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Abstract

Geography is closely tied to language: denominations, definitions, and metaphors are all part of conditioning spatial understandings. In recent years, critical geographers have also highlighted that there is much more to geography than its representation. One philosopher whose work centred on the relationship between language and practice, meaning and use, was Ludwig Wittgenstein. Yet, explicit engagement with his thought has been modest in geography. This article argues that Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language offers useful contributions to the study of geography. It focuses on a space presently undergoing rapid "spatialisation", the Arctic, and draws on articulations by Norwegian state personnel, policy papers, and speeches. Using Wittgenstein's concept of "language-games", the paper demonstrates how spatial understandings are closely tied to practice, while political practices themselves are as much about knowing how to use language. The aim here is neither to unmask any hidden meaning nor to arrive at any one definition, but rather to highlight how meaning lies in terms' use. In order to "make sense of" seemingly competing names, definitions, and sayings, these must be seen in light of different practices. However, as socially defined, the "rules" may also change. This is arguably where the potential and political purchase of Wittgenstein's thought lies: in emphasising how geographical meaning is made through social and political interaction.

Keywords

Language-Games, Geography, and Making Sense of the Arctic

1. Introduction

> Naming is not yet a move in a language-game – any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess. One may say: with the mere naming of a thing, nothing has yet been done. Nor *has* it a name except in a game (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 28)

In the political arena, players may fight their political corners, use their bargaining chips, keep their hand close to their chest, or perhaps put on their poker face: There is no lack of games metaphors in politics. And language matters; it does not just reflect any preconceived meaning, but equally *produces* it through resonances (and dissonances) with experiences, associations, and memories. This political purchase of language is widely accepted in the discipline of geography; not as the *only* representational or meaning-making practice, and certainly not universal, but one that arguably merits attention in its spatialising effects. Perhaps as a reaction to what some might say became an over-privileging of the linguistic and textual, geographers have in recent decades pointed to the importance of practice, materiality, and the multi-sensorial human experience (see e.g. Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Wylie, 2005) – i.e. focusing not just what is said or written, but what is done, how. What has been highlighted by these recent bodies of work is that language too is about *use*, about interaction, and about embodied engagement with the world.

Preceding some of the broadly poststructuralist work often drawn upon in recent geographical scholarship, a thinker whose work centred on the relationship between language, thought, and action was Ludwig Wittgenstein. Although his name will be familiar to most, his work has not been extensively explored in the discipline of geography (however, see e.g. Amoore, 2014; Eades, 2016; Harrison, 2002). In the development of contemporary Western philosophy, however, Wittgenstein's

writing and thinking have been significant and taken up in other social scientific disciplines (see Pleasants & Moyal-Sharrock, 2016). As geographers today have become ever more attuned to practice and performance(Simonsen, 2007), it seems timely to return to his work. Particularly the later work of Wittgenstein centres on language and meaning not as inherent "essences", but as embedded in language's *use*. Among the concepts he developed, perhaps the most famous is "language-games". Not suggesting triviality, it highlights language's inherently social, active, and regulated character. Sense-making, then, happens within the game, which in turn is embedded in a "form of life" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §19), and "understanding" becomes external to any individual.

This paper argues for the relevance and application of Wittgenstein's later philosophy to geographical scholarship. In short, employing Wittgenstein's concepts provides a lens through which to interrogate spatialities neither as wholly discursively constructed nor pre-discursively emergent, but rather as outcomes of social practices. In turn, this allows analytical approaches that are sensitive to geographical descriptions, names, and words less as phenomena to be deconstructed for their "meaning", and rather as meaningful within their respective games: social, plural, and always changing. In order to explore these ideas, the paper takes the Arctic as its case. Specifically, it focuses on the denomination of the geographical region, demonstrating how it only takes on meaning through its context and use – a point often overlooked in discussions about "defining" and "delimiting" the region.

The article proceeds by, firstly, offering an introduction to Wittgenstein, explaining in basic terms some key concepts such as "language-games"; and secondly, the influence of his work in the social sciences and in geography are briefly noted. Importantly, this is not an extensive review, but rather a brief background that lays the groundwork for the case to follow (not presuming prior knowledge on the reader's part). Thirdly, the Arctic site is presented, laying out why it is a region of, on the one hand, plentiful game-metaphors and, on the other, language-games. Fourthly, these language-games are

explored through the articulations of state personnel in one of the eight Arctic states, Norway. This draws on interviews about the question of identification with the region, as well as selected speeches and publications. In short, "the Arctic" tends to play its part in foreign policy, while domestic audiences are often presented with the High North (*nordområdene*) or North Norway – linguistic practices that have not yet been fully explored in scholarship on the region's spatialisation. However, even these few terms may take on different – though "resembling" – meanings according to their invocation. And, as becomes clear, language and geographical terminology are also intertwined with expertise, experiences, and emotions. Finally, tropes and clichés that tend to circulate in various regional fora are discussed: how certain sayings become well-known and repeated throughout stakeholder circles. Again, the point is less about words and more about the act of their utterance: namely, communicating a certain position, knowledge, and familiarity with a region and community – in short, knowing the game.

The aim here is not to arrive at any singular "correct" definition, but to consider the plurality of different definitions in context: to consider the game, players, and rules according to which statements may be "meaningfully" made. As such, the article argues that Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, and here particularly the concept of "language-games", provides a useful bridge between the ideational and the material, the representation and the represented – allowing us to see words and actions, meaning and life, as always already bounded together. And, indeed, bounded together socially and relationally "in play". The paper's contributions are therefore twofold: to the study of Arctic relations and spatial narratives, it offers an overdue discussion of specific language-use; and to the study of geography more broadly, it adds a conceptual lens that has so far not received as much attention as it arguably deserves in the context of spatial meaning-making practices.

2. Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Language

Although Wittgenstein's philosophy might not be, the name will be familiar to most. Without going deeply into biographical detail, some background will contextualise the discussion to follow. Ludwig Wittgenstein was of privileged Austrian background, and studied under Bertrand Russell at The University of Cambridge before eventually taking up a position there himself (Grayling, 2001; Monk, 1991). In the context of the present paper: Wittgenstein lived for a brief period of time in an Arctic state (albeit not above the Arctic Circle). Frustrated with academia, he moved to a cottage on the west coast of Norway in 1913-14, where he would also return in 1936-37. Oxaal (2010, pp. 8–10) explains that Wittgenstein's interest in "the magnetic north" arose in a period following the Polar explorations of Nansen, and later Scott and Amundsen. And on the topic of language, he is said to have learnt both Norwegian and Danish while there (Stewart, 2012). Iceland, also an Arctic state (see Dodds & Ingimundarson, 2012), is likely to have been the furthest north he ventured – and indeed the furthest north he ever wanted to: His student Desmond Lee reminisced of seminars often held in the rooms of the explorer Sir Priestley in Clare College, Cambridge. Sir Priestley was, in fact, an *Ant*arctic explorer, but nevertheless the cryospheric photos decorating the room apparently prompted Wittgenstein's assertion that he would not like to go to the Arctic, as there would be "no brown earth" there (cited in Lee, 2016, p. 485). The factual (in)correctness of this statement mattered perhaps little: the philosophical language-games in which Wittgenstein was here involved were far from the Arctic.

In contrast to Wittgenstein's later and perhaps more influential work, the early part of his philosophical efforts centred on linguistic essences and logic. In his doctoral project and later book, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, 2001 first published in 1921), Wittgenstein sought to find ineffable "singles" of which the world is made, as opposed to the "metaphysical nonsense" of most philosophers. Following his return to Cambridge in 1929 after years outside the academy, the rest of his career would

be spent largely refuting his own earlier arguments (see Monk, 2005). Hence, the earlier years are notable for the response they eventually generated from the author himself. His second and arguably most influential book was published posthumously: In the *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI*) (Wittgenstein, 2009 first published in 1953), Wittgenstein sought to demonstrate that the search for linguistic essences and logical structures is futile. He had by now become convinced that the meaning of language lies not in what words ostensibly "represent", pictures in the mind, but rather, that meaning lies in language's use. This conceptual reorientation was both influential on and no doubt influenced by contemporaneous currents in philosophy – some of which is often retrospectively referred to as ordinary language philosophy today (associated with other philosophers[1] in England, such as Austin, Strawson, and Ryle (see Laugier, 2013)).

Among the most influential concepts in *PI* was "language-games" [*Sprachspiele*]. Not suggesting that language is trivial, it refers to how, in order to make sense, rules have to be followed – not in a strict binary manner of "right" or "wrong", but as common conventions upon which language relies. The rule refers to an abstraction, applicable to all the possible applications of a word. Hence, knowing the rule means knowing how to *use* the word in different contexts. Unlike a dictionary definition, such rules are about nuances, inflections, connotations, and associations – including knowing how one's interlocutor is likely to interpret it in use: "It is not only agreement in definitions but also (odd as it may sound) in judgments that is required" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §242). Its many uses are not deterministically defined by the rule; but, like playing with a ball: "is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them – as we go along" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §83) – together. Importantly then, language is a game that cannot be played alone – meaning is only ever made in relation to and with others (see Bloor, 1983).

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[1] There is much more to be said about Wittgenstein's contemporary influences – as well as about subsequent interpretations, expansions, and critiques of his concepts – but the focus here is kept strictly limited to specific aspects of Wittgenstein's work's potential usefulness to the study of geography and the Arctic.

Accordingly, for Wittgenstein there is no such thing as "private language". A word is only meaningful when embedded in social context: "… the meaning of a word is its use in the language." (Wittgenstein, 2009 §43). He explains, "the term *'language-game'* is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §23) – and with that, language is inherently interactional. As will be elaborated below, this is one reason why Wittgenstein's work might be particularly well-suited to analyses of political and institutional conventions, norms, and indeed meanings – even if he did not himself explicitly engage the question of politics and power. This does not mean that misunderstandings cannot happen of course; language is inherently interpretative, ambiguous, and elastic. The same word can mean different things depending on how it fits into a wider situation (in geography, consider for example the words "home" or "landscape"), but will be related to other uses of it – what he calls "family resemblance". These blurry, "inexact" boundaries are not, he argues, philosophical problems to be overcome (as his younger self would have said), but are instead necessary for the functioning use of language (Wittgenstein, 2009 §71; see also Bondi & Davidson, 2011; Davidson & Smith, 1999). Although sketched out here only briefly, these are ideas that have influenced conceptual work to follow, and which can be usefully explored through the Arctic case elaborated on in the later part of the paper.

