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**POSTCOLONIAL  
PERSPECTIVES ON  
THE EUROPEAN  
HIGH NORTH**

Unscrambling the Arctic

**Edited by  
Graham Huggan and  
Lars Jensen**



# Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North



Graham Huggan • Lars Jensen  
Editors

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Unscrambling the Arctic

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ISBN 978-1-137-58816-6      ISBN 978-1-137-58817-3 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-58817-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016942631

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors and authors would like to thank the European Commission for its support in funding the three-year international research project, “Arctic Encounters: Contemporary Travel/Writing in the European High North,” from which the work in this volume is drawn.



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## Introduction: Unscrambling the Arctic

*Graham Huggan*

**Abstract** While “scramble” is a useful term to describe the ravaging effects of contemporary neoliberal, political, and economic agendas on a rapidly changing Arctic, it is also reductive, overlooking the fact that the Arctic region—one of the most geographically and culturally diverse on the planet—is the uneven product of multiple, often highly disparate, colonial pasts. This chapter situates the contemporary European Arctic in the context of various scrambles for resources across the circumpolar High North and their reworking of colonial relations. However, it also argues the need for an “unscrambling” of the region and an appropriately critical re-reading of the discourses of alarmism and opportunism that underlie popular, often media-driven configurations of the “New North.”

**Keywords** Arctic • Colonialism • Geopolitics • New North • Reindigenisation

The scramble for the Arctic will not be settled by a single act.  
Charles Emmerson, *The Future History of the Arctic*

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**unscramble** *v.t.* **1.** Reverse the process of scrambling. **2.** Put into or restore to order; make sense of, render intelligible (anything muddled or intricate); disentangle (*lit. & fig.*); separate into constituent parts; *spec.* restore (a scrambled signal), interpret (a scrambled message).

*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*

It is not easy to make love in a cold climate when you have no money.

George Orwell, *Keep the Aspидistra Flying*

## INTRODUCTION: A TALE OF TWO ISLANDS

Consider two isolated islands, one little more than a speck, separated by thousands of miles of sparsely inhabited space in the High Arctic. The smaller of the two, Hans Island, can be found almost exactly halfway across the Nares Strait that divides Greenland from Ellesmere Island; the larger, Wrangel Island, lies 85 miles north of the Russian mainland, surrounded by a shifting layer of seaice that cuts it off from the Siberian coast.<sup>1</sup> Neither is a prepossessing place: Hans Island, viewed from above, has all the charm and consistency of a petrified cowpat, while Wrangel Island—an appropriate name, as will soon become apparent—can often barely be seen at all, being subject for much of the year to violent storms and blanketing fog.

Still, the two islands have both assumed a historical and political importance that transcends their uninspiring physical geography. Wrangel Island, Russian territory today, is most readily associated with the controversial twentieth-century Canadian polar explorer Vilhjálmur Stefánsson, whose characteristically vainglorious attempts to colonise the island would eventually propel it into “a diplomatic tug of war” involving Russia, Canada, Great Britain, and the USA.<sup>2</sup> Most readily associated outside Russia that is: for Stefánsson’s would-be colonists, incorporating Americans as well as Canadians, several of whom would lose their lives as a result of his three catastrophically misguided colonisation experiments, went unrecognised by Russia, which promptly pronounced them trespassers, confiscated their property, and repeatedly—definitively—declared the island to be Soviet domain.<sup>3</sup> Then as now, Russians connected Wrangel Island to one of their own, the no less self-aggrandising nineteenth-century explorer Ferdinand von Wrangel (alternatively transliterated as “Wrangell”). Wrangel is often credited with having discovered the island, though his own expeditions in the area had led him no further than deducing its existence. Probably

he is better known today for his expansionist exploits on behalf of the Russian-American company (RAC) in Alaska prior to its 1867 sale—which he himself bitterly contested—to the USA.<sup>4</sup>

As the American historian Melody Webb asserts, it would be difficult to find a more implausible object of imperial rivalry—in the Arctic or elsewhere—than the now largely forgotten Wrangel Island. Yet for a few decades in the early part of the twentieth century it was subject to competing claims of sovereignty and an unfortunate sequence of at best temporarily successful, at worst hopelessly hare-brained colonisation schemes.<sup>5</sup> Webb concludes that the fulsome tributes given to Stefánsson on returning to Canada from his first major Arctic expedition in 1913 “obscured the poor planning, mismanagement, egotism, and death that marked the enterprise”<sup>6</sup>—a tragicomic scenario all too familiar to chroniclers and readers of polar exploration, north and south alike (McCannon 2012; Moss 2009; Spufford 1996).

Scarcely less edifying, though in their own way just as entertaining, are the multiple stories that surround the still-unresolved sovereignty of Hans Island. Most versions return to 1973, when—in Michael Byers’ suitably breezy account—“Canada and Denmark agreed to divide the ocean floor between Canada and Greenland down the middle, using an equidistance line defined by 127 turning points.”<sup>7</sup> The issue of where Hans Island fell along this line was notionally cleared up by fixing the boundary at the low-water mark on one side of the island and then continuing it from its corresponding mark on the other, only for subsequent calculations to reveal that the island was slightly closer to Greenland than Canada.<sup>8</sup>

Vigorous Danish claims to the island ensued, accompanied by an alternating pattern of increasingly bizarre diplomatic stand-offs. The Danes argued that Hans Island had been used for centuries by Greenland Inuit as an integral part of their ancestral hunting grounds and was therefore “theirs” (i.e., the Danes’) as a result of continuous use and occupation. This does not appear to be a particularly convincing argument insofar as the same Inuit would frequently travel across to Ellesmere Island, now generally accepted as falling under Canadian sovereign control.<sup>9</sup> Canada’s territorial claim, meanwhile, revolved around the original transfer of the North American Arctic Archipelago (which excluded Greenland) from Britain in 1880; it also shakily cited “use and occupation” insofar as Canadian scientists had deployed the island as a research station, if only for a brief period during the Second World War.<sup>10</sup>

Tempers frayed after it was discovered that a Canadian oil company had been using the island to sound out the possibility of setting up drilling rigs

in the area.<sup>11</sup> “Threatening” appearances were staged involving Danish military jets, backed up by a semi-regular series of officially attended flag plantings. Not to be outdone, the Canadian government sent jet fighters of its own, while the rhetoric of Danish interference (“Viking hordes,” etc.) was crudely ratcheted up in the Canadian national press, which conflated the Hans Island dispute—a minor maritime border controversy—with larger Arctic sovereignty issues and land-based territorial claims.<sup>12</sup>

Byers suggests that one way of resolving the dispute might be to declare Hans Island a condominium, with Canada and Denmark sharing sovereignty over it.<sup>13</sup> A more recent, also more interesting, suggestion of Byers’ is that should the Greenland Inuit pursue native title, this would effectively invalidate both sets of national claims, operating on the principle that since the island has never been formally colonised, it is they, the Inuit, who “retain pre-existing, pre-colonial rights.”<sup>14</sup> This conundrum raises larger questions about what constitutes colonialism in the Arctic. It seems pointless to dispute that the Arctic—however defined—has not been, and to some extent still is, a colonised region, but it is equally obvious that not all areas of the Arctic have been formally colonised, and that those which have, have not been colonised *in the same way*.

A comparison between Wrangel Island and Hans Island is instructive in this context. The recent history of Wrangel Island would certainly fit most current definitions of colonialism, notably James Mahoney’s to the effect that “in modern world history, colonialism is marked by a state’s successful claim to sovereignty over a foreign land.”<sup>15</sup> Much more tenuous, however, are the legal criteria for sovereignty, for example, those founded on “use and occupation,” and their instrumentality as a basis for colonisation. Even the most systematic accounts of colonialism, such as Jürgen Osterhammel’s, have difficulty forging precise links between colonialism and sovereignty and between both of these and occupation. These accounts prefer to distinguish broadly between *types* of colony (“settlement colonies,” “exploitation colonies,” etc.) that require a greater or lesser colonial presence; and between *colonialism* as a system of domination, *colonisation* as a process of territorial acquisition, and *colony* as a particular kind of sociopolitical formation, usually if not always subject to metropolitan control.<sup>16</sup>

As Osterhammel admits, colonialism can exist without the formal existence of colonies, just as colonies can exist without the full apparatus of colonialism, but exceptions of these kinds tend to complicate rather than confirm the rule.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, colonisation can take place without the for-

mal process of colony building, while some colony building does not rely on colonisation, but on other more obviously violent forms of incursion that are based “on the sword rather than the [plough].”<sup>18</sup> Colonisation, indeed, is a singularly amorphous entity despite the routine brutalities it engenders, just as “the multiformity of colonial situations continues to confound efforts to define colonialism [itself].”<sup>19</sup>

Where does Hans Island fit into this template? Clearly the island has not been *colonised* in any formal sense, nor has any colonial presence, whether temporary or lasting, been established there. Yet it has still arguably been subject to *colonialism*: to sovereignty struggles in which rival powers look to benefit strategically—politically and, at least indirectly, economically—from the object of their claims. Hans Island, to put this in a different way, has been an object of disproportionate concern to people who have no intention of ever living there. In this respect, it is a microcosm of one particular version of the High Arctic, which revolves around *geopolitical advantage* rather than *cultural domination*. The two are inextricably connected, however, with both forming part of that hierarchical system of real and imaginary relations—one important historical manifestation of which is colonialism—that sustains all kinds of dominating activities in the nominally postcolonial era of today.<sup>20,21</sup>

For some time now, geopolitics has been the predominant lens through which an ongoing history of colonial relations has been looked at in the Arctic, an area which, seen in broad geopolitical terms, remains one of the most consistently exploited on Earth. At one level, it makes perfect sense to see the Arctic this way insofar as it constitutes a “region of peripheries [that] comprises more or less remote portions of seven countries: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.”<sup>22</sup> “The Arctic” is generally defined from without; indeed, much like “Asia” the term may make little sense to those who actually live there other than as a strategic means of asserting regional solidarity or leveraging central government support (Huggan 2015). The language of geopolitics constructs the Arctic as an object of national and international concern, often centring on global security issues. It therefore seems worth asking to what extent geopolitics contributes to the colonial scenarios—both past and present—it dissects, even if more recent, critically reflexive geopolitical perspectives on the Arctic have shifted to considering the security, environmental and otherwise, of Arctic peoples themselves.

The work of the Cambridge-based polar researchers Michael Bravo and Gareth Rees is exemplary for this particular kind of critical geopoly-

tics, which focuses on a changing Arctic but interrogates the deterministic discourses that are regularly mapped onto it by political scientists and other designated Arctic experts, several of whom have recently taken to describing the Arctic—whose future is now almost axiomatically seen as being crucial for the health of the planet—as having become subject to ecological “state change” (Borgerson 2008; Bravo 2014; Dodds 2010; Young 2009; Zellen 2009). Such discourses, Bravo and Rees imply, risk reinscribing the Arctic as an object of western knowledge: knowledge that is derived from science and technology, refracted though the modernising rhetoric of international relations, and seconded to ideologies of progress that openly assert global imperatives but tacitly assume western norms and principles of politico-economic development and social change. Such knowledge arguably inflicts what the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) might call a kind of “epistemic violence” on the Arctic that overrides local understandings in the broader geopolitical interest of repositioning the region within a hyper-competitive globalised world. Certainly, it tends to undervalue the experience of the Inuit and other Arctic indigenous peoples, whose role in coming to terms with a changing Arctic is crucial, and whose situated knowledge and knowledge systems are not necessarily compatible with western paradigms—if not necessarily incompatible either, as romanticised models of indigenous resistance suggest (Banerjee 2012).

Bravo and Rees’ more particular emphasis is on what they call “cryo-politics”: the reassessment of ice as a central feature within geopolitical discourse about the Arctic. Cryo-politics goes far beyond scientific calculations of retreating ice coverage and its implications for new navigable sea routes through the Arctic; rather, its main aim is to interrogate the “unwarranted environmental determinism” that is currently being used to gauge Arctic politics at a time of accelerated climate change.<sup>23</sup> An underlying objective is to reaffirm the inherently flexible nature of *maritime* space in accordance with Christian Brünner and Alexander Soucek’s revisionist definition of the Arctic as “a maritime space surrounded by land which has been inhabited by people for thousands of years and which belongs to sovereign countries.”<sup>24</sup>

Interpreting the Arctic as maritime space arguably requires a different kind of vocabulary and approach, a different geopolitical apparatus, to that applied to solid landforms—and a different one again insofar as Arctic maritime environments frequently offer a shifting *combination* of land and water encapsulated in that most materially volatile and conceptually pre-

curious of physical elements, sea ice. As Satya Savitzky among others has pointed out, the liminal status of sea ice, which is neither fully water nor wholly land, presents considerable difficulties for international maritime law, not least in terms of adjudicating sovereignty claims. This has resulted in the coexistence of two competing theories of ice law in which ice is either seen as land, and therefore claimable as sovereign territory, or as water, and therefore subject to the freedom of the seas (Savitzky 2013; see also Oude et al. 2001).<sup>25</sup>

All of this has ramifications for any attempt to understand histories of colonialism, and current processes of decolonisation, in the Arctic. More specifically, Bravo and Rees' emphasis on the complex navigability of Arctic space suggests an urgent need to *unscramble* the Arctic. This entails wresting it away from its persistent status as a fixed object of western control and knowledge, and reasserting the value of those micro-histories of Arctic space and territory (e.g., those surrounding Wrangel and Hans Islands) that complicate western universalising narratives of technological progress, politico-economic development, and ecological "state change." Unscrambling the Arctic potentially involves at least three overlapping elements, each implicitly bound up in a decolonising politics. First, unscrambling the Arctic works towards *depolarising* it as a licence for "end-is-nigh" alarmism and "get-rich-quick" opportunism: the twin frontier logics that underlie contemporary configurations of the "New North" (see section 2 below).<sup>26</sup> Second, unscrambling the Arctic implicitly *desecuritises* it as a largely defunct military zone, a parody of its former Cold War self, even as it recognises that a variety of Arctic stakeholders—both indigenous and not, and often operating with different motives—will continue to debate the region "around issues of environmental security, food security, and human rights."<sup>27,28</sup> Third, unscrambling the Arctic effectively *deterritorialises* it, not so much in the literal as in the figural sense of reimagining it as an ontologically plural and fundamentally unstable, although by no means uninterpretable or unnavigable, space.

It would be naïve to imagine that unscrambling the Arctic in this way would reverse the processes that inform the current "scramble for the Arctic": a popular if by no means entirely inappropriate catchphrase which tends gleefully to batten onto contemporary media-driven perceptions of the heightened importance of the region as a strategic resource base (Craciun 2009; Dodds and Nuttall 2016; Howard 2009; Sale and Potapov 2010). Rather, it suggests that the "scramble for the Arctic" might itself be in need of unscrambling, not just to reveal the conflicting

messages embedded within it, but also to challenge the utopian languages of Arctic commonality and consent that are increasingly ranged against it. This conflictual space includes the heady view that the Arctic has moved into a post-Cold-War era of non-governmentally determined transnational cooperation (Young 2005, 2009), or defensive rejoinders of the kind that cite “the [surprising] absence of jurisdictional conflict” in the region or assert, contrary to populist understandings, that “there is no ‘scramble’ on the part of [the major Arctic] coastal states.”<sup>29</sup>

Unscrambling the Arctic does not entail denying the existence of a “cooperative” alongside a “competitive” Arctic; rather, it seeks to deconstruct the binary opposition between them, and to challenge the polarised geopolitical rhetoric that gave rise to the opposition in the first place—a rhetoric that also underlies more recent articulations of ecological “state change” (Bravo 2014). Unscrambling the Arctic stresses the need to exercise acute vigilance towards those dominant languages, both scholarly and popular, that have done much to frame colonialist representations of the Arctic. It also entails a critique of expert opinion on what should be done with the region, and a revisiting of the question of how to determine the major interpretative patterns through which Arctic peoples and practices are currently understood (Ryall et al. 2010). The humanities have a key role to play here, both in showing how language produces the realities it purports to describe and in positing imaginative counter-narratives of the Arctic that either implicitly complicate or explicitly challenge the unexamined presentism, as well as speculative fervour, of current social-scientific accounts (Ryall et al. 2010; see also Bravo 2014). Some of these latter provocatively assert that the Arctic, and the High North it sometimes metonymically represents, has entered a radically new phase, both environmentally defined (climate change) and economically reoriented (Nordic affluence); a few go further, suggesting that this new phase might sketch a model for the world to come. Such accounts are less scientific analyses, perhaps, than an excitable kind of punditry on the Arctic, and it is to this punditry, defined in part by its obsession with newness as well as its weakness for neologism, that I now turn.

## NEOPHYTES AND NEOLOGISTS: INTERROGATING THE “NEW NORTH”

Let me begin, as I did in the last section, by dealing in turn with two very different examples, Laurence C. Smith’s *The New North* (2012) and Alun Anderson’s *After the Ice* (2009): both well-written books aimed at a gen-

eral readership, and both designed at least in part to capture the volatile atmosphere, as well as the changing strategic importance, of the High North. The premise of Smith's vivid thought experiment, which projects the world forward to 2050, is to ask whether mounting global pressures might cause new societies to emerge in places that might otherwise seem to be unappealing, even unamenable, to human settlement. The provisional answer it gives is that it is the northern geographic regions that will assume an exponentially higher strategic value, and correspondingly greater economic importance, than they have today.<sup>30</sup> The scene is set for Smith's "New North," which he envisions in terms of "all land and oceans lying 45 [degrees north] or higher currently held by the United States, Canada, Iceland, Greenland (Denmark), Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia,"<sup>31</sup> an economically rather than geographically defined region he also dubs, with a sly nod to its profit-indexed Pacific counterpart, the "Northern Rim." The ascent of the North, Smith suggests, owes to the pressures brought about by chronic overpopulation and the increased demand for natural resources it entails.

The Arctic—less clearly defined—belongs to this "New North," but as a periphery of it, and Smith conforms to populist understandings of the Arctic as a globally connected space, but also one that is paradoxically "cut off from the rest of the world."<sup>32</sup> Smith is less enamoured of the populist rhetoric of "scramble," which he briefly invokes—intensifying resource wars, the dismal prospect of remilitarisation, and so on—only to turn his back on it, siding instead with Young and others in seeing the Arctic as having entered a new era of fruitful cooperation—a cooperative spirit which has persisted, he says, "despite [all] the hype about mad scrambles and looming Arctic wars."<sup>33</sup> Instead, he suggests, the stage is set for another kind of carve-up from which the Northern Rim countries (he uses the unfortunate acronym NORCs) stand massively to gain—not least from the much-anticipated new northern seaways that will spring up to feed an already hungry Arctic maritime economy, allowing ships to gorge in situ on northern oil and gas, then turn around and carry it to eagerly waiting markets in the south.<sup>34</sup>

This vision of plenty, hyperbolic in its turn, is backed up by the cheerful view of Northern Rim cities, despite their cold winters, ranking "among the world's happiest places to live."<sup>35</sup> This is only likely to continue, Smith suggests, as "against a global backdrop of rising material wealth, environmental stress, and total human population [...] smaller, flourishing cultures [are set to grow] amid the milder winters and abundant natural resources packed into the northern quarters of the planet."<sup>36</sup> The Arctic

belongs to this clement vision, though Smith implicitly critiques stereotypical views of “a place [once] perceived as a maritime graveyard and killer of men [and] now perceived as dissolving into a frontier ocean, laden with natural-resource riches for the taking.” He furthermore pointedly adds that such contrapuntal images have been “firmly cemented into public consciousness” precisely because there “are so few actual Arctic residents around to protest these frames.”<sup>37</sup>

Smith notably fails, however, to enquire what might become of these peripheral residents of the “New North,” or to ponder the implications of those new geographies of poverty—within as well as between regions—that have recently arisen under the conditions of globalisation. The geography of poverty invokes a different kind of scramble, not so much the scramble for profit as the scramble to survive (Bravo 2014; see also Klare 2013). Anderson’s account, while it has problems of its own, certainly cannot be accused of overlooking this. More interested than Smith in seeing the Arctic as a region in its own right, Anderson nonetheless admits that this region has been discursively fashioned by outsiders—“the scientists who study it, the politicians who want to control it, [and] the oilmen who [seek] to exploit it”—rather than by “those [diverse] indigenous people who call it home.”<sup>38</sup> He tries to counteract this objectifying tendency by spending time with the local (Canadian) Inuit. But he only finds that, despite surface confidence in the future, histories of “colonial paternalism”<sup>39</sup> are being replayed in the poor living conditions, and overall lack of economic opportunities, to which many Arctic indigenous communities are currently being subjected. They are also replayed in the government-sponsored dependency that keeps Inuit and other northern indigenous peoples locked in “a state of financial and emotional despair.”<sup>40</sup>

Here as elsewhere, Anderson rehearses “dark ecological” tropes of the Arctic that are powerfully if predictably associated with “the fastest single environmental catastrophe to hit this planet since the rise of human civilization”: contemporary anthropogenic climate change.<sup>41</sup> And as might similarly be expected, he also supports “scramble” scenarios that pit Arctic stakeholders against each other in an essentially unwinnable struggle for natural resources, and “vanishing” scenarios that foresee the disappearance of keystone Arctic species, great and small alike. Arctic development, Anderson suggests, is a catalogue of risks, just as its ecology is a compilation of “horror stories.”<sup>42</sup> Even the oil and gas boom, which has the potential to bring jobs and prosperity to the region, is written off as “short-lived.” Arctic oil, Anderson gloomily contemplates, might soon enough become

“as archaic as wooden warships,” and if gas will run further, it too seems inexorably destined to run out.<sup>43</sup> Thus, while Anderson does not rule out the possibility of an environmentally protected Arctic that belongs to “the global community, with living standards to match,” he seems much more drawn to its negative counterpart, which conjures up visions of an “abandoned” rather than a “sustainable” Arctic—one that leaves “Arctic people living [in a ruined landscape] among transient workers from the south.”<sup>44</sup>

Miserabilism of this kind can be found in a number of consciousness-raising popular accounts of a warming Arctic. It also surfaces from time to time in allegorical eco-activist vehicles which, pitting victimised Natives against a bullying State, gather voices of indigenous resistance even as global climate change persists in “wreaking havoc” and international resource wars “continue to spread.”<sup>45</sup> My aim here is not to deride such vehicles, but to suggest that they may involuntarily be continuous with the neoliberal discourses of political gamesmanship and economic opportunism they oppose. Certainly, the tropes I identified earlier as “end-is-nigh” alarmism and “get-rich-quick” opportunism are closely joined within the overarching context of a neocolonial “scramble for the Arctic.”<sup>46</sup> And both are incorporated, in turn, into a binary “Arcticist” discourse which has historically governed western expectations of the Arctic; and which, like its close ideological counterpart, Orientalism, also serves as a self-perpetuating mechanism for exercising control and authority over the part-mythologised region it explores.<sup>47</sup>

“Arcticism” is one of the more functional of a series of neologisms—others include “Arcticity” (Pálsson 2002), “borealism” (Schram 2011), and “Scandinavian orientalism” (Jóhannsson 2000)—which attempt to account for either the particular inflection of colonial discourse in the Arctic, or one form or another of Nordic exceptionalism, or both (see section 3 below). Meanwhile, the Arctic has become a magnet for all manner of fly-by-night reportage, attracting media commentators who up till then had shown little interest in the region, as well as generating new forms of cross-disciplinary scholarship that have helped turn Arctic studies into one of the most exciting and innovative of contemporary research fields. Arctic research, like the Arctic itself, is in a boom phase, with all the benefits and pitfalls attached to this, and with particular attention being given to the circumpolar region as part of a politically and economically reconstructed North (Heininen and Southcott 2010).

One of the more interesting recent developments has been the renewed attempt to construct the Arctic Ocean as a “Polar Mediterranean,” a kind

of international free-trade zone that involves political cooperation as well as commercial transaction between the major Arctic states.<sup>48</sup> A further neologism comes to mind here: “mediterraneanism,” whose twentieth-century Fascistic roots and nineteenth-century connections to European cultural suprematism make the idea of the Arctic Ocean as a “new Mediterranean” considerably less attractive.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, as Iain Chambers argues, the Mediterranean, far from representing the pinnacle of European civilisational success, has come to symbolise all that is most divisive and exclusionary about the European project and to provoke reflection, in turn, on the “profound ‘unfreedom’ that characterizes the modern world.”<sup>50</sup>

Little wonder, then, that the geographer Philip Steinberg in a recent piece lays into “Polar mediterraneanism” as a damaging form of Arctic Orientalism—the “othering” process by which the polar regions (and the Arctic as a whole) are separated into “successful” zones and their “unsuccessful” equivalents in accordance with a neoliberal logic of progress, modernisation, and development that is bound to benefit some Arctic states more than others, and that risks setting them against each other as well as creating a new Cold War scenario in which the west is set against the rest (Steinberg 2016). As Steinberg contends, “mediterraneanization is as much an ‘othering’ process on Europe’s northern border as it is on its southern border,” and the hierarchical relations it produces are symptomatic of the racialised outlooks that underpin the proposed emergence of a “New North” (Steinberg 2016; see also Stuhl 2013).

These outlooks are not just projected onto the North; they also exist *within* the North, and are contained within, if by no means coterminous with, ideologies of Nordic exceptionalism (Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2012). In the next section, I want to look briefly at Nordic exceptionalism in an Arctic state that will prove to be exceptional in other ways, and that also has strong links with the Polar Mediterranean: Iceland. As Steinberg suggests, the economic opportunism that is at the heart of northern-style mediterraneanism is neatly captured in the wishful diplomatic image of Iceland as an “Arctic Singapore.” Steinberg cites Iceland’s ambassador to Norway, Gunnar Pálsson, to the effect that:

We may now find ourselves on the threshold of a new epoch, where changes in the patterns of climate, settlements, energy consumption, trade and transportation will begin to converge in a way that could transform the world we live in. In effect, we could be moving towards the activation of the Arctic in a manner that would radically alter, if not reverse, our conceptions of

the world's periphery and center. We could, in effect, be moving towards a world with the pole in the middle: the Polar Mediterranean.<sup>51</sup>

As will be argued in more detail below, Pálsson's confident pitch masks recurrent anxieties over Iceland's place in the global economy; its cultural and political purchase as a European country; and its role in either driving or supporting the cultural, political, and economic reorderings that accompany neoliberal conceptions of a modernising Arctic and a lucrative "New North." "New North" rhetoric of this kind should give pause for thought given the colonial histories that subtend both southern- and northern-style mediterraneanisms, while Steinberg's analysis suggests further that such ostensibly *anti*-colonial discourses of regional transformation contain colonising tendencies of their own. What colonial discourses are at work, then, in self-representations of a "recentred" Iceland? The question can only be answered by looking back at Iceland's not always readily acknowledged colonial past.

### COLONIALISM IN A COLD CLIMATE: THE CURIOUS CASE OF ICELAND

Although Iceland may not have participated directly in the European colonial project, it certainly profited from it, while it has also contributed to a regional Scandinavian "colonialism at the margins" in which the line between coloniser and colonised, already tenuous and shifting across so many different kinds of colonial dispensations, is conspicuously blurred (see also Chap. 5 of this volume).<sup>52</sup> Iceland's connection to colonialism has been further complicated by fractious historical debates as to whether Iceland was or was not a colony, with the term "dependency" being preferred by many national historians. Some of these have also stressed that although Iceland was subject to the Danish monarchy for several centuries, it occupied a special and, in certain privileged cases, semi-autonomous status in the realm (Ellenberger 2009; Loftsdóttir 2012a; Lucas and Parigoris 2013).<sup>53</sup>

This slightly contorted thinking has lent support to a nationalist approach that sees Iceland as having maintained a separate identity long before the actual acquisition of independence, which was eventually clinched in 1944 although its origins stretch back at least as far as the nineteenth century (Lucas and Parigoris 2013). Paradoxically, it also supports the view of the Danes as "benign" colonisers (Naum and Nordin 2013a,

2013b). This erroneous view, still clung onto by many Danes themselves, is of a piece with those larger patterns of Nordic exceptionalism that have allowed the Nordic countries to see themselves as peripheral to exploitative forms of European colonialism and not recognise their own contribution to them. Exceptionalist discourse has also allowed a perception of the Nordic countries as central to the putatively progressive and rational forms of global modernity they helped create (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Mulinari et al. 2009).

“Nordic exceptionalism,” it need hardly be said, is as fraught a term as “European colonialism”; and just as heterogeneous, with distinct national inflections but also some commonalities, such as the aforementioned tendency to claim innocence in relation to the European colonial past. Its Icelandic variant can be seen in two mutually supportive modes: as resisting those demeaning images of the country (“uncivilised,” “backward,” etc.) that circulated—not least in other Nordic countries—for many centuries, and as embracing an alternative image repertoire in which Iceland features *both* as an integral part of ancient Nordic tradition *and* as distinct from it, as demonstrably unique (Loftsdóttir 2012a). Similarly, Icelandic exceptionalism renders Iceland as part of Europe, but also not; as part of the Arctic, but also not; or, perhaps better, as straddling all of these alternative affiliations, often with the further strategic purpose of Iceland positioning itself within some supranational entity, such as Europe or the Arctic, from which it can wield symbolic capital as well as economic power.<sup>54</sup>

Iceland’s interests in the Arctic are understandably considerable. Although Iceland’s mid-Atlantic geography technically prevents it from being classified as an Arctic coastal state, it is clearly a significant player in the Arctic region, and it has strong representation on the Arctic Council, an influential intergovernmental body that also includes representatives from Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the USA. Indeed, for some commentators Iceland is *the* Arctic state, for while it is positioned just south of the Arctic Circle, it occupies a central position in the North Atlantic and is a key node for high northern shipping routes—a role only likely to increase in importance in times to come (Howard 2009; Sale and Potapov 2010).

