**Chapter 21**

**The Antarctic Treaty, Territorial Claims and a Continent for Science**

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**Introduction**

The Antarctic Treaty, which was adopted in 1959 and entered into force in 1961, is a remarkable treaty with a geopolitical history that is perhaps not as well appreciated as it might be. One reason why, could be a common assumption that the Antarctic is somehow divorced from global political, cultural and economic histories and geographies (Dodds, Hemmings and Roberts 2017). It is still commonplace to read that the Antarctic is a ‘pole apart’, as if to suggest that it is an outlier because of its relative geographical remoteness and absence of an indigenous human population. While humans have imported their ideas, practices and objects to Antarctica, the southern circumpolar polar region has always been more than simply a hub for national and international scientific investigation and resource exploitation.

As we shall note, the Antarctic remains an important site for experimentation in human governance, which continues to influence the politics of other parts of Earth and beyond. Examples would include the replication of nuclear-free zones of peace and the adoption of ideas about how to govern Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) including the seabed and the Moon/outer space. But what often captures the attention of international legal and political commentators is the negotiation of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty itself and the manner in which the so-called seven claimant states (Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom) agreed to put aside their territorial claims (under Article IV of the Treaty) and dedicate themselves alongside non-claimant and semi-claimant signatories, such as the United States and Soviet Union/Russia, to co-operation and harmony. Semi-claimant in this context refers to the fact that both the then Cold War superpowers held onto the right to press a territorial claim in the future.

The Antarctic Treaty is not the only treaty applicable to the governance of Antarctica but it is the most significant. The Treaty’s articles helped transform the area of application legally and politically (south of 60° South) into something quite distinct in terms of its promotion and support of science, international co-operation and demilitarization. Under Article IV, all signatories agree to defer on the question of the legal status of the continent and surrounding ocean for the duration of the Treaty. The geopolitical circumstances and the dramatis personae enrolled in the process of treaty negotiation and its entry into force ensured that this was not an inevitable outcome. It was quite possible, as this chapter explains, to imagine there to be a failure in agreement in 1959 and 1960. For its supporters, however, the Treaty’s eventual entry into force appeared to enshrine further a near perfect union of diplomacy and science. When connected to the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957-8, including its Antarctic programme, the securing of the Antarctic Treaty nourishes mythologies of polar science and governance as productive of co-operation and goodwill.

What this chapter does, by way of contrast, is to challenge a near-dominant view that the Antarctic Treaty’s genesis lies with the IGY and the altruistic scientists and diplomats responsible (for example, Walton 2013). The moniker a ‘continent for science’, was popularized by journalist Richard Lewis in his book published in 1965, after two personal visits to Antarctica in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Lewis 1965). In his accounting of the politics of Antarctica, Lewis draws attention to how multi-national collaboration and scientific knowledge-sharing produced an inspiring modus operandi for politics and government. The Antarctic as ‘continent for science’ stood in stark contrast to other continents and their spill-over burdens, complexities and conflicts. The Antarctic functions as a proverbial spatial container for a distinct polar politics largely insulated from elsewhere. What such a geographical and technical framing underestimates, however, is the contested geopolitics of the polar continent and surrounding Southern Ocean.

It is important to resist the idea that Antarctica should be treated as geopolitically exceptional. To be fair the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Science Horizon Scan report, released by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) in 2013 posed the following: “How will external pressures and changes in geopolitical configurations of power affect Antarctic governance and science?” Even to pose such a question would have been unthinkable some years earlier, such was the belief that the Antarctic Treaty helped to ‘seal off’ Antarctica from mainstream geopolitical machinations. Distinctly modern activities and practices such as mobilising rival sovereignty claims, mapping and charting, cultural and historical commemoration, scientific base construction and the intensifying politicization of science reveal a more complex entanglement with the wider world. The techniques of measurement and base settlement used in Antarctica would have been familiar to anyone working for colonial powers such as Britain and France. The map, the chart and the base/outpost were indispensable in the colonization of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Dodds and Collis 2017). All of which matters because the seven claimant states believe that they exercise jurisdictional rights over their own citizens in their territories as well as accruing resource rights and capacities to regulate activity. However, claimant states like Norway and New Zealand have also expressed their support for the principles underlying the Antarctic Treaty and associated legal instruments.

