'Come out and live on your land again': sovereignty, borders and the Unist'ot'en camp

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Abstract: Borders are often understood as 'tools' of sovereign power and as establishing the very possibility for authority in the international system of sovereign states (Salter, 2012). This paper seeks to problematise this perspective by looking at the case of the Unist'ot'en Action Camp in northern British Columbia, which has engaged bordering practices including having established a checkpoint on the roadway into the Unist'ot'en territory and actively policing helicopter traffic into the territory. Looking at the Camp, this paper argues that such bordering practices draw upon traditional Indigenous ways of being in order to contest and *undo* settler sovereign authority, in contrast to the traditional understanding of borders as working to organise settler authority. Understood this way, the paper argues that when inscribed with Indigenous knowledge and when relying on Indigenous authorities, borders and bordering practices can be read as gateways to 'meaningful decolonisation.'

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1   Introduction

Nestled deep within the borders of northern British Columbia (BC), Canada is the Unist'ot'en Action Camp (UAC or Camp hereafter). The Camp was initially built in 2009 to block the construction of an 'energy corridor' across the traditional territories of the Witsuwit'en nation.[1] Despite the nation rejecting the proponents' proposals – which consisted of building liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipelines across the territory – the federal government approved the projects and the companies behind them began building. As a response, members of the Witsuwit'en nation began building the Camp at Talbits Kwah, on the banks of the Wedzin Kwah (Morice River) and Gosnell Creek near Houston BC, directly in the middle of the proposed pipelines. Over the years the Camp has expanded from a single cabin to include a healing centre, a pithouse, permaculture gardens and cabins, alongside additional spaces where supporters are able to come and stay. Most pertinent for this paper though is that as a part of the Camp, the Unist'ot'en and their allies have established a 'checkpoint' on a bridge that crosses the Wedzin Kwah (Temper, 2015). Named the Talbits Kwa checkpoint, those at the Camp rely on traditional Witsuwit'en bordering practices to ensure that only those who will benefit the UAC or the Unist'ot'en are allowed through (Field, 2015). As described by one individual who has visited the camp on multiple occasions:

> "When someone arrives at the Unist'ot'en boundary, the bridge over the pristine Morice River, they must seek permission to enter. A spokesperson arrives and asks their intention, whether they work for the pipelines and how they might help the Unist'ot'en people. Those connected with the pipelines [and government] are denied entrance. Everyone else passes through." [Field, (2015), web]

This denial of seemingly 'lawful' entry to the territory through the establishment of borders has caught the attention of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), who have taken to treating the Camp as an illegal 'blockade' (Field, 2015; Lopez, 2014, 2015; Temper, 2015). However, for those engaged in the work of the UAC it is most often described by those who have built it as a 'community' [Huson in McSheffrey, (2015) web; Temper, (2015), video) or a 'homestead' (Unist'ot'en Camp [web]). The use of this terminology re-establishes Indigenous governance and authority over unceded lands that have been appropriated by the Canadian state. In the words of the leader of the Camp, Freda Huson: "I am not protesting. I am not demonstrating. I am occupying our homelands. These are ours. We decide what happens here and we've already said 'no' to the projects" [Huson in Toledano, (2015), video; see also Toledano, 2014a]. This focus on 'occupation' of traditional lands is further important as it positions the Camp as a direct contestation of the assumption of Canadian settler sovereignty, despite the lack of an explicit focus on resistance.

Rather than a rhetoric based in conflict however – as 'protest' or 'blockade' might indicate – the discourse of reoccupation as it is used by those around the Camp emphasises continuing Indigenous presence on their territories. This sentiment illustrates the way in which many Indigenous peoples within BC – and Canada more generally – feel about their land: that it is still *theirs* and that it is incumbent upon the Canadian

Government to recognise their authority over and responsibility to, the land. This sets up a tension between the assumption of Canadian settler sovereignty on the one hand and unbroken Indigenous presence reliant upon traditional authorities and practices on the other. Without a satisfactory resolution to this tension Indigenous peoples are directly re-establishing their own authority over their lands, including in this case by using bordering practices to delimit their own space in which they are the authority. In looking to the case of UAC then, it is possible to see the ways in which borders and bordering practices are engaged by Indigenous peoples and how this is done to resist against the settler state itself.

