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Beyond Mining *Repair and Reconciliation*

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What questions still linger when mining turns silent? What persistent issues will remain in the wake of bulldozers, rock deposits, and obsolete construction roads leading nowhere?

I drive south across Varanger mountain plateau along the road that connects north-facing fishing harbors on the Barents Sea with the bridge across the river Deatnu (Deanušaldi), which is also a junction for traffic from the Finnish border to the south, the Russian border to the east, and larger towns, like Hammerfest, Alta, and Tromsø to the west. I leave behind a coastal Arctic farmstead turned into a second home, near the Syltefjord nature reserve, where the limits of a cultivated field are still visible as a straight line painted with autumn colors, inscriptions of a state-launched agricultural program bound to falter (see Lien, 2020). I leave behind wind turbines towering on mountaintops, majestic monuments of a carbon neutral future, eating into reindeer pasture as giant scarecrows. I head toward yet another site where expansive mining operations scar an entire mountain and divide a local community, cutting friendship and kinship ties with surgical precision.

The steep and rocky mountain ridge ahead is greyish white, and rich in quartzite (Figure 12.1). It contains “proven resources for more than fifty years production” according to Elkem, operators of the quartzite mine since 1983 (Mining in the Nordics, 2021). It is one of the world’s largest quartzite operations but still not large enough for the company, which is now Chinese owned. The global demand for quartzite is insatiable, they say, as quartzite is necessary for the green shift to happen. Without a six-fold expansion the current quarry will run empty fairly soon, operations will no longer be profitable, and a handful of local people will lose their jobs. Such is the rhetoric of extractive expansion.

The softer landscape behind me is rusty red and soft orange, and rich in nutrients. Reindeer, owned by the Rákkonjára *siida* – the local reindeer herding community – pass through here twice on their annual migration from winter



Figure 12.1 Varanger peninsula: Meahcci or ripe for quartzite extraction? Foreground: Sámi tent. Background: the scarred side of the mountain where company Elkem plans to extend quartzite mine. Photo by Marianne E. Lien

pastures inland to summer pastures on the coast. The landscapes contain nutrients to sustain such webs of life infinitely, animals and landscapes mutually sustaining each other through centuries. For an outsider, the landscape appears untouched, an obvious candidate for protection. But its *siida* leader is tired of being its warrior; tired of defending the age-old reindeer herding tradition left, right, and center, and tired of endless meetings with lawyers, local politicians, impact analysts, and Elkem representatives (Österlin & Raitio, 2020).

Each mining operation has its due date. Resource extraction thus comes to an end again and again, leaving rubble and ruination behind. Monuments of short-lived prosperity and signs of environmental destruction mark landscapes long after machinery has turned quiet (Flyen et al., 2023, see Chapter 9). Each new prospect of Arctic resource extraction marks the beginning of another turn of boom and bust. Profound local transformations blend into a repetitive pattern, in which hope and hype are short-lived assets. While each single instance presents itself as unique, the necessary sacrifice that must be made for something else to improve, we see a recurrent pattern that leaves the impression that in spite of claims to novelty it's all the same; *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.¹

This chapter draws the attention to consistent tensions of extractivism. As several previous chapters show, the massive transformations of sheer landmass that mineral extraction entails are deeply implicated in the planetary era now referred to as the Anthropocene. Resource extraction is, however, not only a driving force in the Anthropocene; it is also promoted as one of the solutions to the *challenges* of

the Anthropocene. Shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources is urgently needed as the global demand for energy shows no signs of decline. Current mining operations in the Arctic and elsewhere are part of the global competition for rare minerals for battery components needed for energy storage in a post-carbon future. Arctic landscapes are scarred by wind-turbines too, their noise disturbing reindeer, thus causing a much larger zone of pasture dispossession than the space they physically occupy. Hence, the ongoing and necessary shift away from fossil fuels and carbon dependency continues to intrude on those who dwell in the Arctic, humans and non-humans. Below the ocean surface, industrial trawlers continue to scrape the seafloor, affecting the density and diversity of deep-sea megafauna in ways that are likely to have negative feedback effects on fish populations (Buhl-Mortensen et al., 2015), thereby also posing a threat to marine food chains that have defined lifeways in the Arctic.

