-assembl[e] the nation from the Arctic" and to connect North and South in new ways.<sup>69</sup> Building on the work of Vannini et al., Stratford et al. have likewise argued that we conceptualize Canada via "the prospect of white Arctic ice-scapes melting to landscapes of brown, green and blue." From such consideration, Canada emerges "not as a unitary land mass but as a series of multiple assemblages of coastal, oceanic and insular identities."<sup>70</sup>

However, Vannini et al. also voice words of caution: "There ought to be no doubt," they observe, "that this shift is not under the control of the Inuit, Dene, and Inuvialuit people habiting in the North and it is thus fraught with dangers for them."<sup>71</sup> A striking example of this need for caution is a 1985 statement by Canadian Foreign Minister Joe Clark on Canada's Arctic sovereignty. Clark announced:

Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic is indivisible. It embraces land, sea, and ice. It extends without interruption to the seaward facing coasts of the Arctic islands. These Islands are joined and not divided by the waters between them. They are bridged for most of the year by ice. From time immemorial Canada's Inuit people have used and occupied the ice as they have used and occupied the land.<sup>72</sup>

In an eerie way, Clark's words echo both archipelagic theories and the call to privilege indigenous histories, but they do so in the name of Canadian national sovereignty. Michael Byers has pointed out that Inuit use and occupation is, in fact, one of the strongest legal arguments for Canadian claims to the region.<sup>73</sup> This seems bitterly ironic given the record of Canadian/Inuit interaction.

As Katja Göcke has argued, the transfer of sovereignty from England to Canada completely ignored the Inuit living in the North, treating the area as "terra nullius."<sup>74</sup> Twentieth-century Canadian interventions in the North were marked by a forced settlement of the previously mobile Inuit, the establishment of residential schools, and by resettlements of Inuit into the High Arctic to serve as "human flagpoles" enforcing Canadian title.<sup>75</sup> Recent governmental settlements of claims in the North with Inuit populations seem motivated not only by a desire to right past wrongs, but to prevent other nations' interventions and to create the legal clarity necessary for resource exploitation. In such a reading, the government's very acknowledgement of an indigenous presence would, ironically, once again confirm non-indigenous sovereignty. As Pauline Wakeham argues,

Although Indigenous claims to inhabiting Turtle Island "since time immemorial" are typically undermined by the government, treated as myth rather than fact, and overwritten by multi-cultural credos that define Canada as a "nation of immigrants," here the state ceremoniously reclaims this phrase to count Inuit Arctic occupation as evidence of settler-state sovereignty.<sup>76</sup>

Among the various modern treaties, the negotiation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement of 1993 and the subsequent creation of Nunavut Territory as Canada's "newest political unit" in 1999 seem particularly striking.<sup>77</sup> The agreements retained a colonial thrust in that Inuit had to surrender claims to all but 17 percent of the territory in question. Nevertheless, although Nunavut includes both Inuit and non-Inuit, Inuit make up 85 percent of the Nunavut population and have thereby obtained de facto self-government.<sup>78</sup> On the

downside, critics remark that Nunavut is mostly governed by standard Canadian bureaucratic structures that painfully grind against Inuit conceptions of politics.<sup>79</sup> In addition, according to many Inuit, the federal government has fulfilled neither its general financial obligations nor the promise to invest in Inuit training and education, resulting in a badly underfunded Nunavut government and in a low rate of Inuit participation in government jobs. As Göcke observes:

So far, [...] the creation of the Nunavut Territory has not led to major improvements as regards the Inuit living conditions. This is mainly due to the fact that the federal government has breached its fiduciary obligations towards the Inuit and not provided the Nunavut government and designated Inuit organizations with sufficient funds or the chance to generate such funds in order to effectively address the immense social and economic problems in the Canadian Arctic.<sup>80</sup>

