

Big Fish in a Small (Arctic) Pond: Regime Adherence as Status & Arctic State Identity in Norway

Ingrid A. Medby

Despite frequent reassurances that the Arctic region's regime of governance rests soundly on two mutually reinforcing pillars: the Arctic Council intergovernmental cooperation and the international UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), doubt is still cast time and time again on the durability of Arctic peace and stability. Explanations for the regime's strength are often based on classical theories of international relations, wherein traditional concepts of power-struggles ensure the relative benefit of state cooperation in the region. However, the case is here made that adherence to the present Arctic regime of governance is not just a matter of material or strategic importance for the eight so-called Arctic states. It is also a matter of status, pride, and identity; indeed, perceptions of a state's role in the world are a powerful and often underestimated force in determining interstate relations. Examining the specific case of one Arctic state, Norway, the paper explores how a state identity linked to the status granted by the current regime of governance guides political practices. This is done by drawing on a range of interviews with Norwegian state officials. For these, Arctic statehood is tied to political status, leverage, and legitimacy, thereby contributing to a positive self-perception and an advantageous international position. Furthermore, this is linked to pre-existing idea(l)s of 'essential' Norwegian history, culture, and values. Thus, through adopting a self-perception founded on the present Arctic regime of governance, the latter is discursively and normatively strengthened and reified, showing the potential potency of a political, state identity.

Introduction

Melting, thawing, 'opening', and high on the international agenda – there is no denying that the Arctic is changing. For many, a changing region spells a seemingly *unstable* region, and time and time again doubt has been cast on the durability of Arctic peace. Trying to keep pace with sensationalist headlines, covering the full gamut from doom and gloom to riches and routes, experts have repeatedly reassured the world that there is no Arctic 'free-for-all', no 'scramble', 'race', nor impending 'Cold War' (see e.g. Arbo, Iversen, Knol, Ringholm & Sander 2013; Wilson Rowe 2013). On the contrary, both academics and politicians stress that the Arctic is governed by an internationally recognised regime resting on two mutually reinforcing pillars: the Arctic Council (AC) intergovernmental cooperation and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (see e.g. Hoel 2009; Young 2009). Although they are far from the only institutions of political significance in the Arctic, they are key to the construction of a circumpolar region where rights and responsibilities are distributed based on a political and legal

framework among eight sovereign states, the 'A8' (Keskitalo 2004; Dodds 2013a; see also Knecht 2013).

Frequently, pundits offer explanations of Arctic regime strength based on classical theories of international relations, wherein a traditional concept of power-struggles ensures the relative benefit of state cooperation in the region. However, adherence to the present regime of governance is not just a matter of material or strategic importance for the eight Arctic states (A8). Rather, regime adherence in the Arctic is also a matter of status, pride, and identity. Indeed, domestic perceptions of a state's role in the world are a powerful and often underestimated force in determining interstate relations. Accordingly, the regime's strength lies not so much in provisions *per se*, nor in any ability to bind and govern actors in a top-down manner, but in its *discursive* power. That is, the implicit power of defining how the region comes to be understood, thereby rendering ideas, actions, behaviours, and futures possible or impossible to imagine. Through normative influence, the combination of AC membership and UNCLOS acknowledgement has come to not just provide a regulatory framework for the region, but moreover, to reify and legitimise a *specific practice* of Arctic politics that is recognised and normalised by the international community. Consequently, belonging to the group of A8 has come to signify more than merely a chair at yet another political roundtable. Indeed, with the added participation of indigenous organisations and permanent observance by a global community, being a member of this exclusive club is a privilege the states in question are well aware is not to be scoffed at. As such, one of the reasons behind the persistence of and adherence to the current judicio-political system in the Arctic is arguably the construction of a political, state-level identity based on being a so-called Arctic state – thereby linking Arctic policies to deep-rooted sentiments of national identity and belonging, which in turn internalise both rights and responsibilities as essential aspects of the states' role in the world.

