



# **The Neoliberal Tourist: Affect, Policy and Economy in the Canadian North**

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## **Abstract**

Throughout his tenure as Prime Minister of Canada (2006-2015), Stephen Harper had a particular fascination with the Canadian North, illustrated in part by his annual tours of the Canadian Arctic and Subarctic region. Using these tours as a case study, this paper argues that state discourses of sovereignty, resource development, and climate change are intertwined with the simultaneous production of a tourist landscape. This tourist landscape is established in part through the circulation of affect within state discourses, like those engaged by Harper on his northern tours. The affective economies of tourism in the Canadian Arctic are heavily intertwined with both market-focused policy objectives and the moral imperative established by climate change. The result is a discourse of northern Canada that puts it within the purview of southern Canada. In particular, the affective, economic, and ecological dynamics in northern Canada produce an image of the North as both a playground for southern desires and a place in danger that is in need of saving. This moral economy in the North proposes market-based solutions and ethics for both economic and environmental problems.

## **Keywords**

Neoliberalism; Canadian Arctic; Stephen Harper; affective economy; tourism

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## Arctic Fears

Dennis and Stacie Woods, a married couple from Seattle, choose their vacation destinations based on what they fear is fated to destruction....Next on their list: the Arctic before the ice is gone.—Allen Salkin, “Before it Disappears”

Prime Minister Harper cultivates not only a sense of fear and uncertainty in order to invoke the exceptional but also a sense of care and reassurance so that the Canadian Arctic is restaged as a place needing a strong paternal figure not only to restore order and stability but also...to massage fears of a graduated sovereignty in the face of an uncertain future.—Klaus Dodds, “We are a Northern Country”



**Figure 1:** Prime Minister Stephen Harper watches as a pair of CF-18 Hornets and a CC-150 Polaris fly past during Operation NANOOK 10 in Resolute, Nunavut August 25, 2010. Image credit: Government of Canada.

After decades of being a landscape feared for its harsh weather and barren landscape, the Arctic has recently been produced as a place to *fear for*: Climate change, geopolitics, toxins, and oil spills are a number of the concerns that now dominate discussions of the Arctic. This transition, as the above quotations suggest, shapes both experiential desire and policy objectives. While fascinating on its own, this transition has happened at the same time as a move towards market-based neoliberal principles in the Canadian North<sup>1</sup> (Medalye & Foster, 2012), making the new affective discourse of the Arctic firmly

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<sup>1</sup> In Canada, the “North” is a powerful and malleable concept. As I illustrate below, there has been a consistent production of the North as key to many forms of Canadian identity and Nationalism, but the regions covered in this imaginary is often quite

linked to capital accumulation. While there are a number of reasons for this economic transition, this article focuses not on the cause, but the outcomes of this transition, specifically in the relationship between state development and tourist experiences in the North. By examining the northern tours of former (2006-2015) Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, I argue that contemporary affective, economic, and ecological narratives of northern Canada produce a conceptualization of the North as both a playground for southern desires and as a place in danger that needs to be saved through those very same desires. This production is facilitated by the rise of tourism in the North, which connects affect, economy, and ecology. Stephen Harper's annual tours throughout northern Canada help to outline the parallel track of extraction, entertainment, and state investment through what I call the neoliberal tourist: a mobile subject whose economic and experiential orientation supports the transition to a market-based governance regime.



**Figure 2:** Map of northern Canada.

At the heart of my argument is the interplay between neoliberalization as a policy doctrine and the production of neoliberal subjects that provide the “permanent consensus” established by neoliberalism (Foucault, 2008, 84). For Michel Foucault, neoliberal policy objectives use the health of the economy to justify state jurisdiction; a healthy economy, not a healthy population, is the metric by which the neoliberal state justifies its existence. Foucault’s “permanent consensus” is the way individuals are assumed to have tacit approval of this program by engaging an increasing amount of their individual self-expression and freedom through that market. Neoliberal policies mobilize this “consensus” by making economic success a marker of individual and state freedom. Here, the political contract of neoliberalism is embedded into the formation of the subject, not just their economic behaviour.

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different – sometimes it is the provincial hinterlands (such as Algonquin Park in Ontario, located along the 45<sup>th</sup> parallel), others times it is the Arctic archipelago (north of 62 degrees). In this paper, while I refer often to the North as a broad Canadian Imaginary, I focus primarily on the subarctic and Arctic regions that encompass the Northern Territories (Nunavut, Northwest Territories and the Yukon) and the provincial far north, especially those around Hudson’s Bay that are not connected by road to southern Canada. These are the regions that were most often featured in Harper’s tours.

Neoliberalism for Foucault is fundamentally a governance model that produces normalized subject positions by harnessing the competitive nature of the market. In the neoliberal model, individuals are drawn to use an economic rationale when considering what might seem like non-economic behaviours (like marriage, exercise, social endeavours, etc) (see also Brown, 2015; Werry, 2011). From this perspective, neoliberalism uses the market to create a disciplinary mode of persuasion that reduces choice to the realm of economic behaviours, enshrining the “market knows best” logic into all aspects of individual behaviour. For some, this process provides unique forms of individual choices, but it also embeds the deep inequalities of capitalism (based on race, gender, geography, and ability, among other vectors) into our beliefs about personal success.

In the case of northern Canada, tourism is drawn into this “permanent consensus” by providing an affect-based rationale for the economic state at the same time as it mobilizes neoliberal economic subjects into novel locations through their interest in unique, powerful (and expensive) experiences of the North (Werry, 2011). The neoliberal tourist, as someone whose travel practices enable the broad governing regimes of neoliberalism, can be a crucial link between the governance model of competition and the spatial practices of territory. In the Canadian North, places are competing for these mobile subjects, both as tourists and as investors in extractive industries. While the industries are significantly different, tourism and extraction find common ground in their governance models and in the importance of place-based competition. The neoliberal tourist becomes the subject that links these affective drives to an expanding market-based economy, enabling the spread of neoliberalization.

