

The role of cultural heritage in the geopolitics of the Arctic: the example of *Franklin's lost expedition*

KIM PAWLIW, ÉTIENNE BERTHOLD AND FRÉDÉRIC LASSERRE



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Sir John Franklin's ships departed from Greenhithe port in Great Britain (1845) with the aim of discovering the Northwest Passage in what is now Canada. During their journey, both ships got stuck in ice near King William Island and eventually sank. Over time, searches were held in order to find both wrecks. More recently, under the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper (2006–2015) there was renewed interest regarding what is now referred to as *Franklin's lost expedition*. Searches resumed and narratives were formed regarding the importance of this expedition for Canadian identity. This article is embedded in a sociocultural perspective and will examine the role that cultural heritage can play in the geopolitics of the Arctic while highlighting the process of 'patrimonialization' that the *Franklin's lost expedition* has undergone during Harper's term in office. Based on discourse analysis, it brings out the main narratives that surrounded the modern searches of Franklin's wrecks which are related to history, national historic sites, mystery, diversity, importance of Inuit knowledge and information gathering. This article demonstrates that these narratives were intended to form a new Canadian northern identity and to assert Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic.

Keywords: cultural heritage, Arctic, identity, sovereignty, Franklin's lost expedition, Stephen Harper

Kim Pawliw (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7962-4339>), Étienne Berthold (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6524-8125>) & Frédéric Lasserre (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5220-9787>), Geography Dept, 2405, Terrasse St, Université Laval, Québec (Québec) G1V 0A6, Canada. E-mail : Kim.Pawliw.1@ulaval.ca, Etienne.Berthold@ggr.ulaval.ca, Frederic.Lasserre@ggr.ulaval.ca

Introduction

In an era of climate change which led to the retreat of polar sea ice, sovereignty questions, such as the status of the Northwest Passage in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, have become prominent among circumpolar states in the Arctic region. Given the potential of the Arctic (hydrocarbon on the seabed, shorter transit routes), various approaches were used by Canadian politicians to promote sovereignty over this region, be it a legal approach with the application of the Law of the Sea, or an approach that highlights the importance of identity, with the emphasis put on Canada being a northern nation (Byers

2009; Bartenstein 2010; Dupré 2010; Guy & Pelletier 2010; Lasserre 2010a; Burke 2018; Têtu *et al.* 2019). Regarding this identity approach, Burke (2018) gave the examples of the adoption of the inuksuk (Inuit landmark) as the emblem of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics or the 50\$ CAD bill which portrays the Amundsen vessel (Canadian Coast Guard) in frozen waters. Another example would be the tremendous importance given to the *Franklin's lost expedition*, a 19th century expedition in the Arctic Archipelago, in official narratives. By analyzing these narratives, this article is embedded in a sociocultural perspective and will examine the role that cultural heritage can play in the geopolitics of the Arctic while highlighting the process of 'patrimonialization' that the *Franklin's lost expedition* has undergone for more than a decade in Canada.

Franklin's lost expedition refers to Sir John Franklin's ill-fated expedition of 1845–1848. In 1845, Franklin's two ships, *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror*, departed from Greenhithe port, Great Britain. This expedition's goal aimed at discovering the Northwest Passage in what is now Canada (at the time a British colony), across the Arctic Archipelago, then loosely controlled – with an uncertain title – by the United Kingdom (Franklin 1910; Smith 1961). During their journey, both ships got stuck in ice off King William Island, resulting in the death of some of the 129 crew members including Franklin himself. Later, in 1848, the remaining crew members abandoned the ships and left by foot, which also led them to a certain death. Eventually, both ships sank. Many searches occurred in the 19th century to locate Franklin's ships but only skeleton remains, graves and some relics were found (McDiarmid 2014; Neatby & Mercier 2018; Têtu *et al.* 2019). According to Lackenbauer and Dean (2016), the expedition became a figure embodying British, and then Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic.

During his term in office, Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic became a priority for Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006–2015). In line with his "use it or lose it" approach, he tried to affirm Canada's sovereignty in several ways, such as the construction of an icebreaker and of six ice-strengthened patrol vessels (McCorristine 2013; Lackenbauer & Dean 2016). The Canadian government has also been trying to show that Canadians do occupy this territory and that their sovereignty is indeed inherited from past events, here rooted in tragedy and in the old narrative of a Canadian history forged on the fight against nature (Lasserre 1998). In this vein, searches sought to find the wrecks of the *Franklin's lost expedition* were conducted by Parks Canada, a governmental agency responsible for protecting and managing Canada's natural and cultural heritage. Starting from 2008, search ships surveyed the Arctic region from late August to the beginning of September almost every year. In September 2014, following the *Victoria Strait expedition*, the *HMS Erebus* was found south of King William Island. This discovery was followed, two years later (September 2016), by that of the *HMS Terror* in Terror Bay, near the shore of King William Island (Government of Canada 2014a, 2014b; Canadian Geographic 2015; Marsh & Beattie 2018; Parks Canada 2019a, 2019b).

Researchers and authors have investigated *Franklin's lost expedition* according to several cultural perspectives: from the viewpoint of popular imagination (Craciun 2014), from the viewpoint of folklore and supernatural beliefs (McCorristine 2013), from the viewpoint of literary imagery of the Canadian North (Atwood 1995), from the viewpoint of Arctic archeological discoveries management in relation to local Inuit populations (Hodgetts 2012) and from the viewpoint of the international legal framework regarding submerged cultural heritage with the examples of *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror* wrecks (Têtu *et al.* 2019).

