

Go North, Young Scholar, Go North

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In crafting their presidential addresses, my predecessors naturally looked to their own scholarly enthusiasms. In this sense, this paper will follow their lead. No one who knows me could doubt that given the opportunity to address the Canadian political science community, I would look to the North.

In another respect, however, what follows will part sharply with established patterns of addresses presidential. According to research by Jack Lucas (2009), no CPSA presidential address has made more than passing reference to Aboriginal peoples and politics. Although one of the defining features of Northern politics is the central role of Aboriginal peoples, my departure from past practice goes substantially beyond making a start at rectifying this longstanding oversight.

In years past, CPSA presidents have opted for a range of approaches for their talks. Some have tackled important intellectual puzzles, in the process making significant contributions to the literature. Keith Banting's analysis of a possible "progressive's dilemma" in Canada comes to mind (Banting, 2010), as does André Blais's careful parsing out of Liberal party support (Blais, 2005). Others have provided overviews—often quite magisterial—of wide swaths of scholarship. I think here, for example, of Grace Skogstad's reflections on political legitimacy and authority in Canadian politics (Skogstad, 2003) and Peter Aucoin's essay "Political Science and Democratic Governance" (Aucoin, 1996). Still others, such as Vincent Lemieux and Tom Pocklington, speak about the discipline and the academy generally (Lemieux, 1992; Pocklington, 1998). A good many of my predecessors have examined either important public policy

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issues of the day or emerging political developments. Here I mention Jane Jenson on Canada's changing citizenship regimes (Jenson, 1997), Miriam Smith on "Diversity and Canadian Political Development" (Smith, 2009) and in a previous era, Eugene Forsey's 1962 address, "Canada: Two Nations or One?" (Forsey, 1962).

This paper fits into none of those categories. It is nothing more or less than an exhortation, a plea, an enticement—a commercial if you will—for more Canadian political scientists (especially those near the start of their careers) to work on the North and northern issues. To be sure, many of my predecessors' addresses implicitly constituted arguments for colleagues to join them in studying particular fields and issues, but few if any exhibited the unabashed boosterism as appears below. Simply put, my objective is to convince more of our number of the need for greater scholarly attention to northern politics and of the attractions of studying the North. The end result, I hope, will be an influx of new scholars into this fascinating yet hugely understudied field.

Precisely what constitutes "the North" is a matter of debate. I appreciate that Northern Ontario, Northern British Columbia and the northern reaches of other provinces—especially their far norths—differ greatly from their southern parts. I recognize as well that these regions and their politics are woefully understudied. Nevertheless, let me stipulate that the North on which I focus here is the territorial North, plus Labrador (Nunatsiavut) and Northern Quebec (Nunavik). A reasonable intellectual justification could be mounted for this definition, but my choice is based on the rather more practical grounds that I know little of the politics or the literature of the provincial norths. In short, in this paper, the North means the Canadian Arctic.

Why Study the North?

Why study the North? So much of our Canadian identity is tied up with visions of what has been termed "nordicity" that it would seem only right and proper for scholars to devote serious attention to our vast and wondrous North. As someone who lives in a city that is routinely paralysed—logistically and psychologically—by a few centimeters of snow, I am well aware of the limits to Canada's claim to be a northern nation. Many, perhaps most, Canadians' perception of the Arctic owes more to mythology than to a solid understanding of real places with real and vexing social and political issues. Thus, our discipline—and others—has a responsibility to educate southern Canadians about the prospects and problems of "the true North strong and free."

No one would argue that the North warrants academic interest on the basis of its population: the three territories combined scarcely exceed

Abstract. The North—defined as the Canadian Arctic—ranks among the most understudied and yet the most promising fields of enquiry for Canadian political scientists. It offers a host of fascinating research topics and intellectual puzzles, many of which entail the often fraught relationship between the Canadian state and Aboriginal peoples. Important conceptual issues await academics studying northern politics and governance. As well, political scientists' work can benefit the governments and the people of the North who are grappling with difficult practical problems as they develop distinctive ways of governing themselves.

Academic work on northern politics can be at once intellectually stimulating, professionally rewarding and of significant practical utility. Accordingly, more Canadian political scientists, especially young scholars, should turn their attention northwards

Résumé. Le Nord, ou plus précisément l'Arctique canadien, constitue un des champs les moins explorés et pourtant les plus prometteurs pour les politologues canadiens. Son étude révèle une foule de sujets de recherche fascinants et d'énigmes intellectuelles, dont plusieurs se rapportent aux relations souvent tendues entre l'État canadien et les peuples autochtones. D'importants enjeux conceptuels se posent aux chercheurs de la politique nordique et de la gouvernance. De plus, les recherches des politologues peuvent aider les gouvernements et les habitants du Nord à résoudre des problèmes concrets associés au développement de façons distinctives de se gouverner.