Adaptations to a carbon-free future may therefore cause dispossessions and disruptions that are just as detrimental to local livelihoods as the rampant destruction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' colonial endeavors. How then, can we avoid colonial forms of dispossessions to repeat themselves? What can be learned from the resource extractivism associated with mining in the Arctic? Which tensions remain? To ask such questions is to pay attention to colonial asymmetries, and to ask about different modes of knowing, and different modes of caring for land. This implies that we also need to challenge extractivism as a hegemonic paradigm. What does it take to recognize that rather than being predetermined along a set trajectory of development from afar, Arctic futures are indeed multiple and open-ended (Wormbs, 2018)? How might we contribute to decolonization in a region where scars run much more deeply than those immediately visible on the surface of fragile landscape formations.

This chapter suggests some persistent patterns and tensions that have enabled resource extraction in the Arctic. It draws the attention to patterns that continue to haunt and are unlikely to disappear just because another mine turns quiet. Acknowledging these is necessary for repair and reconciliation to happen. The final part of the chapter proposes some steps toward what we might think of as a post-extractive, post-colonial Arctic.

The Paradox of Distance

If you happened to set foot in a fishing village on the Norwegian Barents coast around the turn of the nineteenth century, you might find yourself at a hotspot of commercial and cultural exchange, also known as the Pomor trade. Russian vessels from Arkhangelsk would offer grain and wood in exchange for fish from Norwegian-speaking fishermen, giving rise to a now extinct pidgin language called

“*russenorsk*,” Russian-Norwegian (Minaeva & Karlin, 2020). Danish-speaking state servants would ensure some sort of colonial law and order as well as taxation. Sámi speaking *siida* groups would arrive with reindeer for summer pasture and might use the opportunity to trade in fur to acquire capital for taxes, while Finnish or Qvæn-speaking immigrants might have settled permanently to cultivate the land. Most people would be likely to take part in conversation in a language other than their mother tongue, and some would speak several languages. Each group would engage with landscapes and seascapes far beyond the village itself, reliant on sparsely populated hinterlands, and far-reaching trade networks. Comparing this village with a rural settlement further south, you might be struck by what would seem like a vibrant and dynamic microcosm, or a “melting-pot,” far from the image of distant remoteness that is so often associated with the Arctic today.

Many have suggested that distance and low population density have enabled a particularly irresponsible kind of Arctic extractivism (Sörlin et al., 2023; see Chapter 2), and this is also one of the conclusions of this volume. If we suggest that rampant Arctic extractivism is made possible by distance, then we must also ask how and when such perceived distance became a defining feature of the Arctic, and for whom?

Distance is a relational term. It is defined through the framework of an often unspecified location elsewhere, usually in relation to somewhere else that is implicitly seen as a center. Today, distance is a ubiquitous characteristic attributed to practically all Arctic settlements that are part of nation states with territories beyond the Arctic Circle. Defined in relation to territorial and state borders, and state capitals and urban centers invariably located in the south, Arctic regions become “distant by default.” This is the case for all Scandinavian nation states, Russia, Canada, and Alaska, where most of the nations’ territories are situated north of the capital cities (which are far south of the Arctic circle). Whether these Arctic territories were included, occupied, colonized, annexed, or stolen matters less; they all came to share the feature of remoteness in relation to their respective nation states. Remoteness, or being perceived as distant, is thus a geopolitical effect of inclusion or annexation rather than a feature of the place as such.

