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# On Colonial Past and Present in Sápmi

Considering Ideas of the Land of the Future in Northern Sweden

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**ABSTRACT** Ever since the 1630s and the discovery of silver ore deposits in the alpine areas of Sápmi, Sweden has nurtured settler colonial ideas in relation to Sápmi and the Sami. The first legal settler colonial tool was the Lappmark Proclamation of 1673. However, the vision of “the land of the future” with mining and agriculture proved to be somewhat of a mirage. A second wave of settler colonial ideas came with the industrial breakthrough. As we are now entering the third era of settler colonial ideas, sacrificing Sami lands, rights, and self-determination seems to be a continued strategy of the Swedish state. Once again, entrepreneurs, companies and politicians project the idea of a “land of the future” onto the north and Sápmi. In this article, I describe this phenomenon, which has been—and still is—based on settler colonial ideas, an-optimism and sidelining of the Sami and their historical as well as current land rights.

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**KEYWORDS** Sami history, settler colonialism, hydropower, natural resource extraction, re-industrialization, green transition

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## Introduction

In the wake of the so-called green transformation intended to take place in northern Sweden, several narratives and visions are resurfacing. One of these is the phenomenon of projecting an idea known as “The Land of the Future”<sup>1</sup> onto Norrland. In this article, I analyse the continuum of colonialism towards Sápmi through a historical

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<sup>1</sup> Sörlin, *Framtidslandet*, 1988.

overview of some Swedish extractive projects and settlement measures. I depart from a settler colonial theoretical approach,<sup>2</sup> asking how settler colonial ideas and practices have influenced Sweden's colonization projects in Sápmi.

Settler colonialism's primary focus is land and settlement, unlike classical colonialism which primarily involves exploitation of Indigenous peoples as labour and resource. To complete the settler colonial goal, the original inhabitants of the land must be replaced, or their rights and connection to the land terminated. These processes and measures, which eventually made settlers the majority population, are referred to as an "elimination of the Native" and defines settler colonialism as a structure placed upon an area and its inhabitants, rather than the single event of a conquest or an invasion.<sup>3</sup>

Perceived as a structure, settler colonialism is never a phenomenon of the past but is rather continually reproduced and reshaped, while also trying to cover its tracks. This feature of inevitability is criticised by researchers who point out that Indigenous communities' resistance and persistence against settler colonialism has proven that the invasion is rather "a process, not a structure or an event."<sup>4</sup> However, recognizing elimination and replacement processes as central to settler colonial states does not imply that Indigenous peoples were eradicated.<sup>5</sup> Researchers have criticised the structuralism and binarities often used in Settler Colonial Theory (SCT), arguing that this rigidity often fails to harness history's complexity and tends to obscure the agencies of both Indigenous peoples and settlers.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, other scholars have pointed to the challenges of including other groups and actors in the colony, such as former slaves and people of mixed-race categories, in the settler-native divide.<sup>7</sup> These aspects are important since different parts of the Sami area have for a long time also been the home of other ethnic groups and cultures, such as Tornedalians, Finns, Norwegians, and Swedes. Nordic settler colonialism is rather "a structure of replacement"<sup>8</sup> or, as I argue here, an ongoing process of replacement.

In addition, the vastness of the area requires consideration of both geographical and topographical differences that have left traces of a wide range of events, experiences, and histories. However, the diversity within Sami communities has often been generalised into a certain view or idea of *the* Sami in the authorities' perspective.<sup>9</sup> This, in turn, has resulted in one-sided and sometimes contradictory Swedish administration and policies.<sup>10</sup> A concept that applies to Swedish settler colonial disregarding of the Sami and making their rights invisible, which over time risks eliminating them, is *anopticism*, "the politics of not seeing."<sup>11</sup> Although anopticism contrasts with the

<sup>2</sup> Ostler & Shoemaker, "Settler colonialism in early American history," 2019; Konishi, "First Nations scholars, settler colonial studies, and Indigenous history," 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the Native," 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Ostler & Shoemaker, "Settler colonialism in early American history," 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Ostler, "Locating settler colonialism in early American history," 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Konishi, "First Nations scholars, settler colonial studies, and Indigenous history," 2019; Kēhaulani Kauanui, "A structure, not an event," 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Wildcat, "Fearing social and cultural death," 2015, pp. 394–395; Miles, "Beyond a boundary," 2019, pp. 417–426; Spears, "Beyond the native/settler divide in early California," 2019, pp. 427–434.

<sup>8</sup> Kuokkanen, "The Deatnu Agreement," 2020, p. 511

<sup>9</sup> Lundmark, "*Lappen är ombytlig, ostadig och obekväm*" 2002; Nordin, *Relationer i ett samiskt samhälle*, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Lantto, *Lappväsendet*, 2012; Mörkenstam, *Om "Lapparnes privilegier"*, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Dale, "Anopticism," 2019; Broberg & Rönnbäck, "Aednan och Bolaget," 2020.

control and surveillance of the Foucauldian concept of *panopticon*, both aspects are evident in later Swedish policies against the Sami.

