Dreams of Prosperity – Enactments of Growth

The Rise and Fall of Farming in Varanger

Marianne Elisabeth Lien

ABSTRACT

An old tractor serves as an ethnographic entry point to shifting articulations of resources in coastal Finnmark, North Norway. Idle since the 1970s, the tractor is a relic of agricultural dreams, turned to rubble as novel layers of the Varanger landscape are conjured as resourceful. Farming in Finnmark was a geopolitical strategy to secure national borders and to expand a post-war welfare state, it was also a colonial effort to cultivate farmers in the far north. This article details the back-breaking practices required to make thin Arctic topsoil collaborate in realizing modernist dreams of agricultural growth, while state interventions sought to ensure national borders and national identity. The author highlights dialectic relations between mapping and forgetting, crucial in the making of resources and colonizing practices.

KEYWORDS

Arctic, colonisation, domestication, farming, resources, Sámi, Norway

What can a tractor do? It can plough fields and pull heavy things. It can make a horse's power obsolete, and transform reindeer pasture to farmland. But it can also act as a stubborn reminder of a recent past in the process of being erased from collective memory, a testimony of toiling bodies on a windy field. Once it was ploughed. Now it is overtaken by heather. Gone are its furrowed inscriptions in the soil, gone is the man who steered the plough. The name of the field was never inscribed on a map. Resisting the fluidity of changing landscapes, the tractor can help us recapture the hopes that were once nurtured about a more prosperous life on the northern coastline of Varanger, North Norway. The tractor is a memory of a future that never fully came to be.

In this article, the idle Massey Ferguson serves as a proxy for the historical attempts to make a seemingly barren landscape 'liveable' for proper farmers-citizens of a Norwegian nation state. I mobilize

This article is available open access under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as part of Berghahn Open Anthro, a subscribe-to-open model for APC-free open access made possible by the journal's subscribers.

it as an entry point, and a mnemonic device, as I trace ethnographic fragments of biosocial and geopolitical entanglements of colonialism in the region.

I am interested in the making and unmaking of farmland as a resource frontier in North Norway.¹ ‘Natural resources’ are neither ‘natural’ nor obviously ‘resource-ful’, but always dependent on the various projects that make them so (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014). In this article, I focus specifically on the way these efforts have shaped and interrupted landscape practices on the Varanger peninsula, as seen through relics of the past in the present. Varanger is the most eastern part of Finnmark county, bordering Finland to the south, Russia to the east, and the Barents Sea to the north. Seventy-one degrees north, 30 degrees east, is as far north as northern Alaska, and as far east as Istanbul. The peninsula constitutes the northern part of Varanger, and is the core area of this ethnographic account. Most of the peninsula has very low vegetation and few trees.

The ethnographic and historical fragments that follow show how the making of farmland is also a ‘civilizing’ effort and a tool of governance at a distance, and how local efforts to farm incorporated hopes of prosperity as well as a response to harsh policies of ethnic assimilation. From the perspective of Norwegian authorities, a perspective that is invariably a perspective from the south, coastal Finnmark is a periphery ‘particularly suited to the logic of frontier world making’ (Ogden 2018:68). Hence, the unfolding of novel multispecies assemblages resembles those of peripheries shaped by settler colonialism in the southern hemisphere such as in Patagonia (Ogden 2018) or South Africa (Nustad 2015, see also Crosby 2015). Yet unlike the more common stories of settler colonialism, the colonizing efforts of northern Scandinavia appear messier, and more subtle. Tracing the shifting assemblages of resource materialities in the region, I explore the entanglements of northern colonialism and how they are intertwined, first with the expansion of agriculture in the Norwegian welfare state, and later with wilderness conservation. This is also a story of forgetting and remembrance, so let me begin with the moment that triggered a collaborative attempt to remember what was already nearly forgotten.

I have known Vibeke since the 1980s when I first did fieldwork in the region. She was just a few years older than me, but already married and with two children. My fieldwork in the region ended, but our friendship remained, and we have stayed in touch ever since. Vibeke’s mother grew up speaking Sámi, but she had acquired fluency

in Norwegian too, and never revealed her Sámi background to her children until near the end of her life. Hence, when we met, they all presented themselves as Norwegian, which was typical in this coastal region where Sámi was still a stigmatized ethnic identity at the time (Eidheim 1971).

Vibeke grew up in Syltefjord where her family had sheep, a cow, a horse and, from 1958 onwards, a Massey Ferguson. When I met her family in the 1980s, her parents had left the farm, and moved to the central municipality Båtsfjord, like almost everyone else, facilitated by a state policy of regional centralization that transformed places like Syltefjord to seasonal settlements for second-home owners (see Lien 2018). This was the case for my friends too, who frequently travel across the mountain from Båtsfjord to Syltefjord (by road in summer, snowmobile in winter) where the old house and barn still remain as endless projects of repair and refurbishing.

When we were younger we rarely spoke about the past. But recently, this has changed. It started with her complaint, during one of our phone conversations, when she told me that they could no longer fetch firewood in the slopes near the river nearby. The Syltefjord river runs through the Syltefjord valley, which has also been designated a nature reserve. It is adjacent to the Varanger peninsula national park, which covers a great part of the Varanger peninsula.² The reserve comes with signs, and boundaries clearly demarcated on newly made maps. They show that the boundary of the nature reserve runs just up behind their old barn, where signs announce: '*Sylteffjorddalen Naturreservat / Oardu luondumeahcci (S)*'³, denoting Syltefjord valley nature reserve. The sign lists snippets of legal paragraphs, including this one: 'Vegetation, including dead bushes and trees are protected against injury and destruction. It is prohibited to remove plants and parts of plants from the nature reserve'.⁴ Like most territory in Finnmark, the park and nature reserve have been owned by the Finnmark Property (FEFO, formerly the State Forest) since 2005 (see Ween and Lien 2012).