### **Northern Futures, Southern Dreams**

Canadian history is punctuated by waves of interest in the North: from the search for the Northwest Passage, gold rushes, and oil and gas exploration through to the more recent interest in the effect of climate change on northern communities. The North, in these waves, is a place to anchor national dreams of development and identity (see Emmerson, 2011; Hulan, 2002; Warde, 2018). For example, a 1888 Senate report on the resource potential of the Mackenzie Valley reported hundreds of thousands of acres of prairie lands suitable for growing potatoes, barley, and pasturing animals alongside a “petroleum area...so extensive as to justify the belief that eventually it will supply the larger part of the continent and be shipped from Churchill [Manitoba]...to England” (Senate of Canada, 1888, 11). Almost 25 years later, E.T. Seton (1911), naturalist and co-founder of the Boy Scouts, assumed that the subarctic regions could be a “human paradise” (69) that would be an “empire peopled with white men” (67) around a great arable region of wheat harvests north of 60 (see also Piper and Sandlos, 2007). The Arctic explorer Vilhelm Stefansson promoted Arctic development by arguing that the global centre of civilization has been consistently moving northward and would eventually settle in the far North. For Stefansson, “There is no northern boundary beyond which productive enterprise cannot go till North meets North on the opposite shores of the Arctic Ocean” (quoted in Page, 1986, 8). With climate change, these discourses are returning. In a recent *Foreign Affairs* article entitled “The Coming Arctic Boom,” the author argues that climate change is not all bad because

in the Arctic, it is turning what has traditionally been an impassable body of water ringed by remote wilderness into something dramatically different: an emerging epicentre of industry and trade akin to the Mediterranean Sea....Such cities as Anchorage and Reykjavik could someday become major shipping centres and financial capitals—the high-latitude equivalents of Singapore and Dubai. (Borgerson, 2013, 78)

These waves of fascination and involvement with the Arctic and subarctic deploy both material economies of exploration and development as well as affective economies of nationalism and conservation. For Indigenous peoples of the North, this attention has often, as Sheila Watt-Cloutier

(2015) describes it, left scars on the landscape and on its peoples. From the toxic legacies of mining (Keeling and Sandlos, 2009) and pipelines (Dokis, 2015) to forced relocations (Tester and Kulchyski, 1994) and low-level military flyovers (Penashue, 2019), the interest in northern Canada is often focused only on the promise the North has for the South. Although tourism is a relatively small player in the overall economic landscape of the North, the longer history of the North as a landscape of southern dreams of development and adventure reminds us that in the context of Canadian politics, the North is an ideological environment as much as it is an economic engine.

The economic dreams and realities in the North have centred on the expansion of the staple industry economy: Gold in 1897, zinc, silver, and radium in the 1930s and oil starting at Norman Wells in 1937. Until recently, resource development efforts have primarily focused on exploration, with a long lag time between discovery and extraction (and indeed, many of these dreams were left unfulfilled). The entry of the United States into WWII brought a hurried pace of new development, including the Alaska highway through northern B.C and the Yukon, a pipeline from Norman Wells to Whitehorse and airfields through the North in 1941-42. These airfields would be used in the post-WWII years to open up further mineral exploration, however the influence of military planning would also continue in the Cold War through the establishment of several northern American-used military bases (including at Churchill, Manitoba in 1946). The Distant Early Warning (DEW) line, a series of radar stations spanning from Alaska to Greenland built in the late 1950s, is the most prominent of these Cold War developments.

Dreams of economic success in the North were matched by the production of a particular affective environment as well. Anxiety over national control was repeatedly mobilized throughout the past century and a half, especially around the purchase of Alaska, the lawlessness of the Klondike gold rush, and the early American North Pole expeditions (Byers, 2009). These concerns played out in strange ways at times: a nationalist campaign to send Captain J.E. Bernier on a Polar expedition ended up with Bernier traveling through northern waters collecting whaling license fees (Page, 1986, 14). When the American military involvement in the North continued after WWII, the nationalist anxiety expanded (Page, 1986). In 1953, the Canadian government moved Inuit families from northern Québec to unoccupied islands in the high Arctic. This was originally justified by talk of overpopulation in the community, however, it was actually motivated by the fears of American and Dutch claims to the northern islands (see Byers, 2009; Grant, 2016; Marcus, 1995; Qikiqtani Inuit Association, 2013; Tester and Kulchyski, 1994). John Diefenbaker's "Northern Vision" was built upon opposition to American over-reach to secure his majority government in Canada in 1958. Like most northern rhetoric, this vision was not simply a policy plan, it also was meant to align with a particular vision of Canada's identity, strength, and uniqueness.

The North, in the Anglo-European Canadian imaginary, was not just a place but also a common experience. In 1936, Stephen Leacock wrote about the power of the North, and the role of adventure (even when never taken) in the potent North:

I like to think that in a few short hours in a train or car I can be in the primeval wilderness of the North; that if I like, from my summer home, an hour or two of flight will take me over the divide and down to the mournful shores of the James Bay, untenanted till yesterday, now haunted with its flock of airplanes hunting gold in the wilderness. ...I have never gone to the James Bay; I never go to it; I never shall. But somehow, I'd feel lonely without it. (179)

For Leacock, it wasn't just mineral development that was made possible by the flock of airplanes, but also the potential for adventure.

