

Introduction

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New Narratives of the Postcolonial Arctic takes its departure from the 2015 conference of the same name, held at Roskilde University and Nordatlantens Brygge and funded by HERA as part of the Arctic Encounters project, 2013-2016. The conference was organised by the Roskilde University team of the HERA project,¹ consisting of Astrid Andersen, Lars Jensen & Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen, and aimed to look for new ways of discussing approaches to and speaking from the Arctic through a postcolonial optic. The introduction is ours to write, but it has been shaped by conversations and editorial assistance from Julia Christensen, whose maternity leave interrupted her participation in the last few weeks of the editorial work.

Narratives, narrativising and story-telling are ways of conceptualising Arctic experiences that come with a long and loaded history. In the present volume, we have endeavoured to avoid the conventional historical – but by no means just historical - European preference for narrativising the Arctic in terms of white male self-aggrandisement. As this *Kult* issue ‘goes to press’ one of the ships from the ill-conceived and even worse executed Franklin expedition (1845) has been rediscovered in shallow waters in the Arctic, leading to renewed speculation over what exactly happened when 129 men died after the ships were trapped by the ice. Yet, we *do* know what happened and have more or less done so since 1854 when John Rae, on one of the first search expeditions, established this through his communication with local Inuit and through the recovery of items from the expedition. Therefore the afterlife of the Franklin expedition attests to the sustained imaginaries of the arctic that continues to circulate even today. Rather than the factual question of ‘what happened’ it thus seems more pertinent to ask why the obsession with the Franklin expedition continues, not only during the Victorian Age characterised by inflated British imperial self-importance but also in transformed versions through the last 3-4 decades as new technologies enable more sophisticated searches for the ‘lost’ ships, culminating in their location in 2014 and 2016.

¹ The HERA Arctic Encounters project spawned a special issue of *Studies in Travel Writing* (2016) and two Palgrave Pivot volumes, *Green Ice – Tourism Ecologies in the European High North* (2016) and *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North: Unscrambling the Arctic* (2016). The work of the Roskilde team includes Astrid Andersen, whose PhD project has represented the backbone of the Roskilde University team’s Arctic Encounters sub-project. Naimah Hussain needs to be mentioned as another conversational partner, who also assisted in setting up a seminar with researchers at Ilisimatusarfik, and finally the brief research assistant period we could offer Tore Mukherjee Holst also brought him into our Greenlandic conversations.

Not surprisingly, the 2013 “Arctic” exhibition, hosted by The Danish museum for contemporary art, Louisiana, also showcased the Franklin Expedition. The website presentation of the exhibition spoke of the (self-)delusions characterising the mythologising of the Arctic, or to deliberately misquote the Greenlandic artist Pia Arke, the Arctic hysteria, surrounding white European (and North American) males’ approach to the Arctic. Revealingly, however, the website also talks of ‘our very own sledge traveller, the beloved son of the landscape and its people, *Knud Rasmussen*’, repeating a well-rehearsed trope that the hysteria, the imperial ambitions and the misplaced male heroics belong to the others – the heroes belong to us. The narrative of the Nordic heroics (also including the Norwegian Nansen and the Swede Andrée) culminates in museum director, Tøjner’s, concluding remark: ‘ARCTIC is one of our major fundamental cultural narratives’. The use of ‘ARCTIC’ signals he is referring to the exhibition, but as the wording goes, his primary reference is to the Arctic as a narrative repository. But: whose repository might that be? Who is that ‘we’ implied ‘our fundamental cultural narratives’ and alluded to in Tøjner’s speech act? As the exhibition itself attested to, the Arctic has worked as a projection for whiteness, the pure north, pure nature and pure testing ground (for white male prowess from searching for the Northwest Passage to military installation during the Cold War). Through the invocation of a non-specified narrative repository, Tøjner reveals a profound lack of postcolonial insight. The ‘we’ implied may be Denmark, Scandinavia, the Nordic countries, Europe, the West, the global North. It is, however, clearly not the people living in the Arctic. Hence the exhibition through this statement stakes a claim on the Arctic that is simultaneously Western, male and white – and by implication universal. In this way it eliminates local Arctic responses that might have challenged this claim to universality.

The brief account of one particular Western projection onto the Arctic suggests that the ground is rich for exploring alternative narratives about the Arctic rooted either in local accounts or in critical interventions into customary forms of narration. That is, a postcolonial informed sensibility to the Arctic. Precisely, the term postcolonial is, however, often met with reservations from the people of the Arctic: When did colonialism stop, since we now speak of the postcolonial? This reservation conceives of the ‘post’ in postcolonial as merely an after, something we find is a misunderstanding. The postcolonial, as other ‘posts’ in fields of academic intervention, may be taken to refer to an after, a break and a continuity, but is perhaps most concisely described as an entanglement among these three conceptualisations. Nowhere, in postcolonial studies is the postcolonial understood merely or purely as an after characterised by its unconnectedness with the colonial – indeed what would be the point then of using the label ‘postcolonial’, if it is to signal that the ‘colonial’ has

become redundant? When we speak of postcolonial in the present volume, then, it refers to the continued difficulties for the Arctic in extracting itself from historical imperial ambitions and their contemporary neoliberal cousins. The often invoked term of ‘scramble for the Arctic’ brings to the forefront the continuity of the preoccupations with the Arctic in colonial times and in the neo-colonial present.