The government of Nunavut has thus urgently called for devolution, a process which would grant the territory what Canadian provinces already have: the right “to manage surface and sub-surface natural resources, including the power to levy and collect resource royalties and other revenues.”<sup>81</sup> In a 2011 speech, Eva Aariak, then premier of Nunavut, states: “To leave Nunavut – the only territory with an Aboriginal majority – as the only jurisdiction without control over its lands, internal waters and resources would be backsliding towards the paternalism and colonialism of the past.”<sup>82</sup>

In a critical take on devolution, Gabrielle Slowley argues that under current conditions of globalization, devolution serves a neo-colonial function by relieving the federal government of financial obligations while leaving indigenous nations no choice but to cooperate with potentially exploitative businesses.<sup>83</sup> Despite these risks, most Inuit see the modern treaty process, the creation of Nunavut, and the prospect of devolution as milestones on the way towards self-determination. Aariak argues that Nunavut government enables the reclaiming of “a modern form of self-reliance of our past traditional life.”<sup>84</sup> She points out that “Inuit knowledge is also being built into decision making in Nunavut.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the Nunavut Legislative Assembly has no political parties, and Nunavut’s political and legal structures are officially dedicated to incorporating principles and practices of Inuit knowledge (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit).<sup>86</sup> In addition, the Inuit land-claim organization Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, responsible for representing the beneficiaries of the land claims agreement, remains a political force in Nunavut and fulfills a crucial watchdog function.<sup>87</sup> It has recently taken the federal government to court for not fulfilling its part of the Land Claims Agreement.

Nunavut Inuit, and many Canadian Inuit spokespersons of national and circumpolar Inuit organizations, have carved out a very specific position on sovereignty and self-government: while they encourage the Canadian government’s claiming of Arctic sovereignty on the basis of Inuit use and occupancy, they simultaneously insist that such a claim is only legitimate as long as the Canadian government fulfills its modern treaty obligations towards Inuit communities. In this way, Inuit acceptance of their role in claiming Canadian sovereignty denotes not a static “fact,” but an ongoing process of political negotiation. Commenting on the work of Eva Aariak, Pauline Wakeham observes:

From the perspective of many Inuit, therefore, the decision to cede an overarching title to Canada – in exchange for internal Inuit sovereignty – is an ongoing and conditional one

that delicately balances the contingencies of intersecting systems of governance in ways that seek to maximize Inuit autonomy.<sup>88</sup>

Mary Simon, speaking in 2009 as national president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Canadian's national Inuit organization, remarks that "The process for asserting Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic involves establishing constructive partnerships with Inuit." She continues: "since it is our home, we have a perspective on how sovereignty should be promoted."<sup>89</sup>

Many Canadian Inuit are arguing that they are, without conflict, both Inuit and Canadian. At the same time, they unequivocally point to the necessity of changing or adjusting Canadian federal conceptions of sovereignty according to Inuit principles. Pauline Wakeham remarks:

Rather than perpetuating colonial paradigms that view settler-state and Indigenous sovereignties as necessarily pitted in a zero-sum game, many Inuit political organizations are fostering more nuanced conceptualizations of Canadian and Inuit sovereignties as strategically articulated forces that require vigilant and ongoing recalibration in the face of persistent colonial power asymmetries. [...] While some Indigenous intellectuals have argued against capitulation to the Western political category of sovereignty, others invoke the term strategically as what Michelle Raheja calls "a placeholder for a multitude of indigenous designations" that "incorporates European notions of recognizing political autonomy" while also foregrounding "indigenous concepts of self-governance."<sup>90</sup>

Natalia Loukacheva argues that the combination of Canadian conceptions of state sovereignty with more community-centered Inuit approaches would, if widely adopted, result in a new form of "dual sovereignty."<sup>91</sup> Thus the "overlapping sovereignty" discussed earlier is crucially amended by Inuit conceptions. Mary Simon, for example, calls the federal conception of sovereignty "outdated" and advocates the development of "an integrated Arctic strategy that includes federal departments and agencies, provincial and territorial governments and Aboriginal organizations working around a common vision of the Arctic."<sup>92</sup>

