The Global Arctic: From Concept to Theoretical Framework

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Discourses in the Arctic continue to be shaped by geostrategic rivalry and extractivist imperatives. Constructivist approaches recognise that frameworks are needed within academia that strive beyond polarization, simplification, and reductionist interpretations of Arctic complexity. Whilst the Global Arctic is often treated as a concept within current literature, this article highlights that it can be understood as a theoretical framework, which is not distinct from method and practice. This is based on the understanding that a concept is "something conceived in the mind, a thought, a notion" or, "a general idea covering many similar things derived from study of particular instances" whilst a theory is "a discourse that can be brought to bear on the object at the same time as the object can be brought to bear on it" (Bal, 2002). I argue that the Global Arctic framework actively contributes to outcomes within the polis and can be applied in a metamorphic fashion across time, space, historical timeframes, ontologies, individual scholars and geographically dispersed epistemic communities. I further argue that the transition in thinking of the Global Arctic concept to a theoretical framework presents new opportunities for pluralistic critique which recognises the potential for a narrative framework to advance political and other social outcomes.

Introduction

With over four million inhabitants including over forty different Indigenous groups who call the Arctic their *home* or *homeland*, the Arctic stands at an intersection of epistemic and ontological pluralisms. Within Arctic governance, Western rationalist scientific paradigms and localized, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) intersect (Arctic Council, 1996, 2009, 2013, 2014; Harding, 2008; Lauter, 2023). From international academic networks to grassroots businesses, this means that the Arctic is a dynamic space where diverse ways of knowing continuously intersect (Einarsson et al., 2004; Tennberg, 2018).

The Arctic has had global interest since early explorers came to the region to harvest the rich natural resources (McCannon, 2012). Whilst nuance does exist, WWII and Cold War Arctic geopolitics were characterised by state-monopolized strategic science, wherein meteorological, oceanographic, and geophysical research was mobilized to project sovereign presence, support

polar military operations, and secure national defence interests (Doel et al., 2014a). Today, these security imperatives operate within a significantly more polycentric governance landscape (Landriault et al., 2019). Traditional Arctic hegemonic power structures now exist within a broader matrix of actors, including Indigenous peoples' organizations, non-Arctic states, and global market forces (Landriault et al., 2019). However, the intent of science to meet national strategic interests remains (Szkarłat, 2025).

Thus, the Arctic governance landscape can be understood as the attempt to reconcile pluralisms, sometimes supporting inherent oxymorons such as between the mandates of economic development and environmental protection or war and peace (Gabrielsen, 2005; Bidgood and Hall, 2024; Heininen, 2018; Łuszczuk et al., 2022; Söderpalm, 2023; Rendon-Betancur, 2024). Within international governance, this can be seen as a structural mechanism used to secure broader buy-in, accommodating diverse actors who hold competing development and conservation interests (Abbott et al., 2015; Mitrany, 1948; Hegwood et al., 2022).

An inter/trans disciplinary approach has been utilised widely in the Arctic since the end of the Cold War. This inter/trans disciplinarity served as a touchstone for collaboration reconciling cultural, socio-political, ontological and epistemic diversities across geographies and over time (Østreng, 2010). This complexity contrasts with the heightened security environment, where knowledge is increasingly 'secured' within sovereign boundaries to serve competitive and security interests (Fakhoury, 2023; Szkarłat, 2025; Hosa, 2025). Within the context of theory - such dialectical oppositions in approaches are not new. Oscillations between Realist and Comprehensive approaches to Arctic governance have been strategically applied to meet political outcomes since the Cold War (Heininen, 2018). Thus, theory is deeply ingrained in the Arctic knowledge-policy interface where the subjective choice of theory or approach is brought to bear on the Arctic imaginaries and realities based on complex underlying factors.

When looking at the Global Arctic as a meaning-making and directing system, a further aspect to consider is the growing interest from international stakeholders and claimants to the Arctic region (Heininen, 2022). These stakeholders and claimants argue that due to the connection to the rest of the world through oceanographic and atmospheric systems - the Arctic should necessarily be considered *global*. For example, India's draft Arctic policy tentatively calls the Arctic a 'common heritage of mankind' bringing the Global Arctic concept to applied national strategy (Ramesh, 2021). Whilst correct from an environmental sciences point of view, that the earth operates as a system, further questions remain as to the point of this as a *discourse*. Is it - as claimed on the face of it, because changes to the Arctic impacts wide-ranging weather systems vital for agriculture? Or, does it also or entirely support structural mechanisms which support national interests in the region?

