

Critical geopolitics of the polar regions: An inter-American perspective. Dorothea Wehrmann, 2018. London and New York: Routledge, 258 pp., HARDCOVER. £ 120.00.

Dorothea Wehrmann's *Critical Geopolitics of the Polar Regions: An Inter-American Perspective* should find a place high up in the pile of books of any reader interested in polar affairs. The book comes at a time when the Arctic and Antarctic studies community could not be further apart due to an antipode thinking on both sides that highlights differences and neglects commonalities between the two regions. But, those who claim the Arctic and Antarctic would constitute polar opposites mistake comparison for equation (cf. Young, 2016). Wehrmann's book makes a strong case not only for comparing the polar regions but also for the diverse ways in which the two are interconnected. These "interpolar entanglements" constitute the core analytical category of the book and are the main source of an extensive empirical analysis of actors, discourses and processes in polar politics.

Chapter 1 of the book starts with the observation that, despite all the differences, dominant discourses in and about Arctic and Antarctic governance have taken similar directions in the past. The central question for the author then is how these similarities as well as instances of dissimilarity can be understood and explained. In order to answer this question, three broader assumptions are made, namely (a) that the two polar regions are comparable and can be analysed in one analytical framework, (b) that they constitute spaces of various entanglements produced and reproduced through geopolitical reasoning by state and non-state actors and (c) that such discursively constructed representations matter for how political issues in both polar regions are dealt with. Chapter 2 provides an insightful discussion of the state-of-the-art and open research gaps in the study of polar governance and politics and continues to formulate a synergistic analytical framework informed by transnational relations, entanglements, critical geopolitics and political imaginaries. Chapters 3–5 are structured around three established concepts adopted from the critical geopolitics school and focus on how representations of polar issues and their governance by state and non-state actors (*practical geopolitics*), the media (*popular geopolitics*) and the academic community (*formal geopolitics*) are constructed, brought into and negotiated in political processes. Beyond providing a comprehensive descriptive account of polar discourses, their emergence over time and the competing narratives and imaginaries embedded in them, this tripartite analysis "allows a better understanding of the changing political positions and power-relations in the politics of the Polar Regions" (p. 21).

Wehrmann's book makes at least three distinct contributions to polar research. The first is the introduction of a novel perspective on polar politics in the form of entanglements and disentanglements. The "dis/entanglement perspective" adds to the toolkit of policy networks, collaborative governance and institutional interplay known and used in polar studies by revealing how discursive practices from various sources lead to specific ordering principles which in turn affect national policy responses, collective action as well as international negotiations and their outcomes for the governance of the polar regions. There is much to learn from that perspective, particularly because it enables the reconstruction of the similarity of events in both regions, that is, where the Arctic and Antarctic become a matter of interpolar entanglements, as well as peculiarities and deviations (or disentanglements) in their respective evolution.

The conceptual tool of dis/entanglements, secondly, broadens the analysis of polar politics beyond predefined spatial scales, levels of governance or political institutions by focusing on underlying representations and interpretations instead. Entanglements between discourse and politics do not emerge within, and thus are not restricted to, the boundaries of any given geographical or institutional context. Two innovations result from this discourse ontology. Bridging levels of analysis can help to identify the interconnectedness of representations across the domestic, regional and international realm. Wehrmann shows in four case studies of Argentina and Chile for the Antarctic and Canada and the United States for the Arctic how national priorities for polar governance constrained or enabled discussions about policy alternatives in regional and international contexts. In addition to the Arctic Council and Antarctic Treaty System as central deliberative forums for polar governance, also other institutions are taken into account that have previously received little attention, for instance, the Organization of American States. Moreover, the discourse ontology facilitates an

inter-American perspective despite all the differences that may exist between the Arctic and Antarctic as geographical and political regions.

The third contribution of this book is empirical. *Critical Geopolitics of the Polar Regions* corroborates the dis/entanglement perspective with an impressive record of new material. To the reviewer's knowledge, this is the first systematic, comprehensive and long-term collection of discursive and ideational representations of the polar regions across a variety of actors and institutions. Sources include among others original documents from the Arctic Council and Antarctic Treaty Secretariat, about 30.000 newspaper articles for the period from 1989 to 2014, and expert interviews conducted in Argentina, Chile, Canada and the United States. Based on rigorous analysis of this large corpus of empirical material, the book accomplishes to put the recent emergence of the polar regions as objects of international governance in historical perspective by tracing the interwoven effects of discourse and politics over 25 years.

Wehrmann's book breaks new ground in the critical geopolitical analysis of both polar regions. It speaks to two still quite separated academic communities and offers them a united analytical framework for region-specific analysis as well as cross-case comparison. New and advanced scholars of polar affairs,

international relations, political geography, transnational governance and discourse analysis will find much value in the book's transdisciplinary character and empirical richness. While clearly rooted in Arctic and Antarctic studies, the book touches upon more general issues of concern in international affairs, including the construction of multi-level polities, the making and remaking of environmental and resource governance, the discursive underpinnings that shape actor constellations, political agendas and power plays, and the politics of multi-stakeholder cooperation in world politics. In summary, this is a high-quality book that will make an outstanding and important contribution to polar studies and beyond. (Sebastian Knecht, Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Universitaetsstrasse 25, 33615 Bielefeld, Germany (sebastian.knecht@uni-bielefeld.de))

Reference

Young, O. R. (2016). Governing the antipodes: international cooperation in Antarctica and the Arctic. *Polar Record*, 52(2), 230–238.

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