**Territorial claims and the division of Antarctica**

The claiming of Antarctica as distinct territory has an intriguing political history and offers interesting insights into how sovereign nation-states present and implement claims to distinct national jurisdictions. For the last four hundred years, international law has placed emphasis on the occupation, settlement and administration of territory. When thought of as a ‘bounded space’, territory brings to the fore the figure of the border as opposed to a frontier, a zone or a periphery. Lines were drawn on maps and charts and the world divided up in a way that meant rivers, mountains, and coastlines are very often significant markers of the external limits of nation-states. In remoter areas of the world, including the Arctic and Antarctic, lines of latitude have been instrumental in the demarcation of territorial space (Dodds and Nuttall 2016).

When nation-states press their claims to territory they do so as part of the development of ideas concerning an attachment to place. As political philosophers note, there are what are termed connection-based theories, which explore how states lay claim to territory and invest in it so that attachment is strengthened (Nine 2012). This might come about from measurement, settlement, and integration into public cultures. Claimant states argue that important connections exist between their polar and non-polar national territories through a shared history (including exploration and resource use), geography and occupancy. Jack Child, for example, was a pioneer of work about Antarctica and the geopolitics of South America, writing on how South American states such as Argentina and Chile invested heaving in territorial forms of nationalism, informed by geopolitical thinking and geographical education (for a summary, Child 2009).

Claimant states such as Australia and the UK act as explicitly territorial agents, and as part of their attachment to place, their actions and responsibilities are performed in those distinct territories. This might include publicising scientific expeditions, issuing postage stamps, performing legal-judicial duties and/or preserving evidence of earlier inhabitation. A good example would be the work of the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust which preserves and populates (in the summer months with volunteers) the restored Port Lockroy base located in the Antarctic Peninsula region.

This approach is termed functional because it explores and recognises that states need geographical space to secure land and population, regulate affairs, and protect property rights. Antarctica is particularly interesting because it is counter-intuitive to our taken for granted political-legal world. While we are familiar with territorial disputes between states, the Antarctic is the only continent where its entire ownership is disputed between parties. Without an indigenous human population, it is also claimed by outsiders to enjoy global significance, especially in terms of its importance for science, conservation, ecosystem management and debates about environmental protection and sustainable development, because of its intimate connections to global climate change and its relatively untapped resource potential including minerals and freshwater reserves. Marine resources have, historically, been at the forefront of resource exploitation in the southern polar region and have proven controversial as disputes over whaling (involving today, most notably, Japan and ‘scientific whaling’) and most recently the introduction of the Ross Sea marine protection area in 2016 would exemplify (Brooks et al. 2016).

Reinforcing the prevailing division of the world by nation-states are an abundance of ideologies, practices, objects, and discourses dedicated to its endurance and reproduction. Popular and official nationalisms reinforce that sense of how the world is divided up into national territories. Citizens, often through public culture including education, learn about the geographical extent of their nation. Argentine and Chilean students, for instant, learn earlier on in their lives that national territory extends all the way to the South Pole. As claimant states, the Argentine and Chilean governments have invested greatly in ensuring that national maps, charts and postage stamps depict the respective countries as having polar territories. Geographical location and division often help determine citizenship, and the sovereign rights and the territorial reach and scope of the state. In the late 1970s, Argentina flew pregnant women down south so that they would have their babies in Antarctica. States and governments invest heavily and regularly in reminding their citizens where national territories begin and end. It is, historically speaking, an artificial and arbitrary way of dividing the world into distinct spaces but it remains enduring for now.