Vibeke found the new restrictions ridiculous. Her husband contacted the forestry manager to ask for permission to take out firewood like before, but there was no room for dispensation. Since then, my friends have driven to Tana, nearly two hours away, to fetch firewood. In the meantime, the birch meadows near the river have grown denser every year, and have become impenetrable and nearly impossible to walk.

This point of friction was the beginning of a process of mapping in which we slowly and meticulously pointed out spots in the landscape

that were of significance to her family. I learned about Rasjok (*Råssejohka*), a side valley upstream where her family and their neighbours used to fetch firewood when she was a child. They used to cut trees for fencing and for stacking hay, and float them down the river in spring. As we watched the various slopes leading down to the river she pointed out specific sites with names such as ‘Trinastøkket’, ‘Olastøkket’, or ‘Gydaholmen’. These places were used up until the 1970s as uncultivated grass meadows. Locally referred to as *utmarkslått*, these are wild meadows cut in late summer to provide fodder for animals during the winter. They differ from ‘*slåttemark*’, which are cultivated grass meadows closer to the farm, usually ploughed, fertilized, and privately owned. As few of the *utmarkslått* were legally registered, the practice of naming was a shared mnemonic device. ‘Gyda’ was the name of Vibeke’s grandmother. Slowly, as we traced fields and meadows in the Syltefjord valley, another landscape appeared beneath the one I already knew, or thought I knew. I think of these places now as ‘discrete monuments’; sites that are monumental for their ability to hold significance and to carry a specific story, yet discrete (Svensson et al. 2016).

But none of these names appear on the website for the nature reserve. Here, we learn that: ‘Syltefjord valley nature reserve is protected in order to secure a nearly untouched [*tilnærmet urørt*] deciduous forest area’.⁵ We were both puzzled: Nearly untouched? How could they say that? We decided to go back to the river, and explore how this overlapped with the old uncultivated meadows. As it turned out, they overlapped almost completely. Gydaholmen is now nearly covered by the river, which constantly changes course, and other named fields are in the middle of the nature reserve.

And then Vibeke pointed to a flat marshy field filled with heather.

– This is *Moen*, she said.

– What is *Moen*? I asked.

– This is where my father ploughed.

– Ploughed? I asked. I had no idea. But it was, of course, only due to my own ignorance. Because out in the old barn, I could have noticed the old Massey Ferguson, had I only paid more attention. But pieces of rubble often go unnoticed. Purchased in 1958, idle since the 1970s, and sold to a collector while I was visiting in July 2015. It changed hands for 4,000 Norwegian kroner, and I thought of this later as one of those moments that marked the culmination of the agricultural ambitions in Syltefjord. For many years it was the only tractor in the valley, and used by many families. Now even the last sheep are

gone, slaughtered a few years ago as their caretaker, an old neighbour, retired and moved into a pension home.

This incident sparked an ethnographic journey, which aims to trace the rise and fall of farming in the region through contemporary remains and recollections. My concern is not a nostalgic interest in pastoral practices, nor in the transformative power of tractors as such (but see Auderset and Moser 2016). Instead, I am interested in the historical shifts that frame the biography of the tractor from precious tool of progress to post-industrial rubble. As Gaston Gordillo (2004) has argued, a sensibility towards rubble can yield a better understanding of the material and affective ruptures that define our world. Encountering the tractor, I began to wonder how the idea of farming at 70 degrees north came to appear as a viable option in the first place. The story of the tractor signals broader transformations in the region. These transformations (beyond the scope of this article) include legal processes concerning land rights, the changing notions and practices of commons, and the tension between traditional uses of land and contemporary recreational practices and nature conservation. In this article, I focus specifically on how relations between state and local people are formed through agriculture, and how idioms of farming as the proper way of ensuring viability in the north are intertwined with ideas of growth.

Cultivation, Nature, and Morality in the North

Let us turn to the late eighteenth century, when the ideas of agricultural expansion in the north were first established. As I will detail below, state policies to cultivate the north included not only a reconfiguring of the soil but also the sentiments and attitudes of persons, increasingly anchored in an era of evolutionary ideas and a racist ideology (see e.g. Kyllingstad 2012). In what follows, I highlight how viability was forged and envisioned by state authorities, by detailing a few historical encounters in which relations between agricultural cultivation, state agency, and local lives come to the fore.

Act 1: The cultivation of land is entirely neglected

One of the early instances of a clearly articulated state interest in farming practices in Varanger comes from 1769, when Magistrate

Hans Paus wrote a letter to the district governor. I draw on accounts by historian Kirsti Bull (2011, 2014), who writes that at this time the population had gone down, and this was a concern for the magistrate and governor, who acted on behalf of the Danish Norwegian king. His account, entitled: Finnmarks economic situation, with suggestions for improvement [*Finmarkens økonomiske tilstand med forslag om dens forbedringer*] is a sad story of poverty and deprivation, which he for a large part attributes to what he considers inefficient exploitation of local resources (Bull 2014).