This article proposes to investigate the impact of *Franklin's lost expedition* from another perspective, that of heritage studies. We will focus on the role heritage may play in the geopolitics of the Arctic. Our purpose is to highlight that, in the 21st century's context, the politically-driven narratives related to the *Franklin's lost expedition* took shape in a geopolitics in which the interpretation of heritage is sustained by a will to assert the State's sovereignty over the Arctic as well as a wish to rewrite a new chapter of Canada's history, thus forming a new Canadian northern identity.

The article is divided in three sections. First, we will look at heritage and geopolitics from a theoretical point of view, and will expose our methodological foundations which are based on discourse analysis. Second, in order to implement our approach to discourse analysis, we will examine Canadian Prime Minister Harper's heritage policy, with the example of the commemoration of the War of 1812. Finally, we will concentrate on heritage narratives regarding the *Franklin's lost expedition* to underscore the role played by heritage to affirm Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic. We will also compare Harper's

narratives to those of the previous and subsequent governments, respectively the Liberal Governments of Jean Chrétien (1993–2003) and Paul Martin (2003–2006) as well as the Liberal Government of Justin Trudeau (2015–present). To conclude, we will demonstrate that the narratives regarding the *Franklin's lost expedition*, mostly used during Harper's term in office, aimed at forming a new Canadian northern identity and at asserting Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic.

Theoretical framework and methodology: heritage and geopolitics

Cultural heritage can be defined as an object or an intangible heritage that has been judged worthy to be preserved and passed on. In recent years, research has emphasized the fact that heritage conservation is also the offspring of social values. Thus, according to the philosopher Lucier (2011, 64) "To patrimonialize [means] to make decisions [about heritage], to want to make suggestions, sometimes to impose". Heritage may thus be spoken of in political terms, often in ways that seek to legitimize power. As such, studying the 'construction' of heritage necessarily involves ideologies (Berthold 2012) and underlying socio-economic contexts (Narwold *et al.* 2008). In another light, the 'construction' of heritage is clearly a search for a form of meaning. The poststructuralist approach sees patrimonialization as part of a system defined by its capacity to create signs (Graham *et al.* 2000), a system upheld by institutions, practices and values and symbols. What is considered heritage, therefore worthy of preservation, conservation or commemoration, can change depending on the interests of the various actors, such as governments or lobbies. Indeed, heritage is 'constructed' according to the present time interests of various actors. These interests can be perceived through actors' speeches and narratives. Heritage can be embodied in policies. Policies are an essential part of heritage conservation, because they give an impetus to conservation efforts and help to concretize their implementation. Through heritage policies, a specific group may try to promote its interests and its ideologies, and to seek domination over another group.

From a geopolitical point of view, heritage and heritage policies may carry a cultural narrative whose role is to legitimize a political agenda. These narratives may be materialized by statues, commemorative plaques and the cultural promotion of specific places that become "places of memory" (Nora 1984, 1986, 1992). Whether actively supported by public authorities or that they may gradually emerge in popular representations, places of memory confer a historic and political meaning to specific locations. These places thus bear the political values both of those that agree with this reading of History, and of those that reject it, a phenomenon epitomized in 2020 through the destruction of statues of Confederate generals in the United States. Because of these narratives associated with them, these places are thus the object of power rivalries that can be analyzed as geopolitical discourse. Geopolitics is a geographical approach aimed at analyzing power rivalries over territories and places (Subra 2012; Lasserre *et al.* 2020), suited for the analysis of power rivalries and stakes over memory places (Lasserre & Stan 2019).

The method of data collecting and processing consists of discourse analysis. The concept of discourse will be understood according to Foucault's (2002) definition. In Foucauldian theory, the statements expressed by individuals feed a social discourse. The theory considers that each statement "as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced" (Foucault 2002, 118). In other words, a discourse is made of statements which belong to the same discursive formation, that are in a specific spatiotemporal context and that express specific interests. Seignour (2011), for her part, perceived discourses as acts of influence which depend on a certain context. According to her, discourses do not only portray reality as demonstrated by facts. Instead, they are constituted of representations that speakers have of this reality and representations that they want to inculcate to their audience. Thus, speakers aim at influencing their audience with their speeches. Taking into account these definitions, some elements were identified in speeches to facilitate their analysis: the speakers who stated the discourses, the relations between various speakers, the speakers' interests, the context in which discourses were stated and the speakers' arguments. It has to be noted that in the present article, we will focus on narratives, which embody discourses from an empirical viewpoint.

Discourse analysis aims at studying the enunciation of discourses. This method is similar to content analysis which is defined by Krippendorff (1980, 21) as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data in their context”. Content analysis aims at identifying and characterizing themes that emerge from a text, a transcribed interview, an article or any other medium. Discourse analysis is different from content analysis in the way it does not only take into account the content of discourses, but also their ‘container’, the way speeches were expressed. Therefore, instead of just attempting to describe speeches, it also tries to interpret them. This interpretation must be done according to the speakers’ (or actors) intentions and interests at the present time (Paillé & Mucchielli 2009; Seignour 2011).