En somme, la recherche sur la politique nordique peut être à la fois intellectuellement stimulante, professionnellement gratifiante et pourvu d'une grande utilité pratique. En conséquence, plus de politologues canadiens, et en particulier ceux des nouvelles générations, devraient diriger leur attention vers le Nord.

a hundred thousand souls. It is true that the territories do comprise nearly 40 per cent of Canada's land mass and contain enormous reserves of oil, gas, diamonds, gold, iron ore and uranium, not to mention water and wildlife. The attraction of the North for political scientists, however, lies not in its natural resources, but in its politics and in the social and cultural bases of those politics.

I could take up my allotted space just describing the geographic, demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of the Canadian Arctic, but I will highlight just a few essential points. The North is vast, with a harsh climate, a sparse population and difficult transportation. Its economy is heavily dependent on public sector activity and resource extraction. Most significantly for my purposes—and for understanding Northern politics—the North has high concentrations of Aboriginal peoples. In Yukon roughly 25 per cent of the population is Aboriginal, in the Northwest Territories the figure is 50 per cent and in Nunavut it is over 80 per cent. Substantial cultural, linguistic and political divisions exist among the Aboriginal peoples of the North. This is true not only across jurisdictions but also within them, most notably in the NWT. A final, politically salient point: outside the territorial capitals, which are by far the most populous centres, most of the small communities which dot the North have overwhelmingly Aboriginal populations.

Why should the Canadian Arctic engage our attention as political scientists? The reasons are compelling:

- the fascinating intellectual puzzles suffusing Northern politics
- the opportunities for scholars to establish broad, original and intellectually stimulating research agendas without fear of being boxed into narrow, unrewarding niches because the field is overcrowded
- the possibility, indeed, the necessity, of engaging with intriguing comparative and theoretical issues
- the unusually direct linkage in the Arctic between domestic and international politics
- the very real prospect that research will have a palpable—and positive—effect on the governance of the North and thus on the lives of real people. The Arctic is sufficiently small and sufficiently malleable that one person—politician, bureaucrat or scholar—can make a difference.

Other reasons for heading North to study the politics have less to do with scholarly endeavour. Quite simply, politics aside, the Arctic is endlessly fascinating in any number of ways, though I'll only be able to address the lure of the North briefly. But, since all this is a commercial, I will, in the interests of truth in advertising, also comment on the downsides as well as the upsides of conducting Northern research.

The Distinctive and Perplexing Politics of the North

As I began to sketch out some of the distinctive and perplexing political questions that characterize the North, I came to realize just how much of a personal view is presented below. At root I'm an old-fashioned structures-and-processes-of-government guy, so that as an unreconstructed institutionalist, my interests run heavily to governance issues. I mention this not by way of apology but rather to note that mine is but one of a wide range of approaches which can be brought to bear on Northern politics.

It is always risky to list colleagues and their work, since inevitably fine scholars and important work will be left out. Still, it is important to recognize at least a sampling of political scientists whose Northern research only partially overlaps with or indeed has little in common with the institutional issues which interest me.¹ Someone of a political economy bent—Frances Abele, for example, or Gabrielle Slowey—will be concerned with a whole set of issues and questions that may overlap with but differ significantly from my focus on governmental institutions (Abel, 2009; Slowey, 2009). A policy specialist, such as Jack Hicks, who writes on (among other things) suicide prevention policy or Annis-May Timpson, who analyzes (again, among other things) language policy, is concerned with quite different aspects of politics (Hicks, 2009; Timpson, 2009b). Yet another set of interests and priorities is evident in the work of a scholar like Ailsa Henderson, whose focus is on Northern political

behaviour and political culture (Henderson, 2007). Everyone who works on the North recognizes the primal importance of communities; certain political scientists focus explicitly on communities and community politics, but may do so from very different vantage points: Cynthia Alexander, for example, looks at the role of modern communications technology in community development, whereas Peter Kulchyski's approach is one of narrative ethnography, while Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox melds deep involvement in traditional community activities with trenchant analysis of self-government negotiations (Alexander, 2009; Kulchyski, 2005; Irlbacher-Fox 2009). A growing cadre of international relations specialists—Franklyn Griffiths, Michael Byers, Rod Heubert, Greg Poelzer, Natalia Loukacheva, Samantha Arnold and Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon to name but a few—examine issues of vital importance not only to Canadian foreign policy but to the everyday lives of Northerners (Arnold, 2008; Byers, 2009; Griffiths, 2009; Heubert, 2009; Loukacheva, 2007; Poelzer et al., 2008; Riddell-Dixon, 2008). Scholars such as Rauna Kuokkanen bring a strong feminist perspective to bear on the study of Northern politics (Kuokkanen, 2011). Mention of feminism compels me to observe that it is at once noteworthy and heartening that such a high proportion of Northern-inclined Canadian political scientists are women.

