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The Northern Education of Lester B. Pearson¹

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht die kulturellen Ursprünge von Lester B. Pearsons Bild zum Norden und der Arktis Kanadas. Durch eine Analyse von unveröffentlichten Dokumenten aus Pearsons Nachlass sowie seinen öffentlichen Erklärungen wird der Einfluss eines vielschichtigen Repertoires von Narrativen und kulturellen Referenzen zum kanadischen Norden auf Pearson nachgezeichnet. Drei Dokumente Pearsons über die Bedeutung der Arktis bilden den Kern der Analyse: (1) ein unveröffentlichter Vortrag aus dem Jahr 1938, (2) ein Foreign Affairs-Artikel von 1946 sowie (3) ein Foreign Affairs-Artikel von 1953. In diesem Essay wird jedes Dokument in seinen historischen Kontext eingebettet und Pearsons Konstruktionen des Nordens und der Arktis Kanadas im Hinblick auf ihre Ursprünge und dominanten Charakteristika untersucht. Über die Analyse des Einflusses von Nicht-Regierungsakteuren wie z.B. Entdeckern, Historikern, Malern oder Dichtern hinaus leistet der Artikel ein close-reading der Dokumente und untersucht die Rolle des Nordens als ein Vehikel für die kulturelle Konstruktion einer kanadischen Nation auf der Grundlage von Race, Gender und einer Frontier-Mythologie. Letztlich analysiert der Artikel Pearsons Mobilisierung einer durch den Norden und die Arktis geprägten Nationalgeschichte vor dem Hintergrund der sich verändernden anglo-amerikanischen Beziehungen Kanadas und seinen Bemühungen Kanada, als einen unabhängigen Akteur in der internationalen Politik darzustellen. Dieser Artikel trägt daher zu einem komplexeren Verständnis der Arktis-Diplomatie Pearsons bei, indem die Geschichte des Nordens und der Arktis Kanadas nicht als Souveränitäts- und Sicherheitsgeschichte diskutiert wird, sondern die Rolle von Kultur in der internationalen Politik in das Zentrum der Untersuchung rückt.

Abstract

This article examines the cultural origins of Lester B. Pearson's conception of Northern and Arctic Canada. By analyzing unpublished archival documents along with public statements, this essay sheds light on the impact of a diverse repertoire of narratives and

1 I am indebted to Erna Kurbegovic, Stefanie Land-Hilbert, Emilie Notard, Helen Gibson, and the members of the Doctoral Lab in North American History in Berlin for their criticism and encouragement throughout the writing of this article. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for the valuable comments and suggestions. I am grateful to acknowledge the financial support of the University of Calgary's Department of History and the Association for Canadian Studies in German-speaking Countries.

tropes about the North on Pearson's views. Three statements on the role of the Arctic are at the heart of this essay: (1) an unpublished 1938 lecture, (2) a 1946 Foreign Affairs article, and (3) a 1953 Foreign Affairs article. This essay contextualizes each statement and examines Pearson's conceptions of Northern and Arctic Canada, including the sources and the defining characteristics of his northern vision. In addition to reconstructing the impact of non-governmental actors such as explorers, historians, painters or poets on the views of Pearson, the analysis provides a close reading of the aforementioned statements, focusing on the North as a vehicle for the cultural construction of a Canadian nation along lines of race, gender, and a frontier mythology. Finally, the analysis examines Pearson's mobilization of a Northern national story in light of Canada's changing Anglo-American relationship and efforts to assert its role as an independent international actor. By moving beyond a history of Northern and Arctic Canada as a history of sovereignty and security, this article contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Pearson's Arctic diplomacy and the role of culture in the conduct of international politics.

Résumé

Cet article propose une étude des origines culturelles de la manière dont Lester B. Pearson concevait le Nord et l'Arctique canadien. L'analyse de documents inédits et de déclarations officielles du diplomate met en exergue les répercussions d'un vaste répertoire narratif et de références culturelles concernant le Nord canadien sur Pearson. Au cœur de l'analyse se trouvent trois documents de ce dernier consacrés à l'importance de l'Arctique : (1) une conférence inédite datant de 1938, (2) un article des Affaires Étrangères (Foreign Affairs) de 1946 ainsi que (3) un autre de 1953. Dans cet article, chaque document est resitué dans son contexte historique. De plus, les notions du Nord et de l'Arctique canadien y sont analysées au vu de leurs origines et de leurs caractéristiques dominantes. Tout en cherchant à retracer l'influence de personnes qui n'étaient pas agents de l'État, tels que explorateurs, historiens, peintres ou poètes, sur Pearson, l'article propose une lecture détaillée de ses documents ainsi qu'une étude du rôle du Nord dans la construction culturelle de la nation canadienne en s'appuyant sur les notions de race, de genre et de mythologie frontalière. Enfin, l'article propose une analyse de la mobilisation de Pearson pour une histoire nationale marquée par le Nord et l'Arctique au vu du changement opéré par le Canada dans les relations anglo-américaines ainsi que des efforts du Canada en tant qu'acteur indépendant de la politique internationale. Cet article contribue à comprendre la complexité de la diplomatie arctique de Pearson et place au cœur de l'étude non le débat faisant de l'histoire du Nord et de l'Arctique canadien une histoire de la souveraineté et de la sécurité mais bien le rôle de la culture dans la politique internationale.