According to Paus, the region was inhabited by 965 poor and destitute families who were in debt to the Danish crown as well as to the trading company. This debt remained a mystery to Paus, who argued that it could have been avoided if only the inhabitable land was partitioned into farms and settlements that – by themselves – would generously nurture the inhabitants even without ‘help from the sea’ and without leading to indebtedness to the crown. (Bull 2014: 7). His visions for profitable farming in Varanger were even more specific when it came to the municipal settlement Vadsø, a small town and harbour that was allegedly more miserable than any other place in Finnmark. Here, as Paus put it, ‘The cultivation of the soil is entirely neglected’ [*Jordens dyrkelse forsømmes her aldeles*] (Bull 2014: 8). As Bull recounts, even if some parts of the Varanger peninsula were flat and contained grasslands, they were not inhabited by a single family. Instead, everyone lived in the coastal fishing hamlets that, according to the magistrate, were much too densely populated. His suggestion then, was that people should move away from the coast, and that the land should be partitioned into specific farms and grass fields that everyone should cultivate. If this was done rationally then the same land would generously nurture its inhabitants (Bull 2014: 10).

Magistrate Paus offered several recommendations for how to organize the hamlets in forms of collective ownership (four families together), and to abolish what he called ‘free roaming in the mountains’. The district governor, who passed these recommendations on to the king, supported Paus’ recommendations except the one about collective ownership:

If one were to manage the distribution of soils and dwellings in Finnmark in accordance with notions of shared ownership, which in all other well organized places and provinces are sought to be abolished, then one would – in my opinion, act against better understanding, and even more, against human nature. (Bull 2014:12, English translation by ML)

His argument was that collective ownership would contradict ongoing attempts elsewhere in Norway to abolish such notions, and would go against common experience, as well as ‘human nature’. Collective ownership, he claimed, ‘causes nothing but laziness among some, strife among others and confusion’ (Bull 2014:9–10,⁶ English translation by ML).

These reports are among the earliest explicit attempts to intervene in local landscape practices. I mention them here because they foreshadow a preoccupation with land management as an arena of state governance, as well as moral education. Implicit in the texts cited above is the assumption that local inhabitants in Finnmark lack the necessary skills to look after themselves, hence their misery is largely their own fault. It is important to note that the people in question were not only Sámi. Paus’ recommendations came at a time when ethnic assimilation measures were *not yet* implemented the way they would be a century later. The main ‘mistake’ the locals made was that they clustered together in coastal hamlets close to the shore, rather than cultivating the land. In other words, they were not necessarily (not yet) the *wrong kind* of people, but they organized themselves in ways that were seen as inefficient in relation to welfare and prosperity.

As I have travelled through this Arctic landscape in winter, when winds can pull you over and halt any attempts to move outside, I have often wondered how it could occur to Paus that people should *not* live close to their boats and fishing harbour. Clearly, for Paus, the uninhabited land was a resource, but wasted because of local inhabitants’ ignorance, or even laziness. His model was farming, southern style, even in an area with average temperatures barely above ten degrees Celsius during high summer.

The landscape transformations recommended by Paus are no more than paper trails. Fortunately, perhaps, people did not move. Hence, while his recommendations paved the way for subsequent legal procedures in relation to land in Finnmark, they had few, if any, consequences for the people of Varanger at the time.

Migratory Settlement Patterns and *meahcci*

It seems reasonable to suggest that during the eighteenth century, the Danish-Norwegian state was not particularly interested in how landscapes were mobilized to secure local livelihoods except in relation to taxation. So how did people make a living? What constituted

Varanger as a viable place? Archaeological and historical records reveal a complex pattern of landscape practices that included fishing, herding, cutting of grass, gathering, hunting, and trapping. In coastal regions, food procurement reflects seasonal changes. In Varanger, a pattern of seasonal migration was a key element of local subsistence practices. Until around the year 1600, this could include four different settlements, but after 1600, when sheep and cows became more common, they included only one for winter and one for summer.

This migratory settlement pattern, which involves both coastal Sámi and Norwegian speaking hamlets (Hansen and Olsen 2004), lasted until the turn of the twentieth century, and in some places, until the Second World War (Nilsen 2009). It is typical of the way that north Norwegian coastal households typically relied on fishing and small-scale subsistence farming, and included activities such as gathering eggs, gathering eider down, picking berries, and hunting (Brox 1966, Lien 2018). In this way, the scarce grass fodder from uncultivated meadows could be utilized and did not have to be transported, as people and animals moved instead. With the arrival of horses, and later tractors, transport and ploughing was easier and food procurement relied somewhat less on seasonal migration. But even when settlements became more permanent, food procurement practices associated with landscapes far from home were upheld, and many of the sites where people pick berries, fish, or hunt are still regularly used.

Such practices are associated with the Sámi term *meacchi*, a concept related to movement, seasons and affordance in the landscape. Norwegian vernacular maps these landscapes as ‘*utmark*’ (literally ‘outfields’), in contrast to ‘*innmark*’ (‘infields’) that denotes the gardens and fields of the sedentary farmer. But in this Arctic region, there is no ‘*innmark*’ to rely on, as most plants that ‘cultivated’ Europe simply cannot grow (see e.g. Ween and Lien 2012, Lien 2018). Hence, different modes of knowing and engaging with the surrounding landscape are necessary (Østmo and Law 2018). The notion of *meahcci* bears witness to such different sets of relations, and to the entanglements of persons, animals, stories, and plants that together temporarily constitute the landscape as valuable, or resourceful. Hence, they provide an important contrast to other and overlapping state practices of making of farmland as a resource, practices that are associated with the Norwegian (formerly Danish Norwegian) state. However, as we shall see, the intensity and extent of farming has peaked and waned historically. What concerns us here is the association of such shifts of intensity

with the intertwined state practices of domestication and colonization. Let us turn to the twentieth century.