Arctic Indigenous Peoples have been engaged with 'the globe' through international mechanisms such as the United Nations through declarations such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), as well as the Arctic Council, such as through the Permanent Participants (Dodds, 2017). The Global Arctic as an 'approach' has also been engaged with by Indigenous Peoples within the context of the Arctic Circle Assembly. The importance of Indigenous dialogue was first brought to the Assembly in 2017 by Conservation International, and the Mission Council on the Global-Arctic Indigenous Dialogue was launched in May 2021 (Arctic Circle Secretariat, 2021). These structures provide a route for Indigenous agency to be applied to

the international - transporting the voices of a local homeland to be reconciled with a global Arctic imaginary. However, such a relationship is not without its juxtapositions. As Dodds (2017) highlights, "while it might seem perfectly reasonable to argue that there are identifiable 'global Arctic' entanglements, indigenous peoples might argue that global flows and interconnections have been associated with colonial exploration".

Thus, the Global Arctic is more than a vague concept. It is impacted by and can impact the external world - entangling actors, meaning, futures and histories. Dodds (2017) also critiques this point when he argues that the Global Arctic involves *mapping* (which may evoke colonial or imperial histories) and its existence *prompts* gatherings such as the Arctic Circle Assembly bringing together Arctic claimants from all over the world with 2026 for example having over 2300 participants from over 70 countries (Arctic Circle Assembly, 2026). Therefore, the Global Arctic can be understood as a formal and informal system of meaning-making. This meaning-making system is not static and can be reshaped, reimagined and re-applied by actors to meet different strategic or diplomatic ends.

As well as a "gathering place of ideas" (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Ó Tuathail, 2010), International Relations (IR) can be described as a discipline that analyses war and peace (Aron, 1966). From a Realist standpoint, ideas within this broad field may strategically or diplomatically support the state in achieving either outcome (Aron, 1966). Science performs the foundation of how we rationally understand the world through evidence; however, it is not objective (Stone, 2012, 2016). From data collection and description to its application and dissemination within various elements of the polis (such as academia and the media for example), each stage lends weight to a specific aspect within the arena of political struggle (Aron, 1966). This means that - when a collection of meaning - such as the Global Arctic - is applied by an epistemic community or individual researcher to a case, this narrative framework may legitimate and advance a specific set of outcomes (Aron, 1966; Stone, 2012, 2016).

This article examines the Global Arctic as a collection of materialities and immaterialities through assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), conceived as a concept and applied to function as a theory (Bal, 2002). Within this article, I build upon existing research into the Global Arctic (Heininen and Finger, 2017; Dodds, 2017) to consider how this meaning-making system is generated and enacted in the Arctic. The article begins by presenting the rationale for term interrogation, followed by a theoretical framework rooted in New Materialism. I then go on to summarise the history and application of the Global Arctic (formalised in academic literature in 2014 by Heininen and Finger), before evaluating the Global Arctic as a theoretical framework. I then finalize the article with a conclusion where I demonstrate that by framing the Global Arctic as an applied theoretical framework rather than a concept, greater clarity can be achieved concerning how actors engage with knowledge, which knowledge is engaged with and what the outcomes of knowledge agency may be.

The Continued Need for Term Interrogation

It is necessary to ask before continuing - what is the point of this foray into epistemic unclarity? The confusion between a concept and theory represents a methodological crisis (Bal, 2002). To apply a concept without considering its situationality risks oversimplification whereby knowledge is viewed purely as an objective reality rather than a potential agent of intent (Haraway, 1988; Stone, 2012). Ultimately, treating concepts as devoid of meaning-making systems obscures how states and

other actors may strategically and diplomatically construct, deploy, and leverage knowledge to advance diverse interests (Dodds, 2017; Heininen, 2018).

