

Have you heard the one about the disappearing ice? Recasting Arctic geopolitics

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ABSTRACT

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This article unpacks the discourse of Arctic geopolitics evident in the space-making practices of a wide variety of actors and institutions, offering an exploration of the ways in which the Arctic is emerging as a space of and for geopolitics. Tracing the well-aided story of Arctic geopolitics through neo-realist readings of climate change, the melting of polar ice, increasing competition for resources and so on, two kinds of spatial ordering are identified as being entwined in orthodox Arctic geopolitics. The first has to do with Arctic space as such, and its open, indeterminate nature in particular. The perceived openness of Arctic space enables it to become a space of masculinist fantasy and adventure, which is mirrored in contemporary accounts of Arctic geopolitics. It is suggested that this is entwined with and nourishes the second ordering of Arctic space in terms of state-building and international relations. The working out of these spatial orderings in recent interventions in Arctic geopolitics is explored via three examples (two Arctic exhibitions in London, the Russian Polar expedition of 2007 and 'sovereignty patrols' by Canadian Rangers). In conclusion, the article presents avenues for further critical research on Arctic geopolitics that emphasizes embodiment, the resolutely (trans)local, and a commitment to the everyday.

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Introduction

The focal point of this paper is the discourse of Arctic geopolitics, through which, we suggest, the upsurge in space-making practices in the region takes place. These space-making practices are evident in a wide variety of intercessions by foreign ministries, militaries, intergovernmental organizations, corporations, scientific bodies, academic researchers, self-styled explorers and think-tanks. In contrast to prevailing neo-realist (and even liberal) formulations of the Arctic, we offer a reflexive exploration of the ways in which the Arctic is emerging as a space of and for geopolitics.

Our argument vis-à-vis the emergent spaces of the Arctic builds upon but also goes beyond recent interventions by geographers (Dodds, 2008, 2010; Nicol, 2010; Powell, 2008a; Steinberg, 2010) who have highlighted the multiple interests and high stakes at play in the rapidly growing interest in the Arctic Ocean. In particular, we show how a geopolitical analysis attuned to embodiment, the resolutely translocal, and the everyday can contribute to a richer understanding of how, and why, the Arctic is suddenly so prominent in national, inter-national and circumpolar politics.

While we retain the concept of discourse as a central element of critical geopolitical investigation, we use this to signify more than the reproduction of geopolitics via representational practices (McConnell, 2009; Thrift, 2000). We conceptualize discourse as an iterative interplay between representational, embodied and performative practices and the materialization of space (Müller, 2008; Pain & Smith, 2008). Thus, we see 'Arctic geopolitics' as neither environmentally determined by climate change and the melting of ice (as many neo-realist accounts would have it Borgerson, 2008) nor constructed solely within the power/knowledge networks of statecraft (as earlier versions of critical geopolitics might suggest); rather we see Arctic geopolitics emerging as a discourse – a relatively organized assemblage of power/knowledge – via the dynamic assembly and networking of multiple elements across a wide variety of sites. While we trace the widely reproduced story of Arctic geopolitics through climate change, the melting of polar ice, increasing competition for resources and the like, we weave through this a discussion of three examples (two Arctic exhibitions in London; the Russian Polar expedition of 2007 and 'sovereignty patrols' by Canadian Rangers) that complicate those orthodox accounts found within academic and media circles.

We identify two kinds of spatial ordering entwined in the prevailing discourse of Arctic geopolitics. The first is of the Arctic as a space as such. Here we draw attention to the various ways in which the Arctic is imagined and performed as a distinct or

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exceptional space with its own properties. In particular, we highlight how the Arctic Ocean (and the broader Arctic region) is constructed as an opening and thus indeterminate zone in terms of particular environmental, imaginative and affective characteristics, and especially in terms of a frontier masculinity and paternal sovereignty (Gunn, 2008). This spatial ordering is entwined with another ordering of the Arctic, as a space of and for state-building and international relations (Koivurova, 2010). Here we highlight how the national and international politics of the Arctic are produced as an uneasy synthesis of neo-realism and liberalism. In this paper, both 'neo-realism' and 'liberalism' refer to schools of thought in international relations which broadly assume an anarchic world composed of states in competition with one another. While neo-realists and liberals disagree over the capacity of the state to co-operate with others, both are vexed by the absence of world government and the anarchical condition of world politics. Liberals tend to be more interested in the possibilities of cooperation through regimes (Keohane & Nye, 2000), while neo-realists are preoccupied with states and their national security interests (Waltz, 1979).

Thus, on the one hand, the re-opening of the Arctic from the confines of Cold War spatial orderings was read during the 1990s as an unprecedented opportunity to establish a new political order regulated via democracy, freedom and markets, in uneasy tandem with concepts of sustainability, demilitarization and human security. On the other, we show how the Arctic is increasingly read in terms of the resurgence of neo-realism as geopolitical actors allegedly scramble to reterritorialize an opening Arctic space (and especially the Arctic Ocean) in pursuit of national security interests and resource competition. The uneasy synthesis between liberalism and neo-realism, which feeds off and animates the first ordering of the Arctic, presents a richly textured set of possibilities – and threats – to a wide variety of actors across the region and beyond.

The article follows in three main sections. First, we explore various orderings of Arctic space as such. We then investigate how the Arctic is becoming geopolitical in the shift from liberal understandings towards increasingly realist ones. We then go on to contemplate the intertwining of these orderings of space in recent events in the Arctic. In conclusion we outline avenues for further critical research into Arctic geopolitics.

Arctic space

We identify philosophies of realism as underlying Arctic geopolitics; the existence of the 'Arctic' as a space, and its essential difference from other parts of the world (including Antarctica), is remarkably taken-for-granted, as are the notions of an Arctic-specific geopolitics and Arctic fragility (AHDR, 2004). 'Realism', as distinct from the aforementioned 'neo-realism', is here used to signify faith in science and a philosophical commitment to a reality that can be approached, if never completely comprehended through empirical observation (Bird, 1998). This slippage between a term used in international relations (called here 'neo-realism') and one describing an approach to science (called 'realism') is suggestive in an Arctic context. The discourse of Arctic geopolitics carries within it a sense of the Arctic as a space distinguishable from others with regard to the practices of geopolitical actors within it. For instance, it is a commonplace that the Arctic is discernible from other spaces as a result of its extreme climate and relative inaccessibility. Changes in this circumpolar environment and assessments of relative inaccessibility are then seen to produce and perhaps even force changes in the behaviour of geopolitical actors. However, if current theorizations of space hold that space is produced relationally, it follows that the Arctic, as an exceptional

space, results from relationships between human actors and their networks. This simple insight dovetails with well-established geopolitical understandings of power and discourse: the designation of spaces as exceptional, or not, enables particular kinds of interventions. Therefore, it is not climate change and Arctic exceptionalism that produce geopolitical interventions, it is the identification of climate change as a security issue, and the subsequent identification of the Arctic as a space of exception, that enable geopolitical intervention as the region is re-staged as a 'state of emergency'.