With the development of this modern political system came a distinctly modern understanding of sovereignty as being tied to exclusive sovereignty over a bounded territory (Elden 2013). European nation-states, and various thinkers who expounded on the idea of sovereignty such as seventeenth-century theorist Thomas Hobbes, who wrote of the unlimited power of the sovereign, found formal expression in the expansion of European imperialism. What has been described as being fundamentally European in terms of ideas of territory and forms of administration and governance, evolving from a patchwork of local and regional authoritative structures including city-states and imperial unions predominant in the Middle Ages, ultimately became a global export. New territories were identified, demarcated and delimited through practices such as legal proclamations, settlement building, infrastructure planning, and investment in mapping and surveying. Between 1500-1900, European empires encompassed the Americas, Asia, Africa and both polar regions. Shirley Scott (2011, 2017) has argued that Antarctica underwent three distinct waves of imperialism involving South American, European and Australian and American actors and interests. Was the Antarctic, therefore, outside this dominant Euro-American model for appropriating territory at a distance or merely the logical extension of a colonial-administrative legacy that bestowed territorial legacies on post-colonial and independent states such as Argentina and Chile?

In the first wave, Scott (2017) draws attention to the peculiar position of Argentina and Chile who argued that their territorial claims to Antarctica were part of a post-independence inheritance in the early part of the nineteenth century. Utilizing the doctrine of *uti possidetis*, literally meaning from the Latin ‘what one possesses’, the modern boundaries of South American countries owe their origins to the papal division between the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the fifteenth century and subsequent internal divisions within their respective imperial territories.

While the newly independent South American countries of the nineteenth century were caught up in border conflicts over common boundaries along the Andes, the Chaco, and the Amazon, Argentina and Chile contended that their imperial inheritance enabled them to extend further south and encapsulate the Antarctic Peninsula and parts of the South Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean. Adrian Howkins argues that these claims were at heart a form of ‘environmental nationalism’, grounded literally in the intersection of ice, rock, air and sea. Argentina and Chile were entitled by nature to imagine themselves as ‘Antarctic nations’ and their polar territories were southerly elemental extensions (Howkins 2016).

Geopolitically, this notion of natural inheritance mattered to both South American nations and their enduring investment in polar nationalism. Educationally, children were taught under the ‘patriotic education’ curricula designed to inculcate a sense of how the country was geographically and geologically connected to its remote island territories (e.g. Easter Island in Chile’s case and the Falkland Islands and South Georgia in Argentina’s case) and the Antarctic continent (Escude 1992). Geographers and the discipline of geography were essential accomplices in the support of this public consciousness by highlighting the shared geology, ice, weather and fauna between southern Patagonia and the Antarctic Peninsula (Dodds 2002). By the mid-twentieth century, military and civilian governments were committing investment to polar education and ensuring that popular culture including maps, magazines and postage stamps represented their respective countries as ‘Antarctic nations’ (for example, Child 2008). In 1948, President Gabriel Videla of Chile visited the Antarctic and declared that Chile had to be willing, “to defend the sovereignty and unity of our nation, from Arica [in the far north’ to the South Pole” (cited in Howkins 2016: 9). Videla was the first head of state to visit Antarctica.

The British spearheaded the second wave of Antarctic imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century. Having been at the heart of exploratory activity and subsequently Southern Ocean resource exploitation since the eighteenth century, the first formal claim via Letters Patent to the Antarctic was made by Britain in 1908 and refined further in 1917. The earliest Letters Patent of 1843 and 1876 were, however, instrumental in articulating British arrangements for their resource interests in the South West Atlantic. Sealing was the strategically significant activity in the nineteenth century. The regulation of whaling was the main economic driver of the early twentieth century Antarctic claim, and Norway as the main whaler nation operating in the South West Atlantic and Antarctic waters recognized helpfully this nascent imperial authority.

