

**State Discourses of Indigenous “Inclusion”:
Identity and Representation in the Arctic**

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Abstract

Arctic decision-making processes are often praised for including Indigenous peoples. Yet, state practices of “inclusion” may also inadvertently delimit what can be meaningfully said from a stage already set for a highly specific role as “Arctic voices”. The paper draws on reflections offered by Norwegian and Icelandic state personnel on the meanings of Arctic statehood and identity, showing how often well-meaning attempts to “include” may serve the includer more than the included – indeed, may serve to uphold the same power structures they seemingly seek to improve. In so doing, the paper contributes both to understandings of Arctic statecraft and to work seeking the “peopling” of geopolitical concepts such as the state. By focusing on the operation of dominant discourses, the paper argues that current prescribed performances of “inclusion” are not enough in a region marked by histories of dispossession, assimilation, and colonisation.

Keywords

Indigenous, inclusion, representation, identity, Arctic, geopolitics

Introduction

Arctic issues, in my opinion, is [sic] not just a way, a new route for ships and transport; it is not access to new areas, where we can utilise some natural resources and make money – it’s also about preserving heritage, it’s about cultural issues, it’s about research on how people

have been living there, for example. And it's about so many things as well, that are, you know, about flesh and blood, not only money. And in order to do that, to keep the focus also on the cultural issues and on the flesh and blood, we *need* the Indigenous people, we *need* the municipalities, we *need* the, you could say, the closer communities (Icelandic parliamentarian, 2014).

The Arctic is not just about resources but also communities; according to the above Icelandic parliamentarian, the local and Indigenous peoples of the Arctic are needed as reminders of issues of culture and “flesh and blood” in what is an international state-governed region. Arctic governance is often praised for the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, presented as a unique example of inter-state stability and inclusivity. Not least the Arctic Council – an intergovernmental forum where the eight Arctic states meet – is notable for their inclusion of six Indigenous peoples’ organisations as Permanent Participants (PPs), a status created specifically for their participation and consultation (Arctic Council 1996). Yet, it is the members – the Arctic states and their representatives – that hold voting and veto-rights, albeit on the expectation that these are cast in accordance with prior consultations. However positive this inclusion may be when compared to the alternative of *exclusion*, the arrangement arguably serves to uphold and legitimise state privilege in Arctic governance. Indeed, state performances of inclusivity becomes itself a criterion for Arctic statecraft. In the words of US Ambassador Dalton, the PPs “imbue the Council with a special legitimacy on the international stage” (cited in Arctic Council 2016). Moreover, this particular inclusion means that it is state personnel who are cast in the active role of “including”, “consulting”, “recognising”, and so on – while Indigenous representatives are rendered discursively passive (if not politically so). That is not to imply that this is not an important role in the Arctic Council and Arctic governance more generally, but rather to point to the limitations of how it may only be played within the prescribed parameters of inter-state governance regimes. Recognising that state governments retain the ultimate decision-making privilege in the Arctic, this article seeks to explore the dominant discourses “within” the state, among state personnel, that underpin the above outlined relations between states and Indigenous peoples. More specifically, the article focuses on Norwegian and Icelandic state personnel’s articulations of Arctic statehood and identity, and how Indigenous peoples are discursively “included” therein. Although both Arctic statecraft and Indigenous peoples have received scholarly attention, they have rarely been brought together in considering how state

practitioners conceptualise their own role and relation to the latter (Medby 2018). Yet it is arguably a topic that may have significant implications for Arctic relations, reinforcing current structures of political power. In highlighting some of social and anthropological foundations to asymmetrical political structures, the article contributes to recent work seeking the “peopling” of geopolitical concepts, such as the state (see Jones 2007, Kuus 2014); that is, work seeking to re-focus the scholarly lens on the *practitioner* of practices, the *actor* of performances, or, here, the personnel of state action. The particular focus here adds a so far under-explored perspective on how state representation of and relations with diverse communities are conceptualised by state personnel themselves; and it draws on Coulthard’s (2014) work in questioning the political organisation of identity and difference through state discourses of “recognition”, or indeed inclusion. By shedding light on how Indigenous “inclusion” come to discursively co-constitute statecraft and identity in certain ways when articulated by the “includer”, the paper contributes not just to understandings of Arctic geopolitics per se but more broadly to understandings of the state idea(1).

The argument the article makes is that, however well-meaning, Arctic states’ inclusion of Indigenous peoples in existing (state-governed) structures and national identity narratives risks inadvertently subsuming difference, that is, Indigenous identities, politics, and worldviews. The discussion below proceeds in four steps: First, the theoretical premise is laid out, situating the present paper in critical political geographical scholarship on statecraft and state practices, and in particular moves towards the “peopling” of geopolitics. Second, polar geopolitics and the Arctic context are further elaborated; before, third, turning to the study itself. In brief, the insights presented below come from interviews with state personnel about their respective Arctic identities as representatives of the two Arctic states, Norway and Iceland. While they are both small Nordic states, the former is part of Indigenous Saami homelands (Sápmi); whereas the latter does not have a formally defined Indigenous population, but nevertheless interacts with Inuit neighbours from Greenland as well as the other Indigenous representatives in the Arctic Council. As such, the paper is not just about representing a domestic minority, but more broadly about how inclusivity comes to be seen as part of state practices. In the fourth section, the interviewed personnel’s articulations are presented, structured under four themes: (i) The representational role of the state and its personnel vis-à-vis the Arctic Council on the one hand and respect for Indigenous peoples on the other; (ii) the importance (and normativity) of “inclusion”; (iii) the challenge of putting

this into practice; (iv) and finally, state personnel's own sense of "otherness", of Arctic hierarchies perhaps, where identities in a moment of articulation may become blurred and multiple.