No discussion of Arctic geopolitics and the region's 'fragility' is complete without recounting the changing seasonal extent of Arctic ice, the opening of the North–West Passage and Northern Sea Route in 2007 and projected dates for the Arctic to become ice free in summer, along with the latest estimates of oil and gas reserves (framed as unproven potential by the US Geological Survey) and outstanding legal disputes and uncertainties over the delimitation of the Arctic outer continent shelf. All of these elements underscore the extent to which scientific practices such as mapping and surveying are central to the geopolitical constitution of Arctic space. Indeed, recent years have seen a veritable boom in Arctic-related scientific research (Powell, 2008a). However, as work by geographers has shown, research in the Arctic has long been constituted via constellations of emotional and embodied practices as well as epistemic ones, and involved 'complicated relationships between activities which were construed to be scientific whilst also allowing some sort of demonstration of territorial sovereignty' (Powell, 2007: 1796).

This centrality of science instantiates a sense of the Arctic as a space of the real – a zone in which expert natural scientific knowledge provides an authoritative guide that politics must follow. Despite the salience of science (as manifested in the International Polar Year 2007–9) – in close tandem with legal argument – in Arctic geopolitics, however, current understandings of the Arctic are also bound up with a variety of gendered cultural images, fantasies and projections. It is crucial to take these, and the popular cultures and colonial legacies with which they are bound up, into account if we are to understand the constitution of Arctic geopolitics.

The Arctic maintains its long-standing role as a space for masculinist fantasy (Bloom, 1993; Lopez, 1988; Shields, 1991). The nineteenth century exploration of the Arctic north was coincident with a boom in book publishing for a general audience. This assemblage of enlarged education, mechanical typesetting and typesetting, an expanding middle class, and navigational developments helped establish the Arctic as the region *par excellence* for adventure and fantasy, often linking the Arctic to more conventional adventure genre stories (Robinson, 2006). Indeed, the Arctic has been identified in numerous more contemporary literatures as a location in which fanciful creatures reside (Superman's Fortress of Solitude was located in the Arctic, and it is also the home of other superheroes, the armoured polar bears of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and Santa Claus – see Dittmer & Larsen, 2010; Powell, 2007), but it is also a space in which human fantasies and fears are performed. These include fantasies of exploration, science, and control such as those on display in the 2007 Russian flag-planting on the polar sea floor and the rival flag plantings on the contested Hans Island by Canadian and Danish soldiers. In such fantasies Arcticness emerges less as a set of environmental or other physical attributes, but rather as perceived openness and *lack* of attributes (Hill, 2007).

Aritha van Herk (1990) plays with this masculine scripting of the north in her "geografictione", *Places Far From Ellesmere*, in which Ellesmere Island is initially described as "tabula rasa" and "absence" (p. 77), yet it is a space for van Herk to inhabit as her own. Embracing the feminization of the north, van Herk subverts it as

a site from which to undercut male inscriptions, both cartographic and literary (the cover of the book shows Ellesmere Island as a woman's body). Van Herk mocks the patriarchal assumptions regarding the Arctic: "Terror of women = terror of the north. Lost in one frozen waste or another, lost to women or the wiles of Ellesmere," (1990, 123 – for more see Senkpiel, 1997; Surgeoner, 2007). In doing so, however, van Herk leaves the binary in place, albeit with a greater sense of irony (for more on irony and the north, see Ridanpää, 2010). Unsettled boundaries, fluid environments, and non-state-based indigenous social formations provide the space necessary for the performance of southern latitudes' notions of masculinity or indeed the envisioning of an alternative model to the territorialized state (Theweleit, 1987).

This masculine performative dimension to Arctic geopolitics was on display at the 2009 exhibit at London's National Maritime Museum entitled 'The North West Passage: An Arctic Obsession'. This exhibit was itself part of the performance of sovereignty over the Arctic, sponsored as it was by the Canadian government, ostensibly to pay tribute to the British explorers who sought the North West Passage. The exhibit culminated in a room ('The North Today') that explicitly positioned the passage as Canadian sovereign territory rather than as an international strait where the rights to innocent transit passage would prevail. However, the remainder of the exhibit emphasized the British gear, artefacts, maps, and medals associated with the explorations themselves, and these were in turn linked together by an idea of (manly) courage. The only woman in this portion of the exhibition was Lady Franklin, who was highlighted for her faithfulness to her husband, who died looking for the Passage in 1847. She worked to foster public interest in the case for many years afterwards, in hopes that a rescue mission would find either him or his papers (Lambert, 2010). In the exhibit, the Arctic emerges as a space of masculine adventure (and subsequent RGS medals) to be counterpointed with the 'home fires' of feminine domestic spaces. Members of groups already inhabiting the region prior to European intrusion were largely absent from the exhibition, featuring in supporting (i.e., feminized) rather than leading roles, for example as translators and facilitators of European exploration and discovery (Bloom, 1993). The museum gift shop offered the possibility of participatory consumption through which exhibition-goers could engage with discourses of masculine exploration (Fig. 1).

Contemporary with this exhibit was a photographic exhibition on display in the Canadian High Commission, about four nautical miles upriver from the Maritime Museum. This exhibition, entitled 'The Accessible Arctic: Eighty years of Arctic photography from

Canadian Geographic', expressed the claim of Canadian Arctic sovereignty in a more explicit fashion than its downstream cousin. Across the exhibition hall, above the photos, was a quote by geographer and writer James Raffan taken from *Canadian Geographic*: "Sovereignty, if it is anything at all, is not so much about proprietary rights of ownership as it is about a set of responsibilities and commitments to look after this place that is our Northern home," (Fig. 2). The forty photos on display can be placed into four categories: nature photography (20 photos), Inuit life (8 photos), impact of pollution/climate change (6 photos), and Southern Canadian activity in the Arctic (14 photos – note that photos can fall into more than one category, and therefore these categories add up to more than 40 photos). Photos in the 'nature photography' category include photos of Donjek Glacier, Tundra swans in flight, the Aurora Borealis, and an Arctic fox. Inuit life is mostly exhibited as involving fishing (line or ice), although one photo did show a women's sprint race celebrating the 1999 creation of Nunavut as a new territory. The impact of pollution and climate change was largely portrayed through captions underneath photos that are also either nature photography or Southern Canadian activity in the Arctic; for instance fog in Yellowknife is explained as resulting from the impact of pollution on ice fog; similarly a photo of a caribou herd in Manitoba is captioned with an explanation that caribou are grazing further north as a result of regional warming trends.

The category of Southern Canadian activity in the Arctic contains many photos of military or other occupation of the Arctic. In a photo of Blue Alert, a Canadian military base, the base is described as the most northerly settlement in the world; the RCMP schooner St. Roch is displayed as the 'first ship to circumnavigate North America'. The DEW (Distant Early Warning) line, a string of former military installations, is also on display, as is the Snow Goose Research Camp on Bylot Island (Farish, 2006). Also included in this category are a series of *Canadian Geographic* covers which advertise articles such as "Polar Police: patrolling the North West Passage" and "The Mounties in the Arctic". The title of the exhibition, along with the captions running across the exhibit, contextualized the photos in an effort to shape their reception by the viewers.