Examining the specific case of one Arctic state, Norway, this paper explores the state-level discourses – understandings, articulations, statements, and imaginations – that construct an Arctic state identity, and how this in turn influences regime strength and adherence; indeed, how it may guide political, interstate relations in the region. Firstly, the concept of 'state identity' is briefly explained – as related to, yet distinguished from national identity – and its potential influence on political behaviour. This is followed by a presentation of the Arctic region's current interstate regime of governance, as based specifically on the mutually reinforcing UNCLOS and the AC. The specific example of Norway illustrates how those representing an Arctic state may adopt a political identity based on, *inter alia*, rights laid down in UNCLOS and AC membership, thereby reifying the present-day regime. This section draws on interview data from a range of Norwegian state officials, who shared their perceptions on what it means to be an Arctic state. Through their reflections, a certain conceptualisation of Arctic statehood becomes clear, linking regime adherence to core idea(l)s of the Norwegian nation-state. For them, Arctic statehood is tied to political status, leverage, and legitimacy, thus contributing to a positive self-perception of the country as well as an advantageous position internationally. Furthermore, this state identity becomes connected to pre-existing notions of what the country *is* in terms of values, culture, and history; thereby reifying and legitimising Arctic statehood as a natural, unquestionable extension of the Norwegian 'essence'.

As such, the paper argues that when assessing Arctic governance – not least in a time when many worry about spill-over effects from international conflicts elsewhere – it is insufficient to examine merely material or strategic factors of seemingly dehumanised, ‘rational’ states. Rather, the current Arctic regime of governance, founded on UNCLOS and the AC, has come to hold underappreciated normative power through discursive processes of reification and internalisation among those performing the practices of Arctic statehood. This demonstrates the potential potency of governance regimes when their normative bases are adopted as inherent features of perceptions within the state itself of its own role in the world: its state identity. For this to happen, however, this relational self-perception of status among other states must be conceived as positive and advantageous to the state in question, at times even contributing to a sense of relative superiority. In other words, although the Arctic governance regime does not *conduct* states’ political practices, it leads them to conduct *themselves* in certain ways.

State identity

By guiding how states act and interact, the Arctic regime of governance has arguably come to hold underappreciated power. Based on a combination of international law, diplomacy, and science, part of the regime’s viability lies in its *adoption*, rather than incursion, into states’ ‘identities’. That is, their identities as *states* – political organisations within a seemingly bounded, given territory – as distinct from national identity. Conversely, national identity refers to belonging to a so-called ‘imagined community’, a nation, perceived to exist among fellow nationals (Anderson 1983). Although the terms nation and state are often confused, conflated, and even hyphenated, it is important to note the deeply political (and problematic) nature of assuming a bordered correlation between people and territory (Antonsich 2009; Sparke 2005). Hence, *state* identity here refers to the perception at the political level, i.e. among policy-makers and political leaders, of the country’s ‘self’, its role in the world. Of course, the state-level perception of identity does not exist isolated from a popular (the nations’) sense of such (e.g. Hopf 2002), and vice versa, (foreign) policy can be highly influential in shaping national identity (Campbell 1992). Particularly in democratic states, leaders are (to varying degrees) supposed to be representative of the population at large (Breuning 2007; Jacobs & Shapiro 2000). However, as publicly known figures, political leaders’ understandings and framings of the country’s essential character (be they deliberate or not) is not the be-all and end-all, but one among several important factors guiding action; arguably, an often neglected factor in assessing political behaviour in the Arctic and beyond. Thus, the aim in the present paper is not to assess national Arctic identity among the population (see e.g. Medby 2014), but rather to address an official-level, political identity that permeates the governing system, thereby potentially influencing political behaviour in the region (see e.g. Fearon 1999; Jones 2007; Mitzen 2006; Wendt 1994).