It may not always be entirely relevant to describe Swedish and Sami relations as colonial and settler colonial. Therefore, I identify three eras, guided by the intensity of Swedish colonial projects in Sápmi. These eras also determine how this article is structured: *Early mining and settler colonisation* from the mid-1600s (Section 2); *Industrialisation* from the early 1800s (Section 3); and *Re-industrialisation* from the 2010s and onwards (Section 4). Lastly, a discussion (Section 5) concludes the article.

## Early Mining and Settler Colonisation

When silver ore was discovered in the alpine areas at Nasafjäll in the 1630s, Swedish authorities constructed a narrative of Norrland as a colony with a pinch of “a promised land” sentiment, such as when the nobleman Carl Bonde in 1635 wrote to Chancellor of the Exchequer, Axel Oxenstierna, expressing a hope that Norrland “will be the Swedes’ West India.”<sup>12</sup> Some decades later, in the 1660s, new silver ore deposits in the alpine areas motivated a Swedish settler policy aimed at inhabiting and colonizing the north-western parts of the kingdom. In the Lappmark Proclamation of 1673, Swedish and Finnish settlers were offered land with tax privileges for up to 30 years and lifelong freedom from military service.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent Lappmark regulations of 1695 and 1749 clarified the different duties and rights of settlers. This can be perceived as the settler colonial shift from earlier fiscal and trade colonialism, when settlers became the infrastructure for Swedish resource extraction.

Settlements were encouraged by the Crown and established by settlers, who in their role as farmstead settlers (Swe. *nybyggare*), were offered reduced taxes on farms, and later, in their role as workers, enabled natural resource extraction contributing to a colonial power in a distant metropolis in the capital city. Although the settlements eventually led to an “elimination of the native,”<sup>14</sup> research has shown<sup>15</sup> that the Sami, like the North American First Nations, did not surrender their lands “easily, quickly, or entirely.”<sup>16</sup> Initially, Sami customs influenced the judicial culture, which can be exemplified by the district courts in the northern parts of Sweden. The district courts’ jurisdictional areas were established in the north during the first part of the 1600s, and in certain localities in the more northern parts (today’s Västerbotten and Norrbotten counties), a majority of the courts’ jurors were Sami until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Other research has traced court decisions diverting from Sami

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Sörlin, *Framtidslandet*, 1988, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Arell, *Kolonisationen av lappmarken*, 1979, pp. 13–14.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the Native,” 2006.

<sup>15</sup> See Korpjaakko-Labba, *Om samernas rättsliga ställning i Sverige-Finland*, 1994; Lantto, *Tiden börjar på nytt*, 2000; Lundmark, *Samernas skatteland i Norr- och Västerbotten under 300 år*, 2006; Päiviö, *Från skattemannarätt till nyttjanderätt*, 2011; Norstedt, *A Land of One’s Own*, 2018; Larsson & Päiviö Sjaunja, *Self-Governance and Sami Communities*, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Ostler & Shoemaker, “Settler colonialism in early American history,” 2019, p. 364.

<sup>17</sup> Lundmark, *Samernas skatteland i Norr- och Västerbotten under 300 år*, 2006, pp. 26, 106.

customs in the most northern court sessions as early as the mid-1700s<sup>18</sup> and, in the Forest Sami area of Pite Lappmark, in the 1780s.<sup>19</sup>

Among other intentions, the settlements were supposed to function as an infrastructure facilitating the transportation of ore from mines in the alpine areas of the Pite and Lule lappmarks, since reindeer-herding Sami had initially been forced to transport overly heavy ore loads on their reindeer-drawn sleds from the mines down to the coast and return with provisions. Many Sami refused to partake in forced labour that devastated their reindeer husbandry. Instead, they stayed on the Norwegian side, which left some Sami areas on the Swedish side completely abandoned.<sup>20</sup> Further north, in Torne Lappmark, copper and iron ore mines and mills were established, and it seems that, as constraining the Sami was prohibited under local rules, they had to be contracted. Research on the Sjangeli copper mine mentions negotiations in 1699, on what seems to have been equal terms, between the mining company and Sami leaders, in which the Sami accepted the compensation offered for the transports.<sup>21</sup>

The settlement policy was based on the idea that the settlers and the Sami could co-exist—the so-called parallel theory<sup>22</sup> which anoptimized the full diversity of Sami subsistence—but it soon failed; making a living solely out of farming in the harsh Nordic climate was challenging. While it has been described in research that settlers soon encroached on Sami livelihoods such as hunting and fishing, this may not hold for the entire Sami area, as some parts of northernmost Lapland were early on also inhabited and used by Tornedalians.<sup>23</sup> Research has also brought forward the notion that in the early days of colonisation, the Sami welcomed settlers and offered them suitable places to set up a station on a migration route and become part of the community.<sup>24</sup> However, other narratives, from another geographical location, speak of Sami people fearing to have settlers in their vicinity, and that some of them resorted to violence.<sup>25</sup>

From a historical perspective, cooperation is often harder to trace in the source material, which often consists of court records dealing with various conflicts. Settlers' supplementary rights to fish and hunt became more restricted in the Lappmark Regulation of 1749, and the obligation to cultivate the land was underlined.<sup>26</sup> In court records from the seventeenth century, we can follow litigations between different Sami actors, but increasingly also between Sami and settlers who had come into conflict with each other.<sup>27</sup> The farming settlements were often established on Sami taxation lands. These lands can be described as a property rights category that has been

<sup>18</sup> Päiviö, *Från skattemannarätt till nyttjanderätt*, 2011, pp. 140–154.