The ICARP IV Research Priority Team (RPT) 1, highlights that there has been a shortage in our use of the Global Arctic term to move beyond the role of non-state actors within the Global Arctic framework. In particular, concerning how this engagement can be utilised for good governance within the context of a fragmented and rapidly changing Arctic (ICARP IV Research Priority Team 1, 2026). This viewpoint fits in with wider analysis on the knowledge domain that highlights the role of intermediaries (such as the media, academia, networks and political bodies) to bring visibility to, or obscure, certain issues over others in order to meet strategic agendas (Stone, 2012; Doel et al., 2014b). As Jacobsen and Wilson Rowe (2026) highlight,

> "Engaging with and being more transparent about theoretical or meta-theoretical starting points could also help explain fruitfully why accounts of Arctic politics and security diverge in their assessment and areas of emphasis. It may also serve to challenge descriptive accounts that may inadvertently fail to critically reflect upon the provenance of existing understandings about the Arctic region, thereby overlooking an important aspect of power." (p. 8)

This is well applied to the field of IR, as a "gathering place of ideas" (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Ó Tuathail, 2010) or as an avenue to explain war and peace (Aron, 1966) whereby agents test and deploy knowledge claims (Jasanoff, 2004, 2015). The need for such exploration is great considering that climate change continues to drastically alter the human and natural environment and security tensions remain in a heightened state. As I will argue, the Global Arctic as a concept, risks simplification and staticity through negating considerations of power-based applications and the need to recognise pluralistic diversity. This suits Heininen and Finger's (2017) original features of the term Global Arctic in the Journal of Borderlands Studies. Here, the authors write, "we recognize the danger of loose and trendy terms, and that it is necessary to explain, as precisely as possible, what new terms mean" (p. 199). This is affirmed by Bal (2002) who highlights that, "concepts…can only do the work that disciplinary traditions used to do, on one condition: that they are kept under scrutiny through a confrontation with, not application to, the cultural objects being examined" (p. 24).

Transitioning from Concept to Theory/Theoretical Framework

New Materialism, which is the foundation of this analysis, is a theoretical framework that shifts the focus from human-centric analysis to the active, vital role of matter itself. Rather than viewing the environment, technology, and material objects as passive backdrops for human activity, this perspective posits that the world is composed of assemblages where humans and non-humans continuously interact to co-shape reality (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). By rejecting traditional binary separations, such as nature versus culture or subject versus object, New Materialism emphasizes that all things possess a degree of agency, exerting influence and transforming the world around them (Bennett, 2010). Consequently, knowledge and research can be understood as not neutral, observational processes, but instead, practices that actively participate in the enactment and construction of the political, social, and material landscapes they seek to study (Barad, 2007).

While current literature predominantly treats the Global Arctic as an emerging concept, I argue that, through extended use and application, it functions as an applied theoretical framework

embedded with power, agency, and discursive intent. Drawing on New Materialism and assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Bal, 2002), I demonstrate that knowledge within the region is not an objective backdrop, but an active participant co-shaping material realities. I examine the Global Arctic within a dynamic interplay of territorializing forces (such as state-monopolized science, extractivism, and post-2022 geopolitical fragmentation) and deterritorializing 'lines of flight' including Indigenous Knowledge Systems and transdisciplinary networks. Ultimately, by reframing the Global Arctic from a static concept to a theoretical framework, I illustrate how our discursive choices, institutions, and linguistic 'order-words' may dictate which voices are prioritized, how sovereignty is negotiated, and how Arctic governance may be enacted across spatial scales.

At its core, theory models causal relationships, identifying which drivers, actors, and mechanisms produce specific outcomes (George & Bennett, 2005; Walt, 1998). Because institutional and policy frameworks are engineered around these assumptions, theoretical models serve as the structural blueprint for system design (Cox, 1981). Whether a governance system deepens extraction and polarisation or accommodates the entangled reality of the Arctic depends on the causal assumptions of its underlying theoretical framework (Heininen, 2018). Traditional positivist definitions often conceptualize theory as a standardized system of rules, procedures, and assumptions used to generate outcomes (e.g., Collins Dictionary, n.d.). However, Constructivist reasoning highlights how theories function as discursive sites shaped by power relations, subjectivities, and knowledge debates (Jasanoff, 2015). A Realist interpretation does not necessarily refute the existence of these dynamics, but rather re-anchors the role of knowledge production within state-centric interests and geopolitical agendas (e.g., Mearsheimer, 2001; Wilson Rowe, 2018).

The Global Arctic is frequently treated as a 'concept' and the authors of the term describe that:

> "the term "Global Arctic" is not a discourse, but a new research and teaching method, an analytical means to study and examine significant changes both in the Arctic region and globally, as well as the current more complex geopolitical context with deeper and more obvious interdependence" (Heininen and Finger, 2017, p. 199).