The paper concludes by drawing these together and returning to the theoretical premise of the article, arguing that rather than critically rethinking current state practices in the Arctic, there is a tendency to praise "inclusion", "partnering", "consultation", and "recognition" as solutions to colonial relations past and present (Coulthard 2014). That is not to say that efforts to include Indigenous voices are not important or worthwhile, but rather that at present they do not go far enough. There is a need not just to include Indigenous voices in prescribed settings, speaking on predetermined topics of so-called "Indigenous interests", but to radically open up for political participation at *all* levels, on *all* topics; and indeed, to allow different discourses of identity to be heard in a region marked by dispossession, assimilation, and subjugation.

The State: Practices and Practitioners

Critical political geography has always been motivated by an emancipatory ideal (see Agnew and Muscarà 2012, Agnew 2013), challenging taken-for-granted assumptions, including the privileging of "the state" (Moisio and Paasi 2013). Recent decades have seen strides made beyond previous state-centrism in the discipline. However, this should not mean wholly dismissing "the state" as unworthy of academic analysis. What it should mean is challenging discursive foundations by interrogating how and why the state-idea(l) has come to structure and order contemporary society (see Closs Stephens 2013, Murphy 2010). Following poststructural theorists, "the state" should here be read not as an actor in and of itself, but as an abstraction that "materialises" through its continual evocation and enactment (Abrams 1988, Mitchell 2006, Painter 2006). In this particular case, this entails interrogating the privileging of "Arctic states" in Arctic geopolitical discourse, and how they become performed through, *inter alia*, acts of inclusion.

The practices through which the state emerges, from which it is an "effect", are of course enacted by a range of actors – most notably those employed with its representation, state personnel. In looking not at the abstract structure of "the state" as a seeming anthropomorphised being but instead its many enacting people and their practices, the work of Kuus (2008, 2014)

and Jones (2007, 2012) have been particularly instructive. They have both contributed to a conceptual “peopling” of the state, whereby attention is directed towards the practitioners of state practices (see also Antonsich 2009). These are developments in political geography that the present paper builds on and seeks to push further, focusing specifically on discourses of identity and represented community among state personnel.

“State identity” here refers to the discourses of identity that permeate among those employed at the state level, either as politically elected or appointed personnel (see Medby 2018). While related to notions of national identity, the interest lies specifically in understandings of self among those engaging with or employed by the state – in addition to potentially seeing themselves as part of the nation or “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). For clarification, the term “discourse” is here employed in a Foucauldian sense, whereby “discursive statements” may be both linguistic and performative, making up discourses that condition what may or may not be said, thought, and done (Foucault 1972). Drawing on Butler’s (2011) work on performativity, the implications of discourses’ repeated statements and practices are their reproduction and reification, “materialising” structures and beliefs in the world. This connects to the above theories of statehood: the ways in which state personnel articulate a “state identity” also have direct implications for how they *can* enact the practices of “the state” and identity. Or in the context of this paper: the articulation of “inclusion” of Indigeneity as part of (or not) an Arctic state identity matters for how the Arctic state *can* be performed. In short, these are articulations that may condition what becomes politically possible and impossible.

The present paper is inspired by ongoing conversations about privilege and the persistence of structures of domination through politics of recognition (Coulthard 2014, Howitt 2019); or here, discourses of inclusion. It is written at a time when political geographers are increasingly critical of the colonial structures underpinning the discipline itself, including explicit moves to decolonise geographical knowledges (see e.g. Clement 2017, Esson et al 2017, Legg 2017, Noxolo 2017, Radcliffe 2017). What this paper sets out to do is highlight how dominant discourses and perceptions may also uphold these structures in spite of well-meaning attempts to do otherwise (see Ahmed 2012, Leeuw et al 2013 on how this extends also to academic practices of ‘inclusivity and diversity’). This is not intended as a move to once more “give voice to” the already dominant, but instead aims to bring to light these often

unacknowledged discursive structures upon which political relations are based, in order to open up for their potential disruption and change.

Applying a critical lens to structures of power does not, however, guarantee the highly material processes of e.g. Indigenous land and rights repossession that decolonisation refers to (Tuck and Yang 2012, see also Naylor et al 2018). Nevertheless, following the work of Cameron (2015), one small step towards unsettling these structures involves learning to know and relate differently; to recognise the limits of dominant worldviews and stories, however widespread they may be – a process that applies to both non-Indigenous state personnel and scholars. Here, that involves challenging taken-for-granted discourses – such as what, how, or indeed who the Arctic “is” (see Howitt 2019). And as outlined above, it involves conceptualising “the state” not as a unitary, universalised actor but instead a constellation of diverse people, which in turn may open up for knowing and relating otherwise: Potentially rearticulating Arctic relations not as one of includer and included, but as a “peopled” interaction.