It is this re-establishing of Indigenous authority within their territories that I explore here through a critical analysis of the Camp in relation to two core concepts within international relations (IR): borders and the camp. Whereas IR as a discipline understands these to be core to the construction of European-derived sovereign authority, I argue here that by grounding an analysis in the literature on settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence, we can see how they are being used to deconstruct norms of settler sovereignty and claims to authority and that this in turn creates the kinds of decolonial futures imagined by Indigenous theorists.[2] While this pairing may initially seem strange given the way Indigenous issues are typically spoken of in domestic terms, this move towards domestication is precisely what I am here arguing against. Indeed, literature on Indigenous diplomacies (Bedford and Workman, 1997; Beier, 2009) outlines the international character of Indigenous governance. Further, engaging with Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies changes the 'typical' view of core tenants of IR (Beier, 2005; Shaw, 2003). This is particularly acute in the case of sovereignty (Shaw, 2002; Simpson, 2014), upon which IR takes its own world – the system of states – to be built. As I argue below, a different reading illustrates how Indigenous peoples use the very tools that IR scholars take as Western and foundational to the state and modern politics and through investing them with meaning based on traditional understandings, use these tools to strip away the artifice that holds together our understanding of the modern state. Looking at the UAC I demonstrate how bordering practices as a part of a land-based program of decolonial action are being used to push back against and undo Canada's assumption of sovereignty. In doing so, my paper seeks to destabilise an ongoing narrative that locates Indigenous peoples only within settler states. Instead, I speak to the ways that resistance and refusal are undertaken in the name of Indigenous authority and contest a settler politics which is intended to reconcile Indigenous nations to ongoing colonialism.

I build my argument below in four parts. First, I outline my methodological approach to this paper, as well as my decolonial approach more broadly. Second, I describe the twin processes of assimilation and elimination, which are the animating logics of a settler governmentality that forms my theoretical base. Third, I put forward a more critical reading of the border, understanding it as productive of political understandings and imaginaries. Fourth, I bring this all together in my analysis of the Camp itself. This analysis argues that the Camp uses borders to contest not only the smoothness of settler territoriality, but also the construction of a settler imaginary which excludes Indigenous peoples and authorities. Throughout my analysis, I offer a perspective that sees the UAC as a 'gateway to meaningful decolonisation' [Temper, (2015), video] specifically through the building and policing of borders and checkpoints, because it builds an Indigenous space that is outside of the bounds of settler sovereignty.

2   Methodology

In undertaking this analysis I have relied on existing academic literature within settler colonial studies, decolonisation, as well as more critical literature on borders. My analysis of the Camp itself relies primarily upon news stories and reports and videos from other groups who have worked with the Camp. I selected sources which include not only stories about the Camp, but also interviews with the participants and documentation surrounding the actions within and against the UAC. After gathering this information, I performed a critical discourse analysis following a Foucauldian approach wherein I pulled out key themes and points that recurred across the various texts themselves and analysed the underlying relations of power, epistemologies and ontologies at work in the texts (Beier, 2005; McMillan, 2018; Wiebe, 2016). While this form of analysis can typically take the form of a 'colonial discourse analysis' in IR (Beier, 2005), I am here looking to highlight the decolonial imperative of the engagement of traditionally colonial tools. Speaking to the decolonial work of the Camp entails rethinking my own approach to research. Indeed, the traditional model of a detached, neutral researcher is no longer adequate. Instead I am seeking to engage critical and decolonial approaches to research, which recognise and work from an understanding that knowledge is produced intersubjectively and that no individual has a view from nowhere (Davids and Willemse, 2014). Beginning from this position brings with it a necessary reflexivity, a focus on lived experience and a focus on resistance as an 'emancipatory imperative' [Rigney, (1999), pp.115–117]. Further, research with Indigenous communities is intended to deconstruct and analyse relations of power (Lightfoot, 2016) in support of a 'transformative agenda' for empowering the communities themselves (Smith, 2012). This paper follows in this tradition, despite its reliance upon somewhat traditional sources of information.

My experience with the UAC began with the type of media included in my analysis here. Since that time, I have travelled to and spent time in the Camp, to support their work where possible and also to learn from the leaders. This trip was not explicitly a research trip however and as a result I did not undertake interviews but rather focused on building relationships and learning first-hand about the work of decolonisation to support my own process of what Smith (2017) has called 'unlearning'. This is not to say that my trip to the Camp has not informed my analysis, however. Throughout my time at the Camp the emphasis on Indigenous occupation of their lands was reiterated time and time again, as was the way in which traditional protocols continue to hold a central role in present day governance. As a result of these experiences I have been left with a sense that Indigenous resistance to settler colonial norms and development rests not on an idealised vision of what might be; rather, they are a politics of 'refusal' (Simpson, 2014) rooted in a rejection of settler legal systems and norms in favour of Indigenous nationhood, traditional law and its practice. Before turning to this refusal in practice through the Camp, I first outline what is being refused, namely settler colonial assimilation and elimination.

3   Settler governmentality: organisation and elimination

Where I have discussed the decolonial imperative of my work above, here I outline two points regarding the operation of a specifically settler colonialism. First, I discuss dispossession in terms of the theft of Indigenous lands and discuss the camp as a way in which the settler state seeks to interpolate Indigenous peoples into the folds of settler sovereignty. Second, I discuss the impetus towards elimination that drives settler colonialism, targeting Indigenous subjectivities through a delegitimisation of traditional knowledge, cultures, authority and governance structures (Wolfe, 1999, 2006). Together, these are two important aspects of 'settler governmentality' (Crosby and Monaghan, 2012), which I take as my conceptual framework. Indeed, I understand settler governmentality as establishing the conditions for the 'settler colonial present' (Veracini, 2015) whereby settler governments seek to continue organising Indigenous lives, while offering Indigenous communities self-government within existing (settler) legal frameworks.