For the purpose of the present research, we have identified, collected and processed all major speeches by the actors involved in Franklin’s searches from 2006 to 2015, such as Conservative Government representatives, mostly Stephen Harper (Canadian Conservative Prime Minister) and Leona Aglukkaq (Environment Minister and Minister responsible for Parks Canada). Other actors included Ryan Harris, Marc-André Bernier, Jonathan Moore, Charles Dagneau (members of Parks Canada’s underwater archeological team, UAT) as well as John Geiger (Royal Geographical Society). To access their speeches, news releases, newspaper articles and websites (mostly Parks Canada and Government of Canada official websites) were consulted. Other speeches came from videos (which we transcribed), such as short documentaries or Harper’s filmed speeches. To contextualize these speeches, we put them in relation with policy documents concerning the Arctic region.

Stephen Harper’s heritage policy: the example of the War of 1812

Franklin’s lost expedition was not the first attempt made by the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper (2006–2015) to form a new Canadian identity; this identity formation is inscribed in a broader context of heritage policy. Thus, we will examine Canada’s Prime Minister Harper heritage policy, with the example of the commemoration of the War of 1812.

First of all, the War of 1812 was taken to refer to a military conflict between the United States and Great Britain, when Canada was a British colony. It was commemorated in 2012 through exhibitions, documentaries, historical re-enactments, new stamps and coins, iPad apps as well as the erection of the monument *Triumph Through Diversity* on Ottawa’s Parliament hill (Dorion-Soulié & Roussel 2013; Tiro 2013; Frenette 2014). The generous spending in commemorating the war may be justified by Harper’s priority of rewriting history while forming a new Canadian identity through a narrative representing Canada as being a victorious warrior nation, born out of conflicts and proud of its British past. According to Sjolander (2014) and Tremblay (2017), this Prime minister tried to demonstrate that Canada found its origin in the War of 1812; this war was credited for forming the Canadian nation and its armed forces. Indeed, the commemoration efforts tended to show that Canada would not have existed if the American invasion had not been repelled, and that these events led to the Confederation of 1867.

Dorion-Soulié and Roussel (2013), Frenette (2014) and Sjolander (2014) underscored three main characteristics of this new identity formation: distinguish the Conservative Government from previous Liberal Governments, differentiate the Canadian identity from the American identity and unite Anglophones, Francophones and First Nations under the term that they all participated in the war. The first characteristic stressed the fact that the Conservative Government is distinct from previous Liberal Governments which are often characterized as promoting international institutions, multilateral processes, and multiculturalism, thus representing Canada as a peacekeeping nation. As pointed by Sjolander (2014), instead of associating Canada with peacekeeping ideas as was the case under the Liberal Government, it became associated with military conflicts and its attachment to the British Crown, recalling the British colonial period of 1812. Regarding the second characteristic, meaning the differentiation between Canadian identity and American identity, it concerned the fact that Canada is different from the United States because it won the war. As mentioned by Sjolander (2014), this differentiation was intensified by the reminder of Canada’s British past with the significance given to monarchy and loyalty to Queen Elizabeth II. As for the third characteristic, meaning the unity between Anglophones, Francophones as well as First Nations, it showed the importance of the

alliance of these three founding people in repelling the American invasion. For Frenette (2014), this amounts to an attempt to unify Canadians using a common myth – the importance of the war in Canada's history. The War of 1812 was shown as being the unifying factor that allowed Canada to become an independent country respectful of all its people.

According to Sjolander (2014, 159), a “true Canadian national identity” was formed in the context of the bicentenary of the War of 1812. Burke's (2018) research highlighted that this war narrative was used to demonstrate Canadian unity in the face of adversity as well as a positive relation among settlers and indigenous people. This narrative is similar to other narratives regarding *Franklin's lost expedition*, such as one that underscores the relevance of Inuit knowledge. Thus, during Stephen Harper's term in office, Canada was portrayed as a warrior nation in relation to the War of 1812 and as a northern nation in relation to the *Franklin's lost expedition*.

Franklin's lost expedition: Arctic policy and heritage narratives

Arctic policy and narratives under Liberal Governments of Jean Chrétien (1993–2003) and Paul Martin (2003–2006)

Even if the Arctic region was mentioned more frequently and became more significant under its term in office, the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper was not the first to form an Arctic policy referring to a Canadian northern identity and to Canada's sovereignty over this region.

Britain transferred the Northwest Territories to Canada in 1870, and the Arctic archipelago in 1880. However, for several decades this remote region attracted little attention from the Canadian government (Lasserre 2010b). The main federal concerns were the enforcement of the Canadian sovereignty, against poaching by American whalers at the turn of the 20th century, or against American claims on Ellesmere Island or Norwegian claims about the Sverdrup Islands, land claims settled respectively by abandonment by Washington in about 1910 and in 1930 (Lasserre & Lalonde 2010). The construction of the Alaska Highway during WW2 and of the DEW line during the 1950s underlined again this unease about Canadian sovereignty in the High North. The idea that Canada should claim sovereignty over not only land, but also Arctic maritime expanses, was first mentioned in 1946, and considered during the 1960s (Lasserre & Lalonde 2010). Assertion was refrained because of the complete lack, at the time, of legal concepts Canada could mobilize to support its nascent claim (Lajeunesse 2016). It is the transit of the oil tanker *Manhattan* that triggered the formal assertion of sovereignty over the waters of the archipelago in 1973 (Lasserre & Lalonde 2010). Following the unwelcome transit of the American icebreaker *Polar Sea* in 1985 across the Northwest Passage, the Canadian government further asserted its claim by proclaiming straight baselines around the archipelago in 1986, to explicit a sovereignty officially based on historic Inuit title (Byers & Lalonde 2009; Government of Canada 2010; Lajeunesse 2018).