When Angus King, the U.S. Senator for Maine and co-founder of the U.S. Senate's Arctic Caucus,² spoke about the United States' vision for its two year-chairmanship of the Arctic Council at an international meeting in Iceland in October 2015, he opened his speech with this dramatic scene:

It was 8°F below zero when the men finally were forced to abandon their ship and they stepped onto the ice of the Weddell Sea. The story of these men and their leader Ernest Shackleton is one of the greatest stories of leadership in recorded human history. It's not the Arctic, it's the Antarctic but the issues are the same: one of the harshest environments in the world and the issue for them was survival.³

King recalled the British explorer's ill-fated expedition and his efforts to save his crew from certain death after their ship was squashed by ice as a parable for Washington's aspirations in the Arctic. King is not alone in his partiality for invoking the age of British polar exploration to make sense of current challenges in the Arctic. The Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper made the search for the missing vessels of another British explorer a central ingredient in his efforts to claim a Northern and Arctic narrative as a foundational element in the national mythology of Canada. When the remnants of the HMS *Erebus*, one of John Franklin's ships, were located as part of an annual scientific expedition to Victoria Strait in the summer of 2014, Harper took great pride in the discovery:

These modern-day Franklin expeditions are part of our government's broader northern strategy. They are also part of our country's broader northern narrative and northern identity. We are answering the age-old call of the great Canadian North, keeping the faith with the explorers and the adventurers who have gone before us and breaking trails for the generations of Canadians yet to come.⁴

A firm believer in the power of national narratives, the Prime Minister flattened present and past activities in the Arctic into a continuous and distinctly Canadian northern story.⁵

2 Sen. Angus King created the Arctic Caucus in March 2015 along with Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

3 Sen. Angus King, "U.S. Leadership in the Arctic," Speech at the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik, Iceland, October 18, 2015.

4 Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Speech at a reception of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, March 4, 2015.

5 Anonymous sources described Harper's use of Northern and Arctic rhetoric as a "well-thought-out strategy, [...] a blend of opportunism and statecraft, shoring up both his party and Canadian unity." They also confirm Harper's conscious use of the North to construct a national story: "The Prime Minister's a big believer in the idea that nations are built by narratives, [...] a set of

These references to British explorers Ernest Shackleton and John Franklin by senior politicians in the United States and Canada speak to the significance of culture in the conduct of international politics. The use of mediated knowledge—in the form of literature, visual art, history or explorers' accounts—in the absence of direct experience with the life, the people, and the environment of the North,⁶ however, is not a new phenomenon. Diplomat, ambassador, and Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester B. Pearson looked to cultural representations of the North at a time when Arctic politics forced its way onto the U.S.-Canadian agenda. The escalation of World War II and a deteriorating relationship between Washington and Moscow in the postwar period transformed the region from a peripheral space to a frontline of global conflict. With postings in London, Washington, and Ottawa, Pearson was both a witness to and an agent in the recalibration of Canada's Anglo-American relationship. From historically intimate ties with the United Kingdom, Ottawa's gaze shifted south to increasing interdependence with the United States.⁷ Unpublished documents now provide a new window into Pearson's fascination with the Arctic and the sources he relied on to make sense of the region at a time when American pressure for defense cooperation grew. Speech material from 1937 and a lecture he prepared in 1938 attest to the instrumental role of culture in Pearson's Arctic diplomacy and how representations of the North remained solid references of his Northern vision, a vision that he felt came under pressure when more and more American requests for an expansion of Northern and Arctic defense activities arrived in Ottawa during the 1940s and 1950s.

A large part of historical studies that examine the international activities of the Canadian government in the northern and Arctic regions of Canada deals with questions of ownership, jurisprudence, and control, in short sovereignty and traditional forms of security. Numerous book titles and journal articles attest to this concentration on the evolution of Canada's legal claims to the territorial north, the Arctic Archipelago, and the Arctic waters bordering its northern coastline and surrounding the Arctic islands.⁸ This overreliance on Northern and Arctic history as a history of sovereignty and security, however, comes at a cost. A result of this narrow conception is an incomplete understanding of the ideas that drove senior officials involved in Northern and Arctic affairs and its history in the North. While concerns over Canada's territorial and maritime claims in the Arctic certainly were a recurring

stories about yourself, the kind of myths and narratives that create a national identity, [without which] you cease to be a nation." See Chase 2014.

- 6 I use the terms 'North', 'Arctic', and 'Northern and Arctic Canada' interchangeably to accommodate the variety of ideas of the North as they were articulated in the cultural representations I discuss throughout this essay. This is not to ignore the demographical, climatic, environmental or economic diversity of different northern regions.
- 7 Cf. Bothwell 2015; Thompson/Randall 2008.
- 8 Grant 1988, 2010; Coates et al. 2008; Lackenbauer/Kikkert 2011; Kikkert/Lackenbauer 2010; Lackenbauer/Smith 2014; Lackenbauer 2008; Cavell/Noakes 2010; Cavell 2002; Lajeunesse 2012.

topic within official Ottawa when interacting with foreign governments, historical studies which focus on the legal-strategic dimension only partially account for the views and the behavior of senior foreign policy officials such as Pearson. Peter Kikkert, Adam Lajeunesse, and Whitney Lackenbauer, for example, argue that Pearson's Arctic diplomacy constituted an aberration from an otherwise balanced and pragmatic approach to international politics throughout his tenure at External Affairs and later as prime minister.⁹ By locating the reasons for Pearson's Arctic nationalism in his personal idiosyncrasies and a general "naiveté" about Northern affairs, their work adds significantly to our understanding of Canada's Arctic foreign policy and the history of Northern and Arctic Canada. A more comprehensive examination of the origins of Pearson's "un-Pearsonian" Arctic diplomacy, however, remains necessary, one that looks to the social and cultural forces that provided the basis for the diplomat's Arctic nationalism.

This article suggests moving beyond an overreliance on the theme of sovereignty and security to account for Canada's Arctic foreign policy. Pearson made three major statements on the significance of Northern and Arctic Canada throughout his career in the diplomatic service: (1) a yet unpublished lecture at a gathering in Cambridge, UK, in 1938, (2) a *Foreign Affairs*-article entitled "Canada Looks 'Down North'" in 1946, and (3) a second *Foreign Affairs*-article with the title "Canada's Northern Horizons" of 1953. By examining Pearson's statements, this essay proposes a broader analytical framework that looks to those explanatory models and variables that have only recently reinvigorated the analysis of foreign policy and diplomacy: culture, ideas, and the social production of knowledge.¹⁰ Indeed, beyond the legal-strategic dimension of the Arctic, the region assumed a prominent place in the public imagination and formed a reference point throughout debates over what it meant to belong to a Canadian nation. Tropes and narratives about the north have been a staple in the discursive repertoire of Canadian nationalists since the inception of the Dominion of Canada in 1867. As explorers, historians, poets or painters contributed their threads to a growing tapestry of stories and ideas about the north over the years, diplomats and government officials were not oblivious to such statements. To the contrary, oftentimes conspicuous consumers of culture themselves, officials' understanding and analysis of foreign issues was imbued with ideas, images, and narratives that existed around them. As historian Andrew J. Rotter aptly reminds us, "decision makers are creatures of culture"¹¹ and as such they absorb interpretive