The British established what was termed a Falkland Islands Dependencies (FID), and the Falkland Islands acted as a strategic gateway. The Letters Patent of 1908 affirmed the enlarged territorial scope of the FID to include the South Orkney, South Shetland, South Sandwich Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula region (called Graham Land by British administrators) with local administrative activity in the whaling command and control mission of South Georgia. The modified 1917 Letters Patent adopted the so-called sector principle (which was adopted in both the Canadian Arctic and Russian Arctic) to extend the geographical parameters of the FID to include the seas surrounding island chains and the Antarctic Peninsula. Renamed the British Antarctic Territory in 1962, after the entry into force of the Antarctic Treaty in 1961, the area in question remains substantial, encompassing over 1.7 million square kilometers. South Georgia, lying north of the 60° South line of latitude, was excluded from the revised boundaries of the British Antarctic Territory.

Prior to the Antarctic Treaty negotiations, however, whaling was a lucrative business, as a provider of whale oil and baleen used in the modern clothing industry. Whale oil was also used in the production of margarine and explosives. It was, in the first half of the twentieth century, a major resource. Between 1904 and 1962, the South Georgia settlement of Grytviken hosted the Norwegian-dominated whaling industry. The whaling station there handled over 50,000 slaughtered whales and produced over 450,000 metric tons of whale oil and over 190,000 metric tons of whale meat for European and North American markets (Howkins 2016). Millions of pounds of revenue were generated by companies such as the Edinburgh-based Christian Salvesen and the Norwegian-Argentine operation, Compañía Argentina de Pesca.

As the British became more involved with the regulation of whaling, so interest in mapping and surveying the Antarctic Peninsula and islands such as the South Orkneys and Shetlands became more pressing. Obtaining reliable weather information was also considered useful given the primary activity in the FID was whaling. By the 1930s and 1940s, the work of British surveyors, oceanographers, sailors and scientists helped to fix and mark boundary points, enhance understanding of the marine biology of the Southern Ocean and establish a network of base huts in order to exercise control over the Antarctic Peninsula region (Dodds 2002). Establishing and maintaining what was termed ‘effective occupation’ meant that interested parties such as the United Kingdom were concerned with activities and gathering knowledge that helped consolidate their onshore presence. Under prevailing norms of international law, the modes of acquiring territory were two fold – a formal expression of intention to occupy (a territory not already under the sovereign authority of another recognized nation-state) and a demonstration of continuous ‘effective occupation’ thereafter. Antarctica was considered to be a terra nullius and thus legally capable of being occupied.

By the late 1940s, Antarctic territory was increasingly owned, distributed, mapped and bordered. But it was also deeply contested. What’s important to recognize is that while the British were seeking to cement further their legal, resource and geopolitical presence in Antarctica, other interested parties such as New Zealand, France and Australia were articulating their own territorial claims to territory in 1923, 1924 and 1933 respectively. Australia and New Zealand were working alongside Britain in extending a UK-Dominion arc of territorial claiming and administration. The French claim to Adélie Land was predicated on, like their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, a public history of polar exploration, discovery and exploitation. Their collective approach was quite different to the South American states of Argentina and Chile who believe, as already indicated in this chapter, that their claims to Antarctica were inherited rather than something that had to formally claimed and occupied.

As Shirley Scott (2012: 54) usefully reminds us:

For the European states the issue was that of who owned Antarctica; for the South Americans, the issue was that of delimiting the mutual boundary, on the Antarctic portion of their territory. Once the United Kingdom began to challenge the Antarctic rights of Argentina and Chile they felt compelled to justify their position in terms of the contemporary European international law of colonialism – hence their belated Antarctic “claims”. The “homogenous claims” interpretation of pre‐Treaty Antarctic politics, by which all seven states were involved in an equivalent process of territorial claim‐making during the twentieth century, ignores the distinction between two pre‐Treaty waves of Antarctic colonialism.