Unsurprisingly, this role is currently being played for all it is worth by the Icelandic government, which views the nation’s ports as being advantageously placed at one end of a “new trans-Arctic shipping highway” mesmerically opened up by diminishing sea ice.<sup>55</sup> However, the feasibility of this remains uncertain given the largely unchanging logistics of long-

distance travel in the High Arctic: prohibitively expensive transportation costs, highly unpredictable weather conditions, and stiff competition from Asia in particular, which boasts hub ports, container vessels, and general handling capacity that, judged by world standards, are in a class by themselves.<sup>56</sup> A big shipping boom therefore seems unlikely even should the polar route come into effect, though not all Arctic pundits are agreed on this.<sup>57</sup> This is one instance among others where the melodramatic language of “scramble” confronts the sobering realities of commercial activity in the Arctic—for, loosely adapting Orwell, making love in a cold climate may be difficult without money, but making money may not necessarily be enough.

For all that, money remains to be made, particularly in hydrocarbon, with the Arctic recently estimated as containing around 10% of the world’s oil reserves and as much as 30% of the world’s undiscovered natural gas.<sup>58</sup> Much has been made in the media of the opportunity this presents for a resource war, but most oil and gas reserves discovered so far lie within established borders, while resource-rich (albeit economically struggling) Arctic states like Iceland arguably have little need to venture beyond their own internationally ratified economic zones.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the best current example is Jan Mayen Ridge, located on Iceland’s northeast continental shelf, where offshore prospecting licences were first offered in 2009. Although all three initial applicants withdrew their bids, more recent interest has been shown by two Chinese oil companies—to the obvious consternation of some Icelandic nationals. Their media-augmented visions of a Chinese “takeover” provide a further cautionary tale about the need to sift “scramble” facts from “scramble” fictions, as well as to interrogate the racial imaginaries that sometimes underlie them. At least some of the racial fantasies are rooted in the very forms of colonial racism that Icelanders, in keeping with other Nordic peoples, are often too embarrassed to admit to or, in more extreme cases, are at considerable pains to disown (Jichang 2013; see also Naum and Nordin 2013a, 2013b).

Anxieties of this kind might be seen as pointing to the differentiating mindsets that were intrinsic to European colonisation projects. Some Icelandic scholars have seen these as being reproduced in Icelandic exceptionalism, which relies on racialised forms of national belonging in which the typical Icelandic subject is white (Loftsdóttir 2012b). They also point, if only indirectly in this particular case, to those new forms of discrimination and “xeno-racism” (Sivanandan 2001) that are embedded in the supposedly tolerant multicultural societies of the Nordic countries (Jensen

and Loftsdóttir 2012; Mulinari et al. 2009; Naum and Nordin 2013a, 2013b). These forms owe as much to the divisive effects of twenty-first-century global neoliberalism as to those historically produced by European colonialism, but they also demonstrate connections between them, for example, the mapping of negative cultural traits onto perceived economic competitors (“China”) or, conversely, the justification of economic expansion in cultural terms (Iceland as the centre of a white-dominated “New North”).

An interesting epiphenomenon associated with the latter is the swash-buckling figure of the “business Viking,” who—prior to the 2008 financial crash—was popularly cast in the Icelandic media as a contemporary avatar of “Iceland’s first settlers and [its] glorious past.”<sup>60</sup> As the Icelandic anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir has argued, the “business Viking” belongs to an early twenty-first-century period of deregulated economic expansion that fuelled popular-nationalist sentiment about Iceland’s capacity to break free from poverty and become one of the richest countries in the world.<sup>61</sup> The crash effectively put paid to the figure, though not necessarily to the sentiment behind it, which resurfaced in post-crash disputes over the freezing of Icelandic assets, with Britain in particular being seen as draconian in its reactions, prompting none-too-subtle reminders of the 1950s–1970s’ “cod wars” and Britain’s imperial past.<sup>62,63</sup>

Behind this ill-fated appeal to the ancestral spirit of Icelandic entrepreneurialism lie the modernising imperatives of neoliberalism, the ideologies of which—aggressive individualism, deregulated “free-market” capitalism, and so on—have played a key role in repositioning the Nordic countries within an increasingly globalised world (Naum and Nordin 2013a, 2013b). As Loftsdóttir and others suggest, Iceland and other Nordic countries often claim to be modern nations *par excellence* as well as exemplary global citizens, exercising their responsibilities towards less advantaged countries and participating actively in a wide variety of intra- and international development schemes (Loftsdóttir 2012a; Naum and Nordin 2013a, 2013b).

However, some of these schemes, for example, Denmark’s investment in development projects in Greenland or ongoing Norwegian and Swedish attempts to “modernise” the Sami, seem to be driven at least as much by global neoliberal profit motives as by regional social democratic imperatives. Furthermore, they create manifestly unequal situations which, if perhaps irreducible to full-blown colonialism, still demonstrate latter-day forms of colonial paternalism that bear traces of the more obviously unjust

treatment of northern indigenous peoples in the past. This begs the difficult question of what role northern indigenous peoples play—and, just as important, are ascribed as playing—in the contemporary “scramble for the Arctic,” which it would be equally wrongheaded to see as proceeding either *without* the participation of indigenous peoples or *with* their principled consent. As Bravo and Rees (2006) suggest, Inuit and other northern indigenous peoples are faced with difficult choices in the face of a modernising Arctic that both includes and excludes them; and while indigenous communities are oriented towards cultural survival, that survival also closely depends on their collective ability to negotiate the conditions of modernity—cultural, political, economic—in their own terms. Once again, the “scramble for the Arctic” seems to require unscrambling, with “fortress conservation” and “aggressive development” featuring as far from mutually exclusive options, and the fiercely politicised struggle to maintain control over natural resources serving both local and global ends.<sup>64</sup>

### CONCLUSION: REINDIGENISING THE ARCTIC

For some commentators (see, e.g., Brody 1976), colonialism in the Arctic is synonymous with continuing mistreatment of the region’s indigenous peoples, though national and regional conditions vary widely, and historical processes of exploitation and expropriation do not map easily or coherently onto a “colonial present” (Gregory 2004) that replicates the injustices of the past. Indeed, to identify the Arctic region as “indigenous” may itself be seen as an injustice insofar as the circumpolar Arctic is home to groups, both indigenous and not, “with varying identities that straddle and challenge state boundaries.”<sup>65</sup> “The [popular] image of the Arctic as bounded by geography and climate and as a homeland exclusively for indigenous peoples is [therefore] not only [dangerously] myopic,” warns the Canadian political scientist Lisa Williams, but demonstrably false.<sup>66</sup>

As Williams also suggests, well-meaning attempts to view the Arctic as an indigenous homeland have not generally proved empowering, at least in policy terms, for the region’s indigenous peoples; rather, “not only the geographic [...] boundaries, but also the subjectivities of indigenous peoples have become [inflexibly] attached [...] to particular spatial configurations and controlled within the boundaries of nation-states.”<sup>67</sup> As Williams goes on to suggest, Arctic peoples and regions continue to be marginalised in terms of international politics even as they are appropri-

ated as key national symbols; and they persist in being deemed strategically vital even as they are routinely categorised as a “problem” to the maintenance and efficient administration of the nation state.<sup>68</sup>

What can arguably be seen here is further evidence of a global struggle for *indigeneity* in which markedly different actors, with markedly different motives, fight it out for the right to define and control equally divergent meanings of the term (Allen 2002). In the Arctic context, it would probably be fair to say that indigeneity is associated first and foremost with *autonomy*: with the self-given right of northern indigenous peoples to create and consolidate their own regional identity, to capitalise on their own resources, and to manage their own affairs (Huggan 2015). However, it is also clear that autonomy does not necessarily equate with *sovereignty*, and that while northern indigenous communities are party to most of the decisions that affect their own livelihood and well-being, they are by no means the only stakeholders in such decisions, which also often involve state governments, commercial actors, and—in some cases—non-governmental organisations, for example, environmental groups (Bravo and Rees 2006).

In such contexts, *reindigenisation* may represent a useful strategy for northern indigenous groups, both as a solidarity move and an effective means of enlisting “discourses of community, tradition and ethnicity [as cultural capital] to confront historical and political forms of oppression,” both in the globalised (neoliberal) present and in the colonial past.<sup>69</sup> Reindigenisation is a political move designed to allow indigenous peoples, both within and beyond their own particular communities, to affirm a group identity while seeking to wrest control over the “outside” representations that continue to govern public perceptions of their cultural traditions and way of life (Walker and Walker 2008; see also Bravo and Rees 2006).

Such representations provide a further reminder that decolonising processes in the Arctic take at least two different forms: a *politico-economic* form, in which the primary struggle is over appropriate forms of regional governance and the local management of land and resources; and a *cultural* form, in which the powerfully colonising force of western romantic imaginaries of the Arctic is directly challenged if not definitively overcome (Huggan 2015). Reindigenisation goes far beyond those forms of strategic self-stereotyping and “staged ethnicity” (MacCannell 1976) that serve the contemporary aboriginal tourist industries; indeed, it might be better

seen as exercising collective vigilance towards those stereotyped visions and versions of the Arctic—many of them currently disseminated through the global media—that make little sense to the various people, both indigenous and non-indigenous, who call the Arctic their home (Ryall et al. 2010).<sup>70</sup>

As Bravo and Rees (2006) assert, northern indigenous groups, in the Arctic and elsewhere, have become increasingly adept at manipulating the romantic images that have been used historically against them; they have also become increasingly pragmatic—though they probably always were pragmatic—in negotiating their place within the modern globalised world. To some extent, this involves complex trade-offs in an ecologically fragile region that is particularly susceptible to the destructive forms of development that characterise contemporary global neoliberalism. “Scramble,” for all its obvious faults, remains a useful word to describe the potentially ravaging effects of neoliberal political and economic agendas on a rapidly changing Arctic; it also issues a salutary reminder that many—though by no means all—of the commercial activities currently being pursued in the Arctic are both the fruits of colonial legacies of thinking and new forms of colonialism in their own right.<sup>71</sup>

However, as I hope to have argued here, these legacies, and the practices associated with them, are rarely transparent or straightforward; for colonialism, if it is anything, is *disorderly*, involving a wide range of continually shifting registers and positions that weave a tangled web around the mutually constitutive figures of oppressor and oppressed (Hall 1996; Stoler 2008). “Scramble” is a similarly difficult term; operating on tricky terrain, it has little clear-cut or definitive about it. Perhaps, in this last sense, unscrambling the Arctic will always prove to be an impossible exercise; and perhaps, reading between the lines of its dictionary derivation, it will always be condemned to produce further scrambled messages of its own. For all that, unscrambling the Arctic seems like a *necessary* exercise, especially at a time when there are so many stakeholders, and so much at stake, in trying to decipher the conflicting messages that are wrapped up in contemporary Arctic social, political, and environmental change.

**Acknowledgements** I would like to thank Kristín Loftsdóttir for her help in preparing this chapter; also Michael Bravo, Satya Savitzky, and Philip Steinberg for allowing me to draw on (at the time of writing) unpublished work.

## NOTES

1. Melody Webb, "Arctic Saga: Vilhjalmur Stefansson's Attempt to Colonize Wrangel Island," *Pacific Historical Review* 61 no. 2, 1992: 215.
2. *Ibid.*, see also Richard J. Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).
3. Webb, "Arctic Saga," 233.
4. John McCannon, *A History of the Arctic: Nature, Exploration and Exploitation* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 152–53.
5. Webb, "Arctic Saga," 215.
6. *Ibid.*, 225.
7. Michael Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic? Understanding Sovereignty Disputes in the North* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009), 22.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 25.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 26.
12. *Ibid.*, 27–28.
13. *Ibid.*, 30.
14. Michael Byers, "Creative Thinking on Sovereignty," *Policy Options*, March–April, 6/7, 2014: 7.
15. James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.
16. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), 4, 10–11.
17. *Ibid.*, 17.
18. *Ibid.*, 10.
19. *Ibid.*, 4.
20. *Ibid.*, 21–22.
21. One term for that hierarchical system is, of course, imperialism. Imperialism, like colonialism, takes multiple forms and is conceptually uncertain, though a number of commentators—especially those influenced by postcolonial theory—follow Edward Said's distinction between *imperialism* as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" and *colonialism*, which consists of "the implanting of settlements on distant territory" and is "almost always a consequence of imperialism" (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1993], 8). The distinction is a tidy one, and Said is surely right to stress that colonialism requires both formal (ideological) and informal (attitudinal) justification, but as others have pointed out imperialism and colonialism are inherently *untidy* concepts whose mean-

ings can easily bleed into one another and whose applications are subject to epistemological drift and historical change (Hall 1996; Stoler 2008). A further problem with Said's formulation is his emphasis on *distant* territory, which rules out other forms of colonialism, for example, those attached to so-called "internal colonialism" (Hechter 1975), that proceed significantly closer to, or indeed within, the boundaries of the metropolitan nation state. Scandinavian colonialism is a case in point, offering a mixture of distant and proximate forms of colonisation and colonial authority: for further discussion of this, see section 3 of this chapter.

22. Oran Young, "Governing the Arctic: From Cold War Theater to Mosaic of Cooperation," *Global Governance* 11, 2005: 9–10.
23. Michael Bravo and Gareth Rees, "Cryo-politics: Environmental Security and the Future of Arctic Navigation," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 13, no. 1, 2006: 206.
24. Christian Brünner and Alexander Soucek, *Outer Space in Society, Politics and Law* (New York: Springer, 2011), 289. See also McAteer 2013, Steinberg 2001.
25. Savitzky distinguishes between Russia and Canada, both of which have substantial bodies of sea ice adjacent to their territories, and which consequently adhere to the ice-as-land theory; and the USA and China, which "have always held to the ice-as-water theory [and are therefore] unwilling to grant sovereign possession of [...] strategically crucial seaways [such as the Northeast and Northwest Passages] to foreign states." A cross-disciplinary Ice Law project, under the leadership of Philip Steinberg at the University of Durham, has recently been designed to track juridical change in the treatment of sea ice in the circumpolar Arctic region, seeing such treatment as an extension of, but also a potentially radical departure from, customary maritime law. Bravo and Rees' "cryo-politics" project, as mentioned above, also emphasises the fundamentally shifting nature of maritime law and geopolitics in the region, which is associated with but not necessarily determined by geographical and meteorological factors, for example, anthropogenic climate change.
26. Binary rhetoric of this kind, which pervades both popular and academic accounts of the "New North," is often reduced to a common denominator: climate change. See, for example, Zellen (2009), whose "Arctic doom/Arctic boom" dyad is fairly typical for the genre.
27. Bravo and Rees, "Cryo-politics," 214.
28. Arctic commentators are not agreed on the extent to which the region is currently witnessing a military build-up. Cold War analogies miss the mark, though these can be conveniently invoked to buttress the divisive logic of "scramble." Probably the clearest iteration of this is Sale and Potapov's self-prophesying study, *The Scramble for the Arctic* (2010), which cites fig-

- ures to show that the Russians in particular have ramped up their military presence in the region, but still concedes that current conflicts over ownership and exploitation are precariously balanced by diplomatic and commercial cooperation between the major Arctic powers.
29. Klaus Dodds, “A Polar Mediterranean? Accessibility, Resources and Sovereignty in the Arctic Ocean,” *Global Policy* 1, no. 3, 2010: 306.
  30. Laurence C. Smith, *The New North: The World in 2050* (London: Profile Books, 2012), 6.
  31. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
  32. *Ibid.*, 145.
  33. *Ibid.*, 152. See also Young 2009.
  34. Smith, *The New North*, 162.
  35. *Ibid.*, 194.
  36. *Ibid.*, 200.
  37. *Ibid.*, 249.
  38. Alun Anderson, *After the Ice: Life, Death and Politics in the New Arctic* (London: Virgin Books, 2009), 9.
  39. *Ibid.*, 22.
  40. *Ibid.*, 33.
  41. *Ibid.*, 91. See also Morton 2009.
  42. Anderson, *After the Ice*, 253.
  43. *Ibid.*, 261.
  44. *Ibid.*, 262–63.
  45. Subhankar Banerjee, ed., *Arctic Voices: Resistance at the Tipping Point* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), 20.
  46. Neocolonialism is another tricky term in the context of the contemporary Arctic. As Philip Altbach explains, “modern neocolonialism differs from traditional colonialism in that it does not involve direct political control,” but “it is similar in that some aspects of domination by the advanced nation over the developing country remain” (Philip Altbach, “Education and Neocolonialism,” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin [London: Routledge, 1995], 452.). Neocolonialism, Altbach suggests, is “partly a planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence in developing countries” (*ibid.*). This definition might hold good for African countries but it seems inappropriate for the Arctic, which is not a “developing country,” rather—and I am fully aware that the designation is tendentious—an internally differentiated, partly autonomous regional development zone. Still, an argument can be made that northern indigenous peoples, in particular, are currently being subjected to new forms of colonialism thrown up by changing economic as well as geographical conditions in the Arctic. These conditions are linked in turn to the global agendas set by neoliberalism, which some Marxist

commentators, David Harvey prominent among them, see as the primary ideological expression of imperialism today (Harvey 2003). For my purposes here, I will see neoliberalism and neocolonialism as related but non-identical phenomena, linked first and foremost by the desire to control markets in majority interests. To see the Arctic as a “regional development zone” is in part a function of the global pact between neoliberalism and neocolonialism; part of the task of decolonising the region is therefore to alter these objectifying terms of reference, reinstating the Arctic (and Arctic peoples) as autonomous subjects rather than instrumental objects of foreign economic interest, national political consideration, or global ecological concern.

47. Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski, and Henning Howlid Wærp (eds), *Arctic Discourses* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 8.
48. Dodds, “A Polar Mediterranean?” 310. See also Lajeunesse 2012.
49. On ideologies of “mediterraneanism,” see Gillette 2002 and Harris 2005. Probably the most useful recent study is Chambers’ (2008), which places the Mediterranean within a postcolonial context in which its ancient “civilising” imperatives are put under pressure and its racially exclusive myths of origin are unceremoniously debunked.
50. Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 3.
51. Gunnar Pálsson, “The Polar Mediterranean: Change and Opportunities for the Countries of the Arctic Rim.” Speech delivered at the Norwegian Sea Power Seminary, 31 August, 2006. Reykjavík: Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
52. Kristín Loftsdóttir, “Colonialism at the Margins: Politics of Difference in Europe as Seen Through two Icelandic Crises,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 19, no. 5, 2012: 599. See also Hall 1996.
53. Some commentators (see, e.g., Gremaud [2013] and Lucas and Parigoris [2013]) have tried to account for Iceland’s ambivalent status by referencing the American anthropologist Michael Herzfeld’s influential work on “crypto-colonialism.” Though crypto-colonies *pace* Herzfeld are not colonies in the technical sense, they still produce forms of domination in disguise that reveal the “absent presence” of an intrusive colonial power (Herzfeld 2002). Ann-Sofie Gremaud has suggested a further use for crypto-colonialism in the Icelandic context, namely the tendency of crypto-colonies to serve as “bufferzones between the West and the rest.” (See also Karen Oslund, whose 2011 monograph *Iceland Imagined* begins with the rhetorical question: “Is [Iceland] a part of ‘Europe’ or a technologically advanced and prosperous part of the ‘third world?’” [6].) Crypto-colonialism is a useful term to some degree, though it begs the question of what “real” colonialism looks like, and its geographical and historical appli-

- cability may be less flexible than Herzfeld imagines (certainly, his own primary examples are very different: Thailand and Greece). To see Iceland as a crypto-colony also distracts attention from its historical support, whether tacit or direct, for European colonising ventures as well as its contemporary investment in development projects in the Arctic that aim to consolidate its status as a North Atlantic power.
54. See also the work of Oslund (2011), who places Iceland within a North Atlantic context that functions both as a “figment of the European imaginary” (9) and a regional alternative in its own right.
  55. Anderson, *After the Ice*, 218.
  56. *Ibid.*, 219.
  57. *Ibid.* For a more optimistic view, see Charles Emmerson, *The Future History of the Arctic* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), 182–89.
  58. Dodds, “A Polar Mediterranean?” 306.
  59. Roger Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow’s Resources* (London: Continuum, 2009), 70.
  60. Kristín Loftsdóttir, “Colonialism at the Margins,” 601.
  61. *Ibid.*, 606.
  62. *Ibid.*, 607.
  63. For an inside account of the British/Icelandic “cod wars”—there were three in all, strung out across three decades—see Welch 2006.
  64. Bravo and Rees, “Cryo-politics,” 212. See also Nuttall 2002.
  65. Lisa Williams, “Telling an Arctic Tale: Arctic Discourses in Canadian Foreign Policy,” *Arctic Discourses*, ed. A. Ryall, J. Schimanski, and H.H. Wærp (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010), 253.
  66. *Ibid.*, 254.
  67. *Ibid.*, 251.
  68. *Ibid.*, 251. See also Huggan 2015.
  69. D. M. Walker and M.A. Walker, “Power, Identity and the Production of Buffer Villages in ‘the Second Most Remote Region in All Mexico,’” *Antipode* 40, no. 1, 2008: 158. Also quoted in Anthony Carrigan, *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture, and Environment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 140.
  70. It seems necessary again to insist on the heterogeneity of the Arctic, which—however it is defined, and definitions are legion—is one of the most geographically and culturally differentiated regions in the world. Homogenising the Arctic is perhaps the oldest colonial strategy in the book, and it has served different ends for different (would-be) colonisers. Perhaps the most arresting example today is what might be generally termed the discourse of *climate colonialism*: the variety of rhetorical means by which the Arctic region, regardless of significant local differences, is seconded to a sweeping global-cum-planetary imperative that hides spe-

cific economic motives behind general environmental concern. Of course, the complexities of climate governance in the Arctic are considerable and no single discourse can capture these: see Koivurova et al. 2009 for measured reflections on what is at stake and on the positions of Arctic stakeholders, which often revolve around the politics of scale. On the discursive homogenisation of the Arctic and its various effects, see also Ryall, Schimanski, and Wærp 2010.

71. At the time of writing, a new “scramble” is emerging as increasing parts of northern Finland, Sweden, and Norway are opened up to mineral extraction, with “dozens of giant mines [...] expected to open in one of Europe’s most ecologically fragile regions” within the next few years (Vidal 2014). The region has seen intense protests by local Sami communities, who understandably object to the deleterious environmental impact of mining as well as the danger it poses to an established economy based on tourism, fishing, and reindeer herding; but there has also been support for regional development initiatives, not all of them rejected by Sami themselves. As in higher latitudes, “conservation” and “development” are by no means mutually exclusive options (Bravo and Rees 2006), and the tendency to see them as such is arguably *part* of a polarising rhetoric of “scramble” that needs to be critically unpacked, if not comprehensively undone.

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## Barentsburg and Beyond: Coal, Science, Tourism, and the Geopolitical Imaginaries of Svalbard’s “New North”

*Roger Norum*

**Abstract** Despite continued heavy state subsidies, Russian and Norwegian mining operations in the Svalbard archipelago occupy increased strategic importance given recent heightened tensions between the two nations. At the same time, the industries of scientific research and adventure tourism are growing in importance to Svalbard’s economic self-sufficiency. This chapter explores recent geoeconomic changes in the archipelago within the contexts of shifting relationships between Russia and Norway, and of a global Anthropocene consciousness. Considering the histories of the archipelago’s settlements of Barentsburg and Longyearbyen, and of the Russian (Arktikugol) and Norwegian (Store Norske) mining companies, the chapter explores linkages between the industries that fuel Svalbard’s settlements, the international geopolitical interest in the region, and the symbolic and real value of resource extraction within broader Arctic geopolitical discourse.

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**Keywords** Geopolitical imaginaries • Sustainable tourism • Coal mining  
• Russia • Svalbard

Only thus far (and here rumour seems truth) does the world extend.

—Tacitus

You are welcome back to Svalbard as long as no one can see that you were here.

—Spitsbergentravel.com

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers recent geopolitical and geoeconomic (Sparke 2007) changes in the Svalbard archipelago within the context of shifting relationships between Russia and Norway, and between global powers with Arctic interests more generally. I use recent histories of the archipelago's settlements of Barentsburg and Longyearbyen, and of the Russian (Arktikugol) and Norwegian (Store Norske) mining companies, to reflect on broader Russian-Norwegian relations in the region. My aim is to demonstrate that processes of resource extraction—coal mining being the case I examine here—have real symbolic value as much as they do real economic value that might result from excavating the minerals themselves. I use the chapter to explore the linkages between the industries that currently fuel the settlements of Svalbard as well as the international interest that surrounds them. The chapter also calls into relief residual Arctic manifestations of the region's Soviet legacy.

More than four centuries ago, the islands of Svalbard became a popular destination for scientific and surveying polar expeditions, the first and most famous of which was Dutchman Willem Barentsz' own "discovery" of the archipelago in 1596.<sup>1</sup> In the eighteenth century, Russian trappers en route from the White Sea wintered here to take advantage of the abundant fox and polar bear they could easily capture for their valuable pelts. Two centuries later, Svalbard became a site of heavy industrial coal mining for a number of nations that had taken interest in the archipelago, not least among them Norway and Russia. Today, Svalbard, with a population of 2667 inhabitants,<sup>2</sup> is a hotbed of Arctic climate research, boasting a university, several high-tech research stations, and the Global Seed Vault, a doomsday store for several hundred thousand global crop varieties.<sup>3</sup> Over the past several decades it has also become a popular destination for adven-

ture tourists, and both Longyearbyen and Barentsburg are sites of growing (if still diminutive and niche) tourism industries.

The importance of coal mining to Svalbard's livelihood has significantly waned since the global price of coal began to drop in 2008, and the less obviously environmentally polluting industries of research and tourism have now surpassed whatever monies mining ever brought to the archipelago. Still, Svalbard's Norwegian- and Russian-run coal-mining operations continue to operate and—perhaps more importantly—receive regular heavy state subsidies from both governments. Recently heightened geopolitical tensions between the two states and in the circumpolar Arctic more generally have infused coal-mining operations with renewed geopolitical importance. While both nations have committed to further developing tourism as a viable income-generating alternative, in the imaginations of those in power, coal mining continues to play a role for Svalbard's present and future, whether or not it has any substantive economic value.<sup>4</sup>

### FIRST POACH, THEN SCRAMBLE: A GEOECONOMIC ARCTIC

Ever since Europeans first made contact with the Arctic, a range of “explorers, traders, sailors and scholars have all played their part in promoting the interests of various states and companies in mapping, exploiting, administering and controlling Northern spaces such as the Northwest Passage and the Arctic Ocean.”<sup>5,6</sup> Like most other areas of the High Arctic, the Svalbard archipelago was long mythologised as an unknown, inaccessible, and forbidden land; as a remote, wild, and often “othered” frontier. This in turn made it the object of various colonialist “scrambles” (Borgerson 2008; Craciun 2009; Dodds and Nuttall 2016; Sale and Potapov 2010). In recent years, Svalbard has become important both *in* and *for* the Great Games of national, international, and transnational relations. Despite the geographical remoteness of many of the territories that make up the Arctic on a circumpolar level, these individual spaces, much like the region as a whole, are now embedded within the global economic and political system.

As scholars of the postcolonial moment have pointed out, the region has largely been framed discursively by those from elsewhere, among them “the scientists who study it, the politicians who want to control it, [and] the oilmen who want to exploit it” (Anderson 2009: 9; see also Chap. 1 of this volume). Indeed, the Arctic is also emerging not just as a space *of* geopolitics, but *for* geopolitics as well (Dittmer et al. 2011), which is to

say that it has become as much a space for geopolitical actors to play and perform sovereignty games as it has for geopolitically minded scholars to carry out critical research about them.

While geopolitically important regions such as the Arctic are “neither self-evident spaces nor straightforward categories,” they do still manage to “create and recreate configurations of people, objects, practices, sites and affect.”<sup>7</sup> Today’s Arctic scrambles in many ways differ little from those of yesterday, or indeed those of a century or two ago. One sees similar tropes, relationships, and processes reproduced, as Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall have recently noted: “As earlier European explorers sought to accumulate knowledge about trade winds, harbors, oceanic passages and resource potential, so contemporary actors scramble to acquire a greater understanding of navigation potential, ecosystem vulnerabilities and resource availability.”<sup>8</sup> But scrambles are important to think about critically because they reflect and create new geometries of power—inequalities between places that are produced “as a consequence of their positioning and relationship to other places, relationships and power-geometries.”<sup>9</sup>

As Graham Huggan elucidates in Chap. 1 of this volume, one function of discursively decolonising or rhetorically unscrambling the Arctic is that these processes can shift the frames and terms of reference of neocolonialist, neoliberalist policies that typify foreign interest and involvement in the region as well as colour our everyday associations with and imaginations about it. We should, Huggan argues, strive to reinstate “the Arctic (and Arctic peoples) as autonomous subjects rather than instrumental objects of foreign economic interest, national political consideration, or global ecological concern” (Huggan, Chap. 1). At the same time, investigating the individual histories of specific Arctic territories can help contest the facile, essentialist narratives of progress, development, and ecological “state change” that are all too common to public and media discourse on Arctic places. An unscrambling of this space can help, not just to uncomplicate current understandings of Arctic scrambles, but also to carve out paths for more productive and critical reflection in the region’s distinctly complex times.