In advocating a critical re-evaluation of the link between sovereignty and the nation-state, many Canadian Inuit, despite their cooperation with the Canadian government, are breaking through the division between what Aikau has called "indigenous rights discourses," which focus on interactions between indigenous people and the state, and "indigenous resurgence," which connects to indigenous conceptions of "land- and water-based practices."<sup>93</sup> Many Inuit politicians and theorists have developed their positions on sovereignty via a combination of indigenous rights *and* resurgence. In 2009, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, an organization encompassing the Inuit of Russia, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland, issued *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic*, declaring that old models of sovereignty are contested and need to be rethought precisely via the idea of overlap: "Sovereignties overlap and are frequently divided within federations in creative ways to recognize the right of peoples." The members of the ICC situate themselves both as citizens of their respective countries and of the circumpolar Inuit homeland Inuit Nunaat, calling for creative solutions both in their states of residence and "in the conduct of international relations in the Arctic."<sup>94</sup>

In line with these claims, Canadian Inuit politicians and writers are reworking the choices articulated in the debates on archipelagic thinking. They seem not to choose between sovereign nationhood and non-sovereign relationality, but situate themselves



in a threefold position: within Canada, calling for devolution; within an Inuit homeland, which exists in circumpolar space; and as guardians of the Arctic as a passage, overseeing the link between Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in negotiations with the international community. For the project of theorizing the Arctic, the latter two positions, both of which could also provide room for envisioning non-statist solutions, are especially pertinent.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council constitutes an alternative to the Arctic world as mapped by fora such as the Arctic Council, which has not yet found completely adequate solutions for integrating indigenous positions. *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic* declares Inuit as an indigenous people of the Arctic and argues that as such, they have an inherent right to self-determination and various other rights related to the question of sovereignty as codified in the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In this way, Inuit sovereignty does not rest on the decisions made by the nation-states in which they reside.<sup>95</sup> The *Declaration* points out that Inuit citizenship in the nation-states in which they live does not diminish their rights as “a people under international law.” In addition, as the *Declaration* makes clear in its very first words, the authors have a collective identity as “the Inuit of Inuit Nunaat,” the circumpolar Inuit homeland. It is from this positionality that the Inuit delegates call for increased “global cooperation” in the Arctic with “the full participation and cooperation of indigenous peoples.”

In her recent work on the ICC, Jessica M. Shadian argues that the ICC bears some resemblance to nation-states, although “it is not striving for statehood.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, although the organization “functions much like a conventional NGO” and has a transnational membership, it is more than an NGO or a “transnational actor.”<sup>97</sup> In line with Yale Ferguson and Richard Mansbach’s definition of a polity, Shadian argues that the ICC is an Inuit polity, an entity with the “political capacity to mobilize people and resources for political purposes,” to govern, and to develop an identitarian narrative.<sup>98</sup> Inuit land claims, Shadian observes, are filtered through this idea of the polity. Significantly, she argues that Inuit have, from the beginning of colonization and contact, negotiated and thus influenced the Westphalian system of nation-states. Consequently, these histories must be told in relation, as “contingent histories” that make visible not only how the Westphalian system has shaped Inuit politics, but how Inuit politics have been instrumental in creating the idea of an Arctic Council and transnational models of Arctic governance.<sup>99</sup> Building on the work of Aqqaluk Lyngé, Shadian characterizes the Inuit relationship to land as stewardship, which combines individual and collective ownership, understands ownership as based on active use or need, and privileges notions of sustainability, self-rule, and indigenous knowledge.<sup>100</sup> In order to negotiate such a relation to land, water, and ice, traditional Westphalian notions of nation-state territoriality make way for the notion of an Inuit homeland. Shadian quotes Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami:

“Inuit Nunaat” is a Greenlandic term that describes land but does not include water or ice. The term “Inuit Nunangat” is a Canadian Inuktitut term that includes land, water, and ice. As Canadian Inuit consider the land, water, and ice, of our homeland to be integral to our culture and our way of life it was felt that “Inuit Nunangat” is a more inclusive and appropriate term to use when describing our lands.<sup>101</sup>