3.1   Dispossession and the camp

Taking up Indigenous dispossession within the context of settler states, Agamben's (1998) concept of the 'camp' illuminates the way in which settler sovereignty is constituted through the interpellation and ban of alternative (Indigenous), 'peculiar' claims to authority (Rifkin, 2009). This ban is achieved through the localisation of Indigenous peoples via the reserve system, which allows for all other lands to be lawfully opened for 'legitimate' settlement (Morgensen, 2011; Rifkin, 2009). While attentive to the possibility of ignoring the decolonial agency of Indigenous peoples within these camps, it is important to also be attentive to the ways in which camps can be constitutive of contemporary colonial relations of power. This is especially pertinent in the settler colonial context wherein the power to determine one's 'disposability' (Mbembe, 2003) is mobilised by the settler state in part through the removal of Indigenous peoples to reserves.

In this reading camps remain productive of what Agamben (1998) calls *Homo Sacer* ('bare life') – those biological bodies which the sovereign determines are outside of the law. While borders create the space for a sovereign 'inside,' by producing the exception to the rule of law, camps are both productive (Agamben, 1998) and illustrative (Mbembe, 2003) of that sovereign power. Taking up this second point directly, settler authority places those determined to be bare life inside the camp and outside of legal protections in a sort of 'relation of ban' [Rifkin, (2009), p.92]. This ban is particularly useful in settler colonial studies, as Indigenous peoples have been localised to their own reserves-as-camps (Morgensen, 2011; Rifkin, 2009), wherein they are managed outside of the standard juridical framework in a 'peculiar' way [Rifkin, (2009), p.96]. This has two effects. Not only does it establish a more liminal subjective status for Indigenous peoples, but by localising Indigenous peoples to camps the settler state also dispossesses Indigenous peoples of their territories and authorities by extending its own sovereign authority over their lands.

Rifkin (2009, p.96]) discusses this move, as he links biopolitics and settler colonialism through a focus on sovereignty:

> "More than merely recognising Native peoples as 'distinct political societ[ies]' with whom the United States must negotiate for territory, however, the treaty system also seeks to interpellate native polities into US political discourses, presupposing (and imposing) forms of governance and occupancy that facilitate the cession of land."

According to Rifkin (2009, p.97), this interpellation is made possible through the localisation of Indigenous peoples to reserves and organising their life according to the logic of a state of exception. In Rifkin's (2009, p.98) words, this creates a 'boundedness by banning' for Indigenous peoples within contemporary settler states in which indigeneity is banned from the settler political imaginary by binding it to the camp-like spaces of the reserve. This move "quite literally opens the space for a legal geography predicated on the territorial coherence of the nation" (Ibid, p.96), as it localises Indigenous peoples to camps established by the settler state. These camps are then stitched into the folds of settler sovereignty to establish the conditions for its own authority.

Such a process of stitching Indigenous peoples and communities into the folds of settler sovereignty would not be possible if not for the displacement of Indigenous governance traditions through the extension of settler legal frameworks over that newly opened space. This process of 'lawfare' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2007) serves not only to localise Indigenous peoples within the camp, as described above, but also serves to legitimise the appropriation of those lands not within the camp under the exclusive authority of the state itself, producing the legal sovereignty already being put into action (Borrows, 1999). Further, the legal frameworks of the settler state continue to reduce Indigenous authority to a 'subordinate position' in relation to crown sovereignty[3] (Ibid, p.11). Working together, the camp and lawfare serve as the methods through which settler modernity is established: only through the creation of 'camps' – and the placement of indigeneity within the state of exception – is the settler state able to be established through the enactment of sovereign authority over the rest of the territory.

3.2   Elimination and settler assimilation

If the camp and lawfare are tools which are used together to establish settler sovereignty, what is the logic driving their use? The answer here is that there is a 'logic of elimination' which drives settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006). Importantly, as Alfred and Corntassel (2005) highlight, this elimination no longer (primarily) takes the form of the physical destruction of Indigenous bodies – though of course settler authorities continue to produce conditions within reserves in which Indigenous peoples are left to die. Rather, the contemporary settler state seeks their elimination "as peoples through the erasure of the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self" (Ibid, p.598). Put into practice through the creation of conditions of dependency within Indigenous communities (Alfred, 2009) and a legal disavowal of Indigenous forms of governance and authority, this distinction marks the shift from previous forms of colonisation to what Beier (2005) calls 'advanced colonialism.'