It is thus important to assess circumpolar geopolitical developments in the Arctic in terms of both global international relations and individual domestic politics of the multiple countries involved (Pedersen 2009), as well as in relation to the multiple contemporary industrial and capitalist processes that are intertwined in the region. For this reason, I have divided this chapter into three primary sections, each of which looks at the role that these industries—here, coal mining, scientific research, and adven-

ture tourism—have played and continue to play in Svalbard’s geopolitical positionality.

## OF NORTHERN EXTRACTION: FROM COAL RUSH TO COAL WAR

The 63,000 sq. km Svalbard archipelago is one of the planet’s most northerly and remotely inhabited settlements. Located at 78 degrees north, some 640 km north of the Norwegian mainland and 1300 km from the North Pole, this ice-packed archipelago is two-thirds covered by glaciers, and its soil is frozen to a depth of up to 500 m. Between mid-November and late January, the sun sinks a full eight degrees below the horizon, enveloping the land in complete polar darkness; the average temperature in February, Svalbard’s coldest month, is  $-16.2$  C. In contrast to the winter, from mid-April to mid-August the islands enjoy 24-hour daylight, and once the snow has disappeared (usually by July) and the temperatures rise into the late teens, its umber, tussocky valleys are covered in wild flowers—poppy, polar willow, saxifrage—that take advantage of the long periods of daylight. The wildlife that calls Svalbard home includes over a hundred species of migratory birds, as well as arctic foxes, polar bears, and reindeer on land, and seals, walruses, and whales offshore. The islands’ western shores and coastal waters are warmed by the Gulf Stream, which melts sea ice and helps to keep the fjord open for maritime access for several months each year, while also making it relatively tolerable for human life.

The early history of Svalbard has been covered comprehensively elsewhere (Arlov 2003, 2005; Conway 1906) so I will only detail here some recent events relevant to the matter of this chapter. When Willem Barentsz made the first recorded discovery of Svalbard’s ice on June 17, 1596, it was the third consecutive year that Barentsz had come in search of a fabled Northeast Passage (Fig. 2.1). When his crew caught glimpse of the icy peaks of Svalbard, they initially believed they had in fact arrived in Greenland. Barentsz in any event bestowed upon the land mass he saw the name Spitsbergen (“pointed mountains”).<sup>10</sup> At the time, Svalbard was still very much at the edge of the world as it was known to those in southern latitudes, and held an unknown quantity of natural resources (Avango 2012).

Once word reached mainland Europe about the area’s abundant wildlife, the archipelago swiftly became a popular station for the sea-based hunts of explorers, adventurers, and sailors. English walrus hunters, French and Danish whalers, Russian polar bear and fox trappers all fed



drawn and redrawn. Indeed, the mythology of these early explorations is inscribed in Svalbard's place names, which now read like a compendium of Euro-American derring-do and discovery. Here, for example, we find Taylorfjellet, a mountain named after the *fin-de-siècle* editor of *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, W.A. Taylor; Murraypynten, a cape named after the nineteenth-century Scottish oceanographer, Sir John Murray; and Thomas Smithøyane, a group of islands named after the sixteenth-century English merchant and adventurer, Thomas Smythe (Orheim 2003).<sup>11</sup>

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Svalbard's economic importance stemmed exclusively from hunting commodities such as blubber, ivory, fox pelts, polar bear furs, seal skins and down, among other products. During this time, rich coal deposits—the geological residue of a prehistoric tropical forest—provided convenient, good-quality fuel for steam vessels, which at the time had no other source of fuel so far north (Catford 2002). For much of the late nineteenth century, in fact, it was not uncommon to spot the crew members of whaling ships on land foraging by hand for coal, which they would haul back to their vessels to stoke the ships' furnaces or to boil whale blubber for (e.g. lantern) oil.

Early prospectors sought after other minerals to extract as well, including asbestos, copper, gypsum, iron, lead, marble, and zinc—even a small outcrop of gold was discovered on Svalbard at one point in the early nineteenth century (and again recently north of Kongsfjord). But none became as lucrative, productive, or desirable as coal. Come the mid-nineteenth century, European industrialisation had increased the need for mineral resources, since the introduction of steam engines and (later) steel-hulled ships significantly improved the possibilities of navigation, even in icy waters. This newfound interest in the mineral resources of a virtually unexplored, unheard of archipelago led to a wide range of pioneers from Germany, Great Britain, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the USA—individual, state-financed adventurers as well as established companies of significant means—to cast their eyes towards surveying activities in the archipelago.

The full-fledged commercial exploitation of Svalbard's natural resource deposits kicked off in the 1890s. The first recorded profit-oriented coal-mining activity was carried out by Søren Zachariassen, a Norwegian sealer who began extracting from the north shore of the Isfjord in 1899, transporting the first shipload of coal from a pit on Bohemanflya to mainland Norway (Catford 2002). In 1901, the American industrialist John Munro Longyear visited the archipelago with his wife as a passenger on a tourist

cruise ship, the *Auguste Viktoria*; he returned two years later on the same ship, but this time accompanied by two mining engineers. During the trio's 36-hour stay, they borrowed a shovel from the ship to dig up gravel and sand around the coal seams at Recherchefjord. What they retrieved was enough to convince Longyear to stake out territory in Adventfjorden, after which he established the Arctic Coal Co. in Boston, Massachusetts and sought to set up shop in Svalbard.

Production in the mines at Longyear City grew swiftly. Over the next ten years, Longyear built the small village of two dozen miners into a thriving town of 300 inhabitants, with 25 buildings that included living quarters, stores, a community centre, and horse stables, as well as docks, a power station, railways, and a radio station. Other businessmen from other nations (e.g. Sweden, the Netherlands, and the UK) also got their hands into the pie, although none proved as successful as Longyear. From 1907 to 1915, 173,000 tons of coal were shipped out of Longyear City.

During the jostling for maritime and land-based hunting, early territorial disputes between different interests were often simply resolved by dividing the area first between the competing whaling countries and companies, or the individual hunters and trappers on land, leading to the gradual development of a generally accepted system of defined hunting grounds. However, since quarrels could usually be settled amicably between the parties involved and since the area was huge in relation to the small number of hunters, there was no real need to change the legal or administrative status of the remote archipelago from being a *de facto* no-man's-land—even if the riches to be gained there were seemingly unlimited. Later, territorial mineral claims were marked initially with sign poles, though with no central "claims" register to speak of, company wars often erupted over disputed entitlements.<sup>12</sup> These early disagreements highlighted the importance of some eventual legal framework, though any substantive movement towards this process was delayed by the fact that no country was initially interested in governing due to the anticipated costs of administering such a territory.

During the First World War, Norway could not rely on coal supplies from central Europe and Britain, giving Svalbard's coal deposits increased strategic importance. Though Norway had previously been wary of getting too involved in the archipelago, the country was keen to secure its interests from German intervention during the First World War, and decided to purchase Longyear City from the American industrialist in 1916. Politically speaking, Svalbard continued to exist as a no-man's-land

until the 1920s, when a multilateral treaty handed administration of the territory over to Norway, with settlement and mineral extraction rights given to all of the treaty's national signatories.

Because other countries had already been jumping onto the coal-mining bandwagon, when Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard was ratified it was on the condition that other countries operating mines could continue to do so. Initially signed by eight nations, the Spitsbergen Treaty<sup>13</sup> established the Svalbard Archipelago as a demilitarised zone characterised by low taxation and non-discrimination.<sup>14</sup> The Soviet Union was given permission to join the treaty signatories in 1924, and today Russia is the only country other than Norway to exercise the right to establish a settlement officially granted by the treaty—despite 43 current signatory nations that include China, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, among others. The Spitsbergen Treaty has so far proved remarkably enduring and has led to a unique legal status for the archipelago.

#### IN THE COMPANIES OF MEN: STORE NORSKE AND TRUST ARKTIKUGOL

Following the official incorporation of Svalbard into the Kingdom of Norway in 1925, the permanent presence of most other nations gradually declined. Though Norway was understandably (given its relatively poor status at the time) reticent at first to invest much time, effort, and financial investment, the country adopted a policy of gradually buying up foreign properties in Svalbard when opportunities arose, such as when companies began to run into economic difficulties or ended up in dire economic straits, handing the running over to Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani, or Store Norske (“Great Norwegian”) for short. Store Norske was the legal entity established by the Norwegian state to run the mining concern on Svalbard. Though owned and technically answerable to by the Norwegian government, the company has largely operated independently since its founding, with a diverse board of directors.

The political landscape became more charged when the Soviet Union purchased the collieries at Pyramiden in 1927 from a Swedish firm and Barentsburg in 1932 from the Dutch mining company Nespico, which had bestowed on the settlement the name of the Dutch explorer and invested heavily in the installation. That same year, the Soviets set up their own state-owned entity, Trust Arktikugol (“Arctic Coal”), to run its share of mining on Svalbard. Within just a few short years, Russian extractive

holdings on Svalbard had increased from one to four, and Arktikugol built up mining into an extremely well-run operation. Output in Barentsburg, the most productive of their mines, was said to reach 400,000 tonnes by 1936, and the 2000 miners present at that time were topped up by an influx of workers from the Ukraine, a migration trajectory that still occurs today (Catford 2002).<sup>15</sup> Coal mining on Svalbard proved to be moderately profitable for the Norwegians owing to the energy demands of northern Norway; the Russians found it considerably easier to transport coal from Svalbard to Murmansk and Archangelsk than haul it all the way from mainland coalfields in the Donez area.

The new and rapidly growing Russian presence across Barentsburg, Pyramiden, Grumant, and Erdmanflya was enough to convince the Norwegian government to buy up the Swedish-owned settlement of Sveagrava, as well as the properties of the British NEC (Northern Exploration Company), in order to stave off any further increase in Soviet presence on the archipelago. It was during these years that early signs of a geopolitical scramble began to appear—a protracted dance between Norway and Russia over presence in (if not control of) the territories of the European High North.

As Norway's only economic area with coal deposits, Svalbard came to hold enormous (symbolic) military and (real) economic importance for the country during much of the twentieth century, particularly for northern Norway. As worldwide coal prices rose steeply, so did production, reaching almost 500,000 tonnes annually. By 1948, Longyearbyen had become the citadel of the Norwegian coal industry, and Store Norske its king.

Still, its mining activities only ever became a real cash cow for Store Norske towards the end of the twentieth century. Following the Cold War, Norway curtailed its once effusive subsidies of the low-scale mining around Longyearbyen, insisting that Store Norske operate under free-market conditions. Partly on account of the substantial coal deposits discovered in the 1980s near Sveagrava (the site purchased from the Swedes in 1934), production rose to an unprecedented level of three million tonnes per year. In 2001, the mine reported a modest profit; three years later net annual profit had soared to around NOK 200 million (£16 million)—likely a unique case in contemporary European coal mining. Output on Svalbard grew considerably when the mine at Svea Nord opened in 2001: in the record year of 2008, coal production in Svalbard topped 3.5 million tonnes, trebling output from 2000.

Today, however, coal production has dwindled in all of Svalbard's settlements, and there are now disused pits in most of Longyearbyen's collieries (Fig. 2.2). Store Norske still operates activities at Svea and a smaller mine, Mine 7, near Longyearbyen. These produce two million and 70,000 tonnes of coal, respectively, each year, but the coal from Mine 7 is only used to supply the power station in Longyearbyen and to service a few international customers who specifically need its form of coal, including a German firm that casts church bells. While the Norwegian government has acknowledged its intention to increase regulated mining activities, the amount of attention paid to mining pales in comparison to the resources devoted to marine- and petroleum-related activities (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006).



**Fig. 2.2** Abandoned mining structure outside Longyearbyen (photo: Roger Norum)

The settlement of Barentsburg is located on the eastern shore of the Grøn fjord, an inlet off the Isfjord's southern side, roughly 40 km south-west of Longyearbyen.<sup>16</sup> Today, Barentsburg is the only Russian mine still in operation, Grumantbyen having closed in 1962 and Pyramiden shut down in 1998. The Russian mine has been plagued by difficulty in recent years, closing for two years after an underground fire in 2008. In 2013, two Russian workers were killed and one seriously injured in a series of major accidents, after which Norwegian authorities again temporarily closed the mine, citing safety violations.

Due to infrastructure limitations, Arktikugol currently mines 120,000 metric tons of coal a year, though the company must produce 350,000 metric tons of coal per year to break even. While state subsidies have decreased by 40% since 2009 as the company endeavours to become more profitable, it has been considering other activities to generate income. Current reserves are estimated to last until 2030 (“Alexander Veselov” 2015). But because Barentsburg's stocks are so depleted and the last mine still in operation has run into recent geological difficulties, the Russians have been looking into a new mine in Colesbukta, where preliminary exploration in the 1980s had indicated promising coal deposits.<sup>17</sup> Initial work has started in Colesbukta, but at a slow pace. In 2017, the company will make the decision on whether or not to go ahead with opening a new mine there (N.A. The Arctic 2015). During 1994–1995, while drilling for new coal deposits in Ebbadalen near Pyramiden, Arktikugol struck oil and gas, though most geological reports state that the deposit is likely to be rather limited due to the general structure of the area. Interestingly, the Russian companies involved promote the project in the hope, not so much of bountiful oil and gas, but of attractive state subsidies.

These continued exploratory activities (despite a flat-lining industry) are not out of the ordinary for the High North. There has been marked development in mining since 2010 in other areas of the European Arctic, including Finland (Kainuu and Lappi provinces), Greenland (Sermiligaarsuk and Saqqaq), and Sweden (Jokkmokk: see Chap. 3 of this volume). In many of these places, a strike-it-rich Klondike imaginary still pervades, the hope being that if new oil and gas fields are eventually found, those nearby will reap the benefits. Indeed, the largest driver of natural resource interest in the Arctic is not just the presence but the *potential* presence of large, untapped resources with favourable access and low political risk (Haley et al. 2011).

## POLITICAL SCIENCE: DISCIPLINED RESEARCH

Svalbard grew in scientific importance the middle of the eighteenth century, in part because its remoteness and relatively unexplored nature were seen to give the land and surrounding waters a higher scientific value. It was cleaner and less uncontaminated, thus providing more verifiable results in research experiments. With the age of science at hand, “nature in all her aspects found an increasing number of faithful students.”<sup>18</sup> Early scientists working across the fields of cartography, geology, botany, zoology, meteorology, and archaeology all took interest in the rocks and waters of Svalbard. From the early days, these explorer-researchers were instructed by their financiers to

make observations on the dip, variation, and intensity of the Magnetic Needle; the temperature; the barometric pressure of the atmosphere; [...] the extent of open water; the quantity, the position and nature of the ice; the depth, temperature, and specific gravity of the sea; and [...] pay attention to the number of Whales he may meet with.<sup>19</sup>

While the golden era of heroic polar exploration is gone, Svalbard now comprises what is probably the single most important place for Arctic-related research, in part for these same reasons. The past decade has seen a proliferation in Arctic-related scientific research (Powell 2008), to which Svalbard has contributed significantly.

Naturalists and ecologists have come to study the islands’ unique flora and fauna. At present, Svalbard has more than 170 species of vascular plants, 370 species of bryophytes, 600 species of lichens, and 700 species of fungi—a very high diversity compared to other Arctic areas at similar latitudes (Hagen et al. 2012; see also Elvebakk and Prestrud 1996). Out of the 19 different species of marine mammals in Svalbard, three are found on Norway’s national list of threatened species: walrus, harbour seal, and polar bear (Swenson et al. 2010), as well as 16 of the archipelago’s 203 bird species (Kålås et al. 2010). Today, some 65% of the archipelago is a protected environmental area, with three nature reserves, six national parks, and 15 bird sanctuaries.<sup>20</sup>

The archipelago has drawn geophysicists, oceanographers, glaciologists, and geomorphologists who carry out research on atmosphere and climate science. The region has also proven an important centre for bioprospecting, the excavation of geo-biological materials (e.g. enzymes and microorgan-

isms) and processes, which may have significant ramifications for the medical and pharmaceutical industries.<sup>21</sup> Today, fully independent permanent research bases are operated by Norway (at Ny-Ålesund, Longyearbyen, Hopen, Bear Island, and Sveagruva), Russia (at Barentsburg), and Poland (at Hornsund), with minor presences maintained within these facilities by other treaty signatories, including China, Korea, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the USA.

Since the 1990s, an array of large-scale technical research facilities has been installed on Svalbard, including the precision geodetic radio-telescope in Ny-Ålesund, the huge international atmospheric installation of EISCAT (European Incoherent Scatter Scientific Association) near Longyearbyen, and the 800 miles of twin undersea fibre-optic cables that lie along the floor of the Arctic Ocean at depths reaching almost 10,000 feet, connecting Svalbard to the Norwegian mainland. These undersea cables, which are now some of the deepest ploughed cables in the world and the only ones to ever be laid beneath ice, allow the Norwegian Space Centre to send transmissions of satellite data captures at extremely high speeds—up to 1280 gigabytes per second—to leading space and geopolitical organisations in the USA, Europe, India, and Japan. This enables real-time operational services, for example, oil-spill monitoring in marine areas all over the world.<sup>22</sup>

While Arctic scientific research and exploration has contributed to knowledge about the polar regions and the planet more broadly, one must not divorce these interests from economic ones. Scientific research and economic and political interests have long been interconnected (Cornelia and Summerhayes 2012; Roberts 2011). Practices of mapping and surveying, for example, were central to the early geopolitical formation of Arctic spaces. Early whalers and maritime explorers drew the first maps of the region, while one of the tasks of nineteenth-century industrial exploration was to examine coastal areas and improve geological knowledge in the search for valuable mineral resources. A state-funded expedition that led to the establishment of mining activities could in turn improve the influence of that country in the archipelago.

From a broader perspective, even much of the seemingly “pure” science of today is economically and politically motivated, with countries often sponsoring expensive polar research in order to bulk up their presence in these regions and thereby increase their influence. The search for exploitable mineral resources continues up to the present day—primarily for oil and gas, though there is still ongoing surveying in Svalbard for

further coal deposits. Deep drilling, especially for oil, began in the 1960s, and even though some of the results were withheld due to competition between the companies, these expensive drilling programmes, like later seismic shootings, contributed to knowledge of geological structures deep under the surface.

Research both in and on the Arctic has “long been constituted via constellations of emotional and embodied practices as well as epistemic ones.”<sup>23</sup> Such research has been constituted by “complicated relationships between activities which were construed to be scientific whilst also allowing some sort of demonstration of territorial sovereignty.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as was the case with jostling for mineral resources during the previous century, research itself now represents a geography of international competition on Svalbard. Linked to the increase in research activity is the growing conflict between ecological research and protection of the environment, or between geopolitical research and mining or tourism.<sup>25</sup>

## TOURISM AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Although there were passenger ships which made visits to the archipelago as early as the 1820s (Reilly 2010), the beginnings of a tourism industry proper to Svalbard began to be visible towards the end of that century (Fig. 2.3). In 1896, Captain Richard With of the Vesterålen Steamship Co. transported a prefabricated hotel to the mouth of the Adventfjord, naming the spot Hotellneset (“hotel point”). The risk-taking With was overly optimistic: his hotel only remained in operation for two seasons, receiving no more than 100 guests in total, and was eventually demolished. In 1936, the North Pole Hotel was established at Ny-Ålesund, again trading for just a few seasons; the building is now used to accommodate visiting foreign researchers (Catford 2002). While the tourism industry to Svalbard stagnated for the next few decades, it began to grow again towards the end of the twentieth century, as numerous areas of the extreme Arctic began to open up due to climate change, contributing to an increase in tourism across the region (Müller 2013; Dawson et al. 2007; Abram and Lund 2016).

Tourism has since brought significant income and infrastructure to the area, and now makes up a major pillar of the economy, with over 40,000 tourists visiting each year (up from 13,000 in 1998), most of whom stay for a period of five to seven days. While nearly all of the tourist-related



**Fig. 2.3** “Hilsen fra Spitsbergen,” Postcard printed by W.B. Bøgh, Trondheim, 1898. Courtesy of John T. Reilly

establishments are Norwegian-run, Russia has also become a recent player in the tourist game, if its participation thus far has been extremely marginal. Arktikugol has now licensed itself as a tour operator under the brand name *Grumant*, an official operation which in 2014 took in a grand total of 100 tourists. During the same year, the company began construction on its own hotel in Longyearbyen and gave Barentsburg a visible renovation: with the hotel, mess, hospital, and mining administration building all now having received new colourful tiled façades, the settlement is clearly losing its Soviet dilapidated charm. The company also opened a new hostel, Grumant, which offers rooms for NOK 210 (£16.50) per night, and the world’s northernmost microbrewery, “Red Bear.” The company estimates that proceeds will reach 180 million (£1.7 million) by 2018, which is roughly what the company currently earns from coal mining (“Alexander Veselov” 2015).

Today, tourist appeal is not hard to understand in a place such as Svalbard, a destination where—as tourists who have visited enjoy reciting—there are more polar bears than people. As the world’s most northerly settled land—the top, if not the end, of the world—Svalbard easily lends itself to notching up one’s bedpost with geographic superlatives (most northerly kebab, most northerly tacky souvenir shop, etc.). Adventurous travellers seek out experiences such as husky driving and hikes across the permafrost, and are no doubt charmed by the island law that requires everyone to carry a rifle anywhere outside of Longyearbyen, a constant reminder of Svalbard’s much publicised polar bear threat.

Aside from the standard adventure tourist fare of snowmobile or husky rides and Zodiac trips out to the fjords, tourists are also drawn to the historicity of Svalbard itself, whether or not its historical sites are constructed as “attractions.” For one, there is the legacy of the age of exploration. Some of the most important and memorable Arctic explorations hovered around Svalbard. In 1925, Roald Amundsen and Lincoln Ellsworth left from Kings Bay for a scientific research trip over the ice; the following year, the same two men departed from Ny-Ålesund in their 120 metre-long airship *Norge*, with Umberto Nobile as the pilot; Nobile himself took off from the same point two years later in his *Italia*; and Amundsen was killed several days later in an accident during the air-sea rescue operation to find Nobile’s downed ship.

The materiality of mining is another crucial source of tourist consumption. Longyearbyen, built on stilts with hotels, bars, gift shops, and a handful of food establishments, is nothing to write home about visually speaking; if it at one point resembled a mining company town, it certainly does not anymore. Barentsburg and its smaller Soviet counterparts, however, received a heavy dose of Eastern Bloc architectural realism. Today, Barentsburg’s several hundred inhabitants live in a single communal concrete block of flats, built in the Khrushchyovka style, a design that represented an early attempt at industrialised and prefabricated building, with elements (or panels) made at concrete plants and trucked to sites as needed. The structures were originally considered to be temporary housing until the Soviet housing shortage could be alleviated by mature Communism, though in Barentsburg these featured rounded edges to lessen the impact of the bitter winter wind and a large central mosaic depicting the Svalbard landscape populated by heroes of Norse legends.

In many cases, the companies involved in early forays into coal mining on Svalbard were backed diplomatically (and often financially) by their home governments. But not all mining ventures were successful, and a number of early attempts at extraction resulted in the pits, quarries, and shafts getting little further than the initial exploratory stage. In fact, all coal-mining operations on Svalbard have been plagued at various times by financial difficulties, bankruptcies, accidents, natural hazards (e.g. glacier crevasses), industrial relations problems and labour strikes, poor living conditions, and poor worker health, to say nothing of the adverse effects of the archipelago’s challenging climate.

During the mining boom, coal was wrought out of the earth up to the mine entrances by a complex branch of ropeways erected on timber trestles, then loaded into buckets. When mining operations closed down, or were upgraded, there was little incentive (and virtually no regulation) for companies to dismantle, remove, or discard the infrastructure they had set up. If these items weren't sold off to the purchaser of the mine, they were simply left there. Today, the surviving industrial archaeological remains of the mining industry to survive include shaft entrances, seam sites, spoil heaps, loading bays, batching equipment, small railway lines, disused machinery, concrete remains of coal handling structures, barracks and mess blocks, disused ropeways, and piles of timber. The region's cold climate means that these cultural artefacts of Svalbard's past deteriorate very slowly. The office of the *sysselemand* (Svalbard's governor) has strict codes to ensure the preservation, not just of Svalbard's natural environment but also of its historical features, and the archipelago's industrial archaeological remains are now officially protected as "cultural relics."<sup>26</sup> Today, Svalbard has nearly 1600 protected cultural heritage sites, as well as nearly 600 protected buildings and industrial heritage sites (Norway Statistics 2014; see also Norway Statistics 2012).

Other historical artefacts include the survivals of scrambles from previous centuries, such as blubber-drying furnaces and whalers' cabins. As there has been activity on Svalbard for more than four centuries, such cultural sites are part of the archipelago's national and international heritage (Hagen et al. 2012). Authenticity and experience are regarded as important values in Svalbard (Dahle et al. 2000); such objects would lose their authenticity if restored.

Tim Edensor's work on ruins, which he sees as being "emblematic of that which is assigned as waste"<sup>27</sup> and "allied to a sense of melancholia,"<sup>28</sup> has drawn attention to the importance of such artefacts in the construction of place. As Edensor has argued, "industrial ruins are a part of capital expansion, are being produced more rapidly as global production and commodification speeds up, as new products are insistently sought and new markets and more profitable production processes are relentlessly hunted."<sup>29</sup> Yet tourists to Svalbard often come to the North to experience a pristine nature, and an Arctic wilderness untouched by human entrepreneurship, industrialism, or folly. Many tourists end up disappointed to learn that they are in a place where other actors—capitalism among them—have clearly been before, and often shake their heads as they gawk at the rusting eye-sores of Svalbard's industrial past (Figs. 2.4 and 2.5).



Fig. 2.4 Tourist guide patrolling quay at Pyramiden in a fleece Cossack hat (photo: Roger Norum)



Fig. 2.5 Scrap metal, Pyramiden (photo: Roger Norum)

As a legacy of Svalbard's history, mining becomes part of its present mythology, too, and thus itself an object of consumption, sold through tourism strategies (Fig. 2.6). It is only more recently, though, that mining has made its way onto the tourist's itinerary in any substantive manner. The tourist operator Basecamp Explorer, one of the most established on Svalbard, launched in 2015 its Historical Coal Mine tour of the Gruve 3 mine, which operated from 1969 to 1996 and was the last man-operated mine. As the company's web site advertises:

EXPERIENCE THE LIFE OF A MINER. Are you ready to enter an old mine full of memories from coal-dusted miners? [...] You can hear the walls whispering memories of the past and feel the vivid stories of the miners. Gruve 3 is a living monument of the mining history in Spitsbergen. The equipment is standing still, just waiting for the next shift to start. Coal wagons are ready to transport workers deep into the mine. Drills and shovels are leaning against the walls. The anvil of a smith is gathering dust in a corner.<sup>30</sup>

Basecamp charges NOK 590 (£48) per person for this tour, which it attempts to sell with these inspiring words: "The old coal mines represent an important part of the cultural landscape and several of the unique mine structures have been already protected as cultural memorials. Opening



**Fig. 2.6** Tourists gathered around Pyramiden's memorialised final carriage of coal (photo: Roger Norum)

Gruve 3 for visitors is a great step towards sustainable way to create mining history into a tourism adventure.”<sup>31</sup> The company pledges to offset the carbon footprint by planting one tree for each visitor on the tour in a Kenyan forest, Gruve Tre, where the company also runs a tourist lodge.<sup>32</sup>

### ANALYSIS: TENUOUS ENVIRONMENTS

In 2013, Store Norske had two coal mines in operation in Svalbard: Svea Nord in Svea and Gruve 7, just outside of Longyearbyen. In February 2014, just as the company had announced a NOK 75 million (£6.5 million) loss, it proceeded with the earlier proposed opening of a new coal mine at Lunckefjell, in the innermost part of Van Mijenfjord, northeast of Svea and south of Longyearbyen. In order to make the mine operable, Store Norske needed to bore a tunnel from Svea Nord through the rock and out of the mountain at the Marthabreen glacier, then lay a 2 km road over the glacier in order to transport the coal by truck to the harbour. The Lunckefjell mine is said to contain an estimated 7.6 million tonnes of saleable coal, which would take approximately five years to mine in full. Taking into consideration all the remaining untapped coal reserves—Isfallen, Svea Øst, and the zone around Svea Nord—Store Norske estimates that it will be able to continue mining until about 2030.