Act 2: 'Bureising' and the marginalisation of Sámi land ownership

About a hundred years after Magistrate Paus' reports, landscape practices had begun to change, and the change is associated with a phenomenon known in Norwegian as *bureising*. *Bureising* can be defined as the establishment of a farm, or of farmland, where there was none before. The term was first used in the Norwegian parliament by Klaus Sletten in a speech in 1918, shortly after Norway's independence as a nation state, in an effort to replace another term that had been used until then, namely 'inner colonisation' [*indre kolonisasjon*], which essentially referred to the same process (Almås 2002: 76). Since 1908, farmers had received support from agricultural societies to do so-called '*jorddyrking*' and '*myr dyrking*', which refer, respectively, to soil cultivation and marsh cultivation, especially in the north. Norwegian farmers who intended to relocate and settle in in the north (e.g. in Pasvik, Varanger) were promised plots of land for free, and could apply for a loan with favourable conditions. They were even given timber for their first houses. An organization named '*Ny Jord*' (New Soil) contributed to the *bureising* movement, which lasted until the Second World War. The political aim was allegedly to alleviate unemployment and contribute to further productivity, and to mitigate emigration to America by providing other settler opportunities 'at home'. According to a census in 1938, 10,340 so-called '*bureisingsbruk*' (new soil settlements) were registered, covering 3.2 million acres. The most important settled areas were in the north (Målselv, Alta, and Pasvik), while the new farmers were primarily from valleys in the south.

The first migration from the valleys in south Norway to Målselv and Bardu took place in 1789 (Gjerdåker 2002 :129). This was shortly after borders to Sweden had been established and prevented the traditional patterns of reindeer herding migration, with severe impact on Sámi reindeer practices, as previous migratory routes were more or less abandoned, hence large tracts of land seemed 'empty'. From the end of the eighteenth century, Norwegian settlers had increasingly taken possession of Sámi summer settlements, and the farmers voiced complaints regarding damage caused by reindeer to newly cultivated fields and forest. In 1883, 1897, and 1933, laws were passed that curtailed seasonal migration patterns, and stated that reindeer herding

rights had to give way where new cultivation took place (Jones 2004: 28). With *bureising*, such conflicts intensified, and migratory Sámi, who had used this landscape for generations, found that their traditional user rights in relation to seasonal migration were offended (Gjerdåker 2002: 130).

Alongside a shift towards farming, laws were passed that prioritized Norwegian speakers and Norwegian terms. Until the mid-nineteenth century, surveillance documents in the region contained mostly Sámi place names, but in 1876, a new Land Purchasing Act stated that ‘The farm shall be given a Norwegian name with the possible current Sámi or Kven name added in brackets’ (Helander 2004: 109). With this legal shift, state authorities began to translate Sámi place names into Norwegian. This ‘Nowegianization’ policy was taken a step further in 1902, when the Land Purchasing Act was changed again, stating that land property shall be given a separate Norwegian name. From now on, only Norwegian names were accepted as official names for land properties. Additionally, a new set of requirements for land ownership was implemented that required detailed application forms for anyone intending to buy or lease farming land in Finnmark. These forms were to be sent by the county governor to the Ministry of Agriculture for approval, and contained questions about the prospective landowner’s and his family’s nationality, date of birth and occupation, but also ‘whether the applicant speaks, reads and writes Norwegian’. In practice, applicants who did not satisfy these requirements, either with respect to citizenship or to knowledge of Norwegian, had to accept leasehold, rather than legal ownership (Helander 2004: 111).

Legal regulations were important tools of assimilation, and both place names and ownership relations contributed in making Varanger more ‘Norwegian’. Especially in Pasvik, Finnmark, the geopolitical stakes were high, both in light of geographic proximity to the Russian Finnish border, and in light of the ethnic diversity (including Sámi, Kven, Finnish, Russian) in the region. In this context, *bureising* served as an important tool to secure the permanent presence of a Norwegian speaking population. *Bureising* may therefore be interpreted as both a means to relocate southern farmers to secure national sovereignty, and as end in itself, namely cultivating the soil, associated with modernist ideas of progress.

Assimilation policies and legal discrimination against Sámi-speaking leaseholders worked together with *bureising* to remake the land according to a particular model, informed by practices further south. Hence, agriculture became a colonizing tool; state authorities

controlled how land sales developed, and the sales procedure was part of this control (Helander 2004:110). This dual process shows how soil, language, and belonging were intertwined in making Sámi ethnic identity ‘other’, and different from that of settler Norwegians. Domestication became a measure to civilize and to colonize the north.

The Norwegian policy of assimilation in relation to the Sámi population was most intense from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1960s (Kyllingstad 2012). Assimilation policies towards the Sámi speaking population in this period were closely associated with modernist notions of progress. During the post-war era, the former racial hierarchy was solidified as an ethnic hierarchy with stigmatization of Sámi identity taking place both nationally and in local encounters (see Eidheim 1971). It was exactly during these post-war decades that Vibeke’s father intensified his farming efforts.

I have detailed a few ways in which a systematic disfavours of the Sámi went hand in hand with policy measures to transform the landscape to farmland. Unlike the situation described during the era of Magistrate Paus, the aim during the twentieth century was not only permanent settlement, but permanent settlement *by the right kind of people*. Together, these measures led to a consolidation of farming practices in an otherwise unfavourable region. But how did this actually happen? What did it require *in practice* to solidify the utopian vision of fields and hills at 70 degrees north as agricultural resources?

