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Re-Conceptualizing the North

A Historiographic Discussion

ABSTRACT The past few years have brought a surge in re-conceptualizations of the North in the humanities and social sciences. Bringing together history, environment, geography, politics and culture, these re-conceptualizations offer frameworks, terminology and perspectives designed to situate the North in its complex modern context. They are linked by the authors' shared interest in what the North has looked like and what it will look like in the future. This paper engages with a few of these re-conceptualizations in order to understand what agendas they put forward, explicitly and implicitly, and how they are situated within historical contexts. In this context, I ask what the North *encompasses*: which narratives, identities and connections merge with latitude, climate and physical environment to create new (and not-so-new) ways of thinking about northern spaces? Ultimately, I argue that these re-conceptualizations of the North are in fact themselves articulations of the future: developed and presented to tell particular stories, they are part of a larger story, one that reaches into the past and one which will continue to evolve and change.

KEYWORDS North, Arctic, historiography, indigenous voices, climate change, transnational, polar geopolitics

Introduction. Re-Conceptualizing the North

The past few years have brought a surge in re-conceptualizations of the North in the humanities and social sciences.¹ Bringing together history,

environment, geography, politics and culture, these re-conceptualizations offer frameworks, terminology and perspectives designed to situate the North in its complex modern context. They are linked by the authors' shared interest in what the North has encompassed and what it has looked like, and what it will look like in the future. Whilst these works address a core set of common themes, they also differ in important ways. This paper engages with a few of these re-conceptualizations in order to understand what agendas they put forward, explicitly and implicitly, and how they are situated within historical contexts. The works discussed here are chosen for their perceived impact on the field and their representation of scholars from across the Northern world.² Ultimately, this paper argues that these re-conceptualizations of the North are in fact themselves articulations of the future—and, further, that they are not as new as they claim to be.

Much has been written on the definition, the borders and boundaries, and the demarcations of the North (Keskitalo 2004; Schimanski, Wolfe & Niemi 2009; Shadian 2013; Doel, Wråkberg & Zeller 2014). It is clear that borders shift and change, and that *North* (and associated adjectives) can be defined in myriad ways to suit myriad purposes. These borders are constantly being negotiated, modified and revised according to interest, context, approach and intent. I am most interested in the *who* and *why* of these borders and boundaries. Who draws and delineates them, and for what purposes? Whom do they serve? Or, rather than asking where the North begins and where it ends, I am interested in asking what the North *encompasses*: which narratives, identities and connections merge with latitude, climate and physical environment to create new (and not-so-new) ways of thinking about northern spaces (Lemus-Lauzon 2013)? Who can, and should, legitimately speak for the North? Which voices matter, and why?

In today's political and media circles, there is sustained interest in the North, especially in climatic, environmental and security contexts—and, together with this interest, a demand for expert advice on Northern issues. In a recent discussion of the legacies of polar science, Michael Bravo rightly attributes this interest to

the intersection of three global phenomena: the impact of climate change on the Arctic, the volatility of international commodity prices in response to unprecedented demand for minerals and hydrocarbons, and the political contest for polar resources. (Bravo 2009a: xiii.)

To this list we can add the rise of indigenous voices and agency in governance, questions about the ability of technology to shape environmental futures, and uncertainty over sovereignty questions and the balance of power in the

North.³ In response, humanists and social scientists are taking a variety of positions and stances. Some provide direct, solicited advice to governments and companies, whilst others provide less direct advice through the media and other publications. Some argue that scholars should maintain a neutral position and refuse to enter political debates. Still others see this demand as a new opportunity to engage with the public through conventional and social media, and to win funding in the increasingly impoverished academic economic climate. I engage with these themes and questions by charting the discursive terrain and reviewing the ways in which re-conceptualizations of the North are playing out in the humanities and social sciences communities and being broadcast to audiences outside academia.

The Geopolitical and Transnational North

When we survey recent re-conceptualizations of the North, the clearest vision that emerges is one of the North as a moving, shifting geopolitical space. This space reaches far beyond the traditional “great white North,” which encompasses the so-called Arctic Eight (Canada, Denmark [for Greenland and the Faroe Islands], Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Russia, and the USA [for Alaska]), and its relevance is increasingly felt farther south. It is in this light that Ronald E. Doel, Urban Wråkberg and Suzanne Zeller propose the term *New Arctic* to refer to “a recent era in circumpolar history set in motion by an unparalleled confluence of political and natural phenomena” (Doel, Wråkberg & Zeller 2014: 1). This New Arctic encompasses rising interest in the Arctic’s raw materials and natural resources, the opening of Northern shipping routes, and escalating environmental worries, all of which form part of broader geopolitical conversations.