Whether to continue mining on Svalbard has been a regular agenda item on Store Norske’s board for several years, especially since the recent global coal price collapse due in large part to China’s reduced consumption. 2015 was a defining year for coal mining in Svalbard. Not one year after opening Lunckefjell for business, Store Norske laid off 100 employees—a third of its workforce, and a sixth of the number of employees just a few years prior—and significantly curtailed mining activities in its newest mine for the time being due to the market downturn in demand for coal. As of late August, 2015, coal sold for £36 per tonne, yet £43 per tonne is estimated for Store Norske’s mining activities to break even (Sommers 2015).<sup>33</sup>

In terms of Norwegian state policy, too, 2015 became a decisive year for mining in Svalbard, and one during which each month called into question the future of Store Norske and, with it, the future of coal mining in Norway as a whole. The Norwegian parliament spent the better part of both 2014 and 2015 debating the environmental role of the country’s sovereign wealth fund, which has part of its NOK 7.8 trillion (£600 billion) national investment portfolio in several global coal power plants. In June, 2015, parliament voted unanimously to divest itself during the com-

ing year from the largest coal investments in its national sovereign wealth fund, which was seen as a resounding victory by environmental concerns (Hulac 2015).<sup>34</sup>

And yet just one week later, parliament approved a bailout subsidy of NOK 500 million (about £38 million) to subsidise Store Norske, just half of it in loans. Labour party member Else-May Botten commented after the vote that Svalbard gives Norway a “strategic advantage in the Arctic” in geopolitical issues, and that mining “still has great significance” for the Longyearbyen community (Hulac 2015). Then, on December 18, 2015, Norway stated that it was willing to invest NOK 100 million (£7.9 million) into Store Norske during the coming year, moneys which would go towards expanding operations in one mine shaft and slowing down activity in two others. It is estimated that keeping these two shafts idle will cost upwards of NOK 145 million (£11.5 million) annually, but will also allow the company to react swiftly should the market for coal improve (McGwin 2015). Still, it is foreseen that as many as 200 Store Norske employees could well lose their jobs in 2016 (Strøm et al. 2015).

Clearly, Svalbard’s remoteness does not exempt it from being implicated in the global economy. Nor are such struggles limited to remote islands; the economic crisis has begun to take its toll on extractive industries in other areas of the North. On November 18, 2015, the Sydvaranger iron mine in Kirkenes was permanently closed when the Australian-based firm Northern Iron declared bankruptcy, blaming accumulating debt and the sharp drop in global prices of iron ore. In one day, four hundred people lost their jobs, and unemployment in Kirkenes, a quaint northern Norwegian town of several thousand, soared from near zero to one of the highest levels in all of Norway (Staalesen 2015). Miljøpartiet’s Arne Liaklev, who had recently been elected to the regional parliament in Finnmark, said that such changes “show how dependent [we] are on the large economies.”<sup>35</sup>

Various international organisations have been lobbying Norway to shut down its coal-mining operations in Svalbard, thereby ending what many see as a paradoxical extraction given current climate-change debates.<sup>36</sup> The UN’s Executive Secretary on Climate Change Christiana Figueres publicly called on Norway in the summer of 2015 to permanently shut down the Svalbard mines. She warned about the rising cost of extracting ever harder to reach stockpiles, but her primary argument was that because Norway is seen to be a global leader when it comes to sustainable energy programmes and green living, the country must consider Svalbard’s present and future symbolic capital. Mining, she argued, clashes with the country’s responsi-

bility to uphold standards and ethics in climate-change research, and continuing coal operations would be “very incongruous with what the island actually stands for, namely climate research.”<sup>37</sup>

There was an underlying sense in Figueres’s call to arms that Norway should be the one to lead the way and serve as a role model for Russia. A longstanding lack of ecological consciousness in the Russian North has led to extreme pollution from the extractive industries, which has adversely affected many marine and freshwater environments and led to the degradation of wildlife grounds (Stammler and Forbes 2006). These environmentally careless initiatives are often seen as the brainchildren of Russian elites who have championed national security objectives and envisioned the nation as an “energy superpower.”<sup>38</sup> The result is that Russia has been stigmatised as a dirty industrial extractor with little concern for nature. Many Norwegians argue that Russia’s lax regulations on industrial pollution have put a literal and metaphorical stain on the Scandinavian Arctic that risks spreading into Norwegian territory.

At least rhetorically, the Norwegian state is clear about the current status and future direction of its own environmental policy, and in stating responsibility for maintaining Arctic nature it also regularly pronounces that “the management of Svalbard shall be the showcase for the country’s high profile in environmental concern.”<sup>39</sup> Even two decades ago, the words of the Norwegian Department of the Environment were that “Svalbard should, due to the documented values of its environment, be one of the best managed wilderness areas of the world.” Indeed, Svalbard’s high profile in Arctic scientific and environmental research, and in Arctic geopolitics, has given it a key role in Norway’s establishment of a strong role in international polar affairs, and in spearheading its own domestic environmental politics. For all that, in responding to Figueres’s critical words, Norwegian Climate and Environment Minister Tine Sundtoft recently insisted that Svalbard’s economic legacy is based on coal and will thus be difficult to shut down. The UN argues that Norway stands for environmental research and carbon neutrality; Norway argues that it stands for other things as well.

## CONCLUSION

The Arctic is a space where images and imaginative representations have become more significant than in other “global” places, since these are “complex spaces [that] are embroiled in relationships and networks

that span the earth.”<sup>40</sup> A pivotal role is played in Arctic imaginaries by emblematic figures such as the polar bear (O’Neill 2008) and the whale (Kristoffersen et al. 2015) in disseminating the message of environmental degradation, climate change, and the destructive capacities of humans. As Michael Bravo has suggested, discourse around planetary climate change has been based on a marked separation of science and politics.<sup>41</sup> Yet it is specifically because of this separation that social scientists should be wary of the tendency of Arctic representations to codify spaces in “rigid, fixed and unchanging ways,” remaining attentive instead to the multiple nature of “sites, agents and spaces enrolled in this preoccupation.”<sup>42</sup> Just as great mammals such as whales have become emblematic of the planet, coal becomes both a symbol of value and a valuable symbol that forms part of the symbolic capital Figueres references in her critique of Norwegian mines.

As can be seen from Svalbard’s own complex history, exploration, tourism, resource extraction, and environmental pillaging have all been part of the archipelago since its “discovery.” Indeed, there are definitive historical linkages between all of these and geopolitical security (Dodds and Nuttall 2016). As Sale and Potapov among others have shown, connections exist between Arctic mineral-resource extraction and the problems of climate change, the destruction of the region’s wildlife and cultures, and the Arctic scramble (Sale and Potapov 2010), all of which function together in a variety of interlinked ways. It is thus essential to see nominally independent industries (whether cultural, economic, or political) as enmeshed within one another and as functioning in concert with other underlying factors. Research, education, tourism, and polar and space-related activities have in recent years all helped to reduce Svalbard’s dependence on coal mining, still an economic and cultural mainstay in Svalbard but one wielding much less economic significance than it once did (Bjørnsen and Johansen 2014). Svalbard’s economy now has a broader platform and more diversity in types of businesses and income streams (Mathisen 2014). It may have other futures up its sleeve as well. Both the Norwegian Green Party and the anti-immigration Progress Party have suggested that camps be built on Svalbard to house the 10,000 Syrian refugees that Norway has agreed to accept over the coming two years—one of Europe’s largest numbers of quota refugees per capita (Bjørke 2015; Ulyanova and Vassilieva 2015). In the past, Russia has toyed with building a mineral water bottling factory in Barentsburg and an algae and seaweed processing plant in Pyramididen (Trifonenko 1992). Meanwhile, a recent spat between the

Horn family of industrialists (who currently own the property at Austre Adventfjord) and the Norwegian company with rights to the coal mine there is believed to have led to the land going on the market. The 217 sq. km of land (roughly two-and-a-half times the size of Manhattan) put up for sale recently is believed to hold about 25 million tonnes of coal. There have been rumours that China has interest in the land. The melting Arctic implies increasing geopolitical interest, not only from traditional actors in the region but also from new ones such as China (Müller 2013; Solli et al. 2013).

The Arctic as a space of exception—both in the identification of climate change as an issue of global security and in the very state of the region as being one of remote liminality—has been “imagined and performed as a distinct [...] space with its own properties.”<sup>43</sup> It is this liminality, at once geographical and political, which has enabled the Arctic to become a space that is both paradigmatic of “masculinist fantasy and adventure” and deeply embedded within performances of “paternal sovereignty” in state-building and international relations—characterisations which are mirrored in contemporary accounts of Arctic geopolitics at large.<sup>44</sup> Still, some scholars argue against this type of exceptionalism, suggesting that the Poles are “exceptional spaces” not just on account of their “size, location, [and] remoteness,” but also because of “their connectivity to wider global political, legal and economic networks and practices.”<sup>45</sup> Though it does not fall within the scope of this paper, the context of Svalbard does raise an interesting point linked to the concerns of Abram (this volume), Bravo (2009) and others regarding silenced Arctic voices. Though different peoples (e.g. Basque whalers, American industrialists, Russian labourers, Thai restaurateurs, Canadian guides, Swedish chefs) have come to Svalbard for sojourns of various periods, the archipelago has not been permanently inhabited until the past several decades. Due to the fact that most residents only remain on Svalbard for between 6 months and a few years, one could argue that it has never really been “settled” at all. This now-inhabited area of the Arctic is thus distinct from other Northern regions with longer histories of human habitation, casting into relief local concerns of sovereignty and rights, among other geopolitical issues, in new ways.

Through geopolitical action, the Arctic becomes conceptualised as both an *open* (unclaimed, geopolitically undefined) space and an *opening* (melting, disappearing) space, leading many to pontificate over various forms of “Arctic futures” (Anderson 2010; see also Chap. 1

of this volume). In speculations of this kind, the Arctic comes to trace the contours of a geography of rich promise, becoming “the locus of a potential oil bonanza, new strategic trade routes and huge fishing grounds.”<sup>46</sup> The result is that a largely “empty space” ends up needing to be filled with evidence of “effective operation,”<sup>47</sup> morphing into a theatre for imagined or imaginary action of different kinds. Similarly, Svalbard is connected—symbolically and metaphorically as well as physically—with the rest of the world; indeed it could be argued that the more Svalbard develops, the less exceptional it becomes. Certainly it is hardly as isolated as it once was before modern technology irreversibly connected it: on the contrary, in terms of everyday life it is now “a place where mobility is the norm and fixity the exception [...], a partly global place [where] researchers and students, but also people in other sectors, come from all over the world.”<sup>48</sup> Tourists are among these globetrotters: the discount carrier Norwegian Airlines now flies regularly from Oslo to Longyearbyen, while Finnair is scheduled to launch its route from Helsinki to Longyearbyen in the summer of 2016. Armchair travellers will soon join them: BBC Earth recently commissioned a ten-part reality television programme, to be aired in 2016, which will follow the everyday lives of several of Svalbard’s residents (Brzoznowski 2015).

All told, Svalbard is a prime example of “a modern and globally integrated life on the edge of the earth.”<sup>49</sup> Perhaps this, too, contributes to its appeal, both for states and for individuals. As a shifting and shiftable space (Bravo and Rees 2006), Svalbard calls out to be tamed, perhaps more than many of the world’s supposedly remote territories. This highlights a paradox, for Svalbard surely wouldn’t be such a centre of attention if it weren’t remote (Fig. 2.7). It is as if, through a combination of political, economic, and technological moves, the periphery has been drawn into the centre; has been redrawn *in* the centre. Svalbard is perhaps less exemplary, in this last sense, as a site of historical scramble than as a contemporary place in which the lines between centre and periphery, casting new points of orientation, have been and continue to be remapped. Through a combination of political, economic, and technological moves, this periphery-pulled-into-the-centre casts specific forms of entanglement not just between different imagined compass points, but between distinct forms of value production. These encompass livelihood staples and civilization’s foundation stones (coal and other



**Fig. 2.7** Directional signpost outside Longyearbyen airport (photo: Roger Norum)

hydrocarbons), staples of leisure and contemplation industries, and their civilisational counter-cultures (tourism and environmentalism), and discovery staples which are the keystones of western ontologies and regimes of truth (scientific research).

**Acknowledgements** I want to thank Albina Pashkevich for the generous invitation to accompany her on a research trip to Svalbard in July 2014; Frank Sejersen and Julia Christensen for their reflections on a section of this paper presented at the 2014 Cosmopolitan Conference in Copenhagen; and John T. Reilly for access to his personal collection of pre-twentieth-century Arctic postcards. I am also extremely grateful to HERA (European Humanities Research Area) and to the University of Leeds School of English for generous travel funding which facilitated research for this chapter.

## NOTES

1. Though the arrival of Barentsz and his crew to Svalbard is undisputed, whether or not theirs was the first expedition to visit the archipelago is yet to be confirmed. For a compelling analysis of the chronology and historiography of Svalbard's early colonisation, comparing the Viking (Norwegian), Pomor (Russian), and Barentsz (international) hypotheses of first discovery, see Arlov 2005.
2. As of July 1, 2015 (Norway Statistics 2015).
3. The Global Seed Vault's samples number around 250 million (representing 500,000 different food crop varieties), and include samples from one-third of the world's most important varieties and their botanical wild relatives. Constructed some 120 m inside a sandstone mountain and 130 m above sea level, ensuring the site stays dry even if the icecaps melt, the bank would be most useful in the event that any of the world's thousand-plus crop collections were accidentally to lose or destroy samples.
4. Indeed, the everyday geopolitics of many settlements in the Arctic often seem to stand in as poster children for the entire region, while the places themselves seem at times to exist purely for symbolic, stake-claiming purposes.
5. Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall, *The Scramble for the Poles: The Geopolitics of the Arctic and Antarctic* (London: Polity, 2016), xi.
6. To this diverse group, I would suggest the addition of tourists.
7. Dodds and Nuttall, *The Scramble for the Poles*, 57.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 32.
10. "Spitsbergen" is the term that previously designated the entire archipelago. Today, Svalbard is the most commonly accepted name. In contemporary Norwegian and most other languages—Russian being a notable exception—Spitsbergen now refers to Svalbard's largest island. The term *Svalbard* comes from a twelfth-century Icelandic epic that described Norse sailors reaching a land they termed *Svalbarði* ("the cold edge"). However, this land mass might well have been another island in the North Atlantic such as Jan Mayen, or indeed even simply pack ice; no archaeological or historical evidence for the presence of Vikings on Svalbard has ever been uncovered. Nonetheless, the Norse epic was evidence enough for the Norwegian government to "prove" that theirs was the original claim to the islands (Gjærevoll and Rønning 1999).
11. William Martin Conway, *No Man's Land, a History of Spitsbergen from Its Discovery in 1596 to the Beginning of the Scientific Exploration of the Country* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1906), 347–368, provides an insightful appendix on pre-nineteenth-century nomenclature of places in Svalbard.

12. Today, claims are controlled by the Svalbard Mining Inspector. For an annual fee of NOK 6000 (£483), any Treaty signatory or assigned company may claim an area of 10 sq. km, which gives them the sole right to mine within that area (Sale and Potapov 2010).
13. The document's official name is the "Treaty between Norway, The United States of America, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Ireland and the British overseas Dominions and Sweden concerning Spitsbergen signed in Paris 9th February 1920."
14. So far, this demilitarised status has only been violated openly during the Second World War (by both the Allied/Norwegian and the German forces) and secretly during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union maintained camouflaged special forces based in Barentsburg. Setting up Svalbard as a demilitarised zone incidentally made the islands sitting ducks for German squadrons, which arrived to bombard Norwegian coal mines there during the Second World War. In the end, though, Svalbard was spared destruction and the Norwegian and the Soviet mines there continued to operate in the post-war period.
15. Many of Barentsburg's present-day workers hail from the coal-mining region of Donetsk, a place embroiled in the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Salaries in Barentsburg are roughly £700 per month, about three times that of a Ukrainian miner's salary (Higgins 2014).
16. In 2014, there were 471 Russian speakers living in Barentsburg (Sysselmannen Svalbard 2014). This number is nothing compared to the Soviet period, when as many as 3100 miners worked in the pits at Barentsburg, Grymant, and Pyramiden (Arlov 2003). Indeed, one initial obstacle to Norway's control over Svalbard was quite simply the large number of residents in Soviet settlements, which were even then often perceived to be enclaves of the Soviet Union inside Norway (Pedersen 2009).
17. At Pyramiden, too, there are still considerable deposits, but its difficult geology—up to six months of ice cover on the inner Billefjord—makes transport much more challenging and costly.
18. Conway, *No Man's Land*, 277.
19. *Ibid.*, 292.
20. Charles Emmerson, *The Future History of the Arctic* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), 108.
21. *Ibid.*, 166–167.
22. The new communications infrastructure has also enabled people living in Svalbard to tap into some extremely fast internet connections. Although most of the High Arctic lacks anything approximating high-speed internet, Svalbard enjoys uplink speeds that are regularly 10–20 times faster than anywhere else in Norway.

23. Jason Dittmer et al., “Have you Heard the One about the Disappearing Ice? Recasting Arctic Geopolitics,” *Political Geography* 30, no. 4 (2011): 203.
24. Powell cited in *ibid.*
25. Scientific activity has also become one of the major local impact factors on land. Since the 1990s, several times as much terrain has been destroyed for research facilities and access roads, partly in plant reserves, than by tourism in more than a century. Scientific research is a major client of the coal-operated power plants in Longyearbyen and Barentsburg and, along with the Norwegian administration, the largest user of helicopter transport—even in protected areas. Together with fishing, tourism, and administration, research vessels account for much of the ship traffic in the remotest and most sensitive parts of the archipelago. Compared with the tourist industry, environmental regulations and restrictions for research are marginal.
26. Ken Catford, “The Industrial Archaeology of Spitsbergen,” *Industrial Archaeology Review* 24, no. 1 (2002): 36.
27. Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 18.
28. *Ibid.*, 11.
29. *Ibid.*, 18.
30. <http://basecampexplorer.com/spitsbergen/our-basecamps/gruve-3>
31. *Ibid.*
32. This is a pun of a kind. *Tre* is the Norwegian word for both “three” and “tree,” though the seeming etymological connection here is a fallacy.
33. During 2015, no fewer than six major North American coal companies filed for bankruptcy, in addition to New Zealand’s largest coal company and a major producer of coal in South Africa.
34. This excludes mining and power companies that base 30% or more of their income on coal. The fund has also excluded investment in industries linked to nuclear weapons, tobacco, and child labour (Nilsen 2014).
35. Bård Wormdal and Sara Beate Eira, “Sydvaranger Gruve har fått en ekstra måned,” *NRK Finnmark*, December 19, 2015.
36. Environmental concerns about coal mining revolve largely around black carbon, the by-product of partially burned fossil fuels, particulate matter that triggers heat absorption and darkens the Arctic landscape. The mining, storing, and transportation of the coal causes dust to escape and discolour the snow and the surrounding soils with slag. Even if coal is not technically classified as toxic, it contains substances, including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH), which in large quantities and under given conditions can be harmful to organisms (<http://www.snsk.no>). The extraction and transport involved in mining operations also result in the

- emission of greenhouse gases, though these emissions are considerably lower than the fallout that results from actually combusting the coal itself. Together, the mines in Svea and Longyearbyen put out 50,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents; even just transporting the coal by sea to end users in Europe produces annual emissions of about 40,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents. By contrast, combusting the coal extracted amounts to 5.5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents annually.
37. Dodson (2014) cited in Thomas Nilsen, "Svalbard Coal Mine Cuts 100 Jobs to Reduce Costs," *Barents Observer*, November 25, 2014.
  38. Dodds and Nuttall, *The Scramble for the Poles*, 126.
  39. Arvid Viken and Frigg Jørgensen, "Tourism on Svalbard," *Polar Record* 34, no. 189 (1998): 127.
  40. Klaus Dodds and Richard Powell, "Polar Geopolitics: New Researchers on the Polar Regions," *The Polar Journal* 3, no. 1 (2013): 4. See also Chap. 1 of this volume.
  41. Bravo, Michael T., "Voices from the Sea Ice: The Reception of Climate Impact Narratives," *Journal of Historical Geography* 35, no. 2 (2009): 258.
  42. Dodds and Powell, "Polar Geopolitics," 4.
  43. Dittmer et al., "Have you Heard the One," 203.
  44. *Ibid.*, 201, 203. See also Gunn 2008.
  45. Dodds and Nuttall, *The Scramble for the Poles*, 24; Powell and Dodds 2014.
  46. Dittmer et al., "Have you Heard the One," 205; Powell 2008.
  47. *Ibid.*, 208.
  48. Arvid Viken, "The Svalbard Transit Scene," in *Mobility and Place: Enacting Northern European Peripheries*, ed. B. Granås & J. O. Børenholdt (London: Ashgate, 2008), 139.
  49. *Ibid.*

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## Jokkmokk: Rapacity and Resistance in Sápmi

*Simone Abram*

**Abstract** This chapter considers the effects of the “new extractivism” on a region with a strong indigenous (Sami) presence. It shows how dilemmas over new mining concessions in reindeer herding areas have inspired indigenous resistance to broader repressive forces. Amid discussion of the new wave of (persistent) colonialism in the North, the annual Sami winter market in Jokkmokk has become an important arena for the emergence of political resistance, as environmentalists, artists, herders, and feminists unite in a new anti-colonial uprising. The politics of display, new political alliances, and the growing confidence of politicised Swedish Sami artists turn a tourist festival into a forum for resistance against the rapacity of industrial expansion.

**Keywords** Indigenous protest • Arctic tourism • Extractive industries • Sami • Jokkmokk

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G. Huggan, L. Jensen (eds.), *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-58817-3\_3

## INTRODUCTION: REINDEER, MINES, AND TOURISTS

Stories about “scrambles,” from Africa to the Arctic, tend to hinge on a vision of companies and nations racing to gain ownership of resources in other parts of the world, usually areas with rich resources, poor or sparse populations, and weak governments. While the image of greedy states and corporations falling over each other to ransack pristine ecological areas and their peoples is emotionally charged, it is a narrative that merges and dominates what are in fact distinct, complex, and often multi-directional processes with both locally specific and historically peculiar effects. Resistance to new mining concessions in northern Fennoscandia, for example, does not arise from a pristine natural environment, but on the back of historical large-scale mining and industrial exploitation. Sami activists protesting against colonial exploitation are not a “helpless” indigenous people, but Nordic citizens bounded in familial and social histories of forced relocation and disenfranchisement. Nor has Sami resistance appeared recently in the history of Nordic colonisation; rather, the crushing of uprisings in the nineteenth century provides the general backdrop for current political activism and the ambivalent unification of different Sami groups.

In their popular book of the same name, Sale and Potapov’s story of the “Scramble for the Arctic” (2010) builds on histories of “first contact” by property-owning European colonisers staking claims to land that was inhabited by others, and views claims and counter-claims for Arctic resources as compromising the many indigenous peoples of the Arctic regions. The story tells of ecological ransack as Arctic mammals were hunted to, or near to, extinction one after another to feed first a fur trade and then a whaling bonanza, with indigenous people both complicit and exploited; it then traces the gradual emergence of international treaties and laws as repeated attempts to curtail the decimation of species and ecologies in the High North. Even as these conflicts would eventually lead to the establishment of rights for peoples of the North, Sale and Potapov show international investors and industrialists continuing to treat the Arctic as a pot of gold, rich for the picking; as a treasure trove for whoever dares to delve in, and extract what they can (see Chap. 1 of this volume). As Craciun observes, although the scale of the current global scramble for Arctic resources may be new, the scramble itself is “a centuries-long mad pursuit that has not diminished in interest for the colonial and commercial powers involved.”<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the book, Sale and Potapov note the increase in Arctic cruise tourism, a rise which has been similarly rapid and unregulated, but they make little of the links between these trajectories apart from acknowledging the increasing access for tourist ships enabled by changing ice conditions and shipping practices. However, a slight shift in focus is enough to reveal persistent links and conflicts between expedition-exploration, tourism, resource extraction, and indigenous resistance throughout the colonial history of the European High North. As I have argued elsewhere (see Abram and Lund 2016), tourism has followed expeditionary journeys from the European continent, building on the romantic visions of *terra incognita*, the mysteries of the imagined North, and the sublime experiences it offers. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, cruise tourism to the European Arctic regions was rapidly established, undoubtedly benefiting from the marketing effects of the exhibition of Sami herding families at European expositions, which added considerably to the exoticism of the destination.

Cathrine Baglo's account of exhibited Sami herders is important in this context, since she argues that Sami families exhibited in Europe, such as at the Natural Science Museum of London, need not necessarily be seen as unwitting victims of European race-exoticism (2011). On the contrary, it seems quite feasible that the herders Jens and Karen Thomasen took up the invitation from William Bullock to bring reindeer to Scotland, and then to perform on the London stage in 1822–1823, surely an exciting prospect for any well-travelled family. Later exhibitions elsewhere in Europe and the USA were more firmly situated in neo-Darwinist discourses of racial stereotyping, as parodied by Gómez-Peña (1996; see also Fusco and Gómez-Peña 1992), but Baglo's telling of the story of exhibited humans reminds us that the people on display were not always "exploited slaves," but may have been looking to take the opportunity to educate European audiences on their own lives and experiences in a manner that could be styled "resistance." More broadly, it confirms that tourism and resistance have long accompanied the gathering of Arctic resources and the promulgation of narratives about the High North in European and American contexts, links that continue today through the various forms of performance bound up in the postcolonial context (see Picard 2011).

Indeed, colonial themes and trappings in tourism have been the subject of critique for as long as social scientists have studied tourism (Nash 1989). It has been a good while since Ed Bruner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett encapsulated their critique of the performance of colonialism for

tourists in a depiction of the serving of tea and scones with accompanying Maasai dancing on a white ranch in Kenya (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). As Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett would remark at the time, “tourism gives tribalism and colonialism a second life by bringing them back as representations of themselves and circulating them within an economy of performance.”<sup>2</sup> Kenya is a long way from the Arctic, to be sure, but tourism tropes and trappings travel, and there is no reason to suspect that tourists who travel to Kenya do not also set their sights on the North, pursuing experiences of the exotic across the globe.

Critiques of tourism as representations of “culture,” and the exploitation of “native” arts and knowledge for tourism development, have been central concerns in social-science studies of tourism, with the question of colonialism a recurrent worry (Palmer 1994). Indeed, it is now almost impossible to think about tourism without the question of colonialism hovering into view: for, as Anne-Marie d’Hautesserre puts it, “postcolonialism and tourism both perpetuate myths of the colonial exotic.”<sup>3</sup> Amid the so-called scramble for resources in northern Sweden, local resistance to industrial developments are being played out, at least in part, through the tourism performances that are the focus of this chapter, with government mining concessions, foreign mining companies, reindeer herders, and environmental activists all performing set-piece roles in a deadly serious confrontation over Arctic futures.

As Nordic governments open up for a renewed global scramble for Arctic resources, protests over specific sites are growing into something more principled. In Norway and Sweden, in particular, new rounds of concessions for resource extraction have drawn widespread alarm alongside anxiety about the possible economic consequences for existing businesses in the North. This latest push for expansion in mineral extraction is being interpreted locally as a renewed wave of colonisation of the North, not just by the South, but by global capital more generally. Although the discourse of colonial “scramble” is criticised for being alarmist and potentially disempowering (Ayers 2013; see also Chap. 1 of this volume), the intrusion of global capital into sensitive areas can be deeply destabilising. What is happening in Sweden (and in Norway and Finland) is not colonisation of one state by another, as the African literature on the subject typically describes it, but rather the internal colonisation by the state of land made use of by indigenous people, for the benefit of international investors. As the state projects parts of its territory as “empty” or “underused,” it plays on long-standing colonial discourses that have envisaged nature as

resource, and indigenous peoples as immaterial. In these discourses, valuable industries such as tourism, fishing, and herding are rendered worthless in favour of the financialised industries of resource extraction. As with all political actions, proposals, policies, and decisions are supported by a range of performances—attempts both to persuade different social actors to engage in the policy’s ambitions and to dampen dissent (see Abram and Weszkalnys 2013; also Abram 2011). Seeking increased economic activity and industrial employment in the North, the Swedish government has been using established techniques to persuade local councils of the inevitability of minerals extraction by emphasising the statistical representation of low economic activity in the North, thus making income the persuasive factor in local decision-making. Even as particular cases are played out in the council chambers of local government, competing performances of local place and economics are emerging based on quite different characterisations of life in the North and highlighting the value of ecological sustainability and the continuity of territorial traditions. These performances cast the desire to exploit natural resources for profit as an extension of the colonial mentality, calling up anger and defiance rooted in generations of perceived injustice and ethnic prejudice.

In this chapter, I ask how “the postcolonial” plays out through the clash between extractive industries, ecological traditions, and tourism in the European High North. Whereas much of the critical tourism literature has been concerned for many years with the “authenticity” of indigenous or other local cultures performed for tourists, this chapter addresses a rather different set of questions. While Sami tourism has been seen by the Nordic states and Sami organisations alike as a potential economic resource that might also help sustain Sami ways of living, tourism also presents opportunities for political activism. Insofar as it is a means to help sustain Sami practices, tourism becomes a political act in Sápmi, but as recent events have shown, events and activities that occur ostensibly in the name of tourism can be opportunities for communication, promotion, and the performance of political solidarity. Thus, in this chapter, tourism, politics, conflict, environmentalism, and art must all be considered together, though the strictures of linear text mean that they must be presented one after another, in serial form.