Of course, political scientists are by no means the only scholars researching the politics of the North. A host of anthropologists, geographers, historians, legal scholars, communications specialists, sociologists—even economists—are producing notable work on Northern politics. With so many labouring in the blueberry patches of Northern politics (the climate is too harsh for vineyards), how can I argue that we need more scholars in the field?

Easily.

A partial list of research topics where we have only scratched the surface of complex and important questions would include “consensus government;” Aboriginal self-government; federalism in the North; devolution; and the creation of Nunavut.

All of these fall in the realm of my subfield—institutions. In other words, this is but a small subset of the important questions calling for scholarly attention.

Consensus Government

I begin with the feature of Northern politics which first drew me North more than two decades ago and which, I confess, perplexes and fascinates me still: consensus government. The Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories adheres to the fundamental precepts of Westminster-style “responsible” cabinet-parliamentary government and yet operates

without political parties. All candidates, including incumbent ministers, seek election as independents (though their involvement with national parties may be well known). After each election, the premier and the cabinet are elected by secret ballot of all MLAs. The premier assigns portfolios to ministers but lacks the political authority to sack them. Only the legislature can remove a minister from office, which it does from time to time. The seven-member cabinet finds itself a permanent minority in the 19-member House but since what are termed the “regular members”—the non-cabinet MLAs—do not constitute a disciplined opposition, cabinet is usually able to have its policies adopted and implemented with only minor modifications. When Nunavut was created in 1999, the ever-pragmatic Inuit adopted the familiar consensus government model for the Nunavut legislature. In all essentials it operates along the same lines as the NWT Assembly (White, 2006a).

The questions arising from the continuing ascendancy of consensus government—three decades and counting in the NWT, a dozen years in Nunavut—are legion. First and foremost, does it serve the people of the NWT and Nunavut well? On the one hand, consensus government features a remarkable and salutary degree of accountability of the cabinet to the legislature. On the other hand, accountability of government to the people is, at best, indirect and problematic. With ministers running for re-election as independents, voters have little opportunity to pass judgment on the government and its policies. Other key questions: Can cabinet take tough, principled decisions when it not only lacks internal cohesion (being a disparate collection of individuals headed by a premier with limited authority to impose discipline) but also faces the constant threat of removal from office by the regular members? Relatedly, does the fragility and incoherence that can characterize consensus government result in undue power flowing to the permanent bureaucracy? Would the advent of political parties make for greater accountability and more coherent policy? Perhaps the most interesting question is also the most confounding: whether consensus government is to be understood as essentially a non-partisan governance system or as a genuine manifestation of Aboriginal culture. This question—the answer to which I’m still puzzling over—is a special case of a fascinating dynamic which has driven much of my Northern work and intrigued others: the interplay of traditional Northern Aboriginal culture and liberal-democratic governmental institutions (Dacks, 1986; White, 1991, 2006a, 2006b).

Aboriginal Self-Government

Fundamental questions about Aboriginal self-government in Canada—how it’s conceptualized, who participates, how it’s financed, how it oper-

ates and the like—are hardly unique to the North. Nonetheless, some of the Aboriginal self-governments with the widest jurisdictional mandates and most ambitious aspirations are found in the North. However, to say that academic attention to the design, operation and effectiveness of the Nunatsiavut government in Labrador and the Tlicho government of the central NWT is thin on the ground is a charitable rendering (see, however, Rodon and Grey, 2009). And yet these are governments with extensive powers and substantial resources, facing challenging social, political and economic issues. In the Yukon, eleven of the fourteen First Nations have finalized self-government agreements. Their social and economic situations vary substantially, as do their governmental structures and political traditions. Thus they constitute a marvelous natural experiment for determining what makes for successful Aboriginal self-government—a terrific research project just begging for scholarly attention. Important preliminary work on self-governing Yukon First Nations has been done (Dacks, 2004) but the heavy intellectual lifting is only beginning.

We are not just dealing here with questions of “plumbing”—boxes and arrows on organization charts—but with fundamental conceptual and theoretical governance themes.

- Citizenship regimes. What rights, responsibilities and limits characterize Aboriginal citizenship regimes? Who is entitled to citizenship and how are decisions made as to inclusion or exclusion? Lest it be thought that references to the deeply layered concept of citizenship are over-reaching, note that the formal self-government agreements—to which the Government of Canada is a signatory—explicitly speak of “Tlicho citizens” or “Vuntut Gwich’in citizens.”
- Exclusionary provisions. Aboriginal self-government necessarily entails some exclusionary elements, involving, for example, voting and office holding, taxation, or eligibility for government services. In both conceptual and practical terms these vary widely.² Fundamental issues of self-determination and rights are thus front and centre in the design and operation of the emerging Northern self-government regimes.
- Capacity and capacity building. None of the Northern Aboriginal governments has a population even approaching that of a small Canadian city yet they may exercise a wide range of powers and control significant financial resources. Accordingly, the need to build capacity is a pressing concern in the North. But for Aboriginal governments, just what does “capacity” entail? For small Northern Aboriginal governments how is it built and maintained? The well-known Harvard Study in the US cites what it terms “cultural match” as a key explanatory factor in the economic success of American Indian tribes.³ Might success in Arctic governmental capacity building be similarly explained?