President Videla’s visit to Chilean Antarctic Territory in 1948, as we noted earlier, was a belated response to four decades of European Antarctic colonization. For Argentina and Chile, what was fundamentally at stake was how best to establish a mutual boundary between themselves, extending from the Andes to the South Pole. Both countries viewed the UK’s presence on the Antarctic Peninsula and surrounding islands as an unwelcome and unjustified expression of Western imperialism. Britain stood accused of calumniating Antarctica, spreading falsehoods about its unclaimed status.

The final wave identified was embodied by the approach taken by the United States (and to a lesser extent the Soviet Union), which was an active participant in Antarctic exploration, exploitation and settlement. American airmen, sailors and scientists were pivotal, including the legendary naval officer and explorer, Richard Byrd who presided over American Antarctic activities from the late 1920s until the 1950s. Notably in the 1940s, Byrd and the US Navy participated in the large-scale Operation High Jump (1946-7) involving some 4000 personnel and later Operation Deep Freeze (1955-7), which provided logistical support for the US IGY program. Eschewing a formal claim to Antarctic territory, the United States in conjunction with the Soviet Union (which reactivated its Antarctic interests in the late 1940s) reserved the right to make a claim in the future. For now, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, both countries took the view that they were also not going to be limited in terms of where they might operate in Antarctica.

In effect, the third wave of Antarctic imperialism was geographically speaking the most ambitious. Byrd, like other American explorers and geographers such as Laurence Gould, believed passionately in an American polar claim. But their political masters feared that a formal American claim might provoke the Soviets to issue their own claim (on the basis of a long history of exploration and exploitation in the Antarctic) and inadvertently escalate Cold War tension. What they proposed instead was a temporary solution to the knotty issue of Antarctic ownership. In 1948, a proposal was circulated to the seven claimant states (and later after formal protests the Soviet Union) proposing a condominium whereby there would be a commitment to collectively govern the Antarctic. At the heart of the condominium was a conviction by US authorities that there should be freedom of access across the continent, and that claimant states were not going to be recognized as sovereign authorities.

What compounded matters still further was growing evidence that the United Kingdom, Argentina and Chile as counter-claimants were embroiled in a polar ‘great game’, with investment in rival mapping and surveying projects and a collective determination to strengthen their ‘presence’ in the region. British diplomat, William Hunter Christie, coined the term ‘Antarctic Problem’ as shorthand for what was at stake – three rival countries armed with their particular attachments to place (Hunter Christie 1951). Fearing the outbreak of conflict in Antarctica, the United States seized an opportunity to marshal debate about how the polar continent should be governed. What was apparent in the late 1940s and 1950s, however, was that no argument was being offered up in support of common heritage or universal administration of the region. What US officials had in mind was a far more limited vision for the Antarctic, a select group of states acting on behalf of humanity but not desirous of close scrutiny of their individual and collective action.

For all the scientific achievements of the International Geophysical Year of 1957-8, including the Antarctic programme, the preparations leading up to it were mindful of potential complications regarding polar sovereignty. The Arctic was largely absent from the IGY because of Cold War tension between the Soviet Union and the United States, with some research eventually carried out by drifting ice stations in the Arctic Ocean. In the Antarctic, an agreement in Paris in 1955 established the principle that IGY parties would have freedom of access and thus the establishment of research priorities would be grounded in scientific reasoning rather than explicit territorial design. In other words, countries such as the United States and the Soviet Union were adamant that their research plans were not going to be vetted by claimant states. For the largest claimant state, Australia, this meant that they had to accept the Soviets were going to situate their research contribution (through the establishment of a number of bases) in Australian Antarctic Territory. The United States established a South Pole station and worked collaboratively with others including New Zealand. Both superpowers, in other words, were not going to be spatially contained by claimant states.