This desire to link the North to other parts of the world is by no means a new one. In 1922, for example, Canadian Arctic explorer and ethnologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson wrote that

the aeroplane, the dirigible, and the submarine [were] about to turn the polar ocean into a Mediterranean and about to make England and Japan, Norway and Alaska, neighbours across the northern sea. (Quoted in Stuhl 2013: 101.)

Today, China’s voracious appetite for natural resources is putting pressure on Northern communities and governments (Chen 2012), and climate change is increasingly revealing connections between the North and the rest of the world. “The dramatic melting of Arctic ice calls for multilateral efforts to deal with the widespread implications of climate change,” explain Doel and his colleagues—implications which will necessarily be global in

nature as the melting ice raises sea levels, changes far-off weather patterns and accelerates global warming.

The recognition of the North as a geopolitical space stretching far beyond the Arctic Circle raises some thorny questions: What does the North encompass, physically and in the imagination? How are identities and connections construed and contested in Northern contexts? Who can (and should) legitimately speak for the North? As Klaus Dodds and Richard Powell remind us in the context of the Arctic Council, where China, India and South Korea (among others) now have observer status, “the knotty business of who can be an observer raise[s] unsettling issues of geographical and political forms of proximity” (Dodds & Powell 2013: 4). An inter-governmental forum established in 1996 to bring together the Arctic Eight, indigenous permanent participants, and other observers, the Arctic Council provides a forum for cooperation and interaction on common Northern issues, particularly environmental protection and sustainable development (Keskitalo 2004; Koivurova 2010; Young 2010). The admittance of traditionally non-Arctic nations as observers highlights the growing desire of more southerly nations for influence in the North—and that their admittance was strongly contested by some of the Arctic Eight suggests new challenges to the latter’s historically-held authority. These challenges will only multiply as the North’s economic allure intensifies (Byers 2009; Emmerson 2010; Grant 2010). This geopolitical messiness is eloquently captured by the *Financial Times*’ Sara Wheeler, who writes that the rush to claim the Arctic is “colder than the scramble for Africa but no more dignified” (Wheeler 2010).

Lacking an official voice at the Arctic Council, though, are precisely the actors which Dag Avango, Annika E. Nilsson and Peder Roberts identify as critical to future governance in the North: unrepresented indigenous peoples and groups, as well as companies, industries, NGOs, and other non-state actors (Avango, Nilsson & Roberts 2013). How all these groups will—or won’t—work together in the coming years and decades in the North is a fascinating and critical question. How will natural resource industries influence decision-making and affect communities? To what degree will regions such as Greenland and Nunavut continue to pursue increased self-representation and self-determination, and how will these processes affect the lines we see on maps today (Niemi 2007)? To what extent will non-state actors comply with or push back against state-based governance (Knechta & Keil 2013)?

These questions are especially pertinent in the context of clashes between northern indigenous groups and state governments. By shutting down the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East (RAIPON) late in 2012, the Russian government underscored the extent to which the recognition and power of indigenous voic-

es in national and international discourses on the North is still uncertain, as well as the degree to which indigenous agency varies within the Arctic Eight (Wallace 2012). These questions are also important when it comes to the North's natural resources, which were until recently considered far too remote, far too difficult, and far too expensive to extract. These resources are becoming increasingly integrated into international markets, leading to massive proposed investments and huge influxes of workers into sparsely populated Northern regions. For Greenland in particular, northern natural resources offer a hand for negotiation in debates over territorial status, a tool for identity politics, and a possible way to realize political ambitions in the face of economic challenges (Fuglede, Kidmose, Lanteigne & Schaub 2014; Nielsen & Nielsen 2014; Rosing 2014).