The Arctic region & regime

The Arctic is no singularly defined space, but a contextually and topically dependent region with a number of definitions. Common ways of delineating the Arctic include the 10°C July isotherm, the tree line, and several other climatological, biological, or geographical markers. Politically, however, the AC’s reliance on the Arctic Circle’s latitude – 66° 33’ north – has become the most widely accepted

definition, where the eight states with territories north thereof (five of which also hold Arctic Ocean continental shelf claims) are recognised as the so-called Arctic states, the ‘A8’: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark/Greenland, Iceland, Russia, Canada, and the United States. Nevertheless, as largely ocean space, the Arctic has often been thought of as a *terra nullius* and a free-for-all; an unclaimed and *unclaimable* liquid space, where no lines or boundaries may be drawn on the rolling waves (Steinberg 2001).

It is often based on this view that fears of inadequate governance or regulation will lead to a ‘scramble’ or ‘race’ to claim the Arctic’s potentially rich resources have been allowed disproportionate levels of publicity. However, contrary to such concerns, the Arctic is subject to a number of regulatory mechanisms, firmly placed within a jurisdictional framework of international law (Dodds 2013b). In fact, as the Arctic is defined on a number of nested (and at times overlapping) scales, it has become a region whose governance is *highly* multilaterally complex, even seemingly messy in all its intricacy (Dittmer, Moisiu, Ingram & Dodds 2011; Young 2004). As state, sub-state, inter-state, multi-state, trans-state, and supra-state actors interact in the various topically defined ‘Arctics’, institutional interplay and a wide array of interests mean that the region is highly dynamic – not just physically (Jakobsson, Ingólfsson, Long & Spielhagen 2014), but also politically (Stokke 2011, 2013; Underdal 2013; Young 2009). However, although Arctic governance is often described as idiosyncratic in its intricate multilateralism and inclusion of e.g. indigenous peoples’ organisations in AC deliberations, actual authority has repeatedly been affirmed to lie with the eight Arctic states. Indeed, as regional cooperation increases and the range of active stakeholders have expanded far beyond northern latitudes (see e.g. Bennett 2014), the maintenance of state sovereignty remains a key priority for the Arctic states (Heininen 2012; Knecht & Keil 2013; Steinberg & Dodds 2013).

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Whereas territorial sovereignty on land above the Arctic Circle is distributed and bordered among the A8, the application of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982) provides the legal framework for delimitation and distribution of rights and responsibilities among the five coastal states in the Arctic Ocean. This establishes that, contrary to common notions of a ‘global commons’, the Arctic Ocean is not to be considered high seas at all (bar a few ‘loopholes’), but neatly segmented into territorial seas, exclusive economic zones (EEZ), extended continental shelves, and so on – all with their own rules and frameworks for orderly usage. The process of Arctic mapping and boundary-drawing, or ‘cartopolitics’, is therefore instrumental in producing a specific space of state governance (Strandsbjerg 2010, 2012). Guided by scientists’ descriptions of the sea-floor’s geological features, this ‘strategic science’ with long historical roots (Doel et al. 2014) constructs a narrative of the Arctic as unquestionably, obviously like any other ocean; *already* inherently a part of the five states’ spatial extent (see Steinberg, Tasch & Gerhardt 2015).

Despite the seeming neutrality of science and the seeming rigour of international law, the process of UNCLOS-based delimitation is therefore undeniably political, with interpretations of both law and geological data being malleable depending on interest (Brekke 2014). Submissions for extended continental shelves, for example, will only ever be reviewed *after* any bilateral territorial questions have