It is worth noting that the economic potential of the North was not always realized even as it inspired the imagination of the South. For one, northern environments have often troubled these southern

dreams of expansion and profit. For example, while exploration and initial drilling has happened throughout the Arctic for over 100 years, it is only recently that many of the discoveries have been put into industrial production due to the costs associated with the harsh conditions and remote locations. A more significant interruption to resource extraction has been the political work of Indigenous communities in the Arctic. These came to the fore in the context of the Northwest Territories' Mackenzie Valley Pipeline and the James Bay project in northern Québec and have continued since (Desbiens, 2013; Dokis, 2015). As energy exploration and development continued in the North, Indigenous groups re-asserted their claims to the land through the courts as well as in the public arena, with the result that both of the above energy mega-projects, although completed, underwent significant changes based on Indigenous interventions. In the 1970s, the federal government started a renewed effort to settle land claims in the North as a way to open up development opportunities: The James Bay agreement in 1975 (initiated and negotiated primarily by the provincial [Québec] government), the Inuvialuit land claim in 1984, the Gwich'in in 1992 and the Nunavut agreement in 1993.

As a recent player in the northern economy, tourism builds upon the material and affective history of exploration and development. The infrastructure built to sustain northern travel for mineral exploration, Arctic sovereignty, and northern governance also provides the pathways that bring pleasure travellers to the area. From weather stations on the Northwest Passage that help cruise boats and pleasure crafts to the northern airports and bush plane service that deliver anglers and canoeists to remote lakes, the northern tourist industry relies upon the material connections of already established resource extraction economies (which themselves are linked to military legacies). As Bram Büscher and Veronica Davidov (2013, 2) argue, the side-by-side existence of ecotourism and extraction economies is not just incidental, it is based on a set of shared "political economic or ethnological experiences, logics, perspectives, and epistemologies." These connections form a nexus whereby ecotourism often depends upon the infrastructure built for extraction economies. So, for example, canoeists who paddle along the Thelon River to Baker Lake, Nunavut, fly home on the same planes that ferry workers from the Meadowbank open pit gold mine. There is also a similar production of space that comes from both tourism and extraction. Stories of exploration, from Samuel Hearn and John Franklin to the Klondike gold rush and RCMP patrols, are as prominent in the selling of tourism in northern Canada as they are in the expansion of the industrial economies of the North. Even tourists who are critical of the extractive industry often maintain a connection to the exploration narratives that see the North as a region of limitless economic potential (e.g. Vallely, 2017).

Most of the tourist development beyond the road access of the Alaska Highway and Yellowknife region has happened in the past 40 years. In that time, three defining features have shaped development in northern Canada. One feature is the above-mentioned assertion of control by Indigenous groups, both through land claims and self-government initiatives as well as extra-national groups like the Inuit Circumpolar Council. A second feature is the federal push to provide the territories with greater control over local affairs, including elected representatives for territorial governments in 1979. This devolution of federal responsibility over the North has influenced everything from land claims to the regulatory regime for mineral exploration and development. Third, climate change is experienced more acutely in the Arctic and sub-arctic regions shaping a wide range of development plans and discourses in the North (Briner et al., 2015; Hinzman et al., 2005). Increasing the shipping routes and ice-free days, destabilizing once-solid permafrost-based infrastructure, and re-shaping animal ranges and habitats, climate change is a fundamental dynamic in contemporary northern Canada. While significant on their own, these three features of the recent history of northern development have been folded into the neoliberalization of the Canadian North.

## Neoliberalism in Northern Canada

In policy terms, neoliberalism in Canada has focused on the re-organization of the state apparatus towards free-market principles, including the privatization of state responsibilities, deregulation of state-governed industries, and the reduction of welfare-state provisions (Albo, 2002; Larner, 2003; Peck, 2001). These economic and political processes are accompanied by a simultaneous cultural shift that glorifies individualism, the entrepreneurial spirit, and reframes all forms of conduct into economic conduct (see Brown, 2015; Foucault, 2008; Mirowski, 2013; Rose, 1996). As Wendy Brown (2015, 30) writes, neoliberalism contains not a set of governing principles, but rather a “governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life.” This rationality takes aim at both government and citizens, enabling both the production of neoliberal regulations and a culture of consent that approves of them.

Nature has been a central feature of capital growth in the North, as it has for all capitalist regions. Scholarship on neoliberal natures illustrates how this commodification of nature has been intensified through neoliberalization (Büscher et al, 2012; Castree, 2010; Heynen & Robbins, 2005; McCarthy & Prudham, 2004), with early work illustrating the commodification of different forms of protecting nature (Erickson, 2011; Robertson, 2004; Sullivan, 2013). This is a move away, as Bram Büscher (2013, 20-21) writes, from commodification that “uses, transforms, and/or impacts upon socio-biophysical natures” to “the conservation of nature as a capitalist project.” From concerns about the ecosystem services discourse to the entanglement of conservation ideologies within tourism destination marketing, this literature maintains the centrality of nature to capitalism’s growth (Fletcher, Dressler & Büscher, 2015). While there is an extensive literature that has developed over the past 15 years on the relationship between nature and neoliberalism, the use of that literature to understand ecotourism practices is still relatively small (see Duffy and Moore, 2010; Duffy, 2015; Fletcher, 2012, 2015, 2019; Fletcher & Neves 2012; Keul, 2014; Mendoza, 2018; Ojeda, 2012; Werry, 2011). Ecotourism serves as an “ecological fix” to the overaccumulation problem of capitalism in which the need for constant growth demands an ever-increasing source for commodities within a materially and geographically limited world (Fletcher, 2015). Moving from the extraction of nature to the consumption of nature as spectacle allows for nature to be continually consumed in ways that nature as a raw resource cannot (Büscher, 2013; Igoe, 2013, 2017). Conservation of nature as a form of profit making through tourism and ecosystem services then becomes a way for capitalism to “sustain itself via the creation of new commodities from the environmental crises it has created” (Duffy, 2013, 611). Tourism is also paired easily with the subject-production dimensions of neoliberalism, as it promotes the normalization of subjects on both sides of the tourist exchange – the ideal hosts and the ideal tourists (Werry, 2011).