<sup>19</sup> Bylund, *Koloniseringen av Pite Lappmark t.o.m. 1867*, 1956, pp. 235ff.

<sup>20</sup> Sköld, *Samisk bosättning i Gällivare 1550–1750*, 1992, p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> Awebro, *Tre gruvfält i norr*, 1989, pp. 58, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Arell, *Kolonisationen av lappmarken*, 1979, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Claims for a more nuanced history writing have been forwarded by the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaists, SOU 2023:68; The political aspects and background of history writing by groups in the north have been noted by Wallerström, *Vilka var först?*, 2006, and Hagström Yamamoto, *I gränslandet mellan svenskt och samiskt*, 2010, pp. 83–115, 116–135.

<sup>24</sup> See Beach, *Reindeer-Herd Management in Transition*, 1983, pp. 280–281.

<sup>25</sup> See Pettersson, *Kristoffer Sjölssons minnen*, 1979, p. 276.

<sup>26</sup> Olofsson, “Övre Norrlands historia under frihetstiden,” 1974, p. 526.

<sup>27</sup> Granqvist, *Samerna, staten och rätten i Torne lappmark under 1600-talet*, 2004; Ejemar, “Encountering Diversity Before and Beyond the District Courts. The Saami's Situation in North-Western Jämtland 1649–1700,” 2023; see also Larsson & Päiviö Sjaunja, *Self-Governance and Sami Communities*, 2022, pp. 49–69.

regarded as equivalent to the rights of homesteaders and settlers—rights that eventually transformed into modern ownership rights.<sup>28</sup>

The mid-1700s are referred to as a kind of golden age for the Sami due to the thriving in reindeer nomadism and trade, Sami positions in the district courts, and the fact that Sami rights to transboundary herding, fishing, hunting and trade were recognised in the border treaty with Denmark-Norway.<sup>29</sup> Research also argues that the Crown used the strong Sami rights to secure its territory, but directed that the Sami had to choose citizenship and that they could only own land in one country. This resulted in a more collective land use in the northernmost parts of Swedish Sápmi.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while the states respected the Sami and their rights in international treaties, they actually enforced “a Western concept of land ownership that effectively excluded all Sami who had a nomadic lifestyle.”<sup>31</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century, some Sami communities had experienced severe climate impacts, epizootic diseases and predators that diminished their herds. Many Sami had to move and abandon reindeer nomadism, and the Sami population decreased in these areas.<sup>32</sup> The County Administrative Board considered the taxation lands to be Crown lands and gradually removed such land issues from the jurisdiction of the district courts.<sup>33</sup> This can be seen as a reaction to the new deal by King Gustaf III, who had granted self-owning peasants in Sweden stronger rights to their lands. In the new system, settler colonial replacing of Indigenous rights to land appears, as the Sami taxation lands were redefined as crown-owned reindeer pastures. However, according to Lundmark, practices were different in the different counties.<sup>34</sup>

During the first era, settler colonial ideas were visible in the solutions proposed by decision-makers and authorities in order to be able to extract resources, namely, to populate the area with settlers. Initially, settlers were obliged not to encroach on Sami livelihoods. These, however, were so narrowly defined—or anopticized—that the consequences for the diversity of Sami subsistence could not be foreseen as immigration and colonisation increased at the end of the period. The prominent idea was the parallel theory, which was based on anopticism of Sami livelihoods and underpinned the gradual replacement of Sami livelihoods through settlers’ farming, and a transformation but not a complete elimination of Sami property rights.

## Industrialisation

The industrial revolution and the dawning of the liberal era in politics and public administration was marked by the replacement of the old Diet of the four estates with a bicameral national assembly, which was introduced in 1866.<sup>35</sup> Sawmills had already been established along the Swedish Bothnian coast when the steam engine

<sup>28</sup> Päiviö, *Från skattemannarätt till nyttjanderätt*, 2011; Korpiaakko-Labba, *Om samernas rättsliga ställning i Sverige-Finland*, 1994; Lundmark, *Samernas skatteland i Norr- och Västerbotten under 300 år*, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Kvist, *Rennomadismens dilemma*, 1989; Lundmark, *Samernas skatteland i Norr- och Västerbotten under 300 år*, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Päiviö, *Från skattemannarätt till nyttjanderätt*, 2011, p. 195.

<sup>31</sup> Lantto, “Borders, citizenship and change,” 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Kvist, *Rennomadismens dilemma*, 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Lundmark, “Formlös förvaltning och flyktiga rättigheter,” 2008, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> Lundmark, “Formlös förvaltning och flyktiga rättigheter,” 2008, p. 114.