## SWEDEN AND SÁPMI

The territory of Fennoscandia has long been contested. Inhabited for over 10,000 years, rock-carvings of reindeer herding have been dated to the fifth millennium BC and were continuously produced over a 5000-year period (Helskog 2012). The colonial history of the region is much more recent. Colonisation from the South during the Viking period grew sporadically through the Middle Ages; encouragement followed from the Swedish and Norwegian states from the seventeenth century onwards; then recognisable state nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ushered in explicit attempts to nationalise the respective populations. Sápmi, the territory that is home to diverse Sami peoples, was not divided between the Scandinavian nation states until the nineteenth century, but the closure of borders to reindeer herding in 1852 was a watershed moment in Sami history, reinforced in 1889 with the closure of borders between Finland and Sweden and through subsequent conventions on reindeer movements and the violent effects of the Second World War (Pedersen 2004). While the details of colonisation in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia inevitably differ, there are broad similarities in intent and effect. In Norway and Sweden, attempts to settle nomadic Sami, and to “nationalise” them into Norwegians and Swedes, deployed many of the methods familiar from global colonial histories. The outlawing of spoken languages and clothing, mandatory schooling, and the enforcement of settled housing were among techniques that were often brutal not just in physical, but also in emotional and psychological terms. Even if most of the laws and policies have since been rescinded, repression and symbolic as well as physical violence are still all too apparent in the continued expression of racism and equally persistent fears among Sami families about its long-term effects. It is worth repeating here that population figures for Sami are inherently unreliable since so many people of Sami descent remain reluctant to identify themselves officially as Sami, either in everyday life or in relation to authorities. Figures for the number of people on the electoral register for the Norwegian Sami parliament are revealing, having grown from 5500 to 14,000 over 20 years—a rise inexplicable without the understanding that increasing numbers of people are publicly recognising their Sami political identity and registering to vote in parliament. In this context, authoritative statements such as those found in the publications of the Swedish Sami parliament (published with the Agriculture Ministry: Kvarfordt et al. 2004)—that there are 70,000 Sami of which 20,000 are in Sweden—are

highly misleading. It is likely that the figures are significantly higher. A figure of 2500 Swedish Sami involved in reindeer herding is also likely to be inaccurate since herding spills out into associated activities, including the processing of meat, skins, antlers, and other elements, the provision of equipment (including snow-scooters), and the exchange of services for travelling herders. Population statistics are notoriously unreliable, but in relation to mixed ethnic groups within a nation who have been subject to assimilation and settlement policies, they must be treated with particular caution.

I will not rehearse the well-documented history of Sami subjugation here (see, e.g., Lundmark 2008), but restrict myself to some of the aspects of what can be called domestic colonialism that are attracting political attention in the current Swedish context. Paramount among these is the Swedish history of race-biology, which would emerge strongly in the last decade of the nineteenth century then flourish in the early twentieth in the form of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology, founded in 1922, which finally closed its doors as late as 1958. Throughout the same period, Sami children were removed from their homes and forced to attend boarding schools for nomads with the intention of “civilising” them (if not necessarily “Swedifying” them, in contrast to the Norwegianisation programme in the neighbouring country). Such interventions were designed to disrupt the reproduction of cultural knowledge by distancing children from their families and communities, and the pain of this enforced separation, along with the humiliation of being subject to the Institute for Racial Biology, continued through the generations, as Katarina Pirak Sikku documented in a well-received exhibition in 2014.<sup>4</sup> That colonial discourses about the Sami live on in Sweden was also apparent in 2015, when 59 academics came together to object to the use of the language of race-biology in a legal case over hunting and fishing rights in Sami territory.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in both Norway and Sweden historical recognition of Sami has been primarily associated with reindeer herders, effectively deracinating the majority of Sami who engage in fishing and other forms of subsistence agriculture and trade. Ween and Lien (2012) gently point to the idea of reindeer-herding Sami as “super-Sami” in the context of ongoing attempts to relegitimise the notion of non-reindeer-herding Sami, acknowledging in the process that there are many different Sami groups, speaking many different languages, across the expanse of Sápmi.

Whereas in Norway, government plans to dam major rivers over Sami territories for hydroelectric dams provided the spark for uprisings that

would eventually lead to a royal apology and the establishment of the Sami parliament (in 1989), forced relocations in Swedish Sápmi did not lead to such uprisings, but took place on an even larger scale. The pain of forced removal from ancestral land produced deep communal trauma that is only now gaining broader recognition. Those who were young children or teenagers during the years of the removals are now adults, and some have become unwaveringly politicised and increasingly emboldened in their political practice, as I will go on to discuss in more detail below.

Resistance to the acknowledgement of Sami rights can also be detected in the refusal of the Swedish government to sign up to ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention 169, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989), despite its adoption under the UN's 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Sami parliament in Sweden is the most recently established of the three corresponding bodies (Finland's was founded in 1973, Norway's in 1989, and Sweden's in 1993). Each of the parliaments has statutory advisory status, its self-designated role being to uphold the rights of Sami citizens in their respective countries, and to monitor Sami issues. The Swedish Sami parliament is not an organ for self-government, however, but rather disburses limited funds for Sami cultural activities and is the official management body for the reindeer-herding industry in Sweden. Although an architectural competition was held to build a Sami parliament, internal disputes have meant that construction has been indefinitely postponed. In brief, it could be argued that in contrast to the Norwegian situation, where Sami politics are well developed and rights established, the Swedish Sami situation is significantly more fragile, reflected in the continued use of the term "Lapp" as an external ethnic marker—one that has been considered inappropriate for some time now in Norwegian popular consciousness and political debate. In partial acknowledgement of this issue, the national tour operator Visit Sweden advises tourists on its website that the atmosphere "will be super if you refer to them as Sami and refer to their territory as Sápmi," while referring nevertheless to Sami as "a people" and using prominent photographs of reindeer. Against the background of institutionalised colonialism and racism, common misunderstandings can take on deeper significance. The common assumption exclusively linking Sami identity and reindeer herding has been contested in both Norway and Sweden, but it persists in the non-Sami and southern popular imagination, and is reproduced repeatedly in tourism literature.

## CAN TOURISM BE SAMI TOO?

To describe tourism as “Sami tourism” raises many of the more difficult questions about Sami identification arising from a deeply layered history the surface of which is barely scratched above. By what criteria can tourism be described as Sami? Is it in respect of those who carry out the tourism activities, or those who earn an income from it, or those who own and sell the tourism product, or the signs and emblems that mark the product itself as “Sami”? The tourism industry generally operates by cultivating exotic stereotypes of people and places to generate desire on the part of potential tourists to travel (Franklin 2004; Viken 2000); and, as Olsen explains, the Sami have been similarly “constructed” as “touristic emblems” (Olsen 2003). Reni Wright (2014) summarises the difficulties of marking tourism products with ethnic or identity traits, highlighting the essentialism that has long been criticised in tourism “authenticity” debates (summarised in Franklin 2003). Contested rights to use indigenous emblems, designs, and other aspects of intellectual property have long been discussed in tourism anthropology, along with the imagination of what “indigenous art” is among colonial authorities (see, e.g., Graburn 2004), discussions that are relevant to the use and abuse of Sami designs in marketing and other sales techniques (see Kramvig and Flemmen 2016). Striking in Kramvig and Flemmen’s examples is the shock that many non-Sami designers express that their use of Sami symbols might be interpreted as cultural commodification or colonial exploitation. If Swedish designers consider artistic innovation to include the adoption of patterns or designs found in the world around them, Sami designs are just another instance of creative inspiration, but this fits poorly with the political currency of emblems of Sami belonging and kinship. The issue here goes beyond a question of freedom of expression and intellectual property, encroaching into the territory of epistemological difference. The understanding of symbols is categorically different in each perspective; quite possibly irreconcilably different.

Despite these difficulties, northern tourism boards have adopted policies to promote Sami tourism—however defined—even if some Sami entrepreneurs have complained of being sidelined by the larger operators (Larsen 2009). Swedish tourism policy has explicitly supported the development of Sami tourism for over a decade, with some discussion about whether directing policy only at reindeer herders is appropriate, given that they are a minority of the Sami population (see Müller and

Pettersson 2006). Rather than set out criteria for identifying Sami tourism, my focus here is on an event which is, and has always been identified as, Sami, and has increasingly become a tourist attraction for diverse audiences. According to Jokkmokk's municipality, the Sami Winter Market in Jokkmokk (Swedish Sápmi) has been an annual event since the Swedish King Charles IX established an annual market there in 1605. The granting of an official market licence can be contextualised in efforts to extract taxation from Sami trade, and played an important part in the Christianisation of the North. The building of a church in Jokkmokk in 1753 meant that visiting Sami could have their children baptised during the annual market, and hold funerals. Over several centuries, the market expanded to become an important trading point, not only between Sami from across Sápmi, but also for all kinds of traders in the north, including Russians, Swedes, Norwegians, and Finns. Early markets may have lasted for two or three weeks, since it was difficult to reckon on the time needed to travel long distances in winter.

The market's twentieth-century history is punctuated by two important developments. In 1943, a crafts college was established in Jokkmokk, rapidly becoming the centre for Sami arts and craft production (*duodji*) across the region. While there has always been a sense in which grand markets such as this are festive events, the Jokkmokk winter market began its life as a recognisably tourist event with the jubilee market in 1955, by which time many of the formerly nomadic reindeer herders had been more or less settled. Over subsequent years, the number of tourists increased along with the number of traders. In recent years, however, the number of visitors has dropped, from 49,700 over three days in 2007 to 39,000 in 2009 and to only 20,000 in 2012, although that year was marked by particularly cold weather, with temperatures down to -40 degrees Celsius keeping many locals away.

The market as such is just one part of the event, which is a festival by any other name. The two main streets and the town square are closed for market stalls; the college is devoted to exhibitions; and the schools, community centres, churches, and a number of private houses are opened for exhibitions, along with various shops and municipal buildings. A press office is housed within the tourist office, and various cafés and restaurants hold events, concerts, talks, and other meetings throughout the festival week. Pettersson among others has remarked how visible Sami presence is at the market (2009; see also Müller and Pettersson 2006), which features reindeer parades and during which many Sami wear traditional clothes

in bright red, blue, yellow, and green wool, with silver decoration. The tourist highlight of each day is the *renrajd*, a procession of reindeer-pulled sledges through the town and onto the main stage, where speeches are held and the reindeer and their owners presented to the audience. Crowds cluster around the picturesque sleds, led by members of a family who have brought reindeer to the market for many years, at times almost overwhelmed by cameras pressing in and people stepping in for photographs (see Fig. 3.1).



Fig. 3.1 *Renrajd* at 2014 market (photo: Simone Abram)

Prominently on display and sale throughout the market are intricately crafted *duodji* items, including knives with carved and inlaid horn and bone handles, silver and leather jewellery, leather and fur clothing and boots, decorative bone cravat-rings, handcrafted reindeer-leather bags, and other items of decoration, clothing, and utility. The craft college holds a fashion show displaying the work of graduating students, and hosts a market within the college premises of craft materials and *duodji* work. The Duodji Institute also has a special gallery display of the best Sami artists' work, with special prizes and awards, and there are several venues where professional *duodji* artists can display and sell their work. A feverish sense of splendour marks the occasion, with the very best *duodji* artists and craftspeople presenting their latest work. (Artists' previews, and shops and stalls selling artists' and craft materials for the abundant production, clearly go on across Sápmi throughout the year.) Similarly, the well-established *Ajtte* museum, with its shop and café, is an important venue for events, talks, and concerts during the festival, and holds special exhibitions alongside its Sami history collection. In recent years, a number of Sami artisanal shops have opened in Jokkmokk, notably the Viltok sisters' art and couture design shop and the Stoorstálka Sami design shop, thereby reinforcing a visible Sami presence year-round and playing an important role, not just as a sales-point, but also as a location for meeting and socialising during the festival. In other words, this is not a spectacle for tourists, but a major artistic event in the Sápmi calendar, albeit one open for tourists to attend. While tourists are also free to buy, much of the work on sale is of high quality and attracts correspondingly high prices, and little of the work available in the artists' galleries is the kind that attracts a casual purchase though cheaper versions of some items are available in the main outdoor market area.

### TOURISM AS A PLATFORM

In the last three years, the market has taken an unexpected turn in response to local political events.<sup>6</sup> As from 2012, protests have regularly been staged at the market against proposed new mining concessions in the area,<sup>7</sup> with a lively protest march winding through the town, chanting "what shall we do, stop the mines!" followed by dignified political speeches about the colonialism of the Swedish state. Further context is necessary here. The Swedish government (up to 2015) pursued a policy of resource exploitation in the North, and indeed there is a long history

of mining in northern Sweden, most famously around the city of Kiruna, parts of which are now being demolished and rebuilt as the city's foundations are being gradually weakened by underground mine workings (Storm 2014). From Stockholm, i.e. the perspective of the state capital (Scott 1998), the government appears to perceive the North as being racked by underemployment and poverty, yet at the same time as being blessed with rich resources. Few people I spoke to in the northern area could account for any other reason as to why the state would offer mining concessions to foreign companies in return for negligible tax returns, for all intents and purposes giving away the country's national natural resources (with taxes set under 0.5%, in comparison to mining taxes of nearer 30% in, say, Australia). A visiting civil servant confirmed that the government view had been a problem-solving approach, seeing increased mining as an efficient way of relieving unemployment and low levels of reported economic activity in the North (Feb. 2015, pers. comm.). Such a view ties in with the colonial view of Sápmi as "empty" (see Abram and Lund 2016), a view vigorously contested across the North (see, e.g., Rybråten 2013; Ween and Lien 2012; Ween 2009), yet consistently reproduced in both tourism promotional material and state environmental policy (Sandell 1995).

Anger had been sparked in 2012 by comments made by the CEO of the British company, Beowulf, the then holders of the mining concession. The CEO had been filmed saying that his standard response to enquiries about local people's reactions to mining was to show an image of the "natural" tundra landscape and ask them "what local people?"<sup>8</sup> The use of such explicitly colonial discourse of *tabula rasa*, along with its attendant assumption that the area was unpopulated, was intensely provocative, and a website almost immediately appeared entitled "what local people," showing a series of images of local residents accompanied by the phrase: "Here are local people. We are the local people!"<sup>9</sup> The CEO's actions inflamed an already tense situation, rallying support for the cause and turning it from a conflict of interest into a colonial rebellion. Mattias Åhrén, president of the Human Rights committee of the Sami council, duly presented a case to the UN Racial Discrimination Committee against the Swedish government for discrimination against Sami caused by its minerals policy. The government had already been criticised by the UN Race Discrimination Committee for not taking Sami rights into account in developing its mining policies, one of several recent reprimands from the UN about Sami rights. The crux of the case was that the mining policy was directly detrimental to reindeer herding in the region, and thereby under-

mined the legally enshrined rights of Sami herding communities (Eklund 2013).

The year 2013 would also see a series of lively non-violent protest actions to block the road to the exploration-drilling site, Swedish environmentalists joining forces with local protesters who in turn summoned the power of artistic intervention to fortify their sit-in actions. Indeed, the whole movement to date has been characterised by the incorporation of protest art, with Sami artists occupying increasingly prominent roles in the actions, including a number of recognised figures from a new generation of Sami artists, prominent among them Anders Sunna, whose work includes stencil-work portraying Sami men in traditional costumes with AK47s slung over their backs holding a finger up to authority, and traditional reindeer-sled processions carrying missile launchers (see Fig. 3.2). In addition, social media have been used to disseminate videos of the protests, showing policy and security agents violently destroying the blockades and dragging passive protesters from the road (including an



Fig. 3.2 Artwork from the protest movement, exhibited in 2014 (photo: Simone Abram)

octogenarian Sami man), as they were singing and shouting against the mines. The aforementioned exhibition brought together videos, posters, sculptural installations, and other items from the protests, and activists were on hand to distribute information, to sell badges and other items to raise money, and to sign people up to the cause.

The next year, in 2014, tensions were running high at the Jokkmokk market after the local authority voted to allow mining explorations to take place around Gállok, an area traditionally used by reindeer herders.<sup>10</sup> Newspaper coverage focused on Sami members of the local council, who had voted for the mining concession, suggesting that the split in the council was not simply along “ethnic” lines, but followed more general political-economic axes (Nyberg 2014). Tourists arriving at the market in 2014 were met, accordingly, with a series of political protests and demonstrations. At the conference and community centre next door to *Ájtte*, an exhibition brought together artwork and installations that had been built the previous summer during protests against the allocation of mining concessions in nearby Gállok. In the town, ill-feeling was made manifest through the boycott of the market by various Sami artists. The Viltok sisters closed their shop at what is normally the height of their season, placing a large sheet of brown paper in the window with an explanation of their absence. Having participated in the market all their lives as guests, artists, and salespeople, and having raised awareness of Sami cultural life and promoted Jokkmokk, the sisters expressed a feeling of betrayal over the authority’s granting of a mining licence that would, if put into effect, destroy the main livelihood in the region: reindeer herding. Unable to take two conflicting positions, they chose to boycott the market in 2014 and take their work elsewhere (see Fig. 3.3). The irony of the municipality choosing the theme of “Reindeer” for the annual market in the year that reindeer herding was threatened as never before only added to the anger felt by many of the protesters.

Perhaps more controversially, on the third day of the festival artists staged an intervention that was hard for tourists to ignore. As mentioned above, a highlight of each festival day is the *renrajd*. On this particular occasion, though, the procession was not led by a family in brightly coloured Sami clothes, but by black-hooded figures clothed as skeletons, with the message that reindeer herding would be no more if the mines went ahead (see Fig. 3.4).

Throughout that year (2014), protests continued with increasingly sophisticated coordination. Summer camps were organised, with

GLÄDJE, ÖVER JOKKMOKK SOM ORK OCH KOMMUN  
 DÄRFÖR KÄNNER VI STOR SORG OCH B  
 KOMMUNLEDNINGENS OTVIVELAKTIGA JA TILL NY  
 I GÁLLOK VÄSTER OM JOKKMOKK. EN GRUVA SOM, OM  
 FÖRSTÖR EXISTENS-MÖJLIGHETEN FÖR DEN STÖRSTA  
 NÄRINGEN I KOMMUNEN, REN-NÄRINGEN. VI ANSER  
 KAN SITTA PÅ 2 STOLAR SAMTIDIGT. DÄRFÖR VÄLJ  
 INTE DELTA OCH SPRIDA JOKKMOKKS SAMISKA VAR  
 GLÄDJE ÖVER VINTERMARKNADEN ÄR BORTA I  
 VI VÄLJER ETT ANNAT ARRANGEMANG PÅ ANNA

**Fig. 3.3** Notice of the boycott in the window of the Viltoks' boutique, 2014 (photo: Simone Abram)

information about events and camps being spread on social media, and the protest movement being expanded to tie in with other protests against mineral extractions across Sápmi. (There was also support from environmental groups nationally, and a presence in Stockholm.) By the time of the 2015 market, things had escalated and the protests became even more conspicuous, now addressing general issues around Sami rights. As observers commented, this was starting to look more like the Alta uprising in Norway in the 1980s, which had been sparked by proposals to dam the Alta River. A sharp drop in international mineral and metal prices, linked to a downturn in the Chinese economy, had led to the concession at Gállok being put on hold, and Beowulf had since sold the concession on. The immediate threat of disruptive works had thus receded, at least for now, but broader questions of racism, anti-Sami policies, and lack of respect for environmental issues and the voices of local residents had taken centre stage. Other mining conflicts in the region had not gone away, however, and related conflicts in Norway were reinforcing the sense that Sápmi was entering into a new era of recolonisation from the South.

Sameradion & SVT Sápmi

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Jokkmokks marknad

## Svart renrajd på marknaden - manifestation mot den växande gruvnäringen i Sápmi

Publicerat fredag 7 februari 2014 kl 11.06  
Uppdaterat fredag 7 februari 2014 kl 15.17



Ledaren av den svarta renraiden. FOTO: Anne Marit Pälviö / SVT Sápmi

**Idag på Jokkmokks vintermarknads andra dag gick en svarta rajd genom marknadsplatsen, en manifestation för att protestera mot den allt större växande gruvnäringen i Sápmi. Svarta rajden leddes av personer som var vitmålade i ansiktet och klädda i svarta sopsäckar som liknande koltar.**

➔ DELA (1406)    KOMMENTERA (11)

Den svarta renraiden kom till snöscenen kring ett-tiden på centrala marknadsplatsen. Kring 100 personer hade samlats för se renraiden komma och för att höra jojk av Maxida Mäarak och poesi av Mimi Mäarak. En av de som lyssnade var Lise Tapio Pittja som var medtagen av det hon såg.

- Åh, det var som en begravning, som om underjordiska kommit med dóden. Det var så kraftfullt och berörde djupt i hjärtat, säger Lise Tapio Pittja.

**Är det här rätt sätt att visa motstånd?**

Fig. 3.4 Swedish Radio's report of the Black Reindeer Parade (*Svart renrajd*) (SVT 7/2/14; <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2327&artikel=5779117>)

## MINISTERIAL SUPPORT

In late 2014, a new Swedish coalition government came to power, with the participation of the Green party. The Minister for Culture and Democracy was a Green party MP famous for her earlier career as a children's TV presenter. For Minister "Alice" (Bah Kuhnke), culture and democracy were intertwined issues for Sweden's Sami. Kuhnke had already raised the issue when attending the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in December 2014, resplendent in an upcycled dress commissioned from the Sami designer Sara Björne. Possibly the first Minister to be invited to attend the *Samedagen* (Sami day) celebrations at Jokkmokk, Kuhnke attended the whole of the winter market in 2015, bringing a small group of civil servants and holding meetings with Sami representatives and youth groups, attending the opening of the Duodji Institute exhibition, and even entering the reindeer-racing tournament on the town's frozen lake.

In her speech at the *Samedagen* event on the main outdoor stage in the market square, Kuhnke referred to a moving meeting she had previously attended at *Ájtte* on race-biology and skull-measuring, the sense of shame it had provoked, and the urgency of instilling confidence in the new generations of Sami. In radio interviews, she stressed the importance of securing support for mental-health services for young Sami, and asserted how happy she was to have been appointed Sami Minister as well as the urgent importance of continuing to campaign against racism and to promote Sami rights.

There were further events, however, that were not on the Minister's schedule. Outside her hotel, for example, she was met by Mimi and Maxida Mäarak, Jenni Laiti, and others: artists who had been active throughout the anti-mining movement, who had directly confronted the CEO of Beowulf Mining, and who had performed loud rap protests outside the Jokkmokk council. Mimi Mäarak knelt in front of the Minister, reading aloud from a newly composed Sami manifesto while her sister Maxida proceeded to shear off Mimi's hair with a knife. The Minister thanked them for their intervention, accepting a copy of their manifesto. Like all of the protest actions, the event was widely announced, discussed, and documented on social media and on websites the number of which has been on the increase since 2013, including kolonierna.se and the Facebook pages for groups including Sámi Manifesta and Gruvfritt Jokkmokk.

By the same means, and also by word of mouth, a larger demonstration at the market was gathering momentum, anticipated in the form of

a procession through the town. Local media had heard about the event and reported it as a threat to the market, claiming that many market stallholders were against the demonstration and that the police would divert it. In local news reports, however, all of the stallholders interviewed were positively disposed towards the demonstration for Sami rights and had negative views on mining. On the day itself, the procession began with a gathering outside *Folkets Hus* (the town's community centre). A large crowd gathered, some wearing traditional Sami clothing and others carrying handcrafted placards agitating for solid ground and clean water for future generations and calling for the Minerals Act to be scrapped. Before the procession set off, several local activists held brief speeches, including Tor Lundberg Tuorda, author of *kolonierna.se*, who had been active in the anti-mining campaigns from the start. Mimi Mäarak duly appeared in a long Sami hooded cloak, holding a megaphone, and proceeded to give a passionate speech to the waiting crowd and the various camera-people and journalists assembled (see Fig. 3.5). Calling for respect for Sami rights, and reading out the newly published manifesto, she fiercely declared that she was Sami through and through, even under her costume, pulling off her long cloak off and standing in leggings and underwear in the freezing temperatures, fists raised. Accompanied by a fiddler playing folk tunes, the procession then moved raucously through town, led by two low-key police attendees, across one market street and along another towards



**Fig. 3.5** Mimi Mäarak addressing protesters at Jokkmokk 2015 (photo: Simone Abram)

*Ájtte*. Little overt resistance was encountered, though some Sami participants later reported that they had heard racist comments from bystanders.

### POLITICISING TOURISM?

Much has been written, particularly recently, about political tourism (see, e.g., Brin 2006; also Frenzel et al. 2014), most of it addressing the travels of activists to participate in political activism around the world. Less has been written on the opportunities that tourism offers to air political grievances or to support political campaigns. Hofmann's recent work on the transformation of tourism souvenirs into political campaign icons opens a set of questions about the extent to which tourism provides both a platform and a means for communicating and pursuing political goals (Hofmann 2015). As Mitchell's history of European tourism to Egypt suggests, the act of going and looking—of deploying what Urry has called the “tourist gaze” (1990)—is itself a political act, made possible and interpreted through a set of political conditions that favour some people and parties over others. As is hopefully clear from the above, the touristic experience of Sami objects and people at Jokkmokk winter market is shaped by the history of colonial exhibitions. But the market is not simply a neocolonial event; much of it is an arena for Sami to meet each other, share work, buy and sell artworks and other goods, and socialise. And among the visitors are those who come in solidarity with the ongoing fight for Sami rights. During the 2015 market, southern Swedish tourists told me that having been to the north previously on hiking trips, they were horrified to realise the extent to which Sami people were oppressed, and came back to the market every year as supporters. Others, of course, are oblivious to local conditions and see only the picturesque or the exotic. By staging artistic interventions at the market, the artists and activists at Jokkmokk show how multiple such touristic events can be, uncovering it as a stage both for more conventional forms of tourism (travel, hotels, spectacles, shopping), and a political arena where Sami people gather from across the region in support of a common cause.

In recent years, the market as a *tourist* event has been effectively co-opted as a *political* event through the various actions performed there, including exhibitions such as Anders Sunna's (see above). Sunna's 2015 application to the market organisers to hold an exhibition had been rejected, despite his rapidly rising reputation as a major Sami artist, but he still went ahead and held the exhibition in an empty shop space provided

by the Stoorstálka Sami design shop. Sunna's designs have been regularly used in the Gállok protests, including work he produced some years ago, having built an artistic profile as a Sami political artist, and his exhibition has had a constant stream of visitors, including people buying prints and original work.<sup>11</sup> Sunna is just one of many artists exhibiting work at the winter market, giving his work a context amongst the art and craft that ranges from strictly traditional to boldly creative. The work of the Viltok sisters has also been prominent, and during the 2015 Jokkmokk market their shop was busy from morning until night. After their boycott in 2014, the sisters feared their business would suffer since the market is their main opportunity to show their collections, but they indicated to me that their principled stance had attracted support, not only from their clients, but from other sources including numerous invitations to exhibit their work in galleries. Both exemplify what Viltok has called an awakening among young Sami: one possible only with the current generation, who are far enough from the forced removals and oppression of the twentieth century to be freer to act (and less ashamed to be openly Sami), yet are close enough to understand the dangers of their recent colonial history being repeated. Above all, the events at Gállok described above were the trigger point for younger Sami to engage in public debate, to address the media, and to use diverse artistic methods to protest.

### CONCLUSION: PERFORMANCES IN CONFLICT

As I have sought to illustrate in this chapter, the market at Jokkmokk provides a colourful stage for performances of different kinds that bump up against each other, conveying different versions of politics, community, and commerce—and often all of these at once. Recent markets have seen a welling up of political activism, increasingly overt Sami political resistance, and explicit discussions of colonialism and neocolonialism. Among the activists I spoke to,<sup>12</sup> the notion of Jokkmokk (or Sápmi more broadly) as a postcolonial space drew some scepticism since the Swedish state and international mining companies are generally seen as acting in a colonial manner, going over the heads of local indigenous populations to pursue a “scramble” for resources in the North. Directly countering colonialist performances by the likes of the Beowulf CEO, activists have drawn on images and narratives that reinforce a different regional story of a region populated but colonised. This narrative demonstrates the deep historical roots (millennia of reindeer herding) of current environmental concerns,

but it has also to work against European colonial histories that depict indigenous populations as “natural” peoples. Sami activists at Jokkmokk and elsewhere have thus drawn on contemporary art practices to highlight the continuity of traditional Sami activities into the present and future—as evidence of the dignity and sustainability of Sami life—despite a continuing history of repression and persecution by the state. As I have suggested here, while the protest actions at the site of the mine in Gállok were generally clothed in the pacifist creativity of international environmental protest,<sup>13</sup> their counterparts at the Jokkmokk market have taken advantage of a ready-made audience, of the presence of notables, and of the gathering of many Sami families and artists, in the process picking up the more festive, flamboyant style of tourist events.