The ecological fix of tourism is built not only on the ecotourism/extractive nexus Buscher and Davidov (2013) outline, but also through the normalization of an entrepreneurial outlook to place, what Keul (2014, 237) calls “place as tourism enterprise.” Under this practice, the North becomes a location that requires commodification to ensure the health of those who live in it. With the onset of climate change, tourist commodities in the North come partially through the marketing of their potential disappearance, even as tourism builds upon the infrastructure of those industries that are leading to many of the conditions of its disappearance (e.g., air travel, oil and gas exploration, military expenditures). This commodification is an outcome of the permanent consensus Foucault identifies in neoliberalization. Along with the ‘disappearing Arctic’ that is mobilized by neoliberalism in the North, we also see a reduction in the potential subject positions that are available to respond to climate change. Market-based responses privilege the entrepreneurial subject, not those who build community and resilience through subsistence, traditions, and market alternatives (Kulchyski & Bernauer, 2014).

Northern Canada has followed the international shift towards neoliberalism. As everywhere else, this shift has been uneven, operating through a variety of already-established social and political programs. The Canadian state's relationship to northern Canada is shaped by both a colonial desire to control territory (and its potential wealth) and a paternalist (colonial) mentality towards Indigenous peoples (Cameron, 2015). This meant a heavily involved federal government on both fronts, including: 1) providing housing and food transportation for residents and 2) mapping, exploration and infrastructure for industry (Dickerson, 1992). Northern neoliberalism is tempered by the colonial mindset of the Federal government, yet still thrives in its push to economize the North in new ways. Broadly, the influence of neoliberalization falls into three different spheres: the commodification of northern resources; the redefinition of the colonial relationship; and the response to climate change. In these areas, as I illustrate below, the move towards neoliberalism in northern Canada has been shaped by economic interests bent on enabling private profit from northern resources as well as local regional interests trying to assert increasing local control over resources.

### ***Redefining the Colonial Relationship***

In their assessment of neoliberalism in northern Canada, Emilie Cameron and Tyler Levitan (2014, 46) suggest that “the neoliberal reorganization of the state is being framed as consistent with northern Indigenous self-determination...[where] ‘less state’ represents a win-win-win situation for Indigenous communities, corporations, and the state.” The devolution of the northern territories from federal control is an example, where the federal Canadian government sees devolution as a rollback of welfare-state spending and some Indigenous groups—like the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami—see it as part of decolonization. This ‘less state’ option is not actually a diminished state, but a re-organized state where the government opens up opportunities for industry (Cameron and Levitan, 2014). From a policy perspective, the rationale for devolution can be summed up as an attempt to “improve efficiency and responsiveness in service delivery and program development by...transferring responsibilities to regional governments” (Coates and Poelzer, 2014, 2). This transfer also comes with a restructuring of the responsibilities of the state, enabling the privatization described above. For example, in the production of Nunavut—a territory based upon Inuit approaches to governance and created as part of a land claim negotiated by the Inuit of the Western Canadian Arctic—impact benefit agreements (IBAs) were instituted as a way to increase community control over resource use, but they also divested the federal and territorial governments from these agreements. Importantly, the institutionalization of decentralized mechanisms like IBAs (and land claims corporations focused on promoting economic development) creates implicit competition between communities to attract industry and provides greater leverage to corporations (Cameron and Levitan, 2014). The result has been to infuse the process with an implicit growth model that often runs against local opposition to development activities (Kulchyski and Bernauer, 2014).

### ***Commodification of Northern Resources***

The past forty years has seen the privatization of public corporations within the North, including the Northern Transportation Company in 1985, Nanisivik Mine in 1986, and the Canarctic Shipping Company in 1996 (Boardman and Vining, 2012). More recently, the federal government has aggressively restructured the royalty and tax rates for resource extraction: Resource-based corporate income tax dropped from 28% to 21% between 2003 and 2008; provincial and federal royalty payments were reduced through a tax deduction; significant fees like the capital tax on resource extraction were eliminated; and a 10% tax credit for mineral exploration expenditures was introduced (Medalye and Foster, 2012). Alongside these incentives, the federal government is providing significant resource extraction infrastructure in the North, including the training of northern residents specifically for resource

industries, the provision of geological maps and data for resource exploration and the militarization of the North in protection of valuable resources and transportation routes.

### *Responding to Climate Change*

The connection between climate change and neoliberalism has by now been very well established (Dempsey, 2016; Klein, 2015; Prudhum, 2009). In the North, climate change has been seen as the catalyst for two specific state-enabled responses: Adaptation innovations and opening up new resource frontiers. Adaptation to climate change in the North focuses on the dilemmas of the changing landscape, including melting permafrost, flooding coastal zones and changing game patterns (Ford, McDowell and Jones, 2014). These changes are prompting significant financial commitments by governments in the North (NRTEE 2009). Unlike the first wave of government spending in the North, in which modernist planning was the rule of the day (Farish and Lackenbauer, 2009), the new wave seeks to pair outright governmental involvement with the enabling of community and market initiatives through an enabling state. As a report by the National Roundtable on Energy and the Environment (NRTEE 2009, 73) argues, the need to address infrastructure changes in the North can be met by seeing government agencies as effective facilitators, through “markets, financial incentives, liability rules, and fiscal or tax measures” that will encourage the proper behaviour of citizens and corporations in the North.