It is thus apparent that Canadian claims to the Northwest Passage are constructed on the mobilization of Inuit title. From the 1990s onward emerged a gradual movement towards the use of the Inuit title in Canada's claim; a central role played in domestic Canadian politics by native and northern issues, as well as in Canadian foreign policy notably with the Arctic Council (Scrivener 1996; Exner-Pirot 2020); and a gradual devolution of autonomy to Inuit territories, embodied in the creation of Nunavik in 1986 (in Northern Quebec) and Nunavut in 1999 (a federal territory) (Loukacheva 2007). This movement was reciprocated by a strong support from Inuit community leaders for the Canadian sovereignty claim over the Northwest Passage (Fenge 2007).

Following the end of the Cold War, Canada's Arctic policy shifted from a militarization approach toward a more cooperative approach (Lackenbauer & Dean 2016). It was in this context that *The northern dimension of Canada's foreign policy* (Government of Canada 2000) was released under the Liberal Government of Jean Chrétien. This document underscored four objectives in the Arctic region. They concerned the strengthening of security and economic development of Northerners and Aboriginal peoples, the assertion of Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic, the establishment of this region in an international system which must be rules-based as well as the promotion of human

security and sustainable development. Other than these objectives, the document highlighted the importance of the North in Canadian identity asserting that “a sense of northerness has long been central to the Canadian identity” (Government of Canada 2000, 2).

Some years after, under the Liberal Government of Paul Martin, *Canada's Northern Strategy* (unreleased – 2004) was announced and underscored seven objectives in the Arctic region, one of which consisted in reinforcing Canada's sovereignty, security and cooperation in the North (Canadian Arctic Resources Committee 2006). Some time later, with evidence of global warming, more challenges were perceived in this region such as the possibility to transit through the Arctic waters (thus raising the question of the status of the Northwest Passage) which was seen as threatening international recognition of Canada's sovereignty. It was in these circumstances that the *International Policy Statement* (2005) was formed and which stated that the Arctic became a priority, underscoring the need to assert Canada's sovereignty in this region (Government of Canada 2005; Lackenbauer & Dean 2016). Thus, even if less prominent, statements promoting the Canadian northern identity and Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic were established before Harper's Conservative Government.

Regarding specifically the *Franklin's lost expedition*, if one considers the difficulty to find statements about this expedition, it did not have as high a priority as during Stephen Harper's term.

Heritage narratives under the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper (2006–2015): Franklin's lost expedition

Since the very beginning of Stephen Harper's Conservative Government term in office on 6th February 2006, the Arctic became a priority. At the time, as stated by Harper himself, the need to protect “our national sovereignty” in the Arctic was addressed. Indeed, in 2007, during the Speech from the Throne were highlighted four priorities regarding this region: “strengthening Canada's sovereignty,” “protecting our environmental heritage,” “promoting economic and social development” and “improving and devolving governance” (Lackenbauer & Dean 2016, xxxv–xlv). This was followed later in 2009 when *Canada's Northern Strategy. Our North, our heritage, our future* was revealed (Government of Canada 2009). In addition to bolstering the aforementioned priorities, it also underscored the need for cooperation in the North while highlighting the significant importance of this region for Canadians. In fact, it is stated that the North is part of Canadian national identity and of Canada's nation building (Government of Canada 2009, 1–39; Lackenbauer & Dean 2016, xxxv–xlv). Later still, in August 2010, in its *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy. Exercising sovereignty and promoting Canada's northern strategy abroad* (Government of Canada 2010), the Conservative government linked together these four priorities; this means that the protection of environmental heritage, the promotion of economic and social development as well as the improvement of governance were all ways of bolstering Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. The inclusion of the North in Canadian identity is also recalled (Government of Canada 2010). It was in this context where tremendous importance was given to the Arctic region that narratives involving *Franklin's lost expedition* were formed, which became related to Canadian northern identity and Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic.

From 2007 to 2015, on various occasions Stephen Harper reiterated the importance of *Franklin's lost expedition* in Canadian identity. As he stated during the ceremony on the discovery of the *HMS Erebus* wreck at the Royal Ontario Museum on 4th March 2015 “[the Franklin expedition is] part of our concrete broader northern narrative and northern identity” (Canadian Geographic 2015). Thus, he seemed to use *Franklin's lost expedition* in order to form a new Canadian northern identity. This can also be perceived through four specific narratives promoted by Harper himself as well as by other actors such as government representatives and governmental agency representatives, mostly Parks Canada: the importance of Franklin in Canada's history, the promotion of an undiscovered national historic site, the need to solve a great Canadian mystery and the diversity of partners during searches, which seemed to represent Canadian diversity.