Inuit Nunaat/Inuit Nunangat is thus a powerful way to envision the Arctic as a circumpolar world. This oceanic world is further fleshed out in a recent publication on Inuit views on sovereignty, security, and patriotism, created by the Inuit Qaujisarvingat knowledge



center at Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami in cooperation with the University of Toronto and various foundations. The text, entitled *Nilliajut*, brings together Inuit elders, politicians, activists, writers, and translators. One of the contributors, Kirt Ejesiak, envisions a formal Inuit union, which would allow the Inuit of Canada, Russia, the USA, and Greenland to freely travel, hunt, and participate in educational programs across the boundaries of the nation-states in which they live. Such a union, according to Ejesiak, could counteract the status of the Inuit as a people “broken” both by colonization and by geographical borders.<sup>102</sup>

This underlying foundation of the circumpolar Arctic as Inuit Nunaat/Inuit Nunangat also determines Canadian Inuit positions on the Northwest Passage. In the same volume, the relationship of land, water, and ice in the Arctic Archipelago is addressed in Rosemary Kuptana’s “The Inuit Sea,” which both claims and oceanizes the circumpolar Arctic world. Kuptana writes: “The Northwest Passage is part of the Inuit Sea by virtue of its use and occupancy for millennia by the Inuit – a use necessary for the survival of the Inuit as a people.”<sup>103</sup> Kuptana also points to the inadequacy of UNCLOS with regard to Inuit positions, since it

does not address use and occupancy as a way of life on the water as [...] [it] states that it is impractical for humans to occupy the sea ... This omission in its analysis is faulty given the Inuit occupation and use of the Inuit Sea, both as water and as ice.<sup>104</sup>

Kuptana’s position is seconded by Aaju Peter, who comments on the Canadian outrage at the intrusion of the American oil tanker *Manhattan* into the Northwest Passage in 1969. Peter writes: “Inuit have transited these waters and ice for thousands of years. Title was never in question. This is Inuit homeland.”<sup>105</sup>

By declaring water and ice as “homeland,” Inuit are intervening in the debate about archipelagic thinking, insisting, like many Pacific Islanders, that oceanic mobility and indigenous “homeland” remain linked concepts. Inuit Nunaat/Inuit Nunangat, like the Pacific archipelagic world and the archipelago of Caribbean thought, is a space of territorial and oceanic mobility. In addition to the redefinition of homeland as ocean, Inuit definitions emphasize ice as a part of their homeland, creating new relations between land, sea, and moving, melting icescapes, where “the sea ice enables all nearby lands and communities to become connected, no matter what government boundaries are drawn.”<sup>106</sup>

In an attempt to compare Inuit and Canadian conceptions of sovereignty, Rachel A. Qitsualik argues that the European “paradox of sovereignty,” which suggests “that changeless conceptualization can apply to changeable phenomena” like the Arctic land and sea, relates neither to the Inuktitut language nor to Inuit theory.<sup>107</sup> Qitsualik observes that “in a world of shifting ice and capricious weather patterns [...], in which the movements of animals with no regard for borders determined where and when one might eat, Inuit substituted cosmological and existential factors for political boundaries.”<sup>108</sup> In her argument, sovereignty that functions without artificial borders is not conceptualized “via mastery of [one’s] home,” but through a complex process of learning from the environment.<sup>109</sup> Inuit conceptions of mobility on the land and sea thus extend European, US-American, and Canadian conceptions of territoriality in a way reminiscent both of archipelagic theory and theories of decolonization, including the insistence on balancing sovereignty and non-sovereign solutions. In Aaju Peter’s words, drawing “an arbitrary line on a map” to keep others out is not a viable concept. Instead, those passing through will have to

“follow Inuit traditional practices.”<sup>110</sup> In this way, welcoming a stranger in transit may actually affirm Inuit sovereignty over the Inuit homeland, as long as such transit itself is undertaken in line with Inuit practices. Peter writes:

How then do we exercise sovereignty of Inuit Nunaat the way it has been done by Inuit for thousands of years? We do that by showing gratitude to all that our land and waters offer to us. We do that by showing respect to the land, the animals and the people that live there. If we have to allow ships to traverse, it has to be done with the full consent of the inhabitants and be done in a way that is the least harmful and disruptive.<sup>111</sup>

It seems clear that this form of mobility is very different from the transit envisioned for tankers in the Northwest Passage in the US–Canadian debate. The task remains, then, to keep bringing these visions into relation.

### Conclusion: Connecting the debates

It has become clear that the diverging debates on Arctic sovereignty need to be connected in innovative ways. In this respect, scholarship in literary and cultural studies performs an important role by providing an awareness of cultural forms. While much Western scholarship observes a distinction between law, geography, and literature, many Canadian Inuit have pointed out that both maps and laws are often embedded in Inuit stories, names, and songs. Eva Aariak suggests that place names can function as charts and maps:

Not a single road connects any of our communities, but none of them live in isolation. A network of trails and water routes, used for countless centuries, tie them together. Along these routes there are thousands of ancient names for landforms and waterways. Each of these names contains an essential kernel of information – a clue to help with navigation and hunting.<sup>112</sup>

Names, narratives, and songs can also map out sovereignty. As Aaju Peter writes:

An elder welcomes the visitors by singing ancient songs that tell about awareness, hunting, the environment and respect. These songs confirm Inuit use and occupation of the land and waters uninterrupted for thousands of years. You see evidence of this occupation at every bay, fiord and inlet all across the Arctic carrying an Inuit name, passed down for generations.<sup>113</sup>

Similarly, classic Inuit law did not exist in a separate body of legal codes, but in “customs and traditions that had the weight of law.”<sup>114</sup> Legal scholar Natalia Loukacheva’s research on Inuit legal principles suggests that Inuit social control often rested in myths and stories. Restoring peace usually took precedence over punishing specific acts, and song duels, dancing, and music could serve this restorative purpose.<sup>115</sup> Not surprisingly, Loukacheva observes that so far, attempts to reconcile Canadian and Inuit notions of law have not yet been very successful. A stronger awareness of the multiple functions of narrative forms would be an important first step.

In addition, work in literary and cultural studies – particularly in its postcolonial inflection – provides much-needed theories of cultural clashes and connections that have not been considered in mainstream discussions of the circumpolar Arctic. For example, the definitions of sovereignty developed by a number of Canadian Inuit writers, theorists, and politicians seem to create what Kevin Bruyneel has called the “third space of sovereignty.” Bruyneel argues that many Native nations in North America have been trapped

in a “false choice” created by “the imperial binary: assimilation or secession, inside or outside, modern or traditional [...]”.<sup>116</sup> The third space of sovereignty, instead, engages in an act of postcolonial “overlapping, nonbinaristic” mapping of territory, which does not necessarily call for the destruction of settler-state sovereignty, but nevertheless expects the settler state to adjust its conceptions.<sup>117</sup> Like Canadian Inuit, who base their positions on the ICC’s claim that Inuit self-determination is inherent, third space sovereignty argues that indigenous sovereignty exists “prior to and outside of” the history of colonization.<sup>118</sup> Thus, third space sovereignty enables indigenous peoples to negotiate with nation-states while looking beyond statist notions via “a postcolonial supplemental remapping of sovereign relationships that can include but will not be dictated to or contained by state boundaries.”<sup>119</sup>

Unlike approaches characterized by an outright rejection of sovereignty as a European concept, this position potentially enables the use of sovereignty as what Walter Mignolo calls a “connector.” In Mignolo’s argument, connectors are not “empty signifiers that preserve the terms as the property of European Enlightenment while they promote benevolent inclusion of the Other or making room for the multicultural.” Rather, “liberal concepts” and “indigenous concepts” must “come to terms” via connectors. Such “border thinking” can ultimately serve to “displace European conceptions.”<sup>120</sup> As a connector, sovereignty as refracted through indigeneity enables the critical relationality envisioned in archipelagic thinking and becomes a key factor in conceptualizing the Arctic as an oceanic world. In the writings of the Canadian Inuit quoted here, Inuit Nunaat/Inuit Nunangat as a circumpolar space is never quite sealed off from competing visions of the Arctic world. Such a view necessitates both the ability to abide “overlaps” and to see the Arctic from differing perspectives.