One of the moves of this advanced colonialism is to homogenise Indigenous peoples so they may be more effectively governed. Termed 'aboriginalism,' this practice serves as "a powerful assault on Indigenous [national] identities" which holds meaning and tradition for Indigenous peoples [Alfred and Corntassel, (2005), p.599]. Without the

creation of an over-arching aboriginal identity by settler society there would be a need for the settler state to engage on a diplomatic level with "a collection of separate, unsubordinated, self-governing polities" on their own terms instead of those defined by settlers [Rifkin, (2009), p.94; see also Bruyneel, 2007]. Further, it would render illegitimate the achievements of the lawfare outlined above. What this homogenisation realises then is an opening of space for the state to govern through those biopolitical processes which work at "defining and redefining the threshold of political identity and legitimacy and determining how Native peoples will enter that field, including what (kinds of) concepts and categories they will inhabit" [Rifkin, (2009), p.98]. Indigenous 'self-articulation' becomes illegitimate as they are consistently framed within dominant narratives of settler choosing (Rifkin, 2014).

Coulthard (2014) refers to this phenomenon as the formation of 'Indigenous subjects of empire,' arguing that because identities and subjectivities are formed through a process of recognition, the terms of recognition are paramount. Indeed, "in actual contexts of domination (such as colonialism) the terms of recognition are usually determined by and in the interests of the master (the coloniser)" [Coulthard, (2007), p.439]. This is particularly the case in settler colonial systems, where the terms of recognition are established by settlers.[4] Because of this, there is an internalisation of these (settler) frameworks and norms of governance, much like the way in which Alfred and Corntassel understand 'aboriginal' to have become a norm of identification for Indigenous peoples. Indeed, Coulthard writes that the:

> "Long-term stability of a colonial system of governance relies as much on the 'internalisation' of the forms of racist recognition imposed or bestowed on the Indigenous population by the colonial state and society as it does on brute force." [Fanon in Coulthard, (2014), p.31]

In this way, settler governmentality seeks to shift the material and psychological ground on which indigeneity stands, moving it away from traditional lands, cultures, systems of governance or authorities and towards camps and settler standards and logics. Doing so makes possible the elimination of indigeneity – and Indigenous national identity – as a distinct source of legitimacy and authority outside of settler sovereignty.

Understood in such a way, the elimination that is sought is one in which Indigenous communities are continuously raided of their traditional authority, or their subjecthood outside of the bounds of the settler state. Instead, they are contained – as seen above regarding the formation of camps – or assimilated into the political imaginary of the settler state in order to legitimately establish the "settler society on top of the prior social organisation and distinctive cultures of peoples on that land" [Crosby and Monaghan, (2012), p.426].

The establishment of settler society and sovereignty is then only made possible through the elimination of Indigenous claims to authority or subjectivity outside of that organised through the settler state. This is done in part through processes of assimilation (Bruyneel, 2007), a sort of 'bringing in' of Indigenous subjecthood to the 'us' established by the state's borders [Crosby and Monaghan, (2012), p.425] and into a sort of multiculturalism that is mediated through and by settler society (Alfred, 1999, 2005; Alfred and Corntassel, 2005). It also takes on a managerial form of governance organised "towards elimination, where traces of indigeneity – culture, language, self-determination, traditional behaviours and practices – are coded as security threats to the health and

prosperity of the settler state" [Crosby and Monaghan, (2012), p.426; see also Morgensen, 2011].

Such a reading privileges Wolfe's (1999, p.163) understanding of settler colonial 'invasion [a]s a structure not an event'. That is, this logic of elimination did not occur at a fixed moment in history, but continues to drive settler governance of Indigenous peoples today; however, as I discuss below, this logic of elimination has not realised its ultimate goal. Instead, we can look to a politics of resurgence and refusal within Indigenous nations, which centres indigeneity, investing Indigenous national governance, authority and law with legitimacy. Doing so pushes back against and dismantles, ongoing processes of elimination (Simpson, 2014). I read the UAC as engaging in this type of politics, through which it seeks to move forward towards a decolonial future, instead of accepting the paralysis and dependence settler colonialism continues to attempt to enact.

4   Borders as sovereign-making

With the settler state driven by the complementary logics of elimination and assimilation, the camp is a productive tool of settler sovereignty. It is not the only one however and this section takes up the question of borders, which I understand as a productive tool and specifically as "a way of structuring the condition of possibility for authority at all" [Salter, (2012), p.737]. Today this authority is invested in sovereign states and internationally comes in the form of the sovereign state system, wherein states themselves – along with the system more generally – are established through the imposition of borders, as these outline the territory over which the state holds ultimate sovereign authority (Agnew, 1994). In the case of settler states such as Canada this system requires specific violence and dispossession being enacted upon the existing Indigenous nations, making possible European sovereignty. Important here is that recalling Wolfe's (1999) point about settler colonialism as a structure, this occurred not just at the founding moment but is continually re-enacted to maintain the legitimacy of settler sovereignty. In the context of settler colonialism then, contemporary borders and bordering practices are not necessarily about managing a supposed loss of territoriality (Ruggie, 1993), but rather they remain productive of the very sovereignty upon which the state relies.