9 Kikkert/Lajeunesse/Lackenbauer 2016.

10 A 2015 CHR state-of-the-field roundtable on Canadian diplomatic history identified empire and culture as analytical approaches that challenge an established nationalist reading of Canada's engagement with the world, see Meren 2015. For a survey of the role of culture in international history see the essays by Akira Iriye, Emily S. Rosenberg, Kristin Hoganson, and Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht in Hogan/Paterson 2004. For specific studies see Hoganson 1998; Rotter 2000; Dean 2001; Goedde 2003; Gienow-Hecht 2009; Costigliola 2012).

11 Rotter 2000, xvi.

frameworks and paradigms that shape their perceptions and views of international issues.

Lester B. Pearson was no exception to Rotter's observation. Indeed, Pearson did not discuss the risks and merits of defense cooperation with the United States in the Far North in military-strategic terms only. Proposals for weather stations, radar chains or training centers on Canadian soil were not simply a matter of strategic necessity. Instead, Pearson weighed American defense requests and questions over sovereignty and security in light of culturally constructed understandings of Canada's northern and Arctic regions. Along with the vast majority of his colleagues in Ottawa, Pearson never visited the territorial North, let alone the Arctic waters. In addition to briefing notes and legal studies, his knowledge about the regions, its peoples, and the environment originated from cultural agents such as Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris or Yukon poet Robert Service. These and others created a rich repertoire of stories and mythologies—interpretive lenses—about the Northern regions. Together, they established what Daniel Francis has termed “a north of the mind.”¹² In the absence of first-hand experience, Pearson and other officials in Ottawa readily tapped into such tropes when articulating their views on Arctic diplomacy and defense cooperation with the United States.

The North in Canadian History, 1867–1958

Scholars from fields as diverse as cultural studies, indigenous studies, education, and history have examined the subject of Northern and Arctic Canada's role as a cultural space. Carl Berger's essay “The True North Strong and Free” is one of the earliest investigations into the diverse tropes of the North in Canada. In his 1966 text, Berger identified the key themes and subjects employed by public intellectuals, historians, and artists when they articulated ideas about the North and the Arctic and their relationship to the nation. In doing so, Berger laid the groundwork for many critical studies of the North calling attention to categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, and the frontier mythology.¹³ Sherrill E. Grace's landmark study *Canada and the Idea of North* remains the most comprehensive study of what she describes as “discursive formations” of the North. A professor of English, Grace traces the different notions of the North across temporal and disciplinary boundaries ranging from visual art, performance art, music, and literature to exploration, history, and politics. In doing so, she unearths a multifaceted kaleidoscope of shifting yet formative cultural constructions of Northern and Arctic Canada.¹⁴ By the same token, Renée Hulan's *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture* and Daniel Francis' *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* emphasize the mytho-

12 Francis 1997, 152.

13 Berger 1966, 3-26.

14 Grace 2001.

logical nature of Northern representations and provide a critical reading of their usages as a current of Canadian nationalism.¹⁵ Other studies also examine how northern issues spilled onto the national scene in cyclical fashion or analyze the political implications of representations of indigenous people from Northern and Arctic Canada.¹⁶

Southern Canadian representations of Northern and Arctic Canada endowed the region with the power to bring an otherwise diverse and far-flung country into cohesion, a power that flattens linguistic, ethnic, and other regional distinctions and provides a cultural reference point in the narration of the Canadian story. A closer look at the history of cultural statements about the role of the North and its place within Canada, however, reveals a more complicated and ambivalent history. Deeply infused with the Social Darwinist ideas of the nineteenth century and the mythology of the Norse, nationalists of the Canada First Movement looked to the North to create a meaningful vision for the newly created Dominion of Canada at the end of the 1860s. Advocating for a Northern exceptionalism throughout the urban centers of Ontario and Quebec, intellectuals such as Robert Grant Haliburton wove contemporary certainties about race, nature's effects on the formation of human traits, and the fate of great empires into a seemingly coherent worldview in speeches entitled "The Men of the North and Their Place in History."¹⁷ The iconic raconteur of the Klondike Gold Rush, Robert Service, also combined contemporary ideas about racial superiority with an environmental determinism. Service wrote copious amounts of poetry about life in the Yukon in the early twentieth century, hailing the North as a determinant of human strength and virtue. Throughout his poems, Canada's North emerges as a dangerous yet alluring natural selector that distinguishes between those worthy enough to join the ranks of true northmen and those still exhibiting deficient features allegedly common among peoples of the southern parts of the world. Beyond the strong racial overtones, Northern and Arctic Canada was portrayed as a testing ground for those traits Haliburton and Service associated with masculinity, such as courage, ruggedness, decisiveness, and perseverance.¹⁸ The Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson shifted public debate about the North when he published his report on the 1913-1918 Canadian Arctic Expedition entitled *The Friendly Arctic* in 1921. Images of the Arctic as a resource-rich and commercially viable region waiting to be opened up by the age of air travel relegated stories of a hostile, barren wasteland to the margins of public perceptions of Canada's North. Group of Seven painters Lawren Harris and A. Y. Jackson also viewed the North as an essential resource, if more for a distinctly Canadian spiritual and cultural renewal than for economic prosperity. By the same token, historians began to incorporate the North in their national histories of Canada. Foregoing the Social Darwinism and

15 Hulan 2002; Francis 1997.

16 Cavell 2002; Rosenthal 2004, 2005, 2009.

17 Haliburton 1869.

18 Cf. Hulan 2002, 115-18.

the environmental determinism of Haliburton and Service, historian Donald Creighton seamlessly integrated Northern and Arctic Canada as a last frontier into his Laurentian narrative of Canada's past, extending the country's early development along the St. Lawrence River, the westward expansion with the transcontinental railroad to the settlement and exploitation of the North with the advent of air travel.¹⁹

This brief survey illustrates that cultural representations of Northern and Arctic Canada transcended cultural categories. Beyond the written word, ideas and interpretations of the North emerged out of fields such as performance art, radio productions, comic book design, and material culture. One representational boundary that remained firm, however, was the exclusion of indigenous perspectives throughout the debate over the North's significance. For the period from 1867 to 1958, non-indigenous and southern Canadians inscribed their ideas and narratives onto the North without a significant public presence of local or indigenous voices. It was not before the 1960s and 1970s that Northern and indigenous perspectives began to be heard in public over the significance and the history of the North.²⁰ The North, as it existed in the public imagination up to that time, was a southern creation.

