

## Introduction

### Northern Inequalities: Global Processes, Local Legacies

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Against the backdrop of rising interest in global inequalities, this special issue of the *Northern Review* focuses on “northern inequalities,” and attempts to document a range of issues and debates about social, spatial, political, and economic inequality occurring in the Canadian Arctic and Subarctic regions. We understand inequality broadly to encompass differential access to education, training, and employment; differences in the distribution of wealth within and between communities; differences in social and political representation; as well as differences in health as it relates to environmental pollution, intergenerational trauma, subsistence hunting, and food security.

The idea of developing a special issue devoted to exploring northern inequalities came about in the spring of 2014 when we both attended the International Congress of the Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS) hosted in Prince George, British Columbia. During the conference, we noted a gap in the discussion concerning the northern dimension of global inequality trends. These broader trends include the anti-globalization protests being spearheaded by the Occupy movement, as well as the Idle No More movement conceived in Canada by four Indigenous women in November 2012. However, we also were interested in smaller, more targeted grassroots campaigns over the past five years. These include the “Feeding My Family” Facebook group raising awareness about food insecurity in Nunavut (Wing-Sea Leung 2015), as well as organized opposition to uranium mining near Baker Lake (Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit 2015), and the successful resistance to disruptive seismic testing in Lancaster Sound, Nunavut (Qikiqtani Inuit Association 2012). The list could surely go on. Together, these successful movements, amongst so

many others like them, in their own ways bring the northern problems of social, spatial, and economic inequality to the forefront. As Mills (1999) proposed in his seminal 1959 text on the sociological imagination, successful political action is carried out by transforming isolated personal troubles into broad-based public problems, which are then grasped as historical and linked to a larger social whole. Raising inequality to the level of broad social awareness involves precisely this.

In the academic community at the time, issues surrounding global inequality were also gaining renewed attention with the publication of Thomas Piketty's path-breaking book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014). His book painstakingly details the growing income inequalities occurring in the global North since the nineteenth century. One of the central themes of the book is that inequality is not an accident, but rather a feature of capitalism that can be studied through the social sciences, held in check, and even reversed through political action and state programs that take the realities of unequal access to resources into account. Piketty's main call to action is for social scientists and citizens to engage in public debate and not abandon the study of economics to others.

While the topic of inequality in the North is by no means entirely novel, examining social inequalities is often times ancillary to, rather than central to, northern social science research—that is to say, it is often subsumed under a variety of other closely related topics. For instance, a perusal of *Northern Review* volumes over the last decade suggests that major topics involve matters pertaining to the general categories of political, economic, and social development. These include issues such as governance at both the local and community level, as well as in larger institutional bodies such as the Arctic Council, and economic development related to large-scale industrial megaprojects, tourism, and the “social economy.” Other topics discuss education and responses to rapid landscape change due to climate change and resource development.

These topics are important and undoubtedly worthy in their own right. However, organizing topics explicitly around the theme of inequality steadfastly refocuses our attention on contemporary tensions that are simultaneously global and local. Inequality as a signpost links northern debates to larger global struggles that—amongst other events—help to make someone like Bernie Sanders be a serious contender for president of the arguably most powerful country in the world, as well as accounts for the rise of political figures such as Rachel Notley in Alberta and even Justin Trudeau federally, both of whom ran on platforms promising to alleviate inequality to certain extents. While we should engage in extensive public

debate about whether and to what extent these platforms will be, or have been, successful, we can only hope that this inspiring trend of raising the issue of inequality to the level of broad engagement continues to enjoy significant popular support.

Inequality is no longer on the backburner, and this special issue attempts to outline a critical approach for advancing research in this area. And we can only hope this major focus will continue to expand to the northernmost regions of our own country where inequality is arguably an enduring legacy of European imperialism and what Karl Marx (1867) famously called “primitive accumulation”; that is, where colonial exploits absorbed distant territories by first separating people from their means of subsistence and land. David Harvey (2003), in his own work on colonialism, has defined this as the “historical geography of capitalism” (142-3). As the title of our volume suggests, northern inequalities reflect global processes that are rooted in historical structures and legacies. We agree with Piketty’s general assertion, when he states:

... it is long since past the time when we should have put the question of inequality back at the center of economic analysis and begun asking questions first raised in the nineteenth century ... If the question of inequality is again to become central, we must begin by gathering as extensive as possible a set of historical data for the purpose of understanding past and present trends. (Piketty 16)

We are likewise drawn to examining the contexts of inequality. We appreciate that the history of inequality is shaped by “the way economic, social, and political actors view what is just and what is not, as well as by the relative power of those actors and the collective choices that result (20). However, in addition to delimiting the topic to one particular geographic area—the Canadian North—our aim is to broaden the scope of analysis beyond economic inequality to include other historical and social features implicated in the maldistribution of resources.

