

Geir Hønneland, *Russia and the Arctic: Environment, Identity and Foreign Policy* & Leif Christian Jensen, *International Relations in the Arctic: Norway and the Struggle for Power in the New North* (London/New York: IB Tauris, 2016) | 1

Geir Hønneland and Leif Christian Jensen, both friends and colleagues at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Norway, wrote one book each that were published in the early part of 2016 by indie publisher, I.B. Tauris. Although each book discusses a subject of its own, for many reasons, the two books seem to nicely complement each other especially for scholars seeking a more holistic approach to Norwegian-Russian Arctic relations. As the present author started reading Hønneland's book first and then went on to read Jensen's, this review unfolds in exactly the same manner.

In "Russia and the Arctic: Environment, Identity and Foreign Policy," Geir Hønneland goes back to one of his most prolific research subjects, namely Russia, and more specifically how Russia defines its own Arctic identity. Indeed, the aim of Hønneland's book is to shift the discourse from the more media-friendly notions of the "Arctic buzz" and the "Scramble for the Arctic" to discuss what Russia actually wants in the Arctic, and how Russia actually defines itself, through its own Arctic and political discourses, as an Arctic nation. At the heart of the book lies an essential conceptualization of narrative and identity theory in which narratives are not construed as being a mere reflection of the world, but rather constitutive of the self, and as Hønneland puts it, narratives are rarely of one's own making. In having Russia as the main protagonist of his book, Hønneland is able to further explore the role of the Arctic in shaping Russia's projection of its own identity at the national level as well as onto both the international and the inter-regional (i.e. Arctic) stages. To do so, Hønneland divided his book into six chapters of relatively equal size touching upon subjects such as the so-called "Rush for the Arctic", the delimitation of the Barents Sea, management of marine resources, continental shelf issues and Region building processes through identity formation. As a Norwegian researcher, Hønneland also strongly focuses on the relation between Norway and Russia, especially at the Barents-region level but also onto the broader stage.

Ambivalent relations could be said to be one of the major premises on which this book is built. Internally, Russia is perceived as the epitome of the epic absurdist genre, the "anti-Disneyland" where everything that could go wrong actually goes wrong, but Russia also likes to be seen as "the territory without limits", the boundless, borderless land with no edges. And, to this respect, Hønneland shows the readers that the characteristics, which are generally associated with "Northern-ness" or with the Arctic, are the ones Russia associates with itself in a process that aims at constructing its own Arctic identity in blurring the

Geir Hønneland, *Russia and the Arctic: Environment, Identity and Foreign Policy* & Leif Christian Jensen, *International Relations in the Arctic: Norway and the Struggle for Power in the New North* (London/New York: IB Tauris, 2016) | 2

boundaries between the Arctic as such and Russia. On this subject, Geir Hønneland even concludes that the Arctic is more Russian than Russia itself.

In the collective unconsciousness, the Russian struggle for identity is often perceived as being linked to its unconventional relation with the West and, in this view, the only choice there is to make for Russia is between being willing to create relations with the West - to get closer to Europe - or to create a sense of national identity more focused on Russia itself. In either case, Russian identity is construed as being a narrative in which Russia needs to other the West in order to have a more stable identity. In modern days, as Hønneland points out, the Arctic is the modern incarnation of Russia's willingness to work with the West, especially when Vladimir Putin talks of the Arctic as "our common Arctic home." In this mind-set, Russia is both depicted as being wary of the West - especially Norway in the Barents Region and Canada in the broader Arctic - but also as being willing to sit at the table with other Arctic nations.

On top of discussing four key Arctic issues from a Norwegian perspective (i.e. security, Russia, the environment, and the exploitation of natural resources in the Barents Sea), with "International Relations in the Arctic: Norway and the Struggle for Power in the New North," Leif Christian Jensen aims at offering a new methodological and analytical framework to the field of discourse analysis and to social sciences (more so than Hønneland), thus the first two chapters of the book are heavily theoretical. These methodological chapters focus on how dominant discourses enable and disable actions both at the domestic and the international levels and "how socially oriented discourse analysis can be relevant to analyses of actual political issues." Indeed, Jensen himself states that one of his sub-aims is to demystify discourse analysis and make it more accessible (to make it "less frightening and more tempting") to both scholars and students who are active in political science and other fields within social sciences. Therefore, Jensen's book, which is an extended version of his doctoral thesis, could well be read with a non-Arctic approach if one was to focus on the broader theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the case study being the Norwegian 'struggle' to construct itself as an Arctic nation, being knowledgeable in Arctic matters helps to understand how Jensen's analysis is to be applied.

Throughout the book, Jensen wants to demonstrate that discourse is constructive, and that, through discourse, it is possible to construct truth, meaning, and knowledge. To do so, he

divided his book into eight chapters in which he covers subjects such as discourse analysis of Arctic policy debates and official Norwegian and Russian foreign policy discourses on the New North. Relying on a well-constructed database research analysis of four of the main Norwegian newspapers (i.e. *Aftenposten*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Klassekampen*, and *Nordlys*), Jensen researched how national identities are constructed in newspapers and texts written by those holding power. Furthermore, Jensen uses the example of Norwegian mineral resources exploitation to show to what extent discourses and narratives can be co-opted and how Norway's main official discourse in the Barents Sea shifted from being environmentally-friendly to "drilling for sake of the environment." Indeed, the argument of Norwegian environmentalists was co-opted and reversed by the pro-oil side whose argument has been to focus on others, such as Russia, and say that if Norway left it to other states or private businesses, they would do a worse job at being environmentally friendly. To link this with Hønneland's theory, this can be seen as a Norwegian attempt to other Russia to justify its own Arctic identity. Jensen even goes further in his analysis in stating that this kind of shift in discourses is accentuated by the press and by official publications, through which the main discourse reinforces itself.

One of the most positive aspects of Jensen's book - and something rare in academia - is Jensen's strong commitment to connect with his readers and to involve them through the text itself. Far from the generally dry and anonymous academic approach, which, more often than not, tries to suppress any trace of temporality and of self in order to make a lasting contribution to the researched field, Jensen's inclusion of himself and of his readers into the structure of his research manages to make it easier for the readers to relate and to understand the theoretical framework.

Both Hønneland and Jensen managed to avoid talking of the Arctic as the new hotspot in international affairs, and, to some extent, their down-to-earth approach to Arctic relations can be seen as an attempt to normalise Arctic issues and to hush the "rush for the Arctic" discourse and to finally put it to bed. Both books can also be seen as a successful attempt to show how important it is, in terms of international affairs, to understand how countries perceived themselves and how they would like to be seen on the international stage. Far from gathering dust on libraries' shelves, these books will be interesting for students, academics, and anyone interested in Arctic relations, especially in Norwegian-Russian Arctic relations and how this relation is construed on both sides of the border. However, these

Geir Hønneland, *Russia and the Arctic: Environment, Identity and Foreign Policy* & Leif Christian Jensen, *International Relations in the Arctic: Norway and the Struggle for Power in the New North* (London/New York: IB Tauris, 2016) | 4

books should not only be read by Arctic scholars, as they also have much to offer to those seeking to read more about identity and discourse analysis and how it can be used in nation building and in international affairs.