Graham Huggan and Roger Norum have argued that the Arctic, in turn, challenges postcolonial theory by “push[ing] the boundaries of postcolonial understandings of society, politics, ecology.” Like Boelhower in the Atlantic context, they argue that “the Arctic is a rich symbolic *and* material space” and call for a connection between various conceptions of the Arctic:

if the “postcolonial Arctic” is to make any sense, both for [indigenous] peoples and for those who see themselves as acting in their best interests, then it needs to be a fully *dialogical* space within the wider context of an increasingly globalized world.<sup>121</sup>

It is this ability, invoked by Boelhower, to develop a “crisscrossing perspectivism,” that has also shaped Atlantic studies’ conception of the “circum-Atlantic” as a transnational and transcultural space.<sup>122</sup> In Pacific studies, the notion that mobility and multiple perspectives are the factors which determine an oceanic space as “world” is equally emphasized and has led to the conception of the “transpacific,” as in Yunte Huang’s claim that “the transpacific space may be lived, conceptualized, from multiple contested points of origin.”<sup>123</sup> Similarly, Arif Dirlik has established the Pacific as a site of “relationships.”<sup>124</sup> Such multiplicity, in the words of Erin Suzuki, enables us to “theorize against current imperial desires.”<sup>125</sup> Thinking the circum-Atlantic, the transpacific, and the circumpolar Arctic in these terms, however, necessitates the retention of sovereignty as a connector that “teaches how to flow” without exposing entire populations to ongoing or renewed exploitation. Like the Atlantic and Pacific worlds, the Arctic world suggests that in itself, fluidity is not an innocent concept.

Finally, a note of caution: Inuit thought has arisen from the specificity of the Arctic as Inuit homeland, and any attempt to relate to this body of knowledge must endeavor to do justice to this specificity. This equally holds true for the other theories examined and related in this essay. I have nevertheless attempted to read selected Canadian Inuit conceptions of sovereignty as “connectors” because they provide a crucial intervention in current debates on the Arctic. In addition, the Inuit conceptions of Inuit Nunaat/Inuit Nunangat studied here also point towards at least two important possibilities for productively relating Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic theory, particularly with regard to debates on archipelagic and postcolonial thought and the conception of indigeneity. First, many Canadian Inuit positions strike a balance between the insistence on Inuit sovereignty and the insistence on conceptualizing forms of governance that go beyond statist solutions. Secondly, Inuit insistence on thinking about self-governance as interaction with land, sea, ice, and animal life emphasizes the human relation to land and water as a crucial act of cultural production. This realization serves as a hallmark of Atlantic and Pacific theory, archipelagic thought, and Native American studies, but it has likewise not been absent from postcolonial thought. At the same time, Canadian Inuit thought could (and needs to) be framed in various other ways, such as in relation to the work of Inuit from other sites and nation-states of the Arctic, and in its specific relation to indigenous thought across the globe. The frame chosen for this essay can thus only offer one possible – and limited – reading among many previous and, hopefully, many future readings.<sup>126</sup>

My paper thus ends, a little dramatically, with two different contemporary conceptions of the Arctic that both build on the fluidity of melting ice and layered sovereignty, but set in stark relief two very different versions of Arctic futures: One is formulated by Rosemary Kuptana, who writes: “The rest of the world, if it has the courage to look beyond its colonial mentality, must know and recognize that jurisdiction over the Inuit Sea continues to lie with the Inuit.”<sup>127</sup> The other conception is formulated by Michael Byers, who invokes yet another sea in his predictions:

The Arctic is in crisis. The ice and the permafrost – the foundations of its highly specialized ecosystems – are literally melting away, and with them the traditional way of life of the Inuit. A vast, ice-bound, impenetrable ocean is being transformed into a new Mediterranean Sea, a “middle sea” over which the world’s powers will trade.<sup>128</sup>

Whether, and how, scholars of Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic studies can connect over these positions remains an urgent question.

