

Piles of Bones

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Tessel Janse

1 Sápmi covers the northern parts of Scandinavia and includes the Russian Kola Peninsula. I return to the significance of SAG in the first section of this article. Hanna Horsberg Hansen, 'Sámi Artist Group (Keviselie/Hans Ragnar Mathisen, Britta Marakatt-Labba, Synnøve Persen)', *Documenta* 14, 2017, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13551/sami-artist-group-keviselie-hans-ragnar-mathisen-britta-marakatt-labba-synnove-persen->, accessed 12 July 2021.

2 Máret Anne Sara, *Pile o'Sápmi* homepage, <http://www.pileosapmi.com>, accessed 12 July 2021

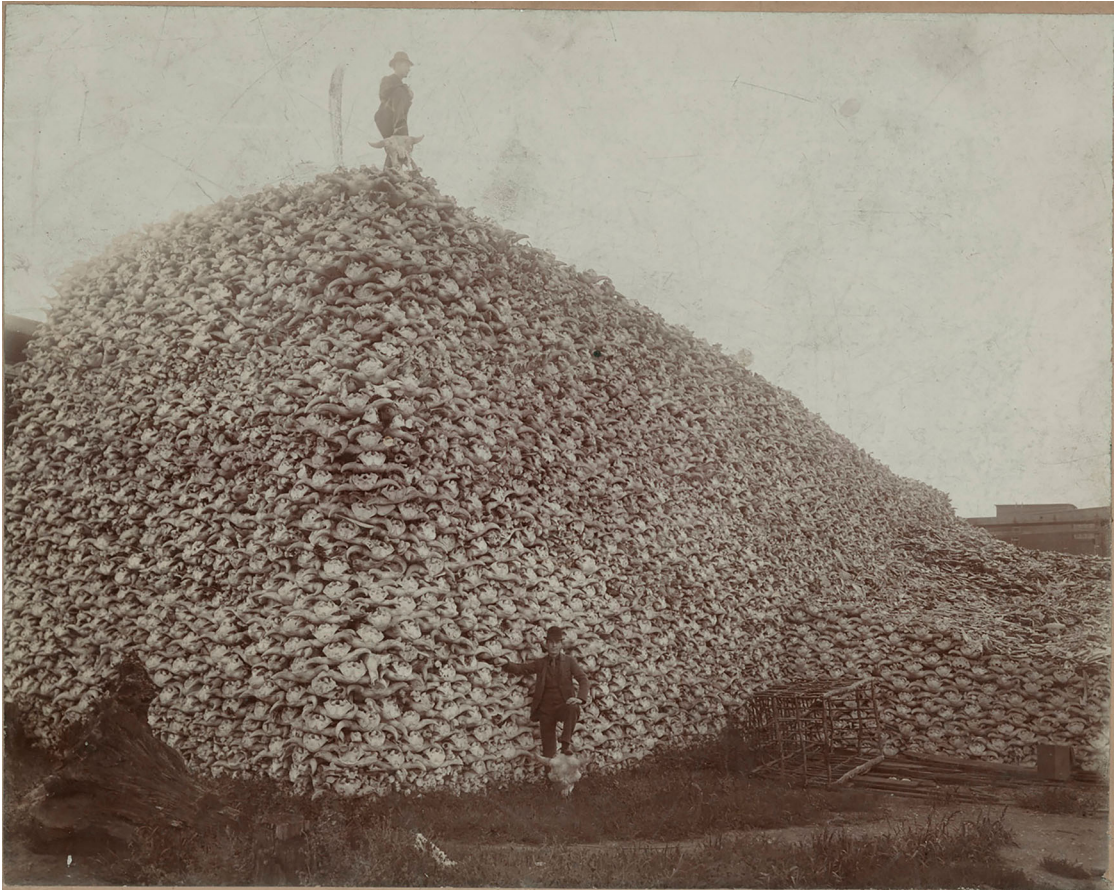
3 On the history of Sámi reindeer pastoralism, which probably started between the eighth and eleventh centuries, see Anna-Kaisa Salmi and Matti T Heino, 'Tangled Worlds: The Swedish, the Sámi, and the Reindeer', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol 23, no 1, 2019, p 263. In addition to