Pearson's references to southern representations and his understanding of the regions form a guide to those themes and tropes that merit greater attention. For this reason, the categories of race, gender, and the North as a settler mythology are of particular interest when examining the role of Pearson's northern education throughout his involvement in Arctic diplomacy over the establishment of American and Canadian defense installations during World War II and the early Cold War.

The Cambridge Lecture, 1938

Lester Pearson's first comprehensive statement on the subject of Northern and Arctic Canada can be dated back to 1938.²¹ A decade after he had joined Canada's foreign service, Pearson served as a diplomat at Canada House in London, the service's most coveted posting at the time. The unraveling of the League of Nations system and the idea of collective security throughout the 1930s shaped Pearson's experience in Europe as he was dispatched to attend economic and disarmament

19 Creighton 1944.

20 Hulan argues that Inuit autobiography before the 1960s and 1970s existed by way of white sponsorship through Christian missionaries or ethnographers. Likewise, southern nationalists appropriated material cultures of the North as evidence of Canada's Northern identity. See Hulan 2002, 60-97. Grace explains that indigenous "rewriting, which entails reaching the dominant discourse to correct or alter the record, did not become really apparent until the 1970s." See Grace 2001, 244.

21 Pearson's first recorded interaction with the Arctic occurred as First Secretary at the Department of External Affairs in the late summer of 1929. In a memorandum, Pearson compiled legal arguments in support of Canada's claim to the Sverdrup Islands for Under-Secretary of State O.D. Skelton. See Pearson 2016.

conferences in Geneva.²² Despite the failure of the international community to find a common position towards the revisionist powers in Berlin and Rome, Pearson relished his time in Europe, not least for the social and cultural amenities that life in London as a member of the diplomatic caste had to offer. The North and the Arctic did not come up as a topic throughout his tenure at Canada House or his travels to international meetings. Nevertheless, Pearson began to collect material on the region in 1937 and spoke at length about the North at a talk in August 1938.²³

Much of the origins of his 1938 Cambridge Lecture remain unknown. Pearson's diary skips the year and his memoirs make no mention of his participation in a seminar, a conference or a meeting during the summer of 1938. Pearson biographers John English and Andrew Cohen are also silent on events or encounters that may have triggered Pearson's interest in Northern affairs.²⁴ His personal papers, however, contain a document with speech material about the significance of the Arctic and the development of Canada's northern regions dated to 1937 without further specifications about its provenance. In those pages, Pearson penned his principal ideas about the history and the importance of the Arctic for the national development of Canada. Pearson's extensive comments about Canada's Arctic in his Cambridge talk the following year are taken from this collection of speech material. Throughout the course of his involvement in Arctic affairs over the coming two decades, Pearson returned to these references and interpretive frameworks again and again to make sense of a changing Arctic he knew so little about.

The absence of contextual clues notwithstanding, it is fair to say that Pearson's Cambridge Lecture in 1938 was a major effort in cultural translation. Immodestly entitled "Canada", the 43-page typewritten talk is a tour-de-force of Canadian history. Speaking to a British audience, the young Canadian diplomat began his survey with the first French settlers, taking his talk right up to the 1930s. Pearson devoted a substantial section of his narrative to the significance of Northern and Arctic Canada to Canadian history and the future development of the country. For most of Canada's early history, the former university lecturer explained, the Arctic did not play a prominent role in the exploration and settlement of British and French North America. It was seen as an empty wasteland with little economic value or strategic importance. Only when technological advancements in the field of aviation and the discovery of precious metals, minerals, and oil took place and opened up Canada's North did the region gain greater attention from business, the public, and officials in Ottawa. Not missing out on the chance to promote his country's economic prospects, Pearson presented a vivid picture of the North as a region that had been

22 For a definitive international history of the interwar period in Europe, see Steiner 2011.

23 Lester B. Pearson, "Canada and the Arctic", Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N1, Vol. 60, File: Speeches & Speech Material – Arctic Question – 1937; *Ibid.*, "Canada", August 2-3, 1938, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N9, Vol. 1, File: 30 Nov. 1930 to 3 Aug. 1941.

24 English 1989, 1992; Cf. Cohen 2008.

waiting for southern exploration and development, a new northern *El Dorado*. If references to stories that lured seventeenth century conquistadores to South America or the imagery of the early twentieth century Klondike Gold Rush failed to fuel the imagination of Pearson's Cambridge audience, his vision of the Arctic as an international hub for air travel unlikely missed its mark. Pearson declared that such international centers of commerce as New York, London, Shanghai or Tokyo would soon establish their travel routes across the Arctic. Despite the North having been relegated to the margins of history over the past two hundred years, Pearson assured his listeners, it was poised to become an engine of prosperity and national maturity in the coming decades.²⁵