Perhaps so ... had we a solid conceptual understanding of just what cultural match might mean in this context (White, 2009).

- Culture. Most would agree that Aboriginal government entails a good deal more than just having Aboriginal people running government. It means government organized and operating according to Aboriginal cultural precepts. To some extent, what a government does may be less important than how it does it. The issues are no less thorny for being concrete. What are the prospects that governments can operate largely or entirely in Aboriginal languages? More generally, how can Northern Aboriginal culture be incorporated into decision-making and administrative processes (Timpson, 2006, 2009a)? The literature on traditional knowledge and Aboriginal governance offers important insights here.⁴

It's important to bear in mind that such questions not only have significant theoretical and empirical relevance to those interested in how governments operate and how they relate to their citizens. The leaders and indeed the citizens of Aboriginal governments need practical answers to these questions, which confront them on a daily basis. Political scientists, working closely with Aboriginal communities, can contribute valuable assistance in the often challenging task of realizing the potential of Aboriginal self-government. I return to this topic below.

We need also to ask prior questions. How are self-government agreements negotiated and what determines the powers of the Aboriginal governments they establish and the financial arrangements to support them? Similar questions surround the negotiation of the comprehensive land claims agreements which cover almost the entire North and which carry far-reaching but highly variable governance provisions. Analyses of such negotiations are amenable to a range of conceptual-theoretical perspectives from bargaining theory to game theory to political economy perspectives to post-colonial theory. A limited but theoretically promising academic literature on self-government and land claims negotiations is emerging (Alcantara, 2007, 2008, 2009; Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). As well, we have a small but insightful collection of personal reflections from those at the negotiating tables (Amagoalik, 2007; Dewar 2009; Fenge and Quassa, 2009; Malloy, 1993, 2000; McPherson, 2003; Quassa, 2008).

Finalization of self-government agreements and comprehensive land claim settlements require the affected Aboriginal people to hold ratification referenda. Most have passed but by no means all. This past April, for example, the Inuit of Nunavik decisively rejected a long-in-the-making agreement to establish a Nunavik Regional Government. The scope for political behaviour specialists to add to their stock of interesting referendum cases by looking North is substantial. The creation of Nunavut, for example, involved no fewer than five plebiscites or refer-

enda. The analytic value that voting specialists can bring to the understanding of important Northern political processes is likewise substantial.

Melding “Public” and Aboriginal Government

Some of the most interesting, important and complex issues surrounding Aboriginal self-government in the North involve the relationship of Aboriginal and “public” government. I well recall during my first research trip to Yellowknife being nonplused by talk of public government—what else can government be? In the North (as indeed elsewhere in Canada), I quickly learned, public government—that is, government open to all residents, regardless of cultural community—stands in clear contrast to Aboriginal government.

The exclusionary provisions of Aboriginal governments can raise difficult problems as to the status and rights of non-Aboriginal people living where Aboriginal governments hold sway. If, in the North, these problems have been more or less resolved at the local and community level, much more intractable issues bedevil attempts to meld Aboriginal and public government at the territorial level. The conundrum arises in its starkest form in the NWT. Geographically, the NWT has a certain coherence but politically it is deeply divided along regional and cultural lines with more than a half-dozen regionally based Aboriginal governments or proto-governments. Accordingly, the dilemma of how to meld, or at least co-ordinate, the public government of the Northwest Territories with the Aboriginal governments—individually and collectively—is of longstanding (McArthur, 2009).

Endless numbers of commissions, task forces, conferences and position papers have explored possibilities for squaring the circle of Aboriginal–public government integration. My office shelves fairly groan with their reports, transcripts and background papers. Yet a broadly acceptable constitutional settlement remains to be found. Note the “c” word, at which right-thinking Canadians understandably cringe. The search for accommodation between public and Aboriginal government at the territorial level, however, is unquestionably, to borrow a phrase from long-time Northern hand Peter Russell, a constitutional odyssey (Russell, 2004). Questions of institutional design are as many as they are difficult. Guaranteed Aboriginal representation in the central territorial government? (One long-ago proposal envisaged a Dene senate.) What decision making processes to adopt? Should decision rules include double-majorities or perhaps regional or cultural vetoes? What jurisdictions should be allocated to which governments? How should resource revenues and financial transfers from Ottawa be divided? Scholars of constitutional politics in divided societies would do well to look closely at the NWT.