At *documenta* 14, in 2017, Sámi artists placed the Global North at the centre of postcolonial debates predominantly gazing towards the Global South. There were proposals for a Sámi national flag (Synnøve Persen, *Sámi Flag Project*, 1977), reworked maps of northern Scandinavia with Sámi place names (Keviselie, 1974–ongoing) and a monumental embroidery telling the history of Sámi oppression and uprisings (Britta Marakatt-Labba, *Historjá*, 2003–2007). Through these works, members of the Sámi Artist Group (SAG) showed over forty years of experience of, and continued resistance to, settler colonialism in their home region of Sápmi.¹ They set the stage for the unsettling work of younger Sámi Norwegian artist Máret Anne Sara. Under the title *Pile o'Sápmi* (2016–ongoing), her installations at *documenta* 14 included a photograph of a pile of reindeer heads with a Norwegian flag sticking out, a flag made of hundreds of reindeer skulls with bullet holes in the forehead (*Pile o'Sápmi Supreme*) and a printed translation of the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food's 2007 Reindeer Husbandry Act. Sara's slogan reinvigorates SAG's message: for the Sámi, 'there is no post colonial'.²

Recognised as Europe's only Indigenous peoples, the Sámi enjoy unique rights to protect their culture. Like Indigenous groups across the subpolar regions, they have conducted reindeer husbandry for hundreds of years.³ Subsequently, their language and way of life are closely connected to reindeer, giving rise to a form of interdependence in which the animals are, as Philippe Descola would say, full members of the collective.⁴ But although Sámi reindeer husbandry is protected by law, the 2007 Act allows the Norwegian government to determine the size of



Máret Ánne Sara, *Pile o' Sápmi*, 2017, reindeer heads, Norwegian flag, Tana bru criminal court, Norway, photo: Iris Egilsdatter



Photographer unknown, *Men standing with pile of buffalo skulls, Michigan Carbon Works, c 1892, 19 × 24.5 cm, Glue-works, Michigan, collection: Detroit Public Library*

reindeer husbandry, salmon fishing is another main resource for the Sámi, especially coastal Sámi. All Sámi, however, traditionally live with reindeer, though coastal Sámi do not follow reindeer migrations. See Steinar Pedersen, 'The Coastal Sámi of Norway and Their Rights to Traditional Marine Livelihood', *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, vol 3, no 1, 2012, p 52. Sámi that depend on fishing face similar challenges in relation to access and conservation. See John Law and Solveig Joks, 'Indigeneity, Science, and Difference: Notes on the Politics of How', *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, vol 44, no 3, 2019, pp 424–447.

the herds.⁵ In 2013 it was decided that a considerable percentage of most herds would be culled, allegedly to protect the Finnmark Plateau from overgrazing and to preserve biodiversity.⁶ Like many, the herd of Sara's brother, Jovsset Ánte Sara, was to be culled to the point that remaining a herder would no longer be financially viable.⁷ He took the state to court. To call attention to her brother's predicament, in 2016 Sara collected 200 reindeer heads from the slaughterhouse, piled them up in front of the local court in Tana Bru, and planted the Norwegian flag on top.

In the same way as SAG, Sara has combined art and activist intervention in a call for a reassessment of Scandinavian colonial history and contemporary politics. With *Pile o' Sápmi*, she refers to another pile of bones: the iconic 1892 photograph showing a mound of thousands of bison skulls, which is exhibited alongside her work.⁸ Two men in bowler hats each have a foot planted on a large horned skull, as if to prove that they have conquered a giant that now belongs to the past. The photograph illustrates the extent of nineteenth-century bison killing by settlers in North America, hunting them for pleasure, food and the fur trade.⁹

4 Philippe Descola, 'Beyond Nature and Culture: Forms of Attachment', Janet Lloyd, trans, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol 2, no 1, 2012, p 462; see also Salmi and Heino, 'Tangled Worlds', op cit

5 See chapter 7, section 60 of Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Act Relating to Reindeer Husbandry (The Reindeer Husbandry Act) 2007, trans from Norwegian, 15 June 2007, <https://www.pileosapmi.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/reindeer-husbandry-act-english.pdf>, accessed 13 July 2021