As mentioned above, the Canadian northern identity formation can be perceived through four specific narratives. First of all, the importance of the *Franklin's lost expedition* in Canada's history was often mentioned by Stephen Harper and Leona Aglukkaq, Environment Minister and Minister responsible for Parks Canada. For Harper, both Franklin expedition and Franklin's modern searches

are important in Canada's history and contribute in uniting all Canadians. The former is related to Canadian heritage whereas the latter, mostly the *HMS Erebus* discovery following the 2014 *Victoria Strait expedition*, is perceived as a "great historic event" (Global News 2014). Having participated in searches, Harper mentioned during the 2014 expedition that "Sir Franklin's exploration and discovery of parts of Canada's North are an important part of our history and contributed to Canada becoming the wonderful country we enjoy today" (Prime Minister of Canada 2014). This statement demonstrated the importance of Franklin in the discovery and the formation of Canada while positioning him as a great explorer and as a significant Canadian figure. Indeed, later the same year, Harper even compared Franklin to John Cabot, Martin Frobisher and John Davis, all great explorers who discovered parts of North America (Geiger 2014). In addition to underlining what he considered Franklin's impressive journey and discovery, Harper qualified him as a "hero" and as an "incredible individual" (Geiger 2014; Canadian Geographic 2015). On some occasions, other than highlighting Franklin's accomplishments and "heroic successes", Harper also stressed his importance for Canadians throughout the years by demonstrating that even songs or essays were written about his expedition. In the same vein, he qualified Stan Roger's song that mentioned Franklin expedition as being "our unofficial national anthem" (Windsor Star 2013; Geiger 2014). For example, Harper stated during the announcement of the finding of the *HMS Erebus* following the 2014 expedition that "[Franklin expedition] has been the subject of scientists and historians, writers and signers and hum... so I think we have really hum, a really important day mapping together the history of our country" (Global News 2014). Aglukkaq shared Harper's view on the significance of *Franklin's lost expedition* in Canada's history and as a factor of unity while specifying that it may contribute to the connection between all Canadians. During a book release on the finding of the *HMS Investigator* wreck on 19th November 2013, while talking about the Franklin expedition, she also accentuated the commitment of the Canadian Government to promote "Canada's Northern history by preserving the heritage which unites us as Canadians" (Parks Canada 2013a).

Another narrative regarding identity formation concerns the promotion of the Franklin's wrecks being a national historic site. From a historical perspective, in 1992, *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror* wrecks were considered at the time the only undiscovered national historic site in Canada. They became a historic site under the *Historic sites and monuments acts*, designated so by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. This designation resulted from the fact that the *Franklin's lost expedition* was perceived as a part of Canada's history, of Canadian northern exploration and of the formation of a Canadian nation. For these reasons, it became important to protect both wrecks should they be discovered. In 1997, a non-legally binding agreement referred to as the *Memorandum of understanding* was reached between the United Kingdom and Canada, whereby the UK was supposed to transfer the wrecks' ownership to the latter. In the 21st century, national historic sites are still important and are designated as sites that help to uncover Canada's history, cultural traditions and identity. Thus, during modern Franklin searches that began in 2008, the significance of *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror* as a national historic site has been recalled (Government of Canada 2014c, 2017; Beeby 2018; Parks Canada 2019c, 2019d). Because the wrecks had long been an undiscovered national historic site, Stephen Harper said he felt an obligation to discover them while Ryan Harris of the UAT directly linked them to the Northwest Passage and to Canada's history (Parks Canada 2013b; Windsor Star 2013). When the *HMS Erebus* was finally discovered in 2014, during a statement on 9th September of the same year, Harper added that "our Government has been deeply committed to finding *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror*, which were Canada's only undiscovered national historic site" (CBC 2014). Other than the inclusion of *Franklin's lost expedition* in Canadian identity, one can really wonder if the promotion of this historic site was also a manner to bolster Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic. Indeed, in the Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy of 2010 (Government of Canada 2010), protection of environmental heritage, such as the establishment of national parks, is directly linked to Arctic sovereignty. We may think the same logic can apply to the protection of cultural heritage and to national historic sites that also guarantee the wrecks a legal protection (Government of Canada 2010; Harris 2018).

Other than the history narrative and the national historic site narrative, Stephen Harper frequently used a mystery narrative, meaning that *Franklin's lost expedition* was a great Canadian mystery,

and that it was a Canadian duty to solve it. Used on several occasions, Harper highlighted the importance of the Franklin expedition as being “one of Canada’s great mysteries” (CBC 2014; Geiger 2014; Government of Canada 2014d). This narrative seems to have been used mostly to underscore the relevance of the Franklin expedition for Canadians, which can be perceived through the use of superlatives such as “great” or “greatest.” Also, the simple fact that this expedition is presented as a mystery seems to bolster its importance, comparatively to similar known events such as the sinking of the Titanic. During an interview with John Geiger of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society some months after the discovery of *HMS Erebus*, on 1st December 2014, Harper mentioned that “the Franklin expedition is part of that broader story [the Northwest Passage] – the most tragic, and most mysterious part, to be sure. For almost 200-years Canadians – not just Canadians, people around the world – have wondered what happened to the Franklin expedition. Now that we’ve found the first of the two ships, we can begin unlocking the mystery of what happened to them” (Geiger 2014). Geiger, for his part, compared the *HMS Erebus* and the *HMS Terror* to the Titanic or the Bismarck. For him, the former are bigger than the latter because of the mystery that surrounded them as told in September 2014 following the discovery of *HMS Erebus* “no journals, no logs, no survivors to tell the story...” (Rannie 2014).