Arctic Geopolitics and Statecraft, “Including” Indigenous peoples

With a focus on the Arctic, the present paper is positioned within a field of critical polar geopolitics (see e.g. Bruun and Medby 2014, Dodds and Powell 2013, Keil and Knecht 2017, Steinberg et al 2015), which in recent years has included renewed interest in the conduct of Arctic politics generally as well as in Indigenous participation. For example, Jessica Shadian (2012) has argued for a new conceptualisation of sovereignty that considers Inuit views as articulated in the *Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic* (ICC 2009). Others have used the Arctic as an example of the inadequacy of current concepts of territory and political orders (e.g. Gerhardt et al 2010, Steinberg and Kristoffersen 2017). And indeed, due to the Arctic’s geophysical characteristics – largely oceanic, and intermittently ice-covered, permafrost, etc. – it does not fit neatly into political-territorial definitions, which allows a disruption of the cognitive status quo: a theoretical disruption that is arguably needed elsewhere too in a time of anthropogenic change (e.g. Castree 2016, Steinberg and Peters 2015).

Paradoxically though, territorially atypical as the Arctic might be, it is nevertheless presently being “statised” in highly traditional ways. That is, the region is currently being neatly carved

into distinct state spaces, according to international law. Under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Arctic Ocean is defined as e.g. High Seas, Continental Shelves, and so on, based on geological data and bilateral negotiations between states. Borders are drawn, and both rights and responsibilities are shared out among states in the most orderly manner. Quite contrary to click-baiting media stories of “scrambles” and “new cold wars” (see Nyman 2012, Steinberg et al 2014, Wilson Rowe 2013), it is (perhaps surprisingly) peacefulness and stability that dominate Arctic rhetoric: as has been a favourite Norwegian slogan, “High North – low tension”. However, with this narrative of stability, little room is left – or indeed, seems necessary – to consider alternative governance structures than those “successfully” imposed on not just oceanic areas but also what are often (albeit sparsely) populated areas far from governmental capitals.

As an inter-state region, Arctic decision-making happens nationally but with deliberations among the eight Arctic states within the intergovernmental Arctic Council. This is arguably the most important political organisation in the region, with the eight states with territories and sea areas above the Arctic Circle making up its membership: Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark/Greenland, USA, Canada, and Russia. Part of the above oft-presented positive polar narrative is the “idiosyncratic” inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the Council (Knecht 2013), who are there represented by six organisations that “have been granted Permanent Participants status” (Arctic Council 2017). Enshrined in the states’ *Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council* (1996), the status was created “to provide for active participation and full consultation” (see also Graczyk and Koivurova 2014). However, a key challenge to *actual* participation can be the prohibitively high cost of travel to these high-level meetings (e.g. Dalton cited in Arctic Council 2016); another is the discrepancies among these six organisations’ practical autonomy – which comes down to state governments. And more fundamentally, while the PPs are to be “consulted”, it remains up to the states’ representatives, such as the Senior Arctic Official or Minister of Foreign Affairs, to act accordingly. In other words, it is state representatives who are cast as *active*, whereas the “included”, “consulted” remain discursively passive (if not politically so). And indeed, state practices of “inclusion”, “consultation”, or in Coulthard’s (2014) work, “recognition” thus become performative acts that serve to uphold state hegemony in the region; in the aforementioned US Ambassador Dalton’s words, giving the current regime of governance, the Arctic Council, “legitimacy”.

Also worth nothing, the Arctic Council includes six thematic working groups, which often meet independently of the high-level biannual Arctic Council Ministerial Meetings. In these, a recent important initiative has been to include Indigenous and/or Traditional Knowledges. To some extent this has been successful, but again, the challenge lies in practical implementation. As critical voices have noted, it is problematic to make different knowledges “fit” a policy report: Traditional/Indigenous or not, they nevertheless have to be articulated in terms of Western modernity (see e.g. Agrawal 2002). As Ellen-Inga Turi (2013:234) has argued in relation to social scientific work on Saami reindeer pastoralism, “the mere application and incorporation of traditional knowledge or indigenous methodologies in research does not necessarily equate to a counter-hegemonic trend”. And further, regardless of how well-meaning many initiatives are, the “voice” granted in both political fora and policy-reports is nevertheless premised on a highly specific role, more often than not performing the Indigenous “other”. Hierarchies of knowledge and knowledge-production remain, highlighted by what is often a post-hoc inclusion of this “otherness” (Mignolo 2012). Again, whether deliberately or not, the inclusion itself may become an act of “statisation”, a performance reifying discourses of state legitimacy.

Finally, although the Arctic Council is arguably the most important forum for regional decision-making, the Arctic’s governance arrangements have been described both as a “mosaic” (Young 2005) and “bazaar” (Depledge and Dodds 2017) due to the many interconnected and overlapping spheres of contact. The latter, in particular, points to the importance of various Arctic-themed conferences, symposia, and meetings in shaping a circumpolar political region. The variety of fora does offer different channels for influence for e.g. Indigenous (and other non-state) stakeholders. However, the kind of political influence a conference intervention may have, often under the heading of “Indigenous voices”, is arguably (unfortunately) not comparable to the more formal negotiations between state leaders; indeed, it may rather become part of the above symbolic inclusivity that serve the includer more than the included. To be clear, the symbolism and soft power of Indigenous “voices” are not to be dismissed (and *can* provide platforms for counter-discourse and resistance). But in the end, the prescribed inclusion does not go far enough – these voices must not be confined to already delimited issues or allocated slots in choreographed programmes.