Pearson's Arctic vision was based on stories he likely drew from newspaper clippings and magazine articles. These anecdotes were instructive tales grounded in narratives of overcoming adversity, demonstrating moral integrity, and proving perseverance in the face of nature's harsh and inhospitable environs. A central vignette forms a widely publicized story about two prospectors who journeyed up North to Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories in May 1930 to survey the area for minerals.²⁶ When one of them contracts snow blindness, his companion nurses him yet also keeps leaving their camp to go out on trips to locate the precious minerals. When the healthy prospector encounters traces of radium, it is only after his sick partner makes a full recovery that both begin their trek south, "back to civilisation," and deliver the news of their discovery. In this anecdote, Pearson's characters retain their moral compass despite enduring nature's challenges in the form of snow blindness and the lure of the North's mineral riches. Unlike the images of drinking orgies and violence, conditions in the North, Pearson suggested, encouraged a virtuous and incorruptible life. Pearson omitted that part of the story in which the prospector who discovered the pitchblende also came across a deposit of silver but chose to withhold that information from his ailing partner. This selective narration highlights the diplomat's appropriation of such stories and the type of North he sought to project.²⁷

Beyond the purported moral qualities of life in the North, the Cambridge Lecture serves as an example to illustrate Pearson's perception of Northern and Arctic Canada as a new frontier that held the potential to act as a cultural marker in the national development of Canada. Pearson explained:

Canada is one of the few countries which still possesses a physical frontier; which still lures the explorer into unknown lands. As Robert Service,

25 Lester B. Pearson, "Canada", August 2-3, 1938, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N9, Vol. 1, File: 30 Nov. 1930 to 3 Aug. 1941, 15f.

26 Robert Bothwell reconstructs the journey and the larger history of the early mining industry in the North in his *Bothwell* 1984.

27 Lester B. Pearson, "Canada", August 2-3, 1938, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N9, Vol. 1, File: 30 Nov. 1930 to 3 Aug. 1941, 19f; Cf. *Bothwell* 1984, 22f.

the poet of the Yukon has put it, speaking of the Canadian north, 'there is a land where the mountains are nameless, and the rivers run God knows where'. [...] We still have a frontier, then, in Canada with all that this implies in the life of a nation. That frontier, however, is no longer the West. 'Go West' has been replaced by 'Go North' as the call to adventure.²⁸

Transplanting the frontier mythology to the 1930s, Pearson continued:

Canadians, like Russians, are looking to the North as the land of the future. [...] Indeed the Canadian Arctic to-day provides an example of the happy union of modern science and traditional adventure. The spirit of the pioneer still lives in these parts. That spirit is contributing vigor and vitality, both physical and psychologically, to our national development. But the covered wagon has been replaced by the twin-engined mono-plane and the gold-pan has given way to the diamond drill.²⁹

Deeply grounded in the romanticized language of nineteenth century Western expansion and exploration, Pearson envisioned the North as a national project. He mobilized the images and stories of a settler mythology in which distinctly Canadian qualities emerged out of the continuous conquest of so-called unclaimed and empty land. This experience, coupled with the irresistible force of modernity, formed the bond that tied present to past projects, endowing them with an aura of historical inevitability and legitimacy.

Pearson's conceptions of the North were neither new nor his own. When he invoked the poet Robert Service or the frontier trope, Pearson provided his audience with a window into the cultural origins of his understanding of Northern and Arctic Canada. Service vitally contributed to the notion that the North acted as a natural selector and as a testing ground for qualities he associated with masculinity. For Service, the North represented a determinant of strength, virtue, and perseverance. In "The Law of the Yukon," Service aptly captured this notion when he wrote: "Send me the best of your breeding, lend me your chosen ones / Them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons / Them will I gild with my treasure, them will glut with my meat / But the others—the misfits, the failures—I trample under my feet."³⁰ This environmental determinism and its impact on the development of the nation and the formation of individual human characteristics echoes throughout the writings of Pearson, most prominently in his images of the gold rush years and his nostalgia for a pioneer spirit and a sense of adventure, however romanticized.

28 Lester B. Pearson, "Canada", August 2-3, 1938, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N9, Vol. 1, File: 30 Nov. 1930 to 3 Aug. 1941, 14.

29 *Ibid.*, 15.

30 Service 1940, 10.

Not unlike Pearson's nod to Service, his reference to the effect of the North on the "vigor and vitality, both physical and psychologically" is reminiscent of the Canada First Movement. In 1869, Haliburton proclaimed, "We are the sons and the heirs of those who have built up a new civilization [...] As long as the north wind blows, and the snow and the sleet drove over our forests and fields, we may be a poor [sic], but we must be a hardy, a healthy, a virtuous, a daring, and if we are worthy of our ancestors, a dominant race."³¹ Recalling Haliburton's speeches about the 'men of the north', Pearson declared that the region "is no country for weaklings and its economic development will test the finest qualities of the men of the north. [...] Fortunately, the men up there will be equal to the occasion."³² While Haliburton had drawn on the sagas and mythologies of the Norse and based his northern vision on an imagined lineage of ancestral purity originating with the Vikings, Pearson looked to nature as source for his Northern nationalism. Once more, the North served as a testing ground for the nation to prove its place among its competitors.

Canada's North served as a projection space for Pearson's conception of Canadian history and the country's future trajectory. His Cambridge Lecture presented a British audience with an oftentimes-romanticized portrayal of Northern discovery, settlement, and exploitation, a narrative that left no room for the ambivalent legacies of, for example, missionary or commercial activities along Northern and Arctic communities. Instead, Pearson constructed a Northern vision that was based on mediated knowledge and cultural representations to compose a meaningful narrative for Canada's national evolution.

"Canada Looks 'Down North'", 1946

Pearson's second major statement about Northern and Arctic Canada emerged in an entirely different context. By the time his *Foreign Affairs* article "Canada Looks 'Down North'" was published in the journal's July 1946 issue, Pearson was two months shy of completing his tenure as Ambassador in Washington and moving back to Ottawa to head the Department of External Affairs as Under-Secretary of State. Beyond Pearson's personal career, developments in Northern and Arctic Canada in the early 1940s had taken a turn Pearson was unable to anticipate in 1937/1938. During World War II, economic and commercial development was no longer the driving force behind southern activities in the North. Defense and infrastructural projects such as the Alaska Highway, connecting Alaska with the continental United States, staging fields for American and Canadian aircraft in the Northeast and Northwest or the construction of an oil pipeline to Fort Norman dominated the political agenda in Ottawa and in Washington. This massive influx of U.S. personnel and equipment constituted the advent of the U.S.-Canadian defense relationship in

31 Haliburton 1869.

32 Lester B. Pearson, "Canada", August 2-3, 1938, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N9, Vol. 1, File: 30 Nov. 1930 to 3 Aug. 1941, 20f.