## Notes

1. Boelhower, “I’ll Teach You How to Flow,” 33.
2. *Ibid.*, 33.
3. *Ibid.*, 36, 38.
4. *Ibid.*, 43.
5. *Ibid.*, 48.
6. Perry and Andersen, *New Strategic Dynamics*, 1–3.
7. Emerson, *The Future History*, 182.
8. *Ibid.*, 268.
9. Emerson, *The Future History*, 95; Carlson et al., “Scramble for the Arctic.”
10. Emerson, *The Future History*, 98.
11. Kuptana, “The Inuit Sea,” 10.

12. Griffiths qtd. in Loukacheva, "Nunavut," 84.
13. Carlson et al., "Scramble for the Arctic," 21.
14. Dufresne, "Canada's Legal Claims," 2–3.
15. Göcke, "Inuit Self-government," 79–80.
16. Lytvynenko, "Arctic Sovereignty," 3.
17. Wakeham, "At the Intersection," 92.
18. Meren and Plumptre, "Rights of Passage," 169.
19. *Ibid.*, 174, 178.
20. Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic*, 47.
21. *Ibid.*, 52–53; see also Dufresne, "Controversial Canadian Claims," 2–3.
22. For a detailed discussion of the legal nuances of this debate, see Dufresne, "Controversial Canadian Claims," 2–8.
23. Meren and Plumptre, "Rights of Passage," 173; Dufresne, "Canada's Legal Claims," 16.
24. Lytvynenko, "Arctic Sovereignty," 5; Meren and Plumptre, "Rights of Passage," 170.
25. Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic*, 82–83.
26. Caspar qtd. in Humrich, "Fragmented International Governance," 80.
27. See "The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea."
28. Humrich, "Fragmented International Governance," 92.
29. Crawford, Hanson, and Runnalls, "Arctic Sovereignty and Security," 5.
30. Carlson et al., "Scramble for the Arctic," 23.
31. *Ibid.*, 39.
32. Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic*, 6.
33. Crawford, Hanson, and Runnalls, "Arctic Sovereignty and Security," 6.
34. Humrich, "Fragmented International Governance," 80.
35. *Ibid.*, 81, 90.
36. Emerson, *The Future History*, 344.
37. Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 5.
38. *Ibid.*, 4.
39. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 139.
40. Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 2, 4.
41. *Ibid.*, 13.
42. *Ibid.*, 16.
43. Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 30–31.
44. *Ibid.*, 31.
45. Dvorak, "Oceanizing American Studies," 616.
46. DeLoughrey, "The Litany of Islands," 27.
47. Roberts and Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies," 3.
48. *Ibid.*, 4.
49. *Ibid.*, 9.
50. *Ibid.*, 5.
51. DeLoughrey, "The Litany of Islands," 34, 47.
52. Roberts and Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies," 7.
53. Stratford et al., "Envisioning the Archipelago," 117.
54. Roberts and Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies," 13, 15.
55. Santos Perez, "Transterritorial Currents," 619. See also Shigematsu and Camacho, *Militarized Currents*.
56. See, for example, Bonilla, *Non-sovereign Futures*.
57. Aikau, "Following the Alaloa Kipapa," 659.
58. Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 16.
59. DeLoughrey, "The Litany of Islands," 25; Stratford et al., "Envisioning the Archipelago," 120.
60. Aikau, "Following the Alaloa Kipapa," 658.
61. DeLoughrey, "The Litany of Islands," 40, 43.
62. *Ibid.*, 43.
63. *Ibid.*, 44.