Altogether, the Canadian High Commission exhibit serves as testament to both Canadian sovereignty and the Arctic's increasing importance and 'accessibility'. Although less overtly masculinist than the Maritime Museum exhibit, the Canadian Arctic is nevertheless seen as a space of adventure; non-military photos of Southerners in the Arctic show cross-country skiing, mountain climbing, hiking and camping. This is emphasized via another overarching quote, this one by J. Dewey Soper in a 1930 issue of *Canadian Geographic*: "The mystery which still surrounds large areas of the Arctic regions is ever a lure to those with a love of geography and the instinct for exploration." Nevertheless, both exhibits serve as masculine performances of sovereignty in a region that is 'dangerously' fluid and unstable (Hyndman, 2001).

The idea of the Arctic as an open – or opening – and uncertain space also calls forth future-oriented imaginative techniques, notably scenario analysis and the booming trade in "Arctic futures" (Anderson, 2010). The rhetorical orientation of such exercises inevitably reproduces and gives free rein to divergent conceptualizations of the future. Thus, on the one hand are dystopian imaginations of the Arctic as a locus of social, political, economic, cultural and ecological disaster. While during the 1990s Arctic space was infused with political idealism and hope as the end of the Cold War seemed to open the possibility of a less explicitly territorialized governance regime (the Arctic Council), current interventions in Arctic space raise the spectres of conflict, environmental degradation and the "resource curse" (Emmerson, 2010). The notion of the Arctic as an open, 'melting space' is thus represented as posing a multi-faceted security risk.



Fig. 1. Capt. Scott's Expedition Biscuits serve as a materialization of the masculine edge to Arctic geopolitics (photo credit: Alan Ingram).



Fig. 2. View of the exhibition space of 'The Accessible Arctic' (photo credit: Alan Ingram).

Scott Borgerson (2008) published a notably neo-realist intervention in *Foreign Affairs* which considered this kind of scenario in more detail; he argued that the decrease in sea ice cover is directly correlated to evidence of a new 'scramble for resources' in the region, involving the five Arctic Ocean coastal states and their national security interests. According to Borgerson (2008: 65), the Arctic "region could erupt in an armed mad dash for its resources". More generally, melting ice is correlated with enhanced accessibility and hence opportunities for new actors ranging from commercial shipping to illegal migrants and terrorist groups to migrate within and beyond the Arctic. At the most extreme, neo-realists have contended that Arctic installations such as pipelines or terminals might be potential targets for terrorist organizations hell-bent on undermining North American energy security (Byers, 2009). At the same time, the Arctic is also framed as a space of promise: the locus of a potential oil bonanza, new strategic trade routes and huge fishing grounds (Powell, 2008a). No wonder then that the Arctic possibilities have resulted in a number of scenarios on the relationship between Arctic resources and Arctic geopolitical order. Lawson Brigham, a well known Arctic expert, has imagined an "Arctic race", a scenario in which "high demand and unstable governance set the stage for a 'no holds barred' rush for Arctic wealth and resources" (described in Bennett, 2010, n.p.). This vision, which is opposite to "Arctic saga", can be regarded as a liberal warning message. Accordingly, without new governance structures based on new international agreements, high demand in the Arctic region could lead to political chaos which could also jeopardize Arctic ecosystems and cultures.

The emphasis on the economic potential of the Arctic maritime areas further highlights the dominance of future over present in contemporary geopolitical discourses. The image of disaster (as epitomised by the *Exxon Valdez* sinking in 1989) thus forms a counterpoint to the image of a treasure chest (the Russian flag-planting in 2007). We suggest that these assertions of Arctic disaster are used to justify a strengthened military presence in Arctic waters in the name of national security along with a range of futuristic possibilities (Jensen & Rottem, 2009). Here neo-realism feeds off the idea of the Arctic as opening, shifting and potentially chaotic space. It thus has an affective as well as descriptive quality – invoking a mood change and associated "calls to arms" (Dodds, 2010). This

theme of 'fearing the future' has emerged periodically within Canadian political discourse, with Stephen Harper's famous "use it or lose it" dictum traceable through previous governments, which have emphasized the threat of incursion by the Soviets or the United States (Dodds, in press; Head, 1963; Huebert, 2003). The disaster argumentation (Berkman & Young, 2009) also underwrites liberal calls for a new multilateral Arctic legal agreement which would set out rules, for example, on how to exploit Arctic resources. In these representations, "multilateralism" denotes peace, prosperity, stability and environmental rescue whilst national control and interest denote increasing tension, environmental degradation and conflict.

Arctic 'openness' is central to the performance of Arctic geopolitics, enabling sabre-rattling by the five Arctic Ocean coastal states. The region's coding as a feminine space to be tamed by masculine exploits provides an arena for national magnification. The remoteness and difficulty of maintaining permanent occupation of the far north also makes it a space where overlapping territorial claims and competing understandings of access to transit passages can (at the moment) co-exist with relatively little chance of actual combat (Baev, 2007). As we shall see, this is particularly true of the US/Canadian arguments over the legal status of the North West Passage. In this way the discursive formation of Arctic geopolitics is also bound up with neo-realist ideas about the inherent tendencies of 'states' towards 'conflict' over 'resources', 'sovereignty' and so on – ideas that have been subject to extensive critical deconstruction in IR and political geography, but which are being rapidly reassembled in relation to the Arctic. The Arctic is thus a space in which the foundational myths of orthodox international relations are being reasserted. It might be said that it is not just the Arctic climate that is changing, with knock on effects for state politics and international relations, but rather that the region is being reconstituted within a discursive formation that renders it amenable to neo-realist understandings and practices inconceivable for other, more inhabited regions. Accepting the premises of 'Arctic geopolitics' risks both obscuring the liveliness of Arctic geography (Vannini, Baldacchino, Guay, Royle, & Steinberg, 2009) and enabling the sovereign fantasy that coastal states and their civilian and military representatives have previously enjoyed security via effective territorial control and may establish it once again.

National and international politics in the Arctic

It is perhaps a short step from the empiricist realism of Arctic science to the neo-realism of much contemporary IR, which sees Arctic states in competition to assert and exercise sovereignty over an opening – and hence geopolitically undefined – space. Another small step leads to a neo-liberalism that sees opportunities (and challenges) in such an opening for the extension of democracy, markets and freedom. By this we mean that debates around global climate change policy are largely framed through scientific discourse. Proponents of climate change policy emphasize the role of scientific evidence and mechanistic understandings of change (see, for instance, [ACIAR, 2004](#)). Opponents of policies intended to mitigate climate change engage in this discourse through the introduction of contradictory scientific claims or obfuscation about the nature of scientific consensus, never directly disputing scientism. Discussions of climate change-related topics, such as Arctic geopolitics, remain embedded in philosophical realism. This either takes the form of mechanistic understandings of geopolitics and neo-realism, or a state-centric (neo)liberalism that sees state action in the Arctic as necessary to an ontology of capitalist development. Arctic geopolitics is caught between such imaginations of international affairs.