6 Kathrine Ivsett Johnsen, 'The Paradox of Reindeer Pasture Management in Finnmark, Norway', *Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment of Development in the Arctic*, 14 April 2014, <https://www.arcticinfo.eu/en/features/112-the-paradox-of-reindeer-pasture-management-in-finnmark-norway>, accessed 1 November 2022

7 Jon Henley, 'Norwegian Herder Ordered to Put Down Dozens of Reindeer in Controversial Cull', *The Guardian*, 22 December 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/norway-court-clears-way-for-controversial-reindeer-slaughter>, accessed 1 November 2022

8 For a translation of the statement that accompanied Sara's initial pile, which asserts the connection with North American bison extermination, see Hugo Reinert, 'The Skulls and the Dancing Pig: Notes on Apocalyptic Violence', *Terrain* 71, April 2019, p 3.

9 Bison are often referred to as buffalo in this context.

10 Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750–1920*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 25

The bones were used in glue, sugar, fertiliser and fine bone china. This almost industrial operation reduced the species' population from an estimated 30 million to less than a thousand.¹⁰ As Cree Canadian scholar Tasha Hubbard delineates, extermination of bison was a settler colonial strategy to undermine Indigenous resistance that had, and still has, devastating effects on the socioeconomic position of many First Nations peoples.¹¹

In this article I attend to how Sara's work makes Norwegian reindeer culls in the name of environmental protection legible as a Scandinavian variation of 'animal colonialism'. This term is proposed by Kelsey Dayle John (Diné), scholar of Indigenous animal studies, who extends Hubbard's argument to Navajo-horse relationality.¹² Writing about the effects of settler-colonial horse slaughter on Indigenous sovereignty and social structures, and about colonialism's disqualification of Indigenous approaches to animals and environments, she identifies animal colonialism as a core mechanism in cultural erasure and the appropriation of land for resources. Notably, John locates possibilities for resistance to animal colonialism and for decolonisation in the restoration of localised and practice-based Navajo-horse relationships.¹³

Decolonisation, here, not only means to *decolonise* by challenging and undoing colonial power relations but also aligns with the notion of *decoloniality*: following Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, I understand this as an unveiling of the material/economic substructures of colonialism and doing the work of upholding and (re)inventing ontologies that can pose as alternatives to the universalised Western capitalist/colonial ontology.¹⁴ Inspired by this, in addition to the question of how Sara exposes a similar, though not identical, form of animal colonialism in the subpolar North, I ask how her work fits into a tradition of Sámi art as a form of resistance to colonialism and a means of tending to decolonial options.

To contextualise this analysis, I begin with a narration of Sámi colonial history combined with a reading of how Sámi creative expression, or *duodji*, developed in close relation to ecological entanglements and colonial oppression.¹⁵ I will show that Nordic colonialism has always been an interspecies phenomenon in which reindeer play a central role. Then I delve into the current dispute over reindeer between the Norwegian state and Sámi herders by following the connections made in *Pile o'Sapmi*. I analyse Norway's politics of recognition, attending to Sámi voices diagnosing Norwegian policy as 'green colonialism', and then turn towards the violence made visible in Sara's work by reading Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat's writing on colonial sovereignty. In doing so I consider how the culling of reindeer acts as a performance of sovereignty over the subpolar regions in which reindeer function as proxies for targeting the Sámi themselves. In the last section I expand on this understanding of sovereignty as performative act to detail how Sara stages a form of counter-sovereignty in return. Drawing from scholarship on Sámi aesthetics, I argue that Sara simultaneously sustains intricate interspecies ecologies that pose more livable options for relating to animals and, by extension, the environment.¹⁶

As a non-Sámi interpreter, I acknowledge that Sámi and other Indigenous art and writing outstretches my horizon in various directions. This inevitably means that misinterpretation and speaking for others are