3. Influence and Legacy

Although not always discussed explicitly, Wittgenstein's influence can be seen across 20th and 21st century theory and philosophy. In some respects, Wittgenstein's language philosophy paved the way for the poststructuralist thought that perhaps more geographers are familiar with (see Barnes & Gregory, 1997; Scott & Simpson-Housley, 1989). Considering the related but not identical "games" – similar, overlapping, or different uses of a word – are perhaps not so far from Foucault's "discursive fields", where related statements and discursive practices make up discourses (see Foucault, 1972). Different

games – as different discursive fields – overlap, interrelate, and even depend on each other, but may nevertheless be considered interplays between groups, e.g. of actors, words, ideas, practices, and objects. Importantly, this point is also at odds with Cartesian mind/body dualism: in Wittgenstein's view, understanding and meaning are premised on practice and social interaction (Ó Tuathail, 2002). Hence, there is no "I think therefore I am", but I *am*, therefore I think (and speak and write in language) (see Smith cited in Edmonds & Warburton, 2012; McGinn, 1997). Or as Gearóid Ó Tuathail (2002, p. 607) explains in one of few political geographical papers explicitly (albeit briefly) engaging Wittgenstein's language-games: "Humans do not converse because they have inner thoughts to express; rather they acquire 'thoughts' because they are able to converse publicly using a shared ensemble of interpretative resources called a 'language.'" By implication, the apprehension of subjectivity and of self too, are dependent on practical being and acting, together. Conceptually, Butler's performativity (2011, 2015), which has also been highly influential in geography, may not be as distant then as one may first assume. That being said, in contrast to Butler, Foucault, and other thinkers whose work has been more widely taken up in geography, Wittgenstein focused more on language's own inception rather than implications for power or social relations. Nevertheless, for Wittgenstein too, it is practices that produce meaning, and that produce our subsequent reasoning for "why" we act as we do (see Harrison, 2000 for an excellent discussion of some of these philosophical connections). However, this is not to conflate nuances of different literatures or philosophical standpoints; there is certainly much more to be said about what specific theories offer over others and how they differ. Nevertheless, what this brief introduction is meant to indicate is Wittgenstein's potential relevance beyond what might first be assumed.

The concept of language-games, as well as other aspects of Wittgenstein's thought, have been taken up across many of the social sciences[2] (see e.g. Bloor, 1983; Pleasants & Moyal-Sharrock, 2016; Shotter, 1993; Staun, 2010). For example, Iver Neumann (2002) argues for a return of practice in the so-called "linguistic turn", and ethnographic methods in order to fully appreciate the going-ons of politics as "lived practices" (see also Frost & Lechner, 2016). He does so through the presently fitting example of Norwegian High North policy in the 1990s, illustrating how even scripted practices remain open and not-yet-determined in play. Another empirically proximate Wittgensteinian approach can be found in Ulrik Pram Gad's (2017) work on "sovereignty games", focusing in particular on Greenland's mimicry of sovereign state practices in anticipation of potential independence (see also Adler-Nissen & Gad, 2014). Also in the field of international relations, Einar Wigen (2015) directs attention to "inter-lingual relations" and specifically how meaning is maintained across linguistic communities and polities. In various ways, these interventions and others have expanded discussions in the social and political sciences; yet, more still remains to be said about the specific applications and contributions potentially found in Wittgenstein's own work – and here, in particular how it may add to understandings of geography.

Despite the above interest afforded by other social sciences, Wittgenstein's influence in geography has been modest. While it is only possible to speculate why this is the case, one reason might be Wittgenstein's own limited explicit engagement with spatiality (or with power and politics); another is the relative dominance in Anglophone geography of later poststructuralist theory. However, that is not to say Wittgenstein's thought has been entirely overlooked: Already four decades ago, Olsson (1980) artfully explored the intersections of language and geography with reference also to Wittgenstein. And a decade later, Scott and Simpson-Housley (1989) noted his relevance to contemporary discussions about

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[2] As aforementioned, Wittgenstein's work has also influenced and been reworked by subsequent philosophers, such as Kripke, Cavell, Bourdieu, and Mouffe – whose thought has also been engaged by geographers (see e.g. Pugh, 2017).

geography and postmodernism. More recently, Wittgenstein's thought has surfaced in the context of the aforementioned increased interest in practices (see Barnes & Duncan, 2011; Couper, 2007; Curry, 1991, 2000; Jones, 2008; Ó Tuathail, 2002; Simonsen, 2007; Stirk, 1999; Thrift, 1996). Some notable works within the last decade include Gwilym Eades' (2016) tracking of the spatiotemporal evolution of geographical names, where Wittgenstein's thought is used to demonstrate their inextricability with practices, beliefs, and societal systems. And Louise Amoore (2014) focuses on an encounter and argument between Wittgenstein and Turing in order to explore how contemporary security practices are based on certain grammars or calculi, i.e. the ordered bringing-together of items that alone make no "sense", but which in their specific arrangements come to "speak".

Moreover, Wittgenstein's thought has been considered in the context of geographers' interest in performance and non-/more-than-representational theories (see e.g. Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Jones, 2008; Lorimer, 2005; Thrift, 1996, 2007). Notably in discussing the shortcomings of a *modus operandi* of social scientific enquiry, Paul Harrison (2002, p. 487) argues that Wittgenstein's "work may provide us with other ways of going-on, ones more sensitive to the eventful, creative, excessive and distinctly uncertain realms of action". And yet, the uptake of Wittgenstein's philosophy has remained limited and far-between. With the above named few exceptions, his work is rarely thoroughly engaged with or applied in geographical scholarship, if at all mentioned. Recent disciplinary discussions have tended to be directed elsewhere, away from concerns with language and linguistic practices. In a time of inflammatory political rhetoric and dog-whistling, of climatic changes increasingly retold as "collapse" and "crisis", and of algorithmically produced communications that can incite powerful emotive responses, attention to language and its use is arguably as important as ever (Medby, 2019a).