Yet the compilation of articles here is also, of course, concerned with narratives from and about the Arctic, as narratives. They are about story-telling not least in Naja Dyrendom-Graugaard’s article, ‘Uanga (“I”): Journey of Raven and the Revival of the Spirit of Whale’, in which she explores her own position as Danish-Inuit researcher in an autobiographical account that can perhaps be understood as a navigation in an inevitably hybrid postcolonial terrain, amidst various forms of explicit and silenced Danish racialised accounts of Inuit/Greenlanders. Drawing upon epistemologies and methodologies preoccupied with similar concerns in the global South she broadens questions surrounding the always deeply entangled Greenlandic/Inuit-Danish relations to show that they have their own particularity but even so, they are also part of a global history of repression, resistance and postcolonial agencies.

Astri Dankertsen’s article ‘Fragments of the future. Decolonization in Sami everyday life’ shifts the articulation of indigenous cultural identity under continued pressure from a dominant majoritarian society no longer geographically displaced. In her article, based on empirical work conducted in connection with her PhD project she discuss how Sami identity is performed in a variety of ways, to a certain extent reflecting their relationship with Norwegian identity, but also their situatedness in a Sami reality characterised by repression of identity and history combined with a search for new forms of expressing Sami identity.

Julia Christensen’s interview with Jens Heinrich who is a member of the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission established in 2014 continues the focus on articulations of cultural identity in a time characterised by postcolonial questionings, yet dominated by the continuity of coloniality. Similar to Graugaard’s and Dankertsen’s articles, the conversation piece, ‘In Conversation: Shifting Narratives of Colonialism through Reconciliation in Greenland and Canada’, explores ways of recovering from a traumatised and traumatising colonial past, through institutional structures governed by ideas of cultural healing, recovery and renewal, in Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. In both cases, albeit in different ways, the lingering question concerns the

decoupling of reconciliation from the responsibility of the nation-state at large towards citizens that are in other contexts celebrated in terms of their equal status.

This is one place to pick up the thread in Lars Jensen's article, 'Approaching a Postcolonial Arctic', which concerns itself more broadly with the question: when and under what circumstances can the Arctic be labelled as postcolonial? It also explores the different conceptualisations of non-Arctic based approaches by Arctic nation-state stakeholders, more concretely Canada, Sweden and Denmark. The article questions national projections, onto the Arctic through the exploration of two artists, Canadian novelist, Martha Baillie, and Greenlandic artist, Pia Arke, both of whom use their artwork to critique prevalent Arctic mythologizing and look for different ways of articulating Arctic experiences. In this way they can be connected back to Dankertsen and Graugaard. But they can also be connected to discussions about the role of postcolonial artwork.

It is the latter question that concerns Mette Sandbye in her article, 'Blasting the Language of Colonialism: Three Contemporary Photo-Books on Greenland'. Sandbye looks at photography as artwork in the production of three photographer artists, Pia Arke, Julie Edel Hardenberg and Jacob Aue Sobol. She is preoccupied with two main questions in her article. The first pertains to how contemporary Arctic artists (Arke and Hardenberg) challenge earlier work of non-Arctic photographers and the broader forms of stereotypical, colonial representations. The second relates to how Arctic photographic artwork can be explored and discussed inside the wider frame of postcolonial representational forms, and contemporary, globalised circulations of representation.

The ultimately unresolvable question over coloniality, postcoloniality and its continuities and breaks also evidenced in Sandbye's article brings us to the question of the relation of mission and Christianity to colonial interventions in the Arctic. In her article, 'Situatedness and Diversity: Representations of Lars Levi Laestadius and Laestadianism', Anne Heith discusses the ambivalent position of one of the most prominent figures associated with Christian revival in the Sami area of Northern Scandinavia, Lars Levi Laestadius, and his afterlife. Heith's article is concerned with the position of Laestadius in the contact zone between colonizers and colonized: on the one hand, his revivalism was distinctly Sami, on the other he collaborated with European racial science of the time. Heith shows how postcolonial representational forms in the circulation of Laestadius and his influences enter their own ambivalent terrain as critique, as a questioning of the relationship between the authoritarian presence of state and state religion in Sami territory.

Rikke Krogh Hansen's article 'The Danish Child in Greenland: Literary Memoirs in a Postcolonial Perspective', situates the question of postcoloniality in the context of contemporary literature concerned with the Arctic – in this case through a discussion of two Danish authors with Greenlandic histories who use their writing as a process both of coming to terms with their own enrolment in Greenlandic society but also as a form of critique of the continuing long shadow cast by Danish colonialism in Greenland. Hansen makes use of the Anglophone postcolonial methodologies that were precisely articulated initially through literary analyses of artworks throughout the Anglophone world and which developed a highly theoretical discourse, not least through the critic Hansen's article primarily references, Homi Bhabha.

The academic peer reviewed section of the issue is followed by a non-peer reviewed essay based on research conducted under the HERA Arctic Encounters project. The essay is concerned with the major parameters of the Roskilde University sub-project under the Arctic Encounters project – tourism, climate change and indigenous political agency. It meditates on the differences between two contemporary locales where contemporary flows of outside influences meet with local strategies not necessarily exclusively to resist – even if it is difficult to read outside influences as other than impositions shaped by neo-colonial desires – but primarily concerned with how to give shape to tourism and climate change discourse through indigenous political agency.

The issue concludes with a book review, in Danish, by Bjørn Lingner, of Ebbe Volquardsen's book, in German, Ebbe Volquardsen, *Die Anfänge des grönländischen Romans: Nation, Identität und subalterne Artikulation in einer arktischen Kolonie*.

Works cited:

<https://en.louisiana.dk/exhibition/arctic>