Act 3: ‘Hardly anything is done to make the fields flat and even’

An incredibly rich collection of state produced documents indicates that the making of farmland in Varanger was far from straightforward. Rather, it consisted of repeated and detailed exercises of mapping, counting, and surveilling. A series of publications entitled ‘Norway’s land and people’ (*Norges land og folk*), is but one example. Published in 1905, the year of Norwegian national independence, it reads almost as an inventory of ‘what the nation contains’, albeit a bewildering one. The volume devoted to Finnmark (Helland 1905), begins with the sentence: ‘Finnmark county [*Finnmarkens amt*] is 10 000 square kilometers, larger than Denmark, and it is inhabited by three nationalities’ (ibid: 424–425). The chapters cover geology, ocean, seasons, fjords, rivers, and then devotes nearly 70 pages to the two chapters called agriculture and husbandry. Here we can read about the number of horses, sheep, reindeer, and other husbandry animals in each local

district, as well as the propensities of various plants, roots, tubers, and garden berries to grow, or (more often) to fail to grow. We learn that the only cultivated plant (apart from fodder) that has any significance in the field agriculture of Finnmark is the potato, of which just over 200,000 litres had been planted. This is followed by detailed considerations of the potential for improvement, and the author lamenting that husbandry in Finnmark is in poor condition, but could become an important source of wealth. Here we see an image of future prosperity, but progress requires a moral shift, as the practices of the local population clearly failed to live up to the current standards:

Hardly anything is done to make the fields flat and even. That fields are ploughed and sowed with grass is a mere exception. (Helland 1905)

This is followed by recommendations for how ploughing and sowing could be done more rationally given the specific climatic conditions. Significant efforts go into surveilling the land, and the conclusion is that Finnmark as farmland is deficient yet holds potential for improvement, and needs to be worked *differently* than elsewhere. Exactly how it should be worked differently, or what exactly was required to make a living at 70 degrees north, is clearly something that the locals failed to understand. Hence, an authoritative expert representing the nation and its relentless and meticulous data-gathering was needed to guide local farmers in transforming this under-utilized and seemingly barren land to productive farmland.

This policy has some similarities with the promotion of agricultural cultivation common in Europe at the time, facilitated by the availability of artificial fertilizer. But the Norwegian efforts to attract settlers to cultivate indigenous land (*bureising*) has more similarities with the support provided to British settlers in Australia.

These texts indicate that for state authorities, the land was not simply there as an agricultural resource, ready to be farmed. Rather, it had to be produced through multiple practices that can be summarized as follows:

- Making the landscape legible for the authorities through practices of counting, listing, describing (governance at a distance).
- Accounting for and overcoming social and moral causes of sub-optimal utilization (laziness, shared ownership, lack of property rights, etc.).
- Opening landscape for the right kind of people (*bureising*), and the promotion of ‘inner colonization’ through state subsidies.

- Prioritizing farmland over reindeer herding pasture in local controversies and legal disputes.
- Bracketing and eventually erasing Sámi place names, and thereby also the usage and affordance of specific landscapes formations recalled by the name.
- Preventing non-Norwegian speaking inhabitants from becoming farmers.

In other words, the making of farmland is at once a biosocial, political, and moral practice that weaves together people and land in very specific ways. The farmland emerges, not only through the plough, the soil, or the tractor, but through the specific combination of the right kinds of people, tools, and land at the right time. To make this happen required the coordination and support of a young and ambitious nation state. It also required the simultaneous silencing or marginalizing of alternative landscape practices – practices that had in fact subsisted Arctic livelihoods for at least hundreds of years (see also Lien 2018).

Act 4: Teaching locals self-sufficiency through farming

While the Norwegian state mapped the productive potential of its Northern resources, institutions of implementation emerged as well, consisting of local, state, and county representatives whose mandate was to teach the locals how to farm the land. This included – in due course – local agricultural schools that served both as centres of teaching and learning and as research stations, experimenting with technologies of farming.

By 1909, such institutions were already in place. Strolling through the local museum in Syltefjord, a collection of mostly traditional farming and fishing tools in what was previously a classroom in the old school building, I came across the 1909 Annual Report from the Finnmark county governor to the ministry responsible for agriculture at the time. The book contained a lengthy report about the activities of the Finnmark Agricultural Society (and by its chairman, A Nielsen), including detailed accounts about improvements in husbandry and agriculture in various county regions. We learn about the purchases of bulls and rams, as well as of agricultural equipment for shared use. Annual exhibits and sheep and cattle shows are described in remarkable detail, and the tone is one of optimism and anticipated progress, but also concerns (Nielsen 1909).

From Varanger (*Tanen-Varanger*) we learn that the season 1907–08 was especially difficult, due to a late spring and northern winds and cold temperatures throughout most of the summer. Warm weather in July was not enough to secure the grass harvest, and much of the winter fodder was lost. The potatoes did not ripen this year, and frost during the night of the 20 August ruined the potato plants. In spite of these hardships, experimental fields were maintained, and artificial fertilizer was applied on marshy soil with very thin layers of topsoil. Controlled experiments compare these to fields fertilized by manure, and the chairman concluded a lengthy discussion stating that manure gives far lower yields than artificial fertilizer. This was due not only to the superior quality of the latter, but also to the inferior practices of the locals in how they distribute the manure. In other words, sub-optimal agricultural yields are due, not only to the Arctic climate, nor to the inferiority of manure as such, but to the ways in which this potential resource is handled by incipient farmers – and especially the Lappish,⁷ he adds in parenthesis – who tend to dump it haphazardly here and there, apparently with no understanding of the valued resource that is thereby lost (Nielsen 1909, 43–44). This complaint is followed by meticulous guidelines for storing manure, the need for straw or turf beddings, how turf can be sourced, and how barns ought to be built in order to ensure what we might think of as the potential resourcefulness of animal manure, a potential that is obviously not achieved.