It is therefore in this particular political as well as academic context that the present paper returns to Harrison's call for further consideration of the creative – and therefore inherently hopeful – potential of

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language-in-practice and practice-of-language. It is hopeful in the sense that an opportunity for bringing together the representational and the non-/more-than-representational, an understanding of not only the represented but indeed the act of represent*ing* – speaking, acting, practicing – may come into view too, drawing on Wittgenstein's work. In light of contemporary societal challenges, this also provides an entry-point to consider agency: Namely, who "speaks" (broadly defined), when, how and where; and importantly, how the "blurriness" of language-games' rules and boundaries may offer opportunities to challenge this. In other words, the concern here lies neither solely with words nor acts in and of themselves, but how they together tell us something about a reality that is undeniably social – and, by implication, a social reality that is also open to change and a future that is not yet determined. Perhaps by considering *both* the ideational and the practical in their interconnectedness may we begin to find "the way out of the fly-bottle" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §309). Thus, the present paper builds on the above valuable and instructive work, but pushes further by focusing squarely on how some of Wittgenstein's later philosophy and conceptual vocabularies could contribute to contemporary geographical inquiry; and it does so by exploring the sense-making practices of the Arctic context.

4. The Arctic Playing-Field

Considering Wittgenstein's notion of language-games in a geographical context, the Arctic region provides an interesting case. Unlike many other geographical terms and concepts – such as space, place, region, and so on – the Arctic suggests a *name*. However, as soon becomes clear, no more than the nouns, verbs, etc. that Wittgenstein the elder argues against the younger do *not* have essences, do *not* delimit logic and reality, neither is the Arctic univocal (Spence, 2017). Rather, as Arctic interest increases, it is becoming ever more clear that there is no singular meaning, no singular, locatable place. What we are seeing, however, is the continual "spatialisation" of the Arctic, the ongoing making of a region through a diverse set of practices (Knecht & Keil, 2013). These processes of, *inter alia*, Arctic territorialisation, regionalisation, and statisation have attracted attention from not only media and

politicians, but also geographers (Steinberg, Tasch, & Gerhardt, 2015). A burgeoning field of critical

polar geopolitics, for example, has highlighted the complex relationships between actors,

environments, resources, and politics in what many consider the poster-region of climate change (e.g.

Dodds & Nuttall, 2015; Keil & Knecht, 2017a; Powell & Dodds, 2014). Others have considered its

cultural, historical, and economic geographies, to mention but a few topics of recent interest (e.g.

Arbo, Iversen, Knol, Ringholm, & Sander, 2013; Cameron, 2015; Jensen, 2016; Lewis-Jones, 2017;

Nuttall & Callaghan, 2000; Shadian, 2012). However, in contrast to Arctic discourses and narratives, to

date the specific language and language-practices of its denomination and linguistic spatialisation have

not received extensive and in-depth academic analysis. That is, in spite of a rich body of work on Arctic

space-making practices, the actual *language*-practices – borders drawn by words and metaphors – are

often noted in passing, but rarely discussed in an extended manner. Indeed, the elasticity and

multiplicity of the region's own definitions have arguably become a taken-for-granted caveat of Arctic

discourse – in turn, risking the inadvertent obfuscation of the language-practices that produce this

effect, as well as their socio-political outcomes.

As part of ongoing Arctic "spatialisations" through cartography, science, and politics, state actors have

actively sought to assert themselves as the key players in the Arctic field also through language and

practice (see Wilson Rowe, 2018a). These are in particular the eight member states of Arctic Council:

Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark/Greenland, Iceland, Canada, the US, and Russia. Nevertheless,

the region is also idiosyncratic in the inclusion of a wide spectrum of non-state actors in governance

arrangements, most notably Indigenous peoples' organisations partaking in the Arctic Council (Medby,

2019b), as well as the welcome of numerous "observers" from near and far (Knecht, 2017). It is this

broad, albeit hierarchical, inclusiveness that has led scholars to describe Arctic political practices in

terms of a "mosaic" (Young, 2005), a "bazaar" (Depledge & Dodds, 2017), and indeed global (e.g.

Bennett, 2014; Keil & Knecht, 2017b). All of this hints at the difficulty of demarcating what an Arctic

"field" might be – who are the "players", and what are the "rules"? Drawing such a border is not the aim here, however. On the contrary, what is of particular interest is how different language-games are played between diverse stakeholders – same words used, but with different meanings depending on context, relation, and users. Again noting the importance of the "game's" inherent playfulness and improvisational "rules", this allows for a more nuanced conceptualisation of agency in Arctic relations: There is no singular "speaker" or "listener" in Arctic discourse; there is neither a monologue nor dialogue, but rather conversation(s) – even if at times dominated by certain voices, as will be returned to later in the paper.

In the context of games, the Arctic is also a particularly fitting case due to its frequent association with populist ideas of e.g. a "race", "rush", and "scramble" to the Poles, even a "new Cold War" (Baev, 2007; Craciun, 2009; Howard, 2009; Sale & Potapov, 2009). These seem persistent imaginaries, despite great effort spent by experts and academics in recent years to debunk sensationalist headlines (see Dodds & Nuttall, 2015; Graczyk, Smieszek, Koivurova, & Stepien, 2017; Steinberg, Bruun, & Medby, 2014; Wilson Rowe, 2013; Woon, 2014). Most recently, National Geographic published an Arctic-themed issue with a cover that read "The New Cold War: As the ice melts, old rivals scramble for position" (*National Geographic Magazine: The Arctic is Heating Up*, 2019). Perhaps connected to historical competitions between imperial powers, masculinity and bravery (Bloom, 1993; Drivenes, 2004; Lewis-Jones, 2017) – brought to the present in the shape of e.g. Olympic Games' torches reaching the North Pole (Bennett, 2016) – the Arctic does seem particularly prone to the aforementioned game-metaphors. Such metaphors are anything but inconsequential; they are part of the above "spatialisation", of constructing the Arctic as a certain *kind* of space (Wilson Rowe, 2018a, 2018b). And, adding to this, non-linguistic signs frequently feature too – e.g. dice to illustrate Arctic meetings, and Arctic *inuksuit* to illustrate (the Vancouver Olympic) games – only bolstering these associations (Wood-Donnelly, 2018). As such, the Arctic is by many imagined as a geopolitical playing-field in itself, where political "moves"

are made according to the "rules", e.g. of diplomacy and international law (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)). However, what is interesting about such metaphors is not only any mental picture produced, but how said picture – the "understanding" of the metaphor – is also premised on knowing a social practice, the practical experience of playing a game.