Approaching Arctic State Identities and Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples

In order to answer the question outlined above – how Arctic state personnel articulate Arctic statehood and identity, and how Indigenous peoples are discursively “included” herein – the paper focuses on two of the eight Arctic states, Norway and Iceland. Although they are two states with much in common – small Nordic states (with populations of around 5 million and 300,000 respectively), historically “peripheral” to Europe under the crown of Denmark (until 1814 and 1944) – they offer two distinct cases of Arctic statecraft and identities. Particularly important in the context of this paper, Norway is part of Sápmi, traditional homelands of the Saami people¹, whereas Iceland has no Indigenous population. That is, defining Indigeneity is of course itself a political question; for the present purposes, the widely recognised definition of Indigenous peoples proposed by United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur Martínez Cobo in 1987 applies: “those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that have developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them” (UN 2009, p.5; cited in Kauanui 2014). The Saami people transcend borders also to Sweden, Finland, and Russia. However, Iceland has as their nearest neighbour and frequent political collaborator Greenland, an Inuit nation vying for full independence and statehood.

The data presented below are based on semi-structured interviews conducted in 2014/2015. The interviews centred on notions of Arctic identity among state personnel², asking them, firstly, the meaning they ascribe to Arctic statehood and Arctic identity/ies; and secondly, if and how they thought this might influence Arctic politics (see Medby 2015; 2018). The majority of interviewees reflected on how Indigenous peoples “fit into” these Arctic state identities, as will be elaborated below; at times, on their own initiative, and at times, in response to the explicit question of what role they considered Indigenous peoples to have in Arctic politics. In total, 16 Norwegian and 12 Icelandic state personnel offered their reflections, with each interview lasting approximately 30-60 minutes, and subsequently transcribed and analysed (Müller 2010, Neumann 2008). Whereas the Norwegian interviews were conducted in both the interviewer and interviewees’ first language Norwegian, the Icelandic were conducted in the shared second language, English (with one exception, in ‘Scandinavian’)³. The participants represented a wide range of positions, levels of seniority,

ministries, and departments⁴, recognising the heterogeneity also within the state institution (without compromising confidentiality). As such, these are of course not generalisable but rather illustrative of views among the many people performing the Arctic state on a daily basis. The study was designed to include a variety of perspectives, not least from those *not* working with “Arctic”-labelled issues in their everyday but nevertheless representing formally titled “Arctic states”. Furthermore, at least one Norwegian interviewee explicitly identified as Saami themselves, and several noted varying levels of geographical “northernness”. Participants were recruited via general email enquiries to all ministries, and later, via a “snowball” process, whereby initial “gatekeepers” referred others (e.g. Dunn 2010)⁵. All interviews were conducted under a strict promise of confidentiality, so in the following they are referred to by letter N/I and number, with no further identifying details. The interconnected issues of positionality and representation that lie at the heart of this article relate not only to political but also academic work (Mansvelt and Berg 2010); and as it was personal experiences as a researcher that initially motivated the article, this merits mention. As a Northern but non-Indigenous Norwegian researcher of Arctic identities, there seems to be a frequent expectation in both political and academic contexts that I will speak about – or even *for* – Indigenous identities. Also in some of the interviews presented below, interviewees enquired about *my* Arctic identity – considered somehow higher on the “Arctic hierarchy of belonging” than those in/from southern capitals (see Medby 2014). With my refusal to speak *for* – or more often, with my diversion to wider Northern relations – often follows a discomfort on my part of both the imposition of a representational role as an “authentic” Arctic person and the colonial undertones of the expectation of “otherness”. Occasionally I have talked about Saami family members or friends, realising later how this may be considered a “move to innocence” (Mawhinney 1998, cited in Tuck and Yang 2012, see also DiAngelo 2018, Alcoff 2005). Having been faced with my own identity through my research has generated a lot of thought, reading, and learning⁶ – and with this, an articulation of what I not only feel I *can* say something about but also what I feel I *should* from my research: namely, how Arctic identities are articulated by those in privileged positions of power, those tasked with representing and making decisions for the region; and in turn, the discursive structures that serve to uphold state hegemony in the international Arctic region.

Reflections on Arctic Identities, Statehood, and Indigenous Inclusion

First of all, it is important to stress that all interviewees expressed positive views on the role of Indigenous peoples in Arctic politics, so this should not be read as a critique of individual articulations. Rather, the interest lies in underlying discourses and implicit effects of statements – not as deliberate or even necessarily conscious acts, but therefore ever more worthy of attention (see Esson et al 2017). The below articulations by Norwegian and Icelandic state personnel on Indigenous inclusion in Arctic state identities and statecraft are presented under four themes: (i) The representational role of the state and its personnel vis-à-vis the Arctic Council on the one hand and respect for Indigenous peoples on the other; (ii) the importance (and normativity) of “inclusion”; (iii) the challenge of putting this into practice; (iv) and finally, state personnel’s own sense of “otherness”, of Arctic hierarchies perhaps, where identities in a moment of articulation may become blurred and multiple.