Northern and Arctic Canada and was institutionalized in the 1940 creation of the Permanent Joint Board on Defense. By 1946, the postwar nature of this relationship had yet to be determined.³³

Against the backdrop of these developments, Pearson sought to impress upon his audience Canada's views on the potential of the North as a space of cooperation for Ottawa's relationship with Washington but also for its relationship with Moscow, its circumpolar neighbor across the Arctic Ocean. In contrast to his Cambridge Lecture of 1938, Pearson now addressed an American audience by publishing in *Foreign Affairs*, the U.S. foreign policy establishment's central forum. In doing so, he sought to shape the debate about the North's strategic importance in the United States' global outlook in light of the emerging tensions over the postwar international order. Whereas in 1938 Pearson spoke as a young, aspiring civil servant, he now outlined his country's position and interests to the U.S. diplomatic elite as Canada's official representative to the United States.

World War II and its impact on Northern and Arctic Canada may have been dramatic; Pearson's understanding of the North, however, did not exhibit a similar transformation. There is a strong continuity in terms of the themes and stories Pearson originally drew on for his 1938 Cambridge Lecture. Many of his anecdotes reappear in his 1946 article with few variations. This indicates that Pearson's fundamental conception of the North had not changed significantly. He continued to stress the Arctic's impact on the nation's character and explained that the North had an "inevitable effect on the life and habits of the Canadian people."³⁴ Not unlike his anecdote about the two prospectors at Great Bear Lake, Pearson presented a similar story to illustrate the North's character-shaping features. With aviation, resources, and the scenery of frontier life, all ingredients at hand to tell his instructive tales, Pearson wrote:

Though the northern frontiersmen today are as sturdy and tough as those of earlier times, their habits are, shall we say, less picturesquely rough and crude. A few days ago a visitor at Fort Norman was interested to see a freight aeroplane land and discharge several cases. They were not, however, cases of rum or six shooters or ammunition. They were cases of lettuce! He reported that the sturdy miners and trappers who had been hanging about followed the lettuce in great excitement to the local supply post, and when the cases were opened, they indulged in a regular debauch.³⁵

33 Coates et al. 2008, 63-68; Grant 2010, 293-307.

34 Pearson 1946, 638.

35 Ibid., 647.

Anticipating ambivalent impressions of weak and effeminate Canadians, Pearson quickly assured his audience of the men's hard-working attitudes and their commitment to the national cause:

*In spite of this trend toward lettuce salads, there is no doubt that the settlers now in the Canadian Arctic and those who will follow them 'down North' will provide a solid and sturdy foundation for the growth and development of that increasingly important part of Canada. (My emphasis)*³⁶

Once more, instead of moral decay and violence, images reminiscent of the days of the Klondike Gold Rush or the American West, the North exerted its moral and virtuous powers over those who proved worthy enough to belong to the 'men of the north'.

The images of pioneer life and Robert Service's environmental determinism remain noticeable currents in Pearson's 1946 article. In his 1937 speech notes, Pearson concluded his story about the lettuce delivery with the phrase "Shades of Yukon Jake and Dan McGrew," referencing characters from Service's poems. His *Foreign Affairs* piece omitted the literary allusion.³⁷ Notions of the North as a source for moral and spiritual uplift, however, were not limited to the writings of Service. As Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris explained,

It seems that the top of the continent will ever shed clarity into the growing race of America, and we Canadians being closest to this source seem destined to produce an art somewhat different from our southern fellows—an art more spacious, of greater living quiet, perhaps of more certain convictions of eternal values. We were not placed between the Southern teeming of men and the ample replenishing of the North for nothing.³⁸

Harris advocated for a genuinely Canadian school of landscape painting. Northern motifs, devoid of human activity and pristine in their portrayal of glaciers, mountains, and lakes, served as a "mirror of national character"³⁹ and a well for an aesthetic superior to southern works of art. Not unlike Harris's North, Pearson envisioned Northern and Arctic regions as a place of virtue and a source for the "sturdy and tough" if "less picturesquely rough and crude" national development of Canada.

36 Ibid.

37 I presume he did not anticipate his American audience being familiar with the poetry of Robert W. Service.

38 Harris quoted in Cook 1986, 204.

39 Berger 1966, 21.

In his second statement on the North, the familiar themes of the North as a new frontier and the North's character-shaping and morally uplifting powers continue to dominate Pearson's views. The North remains a gendered testing ground and a projection space for Pearson's idea of a Canadian national identity. What is more, cultural representations and anecdotes continue to form Pearson's principal sources of information about the life, the people, and the environment of Northern and Arctic Canada. In light of the massive defense projects throughout the North during World War II, however, it is remarkable that no episodes of American construction along the Alaska Highway or other installations appear. In addition to Pearson's recycling of stories he had used for his Cambridge Lecture, this indicates a strong continuity in Pearson's conception of the North and the sources he drew on to make sense of this region, in spite of the war's transformations.