One may argue that when state borders were drawn between Finland, Russia, Sweden, and Norway in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, borders that cut across Sápmi in ways that were detrimental to mobile Indigenous livelihoods, they effectively also enacted these Arctic regions as “peripheral.” Once the center of its own world, Sápmi became fragmented, subject to distant, contradictory, and overlapping policies of distant geopolitical entities that are now recognized as separate and legitimate nation states.² In this perspective, distance becomes a colonizing effect, solidified in various practices of appropriation that together effectively orchestrate distance as a feature of the Arctic.³ For Polar explorers, Arctic

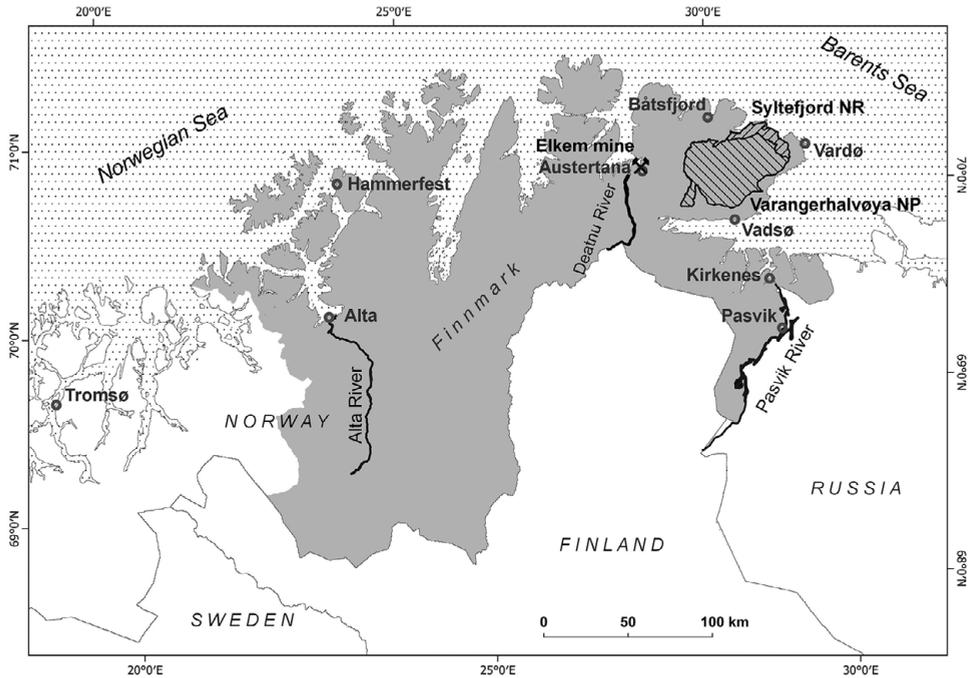


Figure 12.2 Location map of Northern Norway. Drawn by Christian Fohringer

remoteness is a logistical challenge and an obstacle to conquer; for artists and naturalists, it is a romantic feature of its attraction (Ween, 2020). But the consistent pattern of remoteness as a geopolitical effect teaches us that distance is part of a broader re-contextualization of a place, through which the power of definition is shifted from the insider's perspective to the outsider's gaze (Lien, 2003).

The asymmetry of distance continues to haunt, even when landscapes are legally protected. When the Varanger peninsula national park (NP) (Figure 12.2) was established in 2006, local inhabitants received a brochure in their mailbox, from Norwegian national authorities, presenting these "Arctic and ancient landscapes." Accompanied by stunning photos of landscape formations, their own immediate surroundings were introduced with a vignette, citing a geologist's travelogue from 1831:

The grandeur, the curious melancholy of this scene cannot be described in words. The sacred loneliness, is for us located in the mountain ranges of the high North, or on the distant sandy shores, flushed by the ocean (Keilhau, 1831, author's translation⁴).