been resolved – a circumstantial dependency of which the applauded Norwegian-Russian Barents Sea delimitation was a case in point (Henriksen & Ulfstein 2011). Ratification of UNCLOS is still outstanding for the ‘last reluctant Arctic power’, the USA (Huebert 2009); although, their signing of the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration arguably confirmed the state’s commitment thereto. Nonetheless, the 2008 meeting of the five Arctic *coastal* states, excluding Iceland, Sweden, and Finland on the basis of UNCLOS’ supposed irrelevance to their specific relationships to the Arctic region, caused a political hubbub (see e.g. Dodds & Ingimundarson 2012). As with the region writ large, defining precisely where the Arctic Ocean begins and ends is no straight-forward task, not least as currents and fish stocks move Arctic waters. When the five states again met exclusively in 2015 in order to negotiate and sign a declaration on fishing in the Arctic Ocean, this was, unsurprisingly, met with Icelandic criticism. As their authorities stated, fishing in Arctic Ocean international waters concern them perhaps more than most other Arctic (and non-Arctic) states. Furthermore, according to their statement, an Arctic Ocean EEZ was clearly not a condition for participation, as Norway does not fit that description either (I.M.F.A. 2015). The latter point is also one of some controversy, as the details of Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard and its surrounding waters are laid down in the 1925 Svalbard Treaty; that is, a treaty made before UNCLOS, and importantly, extended continental shelf delimitation-rules were agreed upon. Whereas the Treaty establishes all signatories’ rights to conduct activity on the archipelago, the exact conditions of this once more became a topic of debate when the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin landed on Svalbard in April, despite prohibition of entrance to Norway due to political sanctions (BBC 2015). Albeit strongly criticised by the Norwegian authorities, the incident illustrated the inherent ambiguity and interpretative nature of Arctic Ocean matters and international law more generally, as well as the question of appropriate enforcement.

The ostensibly indisputable scientific-legalistic basis of which UNCLOS is portrayed as an objective framework thus retains much of its power in precisely the voluntary and advantageous nature of adherence thereto; even constructing a hierarchy among the A8 of which five are further privileged. Moreover, UNCLOS has been highly successful in motivating interstate cooperation reaching further and deeper than the surface of formal diplomacy, such as necessitating scientific collaboration on sea-floor mapping in order to make submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (Dodds 2010; Numminen 2010). Thus, the promotion and performance of UNCLOS towards particularly non-Arctic states interested in the region – such as the large states India and China – simultaneously constrain and enable the Arctic states’ own political practices in the region.

The Arctic Council

With UNCLOS providing the legal pillar of Arctic governance, the Arctic Council (AC) serves as its political counterpart: an intergovernmental forum for cooperation. In addition to the noted eight member states with territories north of the Arctic Circle, the AC also includes six indigenous peoples’ organisations as ‘Permanent Participants’, who have to be ‘consulted’ on all matters (Graczyk 2011; Koivurova & Heinämäki 2006). Other states and stakeholders may apply to observe – as an increasing number of states have done in recent years. As such, they are not party to decision-making, but may, of course, observe decisions being made and actively partake in working groups and projects (Graczyk & Koivurova 2014). Since its inception in 1996, the AC has evolved from a primarily environmentally

focused forum for cooperation to a wide range of issue topics relating to regional development (Axworthy, Koivurova & Hasanat 2012; Pedersen 2012). This marks both the growing importance of the Arctic region in general, as well as the growing importance of the AC itself, as the ‘pre-eminent forum for international cooperation in the Arctic’ (Clinton, quoted in Pedersen 2012: 149). A few recent binding agreements aside, one of the major successes of the AC may be the sheer *interaction* of states on an equal playing-field; in particular states whose officials are otherwise prone to bilateral dialogue-aversion (see e.g. Byers 2010).