For visiting tourists, Jokkmokk presents a kind of instant historical experience. The small costumed historical market by the lake that precedes the market proper, where craftspeople from across Sápmi (including Russia) present traditional peasant craft, leads on to the contemporary *duodji* in the town galleries, then to the political actions which together constitute a kind of fringe festival around the market that questions and challenges the future for Sami people. During the 2015 market, a young girl from a reindeer-herding family was touring the market with a young white reindeer, inviting questions about reindeer herding and Sami life, with other members of the family quietly present in support. The girl, who was interviewed on local news, explained that she felt it was her duty to explain what reindeer-herding life was like, to counter prejudice, and to educate the public about reindeer.

But the tourists at Jokkmokk are not unknown visitors from “abroad,” in contrast to their local hosts; rather, Jokkmokk attracts a mixed audience, many of whom see the town as their fulcrum: traders who come to sell; artists who come to show their work to friends and family; college students as well as professional craftspeople who sell at the various indoor markets. Since Jokkmokk is a small town with limited hotel accommodation, many residents open up their houses to visitors, renting out rooms, sometimes regularly to the same visitors, year after year. At such an event, the Sami presence is conspicuously multi-layered; so too the protest action that surrounds it. Among the actions I witnessed at the 2015 market were women campaigning against weapons staging a theatrical march through the streets, dressed in camouflage, highlighting the deadly effects of Swedish military shooting ranges in herding areas and questioning

why Sami herders seemed to accept shooting while rejecting mining (see Knobblock 2014 on the role of Sami feminism in environmental activism).

One action not to be found, though, was the performative legitimation of mining, which takes place largely in the ministries and parliament in Stockholm, and around the various investment markets for mining. After all, a crash in the market for iron has a more direct effect on mining development than public protest, but a neoliberal belief that markets always recover means that the possibility of profitable mining remains alive even when there is abundant evidence of other nearby mining companies going to the wall. Still, the positive signs are that tourism at Jokkmokk will continue to provide a stage for political action, realised through contemporary artistic practice. The creative use of Sami symbols, making play on the symbolic language of *duodji*, offers one example among others of a performative politics for a generation emerging from a long, recent era of Sami oppression, casting off the shame associated with colonial prejudice and finding a new political voice.

## NOTES

1. Adriana Craciun, "The Scramble for the Arctic," *Interventions*, 11 (1) (2009), 109.
2. Edward Bruner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Maasai on the Lawn: Tourist Realism in East Africa," *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (2) (1994): 435.
3. Anne-Marie D'Hautesserre, "Postcolonialism, Colonialism and Tourism," in *A Companion to Tourism*, ed. Alan Lew, C. Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 237.
4. <http://www.bildmuseet.umu.se/en/exhibition/katarina-pirak-sikku/12046> (accessed 1.09.15).
5. <http://www.dn.se/debatt/rasbiologiskt-sprakbruk-i-statens-rattsprocess-mot-sameby/> (accessed 1.09.15).
6. Discussion is partly based on field visits to the market in 2014 and 2015, with Britt Kramvig. I thank Kramvig for her insights and guidance during these visits.
7. Chatham House report increased levels of dispute in the extractive sector globally in the decade 2001–2010 (Stevens et al. 2013).
8. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FPeOPTDhio> (accessed 6.12.15).
9. <http://www.whatlocalpeople.se/about/>
10. See map of "*samebyar*" (territorial aspects of herding organisation) <http://www.samer.se/4329>

11. See <http://anderssunna.com> and <http://www.saatchiart.com/ASunna>
12. As noted above, the fieldwork was conducted jointly with Britt Kramvig.
13. See <http://www.faltbiologerna.se/faltbiologen/kallakkriget>

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## Qullissat: Historicising and Localising the Danish Scramble for the Arctic

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**Abstract** The rise and fall of the town and coal mine at Qullissat raises a number of challenging questions about Danish administrative culture in Greenland. Through this historical case study, the authors challenge the assumption that the so-called scramble for the Arctic is solely about our own contemporaneity. The establishment of the coal mine and its labour-force town in 1924 constitutes a much earlier scramble. Importantly, it illustrates how such scrambles represent a continued colonial mindset whose power lines are both deliberately and inadvertently opaque. While the wilful exercising of colonial power has attracted much attention in postcolonial studies, the unintentional, disassembled side of colonial rule creates analytical confusion, not least because of the difficulties involved in tracing decision-making processes even where colonial rule is demonstrably hegemonic.

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**Keywords** Greenland • Mining history • Qullissat • Modernisation • Postcolonial

## INTRODUCTION

The neoliberal scramble for scarce resources has renewed a global attention to the Arctic that is unprecedented since the days of the Cold War (Jensen 2014; Keskitalo 2004; Sale and Potapov 2010; Powell 2010). This new, overtly economic focus has been accompanied by a number of entangled discourses, some more transparent than others: remilitarisation, the assertion of territorial claims, climate change, the opening of new trade routes, and emerging, more locally rooted forms of political agency. In the public domain, these discourses have displayed a remarkable volatility, not least because the Arctic does not have its own legitimated forums for discussing, still less enacting, policies which cut across these interwoven agendas (Jensen 2014; Nuttall 2008; Shadian 2010). Because of the same lack of formalised political power, much of the discourse in the public domain about the Arctic is not only driven from outside, but also takes place outside, the Arctic. In the geopolitical power games within which these discourses are inevitably placed, the peoples of the Arctic are granted at best a token presence.

What this indicates is the urgency to ground discourses about the Arctic *within* the Arctic, to produce narratives which in their necessarily localised form speak about concerns that have repercussions within the wider region. Arctic peoples have a long history of regarding themselves as simultaneously indigenous and global, which in this context means they are acutely aware of the fact they live in a pristine environment where the effects of long-term global societal evolutionary patterns ride alongside more acutely produced local crises such as the current effects of the global scramble for resources and its accompanying militarisation, the staking of territorial claims, intensifying climate change, and widespread environmental concerns over the “opening up” of the region.

In this chapter, we will look at one particular location in the Arctic and examine one particular historical process in order to explore how localised narratives work as examples of the wider spatial and temporal entanglements that are characteristic of the Arctic’s engagement with the outside world. As a situated Arctic case study, the rise and fall of the town and coal

mine at Qullissat raises a number of challenging questions about Danish administrative culture in Greenland from the late colonial administrative era through the modernisation period of the 1950s and 1960s, to the “postcolonial” period of Home Rule and self-government.

Through the use of this specific historical case study, we aim to challenge the ready-made assumption that the so-called scramble for the Arctic is solely about our own contemporaneity, and needs to be understood primarily or even exclusively in terms of an accelerating rush. The establishment of the coal mine and its labour-force town in 1924 constitutes a much earlier scramble, well before the arrival of the neoliberal order that generally delimits contemporary scrambles. But more importantly, it also illustrates how scrambles of this kind represent the exercising of a continued colonial mindset whose power lines are both deliberately and inadvertently opaque. While the wilful exercising of colonial power has attracted much attention in postcolonial studies, the unintentional, disassembled side of colonial rule creates analytical confusion, not least because of the difficulties involved in tracing decision-making processes even where colonial rule is demonstrably hegemonic.

### QULLISSAT: SETTING THE STAGE

Qullissat, a coal mining town in Greenland, was established by the Danish state in the mid-1920s. During its lifetime, it became one of Greenland’s biggest towns, but by the end of the Second World War the Danish administration of Greenland had already concluded that the mine was unprofitable and a decision to close it down was made in 1968. In 1972, all public institutions and shops were shut and those local people who had not left already were forced to relocate to other towns in Greenland. This thumbnail history coincides with major shifts in the wider Danish administration of Greenland. Post-1945, the Danish government decided to embark on a massive “modernisation” programme in Greenland, driven by anxieties over its long-term presence in the country. These anxieties were caused by American strategic interests in Greenland and emerging decolonisation pressures applied through the UN. In 1953, Greenland (along with the Faroe Islands) was annexed to Denmark in response to the UN’s programme to promote the decolonisation of the remaining European dependencies. Greenland was granted two seats in the Danish parliament, while the non-representative (hence undemocratic) system in Greenland continued during the modernisation period. A combination of

the lack of Danish consultancy and various forms of discriminatory behaviour prompted Greenlandic resistance that led to the formation of political parties, which eventually turned into a push for self-determination. This resulted in the introduction of Home Rule in 1979 and, 30 years later, self-government. The opening and closing of the Qullissat mine hence took place in an era that was explicitly colonial, and as Jens Dahl (1986) has pointed out, was *de facto* *more* colonial after Denmark's annexation of Greenland, which officially brought closure to Greenland's status as a colony. Dahl's critique goes against the grain of a Danish public rhetoric (including a sizeable part of the academic community) which has insisted and continues to insist that Danish colonialism is of the past and really never accurately described Denmark's relationship with Greenland in the first place, only really being pertinent to Denmark's colonies in the tropics (e.g. some of the Virgin Islands, parts of coastal Ghana, and Tranquebar on India's east coast). Dahl pins his argument on the fact that the modernisation process enrolled Greenlanders as passive bystanders to their own society's transformation, but also on their status as a cheap and largely disempowered labour pool: a characteristic feature of colonial labour relations. Administrative practices and the people who enacted them continued across the formal divide between pre- and post-1953 Greenland. How might we read the narrative arc of Qullissat against this history?

### REMEMBERING QULLISSAT

As already mentioned, Qullissat was founded in 1924 and closed in 1972; except for a period of two years in the 1950s, the coal mine was owned and administered by the Danish state. During its lifetime it grew to become one of the largest settlements in Greenland—it was the country's first industrial town—and was a centre for arts and sports as well as the organisation of workers' rights. In spite of the Danish strategy to industrialise the Greenlandic economy, Qullissat represents a story of Danish disinvestment in Greenland.

More than 40 years have passed since the authorities closed down Qullissat, cut off electricity and other supplies, and shipped its people off to their new destinies scattered along the vast Greenlandic west coast. But if this closure was irrevocable, Qullissat lived on, and continues to do so, as a significant cultural, social, and political symbol of suffering, subjugation, and resistance. The closure of Qullissat became the last straw, epitomising the dark side of Danish administrative practices in Greenland.

However, it also triggered the Greenlandic autonomy movement which subsequently fought successfully for Home Rule, and the ghost town featured as a key symbol throughout this struggle. For many of the former residents of Qullissat, its closure not only meant the loss of home and of contact with family and friends, but also unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion. For many, the experience of displacement has been disruptive and wounding. But with time, Qullissat has also become a place of resilience for some of the dislocated and their descendants. Summer after summer, they return there—for some a journey of many thousand kilometres—to reacquaint themselves with the community they lost and to recreate a community based on their shared experiences.

In contemporary Greenland, Qullissat remains a source of inspiration and commemoration in both arts and politics. Qullissat weighs in on development plans for both the governing of remote communities and future extraction projects as a lesson from the past, not to be repeated. It is also a recurring symbol of the malpractices of the Danish administration and of the deep wounds these practices caused. At the same time, the extent of and intentions behind these practices are highly contested, forming a point of conflict both domestically in Greenland and in Danish-Greenlandic relations. In this and in other ways, Qullissat acts as a prism through which we may view and understand the complexities of a colonial system that continues to haunt Greenland and its people.

The continued significance of Qullissat's closure is countered by a lack of detailed knowledge. Not much has been written about the mine or the town, and there has been a notable lack of academic research (Sejersen 2014). In the literature on Qullissat that does exist, two prominent questions persist: Why was it closed? And who took the decision? In spite of the straightforward nature of these questions, definitive answers remain elusive. In terms of the first question, a consensus seems to exist, both in the scholarly literature and in popular perceptions, that the decision to close the mine was grounded in economic rationalism. Simply put, the mine—without which the town was considered untenable—was no longer considered to be economically sustainable. However, this assertion was generally hedged about with reservations and more detailed accounts contain many points that contradict it, leaving room for other possible explanations for the decision. First among these rank the broader rationales guiding Danish development policy on Greenland, both before the Second World War and especially afterwards when a new politics of modernisation replaced a policy of relative neglect. Greenlandic politi-

cal agency and organisation as well as geopolitical rationales were further influences on the decision. When it comes to the second question—of who decided to close Qullissat—one obvious question to ask is whether it was down to the Danish state alone or if there were also Greenlandic political agents involved in the decision. However, neither the archives nor any of the actors—civil servants, commissioners, politicians, citizens, activists—involved in the closure of Qullissat have been able to identify with any degree of certainty who made the call, still less where and when it was made.

The most extensive research on Qullissat so far has been carried out by Birte Haagen, who in 1975 undertook an anthropological study of the closure of Qullissat and the consequences this had for the miners and their families. Haagen's work was not published as originally planned, consisting rather of an unpublished provisional report,<sup>1</sup> a publication for Aasivik<sup>2</sup> in Qullissat (1977a, 1977b), and a number of research articles (1975a, 1975b, 1977, 1982). Despite its provisional nature, Haagen's work remains a central source for later research on Qullissat (cf. Fægteborg 2013; Sejersen 2014; Sørensen 2013). Haagen asserts that the story of Qullissat is “about delayed decisions, first concerning the building and afterwards concerning the abandonment of the town.”<sup>3</sup> This then leads her to conclude that “the way Qullissat developed was permanently influenced by the delaying strategy and thereby practically haphazard.”<sup>4</sup> These assertions enable a shift away from the “smoking gun” approach of searching for a single rationale and leads instead to an exploration of the entangled processes surrounding the development and subsequent closure of Qullissat. Exploring the cracks and turns in these processes, the convoluted rationales guiding them, and the ways in which they intertwine, might offer alternative understandings of the past that in turn enable other insights and strategies for the future.

### UNSETTLING QULLISSAT

The process surrounding the decision to shut down Qullissat spanned more than 18 years. During this period, the closure was considered by no fewer than four different commissions and committees: the Greenlandic Commission of 1948,<sup>5</sup> the Coal Commission,<sup>6</sup> the Greenlandic Commission of 1960,<sup>7</sup> and the Greenlandic Council.<sup>8</sup> The Danish Ministry of Greenland was involved in the process throughout, while in the later stages the Auditors of State, the Danish government's Economy

Commission, the Governor of Greenland,<sup>9</sup> the Social and Employment Board in Nuuk, and the Greenland National Council<sup>10</sup> also became embroiled. These boards and councils all, to varying degrees, influenced the decision-making process. Even if the rationales and arguments they used would change significantly during the lifetime of Qullissat, the Danish authorities' negative perception of the mine's economic viability remained a persistent factor. From the very beginning of its operation there were uncertainties regarding the lifespan of the mine: it did not meet the state's expectations of profitability, the quantities of deposits were unknown, and the quality of the coal itself was perceived to be poor.<sup>11</sup> The settlement grew steadily during the first years, but as the mine's future was uncertain, efforts were made to prevent newcomers from settling in the town.<sup>12</sup> Despite a critical housing shortage, building restrictions were in place until the mid-1930s.<sup>13</sup> However, during the Second World War Qullissat prospered. The town supplied all of Greenland with coal, despite a lack of mining equipment and the absence of a harbour.<sup>14</sup> It also served as a transit zone for shipments from the United States to the rest of Greenland,<sup>15</sup> with these shipments replacing missing supplies from Nazi-occupied Denmark. The town eventually became an economic and cultural hub, and by 1948 it had grown to become the fourth largest settlement in Greenland with more than a thousand inhabitants.<sup>16</sup>

The first proposal to close down Qullissat was put forward in 1950. The Greenlandic Commission of 1948 delivered its report on the future development of Greenland, which laid the foundation for the so-called G-50 policies. As part of its preliminary work, the Commission had carried out an economic study of Qullissat, claiming that the mine was operating at a loss because the cost of production was too high and the mine could not compete with cheaper foreign imports.<sup>17</sup> The report advised against further investment in the mine, and recommended phased closure.<sup>18</sup> The G-50 plan, which is generally acknowledged as having initiated the modernisation process in Greenland, emphasised that the development of Greenland should rest instead on investment in the fishing industry. This involved a policy whereby the fishing industry and its population should be concentrated in the open-water towns on the southwest coast. Central to this development plan was a shift from coal to oil as Greenland's main source of energy.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the recommendation to stop further investment in Qullissat was not just a consequence of the deficit of the mine, but was also deeply entangled in the ten-year development plan for Greenland. Alternative forms of generating revenue were pushed aside in favour of a

Greenlandic labour pool in the fish-processing and packaging industry and other related industries in the open-water towns. The report did express hesitation about the closure of Qullissat insofar as it might prove “necessary to use means which are very detrimental to the freedom of the individual. Otherwise it may lead to considerable public expenditures.”<sup>20</sup> The report recognised at the same time that it was well-nigh “inconceivable to move the population through enforcement or decrees.”<sup>21</sup> This dilemma ended up having a significant influence on the decision-making process; but in 1950 the commission was still optimistic enough to believe that Greenlandic people themselves would see the benefits of moving where they were offered work, healthy housing, and good schools in the emerging population hubs.<sup>22</sup>

Closure was put on hold, however, and for geopolitical reasons: the outbreak of the Korean War and anxieties over what this might mean for the supply of energy in Greenland (Lauritzen 1968). During the 1950s, an English mining engineer surveyed the coal and mining operation, finding the quality of the coal excellent and the quantity in Qullissat alone sufficient to supply all of Greenland for the next 25 years.<sup>23</sup> He also estimated that the Vaigat<sup>24</sup> area contained enough coal to supply all of Europe for at least two decades.<sup>25</sup> Far from closing the mine, it was imperative to invest in and further develop it. Notwithstanding, the closure of Qullissat was never taken off the political agenda. The mine’s deficit, as announced in the G-50 report, was related to excessive production costs. It was noted that the retail price of the coal covered only half of the cost of its production;<sup>26</sup> not mentioned, however, was that the Danish state controlled both the cost of coal and wages in the mine.<sup>27</sup> The British mining engineer, and later the Coal Commission, suggested that the coal was significantly better than its reputation, recommending that the price be raised to give the mine a better chance of being economically viable.<sup>28</sup> Other problems which increased the deficit of the mine were of a bureaucratic nature, including a large local administration set-up to ensure that all decisions were authorised by the Ministry in Copenhagen. Added to this were the purchase of the wrong equipment for mining, the inflated salary for Danes working in Greenland, insufficient infrastructural investment and, most importantly, the lack of a natural harbour.<sup>29</sup> The absence of a harbour was a major obstacle as ships were often at considerable risk and crossings were only possible during the summer. Even then, travel was routinely interrupted for weeks.<sup>30</sup>

The mine also lacked reliable accounting. Aware of this problem, the Ministry of Greenland established the Coal Commission in 1957 with the task of reporting back within half a year. The Commission procrastinated (Lauritzen 1968). Five years went by before it finally delivered a report, recommending more research into the economic conditions of the mine. Part of the problem was that the mine's accounts included cost items relating to the state's general expenses for running Qullissat such as supplies, development, and town maintenance, which in other parts of Greenland were incorporated into the accounts of the state corporations that were dedicated to these matters.<sup>31</sup> The Coal Commission expressed doubt whether the state's other operations in Greenland would meet the high economic standards expected of the mine,<sup>32</sup> arguing that it had potential given proper investment and management. Over and against this, the Auditors of State and sundry politicians lobbied for closure, ostensibly on the grounds of the continuing deficit but in clear keeping with ongoing modernisation plans. The Coal Commission felt this pressure. After advising against closing the mine in their report in 1962, and again when summoned in 1964, the Commission finally succumbed in 1965 when, despite requesting more research, they recommended that the mine be closed.<sup>33</sup> They still suggested, though, that the question of the mine's future be passed on to the Greenlandic Council, stating that "the decision is closely connected to the planning of future economic and industrial policy in Greenland."<sup>34</sup> The decision thus shifted from being an economic and technical decision to a political one.

This shift was closely related to the G-60 report and Danish offshore policies. The Greenlandic Commission of 1960 was established to develop a plan for a continuation of the modernisation process initially laid out in the G-50. In 1964, the Commission released a report recommending a concentration of the Greenlandic population in fewer urban centres with better job opportunities. The report recommended the relocation of the workforce to the fishing industries in the open-water towns in southwest Greenland.<sup>35</sup> As such, it affirmed and extended the G-50's political agenda of concentrating on the fishing industry. When the decision was first discussed in the Greenlandic Council in February 1966, the main background for the discussion was the difficult economic situation of the town: the mine's deficit, the lack of alternative employment opportunities in Qullissat, and the realisation that it was too expensive to raise standards after so many years of investment negligence.<sup>36</sup> This local "economic crisis"—as it was perceived and presented by the authorities—was juxtaposed

with the “self-evident demand” for workers in the fish plants in the open-water towns.<sup>37</sup>

At the second round of meetings in June 1966, the Greenlandic Council concluded that a decision about closing the mine ought to be made at its upcoming meeting in November. The Council noted that closing the mine would result in approximately 400 people needing employment in other towns. It recommended that, should a final decision be reached, plans for the removal of the town’s inhabitants would need to be implemented immediately.<sup>38</sup> Though there was little to support the idea of a growing demand for labour, it was taken for granted that such demand would come from the open-water towns.<sup>39</sup> The postponement of the decision until November was justified on the grounds that the local authorities in Qullissat should be properly prepared, as well as closely involved, in the closure of the mine and, with it, the town.<sup>40</sup> With this end in mind, one of the Greenlandic members of the Council (also an MP) and the Council’s secretary were dispatched to Qullissat.<sup>41</sup>

On this occasion, the Greenlandic Council’s documents were translated into Greenlandic: the first time the Municipal Council in Qullissat had been properly informed about the decision-making process since the Coal Commission delivered its report in 1962.<sup>42</sup> Rejecting its premises, the Municipal Council strongly disagreed with the decision.<sup>43</sup> First, they argued that there were grounds for optimism about the future prospects of the mine. The mine had been rationalised, a new shaft had been opened in 1965, and production had improved substantially in the first half of 1966 compared to the previous year.<sup>44</sup> Given these facts, they urged the Greenlandic Council to visit Qullissat to gather first-hand information about the conditions there.<sup>45</sup> Second, they argued that to their knowledge the open-water towns were not in need of an additional workforce.<sup>46</sup> Their experience was that people seeking employment in these towns were able to get work in the summer, but returned to Qullissat in the winter.<sup>47</sup> The Greenlandic MP reported the Municipal Council’s disagreement back to the Greenlandic Council, stressing that it was not so much a failure to understand the factors involved that spoke in favour of a shutdown, rather a deep-rooted optimism nourished by modernisation developments in recent years.<sup>48</sup>

In the meantime, the people of Qullissat were starting to worry about the prospect of unemployment after a closedown. The Municipal Council sent an enquiry to all of the open-water towns mooting the possibility of employment in the winter months for people moving from Qullissat.<sup>49</sup>

The towns reported back that they already had an adequate workforce or, still worse, that they were already experiencing unemployment in the winter months.<sup>50</sup> The enquiry formed part of a letter to the Governor in Greenland arguing against the profitability of closing the mine.<sup>51</sup> The letter, which ridiculed the idea of rising labour demands as “the overly optimistic thoughts of civil servants,”<sup>52</sup> was forwarded to the Greenlandic Council and, together with the report from the Greenlandic MP, formed part of the appendix for the decision to close Qullissat.<sup>53</sup>

Prior to the Greenlandic Council’s meetings in November 1966, the secretariat of the Council had prepared a document recommending the eventual closure of the mine in 1972 and a subsequent collective removal of its residents.<sup>54</sup> The path had thus been set for a relatively smooth process, but this was now obstructed by the documents from the summer meeting in Qullissat. During the November meetings, one of the members of the Greenlandic Council demanded a guarantee of work and housing in the open-water towns.<sup>55</sup> This initiated lively debate, with the result that the previously proposed 1972 closedown was taken off the table; instead, the Council issued a statement recommending closure *once* the necessary conditions to vacate the town were fulfilled, and *unless* new information at that point should make it economically viable to continue the mine.<sup>56</sup> The Greenlandic Council, in much the same vein as the Coal Commission, thus reached a provisional decision to close the mine/town, but this time the conditions changed from more research into economic viability to an emphasis on the practicalities of the shut-down process. Still, even if it was dismissed at the meeting a date had been stipulated, and the decision to shut had moved a little closer to becoming reality.

The next phase of the decision to close Qullissat was a telegram broadcast on Greenlandic Radio in February 1967 announcing that “after negotiations between the Ministry of Greenland and the parliamentary Financial Committee, it has now been decided that the production of coal in Qullissat will stop, as the Greenlandic Council proposed in the autumn of 1966.”<sup>57</sup> The sole condition was that the terms stipulated by the Greenlandic Council be met.<sup>58</sup> In June 1967, the Greenlandic Council visited Qullissat and discussed the situation with the Municipal Council. However, the two councils had conflicting understandings of the outcome of that meeting. The municipality’s minutes from the meeting noted that the Greenlandic Council had expressed the view that mining would not cease until all possible alternative avenues had been explored.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, the chairman of the Greenlandic Council at a council meeting the

following year maintained that the Municipal Council had completely understood the issues at stake and had consented to abandoning the town.<sup>60</sup> In October 1967, a consultant with the Social and Employment Board in Nuuk wrote to the Ministry about the social consequences of prolonged uncertainty regarding Qullissat's future.<sup>61</sup> The Danish Governor in Greenland replied that the politicians had decided to close Qullissat.<sup>62</sup> In May 1968, reacting to a pamphlet stating that Qullissat would be closed by 1975, the Municipal Council in Qullissat telegraphed the Ministry, enquiring who exactly had decided this and when.<sup>63</sup> The secretariat of the Greenlandic Council evasively replied that the pamphlet had expressed a "population prognosis," which was not the outcome of a decision but merely an expected development.<sup>64</sup> At a further meeting in the Greenlandic Council in June 1968, the chairman was asked whether Qullissat had been abandoned, to which he replied that the Council had made the decision.<sup>65</sup> This meeting resulted in a request to the Ministry for a special allocation of funding for 200 new homes.<sup>66</sup> One month later, a telegram broadcast on Greenlandic Radio announced that Qullissat would be closed down in 1972, as had previously been anticipated.<sup>67</sup> Shortly afterwards, the Greenlandic member of the Danish parliament, along with a member of the Greenlandic Council, visited Qullissat; both rejected outright the claim that the Greenlandic Council had made a decision.<sup>68</sup>

In September 1968, the Qullissat Municipal Council sent a plea to the Greenlandic Council to avert the closure of the mine.<sup>69</sup> In their letter, they referred to the disappearance of fish from Greenlandic waters, a phenomenon supported by investigations by experts as well as the Royal Danish Trading Company (KGH).<sup>70,71</sup> Parallel to this, the Minister for Greenland (who was also the Minister of Fisheries) wrote a memorandum to the Danish Parliament's Economic Committee requesting extra funding for 200 new homes in the open-water towns.<sup>72</sup> The request made explicit reference to the profits that would be made once these towns received more labour.<sup>73</sup> Subsequently, the Greenlandic national newspaper, *A/G*, reported on September 26 that Greenland was hit by a "severe industry crisis," referring among other things to a vast reduction in the fishing industry.<sup>74</sup> At the opening of the Danish parliament in October the Greenlandic MP expressed his regret over the Greenlandic Council's treatment of the case, emphasising the lack of long-term employment prospects in the open-water towns.<sup>75</sup> His criticism was suppressed by other members of the Greenlandic Council.<sup>76</sup> A week later, the Government's Economic Committee, consisting of eight Ministers including the Prime

Minister, the Finance Minister, and the Minister of Greenland, granted the requested funding.<sup>77</sup> The minutes from the meeting opened with an “[a]pproval to a decision in principle that within years the mining in Qullissat will be discontinued.”<sup>78</sup>

After 18 years, then, the decision to close the mine was finalised. As the above account shows, the decision-making process had from the beginning been driven by pressures stemming from the conviction that the mine was economically unsustainable—pressures entangled with and intensified by Danish modernisation strategy, which was committed to shifting investment to the fishing industry. Despite evidence in support of this being repeatedly undermined, these pressures persisted, eventually taking on a life of their own and consolidating a pattern whereby the pressure to make decisions resulted in the making of conditional decisions. These conditions were then displaced or ignored as the decision travelled between ministries, councils, and committees until, in the end, it seemed to have been self-propelled.