<sup>35</sup> Lundmark, “Formlös förvaltning och flyktiga rättigheter,” 2008, pp. 132–133.

was introduced and log driving developed in the rivers.<sup>36</sup> With these processes, the forest became an asset that spurred the conclusion of the land partition process in the northern parts of Sweden.<sup>37</sup> In Jämtland, the farmstead owners gained large forest areas at the expense of reindeer herding and the Sami-taxed mountains, marking a settler colonial elimination and anopticism towards the Sami.<sup>38</sup> In 1841, a royal decree paused the process until the situation of the Sami had been dealt with. When the reindeer-herding Sami in the north-western parts of Jämtland gained influence in the process, they negotiated to secure areas for their livelihoods.<sup>39</sup>

As this process moved northwards, the new view of the forests' value eventuated a different approach to Sami land by the state.<sup>40</sup> Instead of acting against the criticism of forest devastation and the expansion of sawmill operations, the Parliament targeted the system of new farm settlements (Swe. *nybyggesväsendet*), which was perceived as being more a matter of forest felling than of cultivating land.<sup>41</sup> Seemingly anti-settler colonial, the decision-makers took several precautionary measures, including introducing a cultivation border above which further settlements were prohibited. Furthermore, the farmsteads' forest units were to be partly divided into forest commons to prevent settlers from selling their entire forests to logging companies, and large forest areas as well as the most important waterfalls were to be reserved for the Crown's management.<sup>42</sup>

However, the land partition process excluded those Sami who had taxation lands. Lundmark points to a reverse historiography when it comes to the proposals for the first Reindeer Grazing Act and their assumptions about Sami reindeer herding in different parts of the country.<sup>43</sup> Decision-makers deemed that the reindeer grazing lands had been recently established and successively become more numerous, thus replacing many hundred years of Sami land-use history. In actual fact, the taxation lands had become fewer, and had existed for at least 250 years before the government inquiry. In 1886, the Reindeer Grazing Act further replaced Sami rights into a usufruct right for reindeer herders, collectively as herding communities (Swe. *lappbyar*), to utilise Crown lands and private lands for grazing reindeer, living, fishing, hunting, and harvesting firewood and building materials. This was a new system for the Southern Sami, while in the northernmost parts, herding had developed into a more collective activity in the nineteenth century. The legislation was modelled on the northern herding system, imposing a one-size-fits-all system on diverse geographies and communities, ranging from nomadic Mountain Sami to semi-sedentary Forest Sami.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Törnlund & Östlund, "Floating timber in Northern Sweden," 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Lundmark, "Formlös förvaltning och flyktiga rättigheter," 2008, pp. 132–139.

<sup>38</sup> Rumar, "Avradslanden, skattefjällen och avvitrningen i Jämtlands län," 2008, pp. 178–187.

<sup>39</sup> Kilander, *När tiden byttes ut*, 2021, pp. 86–87.

<sup>40</sup> Lundmark, "Formlös förvaltning och flyktiga rättigheter," 2008, p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> Bergström, *Kolonisation på kronoparkerna i Norrbottens 1894–1950*, 1979, pp. 10–11.

<sup>42</sup> Stenman, *Avvittringen i Västerbottens läns lappmarker*, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> Lundmark, "Formlös förvaltning och flyktiga rättigheter," 2008, p. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Lantto & Mörkenstam, "Sami rights and Sami challenges," 2008; Nordin, *Relationer i ett samiskt samhälle*, 2002.

### *Agriculture and Industries*

Sawmills, mines, and hydropower required labour migration to these industries, and people moving from the lands that were to be logged, excavated, and dammed. Nevertheless, policies protected agriculture, which was often characterised by sedentariness. This parallel replacement process of agrarian and industrial settler colonialism played an important part in providing forestry and industry with labour in the resource periphery, an infrastructure of the evolving industrialization. The downsides of this process were articulated in the so-called Norrland issue (Swe. *Norrlandsfrågan*), a parliamentary debate on questions concerning the ownership of land in Norrland, especially following the different phases of the land partition. Forest companies had increasingly purchased areas in Norrland, and to counteract the passage of property from peasants to companies, the state launched the Norrland Committee in 1901, followed by a prohibition act in 1906 against certain acquisitions by companies.<sup>45</sup> In the debates on the so-called “reign of companies” (Swe. *bolagsväldet*), Sami rights to land were not discussed, but merely the possibility for Sami who had left herding to live on lands that were utilised as reindeer pastures.<sup>46</sup> Various Sami livelihoods were replaced and limited to herding.