Rendering Varanger as "melancholic," "ancient," "Arctic," and "lonely," people in Varanger were presented with the Norwegian authorities' rather peculiar perspective of their homeland, disconnected from their own intimate knowledge and

landscape practices. The peninsula is far from untouched; it has been a site of food procurement for infinite generations, and it still is (Lien, 2020). Silencing local practices (or rendering them irrelevant in the presentation of the national park), the Directorate of Environment indirectly paved the way for further dispossession of local livelihoods in the name of nature conservation, protection, and increased wildlife tourism in allegedly “untouched nature.” Even without extractive mining, a pattern of distancing persists, enabling and justifying local Arctic people as inconvenient occupants of landscapes that have been repurposed in the name of nature conservation.

The attribution of distance (or remoteness) to sparsely populated territories within contemporary nation states seems, then, to place them at risk of becoming rampant zones of extractivism, out of sight for the majority of the state population and electorate. Locals who have carved out a living in these territories, practicing livelihoods that predate the nation-state, risk being sacrificed as well, removed or dispossessed from their subsistence livelihoods, or forced to remake themselves into persons compatible with the ambitions of progressive nation states. Being (re-) defined as remote within a modern nation state, as Arctic communities invariably are, means being locked into an asymmetrical relation in which your homeland is quite likely to become a future sacrifice zone (Reinert, 2018).

Shifting Scales and Future Commons

Most of the Varanger territory was never privately owned. Property relations in East Finnmark were not legally formalized⁵ by the state until 1775, and even then, only a fraction of the territory was titled as property, partly because public servants were only sporadically present (Ravna, 2020). This lack of formally legalized ownership is the most important reason why Finnmark, like many other Arctic territories, became by default property of the Danish-Norwegian nation state, and later of independent Norway.⁶ But the fact that property relations were not legally recognized by the state does not mean that the territory was not subject to ownership. Arctic ownership takes many forms but is often fluid, shifting with seasons, relational, shared, and subtle (e.g., Kramvig, Guttorm, & Kantonen, 2019; Ravna, 2020). Hence, ownership in the Arctic is not immediately legible to the apparatus of state governance. As a result, such relations of ownership are also often ignored, or perhaps it leaves local claims conveniently “out of sight” for central authorities, facilitating continued dispossession through soft colonial power. In any case, this makes Arctic (and Antarctic) territories particularly vulnerable to extractivist projects, and easily appropriated by “the logic of frontier world making” (Ogden, 2018: 68). Most importantly, fluid practices of ownership tend to leave Arctic peoples’ out of the equation when revenue is distributed and

decisions are being made. To the extent they are represented, their position is as “stakeholders” rather than as legal owners.⁷

To exemplify how Arctic ownership differs from private property, considering the Sámi term *meahcci* is instructive. Often mistranslated to the Norwegian term for outfields (*utmark*) which derives its meaning through a contrast to cultivated agricultural “infields”, *meahcci* denotes an area of multiple affordances. It is a place where things get done and could be referred to as a “taskscape” (Ingold, 1993), but it is also more than that. As Joks, Østmo, and Law (2020) note, *meahcci* is multiple, shifting with seasons and used for different purposes. Hence, “*muorrameahcci* is where you collect firewood, *luomemeahcci* is where you go cloudberry picking” (Joks et al., 2020: 309). While *meahcci* is crucial for survival, it is rarely subject to individual control. Rather, it is shared in a way that is partly captured by the English term “commons.” But *meahcci* is also about unpredictable encounters with lively and powerful beings (Joks et al., 2020). In this way, *meahcci* is more than a unit of shared governance that centers humans as the subject owners (Ostrom, 1990); rather, it refuses a sharp a-priori distinction between human and non-humans, or nature and culture. Finally, while *meahcci* can sometimes involve exclusivity based on internal distribution of rights, such rights are rarely absolute, and they are associated with seasonal resources rather than the territorial land as such.

Consequently, when the *siida* unit on the Varanger peninsula is pushed to recede land to wind turbines or mining operations, they cannot claim that the land “belongs” exclusively to them. It never did. All they can do is to argue that their reindeer needs the pasture at specific times of the year, and all they can hope for, if the traditional ways of using the land are sacrificed by governing authorities and the project is realized, is some form of monetary compensation for the loss of future income.