Nevertheless, with no decision-making abilities, but only ‘soft’ power, relying on the cooperative spirit of the member states, concerns have been raised that the AC remains a weak institution, ill-equipped for the concurrent surge in Arctic interest, stakeholders, and temperatures (Heininen & Nicol 2007; Koivurova 2010; Koivurova & VanderZwaag 2007; Young 2012). However, the AC has since its nascent days been seen as demonstrative of peaceful cooperation in the Arctic (Young 2005), and has consequently taken on a *symbolic* significance, reifying states’ positions in anticipation of Arctic prosperity (Steinberg, Bruun & Medby 2014; Steinberg & Dodds 2013). These hopes of prosperity are, of course, particularly linked to future shipping and resource opportunities, which in turn are contingent on peaceful and orderly relations. It is also, as international law’s diplomatic counterpart, mutually reinforcing and reinforced by UNCLOS, recently making recognition of the latter a criterion for Observer status in the former (Graczyk & Koivurova 2014). Thus, albeit it holds no ‘hard’ power to determine states’ behaviour in the region, the AC is instrumental both for norm-setting and for the reification of a specific Arctic understanding where cooperation is the only obvious, and indeed possible, political practice.

Norway: A case study of Arctic state identity

As one of the A8, and also among the even more exclusive five littoral states, Norway has both land and sea territories in the Arctic, is home to an indigenous Sami population, and has a long history of polar exploration. The basis upon which an ‘Arctic identity’ may be constructed are therefore numerous, and have led the government to designate the Arctic, or ‘the High North’,¹ as Norway’s ‘most important strategic priority area’ (N.M.F.A. 2014). Norway may indeed be particularly advantageously positioned in the current political ordering of the Arctic, as it grants them both high status (Wilson Rowe 2014; see also Carvalho & Neumann 2015) and a ‘great power’-role in e.g. hydrocarbon extraction (Rottem, Hønneland & Jensen 2008; see also e.g. Hønneland & Jensen 2008; Jensen 2007; Kristoffersen & Jensen 2012). Thus, as a state with much to gain from its formal status as an *Arctic* state, Norway serves as an illustrative example of how this rather recent title may (or may not) translate to a self-perception among state officials as representing such; and, furthermore, to what extent this status may impact governance and regime adherence in the Arctic.

In order to assess how state representatives perceive Norway’s role in the region a series of anonymous interviews were conducted with officials in various positions at the state-level.² Altogether 16 interviewees shared their reflections on the topic, allowing for qualitative analysis of dominant discourses that may serve to legitimise or de-legitimise options of political behaviour available at the

state-level (see e.g. Neumann 2008). As Oran Young (2009: 431) explains in relation to Arctic governance:

Although they do not prescribe detailed answers to specific questions about policy, the influence of such discourses is enormous. They often shape the way we formulate questions, and they can direct our thinking in ways that favour some answers and rule out others.

As such, the discourses and conceptualisations of the Arctic region and own role therein held by state representatives hold a powerful potential to guide their approach thereto.³

Main findings

Arctic statehood was for the majority of the Norwegian state officials primarily conceptualised as a result of geographically and geologically based provisions laid down in UNCLOS. Although a status as a so-called Arctic state is often derived from territory north of the Arctic Circle, oceanic rights clearly constructed an internal hierarchy among these, thereby granting Norway an elevated status even within the group. As a small state, this chimes well with Norway's quest for international status and influence – a desire to be heard on the international stage (Carvalho & Neumann 2015). As one official explained:

There is kind of an 'A' and a 'B' team in the AC, as there are five states that have borders to the Arctic Ocean, and Norway is one of those. [...] So that is, in a way, the 'A' team, those who have direct interests and territories in the Arctic Ocean, while the other states – with areas north of the Arctic Circle, but no border to the Ocean – they are kind of part of this game without participating to the same extent (G).

Hence, the specific way in which the Arctic is defined becomes significant for relative status; in this case, emphasising the oceanic definition as it is of particular advantage. Interestingly, the officials' understandings of (dis)similarity between the two terms 'the Arctic' and 'the High North' were highly inconsistent, showing the definitional malleability of the region depending on topical context and favoured political outcome (Skagestad 2010). Among the more reflexive comments on the utilisation of either term, one mused: "That sort of depends on *who* defines what things are; you often define things depending on your own interests" (F).

In other words, UNCLOS grants Norway international *status*, also within the region itself; a status and particular interpretation of Arctic statehood that may advantageously be employed in certain contexts.