Arctic liberalism forms one important organizing frame whereby different political actors may observe and analyze Arctic affairs. Following [Barnett and Duvall \(2005: 5\)](#), we suggest that “Arctic liberalism” revolves around the belief

in the possibility, although not the inevitability, of progress; that modernization processes and interdependence (or, now, globalization) are transforming the character of global politics; that institutions can be established to help manage these changes; that democracy is a principled objective, as well as an issue of peace and security; and that states and international organizations have an obligation to protect individuals, promote universal values, and create conditions that encourage political and economic freedom.

Following the end of the Cold War, representations through which the extension of liberal free-market reforms will bring peace and prosperity to the Arctic became increasingly salient. A significant portion of contemporary geopolitical representations of the Arctic are thus predicated upon the belief that the end of the Cold War provided the opportunity to create a more desirable Arctic via a new “normative consensus” based on fundamental liberal values and international agreements.

This Arctic liberalism sat uneasily with visions emerging from environmental and indigenous groups that suggested a deeper questioning of the implications of political and economic modernization for the Arctic ([Dalby, 2002](#)). Nonetheless, during the 1990s a ‘geopolitics of hope’ ([Sparke, 2005](#)) was frequently articulated in relation to the region. This was predicated upon the ending of the Cold War, a reduction in the role of militarism in constituting Arctic spaces and the establishment of new institutions (notably the Arctic Council). As the [AHDR \(2004: 208\)](#) stated, “the end of the Cold War was accompanied by the rebirth of connections between northern peoples and societies, and the dawning of a new era of Arctic international cooperation”. Military competition was supposed to have been sidelined by regional and intergovernmental cooperation and the pursuit of sustainable social development facilitated by circumpolar institution building such as the Arctic Council.

At least in some geographical contexts (Finland and Sweden, most notably), the geopolitical arguments of liberals (usually international lawyers) have become dominant. These liberals highlight the role of international law in Arctic politics and point out that the actions of the governments in the Arctic strictly follow

the rules of international regimes. Liberals usually straightforwardly critique the neo-realist interpretations of Arctic politics, the famous Russian flag-planting for instance, as premised on incorrect understanding of international politics in the Arctic. Accordingly, it is international law, not climate change, that guides contemporary Arctic politics; not confrontation but cooperation and stability ([Koivurova, 2009](#)). The implicit point in many liberal arguments thus is that the neo-realist ‘threat images’ concerned with the Arctic are not only false but also potentially dangerous.

Within Arctic geopolitics the neo-realist and liberal rationalities co-exist and are partly co-constituted. Both of these rationalities are nonetheless predicated upon a view that the Arctic is experiencing environmental change that inescapably leads to new geopolitical reality. For the neo-realists this new reality ‘forces’ states to adapt in a manner aping earlier neo-Darwinian readings of international politics ([Borgerson, 2008](#)). This form of reasoning is more than a journalistic conceit; it has gained currency in policy circles and is consequently well-supported in academic institutions, think-tanks (e.g. [Geopolitics in the High North, 2008](#)) and inter-state political agendas. The geopolitical dilemma for the Arctic is frequently articulated in terms of whether the future will be characterized by a conflict-driven race for Arctic resources and trading routes or increasing international cooperation and indigent self-determination.

[Megoran \(2010: 188\)](#) has highlighted the “highly localised and concentrated” milieus in which the work of Halford Mackinder remains influential. Indeed, neo-classical geopolitical reasoning has surfaced beyond the eight circumpolar states. One Chinese expert drew on both Mackinder’s geographical logic and turn-of-phrase in his assessment of Arctic space: “who rules the Arctic trading routes commands the new transit system and strategies of global trade” ([Tuohinen, 2010: B2](#)). Similarly, the EU Commission has suggested that, “the environmental changes are altering the geo-strategic dynamics of the Arctic with potential consequences for international stability and European security interests” ([EU Commission, 2008: 2](#)). Not surprisingly, some northern European actors, in particular Iceland and Norway, have suggested that NATO should play an increased role in the Arctic ([Särts, 2009](#)). The northern oceans and the peripheral northern territories of the eight circumpolar states, hitherto considered rather marginal to global politics and the global economy, are increasingly being described as central ([Cohen, 2009; Emmerson, 2010](#)).

Indeed, interest extends beyond the Arctic coastal states. As the Finnish foreign minister recently stated, “The Arctic is evolving from a regional frozen backwater into a global hot issue” ([Stubb, 2009: 1](#)). Various actors have straightforwardly assumed that the Arctic’s possibilities, or the “Arctic becoming”, make it inescapably subject to territorial claims and the re-territorialization of political conflicts. Indications of a regime change away from the multilateralism of the Arctic Council have emerged in the literature with potent warnings concerning prospects for future collaboration and cooperation ([Koivurova, 2010; Young, 2009](#)). The attempt to protect a strict definition of those with ‘regional’ interests is best codified in the [Ilulissat Declaration \(2008\)](#) which purports to limit the actors to the five coastal states (generally understood as an attempt to exclude Arctic Council observers such as China, the EU and the ‘Arctic states’ of Finland, Iceland and Sweden). A Hobbesian understanding that world politics is characterized by strategy, military security, territorial enmities and resource competition is being built into political representations of the Arctic ([Moisio, 2008a](#)). [Fig. 3](#) cartographically illustrates this confluence of Arctic territorialization that emphasizes states and their economic interests.

Another sign of neo-realist rationalities is the assumption that the region is characterized by dangerous anarchy. One commentator has suggested that the Arctic condition is dangerous because there