But there is hope. The annual report offers an account of six female students' successful completion of a six-month course in husbandry and home economics. It is noted that six months is an absolute minimum, as several of the students are of Lappish descent, and hence 'have had initial difficulties following the course, partly because they to a great degree lacked other preconditions for learning, and partly as they lacked the capability of learning something in a short time'. In spite of these obstacles, however, 'a couple of the Lappish girls (*Lapp-pikene*), have attained a respectable level of knowledge, quite on par with the girls of Norwegian descent' (ibid: 11).

Such accounts show how the making of Arctic farmland required transformative efforts that involved soil, manure, young Lappish women, tools, livestock, and much more. The knowing subject in the report cited above is at once a field scientist, a teacher, and a broker, whose translations contribute to shaping not only the region and its peoples, but also an incipient nation state's agricultural policy instruments. The aim is clear: to establish sound agricultural practices adapted to the climate in the region, so that the resource potential is fully utilized.

Agriculture caught on. Local historical accounts tell stories of how families settling in coastal hamlets near Syltefjord filled their boats with soil from patches of farmland elsewhere, and meticulously established fields suitable for grass fodder, even on the mostly rocky shores of the Barents Sea (Antonsen 2010). Agricultural expansion came to a halt towards the end of the Second World War, when the German occupation brutally ended with forced evacuation and the burning of barns, houses, and livestock along the coast of Finnmark. But it was soon re-established, with a new wave of agricultural and relocation subsidies, and inexpensive loans for those who wanted to expand their arable land. Later, such policies were replaced by an emphasis on efficiency, signalling a turn to profit as an indicator of farming as a viable option (see also F. Hastrup, this volume). This trend has continued until the present, with subsidies encouraging larger yields and larger production units. But the dreams of prosperity can be traced back to the late 1940s when subsidies for, and the promotion of, agricultural science, artificial fertilizer and mechanization went hand in hand, in north Norway, as well as in other parts of Europe (Auderset and Moser 2016).

It was against this background that Vibeke's father purchased the Massey Ferguson, ploughed a marshy field, and grew artificially fertilized Timothy fodder. 'Moen' is now visible only as a flat field covered with heather and low shrubs. Vibeke recalls how her father had engaged in conversations with a regional agricultural specialist and studied all the latest recommendations. He was supported by state subsidies to plough approximately 22 acres (90 Norwegian *mål*), and even kept a journal where he logged his experiments. His efforts were intense, but the result was meagre. During the first couple of years of ploughing, adding calcium and artificial fertilizer, the Timothy grass grew so high that they completely covered one as they stood upright, Vibeke recalls. But the yields were unsustainable and rapidly diminished. Of course, she explains, there is hardly any topsoil there at all, just turf and sandy soil. By the time her parents left the farm in the early 1970s, her father had lost his good health, his back completely worn from many years of extremely hard work.

Resource Ontologies as a Colonizing Tool

Narratives of domestication naturalize the expansion of agricultural practices as inevitable elements of progress, or 'civilisation' (Lien, Swanson, and Ween 2018). Tracing the rise and fall of farming at

the margins, we are able to see how the expansion of specific hegemonic practices of domestication required intensive resource-making efforts, and the strong promotion of a nascent welfare state. If natural resource exploitation is a ‘sustained project of abstracting substances identified as useful, valuable and natural in origin from their environment’ (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 6), then the emergence of farming in Varanger may be seen as a first step towards such an end.

This article started from the premise that ‘natural resources’ are neither ‘natural’ nor obviously ‘resource-ful’, but dependent on the various projects that make them so. Hence, the mapping of natural resources constitutes a mapping of the shifting biosocial formations that are implicit in their making. Such biosocial transformations consist of stuff that can be extracted (such as gold, cf. Brichet, this volume), but also that which can be enhanced through emplaced and situated ‘improvements’. As I have shown, this was accompanied by specific ontological assumptions, situated too in particular places and at particular historical moments, in this case associated with nation building and modernization. We might think of these as resource ontologies, which have their own historicity; their own embodiments and affective attachments, sometimes visible as traces in the landscape, in texts, or in broken or able bodies. Tracing colonizing processes in Varanger, we find that they are rarely a matter of brute physical force, or simply a kind of resource extraction, but also often an ontological conflict regarding the status of substances as resources (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014:19, see also Blaser 2009). Hence, the making of resources involves the negotiation and inscription not only of boundaries between nature and culture, but also between, for example, indigenous and non-indigenous, modern and non-modern, growth and backwardness.

Conventional accounts of colonization in the Scandinavian north typically evoke ethnic distinctions between Sámi and Norwegian. In this article I have rethought colonization as a concept that includes the Sámi but *not only*. Hence, I seek to add to the conventional narrative of ethnic assimilation and colonization by drawing attention to ways in which state interventions – couched in a language of growth and progress – served to promote a specific way of being in the world. Forging specific (and novel) ideas about resourcefulness in relation to land, and promoting these as morally superior, state authorities simultaneously promoted a kind of self-discipline (or colonial governmentality) that allowed Sámi an opportunity to transform themselves, and become acceptable citizens of the Norwegian state. This was not only done through the idioms of ethnicity, language, and religion, but

in relation to materials, and through shifting people's engagements with soil. As we have seen through the example of Vibeke's father, such colonial practices exceed ethnic distinctions and categories. Her father's story reminds us that only approaching Scandinavian colonization as a question of ethnicity misses the mark.