Land territory north of the Arctic Circle, i.e. Norway's three northernmost counties, was seen as a further legitimising factor of Arctic statehood, and instrumental in the privileged role as one of the A8. The phrase 'region of opportunities' (*mulighetenes landsdel*) was repeated by many, highlighting the optimism tied to economic resource development in the northern areas benefitting the whole country. This particular focus on Northern Norway granted legitimacy not just abroad, but also among a domestic electorate; in turn necessitating specific political action to match the rhetoric in the form of investment in the northernmost counties:

Building an [Arctic] identity, you build a brand – that is, Norway: a brand – which requires that the state – the government and Parliament – have to deliver something within it. So it drives development. (H).

Just as domestic pressure drives political behaviour, the international implications of Arctic statehood are no less significant. In fact, several noted that being an Arctic state means *more* internationally than domestically, as a status that gives Norway added leverage in diplomatic negotiations. The Arctic state-status was described as “an important asset for Norway” (E), which officials “use deliberately in communication outwards” (B).

As several pointed out, Norway’s Arctic statehood allows it an equal role alongside the so-called great geopolitical powers, Russia and the USA. On the one hand, this may have led to “a Norwegian self-perception that is a bit bigger than it has reason to be” (J). On the other, Norway’s northern border to Russia also serves as a reminder of the country’s small size, leading to e.g. heightened defence spending (J), while simultaneously reinforcing a positive image of Norway as particularly successful at international cooperation (B, I). Thus, for a small state with big ambitions, the Arctic provides an opportunity for Norway to take on a role as a ‘great power’, exerting influence far beyond its population number would suggest: “I think the other countries consider us a key state in the Arctic cooperation” (K). Or, as another phrased it: “we are not the largest nation in the Arctic, but at least we are a *leading* nation in the Arctic” (H). Being an Arctic state is therefore both advantageous for international relations as well as generating and reinforcing a positive self-perception among the population and officials alike, chiming well with an imagined identity of pride and patriotism.

Further adding to this heightened status, several of the interviewed officials pointed to Norway’s history of polar exploration as yet another point of legitimacy in the governance of the region. The very same ideas and ideals that were drawn upon in the construction of a national identity at the turn of the 20th century, framing Norway as distinct from Denmark, now feature in constructing it as an Arctic state. Additionally, highlighting Norway’s history as an Arctic (or indeed, polar) state creates a historical national *narrative*, linking shared past experiences to shared future prospects in the north. In concert with UNCLOS-based rights as an Arctic coastal state, many pointed to a deep-running Norwegian identity as a coastal culture with essential ties to the sea as indisputable; indeed, attributing it with causal power in shaping the nation’s character: “My theory is that there is something different about people who grow up, through generations, by the coast and look outwards, seeing the opportunities that are out there” (F).

In this way, Arctic statehood and coastalness were conceptualised as a natural extension of a pre-existing Norwegian identity, thereby rooting it in an ‘unquestionable’ and timeless Norwegian essence. This also included the cognitive connection between being ‘Arctic’ and so-called Norwegian values:

Of course, the Norwegian agenda – with *responsible* exploitation of resources, to summarise – is very much rooted in Norway, or the Norwegian, as a hunting and fishing nation, explorer nation; and there has always been a connection between Norway as a polar nation, a research nation, that wanted to exploit resources. They have historically also gone hand in hand (G).

The particular role thereby constructed for Norway through its Arctic statehood, as based on the present regime of governance, was one of unquestionable *need* for presence and leadership. In other words, for the Norwegian state officials, being an Arctic state grants political status, legitimacy, and leverage – both internationally and domestically. Furthermore, this identity of Arctic statehood was reified and internalised by linking it to pre-conceived notions of the very core of what it means to be Norwegian – rooted in a re-interpretation of history, a coastal identity, and supposedly national values. This, in turn, constructs a specific self-perceived role for the country at the state-level; a state identity that simultaneously enables and constrains political behaviour in the Arctic region and beyond.