(i) Representation

Firstly, when asked about the meanings of Arctic statehood and identity, many interviewees from both countries reflected on the representational role of the state in relation to Indigenous peoples’ organisations and, more generally, the population. In Norway, most of the interviewees articulated a distinction between (inter)national-level Arctic policy, e.g. through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and more local-level policy through counties, municipalities, and the Saami Parliament in the north⁷ (see Skagestad 2010). Worth noting, while the Saami Council – representing the people across Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia – has PP status in the Arctic Council; local, municipal, or county institutions have no formal inclusions⁸. On the topic of Arctic governance arrangements, a senior Norwegian official explained that this “is shared, in the sense that the Arctic is also domestic politics. And then some things lie with national authorities, and some with local authorities, and some with Saami institutions” (N.11). A Norwegian parliamentarian offered the following on the topic of both local and Indigenous peoples’ institutions:

They are the local democracy in the Arctic. They are important voices that mean a lot for perhaps each nation’s policy development in these areas. So... Although they, perhaps, don’t have authority in all areas, they are important voices in national policy-shaping, and in that way, also in the international (N.7).

This seems to suggest that in high-level Arctic relations, it is primarily state actors who *act*, but that they are expected to do so “on behalf of”, representing, all of the state’s citizens –

regardless of whether these would identify more with a multistate nation or a multinational state.

In Iceland, the discourse was perhaps unsurprisingly different given their lack of a domestic Indigenous population. For Icelandic state personnel, Arctic Indigeneity entered mainly through the international rather than the local level. One Icelandic representative explained that their lack of Indigenous population was something that set Iceland apart, being the only Arctic state without such (I.4). Another explained Iceland's Arctic nationhood in the following way:

[W]e are depending so much on the fishing industry and fishing activities. And that is quite, well, it's so much linked to the Arctic and what is happening in the Arctic. And therefore, I see us as an Arctic nation, in that sense. But the population in Iceland differs from what is in both Norway and Canada. We don't have any Indigenous people living here, as you have in Canada and the Saami people in Norway. So, in that sense we are *not* (I.2).

Interestingly then, they seemed to consider Arctic people seemingly synonymous with Indigenous people. They continued that "here in Iceland it's more Western-style living, and we are not dealing with these different kinds of groups, Indigenous groups, or Indigenous rights and things like that. One nation in the country" (I.2). Another similarly voiced: Iceland, we're the only nation where, the only region where there are no First Nations [*sic*] living. [...] Things would have been different if we had a local population of Aboriginals here, where their culture would have been part of our culture (I.4).

Whether this equation of Arctic and Indigenous peoples was due to particular "Arctic" culture and "style of living", which somehow did not include fishery; or if it was more a matter of ethnicity was left unsaid. The implications of the latter would of course raise difficult questions about the 90% of inhabitants above the Arctic Circle who are not Indigenous either.

In contrast to the above, some Icelandic personnel described *local* knowledges and traditions somehow parallel to that of Indigenous such in other Arctic states. One official considered Iceland's own history of relatively recent independence, echoing what many others too brought up about Iceland's close cooperation with Greenland:

Iceland is not, we cannot talk about 'Indigenous people' in Iceland, but Iceland has always been quite sensitive to Indigenous people in Scandinavia and Greenland; been supportive of their cause. Because they see them perhaps in a similar situation to what Iceland was once in (I.3).

In a sense then, solidarity and identification with other circumpolar peoples were more strongly articulated in Iceland than in Norway – “Indigenous” labels aside. In the latter, the division between state and “sub”-state Saami nation (or trans-state, as might be more appropriate) is formally institutionalised. The degree of self-determination that comes with the Norwegian Saami Parliament and international Saami Council means that, on the one hand, the state would not speak “for” the Saami on what are scripted as so-called Saami issues; but on the other, on topics such as foreign affairs (which of course most of Arctic affairs are), the state holds a representational role. In other words, when definitions and delimitations are considered more fluid, as in Iceland, there might be more scope for relating – despite of and across topic boundaries. Icelandic officials’ sense of Arctic “otherness” paradoxically allowed them to identify with other “others”, such as Indigenous peoples. While in contrast, the formal inclusion of Indigenous peoples in certain Norwegian policy areas, through certain institutions, may (equally paradoxically) become an implicit exclusion from others – and the scope for interaction becomes more rigidly (de)limited.

(ii) Respect

Secondly, many of the interviewees emphasised the importance of inclusion and of respect – as highlighted by the article’s opening quote by an Icelandic parliamentarian. As their explanation illustrates, many stressed being “sensitive to” and “supportive of” Indigenous peoples’ concerns; it is about “heritage”, “culture”, and “flesh and blood”. These were sentiments echoed by several in both countries: inclusion of Indigenous peoples in Arctic fora is crucial for reasons that go beyond the strategic, economic, or high-level political. However, as noted above, these particular issue-considerations may also serve the opposite of its intended purpose: inclusion within specified issues may mean exclusion from others. Albeit in different ways, both Norwegian and Icelandic national identities have been described in value-laden terms of moral “good” (Neumann and de Carvalho 2015, Pálsson and Durrenberger 1996) – extending to questions of Indigenous minorities and multiculturalism more broadly. Both small states are self-declared team-players (for practical reasons too, undoubtedly), yet frequently portray themselves as leaders in various fields – interestingly, *both* in certain aspects of Arctic relations (see Wilson Rowe 2014). In the words of a Norwegian politician, “we are not the largest nation in the Arctic, but at least we are a *leading* nation in the Arctic” (N.10). Hence, when it comes to sensitivity to Indigenous issues, there is also a strong symbolic impetus for support and inclusion – anything but would

jar with both international images and national self-perceptions of identity. However, how the symbolic translates to the practical is not always clear. And given the weight on an *image* of morality, focus may arguably be on (international) audiences of the performance, rather than how and why actors are cast, or included, in what roles.