The historical connections of Nordic nations to the North has produced relationships that continue to ground Nordic claims to Arctic identity in the present (Østergård 2002; Musial 2009). This is at the heart of the term “Arctic *Norden*,” the title of a recent research project examining the traditional Nordic nations—Sweden, Norway, Denmark (for Greenland) and Iceland—as “a permeable sub-region of significance to global affairs” (Sörlin 2013: 2). Based in Sweden and led by Sverker Sörlin between 2007 and 2012, the project focused on the scientific, diplomatic and political connotations of *Norden*, especially in the Cold War arena. The basic idea, Sörlin explains, is “to regard the Nordic region not just as a set of countries that happen to share a northerly location but instead as an extended or ‘transnational’ region.” Sörlin and his team propose “an image of the Nordic countries that stretches far beyond their conventional borders” (Sörlin 2013: 2).⁴ This approach deliberately presents the Nordics as a historically interconnected region in order to argue for its broader geopolitical presence and to demonstrate that *Norden*'s image and prestige matter in face of challenges and threats from larger nations. The implied argument is one in support of greater regional, or intra-Nordic, cooperation. Small nations can only bear so much weight in the modern world, and to have a real impact on the future of the North—for example, to stand up to the growing interests of nations such as China—*Norden* members will need to draw upon their historical ties and act in cooperation. There are, indeed, more actors than ever before in the North: at Svalbard's Ny-Ålesund research station, to take but one example, Norway, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, China, Japan, South Korea and India are active, and money pours in from the European Union (Hacquebord 2009: 12). Sörlin emphasizes that the *Norden* nations have shared past experiences, both positive and negative, that can be used to develop a collective vision for the future. The impact of Nordic cooperation in today's Arctic, including political rapport, institu-

tion-building and scientific collaboration, he and his colleagues argue, will depend upon regionalization beyond borders and upon the cultivation of historical relationships for present aims.

In his reflections on polar science during the International Polar Year of 2007–2008, Michael Bravo puts forth another re-conceptualization of the North: a *post-polar* approach which de-couples the Arctic and the Antarctic. “As the comparative importance of the connections between Arctic ecosystems and the temperate regions become better understood,” writes Bravo,

historians looking back at the present day may describe the Arctic as entering a “post-polar” era, and the notion of “polar science” as an artifact of the twentieth century, when in the light of the alliances between geopolitics and the field sciences, it made sense to group the Arctic and Antarctic as two of a kind. (Bravo 2009a: xiv–xv.)

Pointing to sharp differences in governance, including the internationally-recognized conservation and protection clauses of the Antarctic Treaty, Bravo argues that it is unlikely that the same approaches to issues such as climate change and environmental sustainability will work in the two regions. By rejecting the possibility of an Arctic Treaty and painting the North as a major new arena for exploiting and competing for natural resources, he describes an intensely politicized space in which state and non-state political actors abound—a situation he worries will yield inappropriate policy solutions for the North as political maneuvering is dressed up in the language of environmental conservation.⁵ This post-polar approach to the North forms part of a broader post-Cold War historiographic stance in which the strategic import and militarization of the Arctic world are supplemented by issues of climate change, resource extraction and geopolitical alignments along axes other than East-West.

It is clear by now that these re-conceptualizations of the North embrace a transnational style of thinking and analysis, both explicitly and implicitly. “Transnational” has become a buzzword in recent years, indeed a fashion.⁶ Here, I use it to refer to approaches which emphasize political groups and structures and environmental phenomena that transcend national borders. In this sense, recent work on the North uses transnational perspectives to further understanding of the region in three main ways. First, it draws a set of states traditionally far removed from the North into that sphere: China and India, to name but two, have been deemed “new” Northern nations for their interest in northern resources and their desire to make their mark on the Arctic. By examining the political tensions between traditional and “new” Northern nations in forums such as the Arctic Council, this work illuminates the ways in which Northern identity and authority are being

negotiated and built—issues which are of especial interest as indigenous groups and Northern regions increasingly look to new players for natural resource investment and income. Second, a focus on peoples such as the Sami and Inuit, whose traditional territories cut across national boundaries, also brings out the ways in which stewardship of land and resources is used to negotiate representation and self-determination, and through which cultural integrity is shaping political processes at various levels (Wråkberg & Granqvist 2014). Finally, transnational perspectives also appear in the context of climate change and melting Arctic ice, which recognize neither national borders nor territorial limits. As Bravo writes,

Scientific research is producing a fascinating picture that reveals the extent to which the Arctic is connected to other regions through global-scale carbon and heat exchange systems through the oceans, atmosphere and human economic activity. (Bravo 2009a: xiv.)