Borders also occupy an important role "in the construction, organisation and reproduction of social life" itself [Paasi, (1998), p.69]. In the social sphere the border produces meaning through investing a particular status to the 'us' on the inside, which helps to build the collective national community around particular narratives (Ibid) to the exclusion of 'them' outside those borders. Indeed, this meaning-making occurs because "actors use [borders] to make sense of their lives as members of social collectives and to define who 'we' are. Boundaries between 'us' and 'others' are critical elements in establishing 'us' and excluding 'others'" (Ibid, p.75). More than this though, 'us' and 'them' are constructed primarily through a nationalist lens in which our state-centric identities are primary, over and above other forms of identification (Ibid, p.69). Within the Canadian context, we can understand bordering practices to be productive of a particular settler view of identity: those within the borders are Canadian and Indigenous peoples are interpellated into this (Rifkin, 2014).

Critically, this meaning can be made not only at the physical border itself, but also is being seen elsewhere through the extension of the border to being "within the midst of society" [Rumford, (2008), p.1]. This reading illustrates the way in which borders do not only have to have meaning as a line on the ground [Salter, (2012), p.737] and complements what Frowd (2014, p.227) means when he writes of "borders as diffuse and proliferating social spaces, enacted well beyond the territorial line". Salter's (2012, p.739) concept of the suture seems particularly relevant here, as he writes, "Sovereign states need to stitch in subjects to the narrative of the state". This helps build a social space that is more whole, which is especially important for incorporating Indigenous peoples as seen below.

This building of the social space is in part made possible through the actual visibility of the state itself. Further to speaking of borders as social spaces, Frowd (2014) also speaks to the way in which the material structure itself makes the state visible within communities. While Frowd (2014, p.232) writes that this makes "visible and legible those who cross the border", I would extend this to argue that it further helps to build this sense of community among the 'we'. Taking this seriously means understanding the border as a site of development, as Frowd (2014) does in speaking to the socio-economic 'capacities' built by the border. Another way to read the border as development argument is by connecting it to the social aspect of borders from above and arguing that borders are tools that work towards developing national identities. In being able to see the material border itself, citizens can have a physical representation of where the 'us' is made and the boundaries within which it develops and is encased.

Importantly, existing literature on bordering practices – and the challenges to them – is almost always looking to actions undertaken across borders or at least in relation to other borders: understanding borders as sites of development speaks to the ways in which borders as material objects organise daily life and identity in particular ways; writing of borders as productive of social life oftentimes stresses the ways in which border lines set up an us vs. other understanding of the world beyond the wall. Taken together, bordering practices are engaged by a sovereign state in order to enact and delimit its own authority: bordering practices can act as a sort of Rancièrian 'police action' (Rancière, 2001) whereby the state's sovereign authority is enacted in order to close off contestation over claims to that authority. In this sense – and as is discussed in greater detail below – the Witsuwit'en and their allies are in the process of 'dissensus,' having begun engaging in politics once again. In this respect, the politics of refusal enacted by the UAC's bordering practices directly contests the assumption of settler sovereignty as contained within the borders of the contemporary state. While I read this as a form of resistance, the Witsuwit'en and their allies describe it as an occupation of their traditional territories and a putting into practice of traditional and contemporary authorities and governance structures to promote decolonisation [Lopez, (2014), video; see also: Toledano, 2014b]. Here my argument also somewhat contests the notion of the border as a suture, as outlined above by Salter (2012). While I agree borders retain an 'incompleteness' – especially regarding the status of Indigenous peoples and their territories – sutures are intended to promote the healing of wounds. While the UAC may promote healing within the Witsuwit'en nation, the practices of bordering around Unist'ot'en territory simultaneously break down and scar the smooth lines of settler sovereignty, opening up the space for politics itself in the face of contemporary settler imaginaries.

5 Decolonising through the camp

While I briefly outlined some of the salient aspects of the Camp in my introduction, here I argue for the Camp as a decolonial project. The focus on decolonisation is important, as it centres the Witsuwit'en Nation's continued existence on *their* territory. Indeed, as Huson puts it: "The clan has never surrendered their lands, signed treaties, or lost in war to Canada or BC" [Lopez, (2014), video]. This move to normalise Indigenous authority on their own territory follows Alfred and Corntassel's (2005, p.597) understanding of 'Indigenousness' as a fundamentally 'place-based existence' which has been demeaned through the dispossession of Indigenous nations' lands and territories. In their own words:

> "The struggle to survive as distinct peoples on foundations constituted in their unique heritages, attachments to their homelands and natural ways of life is what is shared by all Indigenous peoples, as well as the fact that their existence is in large part lived as determined acts of survival against colonising states' efforts to eradicate them culturally, politically and physically." (Ibid)

As mentioned above, this framing is important as the Camp is intended to re-establish Witsuwit'en authority over territory which is still theirs [Lopez, (2014), video]. This response is rooted in a Witsuwit'en framework put into practice on Unist'ot'en territory, pushing back on settler colonialism's two fronts: the objective as well as the subjective (Coulthard, 2014). Here I engage with this dichotomy by discussing the way the UAC and its associated bordering practices complicates the clean suture as envisioned by Salter (2012). That is, I show how the bordering practices of the UAC deconstruct not only the territoriality of settler sovereignty, but that they also work to produce a social space that is thoroughly Witsuwit'en.