Similarly, the response to new exploration opportunities highlights the move away from modernist state planning towards a neoliberal model. Early resource development in the Canadian North was often established by the state, including the Cameco Mines in Northern Saskatchewan and Eldorado Mine in the Northwest Territories (NWT). When not directly engaged in by Crown corporations, different levels of the state provided significant infrastructure development: from roads and residences all the way to moving communities to be closer to mining jobs. This pattern of support for resource development has continued in the push to open the Arctic in light of climate change. From geological mapping for resource development through to naval safety and security initiatives to protect transportation routes throughout the northern archipelago, the federal government has highlighted the economic benefits of a changing climate. Federal government supported climate-change related enterprises are designed to enable a market-based development, driving the ascendancy of neoliberalism into not only the budget-cutting acts of government, but also into those “spending ministries” that are most often connected to the welfare-state (Peck, 2010, 105)<sup>2</sup>.

It is common to remark that despite its rhetoric of “small government,” the strategies of neoliberalism do not actually reduce government involvement, but rather they re-organize the role of the state (Peck, 2001). In his lectures on neoliberalism, Michel Foucault (2008) argues that more than just a re-organization, neoliberalism signals a radical change in the path of liberalism. Under liberal philosophy, the economy was there to serve the state as it went about protecting its citizens. Neoliberalism suggests that the market is what empowers individuals, therefore the state’s justification lies in protecting the competition of the market. The transition from liberalism to neoliberalism elevates the place of competition over exchange as the central feature of the market. With the market as the centre of social organization, the state’s purpose moves away from being a protective covenant to its citizens (the implicit social contract) towards a bodyguard for the competitive market. This change produces two

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<sup>2</sup> The replacement of the Food Mail program, which subsidized transportation rates for food through Canada Post, with Nutrition North Canada, which operates through subsidies to individual retailers across the North, is a prime example of such form of neoliberal spending (Galloway, 2014).

significant results: 1) The establishment of governing as a form of expert rule designed to produce orderly productive markets and 2) the production of citizen subjects who bring the economic rationality of neoliberalism into their everyday life.

In a Foucauldian analysis of neoliberalism, the logic of competition and success moves beyond the macro-scale of the market and becomes the logic for individual interactions – generalizing the economic form of the market “throughout the social body and including the whole of the social system not usually conducted through or sanctioned by monetary exchanges” (Foucault, 2008, 243). Under this view, marriage, education, and criminal behaviour could be put through an analysis of supply and demand to illustrate the role of competition at the heart of all aspects of life. This is one of the key insights to Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism: not only does neoliberalism require significant state involvement (despite the rhetoric otherwise) but it also relies upon a mutual buy-in (to use a neoliberal term) by political subjects. As such, this is not simply a political theory, but a regime of subjectivity, in which individuals are brought along with neoliberal directives on a wave of emotion. Therefore, the neoliberalization of northern Canada is established not simply through the policy changes detailed above, but also through the *performance* of those changes in everyday life. The materialization of policy changes are inevitably performed, including the moment of their announcement, the implementation of their desires and even the reaction of citizens to them (Werry, 2011).

These performances, as Werry (2011) illustrates in her history of tourism in New Zealand, are also forms of normalization, in which the production of subjectivity through the market is enabled by the categories of difference that capitalism has exploited. While neoliberal subjectivity is, in theory, available to anyone, it is also established through the racial and gendered inequalities of capitalism (among others). The market is built upon structural inequalities that has valued whiteness and masculinity over and above other vectors of identity. This is part of a racial capitalism that not only privileges these forms of identity but also extracts profit through the exploitation of differences, most predominantly race and gender (Melamed, 2015; Pulido 2017; Robinson 1983). While, the exploitation of race and difference does not necessarily mean that whiteness and masculinity are the only valuable identity commodities, it does mean that race and gender are most likely to be understood from those positions. For example, while Inuit have developed tourist opportunities that markets culture through tourism, the value of these come about through the desires of the tourist market, which is still predominantly Southern and White. The neoliberal tourist is a subject that mobilizes and is governed by this logic of the market within both the pleasure and policy fields. And perhaps the best northern tourist of recent years has been Stephen Harper.

### **Touring the North**

More than any other Prime Minister in recent history, Harper turned to the Canadian North as a central feature of his agenda. Part of his focus was a yearly weeklong journey throughout the Canadian North, profiling recent or future government initiatives in the region. In their scope, the tours attempted to embody the four-pronged approach to northern development found in the Federal Northern Strategy. Those four priorities were “Exercising our Arctic sovereignty; promoting social and economic development; protecting our environmental heritage; improving and devolving northern governance” (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 2009). Different stops on the northern tour highlighted these priorities, and they map easily onto the neoliberalization of northern Canada described above.

However, while these were political trips, they were also decidedly touristic, with sightseeing side trips, photo-opportunities, carefully planned itineraries and an entourage of handlers, media, and interested parties (see figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his wife Laureen enjoy a picnic lunch with other hikers at Miles Canyon, August 19, 2013. Image credit: Government of Canada.