By here focusing on what *seems* to provide a demarcatable, geographical space, it is brought into all the sharper relief that language – be it names, terms, tropes, or metaphors – is anything but static, anything but singular-essence. While this is not a new insight per se, Wittgenstein's thought provides a pertinent way of conceptualising (and indeed, articulating) the ways in which the languages of Arctic relations function and what they *do* socially and politically. The Arctic, like all the words in its "family" – North, High North, etc. – may then be conceptualised not as the field, but in itself a "move", relying on the "rules of the game" to be meaningful. Or rephrased, it is the active employment of the word – how, when, where, and by whom – that gives it meaning and gives it life. As will be returned to in the paper's conclusion, it is these insights and particular aspects brought to attention by Wittgenstein's work that makes it so relevant to geographical scholarship.

In what follows, Arctic language-games – Arctic meanings-in-use – are explored through statements by Arctic state personnel. Focusing specifically on one of the eight Arctic states, Norway, the empirical focus was chosen due to the state's employment of identity discourse relation to the region: that is, an explicit positioning as an Arctic nation in the face of international interest and involvement at the time. While the time-period around 2014 saw a surge in media interest in the region – no doubt connected to broader NATO-Russian relations – the case also offers a useful example in *not* being exceptional as such. That is, another case study could equally have been used to demonstrate the geographical applicability and usefulness of Wittgenstein's philosophy – as is indeed the argument of the paper. Nevertheless, through its Arctic and specifically Norwegian focus, the paper also adds a linguistic aspect to the above

mentioned critical polar geopolitics scholarship, albeit acknowledging that there is much more that can and should be said about other states and actors – i.e. "players" – in the field.

The paper draws on 16 interviews conducted with state personnel in 2014-15, speeches, and formal policy publications relating to the state's Arctic relations (N.Gov't, 2017; N.MFA., 2006, 2011; N.MTIF, 2015). Hence, these are what some would call "elite" use, and not a review of national vernacular per se (nor an exploration of language-use by e.g. non-Arctic or non-state actors). Moreover, interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and all translations, and hence errors, are the author's own. The interviews were conducted under the strict promise of confidentiality, which means that no potentially identifying details are provided about each respondent below[3]. The semi-structured interviews asked state personnel to reflect on their notions of Arctic statehood and sense of Arctic identity (see Author 2017). And, as will be elaborated below, these articulations of identity frequently happened through stories of involvement, engagement, and even embodied experiences (Author 2018).

Worth noting however, interviews constitute a particular type of social interaction, possibly conceptualised as a language-game themselves in their semi-structured interplay, and so the data must also be interpreted as such. As laid out in the discussion of Wittgenstein's thought, language-use is relational, which means that those involved are all "players", including here the interviewer. In other words, the language used below – words, similes, or choice of content – are all influenced by the author's presence too. Much more could be said about positionality and situatedness of research, but in the context of the present paper what it highlights is the contextuality of language too. That is, recognising the "audience" becomes crucial to discussion, even if language's reception can never be fully anticipated or known by the speaker. In the same manner as the case is not the only that could have

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[3] At the time of the interviews (2014/15), nine interviewees worked for the six Ministries of Climate and Environment, Justice and Public Security, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Local Government and Modernisation, and Education and Research, and seven were members of Parliament (*Stortinget*).

been chosen, so too could other methods have provided equally valuable, albeit different, insights. Thus, the below is written in the hope that it opens up for further work to take up issues and concepts further.

The discussion below is ordered in four sections on (1) the Arctic language-game, (2) related grammars e.g. of the (High) North, (3) understanding and knowing through embodied experiences, and (4) language-use as social and interactional. In short, the below demonstrates how representing, imagining, and understanding the Arctic cannot be divorced from the practical and the material too: the Arctic language-game is not only played in a moment of political speech, but also in boardrooms, books, films, imaginations, and indeed the snow.

5. Articulating the Arctic

5.1 Arctic

To begin with, the "Arctic" – name, noun, adjective – is, somewhat ironically, of distant etymological origin, which was also something interviewees frequently reflected on. From Greek [*arktos*], the "Arctic" refers to "of the bear" – not the polar bear, but the constellation Ursa Major, which was used for maritime navigation in the circumpolar north ('Arktisk', 2005). Of course, here one may consider how "bear" too takes on a wholly different meaning than its furry namesake – a star, a position, a region – based on navigational practice. In short, in the language-game of historical seafarers, the bear means something different – but *related* – to e.g. its zoological counterpart, the stuffed toy on child's bed, the Russian Federation, and so on, all within their specific games: they are a family of resembling cases (see Wittgenstein, 2009 §67). Back to "the Arctic", what this shows is how names can be traced back to practices. Today too, the name takes its meaning from how it is employed, and as one interviewee acknowledged, it is "a question of definition that is politically very important". This is also what the

article's opening quote by Wittgenstein refers to: a name means nothing outside its context and use. "The Arctic" is meaningless until the region is engaged with *as such*. Perhaps most often, it is invoked in international discourse, in high-level geopolitical practice, and – like the Greek voyagers – with and by those hailing far from the region itself. These different meanings may be considered as belonging to different language-games, where the term refers to, *inter alia*, a specific region, climate, geopolitical issue, or imaginary. Again, these are all related, all share many commonalities, but point to different conversations and activities taking place: multivalence as a matter of multi-use.