"Canada's Northern Horizon", 1953

Like Pearson's 1946 article, his 1953 essay "Canada's Northern Horizon" was published in the foreign policy magazine *Foreign Affairs*.⁴⁰ The origins of the article illustrate the North's increased strategic significance. Whereas Pearson's 1938 lecture was likely born out of a personal inkling or inspired by recent activities in the North and the 1946 article constituted an expression of Ottawa's ambiguous wartime experience of American defense installations across the North, the 1953 essay was not initiated by External Affairs in Ottawa. A letter by Hamilton F. Armstrong, then editor of *Foreign Affairs*, to Pearson suggests that the journal approached the Canadian Secretary of State "to find the right man to carry the subject along from where you left off in 1946." In this letter, Armstrong relates that key U.S. foreign policy figures had expressed interest in a piece about Canada's recent Northern and Arctic activities and its views about the region's future role in the Cold War. Armstrong played to Pearson's ego when he added that "in the meeting with our Editorial Advisory Board the other evening, [...] it seemed the general opinion, and particularly of Allen Dulles and George Kennan, that Arctic studies had been pursued much further and successfully in Canada than in this country."⁴¹ The timing of Armstrong's letter was equally significant. He approached Pearson less than two weeks after Ottawa had approved Washington's request for construction of test sites for a radar warning

40 Pearson 1953, 581-91.

41 Letter by Hamilton F. Armstrong to Lester B. Pearson, March 9, 1953, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N1, Vol. 19, File: Pearson, L.B. Subject Files Pre-1958 Series Articles – Foreign Affairs 1951-57; Allen Dulles, the brother of John F. Dulles, the later U.S. Secretary of State, had just been appointed Director of National Intelligence in February of 1953 which made him intelligence advisor to the President and head of the Central Intelligence Agency. George Kennan, author of the influential 1946 "X"-article and former head of the U.S. Department of State's Policy Planning Staff, had vitally informed perceptions about the Soviet Union's political and ideological character and intentions.

line across the North American Arctic, the Distant Early Warning Line that would become the largest Cold War defense project in the Canadian North.⁴²

If the origins of the 1953 article differed from its 1946 precursor, so did the international situation in which it was published. The emerging tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union over the postwar order that Pearson had hoped in 1946 could be peacefully resolved had hardened into military alliances, diplomatic brinkmanship in Europe, and a war in Korea. Canada had aligned itself with the United States, it was a member of NATO, it had deployed troops and naval forces to Korea, and it was expanding its defense cooperation with the United States in the North.⁴³

Pearson's third statement on Northern and Arctic Canada was a marked departure from his earlier writings. The article is replete with detailed assessments of the regions' geography, its environment, and its climate. Sober discussions of vegetation and natural resources and the impact of weather on travel mark a fundamental shift from Pearson's earlier environmental determinism. By the same token, Pearson's section on the Arctic's economic potential was not a series of moral anecdotes of courageous and virtuous prospectors or visions of the Arctic as an international commercial hub. Instead, a practical analysis of mineral deposits and energy resources formed the basis for a discussion of the North's potential for development and extraction. Indeed, the 1953 article includes few sections that relate to the North's past and its national significance. In a nutshell, science and data replaced narrative and mythology.

The reason for this transformation was not an overhaul of Pearson's Northern and Arctic views. Rather a shift in primary authorship is the reason for the article's break with the tone and substance of Pearson's earlier statements; a lower-ranking official by the name of R.A.J. Phillips wrote the bulk of the text.⁴⁴ Phillips held the Arctic sovereignty portfolio in the Department of External Affairs and was involved with the 1946 negotiations over the U.S.-Canadian Joint Arctic Weather Stations, a series of meteorological stations to provide more accurate and timely data for civilian and military activities in the High Arctic. In addition to this expertise, Phillips had first-hand experience of the North. He had been to the Arctic various times and excelled his colleagues by far in terms of familiarity with the region. To be sure, Phillips had his own vision for the Arctic, which he published in a book in 1967 entitled *Canada's*

42 "Ambassador in United States to Secretary of State of United States," February 27, 1953, *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, 1953, Vol. 19, 1060.

43 In addition to Canadian-American military exercises in the North and the construction of the Joint Arctic Weather Stations in the High Arctic, the Mackenzie King and Truman governments agreed to extend and intensify their wartime cooperation on continental defense into the postwar period with the Joint Statement on Defense on February 12, 1947. See Coates et al. 2008, 63-68; Grant 2010, 293-307.

44 Cf. R. A. J. Phillips to S. F. Rae, "Memorandum for Mr. Rae: Article on the Canadian North," March 25, 1953, LAC, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N1, Vol. 19, File: Pearson, L.B. Subject Files Pre-1958 Series Articles – Foreign Affairs 1951-1957.

North.⁴⁵ He too saw great value in the North's potential as a nationally unifying and purpose-lending region. His first-hand familiarity and experience with the life and the environment in the North, however, marked a stark departure from Pearson's Northern vision, a vision that revealed the Secretary of State's familiarity with the poems of Robert Service, Haliburton's 'men of the north', and other cultural representations of the North.

For all of Phillips's dispassionate description of the North's geographical and climatic characteristics, the 1953 article did not abandon Pearson's moral anecdotes and aspirational stories altogether. The Secretary of State's hand in the essay becomes apparent in a few instances in which images of Western exploration and tales of bold adventurers revive the North as a cultural marker for a distinctly Canadian national identity:

It takes the story of men with imagination, vision and devotion who have gone far, far 'down north' to explore the mysteries of another world. [...] Within very recent years [...] the Canadian Arctic is being transformed from a vacuum to a frontier, and although it would be a bold man who would forecast the nature of its future development, of one thing we can be sure: if Horace Greeley were alive today, and if he were a Canadian, he would say, "Go North, young man!"⁴⁶

Pearson's North, again, emerges as a promise for the future of Canada and as a prize to be captured. In his portrayal, the Northern and Arctic regions are empty and otherworldly, beckoning the audacious and daring to remake the North as a new frontier and engage in that allegedly foundational experience of conquering nature through modernity.

The theme of the Northern and Arctic Canada as a reimagined Western frontier enjoyed great popularity not only in the poems of Robert Service but also among nationalist historians such as Donald Creighton. Pearson, who had studied history at Toronto and Oxford and taught twentieth century British history in the Department of History at the University of Toronto for two years, was briefly a colleague of Creighton's in 1927.⁴⁷ Creighton, who received a Governor General's Award for each volume of his two-part biography of Canada's first prime minister John A. Macdon-

45 Phillips 1967.

46 Pearson received drafts of the article and was able to direct the writing process: S. F. Rae to Lester B. Pearson, "Memorandum for Mr. Pearson," May 9, 1953, LAC, Lester B. Pearson Fonds, MG 26, N1, Vol. 19, File: Pearson, L.B. Subject Files Pre-1958 Series Articles – Foreign Affairs 1951-1957; Pearson, "Canada's Northern Horizon," 587.

