

Afterword: Tourism, Extraction, and the Postcolonial Arctic

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Throughout the chapters of this book, from Svalbard to Sápmi and from Greenland to Iceland, two industries loom large: tourism and resource extraction. As an afterword, I briefly consider how these two industries, and the interplay between them, reflect and reproduce the Arctic's position as a postcolonial region.

Turning first to tourism, one of the odd curiosities of national account statistics is that international tourism is classified as an “export” industry, even though tourists are *imported*, not exported. But while tourists, as material bodies, are indeed imported, the important thing for an economist is the financial flow, and from a financial perspective tourism operates more like an export industry: goods and services are provided to a foreign consumer and, in return, cash flows in.

This simple formula still leaves unanswered the question of *what* is being exported to the tourist in exchange for cash: knowledge, images, perceptions, happiness, leisure, trinkets, photographs, pride? And how does one consider tourism alongside a more “conventional” export industry like resource extraction? How does one pair what is arguably the paradigmatic export industry, in which a country's very nature (its soil, its rocks, its substance) is sold off, with one like tourism where it's not entirely clear what, if anything, is being sold at all?

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At one level, then, this volume illustrates how, in the Arctic, these two industries operate in (sometimes productive) tension with each other. Notwithstanding the obvious points of conflict between the two industries—one typically depends on the preservation of “unspoiled” landscapes and cultures, while the other almost inevitably results in these being “spoiled”—it emerges that perhaps the two industries are not so different. Both industries thrive by identifying and valuing nature (including human nature) and then commodifying it for consumption by others. Both industries are attractive as development tools in that they appear to involve little more than making available to others what a country already has (its nature, its culture, its landscape, etc.). And each industry can be pursued only with the cooperation of others: tourists need to be catered to; culture needs to be translated; mining technology must be deployed; and labour must be concentrated, trained, or imported. Ultimately, this means adjusting aspirations and transforming lifestyles, and in most cases the effort requires the enlistment of those who have previously dominated the region (or who continue to do so) and who have the capital and knowledge to bring success to the industry.

In this way, the two industries serve both to reflect and to reproduce the postcolonial condition. Each promises a pathway to sovereignty, empowerment, and development, and yet the success of each (in the event that it *is* successful) contains a reminder that success has been achieved according to standards, definitions, and institutions that are not entirely of one’s own choosing. Indeed, the different essays included here reveal that the tourism and resource extraction industries, both of which are so prominent in Arctic development plans, embody and reflect the essential dilemma of the postcolonial condition: how can empowerment be achieved on one’s own terms? Or, to phrase that question less optimistically, can empowerment be achieved if *not* truly on one’s own terms?

So what is to be done? Foregoing resource extraction or tourism as income-generating activities will only further cement relations of dependence. Conversely, it would not be helpful simply to ignore ongoing (post) colonial relations of power. Perhaps a better route would be to appreciate the complex ambiguity of the Arctic situation, even while maintaining the perspective of postcolonial critique. Indeed, the complicated, disputed nature of colonialism (both historically and in the present) in the Arctic may broaden the field of possibility. When the very definition of a Sami is disputed, when the implicit understanding of the ocean as a barrier between societies is questioned, when the relationship between south-

ern capitals and northern peripheries in defining the psychic heart of the nation state is open to continual contestation, and when the designation of precisely what the Arctic is and whether it is colonial, postcolonial, or something else altogether are themselves points of disagreement, new possibilities emerge for Arctic peoples to tell new stories about themselves, not just in relation to their pasts and futures, but also in relation to the outsiders who venture into their lands and seas as rulers, investors, tourists, or critical scholars.

Whether those new stories can bring material improvements or political empowerment to the peoples of the North remains an open question. But in a sense the question of postcolonialism has never been, and never will be, about material betterment or formal political power as ends in themselves. We can do better than return to the modernisationist development paradigm that postcolonial scholars so soundly reject. Rather, a postcolonial perspective on the Arctic directs us to be attentive to lived experiences in a region whose characteristics, right down to its geophysical constitution, challenge categories inherited from the temperate world. With this attentiveness, we can “unscramble” not just the Arctic but also the binaries of centre-periphery and progress-regress that all too often constrain our understanding of and visions for postcolonial societies, whether in the global North or the global South.

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