As touristic trips, these tours helped to mobilize a particular discourse of the Canadian North, a discourse that mixed economic development with pleasure and enjoyment, cultural traditions with national histories, and stunning natural beauty with sovereign protection. By reading the Harper excursions to the North as touristic events, it is easy to see the state's role in the production of 'places in play' (Sheller and Urry, 2004, 3). His excursions show that the production of tourism in northern Canada is a central part of the state's production of the North, not simply part of the drive to economic independence, or an example of 'last chance tourism.'

As a publicity strategy, the tours were a time when Harper could physically connect with and publicize the funding promises and achievements of the Northern Strategy, which he launched in 2009, two years after taking office. For example, in 2013, he spoke at Yukon College (now Yukon University) in Whitehorse, Yukon to talk about the funding of the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining based at the College. In 2007 in Fort Simpson, NWT, he announced the expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve. In 2009, he landed in Pangnirtung, Nunavut to talk about the construction of a small-craft harbour, and in 2013, he promoted the Geo-mapping for Energy and Minerals program that surveyed the surrounding area in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut. More than just announcements and visits, the trips contained photo ops that had the Prime Minister engage in northern activities in significant areas: visits to Virginia Falls in the NWT, riding an ATV, hiking on the tundra, and supervising military training from the top of an iceberg.



**Figure 4:** Prime Minister Stephen Harper learns about Mirnguiqsirviit Territorial Park during a tour with Nunavut Archaeological Repatriation Researcher, Dr. Karen Ryan. August 23, 2013. Image credit: Government of Canada.

As the media outlet *Globe and Mail* notes, “The Prime Minister is not one for grand or sweeping gestures, but up North he has stood atop a submarine as jets roared overhead or sat in a fighter cockpit for the cameras” (Chase, 2014).

Much was made of Harper’s northern trips in the Canadian media. Accompanied by as many as 10 journalists, the events of the trips often garnered prominent coverage, especially around the sovereignty exercises and photo-ops. Alongside the push to highlight sovereignty as a significant part of the Northern Strategy, Harper’s tours were also timed with Operation Nanook, a yearly Arctic military exercise (see figures 5 and 6).



**Figure 5:** Prime Minister Stephen Harper with Chief of Defence Staff General Walter Natynczyk during Operation Nanook, August 25, 2010. Image Credit: The Canadian Press/Sean Kilpatrick.



**Figure 6:** Prime Minister Stephen Harper participates in OP NANOOK 13 with members of the Canadian Rangers, August 20, 2013. Image credit: Government of Canada.

These exercises practiced operational responses to various threats to the Arctic and Canadian sovereignty, including terrorism, illegal trafficking, and ecological threats. As Klaus Dodds (2012) suggests, Harper's approach to sovereignty through his participation in Operation Nanook signals both a material approach to sovereignty, though the defined military exercise, as well as an affective approach, illustrated by the involvement of the Prime Minister as a proud leader. In a speech to soldiers at the conclusion of Operation Nanook in 2012, Harper himself pairs the protection of the North with the affects of the nation, all done through a touristic narrative:

I, like many of you, am among those Canadians who have been fortunate enough to see so much of the wild and vast beauty of Canada's North. And I believe our country's greatest dreams are to be found in our highest latitudes. For us, the North is more than just a great land. The North is Canada's call to greatness. Many have answered this call, from the voyages of Captain Bernier all the way to those who kept constant vigil in the darkest days of the Cold War. You here continue that legacy, one of courage and sacrifice, in the name of our country, all that it possesses, all that it stands for and all of its people. (Harper, 2012)

The travel narrative of this speech, with its focus on adventure and greatness, is matched by Harper's tours and the photos that emerged from them.

Similar fanfare was attached to the push to find the remains of the Franklin expedition, which deserves special mention as one of the stops of his tours. The search for the remains of John Franklin's 19<sup>th</sup> century ill-fated attempt to discover the North-West passage was resumed in 2008 as a partnership between Parks Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada; in 2014, Shell Canada and One Ocean Expeditions, a cruise company, also became partners in the search. Using remote sensing, the expeditions mapped uncharted sections of the Northwest Passage, ultimately finding the lost ships—in waters where Inuit hunters and elders had suggested the ships would be. Harper was instrumental in securing the public funding for the expeditions (Den Tandt, 2010), which were also funded through private donations (most significantly the W. Garfield Weston Foundation, and the Arctic Research Foundation). After having visited the research expedition on his 2014 northern trip, Harper himself announced later in the fall that they had found one of the missing ships.

Like Operation Nanook, the search for the Franklin expedition draws upon a long history of nationalist affect for the North (Hulan, 2018). The ships are among the most famous stories of failure in the Canadian oeuvre (of which there are many) and the culmination of that search has been paraded around as part of a series of museum exhibits, books, and documentaries. But the search also had a material reach beyond finding the ships, as the technology used in the search highlighted the Canadian state's ability to understand and survey the ocean floor in the relatively uncharted Northwest Passage (Den Tandt, 2010). Alongside the search, ships were using sonar to chart the ocean floor of the area in a systematic way for the first time. This data became available to the partners of the expedition; notably, the oil company (Shell Canada) and cruise company (One Ocean Expeditions). The ability to support a multi-ship expedition illustrated the capabilities of the Canadian Coast Guard and Navy's support for other forms of exploration in the North. These technologies played an important role in the reporting of the discovery, as the early stories described the "Torpedo-shaped underwater drone with its powerful sonar" (*National Post*, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014), with the importance of Inuit experience and oral history only being widely reported later (e.g. Pringle, 2019).