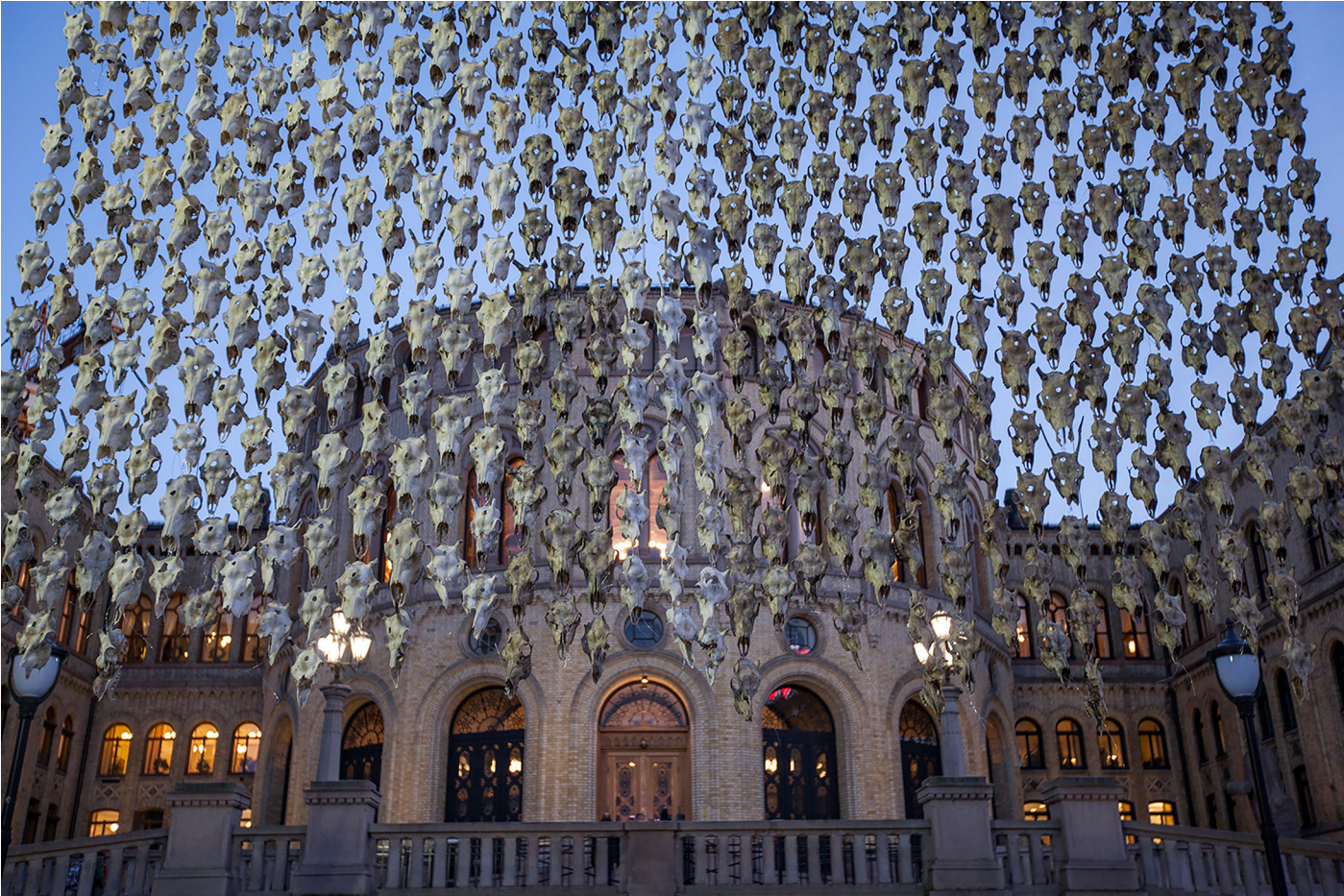
- 11 Tasha Hubbard, 'Buffalo Genocide in Nineteenth-Century North America: "Kill, Skin, and Sell"', in Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto and Alexander Laban Hinton, eds, *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2014, pp 292–305. See also Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Life*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2015, pp 139–166
- 12 Kelsey Dayle John, 'Animal Colonialism – Illustrating Intersections between Animal Studies and Settler Colonial Studies through Diné Horsemanship', *Humanimalia*, vol 10, no 2, spring 2019, pp 42–68
- 13 A similar argument is made in Billy-Ray Belcourt, 'Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought', *Societies* 5, 2015, pp 1–11. See also Zoe Todd, 'Refracting the State through Human-Fish Relations: Fishing, Indigenous Legal Orders and Colonialism in North/Western Canada', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol 7, no 1, 2018, pp 60–75.
- 14 Decoloniality is generally linked to the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, as well as to Walter D Mignolo and the feminist María Lugones, both literary scholars from Argentina. Coined by Quijano and then rethought and largely popularised by Mignolo, 'coloniality' is the power relation of European domination and exploitation along the hierarchies imposed by colonialism. This 'new world order' endures in spite of the formal end of colonialism and poses European culture and knowledge as the model for modernity. 'Decoloniality', then, challenges the