If "the Arctic" means different things to different people this is not a result of personal opinion: they are playing different language-games, acting within different forms of life (see Wittgenstein, 2009 §24). These games include those of biologists, climatologists, cartographers, and of course, politicians. When Norwegian state personnel were asked about the meaning of Arctic statehood, several started with the political definition – namely, the latitude of the Arctic Circle, 66 °33' degrees north. However, as shown in Figure 1, even the Arctic Council's thematic working groups (such as AMAP and CAFF, below) employ different definitions depending on their focus: examples include the 10 °C July isotherm, the treeline, or socio-political populations[4] (Grønnestad, 2016). This resonates with Wittgenstein's (2009 §26) explanation that "naming is something like attaching a name tag to a thing. One can call this preparation for the use of a word. But *what* is it a preparation *for?*". Wittgenstein continues to consider the naming as an act of communication, but points out the equal value of e.g. "here" and "there" as spatial signifiers. What we are left with is the importance of making sense in context, among peers. How the Arctic is precisely bordered and bounded is only secondary to the social recognition of this boundedness. The "preparation" is for the work to be done within working groups,

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[4] With climate change, some definitions mean that the Arctic region is literally shrinking.

the Council, and other fora – including cartographic work that in turn produces Arctic spatialities (Strandsbjerg, 2012).

Fig. 1: Map of the Arctic showing some different regional definitions.

Source: Roto, J.(2007), Nordregio at archive.nordregio.se.

5.2 North

Unlike in these international fora, speaking to domestic audiences about "the Arctic" (or in Norwegian, "*Arktis*") may invoke foreignness and become an act of distancing – even if it is often (roughly) the same geographical area. This was a point raised by a diplomat who explained that they thought that many would still consider the Arctic as something and somewhere seemingly foreign:

> [U]sing 'Arctic identity' or that Norway is an 'Arctic state', exactly those words, I am a bit uncertain about. Because, 'Arctic', in itself, is a foreign word in the Norwegian vocabulary, and it is not used so much; but that people have a strong identity of being a coastal state, near the coast, and having a northern identity, of that I am quite certain.

Hence, in Norway, "*nordområdene*" (literally, "the northern areas", but usually translated as "the High North") has been the favoured term (Skagestad, 2010; Wærp, 2014). The Norwegian report *Future North* (N.MTIF, 2015, p. 31) describes the ambiguous High North[5] as "[…] a broader geographical impact area than North Norway. Attention has been turned to the large sea areas in the north, to Svalbard and the Arctic". Hence, it is a term implicitly referring less to the circumpolar and more to the Norwegian north – perhaps, as Sörlin (2013, p. 9) argues, "political rhetoric designed to make the

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[5] Interestingly, a High North/Arctic distinction has recently also seemed to emerge in the Anglophone, and specifically UK context, whereby the former may allow discussions of 'hard' security and defense in a manner that the latter has precluded due to the latter's discursive association with "cooperation" and "dialogue" (Depledge, Dodds, & Kennedy-Pipe, 2019)

territories north of Norway's Scandinavian mainland seem just a continuation of home" (see also Hønneland & Jensen, 2008).

The example of "northern areas" highlights once more the contextuality of meaning: the north is only ever such in relation to a south. As obvious as it may seem, stood in London, "the north" may refer to Manchester; in Melbourne, it may be the Tropics. Hence, knowing the language-game, the wider situation in which the word is said, is necessary for any meaning. For some, the endless relativity of the north is a problem. Yet, as has been shown above, "the Arctic" may be no more universally understood. Indeed, in an attempt to clarify, and to delimit meaning, one interviewee offered the following explanation:

> [B]ecause the High North is primarily in the Arctic; at the same time as the High North stretches, perhaps, a bit further than the Arctic. The Arctic is, really, north of the Arctic Circle, strictly speaking, but that is more of a, perhaps, technical view. A popular view is that it can vary a lot. It can run much further south, in fact, than the Arctic Circle; but others can also think that it runs much further north, actually. So, I think it is overlapping. And… it depends a lot on where you 'stand' when the question is asked.

Here it may also be worth noting that not just "the Arctic" but also "High North" are relatively recent additions to popular discussion. In the past, names denoting related (although not identical) geographical areas include Hålogaland, North Norway, the North Calotte, and the Barents region (Hønneland, 1998; Hønneland & Jensen, 2008; Niemi, 1993). And furthermore, strikingly absent from these terminological reflections among interviewees, as well as from wider Arctic discussions, is "*Sápmi*": the name of Indigenous Saami homelands[6]. Again, language-use is far from socially and politically inconsequential, as the space becomes spatialised in highly specific ways.

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[6] This is a point I am indebted to Bente Aasjord for.

It does seem that the Norwegian governmental use of specifically "the Arctic" is on the increase, possibly reflecting growing familiarity both on politicians' and electorates' part over the last 10-15 years, and possibly due to its more common usage internationally. For example, whereas the Norwegian government has published High North strategies in the past (e.g. N.MFA., 2006, 2011), the short English-language summary of its 2017 Arctic Strategy made no mention of "the High North" (N.Gov't, 2017). The full Norwegian-language version employs "*nordområdene*" throughout, defining for the purposes of the strategy "*Arktis*" as referring to the entire circumpolar region north of the Arctic Circle, whereas "*nordområdene*" is explained as: "more political and less precise than '*Arktis*', and is not clearly demarcated by the Arctic Circle. In the Strategy, '*nordområdene*' is used as a more rounded term, which nevertheless in practice is virtually equal with '*Arktis*'" (N.Gov't, 2017, p. 6). While it remains to be seen what terminology will be used in the Norwegian government's forthcoming white paper (due for presentation to Parliament in autumn 2020 (Eriksen Søreide, 2019)), it is clear that recent political speeches have favoured "the Arctic" when addressing international audiences. Recalling the act of naming as "preparation" thus raises the question of what this linguistic change means for future practice. In this language-game it would seem to be a move away from domestic political priorities in the north, towards international affairs and, in particular, an increasing oceanic focus.