So too should political scientists interested in the process of constitution making. Attempts to reach a constitutional settlement have included elite-dominated task forces, public commissions mandated to engage in popular consultation, a broadly representative constitutional convention, legislative committees and myriad bi- and multi-lateral meetings of federal, territorial and Aboriginal leaders. Afficionados of both deliberative and direct democracy will be at once heartened and dismayed at the twists and turns which have characterized the NWT constitutional project, as will theoreticians of constitutional processes. As Sherlock Holmes might have put it (had Dr. Watson been a political science PhD rather than an MD), in the Northwest Territories, the constitutional game is afoot.

Federalism in the North

The discussion of constitution making in the NWT hinted at but did not explicitly raise the topic of federalism. Of course, in yet another understudied subfield of Northern politics—intergovernmental relations—the territorial governments have come a long way in the past two or three decades (Funston, 2007). It was not all that long ago that the territorial premiers (then called “government leaders”) were permitted to take part in the “photo ops” at first ministers’ conferences but banished from the room when the real discussions began; southern intergovernmental officials and academic analysts now routinely speaking of federal–provincial–territorial relations (Timpson, 2004). Crucial as the territories’ formal and informal linkages with Ottawa and specific provinces may be, this is not what I mean by “federalism in the North.”

Federalism entails power sharing among two or more orders of government in a common geographic area. Often it is principally about political accommodation of far-flung, disparate regions or of diversity in the form of regionally concentrated religious or cultural groups. Although it will be some time before a constitutional settlement is reached in the NWT, it is already clear that what will emerge—within the territorial boundaries—will be a decidedly asymmetric and possibly quite distinctive federal system. Already the NWT confronts many of the conceptual and practical issues that characterize federalism: establishing paramountcy in certain jurisdictions, developing service delivery agreements in areas of shared jurisdiction and of course working out issues of fiscal transfers and accountability.

The study of the Canadian Arctic encourages non-traditional approaches to the topic of federalism. In the interests of brevity, I’ll mention just three: Gary Wilson’s work on “nested federalism” in Nunavut (Wilson, 2005, 2008); Martin Papillon’s analysis of the impact of

modern treaties on federalism in Northern Quebec (Papillon, 2009); and my own research into the federal–territorial–Aboriginal co-management boards established under comprehensive land claims to deal with wild-life issues and environmental regulation (White, 2002, 2008).

Devolution

As students of federalism know, the allocation of powers and responsibilities among orders of government within a federal system is not set in stone. In the Canadian Arctic, some of the most important political developments of the past few decades have involved the transfer of powers from Ottawa to the territorial governments, a process referred to in Northern circles as devolution (“devo” in the local political vernacular). From the late 1960s through the 1980s the federal government devolved most province-like powers to the Yukon and NWT governments: renewable resources, health, social services, education and local government. Gaining these responsibilities—and the financial resources that came with them—transformed the territorial governments from little more than local administrators of policies set in Ottawa into full-fledged governments, albeit governments heavily dependent on the national treasury for their fiscal wherewithal. Happily, we have a thorough account of the first set of devolution processes from a team led by Gurston Dacks featuring an A-list of political scientists with Northern expertise (Dacks, 1990).

A significant dynamic in these processes was deep-rooted opposition by Aboriginal organizations, which frequently saw the territorial governments as illegitimate, usurping powers and resources that rightfully belonged to them.

Important as it was, the initial devolution round did not put the territories on an equal jurisdictional footing with the provinces. Several jurisdictions of minor to modest significance remained under Ottawa’s control, as did one of fundamental importance: ownership of Crown land and with it control of non-renewable resources. Some minor policy fields were subsequently devolved but on the key issue the territories were left in the position of the Prairie provinces prior to 1930. The implications of authority over land and non-renewable resources remaining in federal hands were—and are—extensive. Setting and enforcement of environmental standards, for example, is principally Ottawa’s prerogative, though the advent of the co-management boards mandated by the land claims significantly loosened Ottawa’s primacy in environmental regulation. The most contentious implication is financial; the enormous royalties from non-renewable resources such as oil, gas and diamonds flow not into territorial coffers but to the federal treasury. The territories can and do levy corporate and personal income tax on firms and workers in

natural resource industries but these monies pale beside the billions of dollars in past and future royalties accruing to Ottawa from mines and oil and gas wells.

Not surprisingly, securing devolution agreements transferring control of natural resources and the revenue they generate has rarely been far from the top of territorial political agendas. In 2003 a devolution agreement came into force in the Yukon giving the territorial government administrative control of non-renewable natural resources, though not ownership of Crown lands and only a limited share of royalties. Significantly, the Yukon government has been pushing to re-open the deal. Over the years tentative devolution agreements were reached between the NWT and Ottawa but all collapsed. In 2010 an agreement in principle was reached in the NWT on responsibility over lands and resources and on resource revenue sharing. Almost immediately, however, leaders of Aboriginal governments and some Aboriginal MLAs voiced deep disquiet over the deal as failing to provide adequate financial compensation or political control for Aboriginal peoples. At the formal signing ceremony in January 2011, only two of the NWT's Aboriginal governments and organizations offered their support to the territorial government's position. The others embarked on a war of words with the government in an attempt to derail further negotiations on the tentative deal. In short, the prospects for devolution in the NWT are beset by the same complex power and revenue-sharing issues that have thus far precluded a constitutional settlement.