The Final Act: 'Back to Nature?'

The policy instruments that encouraged farmers to plough and fertilize their fields during the early post-war decades have gradually been replaced by instruments that aim to optimize yield and efficiency through economies of scale. This has left many medium-sized farms abandoned and many fields fallow, like 'Moen'. Alongside this transformation, another resource-making practice has emerged: nature conservation, backed by science and novel forms of enjoying nature. The signs describe the landscape as follows: 'Here one may find a number of species existing at their absolute Northern limit or in the periphery of their habitat. The lower part of the Syltefjord valley has a fertile and vital birch and salix forest'.⁸ The absolute 'Northern limit', and 'the periphery of their habitat' are novel signifiers of resources in the making, rhetorically deployed factoids to justify the new regulations that keep local wood-cutters out. This nature resource bears little resemblance to the life-sustaining *meahcci*, the hay meadow or the ploughed field once known by local names. Instead, it is a snippet of Norwegian nature that prescribes a specific set of recreational practices, associated with modern ways of appropriating nature by hiking, skiing, or recreational hunting (Ween and Abram 2012, see also Law and Lien 2018).

Just as the state-supported *bureising* rendered previous landscape practices invisible, the current turn to governance through nature conservation erases the memories of my friends' past and personal biography. 'Trinastøkket', 'Olastøkket' and 'Moen' are not inscribed on any map, and soon they will be gone along with the memory of the efforts that made Vibeke's father invest in a tractor, and transform a marshy field to Timothy fodder.

Domestication, Capitalism, and Modern sorcery

Colonialism and resource capitalism go hand in hand. I have shown how resource exploitation can be done with very different

(non-capitalist) aims, and independent of the resource extractive capitalism mode so common to contemporary colonial projects. Subtle, and seemingly ‘benign’ state-making projects are perhaps just as transformative, and just as powerful in their alterations of landscapes, people, and livelihoods. More recently, with the establishment of nature reserves, this process has just taken another turn. The resources are no longer topsoil, manure, and husbandry animals, but Arctic biotopes, and species existing at their northern limits. But the colonial practices are similar, and so are the responses: unable or unwilling to inhabit their landscapes in accordance with contemporary notions of recreational practices, local people still interrupt: occasionally they fetch firewood, and when they do, they appear as ‘lacking’, according to contemporary notions of ‘nearly untouched nature’ as a resource to be left alone.

Capitalism is more than simply a market arrangement. It also involves the reconfiguring of life-projects and senses of self. This reconfiguring has been referred to as the sorcery of modernity:

Because when anyone who is opposed to a decision to plant and produce this or that thing can be marked as ‘backward’, then you have paralysed the enemy. This is how the sorcery of modernity operates through capitalism. (Latour et al. 2018: 595–596)

We have seen how resourcefulness involves messy entanglements that resist a smooth account of where (or when) the ‘resource’ begins and where (or when) it ends. Soil, plants, and tools are marked by differences enacted as hierarchies, ontologically as well as epistemologically. Because the making of ‘natural resources’ invariably involves the hardening of facts – or the stabilization of a specific set of relations – it also presupposes the simultaneous erasure of other relations. Hence, excessive relational entanglements are often lost in translation, silenced, or forgotten. This makes stories of northern resource frontiers difficult to tell, but is also part of the reason why such stories are worth telling.

Acknowledgements

This article is the result of a workshop at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) project group ‘Arctic Domestication in the Era of the Anthropocene’ 2015/16. I am grateful for CAS’ generous support. Early versions of this article have been presented at UC Davis, the

University of Oslo, the University of Linköping and at the University of Bergen. Special thanks go to Marisol de la Cadena, Tim Choy, Frida Hastrup, Britt Kramvig, John Law, Gro Ween, Liv Østmo, and two anonymous reviewers for generous comments. I wish to express my gratitude to friends in Syltefjord and Båtsfjord for hospitality and companionship, and for generously sharing their memories of the recent past.

◆
Marianne Elisabeth Lien is Professor at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo. E-mail: m.e.lien@sai.uio.no
◆

Notes

1. A full account of the installment of agricultural practices in North Norway (and its expansion in Europe) is beyond the scope of this article.
2. See www.nasjonalparkstyre.no/Varangerhalvoya/Verneomrader/Syltefjord-dalen-naturreservat/ (accessed 17 October 2019).
3. Norwegian words are marked in italics, Sámi words are marked in italics and with (S). Place names are generally not italicised, but Sámi place names mentioned in addition to Norwegian place names are in italics.
4. See also <https://lovdata.no/dokument/LF/forskrift/2006-12-08-1385?q=varangerhalvoya%202>.
5. See <http://www.nasjonalparkstyre.no/Varangerhalvoya/Verneomrader/> (accessed 19 October 2019).
6. '*Fællelskap i jordbrug og tilfældige Nærings veje foraarsager intet andet end Dovenskab hos nogle, Uenighed hos andre og Confusion*', cited in Bull (2014:12).
7. Lappish, (Lapp) was the common term for Sámi at the time.
8. See www.nasjonalparkstyre.no/Varangerhalvoya/Verneomrader/Syltefjord-dalen-naturreservat/ (accessed 20 June 2018).