5.1 Taking-back territory

I turn first to the question of territory and the key role that land plays in Indigenous life. As many have said, decolonisation processes cannot and will not truly take hold until the question of lands is put back on the proverbial – and literal – negotiating table (Coulthard, 2014). In this respect, the UAC is different from other decolonisation efforts in that it does not rely upon a reclamation of land through treaty processes, nor does building the community rely upon lands that have been under the existing settler-delegated authority of Indigenous nations (Simpson, 2014). While I would stress that these do represent ongoing processes of decolonisation within Canada the UAC represents a more direct approach to 'taking-back' Indigenous lands. The Camp dislocates the assumed relations within settler colonialism whereby sovereign power creates the spaces within which individuals can invest themselves with agency to act; instead, the UAC itself was built through a sort of 'making concrete' of agency and was built in direct contravention of the assumed norm of settler sovereignty within Canada. Indeed, the Unist'ot'en and their allies have effectively used some of the tools and practices commonly considered to be a part of state authority and settler modernity against the settler state. In doing so, they have given meaning to these practices and tools by looking back to traditional knowledge, culture and authorities in the way that decolonisation can in part be understood as an Indigenous 'resurgence' of culture and governance (Simpson, 2011).

The first point to note is that the establishment of the UAC itself is an act that disrupts assumptions of the normalcy of settler sovereignty enabled by Indigenous dispossession (Simpson, 2014) and thus, ownership of Canadian territory by the Crown. One of the foundational assumptions of Canadian sovereignty is that all the land within Canada ultimately belongs to the Crown. As Blomley (2015) notes, property as a practice is productive of our own understandings of geographies, territories and the relations that they enable. Within the context of Canada, this includes Indigenous lands, even those over which Indigenous peoples have negotiated ownership through land claims processes. In these cases – and despite resistance from Indigenous communities – lands are held by Indigenous communities in fee simple[5], which still vests underlying authority to the Crown (Blomley, 2015). As a creation of Canadian courts, aboriginal title is understood "as coexisting with the radical or underlying title of the Crown" (Ibid, p.171), therefore, not under the exclusive sovereign authority of the Canadian government. In Blomley's words, the Crown's claim to title has been 'muddied' (Ibid). Such a point is analytically relevant precisely because the residents of the camp consistently speak to having authority over that land because of the Canadian courts' decision in the Delgaamuuk case (Toghestiy, 2015; Supreme Court of Canada, 1997). In using this case, they are directly invoking Indigenous authority over the lands in question, which contests the assumptions of sovereignty on the part of the Canadian state apparatus and which Tuck and Yang (2012) understand as core to the project of decolonisation.

This contestation takes direct aim at the erasure of Indigenous peoples from 'pre-contact' territory. Byrd (2014, p.152) notes that in establishing the need for law over newly 'discovered' territory, settlers were required to perform

> "A secondary alchemical transformation that affectively absented Indigenous peoples into territoriality and rendered them lamentable casualties of nineteenth-century westward expansion rather than active agents persistently engaged in anticolonial resistance into the present."

Instead of staying absent however, the UAC provides an example of Indigenous peoples re-asserting themselves on the supposedly vacant Crown Land. In doing so, the Witsuwit'en are engaging in processes of decolonisation in part simply by continuing to exist and refusing the erasure that has been attributed to them. This follows from Frowd's (2014) discussion of the importance of visibility as a tool of state sovereignty. In the context of borders, Frowd (2014, p.232) writes that in Mauritania, border posts can be understood as an 'infrastructure of state visibility' within particular localities, which in turn extends the authority of the state into those locales. Similarly, by building the checkpoints at strategically selected locations such as the Morice River Valley – and where borders do not exist, continuing to patrol for violations of Witsuwit'en sovereignty (Temper, 2015) – the Unist'ot'en and their allies are directly contesting the forced invisibility and subsequent elimination, of indigeneity itself. In being visible, the Camp highlights competing claims to authority and asserts Unist'ot'en existence on their unceded lands.