What is roughly the same "signified" then – e.g. a space north of the Arctic Circle – here has more than one signifier: North, Arctic, High North, etc. The reverse of the previous example of a single word's multivalence, it shows, once more, the inextricability of language and its use. Wittgenstein refers to this as words of "related grammars" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §150). Domestic and foreign policy entail different practices, and can therefore be considered as different language-games too: On the one hand, speaking of "the (High) North" to international audiences may imply a national, potentially even negatively protectionist, focus; on the other, speaking of "the Arctic" to domestic audiences may imply a focus not applicable or relevant to them. These are generalisations, of course – audiences are often aware of these

family resemblances, the many simultaneous associations at play (see also Dittmer & Gray, 2010) – but it highlights how knowing when to *use* which term, how, and to/by whom, is dependent not on strict definitions, but on elastic conventions. And more than this, it depends on awareness and attention to audiences, or more accurately, co-players in the language-game – and the ability to anticipate their reception, interpretation, and the "next move". Here terminological ambiguity may not always be an obstacle, but rather an asset. Wittgenstein (2009 §71) asks metaphorically: "Is it even always an advantage to replace a picture that is not sharp by one that is? Isn't one that isn't sharp often just what we need?". Socially and politically, language thus offers scope for manoeuvre and for change.

5.3 Understanding and knowing the field

As noted, the interviews drawn upon here centred on notions of "Arctic identity" among state personnel – the Arctic not as noun but modifier. In their articulations of what it means to "be" or "represent" an Arctic state, the modifier proved as flexible as the name. Identity as such was simultaneously articulated as a matter of geography, of history, of international, national, and regional relations, and even of personal experiences (see Author 2018). Firstly, this referred to professional practice, an everyday job as state representative and contact with an Arctic title. One respondent explained that they were not sure if the Arctic was a major part of national identity for most, but that perhaps "for us working with the Arctic, perhaps it can [be]. We are of course interested in it. We have read all these books and, like, know this history and such because it is a field that interests us". However, secondly, it was also a matter of personal practices or experiences more broadly. On the topic of Arctic policy communication, one parliamentarian reflected on the heterogeneity of the Arctic – the simultaneity of vast expanses of tundra and of bustling urban centres – as "contrasts that can be difficult to communicate only through words, and which just require people to see it with their own eyes". This might indeed have been what Wittgenstein too recognised in his pedagogy and philosophy as, famously and aforementioned, his aim was "to *show* the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §309,

emphasis added). What this demonstrates – both in philosophical writing and in Arctic policy – is that language is always inextricably tied to social practices and experiences.

Moreover, many interviewees spoke of winter activities and games, and even of embodied sensations of cold. For many Oslo-based interviewees, their Arctic connection was interwoven with a more general notion of national identity, including "national" pastimes such as skiing. Again, the meaning of "being" Arctic, of representing an Arctic state, was intimately tied to practice and even haptic perception. Here, the qualities of the Arctic, "Arcticness" (see Kelman, 2017), extend beyond latitudinally defined territories to encompass far more. And indeed, returning briefly to consider Wittgenstein's visits to Norway, his companion David Pinsent wrote in his 1912 diary of landscapes he described as the following: "Down in the valleys the country is very wooded, but up higher there is only grass, and higher still nothing but rock and glacier – quite *arctic*" (Pinsent, 2016, p. 220 emphasis added). What is here referred to has very little to do with exact latitudinal lines of course, and far more with qualities and characteristics; and importantly, characteristics that imaginary interlocutors would know without any further explanation. Back in the present, it is common to hear officials preface their Arctic speeches with their personal connection to the north – be it through parental ancestry, childhoods spent in northern summer cabins, or serving military conscription in high latitudes. It is easy to dismiss this as mere rhetoric, but here it is also worth considering what these moves in the language-games *do* – to/for both speakers and listeners – extending to the cognitively and emotionally associative. As Wittgenstein explains, instead of searching for definitions, we need to consider the specific usage of the word: not looking for *what* is represented, but instead *how* (see also Depledge, 2015). When a senior politician started the interview by reminiscing of holidays spent in North Norway, it suggested how identity, awareness, and *knowing* the Arctic came about through experiences – experiences which, in turn, for them were closely tied to (positively inflected) practices of caring, leisure, and memory. Thus, what for many would bring immediate associations to a geographical region – coordinates in space, lines on maps

– soon turns out to be much *more*. It is understood through the senses, rather than a "mental process" (Wittgenstein, 2009 §154), through professional and personal practices, rather than formal definitions.