In addressing the above issues, the authors of this volume tend to locate social inequality as a legacy of ongoing colonialism. The main themes that stand out among the articles of this collection relate to the historical effects of colonial activities on northern Indigenous peoples. These include the politics of pollution and health resulting from environmental injustices caused from the exploitation of traditional territories (resource frontiers) for purposes of mining and state formation; the socio-economic marginalization caused by colonialism; the alienation

from traditional cultural practices; the historical contexts of inequality; the complex geographies of inequality; health inequality; and, finally, the effects of Arctic waste legacies on Indigenous peoples.

As such, contributions to this special issue of the *Northern Review* emanate from multiple epistemic positions, and focus on diverse geographical and cultural contexts. We suggest that the contributions explore the ways in which social inequality is related to and implicated in the inclusion and exclusion experienced by northerners in particular regional and institutional settings. In this exploration, the issue endeavours to consider how social inequalities in northern regions are being conceptualized and framed.

The first two articles examine the toxic legacy of mining and military waste on Indigenous populations and their traditional territories. In their article “Toxic Legacies, Slow Violence, and Environmental Injustice at Giant Mine, NWT,” John Sandlos and Arn Keeling examine the effects of pollution from Yellowknife’s Giant Mine on the Yellowknives Dene. And because the toxic legacy of arsenic trioxide from the defunct gold mine that is currently festering in abandoned underground mine shafts and leaching into the local watershed has been amply documented and reported, the authors’ key contribution is to focus attention on the geography of social inequality occurring at the intersections of environmental pollution and racial inequality. Sandlos and Keeling argue that the Yellowknives Dene continue to be uniquely exposed to contamination owing to their reliance on local land and water resources for subsistence.

In “The DEW Line and Canada’s Arctic Waste: Legacy and Futurity,” Myra Hird develops an analysis of military waste that resulted from the creation of the DEW Line system built during the Cold War as part of efforts to maintain continental security. Hird uses the DEW Line as a case study in order to develop policy frameworks that can be used by northern Indigenous governments in ensuring that the impacts of resource-extractive industrial development are mitigated. Her article reveals lessons for how waste impacts the human and physical geography of the North and how the “develop now, pay later” approach misses the importance of prevention and leaves costly and enduring toxic legacies to future generations.

Gwen Healey’s work starts off a second theme related to poverty in Nunavut. Healey’s article, “(Re)settlement, Displacement, and Family Separation: Contributors to Health Inequality in Nunavut,” outlines an extensive literature review of relational and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The article grapples with familial attachments and the

learned behaviour of children through what the author crystalizes as *Iqqaumaqatigiinni*q—the Inuit understanding of how thoughts and ideas “come into one.” This frames the discussion for a rich analysis of the communication of health knowledge through first-hand interviews conducted with parents in Nunavut, discussing intergenerational knowledge transmission. Healey concludes that the trauma some Inuit families experienced as a result of relocation events and residential schools has altered contemporary kinship relations and attachments, which adversely affect health and wellness outcomes today.

Maggie Crump’s article, “Public Engagement and the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: Attempting to Understand Nunavut’s Poverty Reduction Strategy,” develops a reading of the politicization of poverty in Nunavut over the past decade. Crump opens with a discussion of high poverty rates in Nunavut and the dominant conceptual approaches towards understanding poverty that exist in the academic literature. She discusses how these approaches map onto recent initiatives, introduced by elected officials in Nunavut, to take concrete steps towards poverty reduction. Her analysis then develops a close description and analysis of participatory approaches to poverty reduction in Nunavut. Her article teases out the politics of how high poverty levels are understood historically and in a recent sequence of territorial planning documents. However, Crump observes that poverty itself has been largely left undefined through this process.

And, finally, Peter Kulchyski rounds out our special issue with a sweeping critique of structural inequality in “Rethinking Inequality in a Northern Indigenous Context: Affluence, Poverty, and the Racial Reconfiguration and Redistribution of Wealth,” particularly as it pertains to social struggles around development. His article shows that the project of primitive accumulation remains alive and well in the North, and he draws on the many lessons of geographical expansion, including all the hopes and losses that inevitably accompany attempts to transform the fruits of nature into human wealth. However, perhaps most importantly for our theme, his argument opens up space to cast doubt on whether inequality is up to the task of understanding the unique forms of struggle existing in the North, particularly the ability of special programs, taxes, and resource royalties to protect Indigenous cultures. Kulchyski’s positive contribution is to celebrate the virtues of “bush wealth” and rich conceptions of community, while continuing to decry the “racial reconfiguration of wealth” that undermines Indigenous relations to the land and community.

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## Guest Editors

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