Conclusion

As the Arctic region is attracting ever more attention from near and afar, alarming headlines casting doubt on the stability of regional governance appear with increasing frequency. Sensationalism remains persistent despite the repeated reassurances from both political and academic pundits of the strength of the current regime of governance, resting on the mutually reinforcing pillars of international law: UNCLOS; and international diplomacy: the Arctic Council. Arguably, strictly material or strategic explanations of states' relative benefits of regime adherence are unsatisfactory in explaining the durability of current governance mechanisms. Significant as these weights and balances no doubt are to states' leadership, it is also necessary to consider the importance of discourses of *state identity* in legitimising or de-legitimising specific political practices in the region.

Using the example of one Arctic state with particular gains to be made from its status as such, Norway illustrates how Arctic statehood may be internalised as a seemingly inherent element of the state's 'identity'. In other words, how those representing the state – officials at the state-level – adopt a particular understanding of the country's role in the Arctic region and the world writ large. In this specific case, officials articulated Arctic statehood as tied to heightened political status and sense of importance for an otherwise small state, legitimacy within the region, and political leverage both internationally as well as domestically. Furthermore, this rather recent re-articulation of Norway as essentially, naturally 'Arctic' was constructed as rooted in Norwegian history, coastal culture, and 'typical' values. As such, the status and identity – the specific discourses of Arctic statehood – granted through the current regime of governance simultaneously enable and *necessitate* specific political practices as well as constrain and *rule out* others. Most notably, regime adherence becomes an intrinsic, unquestionable part of self-perceived role for the respective state, thereby rendering alternative governance arrangements or deviance therefrom wholly 'out-of-character'.

In sum, as illustrated by the case of Norway, by internalising an identity of Arctic statehood based upon the current regime of governance, state officials consequently invest it with a discursive and normative power that ought not to be neglected when assessing its strength and durability. Albeit Arctic governance as represented by UNCLOS and the Arctic Council does not hold the power to conduct the 'cacophony of voices' (Young 2004: 212) that wish to be heard in the region, it is instrumental in guiding the concert of Arctic states and stakeholders in how they *conduct themselves*.

Adherence to international governance regimes based on symbolic status and state identity is clearly significant beyond the specific case of Norway; indeed, beyond the Arctic region. Albeit Norway is

unique in its particular constellation of identity factors, the concept of Arctic state identity is undoubtedly relevant elsewhere too. While Russian authorities emphasise its long polar history, and the Icelandic draw on its connection to the oceans, there are clearly many ways in which national narratives and identity become intertwined in Arctic policy. However, as a state with much to gain from its Arctic statehood, potential internalisation and reification of current governance will inevitably manifest differently elsewhere than in Norway – not least among those not privy membership therein. Nonetheless, the Norwegian experience – granting a small state a big role in this exclusive region – serves as an illustration of how state identity and governance may at times be intimately interwoven, thereby contributing to understandings of Arctic governance beyond and beneath the material surface of interstate relations.

Notes

1. The Norwegian government often favours the term ‘The High North’; in Norwegian ‘*nordområdene*’, literally ‘the northern areas’.
2. To ensure full confidentiality the respondents are only referred to by alphabetic letter according to the time of their interviews. The interviews were conducted mainly during July 2014, and distributed as: four in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; one in the Ministry of Defence; one in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security; one in the Ministry of Climate and the Environment; one in the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation; one in the Ministry of Education and Research; and seven Members of Parliament. Note that this is part of a larger, ongoing study on Arctic statehood and political identity in Norway, Iceland, and Canada.
3. All translations from Norwegian are by the author herself, as close to the original as possible. Of course, relying on a snowball strategy and general willingness to participate, the participants’ views are not necessarily generalisable, but rather illustrate how individuals at the state-level perceive their state as being (or not being) ‘Arctic’.

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