Although the cultivation border had been drawn during the land partition process with a view to protecting and replacing reindeer grazing lands by turning them into Crown lands, new settlements as well as industrial sites continued to be illegally established west of the border. Norrland was described as a “Promised Land,” in competition with North America. With mines like the one in Kiruna, which demanded other industrial enterprises such as railroads, an industrial revolution was emerging in the north.<sup>47</sup> In 1899, the state tasked the Waterfall Committee with investigating important waterfalls owned entirely or partly by the Crown. The investigation concluded that the state was the owner of 271 waterfalls of “major importance.” Thus, hydropower had the greatest potential in the northern parts of the country where the state could claim ownership of watercourses to the greatest extent.<sup>48</sup>

A large proportion of these watercourses were located within Sami reindeer grazing lands. In the counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten alone, there were 158 such watercourses, and several others in these counties were not included as their geographical location made them less accessible and because of the lack of industries in the immediate area. The future hydropower resources were located in Norrland, as outlined in 1908 in a book titled *Lappland. Det stora svenska framtidslandet* [‘Lappland. The great Swedish land of the future’].<sup>49</sup> A proposal for a permanent waterfall commission resulting from government enquiries into a modern water legislation eventually resulted in the establishment of the Royal Hydropower Board, Vattenfall, in 1909.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Sörlin, *Framtidslandet*, 1988, pp. 186–188.

<sup>46</sup> Norrlandskommittén, *Underdåniga utlåtanden i anledning av den s.k. Norrlandskommitténs den 27 oktober 1904 afgifna betänkande*, 1905, pp. 116, 219–220.

<sup>47</sup> Hansson, *Porjus*, 1994.

<sup>48</sup> Vattenfallskommittén, *Betänkande afgivet den 17 mars 1903 af den för utredning beträffande vissa staten tillhöriga vattenfall af Kungl. Maj:t den 9 juni 1899 tillsatta kommitté*, 1903, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Bergqvist & Svenonius, *Lappland*, 1908.

<sup>50</sup> Lantto & Össbo, “Det åsidosatta folket,” 2011.

One of the first duties of the Vattenfall board was to investigate the possibilities for hydropower expansion in either the Torne or the Lule River for the electrification of the railroad between Luleå and Narvik on the Norwegian side. The choice finally fell on Porjus in the Great Lule River due to the benefits from an agrarian perspective, that is, the area's perceived character of wilderness, and the fact that the Torne River runs along the border with Finland. The most important aspect, however, was the prospects of utilizing the heights of fall, both upstream and downstream in the Lule River water system.<sup>51</sup> Reducing the dependency on imported coal was important for the Swedish state, not least in the face of war. Bårjås, or Bajasberg, was a Sami farmstead settlement with eight inhabitants in 1908. In just a couple of years, the settlement had been transformed into one of Sweden's largest workplaces at the time and a settler colonial company town. The power station was operational in 1915.<sup>52</sup>

With a view to curbing the emigration overseas by potential workers, the government appointed the Colonization Committee in 1916. The committee worked for several years and put forward various proposals for further colonization of the interior of northern Sweden, excluding the area above the cultivation border.<sup>53</sup> In the committee report, Sami lands were dealt with on one single page, in line with settler colonial replacement, and treated as pasture lands guarded by the cultivation border. Simultaneously, a one-man government inquiry investigated the historical evolution and legal position of the Sami taxation lands.<sup>54</sup> If the customary right to Sami taxation lands remained in place, this would clearly cause problems for the new colonization, for the land partition process that was in its final phase, and for the legal framework of the industrial establishments from the late nineteenth century.

### *Decolonial Voices from Sami Actors*

To the above account of the various parts of the industrialisation process must be added the government's concern for reindeer husbandry, and its discourse on the Sami as "dying natives"<sup>55</sup> must be added, even though the Sami political mobilization that arose in the late 1800s and early 1900s points to vibrant and advanced Sami communities. We find several Sami actors pushing back at notions of a monoculture. Among these was midwife Elsa Laula Renberg (1877–1931), who, together with others, established the first nationwide Sami organisation, and in 1917, the Sami Women's Association, of which she was a member, initiated the first cross-border Sami meeting in Trondheim/Tråante. In 1904, Laula wrote a pamphlet, *Inför Lif eller Död? Sanningsord i de lappska förhållandena* ['Facing life or death? Words of truth about the Lappish conditions']. The pamphlet was a reaction against the Reindeer Grazing Acts of 1886 and 1898. In an argument for Sami self-determination, Laula asserts that the Sami ought to have lands of their own and suggests that they should be allowed to use the lands above the cultivation border for whatever purpose they wanted.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Össbo, *Nya vatten, dunkla speglingar*, 2014, p. 75; Lantto & Össbo, "Det åsidosatta folket," 2011, p. 330.

<sup>52</sup> Össbo, "Hydropower company sites," 2023b, pp. 120–121.

<sup>53</sup> SOU 1922:22.

<sup>54</sup> SOU 1922:10.

<sup>55</sup> See Konishi, "First Nations scholars, settler colonial studies, and Indigenous history," 2019, p. 301.

<sup>56</sup> Laula, *Inför lif eller död?* 1904.