Nunavut has also been pushing for a devolution deal but the federal government has been reluctant to begin serious negotiations on the grounds that the government of Nunavut lacks capacity to handle the responsibilities it already has and thus it would be premature to transfer further powers to it.⁵

Devolution of another form bears mention in this inventory of Northern governance topics. It is not usually referred to as devolution, nor does it carry the mega-constitutional status of transfer of control over natural resources. However, in terms of affecting people's everyday lives, it eclipses that issue. This is the transfer of significant policy development and service delivery responsibility from territorial governments to local communities. In the Yukon, such matters are largely tied up in the provisions of the various First Nations' self-government agreements and the administrative arrangements they have negotiated with the territorial government. Quite different have been a series of policies from the government of the Northwest Territories, dating to the 1970s, to enhance what is often called "community empowerment." These processes may seem mundane and obscure and thus of little interest for academics. On the contrary, they are hugely important, involving as they do potentially massive shifts of core governmental activities, most notably in social policy, from large, professional territorial bureaucracies to very small

communities with limited political and administrative talent pools (almost all Arctic communities have fewer than 2000 residents, many have fewer than 1000). Southern Canadian expectations of what is needed for effective policy development and implementation would predict disastrous outcomes—how can such minuscule communities take on such important responsibilities? Yet the on-the-ground record, while mixed, suggests that with strong visionary leadership, hard work and able committed people, impressive results are possible. The remarkable success of the remote Yukon community of Old Crow with a population in 2006 of 253 (Statistics Canada, 2007) in taking over and successfully running key government programs demonstrates both that diminutive scale need not be an impediment to effective, wide-ranging government and that more attention to the governance of small Arctic communities could offer valuable insight into local government across Canada (Garcea, 2007; White, 1998).

The Creation of Nunavut

I conclude this limited inventory of stimulating and important institutional research topics with a personal favourite, the creation of Nunavut and its early experiences. A corollary of the Eastern Arctic land claim was the federal government's commitment to establish a new Inuit-dominated territory, Nunavut. From passage of the *Nunavut Act* in June 1993 to start-up on April 1, 1999, a small number of people literally designed and built a government from scratch. They may not have started with a completely blank slate—the financial and logistical constraints were substantial and Nunavut did come with a fair bit of political baggage—but the creation of the Nunavut government was far and away the best opportunity that any Canadians ever had to put in place the government they, rather than some far-distant officials, wanted. The processes by which the fundamental political and administrative issues of creating a government were addressed and resolved (or deferred) as the Nunavut government took form were little short of fascinating for someone whose intellectual crank is turned by structures and processes of government.

That fascinating period of creation is now history, but the struggles of the new government are ongoing. As of April 1, 1999, reality replaced promise, theory and speculation—and the reality has not always been pretty. The “GN,” as it is called, faces a huge capacity deficit; among other things, large numbers of bureaucratic positions, both in senior management and among front-line workers, lie vacant for extended periods. The primary goals of imbuing the GN with Inuit culture, not least through making Inuktitut the working language of government, and of fulfilling the land claim requirement that “representative” proportions of govern-

ment jobs, at all levels and in all categories, be held by Inuit, remain distant hopes. The social and economic problems besetting Nunavut are daunting. Infrastructure needs are endless. With a very limited tax base, the GN is dependent on Ottawa for 90 per cent or more of its funding, leaving it limited financial room to manoeuvre. It didn't help that expectations were unrealistically high for what the GN could accomplish in its early years. Not surprisingly, a government-commissioned "report card" assessing the GN's first decade found widespread popular disappointment at its performance, with some Nunavummiut (the people of Nunavut) expressing the view that things had been better when Nunavut was still part of the NWT. At the same time, the evaluation did find substantial reserves of hope and confidence in Nunavut's future (North Sky Consulting Group, 2009). In short, on any number of dimensions, Nunavut not only presents promising subject material for study, but requires the expertise of the political science community.

In this overview of governance issues, the essential theme should be clear, but in case not, let me make it explicit. The North is replete with examples of people working out how to govern themselves and putting those governments in place. This doesn't happen often. We need to pay attention.

What Political Scientists Have to Offer

Thus far the message has been mainly that the North is awash with untapped research opportunities both intrinsically interesting and holding promise for theory building and testing. The prospects for political scientists to benefit from shifting their research focus north is, however, only part of the story. No less important is the opportunity—no, the obligation—for political scientists to contribute their expertise and insight to Northerners grappling with the myriad political and policy issues facing them.