This makes *meahcci*, or the “commons-like” land Arctic inhabitants rely on not only up for grabs, a kind of “terra-nullius” that is underexploited according to the state. It also rhetorically replaces local notions of sharing in *meahcci* by notions of commons that derive their meaning from a national or planetary scale. The *siida* unit’s reluctance to give up pasture may, for example, be countered by a moral imperative that Sámi too should take responsibility for the planetary “common good,” such as mitigating climate change through renewable energy. Thus, the inherent reciprocity and long-term commitment between Arctic people and their specific landscapes is replaced by a *different* kind of reciprocal commitment, at a different scale. While sacrifices implied in twentieth-century mining projects were rhetorically justified in relation to the welfare state in the name of economic progress (Hastrup & Lien, 2020),⁸ the sacrifices of the twenty-first century are legitimized at a global or planetary scale. Mineral extraction is now justified by future demand for minerals for battery components, while wind-turbines are

replacing fossil fuels and mitigating climate change. In this way, *meahcci* is a sacrifice that Arctic peoples are expected to make to secure our “future commons” or the shared resources that societies require to sustain human life on earth.

Colonial Dispossession

When the Norwegian parliament agreed on initiating and supporting inner colonization (*indre kolonisasjon*) in the early 1900s, they were not thinking of overseas migration. On the contrary, in an effort to curb the wave of Norwegian citizens seeking a future in the United States, the term “inner colonization” alluded to places like Finnmark, that is, remote and northern regions of the country. These were regions where national borders with neighboring Russia and Finland had only recently been established, multiethnic regions where people were as likely to speak Finnish and Sámi (Lappish) as they were to speak Norwegian. These were “distant” places inhabited by folks who were increasingly identified as belonging to an inferior “race” (Kyllingstad, 2012). Lapps were seen as less developed in relation to human evolution, and many assumed they would naturally be overtaken by the allegedly more advanced Norwegian “race.” The term “inner colonization” was soon replaced by *bureising*,⁹ which denotes the establishment of a farm (farmland) where there was none before. State support for *bureising* was granted through agricultural societies to cultivate both soil and marshes, especially in the north. Hence, Norwegian speaking farmers who intended to relocate and settle in the north could apply for a loan with favorable conditions, and state subsidies for *bureising* continued several decades after the Second World War.

Colonial dispossession across the Arctic goes far beyond the realm of industrial mining. “Inner colonization” is not just an archaic term discussed in the Norwegian parliament more than a hundred years ago. As pointed out in various ways across the present volume, it is a specific frame of mind, preceding the extractivist paradigm (Sörlin, 2023, see Chapter 1) but still visible today (Lien, 2021). It is a premise for policies that continuously seek “development” of a region seen as “lacking,” and crucial in the making of Arctic minerals as resources ripe for extraction. The option of not fully considering the sacrifices entailed in resource extractivism rests, I suggest, on this colonial disposition, which, in turn, facilitates further dispossession (Sörlin et al., 2023, see Chapter 2).

The discovery in 2021 of unmarked graves from Canadian boarding schools is a particularly stark example of the shattering atrocities bestowed on Indigenous peoples whose suffering persists (e.g., Simpson, 2014; Stevenson, 2014). In Scandinavian Sápmi, the aftermath of national borders led to forced migration and broken kinship ties that still haunt (e.g., Labba, 2021). Dispossession concerns not only land as such, or the specific area that the mining operation claims for

extraction. Modes of knowing, of language, and of identity have been undermined simultaneously, often justified by racial paradigms.

Such paradigms informed not only early twentieth century parliamentary debates in Arctic nation states (as exemplified above) but also national policies concerning schooling, health (Stevenson, 2014), language policy, hunting regulations (Blaser, 2009), property regulations (Helander, 2004), and museums and cultural heritage (Finbog, 2021) to mention but a few areas of colonial dispossession. Caring for worlds beyond the human cannot be disentangled from the words in which such worlds are spoken. To dwell in the Arctic is to engage what Mikkel Nils Sara (2009) calls the co-existence of predictability and unpredictability, often overlooked in nature management policy, which is nearly always framed in the hegemonic language of the nation state.