He emphasizes the environmental links between the North and the rest of the world which are increasingly integral to how we perceive, interact with and make decisions about the North.

Even with this emphasis on the transnational, the nation still features prominently in Northern affairs, and with it come national interests, identities and rivalries. Clashes from the Canada-Denmark conflict over tiny Hans Island in the Nares Strait to the more ominous Canada-Russia dispute over the North Pole seabed lead Doel, Wråkberg and Zeller to describe their New Arctic as a region immersed in “a new era of saber-rattling” (Doel, Wråkberg & Zeller 2014: 3). In this North, flag planting, both literal and figurative, matters as nations grapple with changing political, economic and commercial realities. Conflict in and militarization of the North are, of course, themes integral to Cold War historical approaches, which treat the North as a strategically important region of intense interest to both Washington and Moscow.⁷ Lying underneath a key potential missile path between North America and the Soviet Union, the Arctic was central to North American continental defense as well as to Soviet offensive and defensive planning, playing host to huge military bases, radar and early warning sites, refueling stations, scientific camps and other installations which gave double meaning to the term “Cold War.” Today, these issues are mirrored in the question, much debated of late in some quarters, of whether conflict between nations is inevitable in the North (Borgerson 2008; Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009; Fairhall 2010; Murray 2012).

The Living and Spatial North

Contemporary re-conceptualizations of the North are largely unified in their vision of the North as a place teeming with life, peopled by indigenous residents, scientists, diplomats, politicians, miners, and tourists, among others. Following a trend that stretches back to the rise of indigenous rights movements in the 1960s, they reject the Arctic sublime of the Romantic painters, the fatalistic fascination of the British Imperial era, and the frontier mentality of heroic Western explorers. Instead of an empty or barren land, they treat the North as a place teeming with life and lively interests. At the heart of this living North are indigenous peoples, whose voices are increasingly being taken up, supported and encouraged by social scientists and humanists. As Robert McGhee, the curator of Arctic archaeology at the Canadian Museum of History, depicts so elegantly, the still-persistent view of the North as disconnected, “a world apart,” mythic and even romantic, belies the region’s long history of indigenous settlement, which McGhee and others use to humanize and ultimately define the North (McGhee 2007: 10).⁸ These approaches are converging on a North in which indigenous voices are emphasized, a North in which indigenous actors are accorded priority over state actors and historically-drawn national boundaries. This stance is not restricted to the northern sphere; rather, it is part of a broader realignment of the past decades which rejects schematic narrative templates, in James V. Wertsch’s terminology, and brings out actors, events and narratives which have previously been overlooked (Wertsch 2002).

Two ideas, or conceptions, of the North and northern landscapes are being challenged here: the North as a pristine wilderness and the North as a wasteland. As Jonathan Luedee argues in his work on the visual politics of northern spaces, these ideas remain prominent in political debates, where they often erect barriers to constructive discussion (Luedee 2013). Writing about the politics of Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where oil drilling has been politically controversial for more than three decades, Luedee depicts a socially constructed binary: on one hand, anti-drilling campaigners such as Barbara Boxer, a Democratic senator from California, represent the North through gorgeous images of a God-given land replete with polar bears, migrating caribou and colourful wildflowers, whilst on the other hand pro-drillers such as Frank Murkowski, a Republican congressman from Alaska, represent the North as a frozen wasteland of snow and ice, captured by a blank sheet of white paper. Both of these visual and rhetorical images, Luedee argues, obscure the “deep entanglement of nature and culture” in the North and ultimately dehumanize northern landscapes, acting as blinders which shape how we view and approach the North.⁹ Luedee’s argument is that we need to recognize the *human*, or living, aspect of the North, in all its facets.

Scholars are increasingly responding to this need by placing Northern indigenous peoples at the centre of their narratives. The re-conceptualizations of the North discussed here broadly agree on the importance of indigenous voices, but differ as to the effective projection of those voices and their ability to make an impact in the near future. Bravo illuminates the ever-present divide between intention and action in this regard when he notes that the International Polar Year of 2007–2008 distinguished itself from previous ones by

the inclusion of a “humanities” theme “to investigate the cultural, historical, and social processes that shape the sustainability of circumpolar human societies, and to identify their unique contributions to global cultural diversity and citizenship.”