This does *not* mean that one should get off the plane, take some quick soundings of local politics and start pontificating, telling Northerners how they should be running their lives and their governments. Northerners have long and often unhappy experience of Southerners whose understanding of the North is as limited as their ability to restrain themselves from loudly voicing their opinions about the North. It sometimes seems when one first meets someone from the North, the only thing worse than being an academic from Toronto is being a consultant from Ottawa. Still, my experience has been that if one listens a good deal more than one speaks, shows sustained interest and appreciates distinctive Northern ways of doing politics, then Northerners—political leaders, bureaucrats and folks at the community hall—will be remarkably open and helpful ... even to Toronto academics.

Moreover, Northerners are interested in the results of our research. Not perhaps our sometimes high-falutin' theoretical paraphernalia but certainly the practical implications of our work. This is especially so when it combines strong contextual understanding of Northern conditions with comparative insights from other jurisdictions, whether in southern Canada or farther afield. Canada, it is worth recalling, is the only Arctic country without a northern university. University-level courses are available in the North, but not the full range of benefits that universities can render. In particular, with neither universities nor local think tanks doing policy work, the capacity for independent research on important but often politically sensitive policy issues is all but entirely absent in the North.

The North does have an extensive "consultant culture," with able and highly knowledgeable local consultants engaged in researching and advising governments—public and Aboriginal—on all manner of political matters, from policy development to institutional design to constitutional negotiations. Consultants have contributed substantially to the academic literature on northern politics, for example, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, whose *Finding Dasha: Self-Government, Social Suffering, and Aboriginal Policy in Canada*, was short-listed for the Canadian Political Science Association's prestigious Smiley Prize for the best book on Canadian politics in 2009 (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). A number of others have written insightfully about the North and its politics.⁶

An impressive squad of sometimes academically inclined consultants notwithstanding, the research acumen and the comparative insights—and independent judgment—brought by academics based at southern universities can be of great value to Northern governments and to the citizenry. Not all curiosity-driven academic research will focus on questions deemed important by Northerners, though my sense is that political scientists who spend a little time in the North are often attracted to the same questions and concerns that preoccupy Northerners. Since political scientists are, like everyone else, influenced by tangible incentives, it bears mention that "Northern Communities" is one of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's five priority areas for research funding—including the hefty "partnership" grants. The hope, in the Council's words, is to "increase knowledge and awareness of northern issues deemed to be of priority in Northern Canada ... and increase the application of research knowledge in decision making and best practices in the public and private sectors, communities, and civil society" (SSHRC, 2011).

Increasingly, research projects on the North, especially if they focus on Aboriginal peoples or institutions, are designed and carried out in consultation and co-operation with the subjects of the research themselves. By way of illustration, it has become commonplace—some would say best practice—for academics conducting community-level research to return to the communities they have studied to present the results of their

work and to solicit feedback before publications are finalized. This may sound like an infringement of academic freedom and certainly if pushed to extremes it could become problematic but the collaboration of university-based political scientists with governments and with people in the communities brings mutual benefits. Academics come away with better-formulated research designs and with insights they might not have generated on their own, while Northerners get high-quality, independent research on topics they care about, plus in some instances, valuable training in research techniques, at little or no cost.

Northerners have need of the kind of research and insight that we, as political scientists, can provide. We, as political scientists, have the opportunity, indeed the obligation, to provide it. It is worth reiterating that since the numbers of people living in the North—at the community, regional and even territorial level—are very small and since unusual scope exists in the North for significant change in political institutions and processes, it may only take a few people, perhaps sometimes a single person, to make a real difference. Many of us analyze politics via “the three I’s”: interests, ideas and institutions. For the North, we can add a fourth “I”: individuals.

Doing Research in the North

Having, I hope, made the case that research into the politics of Arctic Canada is intrinsically interesting, offers substantial theoretical possibilities and can be of real practical value, I conclude with some brief observations about doing research in the North.

The positives are many. The small but hardy band of Northern researchers is extremely supportive and eager to share experiences and ideas. With so much work to be done, new recruits are welcomed rather than seen as potential competitors.

Academics are constantly reminded of the importance of being interdisciplinary, all the while becoming more narrowly focused. In Northern research, interdisciplinarity is as essential as it is helpful. So, too, though I’ve not much explored them in this paper are comparative perspectives.

Access to key political figures, from premiers and heads of Aboriginal governments on down, is rarely a problem. I could leave it at that ... but I’d rather relate an experience from my first trip North.

It was my first ever day in Yellowknife. I’d been given a tour of the NWT Legislature, which didn’t take long, as in those days it consisted of a wing of the Yellowknife Inn. The Clerk of the House, David Hamilton, had taken me to a small committee room where the legislature’s Standing Committee on Finance was meeting with the Minister of Finance, the Deputy Minister of Finance and other officials to review recommen-

dations the committee had made on the upcoming budget. The only observer, I sat quietly in the single row of chairs against the wall, just back from the large table where the politicians sat. After a while, the committee chair halted proceedings and said, looking at me: "Minister, we're being rude; you should introduce your staff member." To which the minister replied: "My staff member? I thought he was with you." Whereupon I stood up, told them who I was and what I was up to and was heartily welcomed. Not long after, the chair asked the minister and his staff to leave since the committee was about to meet *in camera* to discuss its report to the House. As the minister, the deputy and the others got up to leave, I did as well, understanding (as a former legislative official) that *in camera* sessions were only for committee members. But the committee chair waved me back into my seat, saying "You should stay for this. You might find it interesting."