Before continuing, it is necessary to first distinguish between concepts and theories. Bal (2002) defines a concept as "something conceived in the mind, a thought, a notion" or, "a general idea covering many similar things derived from study of particular instances" (p. .23). Bal (2002) explains a theory as "not an instrument of analysis, to be 'applied'...Instead, it is a discourse that can be brought to bear on the object at the same time as the object can be brought to bear on *it*" (P. 61). Moving back to New Materialism - words within governance have symbolic meaning which inform the maintenance of a concept, as an assemblage, whilst providing direction as to how governance should be undertaken. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write,

> "We call order-words, not a particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement." (p. 79).

In the creation of a concept, these words are not random, "words fill the images, the images give body to the words" (Bal, 2002, P. 195). Bal (2002) does not define discourse, but like Deleuze and Guattari (1987), whom she draws from, sees discourse as a component of text and the linguistic construction of meaning applied to different contexts. Moving back to Deleuze and Guattari's consideration of order-words, these direction-giving words are set within linguistic structures, all of which take on the form of discourse. Thus, through a statement such as, 'the Arctic is Global' we are in turn, applying this reality to the region. The applications of these concepts are both interest-driven and can have tangible consequences for practice. For example, the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW, 1946) was constructed to balance competitive interests and thus provides a quota for harvesting within a conservation mandate (Fitzmaurice, 2017). Likewise, debates over geoengineering expose that the Precautionary Principle can be applied as a medium to undertake or not to undertake the activity (Davies and Vinders, 2025). This means that a concept, such as environmental protection, through discursive and other applications (such as treaties), can become a theoretical framework which provides footing for a meaning-making system for action which has bearance on the world around it.

In the original paper defining the Global Arctic, Heininen and Finger (2017) express that it is also a: "method and means to analyze the multi-dimensional and multi-functional state of the Arctic and its resource geopolitics". Here we have the Global Arctic as a *method*. Paul de Man (1982) defines method as "a controlled reflection on the formulation of a theory". Thus, it can be argued that even in the development stage (Heininen and Finger, 2017) - the authors propose the use of the Global Arctic concept as a method to work towards the development of a theory/theoretical framework to understand changes to and within the region.

When considering the Global Arctic as something that can be applied to a case (e.g., the Arctic) and is impacted in turn, I argue that we need to understand the Global Arctic as a theoretical framework grounded in discourse, which may have practical outcomes. Whether included within national strategy, academic articles, conferences or research partnerships, the movement from a vague notion to a meaning-making system is evident. A parallel can be seen with a lighthouse - the lighthouse serves a purpose of safely bringing ships to shore whilst, in turn, this lighthouse is strategically placed in a location where this function is needed. This moves the Global Arctic from a concept to a theory or a theoretical framework deeply connected to method (Figure 1). Within this meaning-making system further questions are raised concerning agency: who is included, from where, by which means, and why (Dodds, 2017).

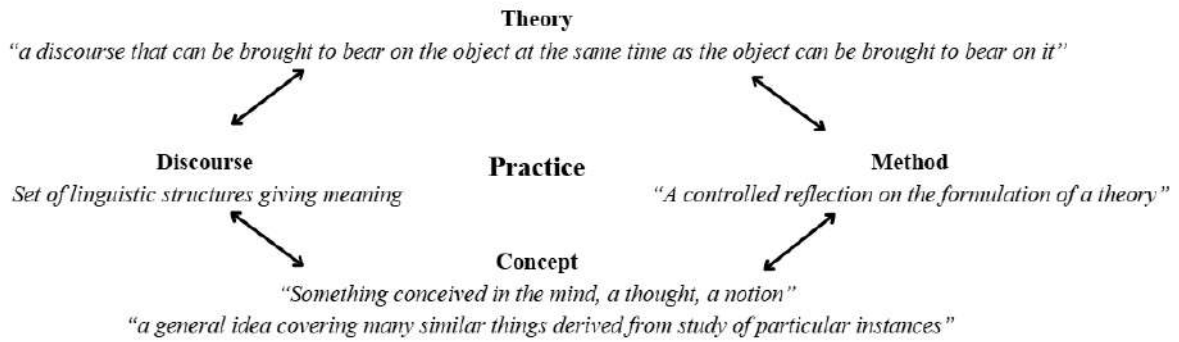

Figure 1. The Connection Between Concepts, Theories, Methods and Discourse (adapted from Bal,

2002; de Man, 1982).