The process had also been haunted by reservations about enforced removal. These hesitations can be discerned in discursive slippages between whether what was being proposed was “just” a discontinuation of the mine or also entailed the closure of the town. The events following the decision to close the mine, but not the town, in November 1968 brought this dilemma to the fore. After the meeting where the final decision to confirm closure was made, the Minister of Greenland was interviewed in *A/G*. The Minister initially said that the closure referred merely to the mine; on no account would the citizenry of Qullissat be forcibly removed from their homes (“Kulminen skal nedlægges” 1968). But he then went on to say something close to the opposite: “[I]t is hard to imagine how they are going to make a living. That is why we make sure they are offered housing and possibility of livelihood in other places.”<sup>79</sup> The organisation of the removal of the population was subsequently assigned to the Social and Labour Management Board in Nuuk. A consultant visiting Qullissat in April 1969 in preparation for removal informed the town’s inhabitants that supply lines and services such as electricity, water, and shops were all to be closed down.<sup>80</sup> In face of this death sentence to the town, it was still emphasised that this was not an “enforced removal”; rather, Qullissat’s inhabitants were advised to move towards the “best opportunities” for employment, housing, and education elsewhere.<sup>81</sup> Unsure whether these statements were valid, the consultant, upon his return from Qullissat, asked for clarification, whereupon the Governor of Greenland and the

chairman of the Greenlandic National Council assured him that the statements he had been given corresponded to those previously made by the Greenlandic Council.<sup>82</sup> The Qullissat Municipal Council had already seen through this, however, and made it clear in a January 1969 issue of the town's newspaper: "The statements saying those who feel like it can stay is demeaning and a pathetic excuse for an enforced removal."<sup>83</sup>

### DEPARTING FROM QULLISSAT

Qullissat was in many ways a unique town in Greenland. Whereas most towns in Greenland were founded as colonial trading posts, Qullissat was established as an industrial town. Its citizens were a melting pot of people from different parts of Greenland, Denmark, and other nationalities such as Scotsmen, Englishmen, and Swedes. Its position as a switching point for the United States during the Second World War added a further dimension to its international character. The town had a lively and active community with many associations. It excelled in sports competitions and founded its own musical genre, Vaigat music, which at its peak in the 1950s and 1960s was the most popular in all of Greenland.<sup>84</sup> It was the first town to have electricity installed and a cinema, and its diversity of shops and goods surpassed most of the rest of the country. As labour centred on the mine, Qullissat cultivated the first Greenlandic industrialised working culture, distinct from the rest of Greenland's occupational hunting and fishing.<sup>85</sup> It was also the site of Greenland's first and most successful negotiation of workers' rights and the founding of its first trade union (Carlsen 2003). If these values had been taken into consideration by the authorities, Qullissat would have formed a vanguard in the transformation from a traditional to a modern society. Instead, the evidence seems to suggest that the town's high levels of organisation were seen as a potential threat that could be directed against specific employers and the whole administrative culture alike (Carlsen 2003).

Despite these material advantages, the town inevitably suffered from the negative effects of the prolonged process associated with closure. The delaying strategy, and the negligence that accompanied it, only exacerbated existing anxiety and despair. In addition, the many years of non-investment adversely influenced not only the operation of the mine but also the town's infrastructure, a point reflected in the Greenlandic Council's view that it was too expensive to raise the standards of the town.

As Haagen has suggested, the administration in Copenhagen operated under different conditions and assumptions than those that applied locally in Qullissat, and this created a deep fracture between different approaches to both the mine and the future of the town.<sup>86</sup> Qullissat operated on the not unreasonable assumption that if the mine performed better, both mine and town could be rescued. If the mine could be rationalised, the workforce stabilised, the price of coal adjusted, and production levels raised, this would make all the difference. But although the mine from the mid-1960s onwards did perform substantially better, producing more coal with fewer employees and operating at a level that experts would claim more than merited its continuation, this did not alter the Copenhagen administration's perception: their minds were already made up. Politicians in Qullissat did what they could to influence the process, but in vain. As one commentator wryly noted at the time in the local newspaper, the state seemed to be practising a hot-and-cold policy that "lately seems to have turned into a wither away policy."<sup>87</sup>

The psychic strains of living with the threat of shutdown, and the inevitable eviction to follow, had dire consequences. In 1967, social and medical civil servants joined forces to express their concern.<sup>88</sup> A sword was hovering over the town: investment had effectively stopped; the rationalisation of the mine had only led to further unemployment; and those who wanted to move away could not get housing or jobs. The district medical head wrote in his yearly report that people were increasingly confused and also noted a growing level of alcohol abuse and neurotic stress-related disorders.<sup>89</sup> This perception was shared by the consultant from the Social and Labour Management Board in Nuuk, who in October 1967 wrote a concerned letter to the ministry.<sup>90</sup> The letter pointed to the frightening prospect of a vast array of social problems being unleashed by the *laissez-faire* attitude to Qullissat, and underlined the urgent need for investment in people, not technology.<sup>91</sup>

## THE AFTERMATH

For residents of Qullissat, relocation was saturated with loss. There was the erosion of community and intimate relations with families and friends, who were separated by sometimes thousands of kilometres. There was also the loss of livelihood. In Qullissat, many people had enjoyed a relatively high income as skilled workers. Most had lived in rent-free houses, and for many the loss of home was the loss of houses they had built and invested in

themselves. They had had free coal for heating and cooking, and boats and sledge dogs for subsistence hunting and fishing; now these were gone as well.<sup>92</sup> Though most wished to be relocated to the Disko Bay area and the northern parts of West Greenland, more than two-thirds of them ended up more or less marooned in the southwest.<sup>93</sup> And though most preferred a house, the majority ended up in anonymous blocks of flats, with high rents and expensive heating bills.<sup>94</sup> For skilled workers, it was a relocation to unskilled work, and unemployment was a dominant feature, especially during the winter months.<sup>95</sup> The loss of access to hunting and fishing not only added to the rise in living costs, but was also a cultural loss: of Greenlandic food; of the Greenlandic way of life.<sup>96</sup> To make matters worse, the towns they moved to were already burdened by unemployment and lack of housing. Former residents of Qullissat stood out as a special group, and in many places they came to represent a large portion of the population: in Nuuk 2.5%, in Sisimiut 3.6%, in Paamiut 5.7%, and in Ilulissat as much as 10.8%.<sup>97</sup> Many encountered resentment, which added to the loss of community and social relations.<sup>98</sup> Some managed despite these hardships to transplant the skills, knowledge, and values of Qullissat into their new lives and also brought their activism skills to unions and local politics. But the relocation was, first and foremost, an economic and social disaster, with deeply wounding and even traumatising effects.

The life and aftermath of Qullissat is deeply entangled with the fate of Greenland. For the Greenlandic people, Qullissat illuminated the ordeals of the Danish administration of Greenland. Qullissat incarnated Danish modernisation policies' displacement of local values and knowledges. As illustrated above, this ranged from the peremptory price-setting of coal to a studied indifference to the strengths and resources of the community; from a blunt disregard for local objections to modernisation policies to unrealistic optimism about the employment opportunities offered by the fishing industry. Qullissat condensed and magnified the Danish government's opposition to Greenlandic political agency. Denmark's prioritisation of economic rationales over the rights and freedoms of people, even if hesitant in execution, remained obdurate. The despair this caused the Greenlandic people was palpable. In this context, Qullissat became both a trigger and a significant symbol in the autonomy movement's struggle for Greenlandic political agency and local government.

The life and afterlife of Qullissat are simultaneously about trials and wounds, resistance and resilience. The closing of Qullissat formed an enduring scar for its former residents, hardened around social and eco-

nomic problems as well as feelings of betrayal and loss (Sørensen 2013; Tejsner 2014). But the afterlife of Qullissat is also about its residents' resilience and their refusal to abandon their town. Though Qullissat is now officially closed, it comes alive every summer when former residents and their relatives return to commemorate it. Central to this effort is the association Friends of Qullissat, which collects money to rebuild houses and arrange summer gatherings (Sørensen 2013). In 2012, the summer gathering was particularly grand, commemorating as it did the 40th anniversary of the closure with the motto "Let us with happiness look forward."<sup>99</sup> People came from near and far to participate, among them activists, politicians, artists, and musicians from the 1970s autonomy movement. The history of Qullissat was dramatised as a theatre concert to the accompaniment of ever-popular Vaigat music (Sørensen 2013). After its première in Qullissat, the concert toured nine towns on the Greenlandic coast and was seen by one in eight Greenlanders (Sørensen 2013). In the summer of 2015, the Danish Queen, on her official summer expedition to Greenland, revisited Qullissat for the first time since her first visit (as a princess) to the town in 1960. At the same time, the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission has marked Qullissat as a special area of attention in their unravelling of colonial legacies. The young Greenlandic band Small Time Giants, in their song 3-9-6-0 (Qullissat's postcode), have likewise commemorated Qullissat, indicating that its symbolic significance also resonates with younger generations born long after the closure. More specifically, the lyrics of 3-9-6-0 address the dismantling of the town, and the song ends with an excerpt from Australian ex-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations, followed by the lines: "We buried our faith in the future/It's clear that the past will catch us all" (Small Time Giants 2014). Through activities such as these, Qullissat and its complex story continue to be re-enacted 43 years after its closure. The town imposes itself on the present: as a vibrant community during the summer; as a bitter reality of enduring wounds and traumas; as a commemoration of the ordeals of Danish colonialism and the resilience of the Greenlandic people; and, still haunting the present and future of Greenland, as an unresolved past.

## CONCLUSION: THE TEMPORALITY OF SCRAMBLE

What lessons might be learned from the story of Qullissat's rise and fall in the context of today's ubiquitous discourse on the scramble for the Arctic? One potential lesson is how the current scramble risks being caught in its own emergent crisis metaphor. While the narrative of a pristine environment being assaulted by extractive industries is a timely warning, it also reduces the vast, heterogeneous space of the Arctic—with its many cultures and divergent histories—to a frozen expanse awaiting onslaught. Qullissat offers a salient case study of a community which was quite literally the result of an earlier, more limited onslaught on a colonial society: one that took place within, and was justified by, a national imperial framework of thought. Yet paradoxically Qullissat also took on its own lease of life; it was not just an “assaulted spot” with a “subjugated population,” even if it was also that. The example of Qullissat suggests significant overlaps between communities created out of earlier, slow-moving national imperial fantasies and the contemporary neoliberal scramble, which is usually seen as being based on fly-in-fly-out extractive industries. Both are based on dreams of massive profits; and both are marked by a remarkable degree of inconsistency, even irrationality, behind the veneer of imperial rational logic: what Paul Carter (1987) in a different context has labelled an “imperial gaze” that orders everything inside its horizon, its own self-defining and narrowly circumscribed space. Carter also shows there are competing ways of conceiving of this space, not just retrospectively but at the time of onslaught. It is these alternative perceptions we need to take into account in order to challenge a doom-and-gloom approach that merely enumerates social and environmental disasters as these befall the Arctic and anywhere else in the global south, to which the Arctic, through a supreme geographical irony, belongs. The point here is not to ignore or relativise the negative impact the extractive industries have had, and will continue to have, on the region. But a hegemonic disaster narrative paralyses rather than animates accounts of anti-colonial resistance. Qullissat is an important slice of history, not least because the story it tells is one of resistance and adaptation, not apathy or resignation, even if these understandably kick in for some once the battle is lost. Similarly, in contemporary Greenland, where decisions over mining are no longer in the hands of colonial administrators (even if the continuing Danish influence on Greenland has identifiable neocolonial characteristics), the same elements can be detected. These take many different forms, for example,

various small-scale organisations working to ensure transparency, accountability, and adequate environmental protection, and to challenge the premise that growth is the only answer to development. This challenge is directed, not just at the extractive industries, which promise precisely that, but also at their own government, which is under constant pressure to finance an aspirational welfare society. Meanwhile, pressures continue to pile up as well from the old colonial power, whose agenda remains as opaque as it was during the 18 years it spent deliberating and manipulating, alternately pushing and stalling, the process of closing Qullissat. Most importantly, and as a lesson for contemporary Greenland, whatever the inconsistencies and contradictions of its policies, the colonial administration never let go of the reins.

## NOTES

1. Birte Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat, foreløbig delrapport af undersøgelsen vedr.’Nedlæggelsen af kulbruddet og byen K’utdligssat,” (Unpublished, 1975), I.
2. Aasivik was the name for the traditional Inuit summer gatherings. In the 1970s the tradition was revived as a cultural political initiative connected to the Greenlandic autonomy movement; it took place several times in Qullissat. Albeit more infrequently, the Aasivik gatherings still take place today.
3. Birte Haagen, “The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland.” *Études inuit = Inuit studies* 6, no. 1 (1982): 95.
4. Ibid.
5. The Greenlandic Commission of 1948 was established to address social, political, cultural, and administrative development in Greenland and to propose a programme for the new policy on Greenland integrating it as a county in Denmark. The Commission consisted of a Main Commission and nine Sub-Commissions. The Main Commission had 16 members, out of which five were Greenlanders (four from The Greenlandic Provincial Councils and one from the Greenlandic Association of Housewives). The Commission had in total 105 members, out of which 10 were Greenlanders. The work resulted in a 1100-page report (cf. Sørensen 2006).
6. The Coal Commission was established by the Danish Ministry of Greenland in 1957 to evaluate the operation of the mine in Qullissat. It consisted of technical experts and representatives from the Danish administration of Greenland.
7. The Greenlandic Commission of 1960 was established to further develop the modernisation politics initiated by the Greenlandic Commission of

1948. It consisted of 19 members, including seven Greenlandic representatives (the two members of the Danish Parliament, three members from the Greenlandic National Council, one member from the Greenlandic Workers Union, and one member from the Greenlandic Fishermen and Hunters Union) (cf. Sørensen 2006).
8. The Greenlandic Council had been established by the Ministry of Greenland in 1964 as a substitute for the parliamentary Greenland Commission. The Council consisted of four Danish and four Greenlandic politicians (the two Greenlandic members of the Danish Parliament and two members from the Greenlandic National Council). The appointed chairman of the Council was a top civil servant who had also been the chairman of the Greenlandic Commission of 1948 (cf. Sørensen 2006).
  9. The Governor of Greenland was the highest-ranking Danish civil servant in Greenland.
  10. The Greenlandic National Council was an advisory council to the Danish Parliament with the right to be consulted on legislation pertaining to Greenland. It was established as a merger between the two provincial councils in 1951. It consisted of representatives directly elected in 13 constituencies by voters in Greenland. In 1959 it was expanded to 16 constituencies. Until 1967 the council did not have its own secretariat but relied on the ministry in Copenhagen. The Governor of Greenland was permanent chairman of the council. In 1967 the council achieved the right to its own secretariat and to appoint a chairman among its own members. In 1979 the council was substituted with the Home Rule government and parliament (cf. Sørensen 2006).
  11. Birte Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland Qutdligssat, om nedlæggelsen af kulbruddet og byen*, (København: BH-Forlag [privately printed], 1977), 8; Haagen, "The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland," 80; Søren Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø* (Frederiksberg: Frydendal, 2013), 70.
  12. Haagen, "The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland," 80.
  13. Ibid.
  14. Ibid.
  15. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 62.
  16. Ibid.
  17. Haagen, "The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland," 82.
  18. Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 9.
  19. Haagen, "The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland," 82.
  20. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 67, *authors' translation*.
  21. Ibid.
  22. Ibid.
  23. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 70.

24. Vaigat is the name of the strait between the island of Qeqertarsuaq, where Qullissat is located, and the mainland.
25. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 70.
26. Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 9.
27. Ibid., 8–9.
28. Ibid., 14; Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 70.
29. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 84; Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 26; Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat,” 10.
30. Haagen, “The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland,” 81.
31. Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 9.
32. Ibid., 14; Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 84.
33. Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 13–14.
34. Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat,” 2, *authors’ translation*.
35. Haagen, “The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland,” 85.
36. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 94.
37. Ibid.
38. Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat,” 21; Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 1.
39. Ibid., 21.
40. Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 23; Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 96.
41. Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat,” 2.
42. Ibid.
43. Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 23.
44. Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat,” 2–3.
45. Ibid., 3.
46. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 90.
47. Ibid.
48. Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat,” 3.
49. Ibid., 22.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., *authors’ translation*.
53. Ibid.
54. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 96.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 97.
57. Haagen, “Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K’utdligssat,” 1, *authors’ translation*.
58. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 109.

59. Ibid., 99.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., 100.
62. Ibid.
63. Birte Haagen, "Mørke minder omkring kul og beslutning i Grønland," *Forskningen og Samfundet* 1, no. 4 (1975), 4; Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 29.
64. Haagen, "Mørke minder omkring kul og beslutning i Grønland," 4.
65. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 115.
66. Haagen, "Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K'utdligssat," 25.
67. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 110.
68. Ibid.
69. Haagen, "Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K'utdligssat," 23.
70. The Royal Danish Trading Company (KGH) had a monopoly on trade in Greenland from 1776 to 1950. From 1950 to 1986 KGH solely managed supply services to Greenland. In 1986 KGH was handed over to the Greenlandic Home Rule Government and changed into Kalaallit Niuersarfik (KNI).
71. Haagen, "Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K'utdligssat," 23.
72. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 116.
73. Ibid.
74. Julut aka Jørgen Fleischer. "Grønland ramt af alvorlig erhvervskrise." *A/G*, September 26 (1968), *authors' translation*.
75. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 116; Haagen, "Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K'utdligssat," 23.
76. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 116.
77. Ibid., 116, 194.
78. Ibid., 110, *authors' translation*.
79. "Kulminen skal nedlægges," *A/G*, October 10, 1968, *authors' translation*.
80. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 121.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Haagen, "Fraflytningssituationen for befolkningen i K'utdligssat," 38, *authors' translation*.
84. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 89.
85. Haagen, "The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland," 81.
86. Ibid., 94.
87. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 82, *authors' translation*.
88. Ibid., 99.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., 100.
92. Haagen, "The Coal Mine at Qullissat in Greenland," 87.
93. Ibid., 88.
94. Ibid., 92.
95. Ibid., 91–92.
96. Ibid., 92.
97. Ibid., 89.
98. Haagen, *Qutdligssat, en kulmine i Grønland*, 46.
99. Sørensen, *Qullissat—Byen der ikke ville dø*, 172, authors' translation.

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## Pingvellir: Commodifying the “Heart” of Iceland

*Kristín Loftsdóttir and Katrín Anna Lund*

**Abstract** This chapter focuses on the Pingvellir National Park and its changing meanings in the present. Pingvellir has been an important nationalistic symbol for Iceland, the site of numerous festivals celebrating the nation, and a space for recreation and leisure. This chapter interrogates the multiple meanings of Pingvellir from a postcolonial perspective, paying particular attention to its more recent position as one of Iceland’s major tourist sites. The chapter critically addresses what happens when symbolic places are commercialised within current neoliberal economies and become components of a global heritage. In particular, it questions the potency of Pingvellir’s image as a gateway between continents as well as its commodification within a universalised humanity.

**Keywords** Pingvellir • Iceland • Heritage tourism • National identity • Commercialisation

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## INTRODUCTION

In July 2015, scandalised Icelandic newspaper reports about tourists regularly defecating in the grounds of Þingvellir’s church, close to the burial site of some of Iceland’s most beloved poets, generated intense discussion in social and conventional media on tourism in Iceland. The Minister of Environment proclaimed in *Fréttablaðið* that this was “sacrilege and disrespect to everything and everyone,” adding that “civilized people don’t behave like this.”<sup>1</sup> Her comment, while contributing to a broader discussion of tourism in Iceland, referred in particular to the (human) waste left behind at Þingvellir National Park, a major symbolic site representing Iceland’s independence. Today, Þingvellir is one of the key attractions for international tourists to Iceland, and is all the more popular since, on the basis of its cultural heritage, it became (in 2004) the country’s first UNESCO World Heritage site. The media discussion referred to above reflects ongoing tensions and anxieties in relation to the island’s booming tourist industry, with the perceived “desecration” of Þingvellir being illustrative of Iceland’s new position as a site of mass tourism, which involves new and not always desirable ways of imagining place. With Iceland’s rapid entry over the past two decades into a transnational, interconnected world, mass tourism represents one of the country’s most visible changes, based on its increasing popularity as an Arctic destination and an imagined place of purity, virtue, and adventure (Bailes et al. 2014; Loftsdóttir 2015). From a broader perspective, this imagining of Iceland is part of a historical continuum, for the island has long since been fashioned as “exotic” and “primitive” in European travel and scientific writing, to the dismay of different Icelandic intellectuals at different times (Durrenberger and Pálsson 1989; Oslund 2002).

This chapter looks at Þingvellir’s multiple meanings from a postcolonial perspective, both as an important site of Iceland’s independence and, more recently, as a place of transnational encounter and exchange (Fig. 5.1). We critically address what happens when symbolic places are commercialised within current neoliberal economies through mass tourism, as well as when they are redefined as part of the global heritage of humankind. We show how Þingvellir’s meaning as an Icelandic place has increasingly been overtaken by a narrative of Þingvellir as global heritage site and/or international geological wonder—a narrative more appealing to non-Icelandic tourists. This changed meaning of Þingvellir is facilitated by the fact that most of its visitors today are not native Icelanders



**Fig. 5.1** Pingvellir on a gloomy day in summer, 2014 (photo: Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir)

but non-Icelandic tourists, many of them arriving en masse on organised bus tours. While emphasising Pingvellir’s important role as a site of national pride and identity in line with other Icelandic scholars (see, e.g., Hálfðánarsson 2000a, 2000b; Hermannsson 2011–2012), we also stress how Icelanders themselves have fashioned it as a modern-day place of leisure as well as a repository of personal narratives and memories: an individual recreational as much as a collective memorial site.

Our emphasis on Iceland as a postcolonial space can be seen as part of a recent interest in the wider positioning of the Nordic countries within a postcolonial context (Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; see also Chap.1 of this volume). This context involves reimagining the Nordic countries as part of the wider world while also “provincialising” them (Jensen 2010). Iceland’s past entanglement with colonialism takes on a particular texture here, for while Icelanders have actively participated in the racist imagining of colonised populations (Loftsdóttir 2014), they themselves have been historically subjected to “othering” within the larger

European context (Durrenberger and Pálsson 1989). It is precisely this dual position that tourism organisations in Iceland have skilfully exploited. Iceland is framed in this discourse as a white western nation, but one which is remotely situated, inviting the touristic adventure of being on the edge of the civilised world (Loftsdóttir 2015; Jóhannesson et al. 2010; Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011). A further layer is provided by what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) have labelled “global civil society,”<sup>2</sup> in which various social discourses are implemented to invoke “the values of globalism”<sup>3</sup> in a new international order, and transnational organisations like the UN play an increasingly important role in creating the very meaning of the world.

This chapter aims to look at how “values of globalism” become entangled in encounters between mass tourism and people in particular localities, and how these entanglements reflect continued or changed hierarchies of power. Its analysis takes in a diverse set of data: promotional materials relating to the branding of Þingvellir; sundry newspaper articles; and four field trips on guided bus tours in which Þingvellir is one of the featured sites.<sup>4</sup> In the first part of the chapter, we discuss Iceland from a postcolonial perspective, assessing Þingvellir’s symbolic meaning as both a traditional locus of independence and the perceived beating heart of the modern nation state. Our discussion initially focuses on the Parliament Festival (1930), which we take to be symbolic of Iceland’s marginal position in the early twentieth century vis-à-vis Europe and other, larger geopolitical entities. We then turn towards the present, demonstrating the rapid emergence of tourism as a major industry in Iceland. More specifically, we look at some of the historical processes that have informed the shifting status of Þingvellir, which is now imagined less as the birthplace of the Icelandic nation than as a kind of global gateway between Europe and America. As we will show, it is this part-mythologised meeting between Europe and America, the two dominant continents in modern western political narratives, which is at the forefront of how Þingvellir and its landscape are presented to tourists today.

### ICELAND AS A POSTCOLONIAL SPACE

The Nordic countries in general and Iceland in particular do not have a long history of being addressed by postcolonial theory (for exceptions, see Palmberg 2009; Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012). The Nordic countries’ legacy of exceptionalism, according to which they

were imagined as somehow standing outside colonialism and imperialism, positioned them as more peace-loving and anti-racist than other countries, and thus as somehow irrelevant to postcolonial concerns (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; see also Chap. 1 of this volume). Graham Huggan’s recent (2015) observation that postcolonial theory has been belated in relation to the European Arctic, even as postcolonial perspectives were applied a good while ago to its American counterpart, can be related to this analytical blind spot with respect to the Nordic countries. As in other places, recent postcolonial perspectives on the Nordic countries have revolved around a critical “reexamination of the colonial encounter and of the contradictions of contemporary global realities.”<sup>5</sup> The recognition of colonialism’s key role in shaping different European identities (Gilroy 1993) has resulted in detailed analysis of the “forgotten” histories of colonialism and imperialism (Naum and Nordin 2013a, 2013b)—histories often entangled with further analysis of the contemporary dealings of northern countries with migration in the recent or more distant past (Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012). While Iceland did not participate as an independent state in the colonial adventure, it still had an indirect and surprisingly influential presence. Keskinen et al. (2009) use the malleable concept “colonial complicity” to capture the various ways in which the Nordic countries participated in various imperial and colonial enterprises. While their involvement most obviously included the scramble for resources during the high watermark of colonialism and imperialism, it also manifested itself in business ventures or the reproduction of racist imaginaries and habits of thought.

After the end of the Commonwealth period in 1262, when Iceland relinquished its power to the Kingdom of Norway, Iceland endured nearly seven centuries of foreign rule: first by the Norwegians (1262–1662), then the Danes (1662–1944). Icelandic anthropologists have long acknowledged Icelanders’ subjectivities as having been shaped by their position under Denmark (Brydon 1995; Björnsdóttir and Kristmundsóttir 1995; Durrenberger and Pálsson 1989). This is not to imply that Iceland was officially a colony; or that it was subjugated in the same way as indigenous populations in the Arctic; or that its people suffered the same kinds of colonialism played out in Africa, with that continent’s intense history of racism, brutality, and dehumanisation. However, for Iceland’s population in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their subordination to Danish rule was an important one, and to this day it constitutes an essential element in understanding the place of Iceland and Icelanders

in the wider world. Iceland's involvement with colonialism, as explored by Loftsdóttir (2015), was therefore characterised by its dual position, with Icelandic subjectivity being shaped by the country's subjugated status even as Icelandic intellectuals participated actively in maintaining and creating colonial discourse. Iceland was thus itself an object of colonialism while contributing to the reproduction and dissemination of colonial-racist narratives of different, and often virulent, kinds.

In belonging to the Danish crown, Iceland was also an outpost in Denmark's colonial empire, which, at its peak, involved colonies in diverse parts of the world including the North Atlantic, the Caribbean, and Africa. Iceland was connected to the wider world in other, multiple ways. The art historian Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, for example, has shown that the centuries-long presence of French fishermen on the Icelandic coast turned Iceland into the subject of French "scientific" explorations aimed at bringing its peoples into the racial classifications of the time (Sigurjónsdóttir 2000). In seeking independence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it thus became particularly urgent for Icelandic intellectuals to affirm Icelandic membership within the ranks of the "civilised" western nations, thereby separating themselves from other subjugated peoples, but also to show the uniqueness of the Icelandic nation, which was perceived as "already" a nation and therefore deserving of its desired freedom (Loftsdóttir 2014). Critical work on colonial complicity emphasises this double logic while also showing how such supposedly benign activities as travel writing produced and perpetuated colonial discourse, justifying racism and the subjection of others. National identity in Iceland has long been articulated in relation to these and other forms of postcolonial anxiety, particularly the fear of being "misrecognised" as a subject people (Loftsdóttir 2014). Icelandic intellectuals thus attempted to separate themselves from other colonised populations as well as replicating the kinds of race thinking that prevailed in "scientific" anthropological classifications of the time (Loftsdóttir 2008). This felt need to dissociate themselves from other subjugated peoples was historically exemplified in Icelanders' vigorous attempts to distance themselves from their neighbouring country, Greenland, whose people, they stressed equally energetically, were nothing like them. By the early twentieth century, some Icelandic politicians were even going so far as to say that Iceland had claims to Greenland, over and against that country's own indigenous peoples, on the basis that it had been settled centuries ago by the "Icelander," Eirík the Red.

## PINGVELLIR’S SYMBOLIC STATUS

With Icelanders maintaining a separate ethnic identity long prior to their independence from Denmark in 1944 (Karlsson 1995),<sup>6</sup> emerging nationalistic sentiments in Europe fitted well with Icelanders’ strong pride in their culture.<sup>7</sup> Even though Denmark had gradually lost its status as an empire, it was reluctant to give up Iceland,<sup>8</sup> possibly due to the fact that many Danes felt that Iceland signified Scandinavia’s “living past.”<sup>9</sup> This was intensified by the long-standing stereotyping of Iceland in European writing; meanwhile, Iceland became a popular destination for European geologists and travellers, who wrote about the country and its people (Oslund 2011).

