

ARTICLES

Michael Bravo
Johanne M. Bruun
Marionne Cronin
Kari Herbert
Tone Huse &
Carsten Aniksdal
Tero Mustonen
Kjerstin Uhre
Citt Williams

POETRY

Nancy Campbell

REVIEWS

Cover: Marja Helander,
'Palopää' (Finnish)/
'Mount Palopää' (English),
2001. C-print on aluminum.
Courtesy of the artist.

Celebrating the
diversity and richness
of local/global
transcultural
communities

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**Moving
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The Postcolonial Arctic

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Editorial

GRAHAM HUGGAN & ROGER NORUM

Never the Muse is absent
from their ways: lyres clash and flutes cry
and everywhere maiden choruses whirling.
They bind their hair in golden laurel and take their holiday.
Neither disease nor bitter old age is mixed
in their sacred blood; far from labor and battle
they live; they escape scandal and litigation
... those blessed men¹

A contemporary of Herodotus, the lyric poet Pindar penned these words during the fifth century BC in an ode to the fabled *ὑπερβόρειοι*, or Hyperboreans. To the Ancient Greeks, these were a mythical people who lived beyond the North Wind in a fabulous landscape of eternal spring, sunlight, and warmth. For them, light perpetual was cast onto a land of enlightenment, devoid of shadow and full of possibility. Indeed, Nietzsche later invokes Pindar's stanzas to argue that we are all Hyperboreans in that we seek out, through solitude, a philosophical, hermeneutical happiness – 'another beginning', as he suggests – in order to overcome the decadence and malady of the modern individual.²

While contemporary imaginations of the Arctic may have turned cooler and darker since the time of the Greeks, the region continues to be mythologized as an unknown, inaccessible, and forbidden land, a remote, wild, and often 'othered' frontier. As an aggregate territory and a phantasy of the public consciousness, there has been a drive to essentialize this diverse, contested space in a way that heavily glosses over the complex geopolitical, (trans)national, cultural and linguistic distinctions that define it. Its history entangled with various cultural and ideological representations, the Arctic is disputed as an idea as much as a broad topographical description we use to orient ourselves. It is not merely that the alterities we ascribe to this part of the world are socially, culturally, and historically embedded. It is that the Arctic's multiple landscapes – and its aesthetic, cultural, political, economic and scientific interests – are all inexorably intermeshed with one another.³

Perhaps it is this seduction towards a unifying singularity that draws in those who seek in the Arctic some measure of inspiration. For if the Arctic has been a space for ideological projections, it has also served as a physical nexus for thought and experimentation, creativity and artistry, engagement and collaboration, excitement and adventure – for artists, writers, thinkers,

scholars, explorers and travellers. Many journeys North are constructed and portrayed as odysseys towards self and truth, movements mobilized by the poetic potential of exploration, both to the ends of the Earth and the innards of the soul.⁴ The Arctic's reluctant, disorienting, and alienating fictional and factual landscapes, whether characterized by remoteness, loneliness or vulnerability, also hold an immense power to encourage the bridging of boundaries, categories, and discourses. Creative work conceived of in this region and by its peoples – or, indeed, through both – can challenge dominant analytic and interpretive frameworks, and question prototypical conceptualizations and beliefs about extreme spaces, and about the humans (and non-humans) who inhabit them.

And yet, for many external observers, the Arctic today is extreme no longer: it is tamed, and more accessible than ever. Two thousand five hundred years ago, Pindar wrote that 'never on foot or ship could you explore the marvelous road to the feast of the Hyperboreans'.⁵ Today, Ryanair flies there direct. Changes (climatic, social, commercial) across the region have further enabled this contested space to exist beyond mere imagination, promising new access to new people. Encounters with the Arctic are being re-envisioned today given the increased accessibility of travel and mobility. This is due not just to us bearing witness to the materialization of anthropogenic climate change, nor to what has been called – in deliberate reference to another colonial hot potato – a 'scramble'⁶ for the Arctic, nor yet to new forms of travel and tourism cropping up in various pockets of the region. It is also due to the paradox that the more we are empowered to move closer to landscapes and experiences that defamiliarize us from what we know in our everyday lives, the more we seek to imagine new unfamiliarities.

This issue of *Moving Worlds* is the outcome of a series of talks convened by *Arctic Encounters: Contemporary Travel/Writing in the European High North*, a collaborative and multidisciplinary HERA-funded research project that explores the ways in which a changing Arctic changes ideas not just about travel, but about the planet and its inhabitants more broadly. The Arctic itself is very much a moving world. It has come to stand for much more than its own landscapes. Movement here is an apt metaphor for a globalizing topography in which immobility becomes more and more anomalous: we move the Earth (with our chlorofluorocarbons, fracking and terraforming); the Earth moves us (through its retreating ice and rising waters). And indeed, if recent scholarly and public debates around the Anthropocene are any measure, such movements mobilize us into political and environmental action. Amid this, old contests over control of Arctic

resources and occupation of its territories resurface as increasingly urgent social issues, and the fight again emerges to define and (re)claim the Arctic's pasts, present, and futures. As the Arctic moves forward, so does it become an even grander geography for the projection of imperial anxieties.