part of this undertaking, which itself is implicated in the power dynamics of extraction and delocalisation inherent to exhibition culture and academic research.¹⁷ Therefore, rather than professing to grasp all aspects of *Pile o'Sápmi*, I aim to listen to the charges it brings to postcolonial studies. This entails an invested focus on the blind spots in my field, without losing sight of the local urgencies to which she responds. Though I attend to Sámi creative practice as formulating a different relation to the environment – different to the dominant neoliberal European approach – I approach Sara's work as expressing more than a pre-existing 'Sámi-ness':¹⁸ as she herself explains, it is its own contemporary form of research and witnessing.¹⁹ The potential erosion of *Pile o'Sápmi's* political aims, through its circulation in the artworld – Sara participated in documenta 14 and the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022 – and acquisition by the Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design for display in their entrance hall, is a pressing issue.²⁰ However, this is a complex discussion that is beyond the scope of this article and only the future can provide answers to it.²¹

The relevance of this research lies in seeking underexplored perspectives in the field of postcolonial studies and in the discussion around Sara's work and reindeer husbandry in Norway. First, it complicates postcolonial studies' predominant concern with the Global South by directing the gaze towards a region often overlooked: the subpolar North and colonialism within Europe itself.²² In an earlier issue of this journal, photographer of more-than-human ecosystems in subpolar North America, Subhankar Banerjee, wrote that in the last decades the Arctic has become a contested space.²³ In many ways the locus of the climate crisis, it also poses a last frontier, an area that remains largely impenetrable and promises resources for exploitation. Banerjee describes how the scramble for oil, coal and gas aggravates an already growing difficulty of access to food for local species. Consequently, the cultures and livelihoods of subpolar Indigenous communities, who depend on local biodiversity and migratory animals, are under threat. Sara's work pulls the gaze towards Scandinavia, showing that the reindeer conflict cannot be separated from settler colonialism in Europe itself.

The close interdependence of humans and animals in a region where subsistence is scarce, and increasingly so, gives shape to the second contribution of this article. The Sámi presence at documenta 14 coincided with increasing international attention to Sámi voices, to the conflict over reindeer, and to Sara's work. However, the emphasis is mainly in *affirming* that the conflict over environmental conservation is indeed a form of colonialism.²⁴ What interests me here specifically is the way in which the presence of reindeer in Sara's work adds an interspecies dimension and thus challenges common understandings of contemporary colonialism.

Lastly, where most interpretations of *Pile o'Sápmi* remain concerned with its anti-colonial activism, turning to theories on Sámi aesthetics and duodji allows for attending to how they simultaneously offer a decolonial approach to ecology. Sámi scholar Harald Gaski explains that, for the Sámi, aesthetic practice is not limited to the 'beautiful' or a self-contained artwork, but rather arises from an ethically responsible way of living specific to the Arctic context: 'it comprises a holistic approach to being human and acting accordingly, ie paying respect to fellow citizens,



Máret Ánne Sara, *Pile o' Sápmi Supreme*, 2017, reindeer skulls, Norwegian Parliament building, Oslo, photo: Pile óSápmi/
Tomi Guttorm

universality of European epistemology and creates space in which other epistemologies outside this hegemonic structure can coexist. See Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, vol 12, no 2–3, 2007, pp 168–178, and Walter D Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2011. Cusicanqui, however, like John, emphasises the need to look beyond cultural and discursive forms of coloniality, and stresses the *practice* of constructing a world where different knowledges can coexist. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 'Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization', *Language, Culture and Society*, vol 1, no 1, 2019, p 112.