Territorializing and Deterritorializing Factors

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a line of flight is a creative, revolutionary force that disrupts rigid, hierarchical systems (strata), allowing new conceptual assemblages and fluid ways of thinking to emerge (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). It acts as an open-ended trajectory of becoming, moving away from central clusters of hegemonic knowledge to invent alternative possibilities for life and governance (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). In the Arctic science-policy interface, for example, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research has been widely championed since the emergence of the international environmental governance regime in the 1970s moving away from siloed mentality research prevalent during the Cold War (Østreng, 2010).

From a Deleuzoguattarian perspective, the discipline of International Relations is perpetually constituted by a dynamic interplay of territorializing and deterritorializing forces (Table 1), undergoing continuous contraction and dilation through an open-ended framework of material and immaterial vectors including overlapping epistemologies, institutional practices, historical legacies, and anticipated futures (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Within this framework, agency is reconceptualized through the lens of *desires*, functioning not as an individual psychological motivation, but as a productive force that simultaneously drives action and exerts the systemic pressures that shape it (Deleuze and Parnet, 1977; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). This conceptualisation of desires, highlights our active positionality as researchers who translate vague notions into theory and in turn, method and practice through an iterative, co-constitutive relationship with the world.

Table 1. Territorializing and Deterritorializing Research Examples

Territorializing	***Deterritorializing***
Scientific Method	Diverse Ways of Knowing
Structured Outputs e.g., papers and reports	Creative Outputs
Institutions and Norms	"Lines of Flight" Thinking
Restricting Desires	Liberating Desires
Past Histories/Future Expectations	New Histories/Future Possibilities
Material and Immaterial Landscape	Changes to this Landscape
Closed Epistemic Communities	Open Knowledge-Sharing
Competition	Collaboration
Research Partnerships/Networks	Research Partnerships/Networks

In the Arctic, these territorializing and deterritorializing dynamics do not operate in a binary or moralistic fashion as inherently good or bad. Instead, they function like a dry-stone wall, where disparate elements, such as scientific data, policy formats, and institutional norms, cohere along

diverging lines, held together by contingent interlocking rather than a singular, unifying mortar (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). For instance, as highlighted by post-Cold War developments in the 1990s, the scientific method may act as a territorializing force when its positivist processes support empirical evidence for environmental protection, enabling structured international and inter-institutional collaboration, whilst simultaneously potentially restricting alternative ways of knowing. This territorialization is further enhanced by historical trajectories of colonialism and extractivism, as well as normative projections of what the Arctic's future should look like (Chagnon et al., 2022).

Revisiting the Global Arctic

Whilst the Global Arctic as an imaginary has long been conceived through early 20th-century polar expeditions, transnational scientific initiatives during the International Geophysical Year (IGY 1957–1958), and Cold War research alliances (Doel et al., 2014a), the term "Global Arctic" was already in use in 2013 when, Käpylä & Mikkola, used it within a policy brief for the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA). The term was developed further by Heininen and Finger in 2014 during a collaborative session of the Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security in Copenhagen (Heininen, n.d). The term was subsequently introduced to the broader scientific and policy communities at the 2014 Arctic Circle Assembly (GlobalArctic, n.d.). Heininen and Finger (2017) trace the term's origins to critical analyses of globalisation. Grounded in International Relations theories – including Realism, Liberalism, Marxist theory, and Constructivism – the term supports how international actors and their agency are understood. Heininen and Finger (2017) argue that the term is evolving based on the need to take into account that "the discourse of regionalism and the Arctic as a distinctive region of the 1990s is no longer sufficient and does not explain the current state of Arctic geopolitics". From this perspective, Arctic research does not stand alone but is part of broader global studies.

Although the seminal Arctic Human Development Report (2004) originally intended to feature a dedicated chapter on globalisation, the theme was not comprehensively addressed in print until the publication of Heininen and Southcott's (2010) Globalization and the Circumpolar North. Concurrently, the Northern Research Forum (NRF) Open Assemblies shifted towards a global approach, notably with the 2006 assembly, "The Borderless North", which highlighted the geopolitical complexities of the Arctic as both a distinct geographic region and an integrated global component shaped by science and technology and wider societal factors (Heininen & Laine, 2008). The interlinkages between the Arctic and the globe continued with the 2011 assembly, "Our Ice Dependent World" which emphasised the political, economic and societal impacts of dwindling ice, with ice acting as a "common heritage of humankind" (RHA, 2011). Such developments show the role in the ascension of the Global Arctic concept through the meaning-making linguistic framing of components which inform the concept (such as science and technology), shaping the concept's development whilst simultaneously impacting future discourse.