What is the basis for social and environmental justice in the aftermath of these circumstances? If the Arctic is deeply transformed by colonial dispossession, scarred by loss at multiple levels, how then can it become a sovereign region? A common political response is to hand over responsibilities for difficult decisions to local governments, at the municipal or county level. This is the situation in current controversies over mining in Finnmark. A major factor in reopening a contested coppermine in Repparfjord, for example, was a decision in favor by a narrow majority in the municipal council. In Varanger, the planned expansion of the Elkem quartzite mine has divided the small village of Austertana, pitting kin and neighbors against one another, just as it divided the council of the “Finnmark Property,” which opposed the plan by the double vote of its chairman.

While the expansion remains unsettled, local divisions grow deeper. In this way, current modes of “post-colonial” governance that seek to hand over jurisdiction to the local level may inadvertently result in a “divide and rule” situation, with conflicts nearly as destructive for local livelihoods as the mining project itself. The problem is one of scale but also concerns modes of knowing. For the *siida* leaders negotiating with a Chinese-owned company and their professional consultants and impact analyses is nearly an impossible task. Representing only their own *siida* unit, and with practically no support from any institutional level other than their own lawyers, the unfolding battle echoes the story of David against Goliath.

Österlin and Raitio (2020) have proposed the term “double pressure” to capture such inter-related processes of fragmented landscapes and what they call fragmented “planscapes,” and the pressures that these multiple battles represent for affected communities of reindeer owners. Several chapters in this volume (e.g., Österlin et al., 2023, see Chapter 5; Rosqvist et al., 2023, see Chapter 6) suggest that reindeer owners are not the only ones affected by extractive operations, hence the term double or multiple pressures has a broader application. The stark

discrepancies of sheer power and scale between multinational extractive industries on the one hand and local Arctic communities on the other exacerbates the situation even more. How then, can local communities and Indigenous peoples attain the empowerment needed to withstand the overwhelming strength of multinational mining companies? Wounded by a policy pattern of “divide and rule,” what sort of hope exists for what we might tentatively think of as a post-colonial Arctic?

To ask such questions is to move beyond mining, and slightly beyond the scope of the present volume. Much work is already done, and especially by Indigenous scholars (Sara, 2009; Simpson, 2014; Joks et al., 2020; Finbog, 2021) to define a post-colonial future in the Arctic.

Evidentiary Practices in the Face of Loss and Disruption

Struggling to capture the continuities of successive epidemics among Canadian Inuits (tuberculosis in the 1940s, suicide since the 1980s), Lisa Stevenson embraces uncertainty as the only way of paying attention to the “moments when the facts falter” (Stevenson, 2014: 2). The suffering and loss, which is still unfolding, calls for an epistemological approach that transcends the evidentiary practices of conventional science. Stevenson (2014: 2) proposes:

a mode of anthropological listening that makes room for hesitation – a way of listening for that which persistently disrupts the security of what is known for sure. This entails taking the uncertain, the confused – that which is not clearly understood – as a legitimate ethnographic object.

Searching for a way to talk about life that is, as she phrases it “constitutively beside itself,” Stevenson’s intervention has relevance beyond the atrocities of Inuit epidemics. Loss is inevitable in colonial encounters, and some forms of loss can hardly be articulated. How can we even begin to address the loss of the ability to speak the language that was denied to you by your parents, in their well-meaning attempt to protect their child from the destined discrimination bestowed on speakers of an Indigenous language. Such is the loss of those who grew up in post-war Finnmark, for example (Lien, 2020). How can we address the loss of land, of *meahcci* among people of the *siida* that happened to cross the Norwegian-Swedish border on their way to summer pastures, when their access to the coast was denied by the state? Such is the loss of Sámi of Swedish citizenship during the decades that followed Norway’s independence from Sweden in 1905, as the members of the now fragmented *siida* group were forcibly relocated to unfamiliar terrains much further South (Labba, 2021). And how can we address the loss of an entire *siida* group of East Sámi (also known as Skolt Sámi), who in the aftermath of the establishment of the border with Russia in 1826 chose to be Russian citizens