15 I will return to the notion of duodji later on. Because Sápmi extends over multiple nation-states, a tension exists when writing about Sámi identity in the specific context of Norway. Sara's brother's case takes place in Norway, which is why my focus is there, but a consideration of Sámi colonial history means thinking across national borders. Likewise, Sámi reindeer husbandry is threatened not just in Norway.

16 In contrast to European understandings of ecology as the study of the natural environment as separate from the human realm, my understanding of 'ecologies' is informed by non-Western approaches to ecologies as networks of relations of which humans are an inextricable part. See, for instance, Dwayne Donald, 'Indigenous Métissage: A Decolonizing Research Sensibility', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol 25, no 5, 2012, pp 533–555. I make clear how exactly this holistic notion of ecology translates to the Sámi context later.

traditions, nature, and one's own surroundings'.²⁵ Read through this lens, *Pile o'Sápmi* does more than witness state violence and perform counter-sovereignty; it is legible as keeping interspecies ecologies alive and thus practises John's decolonial relationality. Here, sovereignty is not a form of state control but what Ariella Aisha Azoulay calls 'worldly sovereignty': the freedom to uphold traditional kinship relations and to practise one's role as carer for the ecosystem.²⁶

Sámi Colonial History and Resistance as Interspecies Conflict

In December 2017 documenta's flag of skulls reappeared, now on the doorstep of the Supreme Court in Oslo. The occasion was Jovsset's third court battle over the decreed cull of almost half of his herd. He stated that remaining with only seventy-five animals would lead him to bankruptcy and claimed an offence against his human right to property and the right to his cultural practice.²⁷ Despite his two earlier victories, a few weeks later the Supreme Court announced that Jovsset had lost the case and the culls were to proceed. Jovsset and his lawyer took the case to the UN Commission of Human Rights.²⁸ The Norwegian government announced they would not wait on the UN decision, after which Jovsset avoided the cull by accommodating his reindeer with a relative.²⁹ In this section I look towards Sámi artistic expression to trace the cultural and ecological connection between Sámi and reindeer, and demonstrate that conflict over reindeer is a recurring aspect in Scandinavian colonial history and anti-colonial activism, in which art plays a central role.

Sápmi extends over Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola Peninsula, yet more than half of the Sámi live in Norway.³⁰ Though today reindeer husbandry is only practiced by a small percentage of the population, Sámi language and culture are inseparably interwoven with the custom.³¹ This is visible in duodji, a form of material culture that resists Western distinctions between art and craftsmanship and gives expression to a way of living together between humans, animals and nature.³² As practical objects often related to handling reindeer, the aesthetic value of duodji, Gunvor Guttorm explains, lies in a thorough understanding of, and respect for, natural materials and their harvesting, with the final item contributing to an optimal relation between user and their environment. In duodji, Sámi environmental knowledge, spirituality and everyday use come together both in the production process and the end result. In contrast to a Kantian aesthetics of 'disinterested pleasure', duodji is marked by decidedly practical requirements and political and environmental ethical values.³³ As Gaski argues, the concept of duodji evolves over time and continues to influence contemporary Sámi art, in which harmony with the more-than-human remains a constant.³⁴

One example of such environmental aesthetics is the video *Manifestations* (2017) by Finnish artist Leena Valkeapää and her Sámi husband Oula A Valkeapää.³⁵ Combining long shots of Oula's surroundings when he goes on his herding journey with a voiceover of observations he sends to Leena through text messages, the video visualises how living with reindeer informs a deeply site-specific knowledge of the



Leena and Oula Valkeapää, still from *Manifestations*, 2017, single HD video, 15 minutes, collection of the artist, photo: Oula Valkeapää

17 Speaking for others connects to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of 'epistemic violence' in which the practice of speaking in the place of another further represses the perspective of those spoken for, or Boaventura de Sousa Santos's 'epistemicide', which refers to the destruction of Indigenous knowledge during colonialism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988, pp 271–313; Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, Routledge, London and New York, 2014.