Local government clerk Torkel Tomasson's (1881–1940) long-standing publication of *Samefolkets egen tidning* ['The Sami people's own journal'] (first pilot issue in 1904, regularly issued since 1918) is another example of Sami agency. Preacher and priest Gustaf Park (1886–1968) was also part of the early Sami political movement and took over the editing of the journal. In 1950, Park was elected the first chairman of Sámiid Riikkasearvi (The National Association of the Sami People in Sweden, SSR).<sup>57</sup> Teacher Karin Stenberg (1884–1969) stated in her 1920 diatribe on Swedish colonial politics and historiography *Dat lāh mijen situd – Det är vår vilja! En vädjan till svenska nationen från Samefolket* ['This is our will! An appeal to the Swedish nation from the Sami people'] that the Sami have a right to Sami land and their taxation lands under the legal principle of "prescription by time immemorial." The appeal also focused on education and the discriminating nomadic school system.<sup>58</sup> She wrote the book together with Valdemar Lindholm (1880–1947), a Swedish author who engaged in and supported the Sami political movement. Lindholm's writings evince a kind of settler colonial awareness and he criticised and dismissed racial biology as unscientific,<sup>59</sup> which was uncommon in the 1920s. While other authors from the northern parts of Sweden were praised as the "Norrländ Authors," Lindholm's work was dismissed by literary critics as "Lapp romanticism."<sup>60</sup>

### *Anopticism in Culture and Politics*

Several important frameworks for the expansion of industrialisation were developed at the beginning of the twentieth century. When studying these investigations, legislations, and proposals, anoptical strategies in the Sami politics which also characterize culture become apparent. The "Norrländ authors" like Olof Högberg, Ludvig Nordström, and Martin Koch dealt with Norrländ's colonial history, but without mentioning the Sami. Koch refers to the Sami as displaced,<sup>61</sup> but continues: "How such a virgin land becomes exploited and destroyed by greedy fortune seekers, how the natives [Swe. *infödingarna*] are enslaved under the obedience of strangers."<sup>62</sup> In his writing, Koch projected the Indigenous identity onto the settlers<sup>63</sup>: they were the natives, and the logging companies were the strangers that enslaved them. Another feature common in settler colonial states is that settlers gradually make themselves native to the land they have settled in. This is referred to in research as settler self-indigenization<sup>64</sup> and occurs when non-Indigenous persons claim an Indigenous identity, which eventually undermines and devalues Indigenous peoples' rights. Describing Norrländ as a Swedish colony whilst omitting Sami history and experience of colonialism exemplifies settler self-indigenization.

In politics, the Water Act was based on the knowledge of where future hydro-power production would be located. Nevertheless, the Act only deals with three local industries of enough importance to be considered: agriculture, forestry (including

<sup>57</sup> Lantto & Mörkenstam, "Sami rights and Sami challenges," 2008, p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Stenberg & Lindholm, *Dat lāh mijen situd!* 1920.

<sup>59</sup> Lindholm, *Vildmarkens besegrare*, 1925.

<sup>60</sup> Össbo, "Hans själ är nomadens," 2020b.

<sup>61</sup> Koch, *Timmerdalen* del 1, 1913a, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Koch, *Timmerdalen* del 2, 1913b, p. 87.

<sup>63</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 2010, pp. 46–48.

<sup>64</sup> Leroux, *Distorted Descent*, 2019; Junka-Aikio, "Can the Sámi speak now?" 2016.

log-driving) and fishing. Reindeer herding and Sami presence were anoptitized. Even in the 1960s, when there were strong opinions against hydropower, and Sami organisations mobilised to include reindeer herding in the Water Act, this continued to be ignored by decision-makers and authorities.<sup>65</sup> It was not until the 1970s and the work with national planning and a revised Reindeer Husbandry Act, that representatives of reindeer herding finally became involved. However, it was at best as a business interest among others in a group of so-called national interests.<sup>66</sup> This can be seen as contributing to the lack of procedural justice concerning the other values of the Sami landscape, not to mention the complete anoptitization of Sami culture as a national interest.

### *Decommissioning Policy*

Just a few decades into the post-war period, the projection of the future onto Norrland slowed down.<sup>67</sup> In some debates, this period and these politics are referred to as “the decommissioning policy” towards the northern parts of Sweden, the former “Land of the Future.”<sup>68</sup> However, the state has pursued a regional policy with a focus on Norrland through several measures since the 1940s. The question is whether these measures were right or had the intended effect.

The contradictions between the physiocratic ideals of subsistence and the practice in the development programmes that followed the second Norrland Committee in the 1940s led to measures that emphasized modernization and industrialization. However, the holistic perspective on the policy areas was not optimal: an agricultural policy decision aimed at achieving income equality between the agricultural population and other population groups through the introduction of “income goals” resulted in the need to phase out farm units of less than 10 hectares. In Norrland, 85 per cent of all farm units were smaller than 10 hectares, which resulted in a rapid downturn in agriculture and increased labour migration from the northern to the southern parts of the country. In Norrland, the combination of agriculture and forestry was important, and therefore the increased mechanization of forestry and the companies’ policy concerning full-time employees had a further impact on combined livelihoods,<sup>69</sup> as well as on those reindeer herders who occasionally worked in forestry. In the modernised Reindeer Husbandry Act of 1971, the former *lappbyar* became reindeer herding Sami communities (RHSCs) modelled on economic associations, and, for a few years, severance pay was initially given to small-scale reindeer herders who left the occupation.<sup>70</sup> Leaving herding eliminated the possibility to utilise Sami rights as defined in the Act. This constitutes a settler colonial replacement, as the state decreased the number of individuals that could utilise their Sami rights.