Maritime jurisdiction and boundaries in the Arctic region

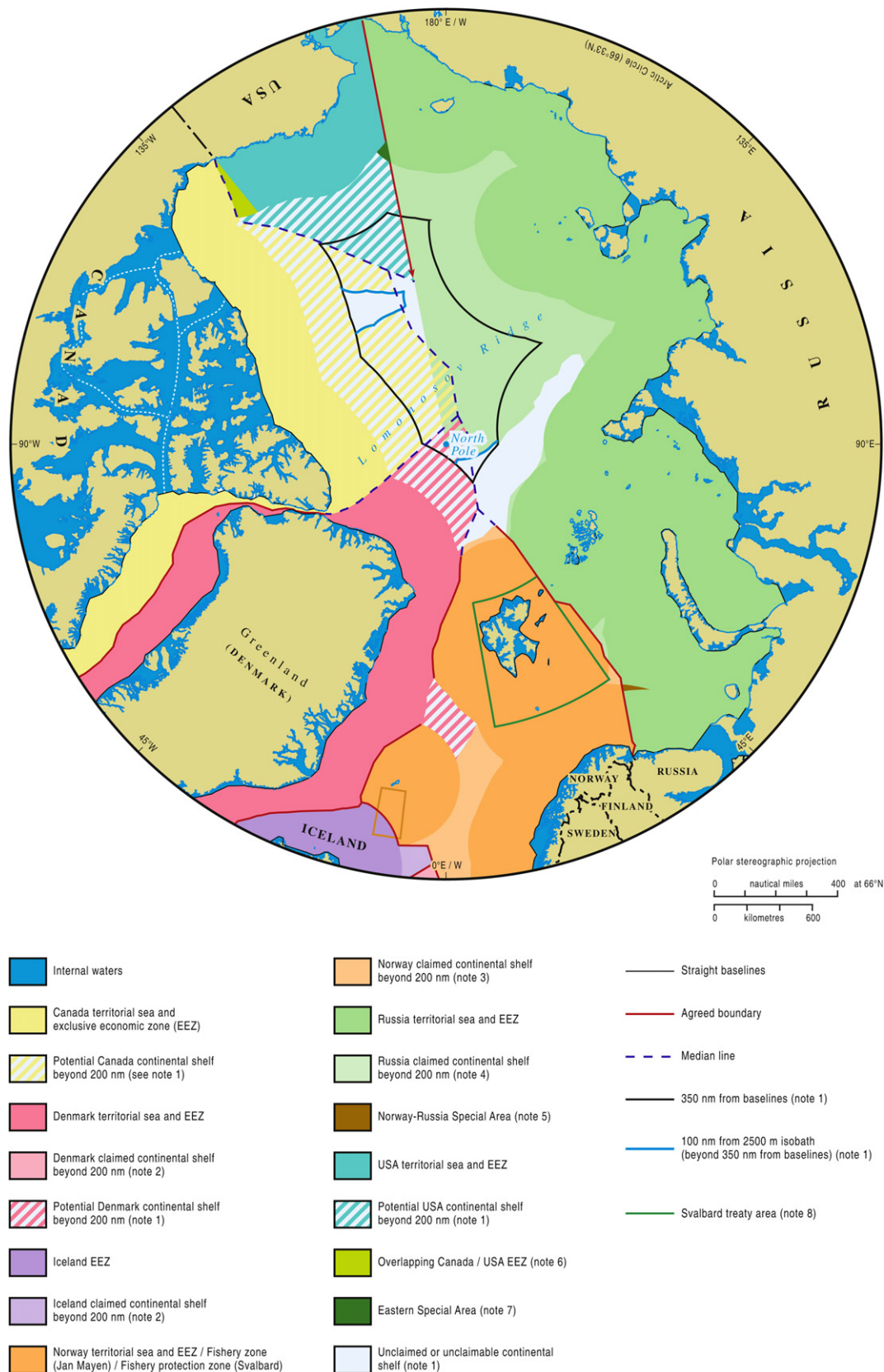


Fig. 3. This map of the Arctic cartographically illustrates a vision of the Arctic that emphasizes state territoriality and economic concerns. Source: International Boundaries Research Unit, Durham University A colour version of the map and briefing notes are available for download from www.durham.ac.uk/ibru/resources/arctic.

are “no overarching political and legal structures that can provide for the orderly development of the region” (Borgerson, 2008: 71). The Arctic Council, created in 1996, is (as neo-realists remind audiences) a soft-law institution that merely advises the member states and does not address military issues. As another US commentator asserted, “if ground rules are not agreed, the area’s oil, gas and other as yet undiscovered resources could spark conflict” (Cohen, 2009: 2). Arctic geopolitics thus recapitulates not just IR realism but the implicit determinism of environment-security and climate-security discourses more generally (Barnett, 2000).

The concept of “ground rule” refers to an understanding that a “great game” is taking place in the Arctic. In such a view, circumpolar states do not necessarily commit themselves to the rules of the free-market world and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); the Arctic appears as a test site for the international relations of the future characterized by scarcity of energy resources. As the *New York Times* put it, the “the free-market democracies with scarce resources will confront free-market autocracies (authoritarian systems that fall short of dictatorships) rich in oil, gas and other raw materials” in the Arctic (Cohen, 2009: 2). “Free-market autocracies” of course refers primarily to Russia: actors who lean towards political realism often cite the 2007 Russian scientific expedition (which was mostly privately-funded by a Swedish businessman) as an attempt by the Russian government to maximize its sovereign rights over hydrocarbon resources of the Arctic, or, alternatively, as an invitation to a new anti-liberal geopolitics characterized by military means and the claiming of territories (e.g., Peter MacKay, cited in Allick, 2010). We suggest that this glosses over how Russia’s – and indeed all – Arctic geopolitical interventions emerge out of embodied, performative and somewhat improvised processes of state- and identity-building (see Dodds, 2010; Steinberg, 2010).

Russia is often portrayed as an exceptional Arctic stakeholder, a circumpolar Other which is partly following the ground rules of international community while simultaneously creating its own path of political development that resonates with state-building strategies in China, Iran and Venezuela. However, Russia (as distinct from the USSR) is a relative late-comer to the region, with a discernible Arctic policy only emerging in 2007–2008. China, another plausible ‘superpower’ in the Arctic, also seems determined to play a role in the far north:

China carried out Arctic research in 1999 and 2003, and in 2004 built an Arctic satellite observation centre at New Olson, Spitsbergen Island, in Norway. The construction of such centres has been permitted by the Norwegian government to the original signatories to the 1920 Spitsbergen Treaty, and China, Japan, Germany, Italy, France, South Korea [and the UK], among others, have taken advantage of the opportunity. China’s application to the Arctic Council for permanent observer status, however, was turned down in 2009[.] (Ebinger & Zambetakis, 2009: 1230)

As we discuss below, neo-realist accounts that would attribute the much-discussed 2007 polar expedition to some sovereign geopolitical master-logic must contend with a more complex picture that highlights how the expedition was improvised, with its supposed geopolitical meaning and significance emerging afterwards (Baev, 2007). This further underscores the emergent, performative character of geopolitics and sovereignty, not just in Russia or the Arctic, but everywhere.

Ordering Arctic geopolitics

In this section we bring together our reflections on the different dimensions of Arctic geopolitics to consider recent developments in a little more detail. In our discussion, and proceeding in an opposite

direction from conventional geopolitical analysis, we highlight the improvised performance of geopolitics and sovereignty, with many small elements being networked with other, more strategic rationalities and sites in an iterative process of construction. This notion of improvisation is important, especially in the context of how Russia’s Arctic ambitions have been interpreted within European and North American media and political circles.

As Baev (2007: 10) related in his detailed exposition of the 2007 polar expedition’s context,

Putin’s spin-masters have stumbled upon rather than invented the Arctic theme, which [Artur] Chilingarov [the leader of the 2007 expedition], fed up with his role as a one-issue oddity in the State Duma, had tried to sell for a long time... In order to attract public and political attention to the North Pole expedition with its minimal scientific content, it was deemed necessary not only to downplay the role of foreign sponsors... but to emphasize the worries of Russia’s frustrated competitors... When the attention was secured, every possible spin was put on the tale, from the historic parallels to energy greed, to defiance of grave risk, to pride in Russian technological superiority (omitting the facts that the *Mir* submersibles were produced in Finland for the USSR and that *Akademik Fedorov* [the expedition’s ship] had engine failure at the start of the tour.

Baev – a well-established commentator on Russian military and security affairs – further questioned Russia’s economic, technical and logistical capability to exploit Arctic energy reserves and raised the strategic irrationality of provoking real competition, never mind confrontation, with the US military in the high north. However, he suggested, the reaction the expedition provoked among other states such as Canada and the United States suited the ‘Putin project’ of consolidating Russian state authority on the basis of a supposedly threatening international environment.