Again then, the presence of the PPs in the Arctic Council may inadvertently give “legitimacy” to state practices, which in turn reify the current regime of governance in the Arctic. While personnel in both states considered respect and indeed inclusivity important, the discourses through which these are enacted remain those of an active state “including” a passive extra-/non-political subset of its denizens. As Coulthard (2014), demonstrates in the Canadian context, politics of “recognition” may reproduce colonial state-Indigenous relations, serving the interests of the former; arguably, a process of (state) acknowledgement can never reconcile “contemporary difference and past histories of destructive colonialism” (cited in Slater 2018:177).

(iii) Practical Reticence

In spite of the above expressions of good intentions, many interviewees noted what they considered practical challenges of inclusion, especially that of Indigenous knowledges. In short, there was an evident uncertainty about what Indigenous and Traditional Knowledges really mean (see Inglis 1993). For example, as Johnsen, Benjaminsen, and Eira (2015) argue, the narratives around Saami reindeer husbandry in Norway often presents “scientific” measurements as apolitical and objective, while the Saami herders’ viewpoints are marginalised as irrational and ignorant (see also Mignolo 2012). This was recently brought to the fore in a landmark case in the Norwegian Supreme Court, where Saami reindeer herder Jovsset Ánte Sara unsuccessfully tried to challenge the Norwegian state’s decision on the culling of large parts of his herd (see Martyn-Hemphill 2017, Rasmus 2018). These are disagreements that are political, but also more fundamentally about different knowledge systems (Johnsen et al 2017). The challenge here is arguably not to “include” one knowledge system, subsumed within or below the other, but to work with them symmetrically and mutually beneficially (ultimately rejecting epistemological hierarchies) (see Agrawal 2002). Yet, challenging knowledge structures inevitably challenges power structures too (Foucault 1998). The “un-learning” that Cameron (2015) calls for, will inevitably be uncomfortable, embracing the uncertain and even unknowable to allow discursive rearticulations.

Ostensibly more relevant in working groups than in Arctic Council ministerial meetings, there have been various successful (and less successful) initiatives to address the lack of Indigenous viewpoints, knowledges, and ontologies in reports and research. An Icelandic representative with some past experience of working groups, described it as, in their view, difficult due to issues of standardised measurements and repeatability:

Although Indigenous knowledge is very important in the process, by pointing out something that needs to be looked at or to verify that what we find in the scientific part is harmonising with their knowledge of what is changing. But you cannot – it's very difficult to put them on the same level [as “science”] at the same time. They are important, but not easily integrated in the whole thing (I.2).

They explained that, although some felt not listened to, it was a matter of competing data on longer-term environmental changes; continuing:

Of course, I want to make it quite clear that I have found the involvement of Indigenous people in the process of very high value. So, I am not criticising that. It is important, and it is needed (I.2).

To the credit of the Arctic Council and its working groups, recent years has seen a sea-change in practice and perceptions on these topics, including the explicit expectation to “consult” (or better yet, to collaborate) with the PPs. These positive changes have been driven by Indigenous groups, including formalised Traditional Knowledge Principles (see Arctic Peoples 2018) embedded in the Council and the development of codes of practice for research in the North American Arctic. However, there are at least two significant obstacles remaining for Indigenous participation: First, the aforementioned prohibitive cost of travel to meetings for the six organisations' representatives. And second, the level at which working group-discussions remain in the practical and advisory sphere – prior to, or separate from, the more high-level discussions and decision-makings.

As aforementioned, voting rights in the Arctic Council lie with the eight Arctic states, albeit after the “consultation” of the PPs. One Norwegian explained that “[The Saami] have a phenomenally important role. Of course. [...] But from a defence perspective it is a bit harder to consider that [...]” (N.8). In their words, they are “an obviously important stakeholder”, yet arguably not on all issues or policy-areas. As such, Indigenous voices may speak – but are only *audible* within already prescribed parameters of “Indigenous interests” (see Bjørst

2012). Speaking about some of the most challenging aspects of Arctic work, another reflected that these may indeed be the “conflicts of interest that may arise at the intersection of a desire for development and for preserving Indigenous traditions and knowledge; traditions, knowledge, language, and culture” (N.9). The same respondent was quick to add that this was not only the case with Indigenous peoples, but all societal groups with different interests, citing also the example of environmental organisations. Nevertheless, there is strikingly little if any talk about Indigenous development, research, and political views on e.g. foreign affairs and defence. “And of course, it is extremely important to get [the Saami Parliament’s] experience and consider the Indigenous interests” (N.2) – but, in this way, Indigenous interests may remain “other” and their views seemingly based on the past. Indigenous and traditional seem to go hand-in-hand, at times explicitly, at others implicitly. In turn, this makes it no surprise that it is seen as practically difficult to find a meaningful place for Indigenous participation across all aspects of Arctic governance.