For example, these initiatives laid the structural groundwork for the establishment of the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik, Iceland (October 2013). This intellectual trajectory was further refined through a series of workshops hosted by the University of the Arctic (UArctic) and the NRF's joint Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security between 2012 and 2013. The prevalence of the term continued in the 2013 Arctic Yearbook, titled The Arctic of Regions vs. the Globalized Arctic, which coincided with the historic May 2013 Kiruna Ministerial meeting where

the Arctic Council formally institutionalized a global perspective by admitting five Asian states as observers (Arctic Council, 2013; Heininen and Finger, 2017).

In 2019, the Mission Council on the Global Arctic was formally inaugurated at the Arctic Circle China Forum in Shanghai with the core mandate of interpreting the globalized Arctic, incentivizing scholarly research, and institutionalizing dialogue on these multifaceted regional shifts. (Arctic Circle Secretariat, n.d). Since the original coining of the definition, the use of the Global Arctic has been transformed into a book series, edited in 2019 by the term's creators Heininen and Finger (Finger & Heininen, 2019) and with two subsequent editions edited by Finger and Rekvig (2022) and Rekvig and Finger (2025). Further, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Coursera was created to broaden academic engagement within the framework (GlobalArctic, n.d.).

The Global Arctic as a term has been critiqued by Dodds (2017) and Shadian (2017) who argue that the term acts as a 'Pandora's box' for discussions relating to internationalization which poses direct contention with the Indigenous inhabitants of the region. Heininen and Finger (2017) balance this by highlighting the growing role of Indigenous Peoples in the international space set within the transborder implications of climatic changes. From this perspective the term is not meant to exclude, but rather present a method to understand these changes. The Global Arctic is presented within a teaching plan by Essex (2024) to support descriptions of the Arctic Council's activities.

Since its establishment, the Global Arctic has been used within the context of Critical IR to primarily give support to interrogation into non-Arctic states' interest in the Arctic region and Arctic governance set against regional environmental and social, economic and political changes (Käpylä and Mikkola, 2013; Rossi, 2015; Keil and Knecht, 2017; Humrich, 2017, Lackenbauer, Dodds, and Woon, 2020). Whilst the term Global Arctic is meant as an explanatory term to explain Arctic change in the context of internationalisation, there is a broader impact that its use propels exploration of processes regarding internationalisation.

The use of the Global Arctic as a factual reality is utilised by Nicol to explain a phenomenon of territorialization linked to increased militarisation of the region (2016). In rarer occasions, the Global Arctic concept can be seen to directly apply a meaning-making structure. For example, Nicoll et al., (2025), in an analysis into Arctic shipping, describe everything above the 62nd parallel (62' N) as the "Global Arctic" in contrast to what they define as the "Canadian Arctic" (Nicoll et al., 2025).

Discussion

Whilst Global Arctic imaginaries and realities have long been assembled, contemporary framings of the Global Arctic reconfigure how these persistent international interests are discursively packaged and deployed. The Global Arctic moves beyond a static concept because its employment inherently involves discourse that continuously reconfigures the term itself. Labeling it a "general idea" fails to capture the weight of a term that can be seen to have parallel development with concrete governance events, such as the 2013 Kiruna Ministerial Meeting and the FIIA policy brief (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2013), acting as part of an entangled meaning-making system for the region. This capacity as a meaning-making system is further evident when the term is deployed to explain and categorize why non-Arctic states, particularly in Asia, establish regional interests (Lackenbauer,

Dodds, and Woon, 2020). And, even more so, when the term is used to support a national claim on the Arctic as a shared space for humanity (Ramesh, 2021).

Thus, based upon diverse deployments of the term, the Global Arctic is not merely a concept but, rather, it is a theory - where a "a discourse that can be brought to bear on the object at the same time as the object can be brought to bear on *it*" (Bal, 2002, P. 61). With the 'object; in this instance, being the Arctic. But, this leaves questions as to who holds the power to perform these discourses and what are their intended outcomes? From a New Materialist perspective, the Global Arctic is shaped by agency, desire, histories and possibilities which inform and deform the assemblage across diverse realities. Recognizing that any academic deployment of knowledge is not neutral (Haraway, 1988; Stone, 2012, 2016), meaning-making assemblages, such as the Global Arctic reflect strategic and diplomatic intentions, directing what knowledge is rendered valid and visible and by what means this knowledge is channeled.