5.4 Social Language

Recalling the "bazaar"-like governance arrangements in the Arctic (Depledge & Dodds, 2017), there is no denying that a lot of Arctic political practice involves participating in numerous Arctic fora, conferences, meetings, symposia, assemblies, and so on (see also Steinveg, 2017). One of the striking attributes of such events is the ubiquity of certain sayings, certain Arctic "memes". Heard repeated, echoing throughout conference venues in circumpolar north are clichés such as: "There is not one but many Arctics" and "what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic" (Lempinen, 2016). Both are meaningful in and of themselves, of course – indeed, the former seems to suggest something similar to the above discussion of family resemblances. What is interesting, though, is their verbatim reiteration: they have become performative of "Arcticness", of expertise, and of policy-circle know-how (Kuus, 2014, 2016). For example, when Singapore's Minister Sam Tan (2017) exclaimed on an Arctic conference stage in North Norway that what happens in the Arctic reaches his country too, he skilfully turned the familiar trope so that it came across as ever more powerful to this particular audience. In this manner, uttering these propositions on a podium does not simply tell the audience about circumpolar heterogeneity or global implications of climate change. What they *also* tell – their move in the Arctic language-game – is about the speaker (see Neumann, 2007). As Wittgenstein (2009 §199) explains it: "To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to have mastered a technique". In this Norwegian conference setting, the Minister showed his mastery and participation in this language-game. Hence, meaning lies not in the composition of words *per se*, but in the composite's deployment. However, as not just commonly but *overly* used sayings, some of their usage may communicate to others the opposite of the speaker's intention: namely, lack of knowledge of their now clichéd status. Again, knowing the language-game – and knowing the other players – is crucial.

The sayings presented above are not the only ones echoing through the circumpolar north, of course. There is a long list of Arctic buzzwords, all of which could merit a study in their own right. For example, considering the different meanings of "sustainability" or "development" in the Arctic when used in different fora, by different actors clearly highlights the contextuality Wittgenstein points too (see Gad & Strandsbjerg, 2018; Medby, 2018b; Wilson Rowe, 2018b). Each presents different moves with highly different outcomes depending on the language-game in which they are involved. Likewise, more could be said about the interactions between actors, be they speaker and audiences or interviewee and interviewer. However, what all of the above shows is that understanding – or making sense in and of the Arctic – relies not on correct definitions or clear borders, but on social experiences and practical relations: insights that Wittgenstein's thought and conceptual vocabulary help bring to light, potentially expanding and enriching understandings of geography.

6. Conclusion

In the end, the above demonstrates how applying some of Wittgenstein's later philosophy to geographical enquiries usefully highlights aspects of language-in-use, and thus, aspects of spatial meaning-making. For geographers, this offers a fruitful way of approaching questions of spatiality as social and ongoing – and a way to join analytical viewpoints of the represented, the more-than-representational, and indeed the continual practices of representation. Here, "making sense of" the Arctic and regional relations requires an understanding of the language-game in which statements about them are made. While the multiplicity of regional definitions, the aforementioned "many Arctics", are recognised, so far surprisingly little academic attention has been granted what this linguistic contextuality *does* – politically, socially, relationally. It is here that arguably the later philosophy of Wittgenstein comes in particularly useful. Articulations, assertions, and arguments are only meaningful as long as they follow the rules of the game, the social conventions. The "Arctic", "High North", and the

"North" cannot (and should not) be defined as singular-meaning, but instead what matters is the contexts in which they are used – that is, the specific functions played by each term in their respective games. Although these functions, or "moves", are not predetermined, there is nevertheless a limited number of meaningful ways in which any word may be used (see Wittgenstein, 2009 §195).

Knowing the game – how to "play" – is perhaps what makes a skilful *player* in the Arctic arena then. These skills are, as any game-playing ability, about practice and experience. Hence, those employed to represent the Arctic state Norway on a daily basis articulated the meaning of the title through their own active engagement. Their spatial understandings – and indeed, their articulations of own identity – are based on, *inter alia*, political tasks, travels, and activities. Even when interviewees mentioned political-legal definitions of latitudes and sovereignty, they did so in conjunction with a recognition of *knowing* and *sensing* the Arctic as exceeding these. Rules, then, are not drawn up and subsequently followed; instead, rules emerge through social interaction, through "forms of life", and through practice. What this means is that rules too may be changed. How and why and by whom engagement with the region plays out is not predetermined, but still an unfolding playing field and future.

Beyond the specific case study, what the above shows is that in order to "make sense of" seemingly competing geographical names, definitions, and sayings, these must be seen in light of different practices. The overlap and blurry boundaries between language-games are no doubt part to blame for confusion. However, importantly, these explicitly contested meanings also provide an opportunity for *change*. That is, by highlighting the competing ways in which e.g. "the Arctic" is used depending on desired outcome, attention may be directed to the politics of any attempt to fix terminological fluidity, of "rule"-setting practices. This is where the potential and political purchase of Wittgenstein's thought lies, in emphasising how meaning is made not only through use but through interaction: As they are socially defined, rules may also *change* through different practices and social relationality, through

pushing the boundaries of the game, and through playing otherwise. Questions that then arise relate to who may play, why, when, and how; what are the power-relations of the game. Game or not, the playing field is never equal – which offers an important avenue for future geographical engagement with Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.

Finally, this paper has argued the need for and benefit of taking up some of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the study of geography. In a time of increasing disciplinary focus on practices and embodied experiences, these insights should also be brought to language and meaning. In particular, there are two avenues for further work worth highlighting, falling broadly within the sub-disciplines of cultural and political geography. Firstly, this paper has provided an introduction to some of the key concepts of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, but there is scope for deeper and more sustained consideration of specific concepts or aspects of them: The question of agency and power is pertinent, probing further how language-games come about and how they dissipate socially. For example, questions include further consideration than that above of who is (not) heard or making sense; or how far can rules be stretched before they are broken, thus becoming an utterance of "nonsense". Secondly and relatedly, the social dynamic of interacting "players" of the language-game can and should be explored further. For example, it is clear that whatever is stated relies as much on the speaker as those listening, but how to capture this in geographical analyses merits further discussion than was here possible. Both of the above broad themes can be taken up through a narrow focus on Wittgenstein's own work, but clearly there is also much to be gained by bringing these into conversation with other conceptual frameworks – also those already more mainstream in geography. Either way, there is much more to be said – while this paper is one move, the language-game and conceptual conversation is far from over.

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