Needless to say, the flag-planting exercise was widely interpreted in the West as *prima facie* evidence of Russian *realpolitik* rather than illustrative of a long and well-established (Soviet) interest in the Arctic, with parallels to the 1930s and Stalin’s ‘Arctic mania’ (McCannon, 1998). During the Soviet era, for example, maps showed the borders of the Soviet Union extending straight along longitudinal lines of 32 E from the Kola Peninsula and 180 E from the Bering Strait towards the North Pole. This implied, according to the Soviets, that about a third of the Arctic Ocean was considered to be territorial waters. The 2007 Arctic expedition was collecting further oceanographic and geophysical data to buttress an earlier submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). While some commentators – notably Canadian PM Steven Harper – viewed the expedition as a “stunt” indicative of a determination to acquire further seabed for Russia’s own narrow gain, this both underestimates the longer historical tradition of state-sponsored Arctic investment and curiously underestimates the politics of flag placement itself – perhaps what was more noteworthy was the decision by Putin to award the ‘Hero of the Russian Federation’ to Chilingarov shortly after his return from the Arctic. Intriguingly, the image of the flag planting on the bottom of the Arctic Ocean has been reproduced within Russia, and appeared on t-shirts in Moscow’s Izmaylovo Market – a tourist haven.

Curiously the 2007 expedition underplayed the popular geopolitical dimensions within Russia in favour of a more international perspective of the event itself and the aftermath. Borgerson (2008: 63) informed his readers that:

Moscow submitted a claim to the United Nations for 460,000 square miles of resource-rich Arctic waters, an area roughly the size of the states of California, Indiana, and Texas combined. The UN rejected this ambitious annexation [in fact, the UN

Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf asked for further technical information in 2002], but last August [2007] the Kremlin nevertheless dispatched a nuclear-powered icebreaker and two submarines to plant its flag on the North Pole's sea floor. Days later, the Russians provocatively ordered strategic bomber flights over the Arctic Ocean for the first time since the Cold War.

Although much was made of the strategic bomber flights, they never entered, or indeed got anywhere close, to Canadian air space, which extends twelve nautical miles from the shoreline (pace the Harper government; for an assessment of that claim see Byers, 2009). It also totally misunderstands the nature of the submission process to the CLCS – coastal states do not make 'claims'. No Russian official ever claimed that the placement of a Russian flag at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean was evidence of effective occupation or legally empowering of Russian annexation of the Arctic Ocean. Putin has emphasized the need, through a speech on 7 August 2007, to discuss the matter with international organizations (e.g. CLCS) while emphasizing the importance of the Arctic to Russian national security.

Crucially, it is Russia (and not other states) that is seen, at least to many European and North American neo-realist observers, as foreclosing the possibility of a liberal Arctic order. The recent Russian military actions in the Arctic are often diagnosed as symptoms of the process whereby Russian "national interests" have sidelined the more liberal "common good perspective" (exemplified by the "Murmansk speech" by Gorbachev in 1987 – Åtland, 2008) which at the time was seen to have paved the way for human development in the Arctic. North America-based observers and political commentators who invoke this neo-realist vision of competing interests and Russian expansionism usually then offer a jeremiad with regard to their own country's capabilities and commitment to the Arctic. Thus, US writers decry the paucity of icebreakers and the unwillingness, thus far, of the Senate to ratify the UN Law of the Sea Convention, which is critical to the Russian and other Arctic coastal states' submissions regarding the delimitation of their continental shelves. Canadian writers tend to focus on the contested status of the North West Passage and the country's lack of investment in consolidating 'their' sovereignty over the Arctic. In both cases, the Arctic is conceptualized as a largely 'empty space' that needs to be filled with evidence of 'effective occupation'.

What does 'effective occupation' look like? One indication as to what the Canadian government thinks might be an answer to this question comes in the form of the Canadian Rangers (Lackebauer, 2007). The Rangers, formally established in 1947, are a small, part-time element of the Canadian Forces who engage in sovereignty patrols, surveillance and other responsibilities.¹ Sovereignty patrols are performances by the military that (re)produce national territory by traversing it. For example, in 2007 three teams of Rangers, leading regular Canadian Forces, engaged in "Operation Nunavut", travelling a total of 5589 km over seventeen days to assert Canadian sovereignty in its Arctic North (CTV News, 2007). On this trip the Rangers planted a Canadian flag on a northerly island and left a list of their names alongside a cairn left by Robert Perry in 1906 at the northernmost point of Canada. Canadian Rangers were also part of Operation Nanook 09, which was designed to "demonstrate a visible presence in the eastern Arctic" via "sovereignty patrolling, a military exercise and a whole-of-government exercise" (ISRIA, 2009). Indeed, the Rangers are intended to "provide a presence and demonstrate a response capability in the most remote areas of the North" (ISRIA, 2009) that it is otherwise uneconomical to patrol. In an indication of contemporary Arctic geopolitical cultures, the Rangers do not wear conventional military uniforms but rather bright red baseball caps and sweatshirts that seem to blend the overt display of presence in and command over territory with the symbols of a corporate



Fig. 4. The uniform of the Canadian Ranger (right) is meant to be highly visible in the Arctic. (Source: Photo IS2010-3014-02, reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2010).

branding exercise (see Fig. 4). Indeed, much is staked upon the visibility of these performances – hence there is no point in wearing Arctic camouflage – the Rangers want to be seen.

This is all intriguing enough on its own, but all the more so in that many Rangers are representatives of Canada's Métis, First Nations and Inuit. The enrolment of aboriginal Canadians in the military infrastructures of the nation-state is clearly of great importance for Canadian geopolitical imaginations of the Arctic, particularly when juxtaposed with the efforts that have been made to develop the identity, rights and representation of aboriginal groups on a trans-national, circumpolar basis since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, it is this indigeneity that is seen as an asset, as Whitney Lackebauer, (2005/06: 52) argues:

The Ranger organization, managed on a local/community level, relies heavily on the indigenous knowledge of its members, rather than assimilationist "militarizing" and conditioning through the regularized training regimes akin to traditional, modern military formations. The recent focus on local humanitarian and surveillance needs clearly prioritizes sovereignty assertion over preparations to engage enemy insurgents. The force has also proven to be a sustainable way to accommodate First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in the military, providing a positive, practical connection between the CF [Canadian Forces] and Northern communities.

The inclusion of indigenous peoples within the Canadian Rangers can be understood as a way to finesse the dual identities of being Canadian and being indigenous; as a member of the Canadian Rangers (which are largely promoted as being indigenous in their composition), northern indigenous communities can express both their local attachments *and* their Canadian-ness. This loyalty itself accrues value for the Canadian state, given how Canadian sovereignty claims to the Arctic ice are dependent on Inuit occupation dating well before Canada existed (Lackebauer, 2005/06).