Since then, and to this day, I've found Northern political leaders—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—bureaucrats, journalists and others involved in politics, extraordinarily open and accommodating to my research.

Doing Arctic research necessarily involves dealing with fascinating people and wonderful experiences. Could anywhere have more interesting characters than the North? As for wonderful experiences, images of rugged mountains, breathtaking fiords, mighty rivers, trackless tundra and, of course, of polar bears, walrus and caribou, can convey a sense of the beauty and the attraction of the North. What they can't convey is the value of encountering the rich and varied cultures of the Aboriginal peoples. We all like to experience the sights of far-off, exotic places while doing research, but in the North it is simply imperative, in beginning to understand the cultural bases of Aboriginal politics, to spend time "on the land." I've done far too little of this, but enough to recognize its importance in beginning to develop an appreciation of the people whose politics I'm studying.

No research is without downsides. Arctic research has some distinctive ones. First, though certainly not foremost, it *is* cold, sometimes brutally cold. Only occasionally, however, is this a serious problem. Northern communities are small and compact and if the weather is really bad it's not usually necessary to be outside for long.

More serious is the cost of travel to and within the North (and of accommodation and meals once there). From central Canada, it costs significantly more to fly to any of the territorial capitals than to Europe. Flights within the North are staggeringly expensive. Nor is cost the only travel issue. It's a very lucky Northern researcher who hasn't been "weathered in" or "weathered out" of some community at some point, or had a trip cut short or extended because the plane "went mechanical," as the locals put it. Given the distances (and the complete absence of roads link-

ing communities in Nunavut), most travel is by air, though in the southern NWT and in most of Yukon, it is possible to drive from one community to another on all-weather roads. The scenery is wonderful but more than scenery is involved. Woe betide the researcher who ventures onto the little-travelled roads in winter without survival gear.

In addition to cost and logistics, Arctic research entails a very steep learning curve. Despite their diminutive size, northern political systems are remarkably complex, with easily overlooked or misunderstood cultural and ideological nuances, overlaid with intricate networks of personal links among key political figures.

As mentioned, access to politicians, bureaucrats and others is remarkably good. One important caveat, however, is the common reluctance of political figures to commit to interview times much in advance. I've long since lost track of the number of times I've asked people for interviews before embarking on a research trip only to be told "Sure; no problem; call me when you get in town." This is frustrating when time and funds are limited; I still find it disconcerting to be landing in Iqaluit or Whitehorse for a short stay with few if any interviews formally lined up. In the end, though, things usually work out. I've come to accept that Arctic research requires a healthy dose of flexibility. It's not for someone requiring a firm interview schedule ahead of time, but it is for someone prepared to take advantage of running into a minister or a grand chief in the Northern Store or the post office.

Conclusion

As they say in Inuktitut, *taima*—enough. To restate my essential arguments: the North offers an all but endless supply of intriguing research topics for political scientists; the governments and people of the North need and appreciate the expertise that political scientists have to offer; research and politics aside, the North is wondrous and fascinating, though a warning is order: once the North gets into your blood, there is no known cure.

The conclusion is obvious: Go North, young scholar, go North.

Notes

- 1 In each instance, only one of each author's works is mentioned (typically something recent); some have numerous Northern publications to their credit.
- 2 The Canadian literature on Aboriginal self-government is extensive. For a wide-ranging overview, see the final report of Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995, II (part 1); for more recent work, see Belanger (2008).
- 3 See, among many other publications, Cornell and Kalt (1995).
- 4 The literature on Aboriginal traditional knowledge (TK) is extensive; Aboriginal scholars have been especially important in its development (see, for example, McGregor, 2004). A considerable literature exists relating TK to Northern governance issues (though little of it by political scientists); see, for example, Abele (2006); Berkes

- (1999); Cruickshank (2004); Ellis (2005); Nadasdy (2003); Spak, (2005), Usher (2000), White (2006b).
- 5 The federal government has been careful not to say this explicitly, but is clearly basing its policy on the *Mayer Report*, which argued that Nunavut lacked the capacity to handle additional responsibilities (Mayer, 2007).
 - 6 In addition to writing for quasi-academic venues such as *The Canadian Parliamentary Review* and *Policy Options*, Northern consultants publish in refereed journals and with academic presses. A small sampling would include Cameron (2009); Cameron and Campbell (2009); Campbell, Fenge and Hanson (2011); Hicks (2009); Merritt et al. (1989); Merritt and Fenge (1990); Usher (2000, 2003).

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