Finally, the last narrative of the formation of a Canadian northern identity concerned the diversity of partners during Franklin’s wrecks searches, which was mentioned by Stephen Harper, Leona Aglukkaq and Ryan Harris. Indeed, a wide range of partners was involved in modern searches, such as “governmental, non-governmental, community, profit-seeking-businesses”, and Inuit colleagues (Canadian Geographic 2015). Harper seemed to use this diversity in order to make the search more Canadian, meaning more representative of Canada’s history, with references to the British colonial period and modern Canada. Concerning the British colonial period, Harper and Aglukkaq pointed out that these searches would not have been possible without the relation between state-of-the-art Canadian technology and Inuit oral history. This seemed to refer to the period of first encounter between Europeans and Inuit that is part of Canada’s early history. For Harper, this represented a “great metaphor” for the country. In keeping with the same stance, Ryan Harris considered that both wrecks “speak to a very early period of interaction between hum, the Inuit and Europeans” (Parks Canada 2013b). Concerning modern Canada, Harper underscored that the diversity of partners represents Canada’s diversity, which contributes to its actual prosperity. During the ceremony on the discovery of the *HMS Erebus* at the Royal Ontario Museum on 4th March 2015, after enumerating all the people, agencies and organizations having taken part in the searches ranging from Parks Canada to “friends in Nunavut,” Harper stated that “when you look at such a broad diverse group of partners, governmental, non-governmental, community, profit-seeking businesses working hand-in-hand as partners, that is really a metaphor for this country itself, what makes it as successful as we are” (Canadian Geographic 2015). With this narrative, it seemed that it is not just *Franklin’s lost expedition* that is important for Canada’s history, but the searches themselves that, by the diversity of partners, well represent Canada. Following the discovery of the *HMS Erebus*, Harper addressed the people who took part in the searches and stated that “by uncovering this piece of Canadian-British global history, you made history yourself” (Canadian Geographic 2015).

Other than through these narratives, Canadian identity formation can also be perceived by the semantic fields that were often used in Stephen Harper’s speeches regarding Franklin expedition and the *HMS Erebus* discovery; a semantic field associated with Canadian pride and another associated with Canadian unity. They stand out through the use of certain words such as “proud” (3 times), “unique,” (1 time), “iconic” (2 times), “wonderful” (3 times), “monumental” (1 time), “great” (15 times), “big” (2 times) and “heroes” (2 times) for the former and “unites us” (1 time), “all” (6 times), and “our” (14 times) for the latter^{4,5} (Heritage Daily 2012; Stephen Harper Northern Tour 2013; Windsor Star 2013; CBC 2014; Geiger 2014; Global News 2014; Government of Canada 2014a, 2014d; Prime Minister of Canada 2014; Canada Free Press 2015; Canadian Geographic 2015;). Indeed, Franklin is depicted as being important for Canada’s history and as a great Canadian mystery while the *HMS Erebus* discovery, which involved a diversity of partners, is something all Canadians should be proud of. So, it is not only narratives about Canadian history, national historic site, mystery and diversity, but also about the need to be proud and united towards a shared northern past, thus

forming a northern identity. In fact, Franklin seemed to be another means to unite Canadians towards a shared northern identity; an identity that was even mentioned in some policy documents such as *Canada's Northern Strategy* (Government of Canada 2009) and the *Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy* (Government of Canada 2010).

Moreover, as previously seen with the commemoration of the bicentenary of the War of 1812, the *Franklin's lost expedition* is not the only example where Harper tried to rewrite Canada's history and tried to form a new Canadian identity which aimed at the unity of all Canadians and the development of their pride over a shared past. Heroes, be it Franklin and his crew or Isaac Brock, Irumberry de Salaberry, Tecumseh and Laura Secord (War of 1812) became more glorified while both events showed unity between Canadians.

Other than forming a Canadian northern identity, the *Franklin's lost expedition* was also used to bolster Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic. From 2007 to 2015, on various occasions Stephen Harper reiterated the importance of *Franklin's lost expedition* regarding Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic, while stressing that the maintenance of the country's ownership over this region will advantage all Canadians. With global warming and its consequences, for example the retreat of Arctic sea ice, he perceived Canada's sovereignty at stake over the waters of this region. As Harper stated during an interview with John Geiger on 1st December 2014 "[...] at a time when international interest in the Arctic region is growing, finding this Franklin ship [*HMS Erebus*] bolsters Canada's claim to Arctic sovereignty – clearly something that directly benefits all Canadians" (Geiger 2014). This use of the Franklin expedition as an instrument to demonstrate Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic can be inscribed in the "use it or lose it" approach, meaning that if Canadians don't use the North, they run the risk of losing it. Other than military occupation of the North as mentioned earlier, other techniques can be used to occupy this region such as the establishment of protected areas, the devolution of governance to Canada's Northern Governments and the strengthening of research activities. This was mentioned in an address to the House of Commons on 17th October 2007 when Harper also added that:

...as Stan Roger once sang, Franklin's dream of tracing 'one warm line through a land so wild and savage' to 'make a Northwest passage to the sea' seems about to be realized [...]. We have to use the North, or we will risk losing it [...]. We have taken strong measures to strengthen the ability of our territorial Governments to deliver services to Northerners, with particular emphasis on Northern housing for First Nations and Inuit [...]. We are stepping up our environmental activities and increasing the number of protected areas [...]. We are enhancing research in the high Arctic [...]. (Government of Canada 2007a)

This demonstration of sovereignty in the Arctic can be perceived through two specific narratives promoted by government representatives and governmental agency representatives, such as Parks Canada: the importance given to the Inuit who live in the region and the information gathering regarding the Arctic.