But, he continues, whilst the recognition of the northern indigenous as “legitimate participants in this IPY represents a policy landmark and a departure from previous polar years,” still Bravo considers that “its implementation placed severe constraints on participation” (Bravo 2009a). Others are more optimistic when describing the place of indigenous voices in political dialogues: Mark Nuttall, for example, argues that “a pan-Arctic indigenous politics [is giving] indigenous peoples a greater voice in discussions on environmental protection, sustainable development, extractive industries, health and well-being, and circumpolar security” (Nuttall 2012: 2). Either way, it is clear that the rise of indigenous voices at subgovernmental, national and international levels is reshaping governance in the North, especially in terms of land claims negotiations and bids for self-determination—and that these processes are far from complete. Whilst support for these voices is important, social scientists must avoid the trap of treating northern indigenous peoples as a uniform group. As Kirsten Thisted’s work on indigeneity in Greenland reminds us, there is no single indigenous voice, emotional topography, or vision of the future: rather, these voices are multiple, diverse, and not always in agreement (Thisted 2013; see also Martello 2008; Bravo 2009b; Dodds & Powell 2013; Hastrup 2013).

As a place of life, culture and work, the North has also been swept up in the so-called spatial turn in history. This has led to the emergence of a *spatial* North in which social scientists, particularly archaeologists, marry historical and geographical methods of analyzing, representing and understanding the North.¹⁰ P.J. Capelotti’s investigation of sites from seven American expeditions to the European Arctic, for example, proposes field methodologies and cloud computing techniques to collect, interpret and network data in order to ultimately offer a model for archeological tourism (Capelotti 2012). How, such researchers ask, are northern spaces construct-

ed by the movement of people, animals, goods, and knowledge? How do settlements, research and industrial stations, and exploratory camps affect people and their relationships with the land over time? What role might such spaces play in the construction of the future North? The large-scale, fieldwork-intensive and usually very expensive nature of the spatial North comes through, too, in the Large-Scale Historical Exploitation of Polar Areas (LASHIPA) project, a Dutch-Swedish-Russian historical-archaeological project undertaken from 2007 to 2009 in the framework of the International Polar Year.¹¹ Aiming to understand the development of natural resource exploitation in the polar regions over the past three centuries and to shed light on the consequences of that development for today's geopolitical and environmental situations, LASHIPA saw eight fieldwork expeditions to Spitsbergen, South Georgia and the Antarctic. Through archaeological digs, GPS mapping, sketching, photographing and measuring old whaling, hunting and radio stations, mines, and mineral exploration camps, the LASHIPA team demonstrated how the social, technological, and political aspects of resource management and extraction have shaped Northern environments and cultures not merely for years or decades, but for centuries. This work depicts the North as a space in which indigenous and non-indigenous people have long lived and worked, a place of daily needs and problems and solutions, of big challenges and mundane routines: truly a *living* North.

The Future North

As the consequences of climate change for the North look ever more troubling, the region is increasingly being discussed in the popular environmental literature, too. With titles such as *The New North* and *Who Owns the Arctic?*, these books—written by scientists, geographers and lawyers—make the North out as a place often far away in geographic terms but close to home in environmental (and, to a lesser extent, emotional) terms. Melting Arctic ice, they emphasize, will affect us all, and will have a significant impact on the ways in which we live, eat and move around. The crux of the problem presented in this literature is the need to balance protection of fragile Northern environments (inclusive of peoples, animals, flora and land- and sea-scapes) with economic opportunities for trade and the development of natural resources, all whilst confronting a changing climate.

In this context, the term *New Arctic* reappears in the writing of Alun Anderson, a biologist and former editor-in-chief of *New Scientist*. Anderson's New Arctic has a different connotation from that of Doel and his colleagues, a more apprehensive and forbidding one. Anderson argues that the North is undergoing irreversible and damaging changes that are rapid and far-reaching, and that will affect all aspects of the northern ecosystem.

The title of his book captures the heart of his message: *After the Ice* refers both to the annual melt of Arctic ice and to Anderson's argument that "an Arctic that freezes over and melts again each year is a completely different place for the creatures and the people that live there now"—including the starving polar bear on Devon Island which so disturbed Anderson on the second day of his trip to Canada's far north (Anderson 2009: 97). In contrast to Anderson's discouraging New Arctic lies geographer Laurence C. Smith's *New North*, an articulation of the future North put forward in his book *The New North. The World in 2050* (US title: *The World in 2050. Four Forces Shaping Civilization's Northern Future*) (2011). Halfway through the present century, Smith predicts that the Arctic Eight will be economic powerhouses and migration meccas, with cities such as Arkhangelsk (Russia), Nuuk (Greenland) and Hammerfest (Finnmark, Norway) flourishing and envied for their access to fresh water. The range of visions presented in such books underlines that the North's future is still very much in flux: its outlines are framed by the climate change underway, but its outcome is not yet fixed.