(iv) Reassessment of Self

Fourthly and finally, several interviewees admitted a sense of own Arctic identity being somehow “lesser” than Indigenous peoples, or even people from further north than themselves – suggesting a sense of own alterity and even humility in perceived hierarchies of “Arcticness” (see Medby 2017). One Norwegian representative answered the question of Arctic identity somewhat hesitatingly as “perhaps first and foremost a North Norwegian and Saami thing” (N.4). They continued that international collaborations, such through the Arctic Council, had perhaps led to more of a shared circumpolar identity among Indigenous peoples today than previously – shared around specific “Arctic” issues, which the representative did not feel related to their own or other non-Indigenous lives in the same way. The interviewed Norwegians were all careful not to claim an identity that was not theirs but ostensibly Saami, while at the same time reflecting on an Arctic identity otherwise defined. Geography was one such “otherwise” legitimately Arctic. A surprising number of interviewees spoke of their own attachments to the geographical North, whether through family, childhood, or other experiences – resonating, once more, with what Tuck and Yang (2012 drawing on Mawhinney 1998) refer to as “moves to innocence” to cognitively reconcile colonial complicity. However, it does also demonstrate one example of hesitation and humility, whereby reassessing past relations may become possible.

At least one interviewee explicitly identified as Saami themselves: “my identity is *very* connected to being from Finnmark county and having a multicultural background. That is, I am both Norwegian and Saami and have always lived in that tension” (N.1). What is here particularly interesting is that for them the discourses of Arctic *state* identity were articulated as clearly distinct from their Indigenous identity; in other words, political inclusion does not necessarily mean a common identity. While this demonstrates the above respect, it again inadvertently draws boundaries between different “types” (or even levels) of Arctic identities, interests, and worldviews. And it is worth considering that for a majority population, leaving certain so-called “Indigenous issues” (e.g. Saami language preservation or reindeer herding quotas) up to a minority population may be a negligible issue; however, when the minority population is thereby limited to *only* those issues and prescribed identities, that certainly is not.

In the case of Iceland, several interviewees brought up their aforementioned lack of Indigeneity – “but we are not an Arctic nation as the Indigenous people [...]” (I.2) – while at the same time speaking of a sense of shared issues, interests, and identities. Not only Iceland’s experience of relatively recent sovereign independence was brought up, but also their recent exclusion from Arctic decision-making between the five Arctic littoral states⁹ was for many a cause of solidarity with otherwise excluded views and voices. In addition to challenges of gaining (or trying to gain) full sovereign independence from Denmark, Icelandic ties to Greenland were discussed also through the maintenance of culture, heritage, and language as a small nation in a globalising world:

And like, Iceland is very supportive of Greenland having independence, and that is based on this historical experience of Iceland, [and] this notion of language, preserving the language, which has been very much the case here in Iceland [...] That is also very important about how you develop your own identity, with a distinct culture and language and history and things like that. [...] That is very important in this Arctic cooperation if it is to be of benefit to everyone (I.3)

At other times, however, the lines of similarity were drawn towards the west, towards Europe, and towards more “similar societies” in North Norway and the Faroe Islands: We have not had very much contact with Greenland, and as we have no other Aboriginals in Iceland it has been, probably, more difficult to associate ourselves with the local population in Greenland. [...] I *imagine* that the Aboriginal – I think, I hope this is the correct word to use – the First Nations around the Arctic... I *assume* they also feel some kind of common...

value among them. But Iceland is just a little bit special in this case that none of them are living here. (I.4)

As they also added, this sense of difference was not only because of different cultures, however, but “[a]lso because of the Danish – like, the direct contact between Denmark and Greenland, a lot of the cooperation with Greenland has to go through Denmark. It makes things a little bit more complicated” (I.4). Hence, the same colonial histories that for some led to shared affinities between Icelanders and Greenlanders may also set them apart.

Historically, Icelandic nationalists explicitly sought to distance themselves from their Greenlandic neighbours, arguing for independent statehood based on their “Europeanness” (Loftsdóttir 2009, 2010, see 2012). This relationship has of course changed drastically in more recent years. Today, they frequently collaborate on Arctic-related issues, not least through the West Nordic Council (which also includes the Faroe Islands; see Konradsdóttir and Nielsson 2014). However, it does show how fluid lines of connection and disconnection are; finding similarities and shared identities is a performative act as any other. It is not through acts of including *within* but through interactions *between* that a plurality of worldviews, identities, and voices may all be heard. And it may be through performances otherwise of what it might mean to share always heterogenous Arctic identities that discursive structures of political power may be rearticulated too.

Conclusions

In sum, “inclusion” of Indigenous peoples in Arctic statecraft and identities was articulated along similar lines by Norwegian and Icelandic state personnel. The Norwegian personnel referred to institutionalised divisions of political issues, whereby a Norwegian Arctic state identity could be articulated as independent of but *including* Indigenous perspectives. Particularly in the intergovernmental Arctic Council, it is the state’s responsibility to perform their duty to “consult” Indigenous organisations. Although praised as successful, this two-tier process nevertheless shifts agency from Indigenous organisations to the state – whose privilege it is to actively include. For Icelandic state personnel, their articulations of Arctic state identity were also made in relation to, yet different from, Indigenous such. Discourses among the interviewed Icelanders were that of simultaneous difference and similarity, such as small-nationhood and historical struggles for independence and political voice. They too spoke of the moral impetus of inclusion, which in relation to their majority-Inuit Greenlandic

neighbours was often articulated in terms of benevolence. In both states, the practicalities of inclusion, however, were often seen as more challenging. In other words, there is a disjunction between statements of inclusion and actual practices thereof. However, state personnel from both countries articulated a sense of own “otherness” too. These may potentially be glimmers of humility and discursive hesitations, which may allow reassessments, rearticulations, and reimaginings of what the Arctic state “is” and should be; not of who is included but who *fully* participates and inter-acts.

