

Research Perspective

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Editorial: Number 56

Ken Coates

The Circumpolar North is as much an abstraction as a reality for the world's people, created in their imaginations through books, newspaper articles, poetry, movies, television programs, music, and other media. The North has been created, fantasized about, re-imagined, bastardized, transformed, reported accurately, and misrepresented. There is a huge global audience for these many different Norths—real, imaginary, metaphysical, and conceptual—and this interest has been sustained for hundreds of years. In the early days of Arctic exploration, memoirs and tales of Arctic adventures sold in large numbers. In the nineteenth century, lecturers gave lantern slide shows to packed theatre audiences across Europe and North America. Robert Service created word pictures, in popular verse, of the Klondike that made him one of the most important authors of his generation. And so it went, through Charlie Chaplin movies, many B-grade adventure movies, children's programs, numerous advertising campaigns, uneven and unpredictable news coverage, and now the anarchistic world of social media.

The media matters a great deal for all regions, but more for the North than elsewhere. There are many media representations of Hawaii or California, but millions of people travel to these destinations each year. Personal observations, private photos, and word of mouth serve as a counterbalance to whatever images and impressions come through the various media. In the case of the North, media outlets provide “Outsiders” (as Yukoners describe the rest of Canada and the South) with eyes on a region that few people will ever visit. Reporters, writers, journalists, photographers, and filmmakers visit the far corners of the North, dropping into fly-in communities, mining camps, caribou migratory fields, pristine wilderness lakes, and inside Indigenous people's homes and community halls. Their selections, interpretations, and presentations of even “real” Arctic images have collectively created the public understanding of the nature and reality of the North.

Special collection guest editor Mathieu Landriault has done an admirable job of jump-starting an extensive investigation of media representations of the Arctic. He and the other authors in the collection clearly understand the role

that media plays in creating, some would say manufacturing, public images and understandings of the region and the people who have lived here for thousands of years. These articles illustrate why it is important to understand the media personnel who created the images, the motivations that brought them to the North or to their specific stories, and the audiences who consume these representations. The North, of course, now has a substantial media industry, creating the region's own news stories, tweets, movies, television shows, documentaries, YouTube and TikTok videos, Instagram posts, and photographs. Many of the journalists, filmmakers, and content creators are Indigenous people who bring important insights, as do the numerous long-time non-Indigenous content creators contributing to the media representation of the Arctic. This media enterprise is, of course, an ongoing process and will continue to evolve over time. The special collection in this issue of the *Northern Review* is, we trust, a valuable contribution to what promises to be an important and ongoing debate.

The collection is joined by five insightful articles submitted to the journal, all reporting on studies and perspectives completed by researchers living in the North—from the University of Northern British Columbia to the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and from Yukon University to the University of Greenland. The articles cover topics as broad and diverse as the North itself, including education, history, community development, governance, geography, and climate change; and they all include discussions concerning relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. We are pleased to include these valuable and timely conversations in the pages of the *Northern Review*.

Ken Coates is a founding and senior editor of the *Northern Review*, and professor emeritus, Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

Special Collection

Introduction: Media Representations of the Arctic

Mathieu Landriault

Guest Editor

The Arctic has been under the media gaze for a considerable amount of time, both in traditional media and popular culture. Explorers' tales of the region have occupied a preeminent place in popular culture, describing the Arctic in mythical ways. These tales have contributed to persistent preconceptions of the region in the popular imagination. As Hansson (2018) points out, the Arctic was portrayed as a site for heroic endeavours, a futile objective for potential conquerors, as otherworldly, and as a gendered space. The Arctic is primarily presented as an area to dominate, to subjugate rather than to embrace or live in. Indeed, references are seldom made to people inhabiting this space, rendering the region as an empty space.

Traditional media has also focused and framed the region in specific terms, molding public perceptions about the Arctic. For example, traditional media has devoted significant attention to framing the region as a zone for economic development (especially natural resource extraction) and as an area to protect from sovereignty and security threats (Nicol, 2013; Landriault, 2016; Gritsenko, 2016).

However, scholarship on explorers' tales and traditional media has constituted a rather modest corpus of research. In most research, attention is centred on conducting content analysis to list popular frames, and focuses on how Arctic issues are described, without investigating the motives or intentions of reporters or media outlets. In turn, very little attention is devoted to understanding why these frames are popular or more frequently relayed in media outlets.