The overarching question which emerges from these and other similar books is how the North will be governed and contested as the ice continues to melt. Which organizations and bodies will provide vehicles for governance in a changing climate? To what extent will environmental protection and resource development be balanced? How will political, economic and security ambitions play out in the North? Or, to put it more simply, who will shape the future of the North, and why? Between thinning, receding and disappearing sea ice, calving and melting glaciers, increasing coastal erosion and seasonal changes, and the resultant disruptive impacts of all these changes on communities, infrastructures and planning, there is a newly emerging and as of yet undefined balance of power in the North. The need for governance and control may well be filled as much by non-state as by state actors—and, in particular, indigenous groups. Indeed, as Michael Byers argues in his book *Who Owns the Arctic? Understanding Sovereignty Disputes in the Arctic*, indigenous agency is at once a force unto itself and a tool which countries such as Canada can use to exercise sovereignty in the North (Byers 2009). The ever-growing presence of popular books on the North is a reminder that these issues have a wide reach and interest. Northern matters are everyone's business now—as are the processes by which voices are gaining, and trying to gain, legitimate agency to speak for the North.

Towards Conclusions

When we put all of this together, what do we get? Where do these re-conceptualizations of the North take us, where do they agree, and where do they differ—and why? How do they try to define the North, and to what

ends? And what are the challenges facing humanists and social scientists interested in the North from these perspectives?

The overview of work on the North provided here identifies several interconnected themes that are central to how the North is perceived today. The first is the depiction of a geopolitical North, a region extending in reach far beyond the Arctic Circle, a region increasingly politically and economically linked to countries with few historical or geographical connections to the North, and a region vital to the phenomenon of global climate change. This geopolitical North is more than a polar projection, a technical manipulation of cartography to see the world differently; rather, it is a true re-orientation of both geography and mindset. If we take this path to its extreme end, we come to Charles Emmerson's conclusion that "the Arctic has become a lens through which to view the world—and this, ultimately, is why the Arctic matters" (Emmerson 2010). A second theme coalesces around questions of environment and climate change: how humans have shaped the North and northern environments, and how the North has shaped those who live and visit there, both feature strongly in the re-conceptualizations discussed here, as do the implications of climate change for the North's land- and sea-scapes, peoples, and ecosystems. This focus tries to make sense of the place and role of humans in an environment that is changing in ways not fully understood, to grasp the implications of climate change for the North, and to understand how changes in the North will impact other regions of the globe. A third theme takes a transnational perspective that emphasizes the long geographic reach of economic interests and governance structures in the North, as well as the ways in which climate change is making the North's presence felt globally. Finally, this scholarship also takes up the question of legitimacy and agency, asking whose voices matter in Northern affairs and how this relevance is determined. Indigenous voices feature strongly here, and are often given prominent weight and attention.

Perhaps the most critical differentiation between recent re-conceptualizations of the North hinges on the scholar's place in policy discussions. With the demand for expert advice on northern issues today, the question of to what extent, if at all, social scientists and humanists should be involved in providing advice is paramount. For Doel, Wråkberg, and Zeller, the answer is clear: "Our largest ambition," they write, "is to work toward an improved understanding of Arctic scientific research, not only as history *but also as a resource for policy*" (Doel, Wråkberg, & Zeller 2014: 13; emphasis added). Researchers involved in the Swedish Assessing Arctic Futures project go a step further, identifying the creation of policy and decision-making tools as a key goal of their work and aiming explicitly to "develop tools with which proposed Arctic futures can be assessed beforehand, thereby offering the

decision makers a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of paths to be taken.”¹² But others are wary of interaction between scholars and policy makers. “Researchers in both the natural and social sciences are being invited to join the game of polar geopolitics to help devise strategies to redefine the polar regions,” writes Bravo—but he worries that the use of scholarly research by policymakers is infused with prejudice and a lack of accountability:

It is ironic that at precisely the moment when there is an international collective effort to harness environmental research in the Arctic under disinterested knowledge, there appears to be less transparency than ever about the use of academic research in the social and natural sciences by policy makers.