The Rangers' small expression of sovereignty in a baseball cap is networked with a neo-realist imagination of Arctic geopolitics that downplays the role of indigenous communities and competing senses of sovereignty. Indigenous groups and organizations such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council have pressed, with reference to the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), for greater recognition of the human rights of the people living in the Arctic (Nicol, 2010). The result of this intervention has been to emphasize both the circumpolar nature of the Arctic (as

opposed to a purely nationalist vision) and the diversity of local and regional governance arrangements throughout the region. While the interests of national actors and regional structures such as the Arctic Council often frame the discourses and practices of territorial control, indigenous communities are increasingly demanding that their interests be recognized.² Land claims, home rule, self-governance and possible independence for Greenland will further complicate the kinds of claims and rationales put forward by nation-states in the name of the 'Arctic'. For most commentators on Arctic geopolitics, sovereignty is understood in traditional terms as something that states possess within the established norms of the international community of states. As the Harper government in Canada is fond of claiming, territory has to be 'used or lost'. Effective occupation then becomes a benchmark for adjudicating the validity of particular sovereignty claims. However, what neo-realist visions of the Arctic Ocean rarely do is to juxtapose that understanding of sovereignty as relating to occupation and possession (i.e. in UNCLOS) with aboriginal claims and rights to Arctic land, sea and ice. The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is rarely cited in the strategic analyses that inform and are informed by exercises such as Nanook 09, but if it were it might unsettle these state-based narratives (Fig. 5, and compare with Fig. 3 earlier). As the Inuit Leaders Summit on Arctic Sovereignty in 2009 noted, "Our rights as an indigenous people include [...] rights recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, all of which are relevant to sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic" (*Inuit Circumpolar Conference, 2009*, point 1.4).

Canadian sovereignty discourses surrounding the North West Passage provide a further case in point. On the one hand, the Harper government has argued that Canada must demonstrate its sovereignty and persuade others such as the United States that the Passage is part of Canada's 'internal waters'. Indeed, one reason why that might be so is that it is argued that if the Passage was recognized, as the United States believes it should be, as an 'international strait' then all kinds of state and non-state actors might use the Passage in unscrupulous and dangerous ways without needing to seek Canada's permission to do so. The rights of transit passage would thus prevail. On the other hand, Inuit communities and their leaders have argued that Canada's claims to sovereignty over the North West Passage frequently neglect the existence of indigenous occupation and the way in which they understand these northerly environments in fundamentally different ways – in terms of ice stability, hunting potential and sustainable lifestyles (*Bravo, 2009*). So what counts for 'Arctic security' and 'Arctic sovereignty' becomes less clear once one considers the rather different geographic understandings of the Arctic (see *Gerhardt, Steinberg, Tasch, Fabiano, & Shields, 2010*) – either as an abstract space (and thus security commodity) or occupied place (homeland).

Arctic geopolitics thus involves assigning specific identities to the actors that require recognition as Arctic subjects (*Moisio, 2008b; Ringmar, 1996: 80*). The issue of political recognition is significant given that the Arctic is potentially an exclusionary geographical marker, a contested space open to competing definitions. A number of governments are today connecting the political identity of their states with the concept of the Arctic, which makes the issue of political recognition one of the most salient issues in contemporary Arctic geopolitics. From such a perspective, how different actors perform their Arctic actor-ness and how others recognize their actor-ness may become a crucial issue as far as political tensions and cooperation in the Arctic are concerned.

The question of political recognition is important in the context of territorial claims by the Arctic Ocean coastal states over the northern maritime areas. In this context the issue of recognition touches not only upon who is legitimately an Arctic player but also

the institutional arrangements closely associated with "Arctic territory". For instance, as *Dodds (2010: 9)* observes, "until the U.S. becomes party to UNCLOS then it will not be able to seek a CLCS recommendation and possible wider international recognition". Acceding to UNCLOS not only enables a coastal state to delimit its continental shelf, over which they have sovereign rights.³ In so doing, the territorial domain of the coastal state can expand by thousands of square miles.

As mentioned earlier, the Ilulissat process that began in 2008 has rapidly gained significance in boundary construction within Arctic geopolitics. A number of governments beyond the five Arctic Ocean coastal states have expressed increasing interest in the Arctic. For example, official representatives of China, South Korea, the EU and even NATO have drafted policy reviews on the Arctic issues and are increasingly requiring recognition as Arctic stakeholders. They have also promoted an inclusive geopolitical vision of the region as being important to all while reserving the right for themselves to act both as coastal states and environmental stewards. These actors tend to operate through such geographical markers as the North Pole, the Arctic Ocean and the Arctic seabed as a "common heritage of mankind" in order to detach the signifier Arctic from the five coastal states and in order to promote an open geopolitical vision of the Arctic, a vision likely to be opposed by the official actors of the five coastal states.

The recent attempts by the five Arctic Ocean coastal states to consolidate a regional political order based on international legal procedures is often interpreted as indicative of the exclusionary nature of Arctic geopolitics. The regional efforts by the five coastal states prompted some unease in some of the Arctic Council member states that were excluded from the Ilulissat meeting in 2008. The Finnish government, for instance, has advocated a return to multilateral governance of the Arctic (for the history of this governance, see *Keskitalo, 2004*). The Finnish minister for foreign affairs, a well known defender of the political interests of the EU, recently suggested that "we have to foster cooperation and make sure that the interests of all Arctic countries and countries beyond the Arctic region are taken into account... the future of the Arctic is not only of concern to some states but a legitimate concern for all" (*Stubbs, 2009: 4*). Similarly, the government of Iceland has spoken out in opposition to their exclusion from the Ilulissat meeting (*Koivurova, 2010*). In 2008, the EU Commission launched a formal agenda on its policy objectives and – we might say – possible actor-ness in the Arctic. This document is premised on an argument that the EU has a legitimate right to be engaged in Arctic affairs because the region is a common property: "no country or group of states have sovereignty over the North Pole or the Arctic Ocean around it" (*EU Commission, 2008: 9*). The Commission articulates explicitly that the EU seeks to contribute to "enhanced" Arctic multilateral governance through various mechanisms such as environmental agreements and Arctic research. The document further legitimizes the role of the EU as an Arctic stakeholder by not only mentioning that the "European Union is inextricably linked to the Arctic region" but also by stressing that "the EU Member States and the European Community are major contributors to Arctic research" (*EU Commission, 2008: 5*). These justifications may be considered as expressions through which an EU Arctic identity is claimed. But the Arctic identity of the EU has not yet been fully recognized by other stakeholders. The EU's application for permanent observer status in the Arctic Council was rejected in 2009 whilst China as with the EU, for instance, has ad hoc observer status. It is noteworthy that recently the Arctic interests and identity of the EU are increasingly being presented in the Arctic strategy documents by its northern member states.⁴

With all this in mind, we can return to the question of how Arctic geopolitics is being constituted by formal and practical



Arctic peoples subdivided according to language families

Indo-European family	Isolated languages (Ketic and Yukagir)
Germanic branch	Eskimo-Aleut family
Uralic family	Inuit group (of Eskimo br.)
Finno-Ugric branch	Yupik group (of Eskimo br.)
Samoyedic branch	Aleut branch
Altaic family	Na-Dene family
Turkic branch	Athabaskan branch
Tungusic branch	Eyak branch
Chukotko-Kamchatkan fam.	Tlingit branch

— Arctic circle
— Arctic boundary according to AMAP

Notes:

Areas show colours according to the original languages of the respective indigenous peoples, even if they do not speak their languages today.

Overlapping populations are not shown. The map does not claim to show exact boundaries between the individual language groups.