The IGY hard-wired the principle that scientific investigation in Antarctic was open-ended in principle and not artificially constrained by territorial claims even if claimant states such as the United Kingdom based their IGY contribution in the Falkland Islands Dependencies. Claimant states were rooted in their ‘areas’ while non-claimant states worked across the polar continent and offshore. Notably, US glaciological studies worked across the ice sheet in their concerted efforts to discover more about the thickness of the ice and the underlying morphology of the continent. Through their geographical mobility and scientific probing, the traversing of the Antarctic ice sheet serves as a powerful reminder of what was at stake; the American snow-cats moving over the polar continent unimpeded by others and indifferent to lines on the map (Barr and Lüdecke 2010).

Recognising that there was an opportunity to re-wire the geopolitics of Antarctica for their benefit, the Eisenhower administration convened a series of preliminary meetings to discuss with the eleven other Antarctic IGY parties (Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Soviet Union and United Kingdom). When the parties did gather to negotiate an Antarctic Treaty in October 1959, agreement on its form and content was not guaranteed. There were knotty issues to resolve including how to manage conflicting positions on territorial sovereignty. For six weeks, details were thrashed out and argument raged about how to accommodate the negotiating positions of claimant states such as Australia, France and Argentina and the interests and wishes of the Soviet Union and the United States. Even after agreement was secured, the entry of force of the Treaty in June 1961 depended on its ratification by national legislatures and in Argentina there was serious resistance to its content, which was seen by some nationalists as weakening Argentina’s sovereignty.

**Antarctica as a continent for science**

The 1959 Antarctic Treaty scrambled some of the received wisdom of the previous five hundred years. It established the continent and surrounding ocean as exceptional in the sense of being unique in encouraging the seven claimant states to defer their territorial claims in support of scientific investigation, peace and wider co-operation. Other signatories were also obligated to restrain from making any claims to territorial sovereignty. As the relevant part of Article IV stipulated, “no acts or activities taking place while the present Treaty is in force shall constitute a basis for asserting, supporting or denying a claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica or create any rights of sovereignty in Antarctica. No new claim, or enlargement of an existing claim, to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica shall be asserted while the present Treaty is in force”.

As Article I of the Treaty notes, “Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only. There shall be prohibited, *inter alia*, any measure of a military nature, such as the establishment of military bases and fortifications, the carrying out of military manoeuvres, as well as the testing of any type of weapon”. After establishing the principle that the Antarctic should be a zone of peace and co-operation, Article II posits the following, “Freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica and cooperation toward that end, as applied during the International Geophysical Year, shall continue, subject to the provisions of the present Treaty”. Article III reiterates that importance by stipulating that international co-operation is essential in order to build confidence and permit ‘permit maximum economy of and efficiency of operations’ given the expense of operating in the Antarctic and the logistical challenges posed by remoteness, weather and distance.

The Treaty’s area of application actively encouraged a containment model of scientific politics. Additional legal instruments such as the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS 1972) and the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR 1981) either used the designation of 60° South or extended the area of application to the Antarctic Convergence on the grounds that it made more sense to incorporate more of the Southern Ocean for the development of conservation measures. The terms and conditions of the Antarctic Treaty ‘containerised’ the Southern Ocean and polar continent, conveying inadvertently that the region itself was isolated and capable of being isolated repeatedly from the interactions of other parties, interests and flows.

Social scientists such as Aant Elzinga (1993, 2009) have been at the forefront of critical scholarship exploring how the Antarctic Treaty and associated legal instruments including the 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection (as part of an assemblage of practices and values embodied in the Antarctic Treaty System, or ATS), were complicit in framing the region as a ‘continent by and for science’. The epistemic dominance of science and scientists was written into the DNA of the ATS. Scientists and polar science-educated diplomats responsible for the workings of the Treaty were dominant and largely unchallenged for much of the 1960s and 1970s. This changed in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s as interest in Antarctica was globalized. Non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace and the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition became more active in polar environmental matters, often accusing the ATS of being too secretive and isolated from global auditing and scrutiny. The resource potential of the region was attracting a new body of interest from historically marginalized states, many of whom were still under imperial administration when the Antarctic Treaty was negotiated. Led by the former British colony, Malaysia, members of the Global South used the United Nations General Assembly to consider the ‘Question of Antarctica’ – an issue first raised in the UN by Malaysia’s prime minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad in September 1982, and promoted further by Malaysia at the signing of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in Jamaica three months later, and at a summit of non-aligned countries in New Delhi in March 1983.