18 Métis art writer David Garneau explains that white critics of Indigenous art often end up reproducing a colonial gaze, looking for both authenticity and newness and driven by an urge to 'discover' that which has

Arctic. Interweaving interpretations of weather phenomena, the needs of the herd and the health of the climate with contemplations of what an interwoven existence means – asking 'When do I exist?' – the video is set against the looming changes brought about by economic development.³⁶

Reindeer husbandry may now be highly modernised, but the average annual income of a herder is less than half that of a Norwegian industrial worker.³⁷ In a study of the vulnerability of the practice to climate change, biologist Nicholas Tyler and his colleagues describe how reindeer husbandry is part of an intricate socioecological system of human and non-human influences that includes climate change and its effect on foraging plants and the number of predators, sharing pastures with domestic grazers and fluctuating meat prices.³⁸ As herder-artist Johan Turi described in 1910 in *Muitalus Sámiid Birra (An Account of the Sámi)*, categorisations of weather conditions and their impact on the consistency of snow and vegetation are part of the Sámi vocabulary.³⁹ This knowledge also allows herders to keep close track of the local implications of global warming. In the past, herders dealt with the many challenges by moving between pastures and sustaining a high diversity of phenotypes, gender and age within the herd. Freedom of practice and the availability of various migration routes is thus key to coping with climate change.

Whereas before colonisation duodji mainly applied to practical objects suited to nomadic life, the emergence of Scandinavian nation-states had a profound effect on this lifestyle and thus duodji itself was transformed.⁴⁰ As migratory animals, reindeer require sizable areas of untouched land to roam throughout the year, moving between summer and winter pastures for sufficient grazing. Before the rise of nation-states the Sámi were free to migrate across Sápmi.⁴¹ When in 1751 the

- been known in Indigenous cultures for a very long time. David Garneau, 'Can I Get a Witness? Indigenous Art Criticism', in Katya García-Antón, ed, *Sovereign Words: Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism*, OCA Norway/Valiz, Amsterdam, 2018, pp 18–20.
- 19 Cristina Nualart, 'Communicating Difficult Pasts: A Latvian Initiative Explores Artistic Research on Historical Trauma', *Third Text Online*, 7 November 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/3xzfpmkh>, accessed 1 November 2022
- 20 The Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA) selected Sara, along with Swedish Sámi artist Anders Sunna and Finnish Sámi film artist Pauliina Feodoroff to transform the Norwegian Pavilion into the Sápmi Pavilion for the 59th Venice Biennale. The OCA is a driving force behind the visibility of Sámi artists, providing publications, an exhibition programme and funding for SAG and individual artists, writers and curators.
- 21 Hanna Horsberg Hansen, 'Pile o' Sápmi and the Connections Between Art and Politics', *Symmet* 1, 2019, p 93. See also Nualart, 'Communicating Difficult Pasts', op cit. For more elaborate writing on the risk of critical art being appropriated by neoliberal states to further social control, see Jonas Staal, *Post-Propaganda*, Stout/Kramer, Rotterdam, 2009; Josephine Berry, *Art and (Bare) Life: A Biopolitical Inquiry*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2018.
- 22 See eg Walter D Mignolo, 'The Global South and World Dis/Order', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol 67, no 2, 2011, p 165, p 183. As Mignolo explains, 'Global South' has come to replace 'Third World' and is used first national borders were drawn, their movement across these borders was protected, although they were forced to take on national citizenship and their lands were slowly transferred to state control or private ownership. Over the course of the nineteenth century the northern regions became part of nation-states. 'Foreign' Sámi and their herds were often prevented from accessing pastures. Simultaneously, with the growth of national consciousness, Sámi were relegated to the bottom of a cultural hierarchy. Reindeer herding was seen as impeding economic development and therefore inferior to agriculture, in line with John's description of the devaluation of Indigenous approaches to animals as central to animal colonialism. In the first half of the twentieth century new conventions restricted any grazing across borders, which transformed borders into definitive barriers.
- Given the importance of the more-than-human to Sámi aesthetics as a way of life, and the centrality of reindeer in conflicts over access to land, interpretation of the conflict between Sámi and the Scandinavian states requires an interspecies approach. Julie Livingston and Jasbir K Puar use the term 'interspecies' to emphasise relationality between different forms of life, as well as the deeply political impacts that stem from interdependence and shared experience.⁴² Informed by postcolonial critiques of Western definitions of who counts as human, they challenge the cultural construction of species boundaries to advocate for scholarship that does not take the human as its sole point of analysis. According to them, interspecies relations are the often unrecognised basis of political intervention and capitalist exploitation.⁴³ As Joseph Pugliese describes, it is precisely the settler state's exclusion of the interspecies from the political sphere that discredits both Indigenous and more-than-human claims to land.⁴⁴
- Colonisation was not limited to the enclosure of the land, however; it also targeted Sámi culture. This culminated in a policy of Norwegianisation: missionaries forced Sámi to drop their language and religion and assimilate to mainstream Norwegian culture.⁴⁵ Material culture was destroyed or sold to museums and in some cases shamans were put to death.⁴⁶ The use of Sámi languages was prohibited in educational institutions and from the nineteenth century until the 1960s Sámi children were placed in boarding schools, where they learned to renounce their heritage.⁴⁷
- In reaction to this suppression, from the late nineteenth century onwards a Sámi artistic school emerged. Inspired by Western autonomous art, herders Turi (aforementioned, 1854–1936), Nils Nilsson Skum (1872–1951) and later John Savio (1902–1938) combined their skills in duodji with writing and visual art to capture Sámi identity.⁴⁸ Their protest was mostly expressed through a focus on the entanglement of land, humans, animals and spirituality in nomadic reindeer husbandry, which they documented as a more ecologically suitable alternative to settler society.⁴⁹ All three are known for their almost descriptive landscapes with reindeer herds, capturing these multiple levels of entanglement as they manifest themselves to herders, much like the observations of Oula A Valkeapää. Importantly, Sámi art historians agree that the works of these early Sámi artists went further than documentation to preserve their culture, and were already politically motivated.⁵⁰ Svein Aamold details how Turi's work urges the spectator to

