For each country, what is the political dimension to practical application of their aspirations to become key players in polar regions? In terms of research that will be carried out as a result of the scientific research endeavours and the scientific merit of research programs in order to advance significant polar bases, and to increase science cooperation for addressing the challenges facing the polar regions. In doing so, it develops themes of my earlier work on the interface between science and politics in Antarctica and the organization of multinational Antarctic science programs (Dey Nuttall 1994, 1997), as well as recent research on the comparative politics of Nordic Arctic science and research policy (Dey Nuttall and Nuttall 2009a, 2009b).

Canada in the Antarctic

Canada is the second largest Arctic state (after Russia) and a key member of the Arctic Council. It is also a signatory to the Antarctic Treaty but it operates outside the decision-making apparatus and has no Antarctic research facility. In 2009, the federal government launched a new Northern Strategy and has asserted its claim to be an Arctic power and a polar nation. Scientists and policy-makers have argued, however, that both Canada’s northern science and political strategies for the North should be framed within a larger context of a polar strategy that is not only circumpolar, but which encompasses the Antarctic as well. The Canadian Committee for Antarctic Research (CCAR) has identified the creation of a Canadian Antarctic Research Program (CARP) as one of its highest priorities and over the last decade or so — indeed, the initiation of CARP has been recommended by the CPC (e.g. Canadian Polar Commission 1995, 2002).

As the last Arctic state to accede to the Antarctic Treaty, Canada is also a major Arctic country that operates as a non-consultative party member outside the decision-making machinery of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). Canada acceded to the Antarctic Treaty in 1988. The same year it became a party to CCAMLR and then to CCAS in 1990. In 2003 Canada ratified the Madrid Protocol. Notably, Canada is one of four non-consultative parties (the others being three being Denmark, Romania and Switzerland) of the Antarctic Treaty that is a full member of the Scientific Committee of Antarctic Research (SCAR). Full membership of SCAR requires a country to have an active research program in Antarctica. After four years of associate membership to the SCAR, Canada was admitted as a full member in 1998. Yet, Canada has chosen not to participate in a decision-maker within the ATS. This has also meant a lack of commitment to the establishment of CARP.

Significant investments are required to sustain Antarctic operations and this has been identified as a key challenge for a Canadian Antarctic program (Canadian Polar Commission 2002). This research investigates the reasons and arguments put forward for a Canadian scientific presence in Antarctica. The study argues that it is important to make the distinction that matters relating to the Canadian Arctic are largely domestic issues for Canada, whereas the significance of Antarctica lies in being a unique area where a system of international governance is being successfully developed.

This project will contribute to our understanding of the region of both Antarctica and the Arctic as international political regions and to the policy-focused literature on the future of both polar regions. There is very little critical literature available on the organization and management of polar science and the influence of politics in determining national priorities and funding of research and logistics in the polar regions. While there are some case studies of individual countries engaged in long-term polar science (e.g. Gaudin 2007), there are limited comparative studies on how governments handle the links between science and politics in the polar regions. This research will attempt to fill the gap in understanding such dynamics.

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