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Introduction: Justice in the Arctic

Corine Wood-Donnelly and Johanna Ohlsson

Policy makers and scholars often see the Arctic as an attractive laboratory for international cooperation, especially concerning sustainable development and environmental protection, yet it is hardly considered a site for fostering or testing the principles or perspectives of justice. Across scales of geography and hierarchies of power, the conditions of the Arctic has provided repeated opportunities to generate new ideas for cooperation and equitable systemic structures that seek to redress injustice in the future development of the region, and, beyond development, a flourishing existence. Yet the chapters in this volume are testaments to the opportunities missed in establishing the just conditions found within theories of justice. We are aware that, despite the potentially good intentions held by stakeholders with interests in the region, there is an inherent disjunction between the governance of the Arctic and its economic development. Caught between this disjunction are the people and the environment that it affects – an environment that is increasingly connected to, and important for, the entire global system.

Despite its oftentimes intuitive conviction and common-sense use, there is not one definition for the notion of justice. Justice has been discussed throughout centuries, across civilizations and the globe – not only in legal, moral and political philosophy but also in the various disciplines of social sciences, and, more recently, in environmental sciences. This provides us with a broad and nuanced understanding of justice, but a commonly agreed upon definition remains elusive. Some emphasize justice as a normative concept, while others see it as a relational process, yet others view it as fundamental to societal structures. Some focus on issues of distribution, others on representation, participation and recognition, while others take up the concept of core values in framing moral positions. These concepts each make up the core of our understanding of justice. The understanding of justice will, therefore, have subjective meanings that will also depend on where one begins their analysis. That justice can be understood and operationalized differently becomes inevitably clear when exploring issues of justice and injustice in the Arctic. What justice is, could be and should be in

the context of the Arctic is the theme of this book, and it starts an important conversation bridging research from various traditions. As an introductory collection of justice scholarship on the Arctic region, the purpose of this volume is rather to show the diversity of the notion of justice in the Arctic than to develop a grand theory of justice for the Arctic.

This volume marks the beginning of an inquiry into the issues and challenges of the Arctic through insights drawn from theories and perspectives of justice. In studies of the Arctic, the notion of justice is largely absent in normative, empirical and applied research. This void has existed even though scholars have long referred to injustices and problems in the region from the results of colonial legacies to the incorporation of the region into the international political economy, and even more recently, as the locus of concern for bearing an uneven impact of global climate change. Across society, environments and governance arrangements in the Arctic, there is momentum rising for recognition, reconciliation and transformation to ensure that the future of the region is not the same as its history. The purpose of this work is to introduce the ideas and theories of justice into the domain of Arctic research and to plant a seed for scholarship that makes investigations into how and why the conditions that foster injustice prevail in the Arctic.

Arctic Justice: Environment, Society and Governance offers a fundamental introduction to the study of different aspects of justice in the Arctic region. The chapters all contribute to the understanding of justice in the Arctic and, to varying degrees, consider three overarching themes: (1) global or broader circumpolar contexts to local challenges facing communities, (2) responsibility for justice in governance on various administrative levels, and finally, (3) failures of justice in distribution, procedures and recognition within the environment, society and territory. This work provides foundational insights for justice research on the Arctic and marks the starting point for such future research. Inspired by key thinkers in various traditions of justice theories, these chapters highlight the practical consequences of Arctic imperialism, resource exploitation and unequal power hierarchies in its governance practices.

Each individual critique draws the reader's attention to the familiar stories of the Arctic: global warming, resource extraction, economic and governance development, but does so through the lens of the concept of justice. The scholars included in this volume range from experts in the concept and conceptions of justice to those with decades of experience in Arctic research. Sincere, scholarly and informative, the essays in this volume offer important insights and provide a fascinating overview of perspectives and possibilities for bridging the gap between the Arctic, as it is today, and a future Arctic with just conditions. The cases and foci included here are intended to draw attention to issues of justice at the heart of the Arctic region and begin with

discussions of the broad ranging injustice that spans the entirety of the region, then narrows to more specific investigations on issues within a nation or a particular geographic place.

When it comes to issues of justice (and injustice) in the Arctic, many scholars have emphasized the climate change related challenges emerging in the Arctic. Additionally, aspects of socio-economic inequalities (see for instance [Chapters 11 and 12](#)), land dispossession ([Chapter 9](#)), resource grabbing ([Chapter 8](#)) and the colonial past ([Chapters 9 and 11](#)) still influence relations, structures and policies, and pose central questions for understanding issues of justice and injustice in the Arctic. Perspectives of justice theory could hence be seen as central to understanding the dynamics of justice and injustice in the Arctic region, with historical legacies central to comprehensively understanding contemporary circumstances. This contributes to the argument that justice theories – by addressing injustices – offer a crucial lens for increasing social, economic and environmental sustainability in the region. However, the use of the lens of justice theory has until now been lacking in Arctic research. This volume speaks directly towards this void.