47 Their relationship remained cordial without much personal affinity. John English explains that Pearson did not share Creighton's lament for the decline of the British Empire and an expanding relationship with the United States. See English 1989, 110.

ald—a biography Pearson “greatly admired”⁴⁸—began to expand his history of Canada to include the North in a grand narrative of territorial expansion. Based on his mentor Harold A. Innis’ ‘Staple Thesis’;⁴⁹ Creighton had developed his own metanarrative, the ‘Laurentian Thesis’. In this interpretation, the construction of the transcontinental railways grew organically out of the St. Lawrence waterways to carry the exploration, settlement, and development across the British North American continent. In Creighton’s 1944 *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada*, he applied this reading of the past to the North:

Pushing far into the Arctic Circle, the Hudson’s Bay Company extended the fur trade to King William Land and Somerset Island and made contact with the last northern bands of Eskimo. Restless pioneers, with the old urge for space, free land, and independence, were encouraged by the colonization policies of the two central provinces to move in the Lake St. John region of northern Quebec and the Clay Belts, within the Precambrian Shield, in northern Ontario.⁵⁰

Creighton’s “restless pioneers” and their “old urge for space, free land, and independence” were fueled by a larger calling than the prospect of a plot of land and hard labor. Creighton adopted the moral and spiritual language of the Group of Seven’s Lawren Harris to make the case for the North’s transformative powers:

The North became the great impulse of Canadian life. It filled men’s pockets and fired their imaginations. Its massive forms, its simple, sweeping rhythms, its glittering and sombre colours, inspired Tom Thompson and the members of the Group of Seven, the most distinctive group of the painters which the country had yet produced.⁵¹

The North was integrated into Creighton’s larger narrative of Canada’s past. Whereas the waterways of the St. Lawrence River drove settlement along its banks and the transcontinental railroad expanded this project to the Pacific, the emerging age of air travel was now destined to push that sense of exploration and develop-

48 Ibid.

49 A mentor to Creighton and a University of Toronto contemporary of Pearson, Harold A. Innis joined the university’s Department of Political Economy in 1920 and published his *The Fur Trade in Canada* in 1930. In his book, Innis argued that the political evolution of Canada was predominantly shaped by its status as a resource economy. His so-called ‘Staple Thesis’ became an influential interpretation of Canadian history and the origins of its social and political institutions. See Innis 1962.

50 Creighton 1944, 473.

51 Ibid.

ment northwards towards the Arctic Ocean, promising the country economic prosperity and a national purpose.

"Canada's Northern Horizon" of 1953 is the most distinct of Pearson's three statements on Northern and Arctic Canada. The continuity of Pearson's references to the days of Western expansion and the lure of the North strongly suggest that the changing emphasis of the article is the result of a change in authorship, not a shift in Pearson's understanding of the Arctic. The article remains a useful example to illustrate the impact of cultural representations of the North on Pearson's views, particularly when contrasted with the style of a co-author who brought extensive experience and first-hand knowledge to the piece. In the absence of such experience and knowledge about the life, the environment, and the people of the North, Pearson turned to literature, speeches, and explorers' accounts to construct his Northern vision for Canada and to shape debates about the future of the Arctic during the early Cold War.

Conclusion

As Northern and Arctic Canada emerged as a space of growing political, economic, and strategic importance, cultural representations of the North assumed a critical role in the imagination of senior foreign policy officials in Ottawa. Narratives and mythologies provided a collection of meaning and purpose-lending interpretations which enabled Lester B. Pearson to make sense of the North's historical and contemporary place in the evolution of a Canadian nation. The cast of cultural producers is extensive, cross-disciplinary, and boasts a rich repertoire of Northern stories and mythologies. I have only been able to hint at some of the most prominent articulations of such Northern and Arctic representations. As a student and consumer of the cultural and intellectual traditions of his time, Pearson was conversant in the Canada First Movement's racialized environmental determinism, Robert Service's frontier mythology, and Donald Creighton's Laurentian reading of Canadian history. He readily tapped into these paradigms and embraced the assumptions and prejudices inherent in these representations. Pearson's understanding of Canada's Northern regions then was based substantially on a body of southern representations, mediated knowledge, and highly ambivalent narratives about the nature of the North and its role in the evolution of Canada.

Pearson was not the only diplomat who saw himself confronted with the task of defining Canadian interests in the North and devising a strategy to negotiate Arctic defense projects with the United States without a clear understanding of the region. Prime ministers Louis St. Laurent and, more prominently, John G. Diefenbaker never traveled north of 60° yet adamantly claimed the North as an indispensable ingredient of a Canadian national identity. Diplomat Escott Reid and Ambassador to the United States A.D.P. Heeney also drew on romanticized depictions of the North when discussing the importance of the North to Canada's national development. Hugh L. Keenleyside, Commissioner of the Northwest Territories and Deputy Minis-

ter of the Department of Mines and Resources, identified the North as the linchpin of Canada's core values and its existence as a free and democratic country. Such culturally informed perceptions were real and they shaped the ways Canadian officials viewed the North as well as the actions they took. They also helped to establish legitimacy and authority, setting the boundaries for those who were allowed to participate in a national conversation about the future of Northern and Arctic Canada.

This analysis of Pearson's statements on the role and the significance of Canada's Northern and Arctic regions throughout its history suggests that External Affairs officials and politicians looked beyond their legal studies, briefing books, and meeting protocols to determine Ottawa's interest in the North. Not unlike Senator King or Prime Minister Harper's parables of Shackleton and Franklin, Pearson's narratives and mythologies bracketed economic assessments and strategic discussions. The history of Pearson's Arctic diplomacy and U.S.-Canadian defense cooperation during the early Cold War period then cannot be fully understood if an overreliance on sovereignty and security obscures the ideas and assumptions that guided Ottawa's senior diplomats. Lest an incomplete picture of that period remain, the cultural origins of Pearson's northern education must claim its place in the history of Canada's Arctic diplomacy.

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