64. See Michelle Stephens' review of Shona Jackson's argument in *Creole Indigeneity* (Stephens, "Intimate Relations," 1245).
65. Aikau, "Following the Alaloe Kipapa," 658.
66. Vannini et al, "Recontinentalizing Canada," 123.
67. *Ibid.*, 124.
68. *Ibid.*, 126.
69. *Ibid.*, 128.
70. Stratford et al., "Envisioning the Archipelago," 121.
71. Vannini et al., "Recontinentalizing Canada," 134.
72. Qtd. in Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic*, 53.
73. Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic*, 53–54.
74. Göcke, "Inuit Self-government," 80.
75. Loukacheva, *Arctic Promise*, 31; Wakeham, "At the Intersection," 85, 92–93; Pelaudeix, "Inuit Governance," 68–69; Göcke, "Inuit Self-government," 81.
76. Wakeham, "At the Intersection," 102.
77. Göcke, "Inuit Self-government," 77.
78. Loukacheva, *Arctic Promise*, 41; Pelaudeix, "Inuit Governance," 74; Göcke, "Inuit Self-government," 77.
79. White, "Governance in Nunavut," 76.
80. Göcke, "Inuit Self-government," 77.
81. *Ibid.*, 96, 97.
82. Aariak, "An Independent Nunavut," 9.
83. Slowley, "Globalization and Self-government," 265.
84. Aariak, "An Independent Nunavut," 5.
85. *Ibid.*, 7.
86. White, "Governance in Nunavut," 64.
87. *Ibid.*, 60.
88. Wakeham, "At the Intersection," 108.
89. Simon, "Inuit and the Canadian Arctic," 251, 252.
90. Wakeham, "At the Intersection," 105.
91. Loukacheva, "Nunavut," 97–98.
92. Simon, "Inuit and the Canadian Arctic," 258.
93. Aikau, "Following the Alaloe Kipapa," 656.
94. *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration*, n.pag.
95. See also Loukacheva, *The Arctic Promise*, 36.
96. Shadian, *The Politics of Arctic Sovereignty*, 4.
97. *Ibid.*, 5, 121.
98. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
99. *Ibid.*, 11, 200.
100. *Ibid.*, 58–59, 151.
101. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami qtd. in Shadian, *The Politics of Arctic Sovereignty*, 194.
102. Ejesiak, "An Arctic Inuit Union," 68.
103. Kuptana, "The Inuit Sea," 10.
104. *Ibid.*, 11.
105. Peter, "Inuit Use and Occupation," 45.
106. This notion is developed by Inuit community members from Cape Dorset in Nunavut during interviews tracing Inuit positions on the sovereignty debate. See Kelley, "Inuit Involvement," 61.
107. Qitsualik, "Inummarik," 32.
108. *Ibid.*, 26.
109. *Ibid.*, 33.
110. Peter, "Inuit Use and Occupation," 43, 45.
111. *Ibid.*, 47.
112. Aariak, "An Independent Nunavut," 4.
113. Peter, "Inuit Use and Occupation," 44.

114. Kuptana, "The Inuit Sea," 12.
115. Loukacheva, *Arctic Promise*, 80–83. See also Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, *The Inuit Way*, 9–10.
116. Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty*, 217.
117. *Ibid.*, 173, 214–215, 220.
118. *Ibid.*, xv.
119. *Ibid.*, 222.
120. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis," 742.
121. Huggan and Norum, "Editorial," 3–4.
122. See Boelhower, "'I'll Teach You How to Flow'" and Armitage, "Three Concepts."
123. Huang, *Transpacific Imaginations*, 11.
124. Dirlík, "Introduction," 4.
125. Suzuki, "Transpacific," 353.
126. I am grateful to the reviewers of this essay for highlighting the importance of reflecting on my chosen frame and for pointing to other possibilities for structuring my argument.
127. Kuptana, "The Inuit Sea," 12.
128. Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic*, 127.

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## Notes on contributor

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