One narrative used by Stephen Harper, Leona Aglukkaq as well as members of the UAT (Ryan Harris, Marc-André Bernier and Charles Dagneau) regarding Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic concerns the importance given to Inuit knowledge and Inuit oral history in Franklin's wreck searches. Compared to early searches where Northerners were ignored, Inuit were involved in modern ones. The Government of Nunavut as well as the historian Louie Kamookak, who collected elders' stories concerning Franklin's wrecks, were often mentioned as having played a great role in the searches. John Geiger even argued that Kamookak's knowledge played a "critical role" in the discovery of both wrecks (O'Connor 2018). In the same vein, Harper underscored the relevance of "age old Inuit history" in the finding of the *HMS Erebus* while Aglukkaq also talking about this wreck said that she was "proud of the important role that Inuit oral history played in its discovery" (Canadian Geographic 2015; Government of Canada 2015). This importance given to Inuit knowledge can be related to the *Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy* of 2010 (Government of Canada 2010) where Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic is partly based on the devolving of governance to Northern Governments. This sovereignty demonstration can also be linked to Harper understanding that Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic is based on historical titles, meaning the longstanding occupancy by Canadian Inuit and Indigenous people, as written a year earlier in *Canada's Northern Strategy*

(Government of Canada 2009). In fact, the importance given to the Inuit and their frequent mention can be linked to Canadian Arctic sovereignty; Harper and Aglukkaq recalled that people have been living there for a long time and that the Canadian Government does consider them. Other than government representatives, Parks Canada UAT members also acknowledged the importance of Inuit oral history, such as Marc-André Bernier for whom searches were inspired by Inuit testimony, both ancient and recent (Parks Canada 2014).

Finally, the last narrative regarding Arctic sovereignty, meaning information gathering about the Arctic, concerned the fact that Franklin's searches allowed data collection in an understudied region. To find both wrecks, searchers were mapping vast sections of the seabed while learning to better understand how to navigate through the Arctic waters. They also took the opportunity to collect water column samples and sea floor sediments. As mentioned by Ryan Harris in 2013, during their journey through the Alexandra Strait, they succeeded in establishing a navigable route, which can benefit not only the delimitation of northern maritime routes, but also the field of search and rescue (Parks Canada 2013b). The same year, Leona Aglukkaq added that the search team already covered 800 km² and that this gain of knowledge will help the scientific understanding of the history and geography of Canada, as well as its development as a nation (Parks Canada 2013c). Hence, the data collected during the modern searches for Franklin can be associated to Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic. In fact, in his 2007 statement in the House of Commons, Stephen Harper stressed that Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic can be asserted in part by enhancing research in the region (Government of Canada 2007a). Along the same lines, the day before this statement, during the speech from the Throne, it was mentioned that "as part of asserting sovereignty in the Arctic, our Government will complete comprehensive mapping of Canada's Arctic seabed" (Government of Canada 2007b). Later, in 2010, the Government of Canada explains in its *Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy*, that the exercise of Canadian sovereignty in the North can be asserted through several means, including "Arctic science and research" (Government of Canada 2010). Thus, there seemed to be a direct relation between information gathering in the Arctic, particularly mapping activities, and sovereignty over this region. This relation was mentioned more recently in Harper's statement of the discovery of the *HMS Erebus* at the Royal Ontario Museum on 4th March 2015:

...we are also mapping vast areas of undersea territory in the North that have never before been documented, we're expanding the possibilities for navigation, and maritime safety and security. We're studying the land and the seas to learn more about our North, its challenges and its possibilities and indeed, all the while of course, we are demonstrating our absolute sovereignty over this piece of iconic territory. (Canadian Geographic 2015)

Changes in Arctic policy and narratives under the Liberal Government of Justin Trudeau (2015–present)

Since the election of the Liberal Government of Justin Trudeau at the end of the year 2015, Canada's policy toward the Arctic region began to change. There were discussions to replace *Canada's Northern Strategy* of 2009 (Government of Canada 2009) and the *Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy* of 2010 (Government of Canada 2010) by the *Arctic policy framework*. Several priorities are highlighted in this document, such as: "strong Arctic people and communities," "strong, sustainable and diversified Arctic economies," "Arctic science and Indigenous knowledge," and "protecting the environment" (Bell 2019; Government of Canada 2019). According to Everett (2018), one of the main changes in this policy is the fact that there is no section about "exercising our Arctic sovereignty" compared to the two former documents. However, sovereignty can be indirectly included in other sections. Furthermore, the new policy seems to put the needs of the Northerners first and to explore new means of governing Canada's Arctic.

In this context of the changing approach toward the Arctic region, narratives regarding Franklin also began to change. What is most noticeable is perhaps the fact that Justin Trudeau barely mentioned Franklin, even though the *HMS Terror* was found during his term in office. However, he did mention on his Twitter account that "The second ship lost in the Franklin Expedition has been found! #HMSTerror lying off King William Island" (Trudeau 2016). In recent years, speeches were mostly pronounced by

Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada. Most of the time, Franklin expedition and Franklin's wrecks had been mentioned according to two issues: who between Canada and Great Britain⁶ will own the ships, and how will the Inuit living in the region be involved in the wrecks management? (Kyle 2017; Harris 2018). Even if McKenna sometimes mobilized narratives about History and the mystery shrouding the fate of the expedition, she mostly underscored the narratives regarding the importance of Inuit knowledge in the finding of the wrecks and the promotion of Franklin's wrecks being a national historic site.