Iceland’s position under Danish rule was challenged in the mid-1800s by Icelandic intellectuals, whereupon Þingvellir quickly became an important nationalistic symbol of Iceland’s past. The general assembly, *Althing*, was established at Þingvellir in 930, not long after the settlement of Iceland in 874. Iceland back then primarily consisted of farmsteads, with *Althing* seen as a “sovereign legislature of a loosely federated farming society.”<sup>10</sup> The country’s main chieftains gathered at Þingvellir during the Commonwealth period spanning from settlement to 1262 for two weeks every summer to create and announce laws and punishments. The choice of location reflected its proximity to the densely populated southwest, while in addition there were two main highland routes through the rugged interior of the country, reaching Þingvellir from the north and the east (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011). However, perhaps an equally important purpose was *Alþingi*’s role in uniting people living in different corners of the land. The original settlers were from a disparate array of origins in Norway and other parts of northern Europe including Scotland, Ireland, Sweden, and Denmark; a general assembly was therefore seen as a means of unifying people from various different ancestral backgrounds.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars have alternately described Þingvellir as *lieu de mémoire* (Hálfðánarsson 2000a, 2000b) and “historical monument” (Hermannsson 2011–2012), both of which suggest Þingvellir’s instrumentality in forming and maintaining Icelandic identity. Þingvellir was established as Iceland’s first national park in 1930, and when Iceland finally celebrated its full independence from Denmark on June 17, 1944, it was done from the symbolic domain of Þingvellir, which—so it was proclaimed—was “the place where the Icelandic nation entered the world.”<sup>12</sup> As a national symbol of Iceland, Þingvellir could be used both to celebrate the oneness of

the nation and to confirm “what sets Icelanders apart from ‘others.’”<sup>13</sup> Þingvellir’s importance was intensified by its perceived neutrality as a symbol, as the park’s historical association was not entangled with disputed issues or class differences but with the mythical past of Icelandic settlement.<sup>14</sup> During the independence movement, Þingvellir became important as a symbol of Iceland’s former status as a sovereign country in the early days of settlement.<sup>15</sup> There were 25 such meetings between 1848 and 1907 at Þingvellir, though it would have been much easier to hold them in Reykjavík. As Hermannson asserts, this can be attributed to the fact that political meetings at Þingvellir had symbolic meaning, with Þingvellir functioning as a metonymy for the golden age of Iceland as a free independent state. Hermannson maintains that Þingvellir became a place where directions for the future were set.<sup>16</sup> Thus, when Þingvellir eventually became a national park in 1930, it was fitting that it should become the property of the Icelandic state, solidifying its symbolic status as belonging to the nation at large.<sup>17</sup>

Claims for independence from Denmark in turn drew strength from medieval Icelandic literature, in which national narratives were celebrated, especially in terms of the glory of the Commonwealth period when Iceland was first settled.<sup>18</sup> The roots of Icelandic identity in ancient history were also clearly reflected in Jón Jónsson Aðils’ influential nationalistic ideas.<sup>19</sup> Jónsson Aðils maintained that the Icelandic national character was originally defined by beauty and glory, but that when Icelanders lost their independence to Norway these noble qualities deteriorated.<sup>20</sup> Another enduring claim to fame is Þingvellir’s well-documented history as the site for the Icelandic parliament. It is worth pointing out here that compared to many other European countries, Iceland has very few physical remains from the past: hence the importance of *Alþingi* (the parliament) as an embodiment of the island’s history. This role is clearly visible in the original application for Þingvellir as a UNESCO Heritage site, where the enduring presence of the parliament is expressed in the “well preserved remains of habitation,” which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries consisted of “farms, tracks and grassfields.”<sup>21</sup> For the untrained eye, these remains would probably blend in with the physical landscape. They are brought to life, however, by a detailed historical and archaeological mapping of the parliamentary site that works towards creating a holistic picture of its different components through the ages. The site, visualised in this way, creates continuities between the settlement of people in the distant past and the formation of a modern nation state—an important link to the

present. With Icelandic nationalists basing their claim for independence strongly on the cultural continuity between the Saga period and modern-day Icelanders,<sup>22</sup> Þingvellir became particularly important in creating these links between Iceland’s “proud” present and its “glorious” past.

The Parliament Festival, *Alþingishátíðin*, which was celebrated in 1930 at Þingvellir to honour a thousand years of the Icelandic parliament, can be taken as a further example that embodies Iceland’s aspirations in early twentieth century and Þingvellir’s central role in them. The festival symbolises how Þingvellir was selected as the site of numerous festivities memorialising the history of Iceland. (Þingvellir has been seen as the undisputed natural location for such events.)<sup>23</sup> These commemorative events were well attended throughout the twentieth century, with large crowds of people participating in the celebrations. Nationwide celebrations included the 1874 National Festival, which commemorated the millennium of settlement of Iceland; *Kristnitökubátíðin* 2000, celebrating a thousand years of Christianity in the country; and a further National Festival in 1994 (Proppé 2003). The Parliament Festival, which was aimed at allowing the Icelandic nation to demonstrate its legitimacy as an independent nation state heading towards modernity, was not just for Icelanders, but for a number of distinguished foreign visitors who were invited to the festivities. As such, it can be positioned as part of a strong desire on the part of Icelanders to be acknowledged by powerful European nations as modernising and progressive, in line with other western nations (Loftsdóttir 2012b). Þingvellir was the logical place to hold the event, not only due to its being the place where the first parliament had been established, but also owing to its importance as a meeting ground for leaders to discuss political strategies towards independence.<sup>24</sup>

The historian Ólafur Rastrich has pointed out that although the festival was supposed to show the “best and the most beautiful” of Icelandic cultural life, what was presented was in fact a reflection of what the organising committee thought was representative of Iceland. What the foreign guests got to see was thus a conservative selection of displays performed by Icelandic artists and intellectuals who had been educated in Europe. This was a performance that foreign guests could probably identify with, in line with European arts and firmly locating Icelanders as part of European culture.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Icelandic newspapers from the time reflected intense speculation in Iceland on what the festival at Þingvellir might mean for its foreign guests, clearly seeing the festival as an opportunity to introduce

Iceland's history and high culture. One newspaper article stated that foreigners attending the festival would clearly see that:

Here is a culture-nation, certainly poor and unpopulated, but with secure development towards maturity. Foreigners will see the development in all areas, and that proves the nation's capacity for culture. This will lead to Iceland no longer being seen as a savage island in the sea in the north. The nation will be seen as part of the nation's journey towards higher culture and maturity.<sup>26</sup>

Pingvellir is presented here as a site which allows important nations to realise that Iceland deserves independence despite being one of Europe's poorest countries, reflecting the further aspiration that foreigners' lack of knowledge of the country will considerably improve after their visit.

### PINGVELLIR'S IMPORTANCE TODAY

During the Second World War, Iceland was cut off from Denmark during the occupation of the latter by the Nazis, while British military forces, later to be replaced by their US counterparts, invaded Iceland. Continued US occupation in the post-war period, not ending until 1996, led to ongoing concerns over what this might mean for Iceland as an independent country.<sup>27</sup> The presence of American army bases also facilitated American influence in Iceland, for example, through the media and various consumer products, while further complicating Iceland's location between America and Europe in a wider sense. Tied in with massive development aid, the post-war period signalled the transformation of Iceland, so strongly desired by the early nationalists, into an affluent modern country. The presence of the British and, later, the US army in Iceland, in addition to various international disputes, further intensified a feeling of "us" and "them," with Icelanders being defensively pressed into preserving their independence (Loftsdóttir 2014; Hálfðánarsson 2009). The importance of Pingvellir in this context is clear, its association with Icelandic national identity continuing until the end of the twentieth century. A salient example was the selection of Pingvellir in 1994 as the location to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic of Iceland. As Hálfðánarsson points out in his detailed analysis, this anniversary stressed the historical roots of the nation as well as offering a reminder of the progress that Iceland had made since independence.<sup>28</sup> At Pingvellir, Iceland's progress as an

independent nation was both locally situated and collectively celebrated: at the birthplace of the nation, as Hálfðánarsson puts it, “the Icelandic population [could] merge into one national community.”<sup>29</sup>

Pingvellir’s enduring importance as a national symbol is also gauged to the degree that its beauty is taken to represent Icelandic nature. As Hálfðánarsson claims, Pingvellir has historically been viewed as “a place of exceptional natural beauty, representing the forces of nature that are still shaping the country.”<sup>30</sup> Pingvellir thus embodies not only Iceland’s history, but also its nature, bringing together “the two main sources of national pride in modern Iceland.”<sup>31</sup> This double association with nature and history has also taken on a mystical dimension, enhancing the notion that Pingvellir encapsulates the nation’s intrinsic spirit. The mystical role of Pingvellir has been referred to in many a political speech: for example, when the former President of Iceland, Vígðís Finnbogadóttir, famously referred to Pingvellir as the “heart of Icelanders,” she was echoing Guðmundur Davíðsson, who originally suggested in 1913 that Pingvellir should become a national park, calling it “the most beautiful and most famous historical place in Iceland—the place of the heart.”<sup>32</sup> At a festival held at Pingvellir in 1994, the Prime Minister, Davíð Oddson, similarly claimed that “the nation’s heart beats at Pingvellir.”<sup>33</sup> Putting these speeches side by side shows the conflation of the Icelandic people—Pingvellir, the heart of Icelanders—with the physical land of Iceland: Pingvellir, the heart of the country itself.

This sense of Pingvellir as a mystical place is reflected in the application to UNESCO, where it is proclaimed that:

It is beyond doubt and well arguable that to most Icelanders today Pingvellir remains a sacred place, where the dormant national spirit dwells and calls the nation to come together at crucial points in time.<sup>34</sup>

The historian Sumarliði Ísleifsson has pleaded for a more heterogeneous view of Pingvellir as a place of culture: “When places become sacred what is ordinary disappears into the shadow.”<sup>35</sup> The site’s proximity to the capital has made it readily accessible to the majority of the Icelandic population during the twentieth century. It has thus become common for Icelanders living in the capital region to travel to Pingvellir and spend part of the day there, enjoying the national park, having coffee at Hotel Valhöll, or bringing a picnic and taking in the beautiful scenery. Taking a walk, using the various well-marked paths in the park, is also a popular activity. A leisurely

autumn stroll at Þingvellir is, for many, an annual “must-do” in order to enjoy the changing colours, and such trips are frequently combined by the picking of blue- and crowberries, a common family practice in Iceland. These ordinary acts do not necessarily have explicit nationalistic connotations, but they foster a sense of Icelandic identity that simultaneously involves the active remembering of the park’s past. This last point is particularly important because—to some extent at least—it associates Þingvellir less with the stilted speeches of politicians than with the more intimate experiences of people in their everyday lives. In the process, the park becomes part of people’s childhood memories, also linking them to others as part of a shared community.

Debates about the increasing number of holiday homes around Lake Þingvellir illustrate public demands for Þingvellir to be freely available to everyone. Regulations about the park, which were passed by parliament in 1919, initially stated that summer cottages should not be built, either by individuals or associations, but the rules were later reinterpreted by Members of Parliament such as Jónas frá Hriflu (who incidentally was one of the leading voices in shaping Icelandic nationalism in the twentieth century). Without prior advertisement, parcels of land at the lake were allocated to selected individuals, and resources given to the owners for services and the maintenance of roads (Helgadóttir 2011). These privileges and asymmetries show that Þingvellir is clearly not just a shared shrine to national culture, but has been experienced and narrated very differently by local people, with some being given a stronger claim to the place.

### ÞINGVELLIR IN NEW CONTEXTS

As a contemporary as well as historical touristic attraction in a globalised, neoliberal world, Þingvellir is entangled in complex networks of global mobile practices (Fig. 5.2). In spite of Þingvellir being listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, its cultural values are not necessarily visible to foreign visitors.

“Culture” can be hard to see, especially when it is enmeshed in the surrounding natural landscape—all the more so when “nature” itself is being promoted as a way of selling Iceland to tourists, as has been the case for a good while. The tourism industry in Iceland has grown substantially in recent times, with the number of foreign visitors to the country nearly doubling in a period of six years: from an estimated 502,000 in 2008 to



**Fig. 5.2** Tourists strolling “between two continents” (photo: Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir)

997,556 in 2014.<sup>36</sup> These statistics are underlined by the fact that the population of Iceland is only around 330,000.

The rapid growth of tourism, which is central to discussions about Þingvellir today, can be linked to two highly publicised events that occurred in the early twenty-first century. The Icelandic financial collapse of 2008 provided an impetus for bolstering the tourism industry as a primary means of economic recovery (Jóhannesson and Huijbens 2010). This was followed a couple of years later by the eruption of the volcano

Eyjafjallajökull, which caused catastrophic air traffic delays. The eruption stirred up a panic among individual tour operators and the Icelandic Tourism Industry Association (SAF) alike, with both fearing a rapid downturn in visits to the island. As a consequence, the Icelandic government in collaboration with commercial parties initiated an extensive campaign, “Inspired by Iceland,” which was designed to rebuild Iceland as a tourism destination (Benediktsson et al. 2011). However, as Benediktsson et al. (2011) have pointed out, it might also have been the case that the mighty volcano with the unpronounceable name played just as important a role in drawing tourists to Iceland (see also Benediktsson et al. 2010). Certainly, though numbers dropped temporarily during the main volcanic activity in the early summer of 2010, they quickly picked up again. After all, nature-based tourism has historically been the most popular reason for foreign visitors to come to Iceland, and the vast majority still come in order to experience nature as pristine wilderness (Sæþórsdóttir 2010). Iceland’s wide-open expanses, its rugged volcanic mountains and narrow fjords, and its steaming geothermal hotspots are all star attractions; and this allows for the marketing of nature in close connections to the Earth’s formation, putting emphasis on longer historical narratives than those of Icelandic nationalism which account for a history of nature—sometimes mediated by European travel writing—that can be globally shared (Oslund 2002; Karlsdóttir 2013). Karen Oslund, for example, states that it was after the so-called *Móðurharðindi* or “famine of the mist,” a major volcanic disturbance that started in January 1783 and continued for two years, that interest in Icelandic natural landscapes was aroused by scientists and explorers.

Volcanic upheavals were of immediate interest to European geologists investigating the origins of the earth. Ironically, the very changes in the landscape that caused the Icelanders so much distress came to be considered the most “attractive” by European explorers. After 1783, travel books about Iceland devoted considerable space to describing the new landscapes and speculating about the composition of rock formations caused by these lava flows.<sup>37</sup>

As Oslund points out, though Icelandic landscapes were appealing they were not necessarily considered to be beautiful. On the contrary, they were seen as barren and inhospitable, but fascinating nevertheless as subjects for science. However, this was an attitude that changed during the era of the Romantic movement, when “these [selfsame] barren landscapes began to be re-evaluated in the more positive terms [...] as majestic and

awesome.”<sup>38</sup> Icelandic landscapes were henceforth imprinted with the label of the unique: as earthly nature in its purest form.

These sublime images of Icelandic nature, freely used by many of those who promote tourism in Iceland today, are reflected in some of the slogans used to promote Iceland as a wilderness destination: for example, “Iceland Naturally,” “Nature the Way Nature Made It,” and “Pure, Natural, Unspoiled” (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2011; see also Oslund 2005; Lund 2013). It may therefore be assumed that most contemporary visitors to Iceland are searching for natural wonders. Certainly, the most visited sites in the vicinity of Reykjavík are those that represent a volatile but magnificent nature at its purest. These include the Blue Lagoon, a man-made swimming pool that has a distinctive milky blue colour and is considered one of National Geographic’s Twenty-five Wonders of the World; Geysir, a geothermal geyser from which the English word originates; Gullfoss, a stunning waterfall with a profound conservationist history; and of course Pingvellir. One of the most popular tourist routes in Iceland is the so-called Golden Circle, which combines a visit to Gullfoss, Geysir, and Pingvellir in a one-day trip, giving even the short-term visitor to Iceland a glimpse of nature in miniature. Pingvellir, the heart of national history in Iceland, thus tends to be lumped together with other sites of “natural history” that are easily accessible on day tours from Reykjavík.

### NATIONAL PARK AND/OR WORLD HERITAGE

As suggested above, the symbolic significance of Pingvellir is still anchored to its status as the birthplace of the Icelandic nation. National anniversaries and other commemorative celebrations underline this status in the context of national pride. As Hermansson (2011–2012) points out, its more recently earned status as a World Heritage site can cause complications stemming from the fact that a larger and more diverse set of people now comes to relate to the place and claim it in their own personal narratives; and this in turn sharpens the different histories and meanings that Pingvellir entails. Arellano (2004) has discussed similar problems in relation to Machu Picchu, the lost city of the Incas in Peru, after it was accorded World Heritage status in 1983, not least in relation to the radically different meanings that were attached to it in proportion to the much greater international attention it received. Arellano emphasises the particular complexities that are involved in branding a place:

The rapid growth of tourism has often driven cultures and places to rethink their uniqueness, identity, and “brand” by which political authorities package local, regional, and national culture for tourist consumption. However, apart from the cultural and economic consequences of tourism, little attention has been paid to the changing configurations of local places after “world heritagization” and “touristification” has catapulted them into the “global order.”<sup>39</sup>

With rapidly expanding tourism in Iceland more generally, Þingvellir as national park and World Heritage site has certainly been propelled into the global order. Branding becomes increasingly important in this context. On the official website for Þingvellir (<http://www.thingvellir.is/>), both the cultural and the natural aspects of Þingvellir are highlighted, but under separate links marked on the one hand as “History” and on the other as “Nature.” The conventional distinction between culture and nature has generally been observed in tourism branding in Iceland (Lund 2013), and this has had visible effects on how Þingvellir as a tourism attraction is promoted and performed. The descriptions for “History” and “Nature” on the Þingvellir website are worth citing here at length:

#### History

No single place epitomizes the history of Iceland and the Icelandic nation better than Þingvellir by the river Öxará. At Þingvellir—literally “Parliament Plains”—the Alþing general assembly was established around 930 and continued to convene there until 1798. Major events in the history of Iceland have taken place at Þingvellir and therefore the place is held in high esteem by all Icelanders. Today Þingvellir is a protected national shrine. According to the law, passed in 1928, the protected area shall always be the property of the Icelandic nation, under the preservation of the Alþing.<sup>40</sup>

#### Nature

In the last few decades, research has made it clear that Þingvellir is a natural wonder on an international scale, with the geologic history and the biosystem of Lake Þingvallavatn forming a unique entity, a magnificent showcase. Being able to witness the evolution and formation of new species in a place like Lake Þingvallavatn is of immense value. The Þingvellir area is part of a fissure zone running through Iceland, being situated on the tectonic plate boundaries of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The faults and fissures of the area make evident the rifting of the earth’s crust.<sup>41</sup>

What is immediately evident here is that though its cultural value results in Þingvellir being described as a “protected national shrine,” “culture” is separated from “nature”; indeed, “nature [...] in its purest form, is allegedly situated somewhere where there is ‘no culture’ [at all].”<sup>42</sup> According to this binary logic, the history prior to cultural history is natural history, which has no clear boundaries and is therefore universal—at least when it comes to western tourism practices. Everyone can relate to nature—and nature sells. Thus, while Þingvellir may have been granted its status as a World Heritage site for its cultural values alone, these values are invisible to most people unless they have a particular desire to go in search of them. Consequently, organised tours that combine a visit to the site with trips to, for example, Gullfoss and Geysir tend to highlight the natural history that Þingvellir embraces. For example, the company Reykjavík Excursions, which is the main outlet for day trips for the Golden Circle, advertises it as follows:

The Golden Circle tour allows you to visit some of Iceland’s most stunning sights, starting with the Geysir geothermal area where the Strokkur geyser shoots a column of water up to 30 metres (98 ft.) into the air every 4–8 minutes in a thrilling display of nature’s forces. The visit continues with Gullfoss (Golden Falls) waterfall, created by the river Hvítá, which tumbles and plunges into a crevice some 32 m (105 ft.) deep. The Golden Circle tour also includes the historical and geological wonder that is Þingvellir National Park, where the American and Eurasian tectonic plates are pulling apart at a rate of a few centimetres per year. Additionally, the tour includes a visit to the idyllic Friðheimar greenhouse cultivation centre, where you can learn about the magic behind growing delicious, pesticide-free tomatoes and cucumbers with the aid of the geothermal heat that Iceland has in abundance.<sup>43</sup>

Here, Þingvellir is promoted to tourists as a “historical wonder”—but not due to its national significance, rather due to its unique geological formations “where the American and Euroasian tectonic plates are pulling apart.” Notably, there is no mention of national culture or the significance of the place to the people living there. While frequently promoted in this way in travel guides and on commercial websites, the idea of Þingvellir as a meeting place of American and Euroasian tectonic plates is incorrect, as Icelandic geologists have demonstrated.<sup>44</sup> This emphasis is recent, not having previously featured as part of the promotion of Þingvellir prior to the tourist boom in Iceland; and it is worth asking why it is considered

to be important now. One reason might be that the (mistaken) idea of Þingvellir as a meeting place of American and Euroasian tectonic plates is often simplified into “America” and “Europe,” thereby referencing the two major geopolitical powers in recent western history. The values associated with these powers, moreover, are not presented as a “local mediation of the universal,” but as “a concrete universal itself.”<sup>45</sup> This essentially ideological condensation into “Europe” and “America” is often given a playfully geographical or geological twist in tour company guides, as in announcements like:

Right now we are driving in Europe, according to 1 million years ago. Soon we will be in America.

We go from Europe to No Man’s Land (referencing the space between the plate cracks). This is the best place to live in the world—you don’t have to pay any taxes in No Man’s Land—except since it’s a national park you won’t be able to build a house here.

The only time you won’t have to show any passport when entering America.<sup>46</sup>

The appeal of this idea can also be seen in the playful behaviour of tourists at Þingvellir taking photos of themselves and others jumping across the rift, with presumably one foot on each continent. In such performances and the narratives that support them, Þingvellir becomes a no-man’s-land, a space in between the two dominant continents of the western world. As such, it is not a land of particular historical significance to the people that live there, but is separated from history itself. In this and other ways, the meaning of Þingvellir is brought closer to the life worlds of the predominantly American and European tourists that visit it. The notion of “no-man’s-land” intensifies the exotic nature of Iceland while evoking an image of the whole world as part of Europe or America. Moreover, as Hermannsson (2011–2012) points out, the redefinition of Þingvellir as a UNESCO World Heritage site has turned it into an integrated part of the heritage of all humanity. In asking for acknowledgement of Þingvellir as a heritage site, the original UNESCO application emphasised the national cultural value of the place, but this clearly does not extend into promoting Þingvellir as an international tourism destination. Þingvellir, instead, is marketed today as a tourist site of particular—mainly natural—interest, strategically misconceived as the meeting place of two tectonic plates.

More recently still, in 2015, considerable media attention was given to a 13-year-old British girl, Charlotte Burns, who wanted to attempt a dive into the Silfra at Pingvellir. Burns would take the dive together with the “explorer” (as he was referred to in one of the news stories) Monty Halls, as part of a BBC documentary. Another news story claimed that Burns would become “the first child to dive between the two tectonic plates that separate the continents of North America and Europe,” and that she was “particularly looking forward to stopping on the way down the 200 ft-deep fissure, putting out her arms and bridging the gap.” This was embellished with a statement from Burns herself to the effect that “being able to dive through that in water and touch two continents at the same time is amazing.”<sup>47</sup> As Burns further explained: “If a 13-year-old [girl whose] first dry suit dive [is] in a lake where she [can] barely see her hand in front of her face, can do it, anyone can.”<sup>48</sup> In similar vein, “[t]he fact that, at 13 years old I can do it puts across a clear message that no matter what age you are, anyone can rise to the challenge and get used to diving.”<sup>49</sup> The appeal to wider, “universal” narratives of exploration is clear here, as is the rush to be “first” so intrinsic to the western explorer aura. If the image of Icelandic nature is linked here to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century western explorers and travellers, there are still elements of it waiting to be discovered—in humanity’s name.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have highlighted two issues in regard to the “heart” or “birthplace” of Iceland in a global context. First, we have discussed the meaning of Pingvellir as a tourist attraction and its listing as a UNESCO site, examining at the same time what particular kinds of—and meanings of—cultural heritage are presented to and experienced by tourists. Second, we have pointed to Pingvellir’s increasing commercialisation, reflecting in the process on how the reference to “universal” values or “universally” important sites can make local histories become invisible. Neoliberalism, scholars maintain, is based on particular types of ethical or moral subjects (Muehlebach 2012). Within this context, the commercialisation of Pingvellir has moved the site away from Icelandic history, turning it into a more fluid, more readily commodified, and explicitly or implicitly westernised symbol for the heritage of humankind. While Pingvellir’s role as an opportune site for politicians to proclaim Iceland’s identity—the “shrine of national culture” trope—is well documented, we have suggested that

it is also a place that is experienced and performed differently by different individuals in their everyday lives. This sheds a slightly altered light on how tourism has influenced perspectives on and practices related to Þingvellir as a place of symbolic importance. The scandalised news stories with which we began create the sense of a world spinning out of control, in which what we might call the current “scramble for Iceland”—made manifest in morally degraded forms of global mass tourism—raises larger issues about the preservation of fragile natural settings, the public ownership of resources, and the responsibility of tourist companies in safeguarding the cultural as well as natural heritage of popular tourist sites. Þingvellir, we have suggested, should continue to mean something to local communities, even as it continues to play a part in Iceland’s economic future. Our point here is not that Þingvellir—or other important historical sites of its kind—should only be enjoyed by local people, but rather to uncover those transformations in the neoliberal economy whereby particular local places become transformed into globally marketable consumer goods. As we have shown, the incorporation of local places into a perceived “common heritage of humanity” helps transform them into multi-functional symbols that can be readily turned to commercial ends. And as we have also demonstrated, through such practices the Icelandic tourism industry has been complicit in a continuing exoticisation of Iceland in which touristic encounters with the exotic can be enacted without unwanted reminders of colonialism’s brutal history, and stereotypical attributes of “the” Icelanders are one of the several products being sold (Loftsdóttir 2015). Ironically, the contemporary touristic imagining of Iceland as a no-man’s-land, located somewhere between Europe and America, does much to capture Iceland’s historically strategic position while also drawing attention to its current marginal state.

## NOTES

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17. Hálfðánarsson, “Þingvellir: An Icelandic ‘Lieu de Mémoire,’” 23.
18. Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Arfur og umbylting: Rannsókn á íslenskri rómatík* (Reykjavík: Reykjavíkúakademían, 1999), 37.
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# Afterword: Tourism, Extraction, and the Postcolonial Arctic

*Philip E. Steinberg*

Throughout the chapters of this book, from Svalbard to Sápmi and from Greenland to Iceland, two industries loom large: tourism and resource extraction. As an afterword, I briefly consider how these two industries, and the interplay between them, reflect and reproduce the Arctic's position as a postcolonial region.

Turning first to tourism, one of the odd curiosities of national account statistics is that international tourism is classified as an “export” industry, even though tourists are *imported*, not exported. But while tourists, as material bodies, are indeed imported, the important thing for an economist is the financial flow, and from a financial perspective tourism operates more like an export industry: goods and services are provided to a foreign consumer and, in return, cash flows in.

This simple formula still leaves unanswered the question of *what* is being exported to the tourist in exchange for cash: knowledge, images, perceptions, happiness, leisure, trinkets, photographs, pride? And how does one consider tourism alongside a more “conventional” export industry like resource extraction? How does one pair what is arguably the paradigmatic export industry, in which a country's very nature (its soil, its rocks, its substance) is sold off, with one like tourism where it's not entirely clear what, if anything, is being sold at all?

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At one level, then, this volume illustrates how, in the Arctic, these two industries operate in (sometimes productive) tension with each other. Notwithstanding the obvious points of conflict between the two industries—one typically depends on the preservation of “unspoiled” landscapes and cultures, while the other almost inevitably results in these being “spoiled”—it emerges that perhaps the two industries are not so different. Both industries thrive by identifying and valuing nature (including human nature) and then commodifying it for consumption by others. Both industries are attractive as development tools in that they appear to involve little more than making available to others what a country already has (its nature, its culture, its landscape, etc.). And each industry can be pursued only with the cooperation of others: tourists need to be catered to; culture needs to be translated; mining technology must be deployed; and labour must be concentrated, trained, or imported. Ultimately, this means adjusting aspirations and transforming lifestyles, and in most cases the effort requires the enlistment of those who have previously dominated the region (or who continue to do so) and who have the capital and knowledge to bring success to the industry.

In this way, the two industries serve both to reflect and to reproduce the postcolonial condition. Each promises a pathway to sovereignty, empowerment, and development, and yet the success of each (in the event that it *is* successful) contains a reminder that success has been achieved according to standards, definitions, and institutions that are not entirely of one’s own choosing. Indeed, the different essays included here reveal that the tourism and resource extraction industries, both of which are so prominent in Arctic development plans, embody and reflect the essential dilemma of the postcolonial condition: how can empowerment be achieved on one’s own terms? Or, to phrase that question less optimistically, can empowerment be achieved if *not* truly on one’s own terms?

So what is to be done? Foregoing resource extraction or tourism as income-generating activities will only further cement relations of dependence. Conversely, it would not be helpful simply to ignore ongoing (post) colonial relations of power. Perhaps a better route would be to appreciate the complex ambiguity of the Arctic situation, even while maintaining the perspective of postcolonial critique. Indeed, the complicated, disputed nature of colonialism (both historically and in the present) in the Arctic may broaden the field of possibility. When the very definition of a Sami is disputed, when the implicit understanding of the ocean as a barrier between societies is questioned, when the relationship between south-

ern capitals and northern peripheries in defining the psychic heart of the nation state is open to continual contestation, and when the designation of precisely what the Arctic is and whether it is colonial, postcolonial, or something else altogether are themselves points of disagreement, new possibilities emerge for Arctic peoples to tell new stories about themselves, not just in relation to their pasts and futures, but also in relation to the outsiders who venture into their lands and seas as rulers, investors, tourists, or critical scholars.

Whether those new stories can bring material improvements or political empowerment to the peoples of the North remains an open question. But in a sense the question of postcolonialism has never been, and never will be, about material betterment or formal political power as ends in themselves. We can do better than return to the modernisationist development paradigm that postcolonial scholars so soundly reject. Rather, a postcolonial perspective on the Arctic directs us to be attentive to lived experiences in a region whose characteristics, right down to its geophysical constitution, challenge categories inherited from the temperate world. With this attentiveness, we can “unscramble” not just the Arctic but also the binaries of centre-periphery and progress-regress that all too often constrain our understanding of and visions for postcolonial societies, whether in the global North or the global South.

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