He continues: “As academic researchers we have an ethical challenge to preserve the intellectual neutrality and critical objectivity of our universities” (Bravo 2009a: xiii).

Even whilst heeding Bravo’s legitimate concerns, it strikes me that humanists and social scientists have something important, even critical, to add to the cacophony of voices from politics, think tanks, science and industry that offer and provide advice on the North today. As the work discussed throughout this paper shows, humanists and social scientists, regardless of their disciplinary identity, can add a dimension frequently absent from the broader discussion: a historical dimension that links present and future concerns to past events and narratives. The governance, institutional, cultural and environmental contexts of the North have long histories that are too often ignored in political discussions and forums. As Joseph E. Taylor reminds us, history can serve policy making by reminding decision makers of the messiness and complexity of the past (Taylor 2008: 470). Social scientists and humanists can shed light on how past decisions and events have shaped today’s governance structures and environmental conditions in the North, and how historical circumstances might influence or affect future options in the region. In this sense, humanists and social scientists, too, belong in the North, as a lens through which to tie northern pasts, presents and futures together.

What are the re-conceptualizations of the North discussed here—ones with specific names such as New Arctic or Arctic *Norden*, ones described as new polar politics or post-polar, ones that are nameless but nonetheless present—ultimately doing? They are themselves articulating and projecting possible Northern futures. In some cases they do so explicitly, and in other cases they do so implicitly by setting up structures through which we can envision the North.¹³ By identifying themes and associated vocabulary,

these re-conceptualizations of the North set the agenda for further discussion; by assessing the authority and legitimacy of voices and storytellers, they suggest who has the right to articulate, debate and decide northern issues; and by looking into the past and drawing lines to the present and beyond, they construct narratives that can give us a framework for assessing and imagining various futures for the North. As Andrew Stuhl reminds us, the term “New North” has been used for decades to “structure the human relationship with the Arctic [and] imagin[e] the shape of Arctic futures” (Stuhl 2013: 96)—and, indeed, the work discussed here is also part of this genre of thinking and writing; that is, a way of imagining the North and of making a statement about its relation to the past, present and future.¹⁴ In this sense, perhaps the most important message is that laden terms and ideas used to describe the North—*New North*, *Norden*, *New Arctic* and the like—are inherently embedded in historical contexts. These visions of the North, developed and presented to tell particular stories, are part of a larger story, one that reaches into the past and one which will continue to evolve and change.

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NOTES

- ¹ Here, I refer primarily to geography (including historical geography), political science (including comparative politics, governance and public policy), and history (including environmental and comparative history).
- ² This coverage includes Canada, the United States, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and, to a lesser extent, Russia, as well as the United Kingdom. Given the English-language nature of this special forum, I look primarily at re-conceptualizations published in English, with some Danish-language sources as well.
- ³ Whilst important in northern narratives, technological change is beyond the scope of this paper. For technologically-oriented studies of the North, see Wynn 2007 and Jørgensen & Sörlin 2013.
- ⁴ On historical and transnational Nordic identity, see also Østergård 2002 and Musial 2009.
- ⁵ For discussion of an Arctic Treaty, see, for example, Fløistad & Lothe 2010 and Young 2011.
- ⁶ I do not purport to deal with the messiness surrounding this term here. For an insightful discussion, see Taylor 2008.

- ⁷ The literature on the Cold War North is vast. Two sources to start with are Tamnes 1991 and Ellingsen 1988.
- ⁸ For another take on the southern relationship with the North, see Adcock 2013.
- ⁹ For another take on visual imagery, this time photography, in the North, see Möller 2011.
- ¹⁰ For the spatial turn in history, White 2010 is a good starting point. For the spatial North, see, for example, Wråkberg 2012: 194–195.
- ¹¹ For LASHIPA, see www.let.rug.nl/arctic/lashipa_web/.
- ¹² For the Arctic Futures project, see www.arcticfutures.se/.
- ¹³ For a discussion of more explicit articulations of northern futures, see Dag Avango, Annika E. Nilsson and Peder Roberts' (2013) recent work on Arctic future in the context of voices, resources and governance.
- ¹⁴ For another critical take on this type of terminology, this time in the context of the American West, see Taylor 2004.

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