Since the finding of both wrecks, efforts were made to include the Inuit in the management of this national historic site. On 2nd December 2017, plaques were unveiled during the Umiyaqtutt Festival (Shipwreck Festival) in Gjoa Haven (Nunavut), which intended to commemorate both the new historic site and the Inuit that helped finding the *HMS Erebus* and the *HMS Terror*. On this occasion, Canadian Minister of the Environment Catherine McKenna mentioned the importance of Inuit knowledge in modern searches as well as the Government's commitment to work closely with northern communities in some areas, ranging from environmental protection to economic development. The year before, while talking about investments in the new national historic site, she also highlighted the importance of the Inuit and of these sites in Canada's history: "Our national historic sites tell the stories of who we are, including the history, cultures and contributions of Indigenous Peoples. The Government is committed to working respectfully with Inuit and honouring their contributions to Canada's protected places" (Government of Canada 2016). Thus, narratives regarding the Franklin expedition under the Liberal Government concerns mostly the management of the *Wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror national historic site* and the need to involve Inuit.

Conclusion

Few papers tackle with the connection between identity narratives and political agendas in Arctic geopolitics. This article is related to the research that investigates *Franklin's lost expedition* from the viewpoint of sociocultural studies. It contributes to the development of research perspectives that consider the role cultural heritage can play in the geopolitics of the Arctic. To analyze the narratives concerning this expedition, we opted for an approach of discourse analysis by paying attention to speeches by various actors in a position of power, foremostly, Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Conservative Government, 2006–2015). Through this method, this article demonstrates that cultural heritage has been used to promote a geopolitical agenda, in this case, to foster the Arctic dimension in the Canadian identity and to assert Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic – and then of course reap the political benefits of presenting the conservative government as the defender of the very Canadian sovereignty.

Due to the tremendous importance given to the Arctic during the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper's term in office, emphasis has often been put on the formation of a Canadian northern identity and of Canada's sovereignty over this region as stated in *Canada's Northern Strategy* (Government of Canada 2009) and in the *Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy* (Government of Canada 2010). In this context, the *Franklin's lost expedition* has been used as a means to promote these two objectives. Regarding the formation of a Canadian northern identity, it was observed through four specific narratives: a history narrative, a national historic site narrative, a mystery narrative and a diversity narrative. Thus, Franklin became a Canadian figure intimately linked to Canada's discovery, history and mystery, which was emphasized by the establishment of a national historic site (*Wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror national historic site*). Relevant to Canada's history were his expedition as well as modern searches for the wrecks. On account of all the actors involved, it was said to represent Canada's diversity, both past and present. Thus, the inclusion of *Franklin's lost expedition* in Canadian northern identity should unite all Canadians toward a shared past. These narratives were consistent with Harper's heritage policy meaning that he wanted to reform Canadian identity and to rewrite a new chapter of Canada's history as seen with the example of the War of 1812.

Now, regarding *Franklin's lost expedition* as a representation of Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic, it was observed through two specific narratives: the importance of Inuit narrative and the research narrative. According to the *Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy* (Government of Canada 2010),

Canada tried to affirm its sovereignty by other means than military among which can be listed the longstanding occupancy of Inuit and Aboriginal people in the region and the increase in the knowledge about the Arctic. Thus, the important role of the Inuit during the searches as well as the information gathering (mapping, navigating, and safety) were often mentioned in statements. Moreover, we should mention that the narratives used to demonstrate Canadian northern identity and Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic may be related. On the one hand, according to Genest and Lasserre (2015)⁷, one way Canada may have served its claim on sovereignty is by demonstrating that Canadian identity is intimately linked to the North, which by the same occasion, can also fulfill electoral and domestic policy objectives (rallying Canadian public opinion). However, even if identity is mobilised in political narratives, it does not have any legal value. On the other hand, according to Dolata (2015), sovereignty can be used to bolster Canadian identity, uniting Canadians toward a perceived threat.

Finally, narratives regarding the *Franklin's lost expedition* formed under the Conservative Government were also compared to narratives under the previous and subsequent Liberal Governments. The previous Governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin barely mentioned Franklin while the actual Liberal Government of Justin Trudeau did not mention him as much as the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper. In a context of reforming Canada's Arctic policy (*Canada's Arctic Policy framework*, 2015 – unreleased) narratives regarding Franklin are now mostly linked to the management of the *Wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror national historic site*. Therefore, we can conclude that the Franklin's narratives were formed and disseminated by the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper in a context of tremendous importance given to the Arctic; the perceived need to assert Canada's sovereignty in this region and the desire to form a new Canadian northern identity.

Notes

¹ Meaning of a certain significance, such as “great historic event” (Global News 2014).

² Meaning the inclusion of all the Canadian population, such as “the discovery of the wreck is something all Canadians can be proud of” (Geiger 2014).

³ For example, “our North” (Geiger 2014; Canadian Geographic 2015).

⁴ It must be noted that these words are found in Harper's speeches regarding directly the Franklin's lost expedition.

⁵ The translation of a word in French as well as the word's derivatives are considered as being equivalent. For example, our/notre and great/greatest.

⁶ According to international law, Great Britain owns both wrecks (the agreement of 1997 was non-legally binding). However, each sides agreed to transfer the wrecks' ownership to Canada (Harris 2018).

⁷ Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic can be justified by legal, geographical, historical and identity reasons (Genest & Lasserre 2015).

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