and were forced to regroup on the Eastern side of the Pasvik river (Andersen, 1989)? Their subsequent loss as “collateral damage” in several wars and political upheavals is beyond the scope of this chapter, but serves here as a reminder of what colonial relocation and loss may entail.

Similar reflections are articulated by anthropologist Yael Navaro’s more recent article (2020) proposing what she calls “a negative methodology” as an epistemological approach in the aftermath of mass violence. Navaro is concerned with conditions of possibility for anthropological and historical work in relation to prolonged mass violence, and is critical of conventional anthropology’s “positive outlook for evidentiary practices in the field” (Navaro, 2020: 161). More precisely, she draws on how the scholars working in the aftermath of mass atrocity have developed ethnographic methods that seek to address the gaps and hollows in such sites, summarized by what she calls “a negative methodology.” This approach may be appropriate when the accessibility of evidence cannot be assumed, when no archive is available, witnesses are missing, or forcibly relocated, or perhaps “refashioned” into another way of inhabiting the world. Navaro has mass violence in mind and focuses on people. In relation to extractivism in the Arctic, we may also ask what a negative epistemology might look like in the aftermath of rampant landscape transformation. How can we grasp the triple undoing of peoples or livelihoods and of landscapes that is a feature of ruination in the North?

One way to approach this is to be attentive to subtle materials, traces in the landscape, and in the people who remain, which might inadvertently open up spaces for posing questions differently. What stories linger between the lines, and what remains unspoken? What sort of absences are produced in the assembling of archival material? And what might a rust-covered plough tell us about projects that failed? Such questions may stitch together fragments of lives that may contribute to an acknowledgment of loss, intervening into persistent patterns, and possibly also be helpful as a first step toward reconciliation.

Notes

- 1 Jean-Baptiste Aplhonse Karr, 1849, *epigram on the January issue of his journal Les Guêpes (The Wasps)*. (Source, Wiktionary).
- 2 Map-making is an important practice of nation building, In the Finnmark region, mayor Peter Schnitler’s protocols from 1742–1745 are of particular importance (for details, see Hansen & Schmidt, 1985).
- 3 For a similar argument relating to Australian conceptions of distance, see Lien, 2005; Blainey, 2001. For a material semiotics approach to distance and objects, see Law, 2002.
- 4 In Norwegian “*Denne hellige ensomhed, som i den nye verdensdel endnu bor i urskogene, er hos os hentyet til det høie nordens fjeldstrøkninger eller til disse fjerne strandbredder, som havet beskyller.*” Source: B. M. Keilhau 1831, available on: www.altabibliotek.net/finnmark/Keilhau/Reise.php (accessed 21 December 2021).
- 5 The legal term in Norwegian is that it remained “*umatrikulert*,” and thus by default property of the Danish-Norwegian state (Ravna, 2020).

- 6 In 2005, this was handed over to a new legal entity called the Finnmark Property (for details, see Ween & Lien, 2012).
- 7 As Sverker Sörlin has argued, “the stakeholder concept has served, perhaps inadvertently, the purpose of limiting the controversy to those with acknowledged rights to speak because of their stakes, as landowners, residents, community members” (Sörlin, 2021: 5).
- 8 Examples include the Alta River for Norway’s hydroelectric reserves, Kirkenes and Kiruna for much needed iron ore.
- 9 The term was first used in the Norwegian parliament by Klaus Sletten in a speech in 1918 (Almås, 2002: 76; for *bureising*, see Lien, 2020).

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