Typical colonial populations, which are not traditional Arctic populations, are not shown (Danes in Greenland, Russians in the Russian Federation, non-native Americans in North America).

Fig. 5. This map of the Arctic, disseminated by the Arctic Council, de-centres states and instead highlights indigenous peoples of the Arctic. Note that states are not labelled or even bordered. This map was originally published in *AHDR* (2004). Used with permission from the Arctic Council.

geopolitical networks and knowledge. A five-year research programme entitled *Geopolitics in the High North*, which is led by the Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies, is premised on a description of Arctic challenges as indicated in the programme outline. This offers a paradigmatic formulation of Arctic geopolitics:

The effects of climate change threaten the traditional livelihoods of indigenous populations. Changes in sea temperatures might lead to fish stocks changing their pattern of migration, creating new challenges for multinational fishery management. Conflict-interests create a potential for rivalry between various actors – a potential aggravated by important, unsolved jurisdictional issues. Moreover, security in a military-strategic sense is about to experience a renaissance. As with the expansion of economic activities in the region, Russia's renewed self-assertiveness and intention of rebuilding and modernizing its armed forces, including its strategically important Northern Fleet, will likely also serve to revive states' interest and involvement in the region. (*Geopolitics in the High North*, 2008: 2)

What we hope to have achieved in the discussion so far is to show that there is far more to geopolitics in the 'High North' than in such neo-realist inspired formulations. The texture of geopolitics is far richer – and more entangled – than such accounts allow. It emerges not so much out of the action of external, environmental stimuli (climate change, ice melting) on already-constituted entities (nation-states and their interests) and their interactions with each other (via "rivalries"). Rather, we have suggested, geopolitics is about the iterative, performative and embodied materialization of spaces and relationships. When we examine the formation of Arctic geopolitics, it is not the working out of timeless geopolitical processes that is intriguing here but the ongoing assembly of the geopolitical itself out of multiple elements, across a wide variety of sites, only a handful of which we have so far considered.

Conclusions: researching Arctic geopolitics

Our approach is not intended to supplant other ways of critically analyzing Arctic geopolitics, but to complement them. Recent interventions in Arctic geopolitics have argued for an ethnographic turn and the construction of 'thick' regional knowledge (Powell, 2010; see also Ó Tuathail, 2003). Further, Heather Nicol (2010) has argued that the main story of the Arctic is not the production of geopolitical space so much as the *de facto* insertion of indigenous voices and sovereignty into the process. Powell's argument for ethnography is directed toward to the production of regional generalizations: "there is a need for an ethnographically informed voice for the Arctic at a scale beyond the local or the community," (Powell, 2010, 76). Similarly, Nicol's attention to the indigenous peoples of the Arctic imagines them as a collective actor. The construction of a more equitable and effective legal and governance regime for the Arctic is clearly a matter of pressing importance (although it raises further questions about what equity and effectiveness might mean in this context). Similarly, it is certainly important to consider the ways in which Arctic geopolitics might be interpreted in terms of militarized political economies and ecologies. However we believe that such approaches could be complemented by a research perspective that is resolutely focused on the local and everyday, following the embodied performances and material traces of the discourse of Arctic geopolitics both within and outside the region itself.

This approach opens a number of potential avenues for research. First, we have at various points signalled the pervasive gendering of Arctic geopolitics. This is evident in accounts of Arctic science, nation building discourses focused on the North and accounts of inter-state politics, which emphasize the role of masculinist and

male-dominated research, foreign policy and military institutions. Despite the strikingly gendered form of Arctic geopolitics, many of the basic questions of feminist geopolitics and international relations remain to be asked, especially with regard to indigenous communities and human security (Tennberg, 2010). Further, researchers in Arctic geopolitics should incorporate the recent comments of Caroline Desbiens (2010), who argues for an agenda set less by climate change (and, it might be said, by questions of state sovereignty) than by Aboriginal concerns. For instance, research on the intersection of Inuit diplomacy with traditional state-based diplomacy in the Arctic Council can serve to 'provincialise' Euro-centric discourses of diplomacy and international relations (Beier, 2010; Robinson, 2003).

Second, there is clear potential for greater engagement between geographies of Arctic science and critical geopolitical analyses of the Arctic, to trace the associations between scientific enterprise and state-territorial projects. While a number of insightful papers have been produced that explore particular state contexts or issue areas, there is scope for more systematic studies across states, issue areas, epistemic communities and international institutions (Powell, 2008b). For instance, the material culture of expeditions and exhibitions (photos, samples, supplies, awards) can be traced as it moves in and out of the Arctic, shifts between various institutional/national contexts, and is alternately displayed or hidden (see MacDonald, Hughes, & Dodds, 2010).

Third, the relationship between orderings of Arctic space and state and international affairs is another potential area for further research. Paradoxically, it seems that the unique nature of Arctic space is giving rise in Arctic geopolitics to a reassertion of the very territorial political order that this uniqueness is held to call into question. There is much more to explore in terms of the relationship between Arctic space and Arctic political order. The kind of critical geopolitical examination we have in mind would see these spheres as being intrinsically related. One may for instance inquire into how the liberal and neo-realist rationalities are articulated in different places and institutional contexts and how these rationalities are indeed entangled and co-constituted. The operation and manifestation of these rationalities should thus be examined through the lens of the "very local" as they actualize and transform in different Arctic "events" ranging from the formal meetings of the Arctic Council to the many informal meetings which bring together different "Arctic actors". This type of perspective would potentially provide insights into how different Arctic identities and subjectivities are negotiated and how these identities are related to the wider political rationalities of Arctic geopolitics.

Fourth, these kinds of questions and issues call for a diversity of methodological approaches, ranging from the kinds of textual and institutional analysis familiar to critical geopolitics, to more ethnographic explorations of practice, to archival research, to interviewing and networking in policy communities, to examinations of the kinds of epistemologies at work in military exercises, scenario planning and "Arctic futures" (see Anderson, 2010). One could easily imagine a wide range of approaches to studying the Canadian Rangers which would build on the archival and interview-based techniques deployed by Lackenbauer (2005/06, 2007). Such research might distinguish itself by focusing on everyday life (rather than say looking for examples of so-called hot and banal nationalisms) within the Arctic (Dittmer & Gray, 2010), and the ways in which Arctic populations, especially indigenous peoples, negotiate their identities as Arctic peoples *vis-à-vis* the state-based identities which the discourse of 'Arctic geopolitics' and the Canadian Rangers seek to impose. Unpacking Arctic geopolitics further will require the effort of many scholars working in different ways, but also collaboratively, across a variety of sites.

Endnotes

- ¹ See <http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/land-terre/cr-rc/index-eng.asp> Accessed 16.07.10.
- ² Indigenous peoples and their representatives are recognized as permanent participants of the Arctic Council.
- ³ The US did not accede to UNCLOS because of its association with the United Nations as a form of emerging global government. The US nevertheless abides by the provisions of UNCLOS but has not formally ratified it.
- ⁴ It should be noted that Hillary Clinton was critical of indigenous groups and the three other members of the Arctic Council being excluded from the 2010 meeting of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states in Canada.

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