Other countries such as Brazil, India and China were making their presence felt as they joined the ATS in the 1980s, and brought their own interests to bear on a group that was dominated by a Euro-American cluster led by the United States and its allies including Norway, Australia and New Zealand. While the emphasis on science and scientific knowledge retained its valence, it was no longer unchallenged. The framing of Antarctica as a ‘continent by and for science’ was being openly challenged by newer parties to the ATS and outsiders as self-interested rhetoric designed to entrench the power of the original signatories. It also contributed to the legitimacy of pariah states such as apartheid South Africa, which was allowed for years to participate in the ATS because fellow members were complicit in ensuring that global politics should not ‘contaminate’ Antarctic science and politics. For all the high-minded rhetoric, however, Antarctic science continued to serve the interests of claimant and non-claimant states alike. Politics was to be found everywhere in Antarctica and beyond ranging from decisions to inspect other scientific bases to the production of research papers that were being used to champion particular nation-states as primus inter pares. If Antarctic science was the prevailing currency of status and influence then all the parties, it was noted, were adept at adjusting their political ideologies, outlooks and practices.

The politics of Antarctica, and in particular the framing of the idea of a ‘continent for science’ also revealed other commitments that were part of the taken for granted world of the late 1950s. As a raft of feminist, post-colonial and critical race studies have shown, the Antarctic was assumed to be a space for white men in the main. Women were largely absent, and the world beyond Europe, Oceania and Latin America was marginal with the exception of Japan and South Africa. The Antarctic Treaty in its earliest incarnation was born out of privilege and the terms and conditions of the Treaty were in favour of restricting membership. Article IX of the Treaty notes that any contracting party would need to “demonstrates its interest in Antarctica by conducting substantial research activity there, such as the establishment of a scientific station or the dispatch of a scientific expedition”. Little detail was offered, at the time, about how such activities would be evaluated by the existing membership and until the 1980s and 1990s the membership of the ATS was largely unchanged.

When considering the contemporary challenges facing the Antarctic, the position of polar science remains significant but co-exists with other actors, interests, and regimes. The fate of Antarctica’s resources, including fish and in the future minerals, reveals the competing claims that parties do make to scientific authority and knowledge. There are disagreements over what constitutes sustainable fishing in the Southern Ocean. There are challenges for the ATS that extend beyond the political-scientific nexus and include overlapping legal regimes, which mean the exploitation, management and protection of an array of issues including biodiversity, heritage, tourism, marine pollution, and climate change involves the intersection of regional and global governance. Finally, the ATS itself relies on individual and collective restraint as all parties recognise that the sovereignty of Antarctica remains unsettled. Arguably, the very durability of the ATS rests on investing in the epistemic authority of scientific knowledge and practice while also finding ways of defusing even deflecting the more destructive potential of conflict over resources.

The politics of Antarctica will become increasingly complicated and even controversial in future years. The struggle for the mastery of Antarctic futures will be emblematic of wider earthly politics regarding what we value, where and how we protect, and who decides on such matters. The role of non-human actors and forces will also make itself felt in the intervening period – warming oceans, acidification, underground volcanic eruptions, melting ice, alien species invasion to name but a few. In a warming world, with a population some projections suggest approach ever closer to 10 billion around the 2050s, it might mean that the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty and associated legal instruments like the Protocol on Environmental Protection (and its prohibition on mining and mineral resource exploitation) are stress-tested in ways that were unimaginable in the late 1950s. For now, the living resources of the Southern Ocean will remain in the proverbial frontline of struggles to reconcile human-led conservation with exploitation.

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