According to economic history research, the Norrland elite’s adherence to the ideas that Norrland should be compensated for natural resource extraction through public investments led to the rejection of alternative development strategies in favour of “a policy that aimed either at creating a physiocratic agricultural and forestry so-

<sup>65</sup> Össbo, *Nya vatten, dunkla speglingar*, 2014, pp. 191, 194.

<sup>66</sup> Lundmark & Stjernström, “Environmental protection,” 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Sörlin, *Framtidslandet*, 1988, pp. 254–261.

<sup>68</sup> Tidholm, *Norrland*, 2014; Össbo, “Hydropower company sites,” 2023b, p. 117.

<sup>69</sup> Eriksson, *Synen på befolkning och försörjning i Norrland 1940–1970*, 2010, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Össbo, *Nya vatten, dunkla speglingar*, 2014, p. 160.

ciety or a region dominated by public activities.”<sup>71</sup> While the rest of Sweden reaped the benefits of industrialism, the heyday of hydropower expansion was over in the sparsely populated areas in the north; rationalization and centralization were promoted as the solution for agriculture, forestry, and reindeer husbandry, which led to fewer and fewer people finding their livelihoods in the former primary industries. The impacts of hydropower expansion on reindeer husbandry included, among other things, fragmented and lost grazing areas, poorer grazing quality, and disrupted and destroyed reindeer migration routes. Sami society at large was also affected, with land losses that eventually circumscribed the rights of Sami outside reindeer herding and changed divisions of labour within the households.<sup>72</sup> The supplementary income from fishing was often lost, while other income from seasonal work for the hydropower company became more common, even though its facilities were detrimental to reindeer husbandry.<sup>73</sup> Overall, reindeer herding became mechanized and more dependent on modern equipment such as larger boats, boat engines, trucks, snowmobiles and motorcycles.<sup>74</sup>

The “Norrländ debate” encompassed the refusal of economic rationality and demands for a mobile work force forwarded by businesspeople and politicians, while Norrlanders refused to migrate.<sup>75</sup> Evident in this debate is also the dimension that Norrland ought to get some return from the extraction of natural resources in the area and a certain degree of independence, given the continuity of excavating resources, and thus the elimination of Sami rights. However, these opinions did not develop into claims that Norrland should be a state in its own right.<sup>76</sup> In the war and post-war political debates on Norrland, the ideas displayed the same characteristics as those in the discussions in the early 1900s, when the region was presented in physiocratic terms as an agriculturally-oriented “Land of the Future” ever since the colonisation period.<sup>77</sup> However, the Sami and their livelihoods were anoptimized in the more general Norrland debate.

## Re-Industrialization

Since the 2010s, increased climate mitigations have spurred economy and technology towards a vision of a green transition re-industrialization. The so-called greening of energy and steel production, as well as mining, are defined as being of decisive importance, and the focus is directed towards the sparsely populated northern parts of Sweden, especially after the city of Skellefteå won a bid to house a factory for the production of batteries for electric cars in 2017. Shortly afterwards, the state-owned mining company LKAB presented an investment in fossil-free steel production in Gällivare, and another company with the same focus was established in Boden.<sup>78</sup> The argument for these locations was the proximity to renewable energy production, i.e.,

<sup>71</sup> Eriksson, *Synen på befolkning och försörjning i Norrland 1940–1970*, 2010, pp. 44–45.

<sup>72</sup> Össbo, *Nya vatten, dunkla speglingar* 2014, pp. 248–251; Amft, *Sápmi i förändringens tid*, 2000, p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> Amft, *Sápmi i förändringens tid*, 2000, p. 45; Beach, *Reindeer-Herd Management in Transition*, 1983, p. 294.

<sup>74</sup> Amft, *Sápmi i förändringens tid*, 2000, pp. 44–45.

<sup>75</sup> Eriksson, *(Re)producing a periphery*, 2011, pp. 35–36.

<sup>76</sup> Össbo, “Hydropower company sites,” 2023b.

<sup>77</sup> Eriksson, *Synen på befolkning och försörjning i Norrland 1940–1970*, 2010, pp. 16–20.

<sup>78</sup> De Leeuw, “Scrutinising the commodity hype in imaginaries of the Swedish green steel transition,” 2024; Coates & Holroyd, “Northern Sweden and economic development,” 2021.

hydropower and wind power. Since then, interest in the Norrland region has once again grown enormously in Sweden.