The above shows that most state personnel articulate wanting to include and listen to Indigenous perspectives in Arctic policy-making; however, as has been argued throughout the article, this attempt at inclusion may at times work against its intended purpose – something which extends beyond the Arctic context per se, to understandings of statecraft and state identities more broadly. By inviting so-called “Indigenous voices”, the stage is often already set for a performance of a highly specific role. More often than not, a handful of people are asked to represent potentially highly diverse worldviews, interests, hopes, and fears. These hopes and fears are in turn expected to relate to tradition, culture, language, and so on – in short, that for which the state may then “provide”. Hence, the state remains the level of decision-making, agency, and action; others, such as Indigenous peoples, remain prefixed at the “sub”-state level of consultation.

With this, the paper contributes a so far under-explored perspective on statecraft and state identities: bringing together insights on a “peopled” state – discourses of identity that permeate among its personnel – and how these are articulated through Indigenous “inclusion”. The paper has sought to shift attention to those granted agency to include, namely state personnel, and their perceptions of Arctic state identities. In so doing, the aim has been to highlight and, in turn, challenge the taken-for-granted discourses that ultimately structure political relations. By focusing on state personnel, it is possible to discern the discursive processes through which Indigenous peoples come to be “included” – as well as the limits of inclusion *within* a state.

While this article has explored these discourses among state personnel, further research is needed to take this work forward, asking: Firstly, how do articulated discourses translate to practical and embodied performances of inclusion or consultation look like within e.g. the

Arctic Council, its working groups, and other Arctic-related fora? Secondly, what are prevalent discourses among Indigenous representatives and/or populations; do these diverge considerably from state-level discourses or are there significant parallels? And thirdly, most importantly, how may these discursive openings and potentialities be harnessed for political change, and indeed, material decolonisation (see Tuck and Yang 2012)?

In closing and in laying out a new research agenda, there is, finally, also a need to consider academic “inclusion” – or better yet, working towards participation and collaboration. That is, the above argument extends beyond meeting rooms of policy-makers. It is a call for rethinking also, however well-meaning, academic attempts to “include” and speak *for* underrepresented peoples. Every time the “Indigenous” label is used as shorthand for something e.g. closer to nature, more “harmonic”, traditional, and so on, scholarship too contributes to the maintenance of discursive boundaries of Indigenous agency. To take Cameron’s (2015) cue, non-Indigenous researchers, just like state personnel, need to know when to adopt humility and a role of listener: Not by “including” the voices that may speak about (only) a list of wanted topics, but to radically un-learn preconceived assumptions, to open up for polyphony of viewpoints and opinions on *any* topic. Not everything has to be “included” or fit neatly into prescribed structures; *not* knowing and *not* speaking for can sometimes be the most powerful way to disrupt a stale discourse – in turn, opening for Indigenous peoples to articulate on own terms how and what participation should look like.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers and editor Professor Katherine McKittrick for their thoughtful reading, helpful comments, and patience. Their careful engagement with the text and generous suggestions for further reading has not only improved this paper but has also pushed my own thinking forward. I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues Sarah M. Hughes, Johanne M. Bruun, Philip Garnett, Doerthe Rosenow, Thomas Chambers, and Victoria Brown for feedback throughout the paper-writing process. Finally, I am indebted to the study’s respondents who gave up their time and offered their reflections on these topics; as well as Philip Steinberg, Angharad Closs Stephens, and Andrew Baldwin who offered guidance and support during the research project now some years ago.

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1 The Kven people is also another ethnic minority in Norway whose status as non-Indigenous has been debated in recent years; however, at present they are not recognised as such.

2 The broader study also included interviews with Canadian state personnel (see Medby 2018).

3 All translations, and hence errors, are the author's own.

4 In Norway, 9 interviewees worked for the six Ministries of: Climate and Environment, Justice and Public Security, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Local Government and Modernisation, Education and Research, and 7 were members of Parliament [*Stortinget*]. In Iceland, 9 interviewees worked for the five Ministries of: Foreign Affairs, Environment and Natural Resources, Education, Science and Culture, Industries and Innovation, Welfare, and 4 were members of Parliament [*Alþingi*].

5 As such, I make no claims of a generalisable sample; it is likely that those agreeing to be interviewed might have an interest in the Arctic regardless of professional portfolio (see Valentine 2005).

6 Some of which I am indebted to the anonymous peer reviewers of earlier iterations of this paper; thank you.

7 The Norwegian Saami Parliament (*Sámediggi*) is an elected body established to address Saami issues and represent Saami interests in Norway. The Saami Council (*Sámiráđđi*), on the other hand, is a non-governmental organisation consisting of nine Saami member organisations in Finland, Russia, Norway, and Sweden (Saami Council 2017). It is the latter umbrella organisation that has status as IPP in the Arctic Council.

8 Indigenous peoples are estimated to make up approximately 10% of inhabitants north of the Arctic Circle; the non-Indigenous 90% of Arctic citizens are thereby expected to be fully represented by the state.

9 Of the eight Arctic states with territory above the Arctic Circle, only five have coasts/ocean areas as far north as the Arctic Ocean: Norway, Canada, Russia, Denmark/Greenland, and the USA.