

Book Reviews

Postcolonial perspectives on the European High North. Unscrambling the Arctic. Graham Huggan and Lars Jensen (editors). 2016. London: Palgrave MacMillan. xi + 155 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-1-137-58816-6. €51.99.

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The book *Postcolonial perspectives on the European High North* is a brief compilation of four content articles accompanied by an introduction and an afterword. As a whole, the book is – as its title suggests – best described a collection of scholarly *perspectives* loosely bound together by an interest to unscramble the contemporary neoliberal and geopolitical framings of the Arctic. In the articles, this unscrambling is mainly done through a postcolonial lens and with an underlying interest in the forms, dynamics and potential of resistance.

In the introductory chapter written by Graham Huggan, the conceptual debates that underpin the discussions in the volume as a whole are laid out. The authors deploy the term *scramble* to refer to the ‘ravaging effects of contemporary neoliberal, political, and economic agendas on the rapidly changing Arctic’ (p. 1) and underline the need to *unscramble* these perspectives through ‘an appropriately critical rereading of the discourses of alarmism and optimism’ (p. 1) – the opposite storylines which constitute and dominate the ways in which the Arctic region is constructed and understood equally in political and popular debates. In the volume, much of this rereading takes place keeping in mind the historical focus of the Arctic as a colonised region (and acknowledging the different forms and degrees of colonisation both in terms of conceptual debates as well as the vast and diverse nature of the Arctic as a region).

The authors perceive colonial aspects in the contemporary Arctic region not only in economic and geopolitical but also in epistemic terms: as the dominance of ‘knowledge that is derived from science and technology, refracted through the modernising rhetoric of international relations, and seconded to ideologies of progress that openly assert global imperatives but tacitly assume western norms and principles of politico-economic development and social change’ (p. 6). The chapter also provides a healthy reminder that while for many colonialism in the Arctic is defined and understood in terms of the ‘continuing mistreatment of the region’s indigenous peoples’ (p. 17) this is only a part of the story. The Arctic is also home to other groups and populations with varying identities whose lives, livelihoods and experiences are fundamentally shaped by both ‘colonial legacies of thinking and new forms of colonialism in their own right’ (p. 19).

In the first ‘perspective’ chapter of the volume, Roger Norum focuses on Svalbard, a ‘periphery-pulled-into-the-centre’ (p. 56) by an interplay of geopolitical and geoeconomic development trajectories. The article touches upon tourism, resource exploitation and scientific exploration, and their linkages both today as well as along a historical continuum. In the process, the author also aptly observes that the value of resource extraction in the Arctic is not only about the ‘real economic value’ (p. 32) of the excavated resources but also about the symbolic value that these resources and activities possess in constructing the

(self-)understanding of both the archipelago and the region as a whole.

In her contribution, Simone Abram delves into the tensions between indigenous presence and the new wave of extractivism in the circumpolar north through a very specific case study that looks at the ways in which new forms of political display and indigenous political agency have shaped the annual Jokkmokk market in Northern Sweden, turning a ‘tourist festival into a forum for resistance against the rapacity of industrial expansion’ (p. 67). In contrast with how tourism is usually framed in terms of commodifying and exploiting local cultures and populations, Abram highlights the ways in which indigenous activists are using a local touristic event as a platform to promote their own culture and cause.

The third content chapter of the book, written by Astrid Andersen, Lars Jensen and Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen, focuses on the Greenlandic coal mining town of Qullissat. The chapter provides a historical account of the mine and the town, which were established by the Danish rule and closed down as unprofitable after 50 years of operation leaving the town’s residents not only unemployed but also forcibly relocated to other Greenlandic towns. However, the story of Qullissat constructed in the article is not solely the one familiar from the ‘hegemonic disaster narrative’ (p. 110) through which boom-and-bust resource extraction in the Arctic tends to be depicted, but also one of everyday anti-colonial resistance and adaptation.

In chapter four, Kristín Lófsdóttir and Katrín Anna Lund ask ‘what happens when symbolic places are commercialised within current neoliberal economies and become components of local heritage’ (p. 117). In a case study focusing on Iceland and its Þingvellir National Park – a national historical landmark as well as a UNESCO World Heritage Site – the authors demonstrate some of the challenges associated with the introduction of global mass tourism through highlighting the ways in which universalising the value of a place can obscure the importance it has in terms of local experience and history.

The afterword of the book by Philip E. Steinberg is very short; it is condensed into three pages revolving around the two major Arctic industries that all of the chapters of the volume in one way or another deal with or touch upon, extractive industries and tourism. The author sees both of the industries as not only dealing with valuing nature as a commodity – although from very, very different standpoints – but also as industries dependent on both knowledge, capital and effort often of exactly ‘those who have previously dominated the region’ (p. 144). As such, they are far from unproblematic from the perspective of regional life and development in and by the region’s own terms.

As a whole, the volume draws attention to the changing and plural nature of the Arctic as a region, too often depicted in terms of ‘universalising’ (p. 7) Western framings and with little attention to accounts from within the region. It is exactly these perspectives that the volume as a whole can be read to bring forth, and its strengths lie in the manners in which contemporary debates and developments are situated also historically. Meanwhile, the most significant shortcoming of the book is that it lacks a proper concluding chapter which would knit together the most important observations and findings of the individual case study

chapters and, as such, make the core message of the volume more accessible for a wider range of potentially interested readers.