Surprisingly, in today's transition, Sami experiences of previous processes of industrialisation are made invisible and left unconsidered. Co-existence, an offspring of the old parallel theory, between new extractive projects and reindeer husbandry is often referred to as feasible.<sup>79</sup> Although Sweden is taking steps towards recognizing Indigenous rights thanks to the hard work of Sami organisations over decades, the Sami—now recognised as an Indigenous people—are still excluded from decisive processes, and, at best, merely consulted in deliberation processes and requests for comments on government bills.<sup>80</sup> Sparsely populated municipalities suffering from decades of depopulation previously grasped the straw offered by mining or other extractive industries in hopes of in-migration. However, these communities now risk becoming the target of fly-in/fly-out businesses, while still having to offer a fair number of public services. Kiruna municipality is an example, a sacrifice zone due to over a hundred years of mining, yet a resource periphery in constant making.<sup>81</sup> The mining operations beneath the city, conducted by LKAB, are forcing the city to move to nearby safer grounds. Branded as “urban transformation,” this involves the resettlement of thousands of Kiruna residents from 2012 and onwards.<sup>82</sup> As a miner has a higher salary than a teacher or a homecare assistant, the Kiruna and Pajala municipalities are increasingly losing employees to the mines, which creates further challenges to public and social services due to a lack of educated and experienced personnel.<sup>83</sup> When Sweden held the chairmanship of the EU, the LKAB company announced the discovery of a deposit of rare earth metals which they argued could become vital for Europe's independence from Russia and China. The deposit is located on Gabna RHSC's traditional land, which is already heavily impacted by existing mining operations, but the community was not informed prior to the press release. By labelling the discovery as good news “not only for LKAB, the region and the Swedish people, but also for Europe and the climate,”<sup>84</sup> while completely ignoring the RHSC and leaving out the land the company operates on, the company blatantly anopticized the Sami.

## Discussion

If we consider “elimination of the native” politics in the Swedish context, its most common elements are ethnic categorization and the establishment of different borders, rather than necropolitics,<sup>85</sup> the physical eradication of Indigenous peoples, often referred to in connection with settler colonial states. Ethnic categorisation led to segregation policies towards reindeer-herding Sami and assimilation policies towards the Sami who engaged in other livelihoods such as farming or sedentary reindeer

<sup>79</sup> Kløcker Larsen et al., “The impacts of mining on Sámi lands,” 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Össbo, “Back to square one,” 2023a.

<sup>81</sup> Lopez, *Transforming Kiruna*, 2021; Nuttall, “Wild lands, remote edges,” 2022, p. 85.

<sup>82</sup> Lopez, *Transforming Kiruna*, 2021, p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 May 2022; [www.dn.se/ekonomi/hon-lamnade-hemtjansten-for-gruvjatten-borde-ha-gjort-det-tidigare/](http://www.dn.se/ekonomi/hon-lamnade-hemtjansten-for-gruvjatten-borde-ha-gjort-det-tidigare/); accessed on 29 Nov. 2024; Sveriges television, 17 Aug. 2022; [www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/norrbotten/intensiv-jakt-pa-larare-i-kiruna-in-i-det-sista](http://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/norrbotten/intensiv-jakt-pa-larare-i-kiruna-in-i-det-sista); accessed on 29 Nov. 2024.

<sup>84</sup> LKAB, Europe's largest deposit of rare earth metals located in Kiruna area, 12 Jan. 2023; <https://lkab.com/en/press/europes-largest-deposit-of-rare-earth-metals-is-located-in-the-kiruna-area/>; accessed on 10 Oct. 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 2010; Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the Native,” 2006.

herding.<sup>86</sup> The establishment of various borders have resulted in forced relocations of Sami ever since the eighteenth century.<sup>87</sup> The gradual replacements of Sami and their rights to land, prioritizing settlers farming, and making certain Sami livelihoods and groups invisible to rights claims, as in the land partition process, have paved way for continuing collisions between different groups in local communities, among Sami groups and between local communities, RHSC:s and extractive industries.

Although leisure activities, and marketing their alpine areas, nature reserves and forests as wilderness have become the strategy of sparsely populated northern municipalities, hopes of re-industrialization still remain. Both these activities and strategies have the potential to create tensions within the local communities in terms of land-use rights.<sup>88</sup> This may be best exemplified by the public debate following the affirmation of the exclusive right of a reindeer-herding Sami community to manage hunting and fishing on state-owned land in the Girjas court ruling, and by the subsequent review of the reindeer husbandry legislation.<sup>89</sup> The preconditions for a just transition and social sustainability risk being overshadowed by the need for forestry products, minerals, water/wind power and access to nature and leisure activities, both for the workforce expected to move into the northern communities as a result of the reindustrialisation, and the local population. In this future-driven discursive landscape, the settler colonial objective of gaining access to land by the state, state-owned companies and regional and local authorities, and utilizing it for whatever purpose, replacing and making invisible the Sami and their rights and connection to the land, is still very much in evidence.

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<sup>86</sup> Mörkenstam, *Om “Lapparnes privilegier”*, 1999.

<sup>87</sup> Össbo, “Från lappmarksplakat till anläggsamhällen,” 2020a; Lantto, *Lappväsendet*, 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Sandström, “Green transformation or green colonialism,” 2024.

<sup>89</sup> Johansson et al., “Cultural expertise in Sami land rights litigations,” 2023.

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