Red threads of justice

The overarching concern of this book asks what we can learn about the Arctic when we apply the theories and ideas of justice to the region. This book investigates what the Arctic looks like through the lens of justice. The contributions include approaches from different disciplinary perspectives present within the group of scholars contributing chapters to this volume, drawing on justice as a conceptual tool in framing the ontology of the spatial and temporal relationships inherent in studies of the Arctic. The scope of this volume focuses on research that considers the environment, society and governance in the Arctic through the themes of responsibility and failures of justice through circumstances and conditions of injustice. Contributing to the existing discourse of normative and applied theories of justice, the volume seeks to conceptualize the role of justice in Arctic research, as well as find ways to promote and assist the transition from current modes of economic development and consumption towards a just and sustainable future. In claiming this broad academic scope on justice, the volume aims to speak to aspects of responsibility, both globally, transnationally and locally, as well as circumstances and conditions of injustice both normatively, conceptually and applied.

There are four central key features in this volume, which tie all of the chapters together. These are (1) the *Arctic*, (2) *normative aspects in conjunction with empirical problems of injustice*, (3) the centrality of the concept of *rights*, and (4) a *multidisciplinary* approach. Firstly, the initial key feature is the Arctic region. By bringing the Arctic and justice together, the volume contributes new insights of relevance for several disciplines, such as various environmental

social sciences, but also policy makers. Secondly, this volume contributes to the existing literature by bringing in normative aspects of justice in conjunction with issues of ethics, which arise in empirically based problems of injustice. By exploring what a just and ethically defensible future for the Arctic could and should look like, the volume benefits the reader in that it combines normative and empirical research, often by looking at conditions created by the past. Thirdly, in much of the authors' work throughout the chapters, the notion of rights holds a central position. This volume offers readers a nuanced account of what questions different types of rights give rise to. This volume's multidisciplinary approach is what makes this research possible and serves as the fourth key feature. The authors utilize sociology, geography, law, International Relations, political science, anthropology and ethics to create their arguments. This offers the reader a comprehensive volume which bridges theory and empirical work while offering a novel way of addressing and understanding issues in the Arctic.

Structure of the volume

The volume is organized so that the contributions and the questions posed by the scholars start from an international and conceptual perspective, and then continue toward a regional, national and community oriented one based on applied and empirical scrutiny in the various case studies. The first four chapters have a broader conceptual outlook centred on the overarching theoretical and empirical issues of justice and injustice in the Arctic, primarily focusing on aspects of responsibility. The chapters address what responsibility could (or should) look like in the Arctic in terms of environmental, societal or governance approaches. [Chapters 1, 2, 3](#) and [4](#) focus on international and transnational aspects of justice in the Arctic, and level critique towards previous as well as current structures, based on theories of justice.

[Chapter 1](#) applies Rainer Forst's theory of transnational justice to the region's norms, sovereignty and development. It specifically considers the issue of Arctic exceptionalism. By assessing Forst's normative principles and relating them to the structure and set up of the Arctic Council, the chapter contributes to the discussion on agency and governance in the Arctic. Within the framework of the International Relations theory of Social Constructivism, [Chapter 2](#) explores the function of the Arctic Council through the lens of Iris Marion Young's conceptions of structural injustice, five faces of oppression, and designations of responsibility for (in)justice. By showing where existing rules of governance result in oppression, this chapter contributes to a discussion of the role and potential of the Arctic Council and governance in the region more broadly.

[Chapter 3](#) contributes to the understanding of climate justice in general, and the particular challenges facing people, nature and landscapes in the

Arctic. By taking stock of what might be perceived as relevant normative standards for taking responsibility for the effects of rising global temperatures on the territories and communities of the Arctic, the chapter discusses the conditions for responsibility and accountability. Further, the chapter proposes a relational ‘civic connections approach’ model of responsibility that emphasizes the interconnectedness of peoples, regions, climate actions and outcomes.

In looking at the transnational scope of Arctic development, [Chapter 4](#) contributes a critical discussion on corporate social responsibility (CSR), suggesting that taking responsibility principally is not enough and that companies also need to consider a variety of justice concerns. The chapter argues that the processual focus of responsibility tends to leave out important aspects of the outcomes and their consequences, and thus why it is important to adhere to both processes and outcomes, combining various justice theories. Putting forward the JUST (Justice, Universal, Space, Time) framework, the chapter contributes constructively to debates on the role and responsibilities of energy companies in the Arctic.

Contributing important discussions on circumstances and conditions of injustice in the Arctic, and the assessability of the same, [Chapters 5, 6 and 7](#), take more of an explicit applied justice approach into consideration, centring on the fields of energy and environmental justice. [Chapter 5](#) is positioned in the emerging tradition of energy justice scholarship and speaks to some debates in the literature on Just Transitions. Here, the authors make novel and important contributions to the utility of the Capabilities Approach in conceptualizing and assessing the impact of oil and gas activities on the energy transition in the Arctic.