References

- Almås, R. (2002), *Norges Landbrukshistorie IV* [The History of Norwegian Agriculture IV] (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget).
- Antonsen, L. (2010), *Livet i ei steinur: skrevet i ærbødig takknemlighet til de som rydda grunnen for kommende slekter* (Båtsfjord: L. S. Antonsen).
- Auderset, J. and P. Moser (2016), 'Mechanisation and Motorisation: Natural Resources, Knowledge, Politics and Technology in 19th and 20th Century Agriculture', in C. Martin, J. Pan-Montojo, P. Brassley (eds), *Agriculture and Capitalist Europe, 1945–1960. From Food Shortages to Food Surpluses* (London: Routledge), 145–164.

- Blaser, M. (2009), 'The Threat of the Yrmo: The Political Ontology of a Sustainable Hunting Program', *American Anthropologist* 111, no. 1: 10–20.
- Brox, O. (1966), *Hva skjer i Nord-Norge?* [What is happening in Northern Norway?] (Oslo: Pax).
- Bull, K. S. (2011), *Kystfisket i Finnmark, En rettshistorie* [Coastal fishing in Finnmark: A legal history] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget).
- Bull, K. S. (2014), *Jordsalgslovgivning. En rettshistorisk lovgjennomgang av jordsalgslovgivningen i Finnmark i perioden 1775–1965* [Land sales: A legal overview of land sale regulations in Finnmark in the period 1775–1965] www.domstol.no/globalassets/upload/finn/sakkyndige-utredninger/jordsalgslovgivningen-kirsti-strom-bull.pdf.
- Crosby, A. W. [2004] (2015), *Ecological Imperialism: The Imperial Expansion of Europe. 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Eidheim H. (1971), 'When Ethnic Identity is a Social Stigma', in H. Eidheim (ed.), *Aspects of the Lappish Minority Situation* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget), 50–68.
- Gjerdåker, B. (2002), *Norges Landbrukshistorie III* [The History of Norwegian Agriculture III]. (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget)
- Gordillo, G. (2014), *Rubble. The Afterlife of Destruction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- Hansen, L. I. and B. Olsen (2004), *Samenes Historie fram til 1750* [Sápmi history until 1750] (Oslo: Cappelen).
- Helander, K. R. (2004), 'Treatment of Saami Settlement Names in Finnmark in Official Norwegian Place Name Policy', *Diedut* 30, no 3: 102–119.
- Helland, A. (1905), *Topografisk-statistisk beskrivelse over Finnmarkens amt. Første del. Den almindelige del* [Topographical-statistical description of Finnmark County. First part: The common part. (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & C o.) 1905 (Book series: *Norges land og folk* [Norway's land and people]).
- Jones, M. (2004). 'Seasonal landscapes in Northern Europe'. *Diedut* 30, no. 3: 11–39.
- Kyllingstad, J. R. (2012), 'Norwegian Physical Anthropology and the Idea of a Nordic Master Race', *Current Anthropology* 53, no. 5: 546–556.
- Law, J. and M. E. Lien (2018), 'Denaturalising Nature', in M. de la Cadena and M. Blaser (eds), *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 131–171.
- Lien, Marianne E. (2018), 'Ducks into Houses: Domestication and Its Margins', in H. A. Swanson, M. E. Lien, G. B. Ween (eds), *Domestication Gone Wild: Politics and Practices of Multispecies Relations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 1–33.
- Lien, M. E., Swanson, H. A. and Ween, G. B. (2018), 'Naming the Beast – Exploring the Otherwise', in H. A. Swanson, M. E. Lien, G. B. Ween (eds), *Domestication Gone Wild: Politics and Practices of Multispecies Relations*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 117–140
- Latour, B, I. Stengers, A. Tsing and N. Bubandt (2018), 'Anthropologists are Talking – About Capitalism, Ecology and Apocalypse', *Ethnos* 83, no 3: 587–606.
- Nielsen, A. (1909) Beretning om landhusholdningsselskapets virksomhet i aaret 1908 m.v. [Report of the activities of the agricultural association, year 1908], Sak nr. 69 [Issue no. 69], in *Finnmarkens Amtstings forhandlinger for aaret 1909* [Negotiations of the Finnmark county council 1909] (Vadsø Trykkeri: Vadsø, Norway).
- Nilsen, Ø. (2009), *Varangersamene. Bosetning, næring, folketall, utmarksbruk mv. Frå historisk tid til i dag.*[The Varanger Sámi. Settlement, subsistence, number of inhabitants, outfield utilisation etc. From historical time until today],

- Varanger Samiske Museums Skrifter, Nr. 5 (Varangerbotn: Varanger Samiske Museum).
- Nustad, K. (2015), *Creating Africas: Struggles over Nature, Conservation and Land* (London: Hurst Publishers).
- Ogden, L. (2018), 'The Beaver Diaspora: A Thought Experiment', *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 1. 63–85.
- Svensson, D., S. Sörlin, and N. Wormbs (2016), 'The Movement Heritage – Scale, Place, and Pathscapes in Anthropocene Tourism', in *M. Gren*, and *E. Huijbens* (eds), *Tourism and the Anthropocene*, (London: Routledge), 131–151.
- Richardson, T. and G. Weszkalnys (2014), 'Introduction: Resource materialities', *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, no. 1: 5–30.
- Ween, G. B. and S. Abram (2012), 'The Norwegian Trekking Association: Trekking as Constituting the Nation', *Landscape Research* 37, no. 2: 155–171.
- Ween, G. B. and M. E. Lien (2012), 'Decolonisation in the Arctic? Nature Practices and Rights in Sub-Arctic Norway', *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 7, no. 1: 93–109.
- Østmo, L. and J. Law (2018), 'Mis/translation, Colonialism and Environmental Conflict', *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 2: 349–369.