There are three important aspects of Harper's trips and announcements. First, The North offered him an opportunity to connect to the conservative myths of the nation in an embodied way. This resulted in some of the most nationalist and masculine images and stories from Harper's tenure. The heroics of

the Franklin expedition and Operation Nanook rest in the endurance of northern suffering for the good of the colonial state. Even with the presence of Indigenous partners in each case (the government of Nunavut and local communities for the Franklin search and the Canadian Rangers, a predominantly Indigenous volunteer army reserve group, in Operation Nanook) Harper's rhetoric was strictly nationalist in his participation of each. The trips to the North also featured Harper performing masculinity for the cameras, from shooting rifles and riding around on an ATV to being in the midst of the action in Operation Nanook. The white masculinity on display in these events—at once both administrative and embodied, intellectual and physical—provides the background for Harper's northern tours, but also draws upon the affect in circulation in northern tourism (e.g. Yudina, Grimwood, Berbary and Mair, 2018). While this affect was not flawless, it provided the trip with even more tourist authenticity. When we see Harper on an ATV or in the fray of Operation Nanook, we can clearly see that these are exceptional experiences for him, something not part of his daily routine.

A second important aspect is that, as Harper clearly states, these tours were focused on promoting Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. While this might be expected during the defence-focused aspects of his tours, it was also repeated during what might seem like non-sovereignty related events. For example, on board the HMCS Kingston searching for Franklin's lost ships, Harper suggested that Franklin's voyage laid "the basis for what is in the longer term Canadian Sovereignty" (quoted in Boutilier, 2014). While often deemed a heritage project, Harper's repeated claims that Franklin's voyage was connected to Canadian Arctic sovereignty provide a strategic justification for the search. In his speech at the end of Operation Nanook, Harper stated that the Canadian Forces are the "guardians of [Franklin's] legacy" (Harper, 2014). This relationship between heritage and sovereignty is also reflected in the funding for the search. Led by Parks Canada, a significant amount of resources also came from the Canadian Forces. In 2014, Parks Canada estimated they spent \$1.1 million on the expedition, while the Department of Defence estimated their contribution at \$1.75 million (Thompson, 2014)<sup>3</sup>.

Early in his tenure, Harper claimed that "the first principle of Arctic sovereignty is: We use it or lose it." (quoted in Chase, 2014). He would repeat the phrase for a number of years, despite the overwhelming contradictions of this statement. For one, as the Inuit reminded Harper throughout his term (Simon, 2007, 2012), the majority of the Canadian Arctic has and continues to be used with no real sense of it being abandoned. The "we" of Harper's statement is perhaps a warning to Southerners and to the state itself. The implicit message behind Harper's statement is that sovereignty is performative, not juridical. While the recognition that territory and sovereignty don't always align perfectly is common within political geography, this view of sovereignty is in contradiction with Canada's official policy on sovereignty, which claims control over lands and sea-beds by virtue of administrative right, not national use (Dodds, 2012). While the tone of Harper's sovereignty claims changed in later years, it is important to note that 'using' the Arctic for Harper was not simply a presence, but rather an economic and juridical presence within a national discursive frame (Dodds, 2012; Dolata, 2015). Operation Nanook, the Franklin Expedition and tourism all fit within this performative vision of neoliberal sovereignty. Indeed, one of the connections Harper finds between Operation Nanook soldiers and Franklin was an embodied connection. Having pointed out that Franklin had served the British Navy throughout the world before dying in the Arctic and that many of the soldiers in the audience had served in both Afghanistan and the Arctic, Harper (2014) claimed the soldiers at least had this in common with Franklin: "you know what it's like to be boiling hot, and you know what it's like to be freezing cold."

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<sup>3</sup> This spending was during a time when both Parks Canada and the Canadian military were facing steep reductions in their budgets.

The third important feature of Harper's northern tours is that many of the tour stops placed nature at the centre of the performance of the state in the North. From the feeling of being cold to the desire to protect significant features of the Arctic, the natural environment was brought out as a container for the narrative of the nation. Again, Harper (2012) makes this clear, this time at the completion of Operation Nanook in 2012 in Churchill, Manitoba:

There are those in this world who value strength at the expense of freedom, who would harvest resources by destroying our common environment and who would come here without respect for our laws. Against such risks, we must be prepared and [the Canadian Forces] are the ones who are prepared. Through history and destiny, it has become Canada's destiny to protect a large portion of our planet's North. Canada has been a consistent champion of the Arctic as a zone of responsible development, environmental protection and international peace.

That year, one of the scenarios for Operation Nanook involved the interception of an unidentified vessel, with the thought that it could contain hazardous materials. In 2015, during the election, Harper helped set up an emergency boom that mimicked the necessary action in the event of an oil spill. The connection between sovereignty and the environment did not start with Operation Nanook, however. While the first transit of the Northwest Passage was in 1903, it was the U.S. Supertanker SS Manhattan's passage in 1969 that provoked consideration of a commercial route through the Northwest. Concerned about American claims that the Northwest Passage was an international waterway, Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government passed the only kind of regulation that his experts believed would hold up to international scrutiny: The Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act of 1970 (Byers, 2010). Like Harper, Trudeau saw pollution prevention as a justified use of sovereign power, and its proclamation would then lead to further re-enforcement of Canada's claim to the region, the waters, and importantly, that which lies below. Nature, within these discourses, is bound to the nation and implies an exclusionary limit on its use and enjoyment.

### **The Neoliberal Tourist in the Ecotourism/Extraction Nexus**

That the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act would be used for sovereignty and not just marine protection signals an interesting connection between conservation and industrial development of the North. Sovereignty in the neoliberal North translates territory into market opportunities, and this commodification is aimed at both tourist and extraction economies. The conjoined logic of market development is illustrative of the ecotourism/extraction nexus (Büscher & Davidov, 2013) found throughout global conservation hotspots. This nexus is built through material and financial connections as industrial extraction builds infrastructure and investment opportunities that tourist developments often piggyback on. However, as I have argued, extraction and tourism are also joined by discursive and affective economies, including geographic knowledge and representations.