Further, the Camp itself seeks to break up the localisation of Indigenous peoples and authority to reserves, which are lands that continue to be established and held by the Canadian government. Under this system and in relation to my discussion of the camp above, there is an extension of settler uniformity across the rest of sovereign territory that is made possible only through the seeming absence of Indigenous peoples and nations. This narrative is also disrupted by the UAC. Indeed, in building the camp on lands that

have not been set aside for Indigenous peoples – and are therefore considered to be Crown Land – the Unist'ot'en have broken the naturalness or smoothness of settler Canadian occupation and sovereign authority. In this way, the Unist'ot'en are building a new narrative about the ways in which settler sovereignty exists, that is, they – and their allies – are making clear that they are not absent, that they continue to exist and are decolonising through invoking Witsuwit'en authority over *their* lands (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Looking to the bordering practices themselves, we see that the checkpoints are not only established with reference to traditional authorities, but that the actual practices and performances engaged in at the border are undertaken according to traditional logics and frameworks. This includes having those wishing to enter the territory wait at the checkpoint until free, prior and informed consent has been given for them to pass. While this is reminiscent of contemporary state-enacted bordering practices and principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, Toghestiy – one of the hereditary chiefs of the Likhts'amisyu clan and a member of the Unist'ot'en – tells visitors who enter that they have "just experienced something that our ancestors used to do for thousands of years" (Temper, 2015). The reliance upon traditional protocol – and authorities, including Witsuwit'en traditional chiefs (Toghestiy, 2015) – includes even the particular questions asked during these interactions [subMedia, (2015a), video; UnistotenCamp, (2012)], which are intended to allow the Unist'ot'en to "keep the integrity of the land" [Lopez, (2012), video]. This protocol has taken hold among those who must interact with the Camp, with companies now informing employees of the protocol and ensuring that they 'play by the rules' before entering Unist'ot'en lands [UnistotenCamp, (2012), video]. Further bordering practices also include the tracking and detention of those crews that are sent in via helicopter [subMedia, (2015b), video; UnistotenCamp, (2015)]. The decision on what to do with these individuals then is made by traditional authorities according to whether or not those who bypassed a checkpoint will do harm to the land (Temper, 2015). Those who are determined to be improperly trespassing are issued eagle feathers, as has been done for generations to mark trespassers, to warn them not to return (Toghestiy in Temper, 2015). The enactment of such practices shows the ways in which the Unist'ot'en and their allies are working to take back control of their territories by reinvesting traditional means and authorities with legitimacy.

5.2 *Decolonial resurgence*

Decolonial action around the UAC manifests itself outside of the material reality around the Camp as well. As I touched on above, in addition to the interpellation of Indigenous territories into settler territoriality we also see the assimilation of indigeneity itself into the settler political imaginary so as to eliminate it as an oppositional perspective. In this respect, the instantiation of Indigenous authority over territory through the establishment of borders or checkpoints is one mode of resistance and decolonisation. Another, further discussed here, is the negation of the elimination and a reestablishment of indigeneity and Indigenous authority as legitimate (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2011). This is also done through the UAC, particularly through appeals directly to traditional sources of Indigenous authority and a repudiation of settler frameworks when they contradict Indigenous ways of being and governing.

Perhaps most importantly, work on decolonisation is often focused around a self-generation by Indigenous peoples, instead of working towards regeneration through the settler state. In this sense, Coulthard (2014, p.29) specifically argues against the possibility of decolonisation through frameworks premised upon a politics of recognition, arguing that through such processes Indigenous subjectivities become 'significantly deformed'. Instead, Coulthard (2014, pp.154–155) seeks a form of 'resurgence' through a regeneration of traditional knowledge, norms and values. This perspective is also put forward by Alfred (2005, p.34) who while speaking to Indigenous peoples argues that regeneration occurs when Indigenous peoples "self-consciously recreate our cultural practices and reform our political identities by drawing on tradition in a thoughtful process of reconstruction and a committed reorganisation of our lives in a personal and collective sense". This is because, similar to Rifkin's point above, settler modernity is enabled only through the location of Indigenous peoples, cultures and aspirations within the colonial settler state through the construction of an aboriginal identity (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005). Such a 'resurgence' is apparent in the case of the UAC, in part through the bordering practices I discussed directly above. Indeed, in relying upon Witsuwit'en tradition and authority there is a reinvestment of legitimacy into those practices which settlers and the settler state understand as illegitimate precisely because of their reliance on sources of authority outside of those settler frameworks.

Looking to questions of subjectivity then, the UAC has been productive of a non-aboriginal form of identity through the engagement of Witsuwit'en traditions and the production of a new social space. This is apparent in a variety of ways, but perhaps most directly in the way in which the territory of the UAC is talked about. Throughout interviews and in talking about the Camp, those Unist'ot'en involved continually make reference to a re-occupation of 'their' lands and speak of their actions as 'asserting [their] rights on [their] lands' [Temper, (2015), video; emphasis mine]. Moreover, the denial of consent for the construction of the pipelines themselves was based upon the harm that would be brought to the lands (Lopez, 2015). This harm is talked about not only in terms of the harm that comes to future generations of Unist'ot'en, but also in terms of how it would negatively impact the lands as a sort of subject (Ibid). Indeed, in combining the two, there is talk of the way in which the land takes care of the Unist'ot'en as long as they also take care of the land (subMedia, 2015b; Temper, 2015), showing the way in which land itself is conceived of having agency which is to be protected and maintained.