While the book has an explicitly (Euro-)Arctic focus, the themes it deals with are also highly relevant beyond the context of the region. Issues such as market dynamics of resource exploration and exploitation and their implications on the

everyday lives of people and communities; commodification of local life, culture and national heritage in the name of tourism; and having the right to define the terms, goals and contents of one's own 'development' are acutely timely also elsewhere around the globe (Hanna Lempinen, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland (hanna.lempinen@ulapland.fi)).

Antarctica and the humanities. Peder Roberts, Lize-Marié van der Watt and Adrian Howkins (editors). 2016. London: Palgrave Macmillan. xxv + 312 p, hardcover. ISBN 978-1-137-54574-9. €88.39.

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Congratulations to Peder Roberts and his team for developing the concept of representing the humanities in Antarctica with a collection of essays, which take the reader across Antarctic time and space from archaeologists' attempts to understand the experiences of nineteenth-century sealers on the South Shetland Islands (Zarankin & Salerno, Chapter 4) to discussions of the Anthropocene and the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and other polar-related organisations in the 20th and 21st centuries (Elzinga, Chapter 12). Authors range from young researchers to professors, and the result of their combined efforts and perceptive interpretations is a comprehensive publication. The content is richly informative but, in necessarily addressing ongoing issues, a cluster of these authors express a well-articulated despair in the pursuit of an elusive status that they believe scholarship in the humanities deserves, but does not yet enjoy, in Antarctic studies. Such despair is rooted in decades of promotion of Antarctica as 'a continent for science' but the sciences and the humanities were – and are – so closely, inextricably, linked in Antarctic subjects. Conventions of science, which demand robust analysis, and the conventions of the humanities, which allow a more subjective approach, can steer their respective adherents into conflict. Certain passages in this book will inevitably resonate agreeably with one group of readers, and not with another, but viewpoints developed by immersion in separate areas of Antarctic study will hopefully find avenues to a connectedness between disciplines and to inclusive dialogue.

After a foreword by Professor of Geopolitics Klaus Dodds, in which he discusses the complex relationships people have had with Antarctica, the editors' introductory chapter explains the presentation of the book in four parts. Part I, *The heroic and the mundane*, connects the Antarctic experiences of isolated expedition members to the outside world via interpretations of diaries and a medical case study. Part II, *Alternative Antarcitics*, examines perspectives formed by disparate sources. Part III, *Whose Antarctic?*, delves into the development of a perceived sense of ownership. Finally, Part IV, *Valuing Antarctic science*, considers the interconnectedness of science, politics and the humanities. The final chapter, in which the author aims 'to trace a few strands in the emergence of Antarctic humanities as a field', is an engaging series of deliberations with a more optimistic outlook for the future of the humanities in Antarctic studies with the possibility of 'cross-disciplinary collaborations across faculty boundaries'.

In Part I, the author of the first essay examines the characteristics of Antarctic diaries, particularly those of the Heroic Era,

their contribution to the reputations of the diarists compared to the reputations attributed to non-diarists, and their place in the literature (Leane, Chapter 2). She lists diaries published during centennial commemorations of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, but omits those of Leslie Blake, Macquarie Island Base, and of Xavier Mertz, Main Base. Both were published in 2014 and were reviewed in *Polar Record*. The second essay describes the case of a beriberi outbreak on an Antarctic expedition in the early 20th century, how the power of prestige enabled the perpetuation of an erroneous theory postulated by members of the medical profession not in attendance, and how the ship's surgeon could eventually prove otherwise and challenge that authority 'with actual evidence' (Lüdecke, Chapter 3).

Part II begins with an investigation into sealers' experiences on the South Shetland Islands and researchers' attempts to develop an understanding of those experiences through awareness of working and living conditions, shelter, clothing, food, and a dearth of familiar cultural connections (Zarankin & Salerno, Chapter 4), and then examines the notion of white supremacy in *How did Antarctica become a space for Nazi survival mythology?* (Roberts, Chapter 5). The disturbing record of apartheid and South Africa's history in Antarctica is also presented (van der Watt & Swart, Chapter 6). These three essays present alternative attitudes and encourage the reader to question influences and representations.

Part III focuses on a sense of place. There is a gradual separation from the perception of Antarctica as a global commons, to a place to be wrested from the monopoly held by scientists, to an inclusive dynamic that considers the plurality of Antarctic places and environments (Antonello, Chapter 8). The consideration of materials remaining at specific places, such as former whaling stations, in Antarctica is a multifaceted and debatable issue. National attachments to a location and the historical value of artefacts may need to defer to common sense when possible toxicity of those artefacts and their potential effect on the environment is considered (Avango, Chapter 7). An array of linkages, historical and current, prompt the investigation of 'the cultural enmeshment of Antarctica in the world system' (Glasberg, Chapter 9). Selected literary and filmic representations of Antarctica – as imagined by authors from different cultural backgrounds – and examples of exploration and tourism define threads that form in this mesh of global association with the ice. These examples are intermingled with more substantial threads of built scientific stations, geopolitical and national interests, and the involvement of multinational organisations until the evidence for that 'enmeshment' is unassailably convincing.

Part IV both challenges and applauds the involvement of scientists in Antarctica, but wherever many players bring their own interests to the same platform (or book), the perspective will shift as each makes their presentation. Asserting the