In their drive to increase resource development in the North, one significant area of investment by the federal government was increasing the geospatial knowledge in the North. Along with projects like the seabed floor mapping that was folded into the Franklin search, a push was made to increase the production of geological maps in mineral rich areas. These detailed maps, which the government earmarked \$200 million for, would enable businesses to identify promising areas for exploration. As Harper (2013b) described it, "if discovering minerals in Canada's North is like finding a needle in a haystack, our Government's geomapping program doesn't find the needles, but it will help find the haystacks." Alongside a Mineral Exploration Tax Credit, the development of geospatial data is part of a neoliberal approach to enabling market access through public funds (Dolata, 2015).

The material and financial strategies aimed at industry, including the mapping initiative and the drive to deregulation, were paired on Harper's tours with the affective economies of the North as a place of adventure and exploration. Talking about the geo-mapping, Harper (2008) described it as "part of a larger plan to map and chart Canada's North, to continue the bold tradition of exploration that has defined our history, and to strengthen our understanding and our sovereignty over a region that will define our future." This rhetoric continues the celebration of stories about the North that will encourage economic development through private investment. These stories frame the North through adventure, exploration, wonder, and opportunity, much like the framing of a tourist destination. The affective economy of northern Canada, as it was produced through the federal lens through the Harper decade, was one in which both tourism and economic activity are adventures. At the end of a speech in Whitehorse, Yukon in 2013 celebrating the development of a mining training program at Yukon College, Harper (2013a) connected the promise of adventure to the industrial development of the North.

Canada's North has always attracted the brave, the industrious, and the dreamers. Even today, adventurous Canadians still come here to seek their fortune, and I am more convinced than ever that the call of the Yukon, the call of the entire North is truly Canada's call to greatness.

So go forth, young man, young woman, to a place that inspires, a place of infinite promise, the North, where there is no limit to what can be achieved today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Not only does this rehash the limitless enthusiasm of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, E.T. Seton and others, it also fits neatly into the tourist-like atmosphere of Harper's northern tours. The economic outlook on the North, the future that is referenced so often as a future of national opportunity, is a future of southern investment, travel, and extraction. Notice how even during a speech to students in the North, he still manages to address southern young men and women, inviting them to come north, not those students who are already in the North. In this adventure, pictures, minerals, and polar bears all fly out together as if they were all but different variations of the same set of northern commodities.

It is also worth noting that more than just a shared image of the North and the commodification of its resources, the governance model is the same between these extractive and ecotourist sensibilities. As Harper's haystack analogy suggests, the state is not uninvolved in the North; rather, the state acts as an enabler, a map that guides private investment. The state seeks to establish the conditions for entrepreneurial activity to take place. Tax breaks, data production, regulatory regimes, and even the assertion of sovereignty are essential elements of this, but they all require the acceptance of entrepreneurialism as the way forward in the North. The entrepreneurial model provides opportunities for community and individual initiatives and control over their futures, but these opportunities are prioritized and successful based upon their ability to translate that future into one that sells on the market. Entrepreneurial development is not often framed around enhancing the resilience of a subsistence livelihood, or the production of community food networks of sharing, it is more often seen as a matter of monetizing those relationships—of selling hunting and guiding skills, of opening up resource frontiers or of capitalizing on unique landscapes and cultural activities. In this way, both the push to develop ecotourism in northern Canada and the investment in resource development rely upon the same economic subject who is willing to commodify the landscape around them.

## Conclusion

By considering Stephen Harper as a tourist to northern Canada, I argue that the policy changes he initiated are part of a larger trend that links climate change and economic neoliberalization to the

affective economies of northern tourism as a renewed strategy of colonialism. If the early colonial discourse of the North in Canada was of a landscape that invoked fear and danger (and concomitant intense fascination), this contemporary discourse presents the North as a place that is itself in danger and in need of saving. Through this saviour discourse, Harper exemplifies and drives forward the sensibilities of the neoliberal tourist: a white, southern, tourist subject that links place-based economic development to the entrepreneurial governance model of neoliberalism. At the heart of this trend is the attempt to bring the logic of the market to all realms of life. In the warming North, this world of competition ties together tourist development and resource development in order to save both the economic and ecological landscape in the North. As illustrated above, tourist and resource development are forms of economic investment that seek to commodify the landscape for the benefit of local communities and outside investors. The landscape becomes a central commodity within the mobility regime of neoliberalism, whether as an object for local control (as happens within the renegotiation of land claims), for resource development, or as tourist scenery. Importantly, these ways of commodifying the landscape are often competing with each other. Mining and other forms of extraction need to be separated from tourist operations, as the landscape's value for one depends upon the perceived lack of the other. While this might provide some communities with a variety of opportunities, a competitive field is always an unequal field, especially when the primary commodity is the (uneven) landscape.

The commodification of the North follows in the wake of the commodification of urban landscapes in the south as an object of economic investment, both for companies and individuals. This commodification is part of the push towards market-based governance and prioritizes a (very specific) consumer subject as the ideal citizen. The significant difference between the northern experience of commodification and that of neoliberal urban development is that the privileged individual experience of the northern landscape focuses on the tourist, almost exclusively so in some regions. Thus, the value of that landscape is based upon a southern subject, not the local inhabitants. In this way, the neoliberal tourist promotes the colonial fascination with the North as a landscape that enshrines whiteness as the future for economic and ecological stability even as it pushes aside local northern forms of economic stability and conservation.

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