Recall that, "As a regime of power, patriarchal white sovereignty operates ideologically, materially and discursively to reproduce and maintain its investment in the nation as a white possession" [Moreton-Robinson in Rifkin, (2014), p.8]. While the UAC cannot create a new imaginary to be spread uniformly across Canada – and indeed should not, lest it become a new form of colonisation – what it has done is to create a new narrative and specifically Witsuwit'en national imaginary. This new narrative is organised through a resistance to settler sovereignty, with the building of checkpoints and the engagement of bordering practices as its base. It also taps into a long history of Indigenous diplomacies and bordering practices themselves (Bauerkemper and Stark, 2012; Beier, 2009; Brown, 2006), further adding to the decolonial nature of the Camp as it attempts to effect what Simpson (2011) calls a necessary 're-balancing' towards nation-based relations between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state. Because of the appeal back to traditional cultures, practices and authorities, the Unist'ot'en narrative is one that manifests indigeneity in everyday life. This mirrors the re-establishment of Indigenous nationhood that Alfred, Corntassel, Coulthard, Simpson and others are

seeking and at least deconstructs the totalising myths of settler colonial elimination. In contrast to the *appartenance* of a unified settler modernity based on uncontested Crown sovereignty, the borders of the UAC produce an apart-ness that allows for the construction of an Indigenous resurgence and a direct challenge to the sovereign authority of the Canadian state.

6   Conclusions

As Ford (2010, p.1) writes, "Perfect settler sovereignty rested on the conflation of sovereignty, territory and jurisdiction". The UAC effectively undermines this conflation, recalling and re-establishing particularly Indigenous forms of being on the land, governance traditions and practices of bordering. If we understand the settler state as seeking to stitch Indigenous peoples into settler's social and territorial imaginary, the UAC can be seen as a space of repossession, with the mobilising of bordering practices rendering this reclamation concrete. The Camp disrupts the clean lines of Canadian settler sovereignty by engaging the very tools which IR as a discipline understands as productive of this sovereignty. By building borders and looking to Witsuwit'en tradition for authority, the Camp is forcing nation-based diplomatic relations in place of the hierarchical authority-subject relations that have characterised Indigenous-settler relations for generations. In separating out physical territories as Unist'ot'en, not settler, these borders have been productive not only of new physical spaces, but have also helped to produce new narratives and social spaces. Because these new spaces are based upon Witsuwit'en authorities, culture, practices and traditions, the Camp can be seen to support the kind of resurgence that offers a decolonial future that is based in indigeneity (Simpson, 2011) and not a form of reconciliation which furthers the assimilative agenda of the settler state by creating its own sense of innocence (Tuck and Yang, 2012) and ultimately reconciling Indigenous nations to continued colonialism.

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Notes

1   Through the text I have used both Witsuwit'en and Unist'ot'en in reference to the Camp, however they are not interchangeable. As I have been taught, Witsuwit'en is the name of the nation, while Unist'ot'en is the traditional name of the territory on which the UAC has been built. However, today Unist'ot'en is also used to refer to the group within the Witsuwit'en nation who are directly involved with the Camp, though they do not necessarily constitute a clan as understood traditionally. For this reason, while both will be referenced in the paper, their usage at particular times is intentional and reflects norms within the community.

2   I discuss decolonisation more specifically throughout the paper. To centre the term from the outset however, I follow Tuck and Yang (2012, p.1) who write that "Decolonisation brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life". That is, through decolonisation there is a taking-back of lands by Indigenous nations and a re-legitimisation of authority in Indigenous models of governance, tradition, culture and spirituality. Ultimately it takes the form of Indigenous communities and nations self-determining through frameworks defined by themselves and not subject to settler legal or philosophical frameworks.

3   This includes situations in which Indigenous communities are legally 'self-governing.' Even in these situations the Canadian state maintains its own authority by reinforcing its own legitimacy in part by legally precluding the possibility for Indigenous forms of governance through recognising only settler-approved forms of Indigenous governance. Indeed, authority remains devolved from the Canadian Government, who is assumed to retain ultimate sovereign authority within the borders of Canada. For more information see: Alfred (1999; 2005), Bedford (2010), Coulthard (2014), Simpson (2011). This is further attested to through the way in which Indian status in Canada is organised around eliminating the status itself altogether (Palmater, 2016).

4   This is the case for social norms, but also for legal recognition and entitlement to rights which those conferred status have access to. These legal statuses are constructed unilaterally by the settler state and are not based upon Indigenous traditions.

5   Fee simple tenure is one type of land tenure under British Common Law and is considered 'the highest and purest form of property' [Blomley, (2015), p.170]. It is a form of freehold estate over which "there is no restriction as to whom the estate may be passed on to" (Ibid, p.171). Underlying title still remains with the Crown however (Ibid). This 'fact' is oftentimes contested by Indigenous land rights claims within settler jurisdictions, since "fee simple and its sleep-inducing certainties are only possible in a settler society to the extent that a set of prior entitlements and geographies were and continue to be, erased and ignored" (Ibid).