[Chapter 6](#) takes up the adoption and mainstreaming of the concept of environmental justice into various legal and policy instruments, such as the European Landscape Convention (2000), the global Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and, more recently, the European Green Deal (2019). Voicing a crucial concern about these practices only leading to signposting sustainability rather than creating actual social and political change, the chapter argues that such mainstreaming ultimately depends on a narrow and idealist theorization not simply of justice, but of nature and history in the production of landscapes. [Chapter 7](#) also relates to aspects of environmental justice. It addresses and assesses the concept of Sacrifice Zones. This makes an important contribution by expanding the discourse on environmental justice as well as Sacrifice Zones beyond the American context. By assessing the viability of the concept and linking it to aspects of justice and injustice in the Arctic, the chapter contributes an innovative and unifying framework that is helpful for analyses that examine the linkages between the environmental and human challenges in industrial extractive projects in the Arctic.

Several chapters in the volume, particularly [Chapters 8, 9](#) and [10](#), analyse various issues and challenges facing Indigenous peoples – both generally and with specific attention to the Indigenous populations in Finland and Norway. For instance, [Chapter 8](#) explores how industry projects affect Sámi peoples in the Norwegian Arctic. The regulatory processes for initiating industrial projects in the Norwegian Arctic are extensive. Still, as the authors convincingly argue, rights holders (typically Indigenous peoples) often do not know when or where in the processes their voices will be heard – or desires actioned. Procedures can be developed ‘by the book’ but still leave significant room for interpretation which then creates ambiguities for representation, participation and recognition. In addition, stakeholders’ and rightsholders’ legitimate claims for having their rights respected are often reduced to ‘interests’, indicating a loss of trust in the state, but also a failure of the state in fulfilling the obligations inherent in the social contract.

[Chapter 9](#) also contributes research based on Arctic Indigenous communities, and explores the historical legal context and colonial history that shapes the current debates and challenges for Forest Sámi in Northern Finland. Pinpointing how the legacy from the past still affects the opportunities of Indigenous peoples to secure their political autonomy, territory and cultural continuity, the chapter makes a crucial contribution towards our understanding of the Forest Sámi as the existing literature is scarce. Directly related to issues of Indigenous representation and the rights of Indigenous peoples, [Chapter 10](#) critically discusses the role of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in geoengineering in the Arctic. By focusing on the emerging issues of solar radiation management and ice-geoengineering through procedural aspects of justice, the chapter utilizes ideas emerging from intergenerational justice.

[Chapters 11](#) and [12](#) centre on aspects of justice and injustice of economic initiatives and developments in various parts of the Arctic. Economic extractive projects are now operating more widely in the Arctic, and [Chapter 11](#) contributes a discussion on the circumstances, structures and colonial legacies of industrial projects in South Greenland. Being closely connected to Denmark, local solutions in Greenlandic society indicate the interconnectedness of many issues such as aspects of representation, participation and recognition. The chapter connects the local communities’ legitimate demands for sustainable livelihoods with external interests and global trends.

Related to economic consequences and situated in a discussion on Just Transitions, [Chapter 12](#) discusses the challenges met by local communities when extractive oil and gas industries establish themselves in remote areas of the Arctic, centring on Hammerfest in Northern Norway. This chapter indicates that the oil and gas industry has a central role to play in developing small towns and in creating opportunities for thriving societies, but that

these industries must pursue these developments in a respectful and just way. It also conveys the complex picture of some societies thriving and others shrinking due to economic development trajectories.

Positions of justice

Taken together, the various chapters contribute to the volume being descriptive, explorative and normative in character. It verges on prescriptive recommendations for introducing change. They contribute to the different aspects of justice theory, as well as its applicability to the Arctic region. The chapters discuss injustices faced in the Arctic, and to various degrees relate these to theories or concepts of justice. Some of the chapters offer deductive discussions most often based on empirical and practical problems, yet with a primary theoretical focus, whilst others are more inductive, showing how the injustices empirically and contextually shape the societies, environments and territories of the Arctic. Most chapters in the volume contribute empirically grounded accounts, often with normative implications of high policy relevance for the public as well as business sectors.

Justice and injustice in the Arctic are multi-layered and multi-faceted. Each of the situations under study in this volume could have been examined from other perspectives of justice that may have come to different conclusions. There is also the question of subjectivity and positionality that emerges within this scholarship. Some of these assessments and analyses are conducted from an outsider perspective, yet often in co-creation with Arctic Indigenous communities, and most of this work is by scholars making no claims to Indigenous positions themselves. We acknowledge that this is a central and sensitive issue related to questions of Indigenous agency and recognition – and absolutely justice. The scholars in this volume are acutely aware about the debate on who legitimately could and should be researching Indigenous issues. Yet, speaking out on injustice and pointing towards the possibility for justice is the responsibility of scholars everywhere, regardless of cultural identities or global location.