Interaction with the term is not simple. For example, an Indigenous actor who engages with the Global Arctic to give voice to their homeland must reconcile with territorializing factors within science-policy practice (such as the scientific method or colonially rooted institutional practice) to present a deterritorializing line of flight away from neo-colonial processes or engage with the structures existing already. With interest-based science and geo-strategic rivalry (Doel et al., 2014b; Szkarłat, 2025), questions remain concerning the potential for subjectivities to navigate the term Global Arctic and its components when powerful imperatives may exert influential force.

For many, the Global Arctic is a useful functional construct providing an avenue to exert agency. For a non-Arctic state, the Global Arctic may legitimize their stake in the Arctic region, whilst for an Indigenous actor, the Global Arctic may provide a mechanism to engage with the international - having their voice at the table for issues important to them (Dodds, 2017). Through engagement with the Global Arctic, therefore, diplomatic and strategic objectives can be achieved; however, the Arctic is also reshaped as a global phenomenon in turn. For example, the deployment of the term within a cartographic description, such as within Nicoll et al., 2025, ultimately delineates the geopolitical boundaries to the region thus emphasising who has the right to agency.

Conclusion

Moving from the Global Arctic as a concept (something conceived in the mind, a thought, a notion" or, "a general idea covering many similar things derived from study of particular instances) to an applied theoretical framework ("not an instrument of analysis, to be 'applied'...Instead, it is a discourse that can be brought to bear on the object at the same time as the object can be brought to bear on *it*") highlights two key points. Firstly, the evolving metamorphic relationship between concept, discourse, method and theory and secondly, the situationality of research approaches which necessarily need to be taken into account for furthering productive Arctic research (Haraway, 1988; Heininen, 2018; Jacobsen and Wilson Rowe, 2026). Treating the Global Arctic as an applied theoretical framework compels researchers and other actors to critically reflect on the specific discourses they employ, the data they select, the methods they adopt, and the real-world impacts of deploying the framework. These reflections challenge prevailing theories to account for power-embedded discourse which may have a lasting impact on the Arctic itself.

The history of the development of the Global Arctic concept, through shared meaning-making and the concept's impact on practical science (such as the creation of geographical delineations)

and policy outcomes (such as national strategies) highlights that, through discourse, the concept is iteratively in a back and forth with theory and this theory has the outcome of the creation of a method through providing the boundaries for the case and the framework for data analysis. These methods have a bearing on the future trajectory of the Arctic through the inclusion or exclusion of voices and how these voices are embedded within a meaning-making system. These linguistic structures are not devoid of meaning but instead are reflections of legacies and histories which may be imperial or neo-colonial in nature and based in national interests such as claims to the Arctic. This application of the Global Arctic *concept* as a *theory* highlights that academic research is never a neutral, observational act; rather, our choice of conceptual framework designates a theoretical application of material and immaterial things and processes which are employed and deployed within our situated realities. These realities are not neutral but may be shaped by (and in turn shape) who has the agency to speak, on what terms and why.

Applying the Global Arctic as a theoretical framework illuminates how knowledge-driven endeavours, present from early Arctic exploration to today, seek to contain a multi-spatial, multi-actor governance landscape within a broader meaning-making system. This framing establishes that the Global Arctic is more than an evolving descriptive concept; rather, it functions as a construct for analyzing and navigating regional plurality. However, in order for this plurality to be taken into account - users of the term must be critical of the wider meaning-making elements that constitute the 'dry-stone wall' of the Global Arctic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994).

Through understanding the Global Arctic as an applied set of ontologies and epistemologies set against real-world phenomena such as governance processes and artefacts, the Global Arctic as a theoretical framework opens vital pathways for the consideration of theoretical pluralism. This framing allows the Global Arctic to evolve from a general idea, towards a meaning-giving and evolving theoretical framework which has practical implications in the Arctic. Without losing sight of the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and the real world, this positions the Global Arctic as a dynamic pedagogical tool that gives rise to questions concerning who participates in knowledge production, how it is constructed, and what political outcomes it advances.

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