That these anxieties are writ large today is hardly surprising. The history of the Arctic is – albeit at different times and in different ways – one of subjection, both to the absolutisms of imperial rule and to more locally inflected colonialisms. That history continues apace, confirming the obdurate legacies of 'old-style' modes of colonial governance, but also ushering in the 'new imperialisms'⁷ that are generally associated with late-capitalist globalization, one epiphenomenon of which – all too visible in the Arctic – is accelerated climate change.

If none of this is in dispute, two questions still remain in the context of this particular issue. The first is the extent to which the contemporary Arctic can be seen as 'postcolonial'. The second is the extent to which the region – however defined, and there are many possible definitions – can benefit from 'postcolonialism': that loose toolkit of approaches, theories, and methods which, rarely accepted with equanimity, has been applied to so many other parts of the world.

Neither question yields an easy answer. If the Arctic is postcolonial, then it will only be so if the term is seen as negating its own prefix; as challenging the very conditions of colonialism within which it is itself inscribed. And if it is amenable to postcolonialism, then it will only be so if those approaches, theories, and methods are taken to their own limits. Indeed, in some ways the Arctic, which has become central to 'one-world' ecological debates around planetary stewardship even as it continues to be socially and politically marginalized, pushes the boundaries of postcolonial understandings of society, politics, ecology – and conceptions of itself.

The essays included here engage with these reflexive dilemmas without falling into the trap that postcolonial criticism often sets for itself: that of debating 'real-world' issues that are designed for the application of postcolonial methods, only for those methods to end up circling back on themselves. One way of confronting this is to elevate practice above theory. *The Postcolonial Arctic* begins with a moving experiential account by the British writer Kari Herbert – daughter of the famous polar explorer Sir Wally Herbert – of part of a childhood spent in northern Greenland. The account is characterized by a love – of people, of place, of the multiple fascinations of the Arctic – that has remained undiminished over time. It is also remarkably free of nostalgia, recognizing

the harshness, even ugliness, of the far north and the acute social and environmental problems that have arisen there. These problems are accentuated in the essay that follows by the award-winning Norwegian political geographer Tone Huse. Huse focuses on the notorious Blok P – a now-defunct housing estate in Nuuk, Greenland’s capital – which becomes the site for a lyrical contemplation on the country’s colonial past. Blok P is perhaps best known for the violence – suicide and aggravated assault, domestic and substance abuse – that happened inside it. But Huse is more interested in the *external* violence that created it in the first place: the violence of central government planning; the violence of a certain kind of architectural modernism; and, above all, the violence of colonialism itself.

The Arctic’s colonial pasts – multiple, often confused, always internally differentiated – are also the subject of the next four essays, whether colonialism is refracted through mediatized geopolitics (Johanne Bruun), the technologies of polar exploration (Marionne Cronin), threatened indigenous life-ways (Tero Mustonen), or digital governance regimes (Citt Williams). In all four cases, colonialism is as much of the present as of the past, caught up as it is in the enduring (albeit historically shifting) symbolic politics that has come to characterize the region for those who seek to control it rather than those who wish to inhabit it; for those who want to manipulate it either as an object of Western knowledge or as an opportunity for resource extraction – or both, since the Arctic is a rich symbolic *and* material space.

This sense of the symbolic as well as material importance of the Arctic is maintained in the last two essays: a visually arresting piece by the Tromsø-based architect, Kjerstin Uhre, and a rousing *cri de cœur* by the Cambridge-based environmental historian, Michael Bravo. Much in the spirit of the issue as a whole, Bravo sees the Arctic in terms of a complex set of interrelationships between ‘old’ and ‘new’ colonialisms – one that offers opportunities to colonize others, but also to decolonize ourselves. Who ‘we’ are in these particular instances is moot, and (as Bravo is well aware) the diverse peoples of the Arctic are fed up with being spoken for by others. But if the ‘postcolonial Arctic’ is to make any sense, both for these peoples and for those who see themselves as acting in their best interests, then it needs to be a fully *dialogical* space within the wider context of an increasingly globalized world.

NOTES

1. Richmond Lattimore, *The Odes of Pindar* (London: U of Chicago P, 1976), p. 92.
2. Robert B. Pippin, ‘Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Metaphysics of Modernity’, in *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, ed., Keith Ansell-Pearson (London: Routledge, 1991).
3. Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerstahl Stenport, ‘Introduction: What are Arctic cinemas?’, in *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, eds, Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerstahl Stenport (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014).
4. Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).
5. Lattimore, *The Odes of Pindar*, p. 92.
6. Adriana Craciun, ‘The Scramble for the Arctic’, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 11 (2009) 103–14.
7. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005).