to indicate nations underdeveloped by colonialism. Anne Garland Mahler says that the Global South is not a rigid geographical distinction but rather indicates those negatively impacted by capitalist globalisation, and that pockets of Souths exist in the Global North and the other way around. Nevertheless, I argue that the preoccupation with North–South colonialism means that colonialism in the North is often underexposed. Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2018.

23 Subhankar Banerjee, ‘Ought We Not to Establish “Access to Food” as a Species Right?’, *Third Text* 120, vol 27, issue 1, January 2013, pp 33–43. See also Subhankar Banerjee, ed, *Arctic Voices: Resistance at the Tipping Point*, Seven Stories Press, New York, 2013. The phrase ‘more than human’ was coined by ecologist and philosopher David Abram to indicate the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and other species. In doing so, he aimed to decentre anthropocentrism in our perception of the world. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*, Vintage Books, New York, 1997.

24 See eg Susanne Normann, ‘Green Colonialism in the Nordic Context: Exploring Southern Saami Representations of Wind Energy Development’, *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol 49, no 1, 2021, pp 77–94; Reinert, ‘The Skulls and the Dancing Pig’, op cit; Katya García-Antón, Harald Gaski and Gunvor

reflect on the contrast between Sámi ecologies and coloniser approaches to nature as property, and in doing so manifests the right to practise age-old traditions of care.⁵¹

Artistic expression and political solidarity mutually reinforced each other.⁵² During the 1950s Sámi populations across the Nordic region started to organise as one nation, drawing from a pan-Sámi identity.⁵³ Their pressure for recognition was answered in 1969 with the revival of the languages in daily use and their acceptance as an official language.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, discrimination continued and a more structural Sámi rights movement emerged. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Sámi protests against a hydro-electric dam on Norway’s Áltá River, known as the Áltá Action, became a wider struggle for Sámi self-determination against environmental destruction under the motto ‘La Elva leve!’ – ‘Let the river live!’⁵⁵ It gave rise to the aforementioned SAG, who had trained at European art institutions and developed contemporary Sámi art with an explicitly political agenda.⁵⁶ To set this apart from duodji’s connotations with ‘handicraft’, it was given the name *dáidda*, though, arguably, duodji values still strongly inform *dáidda*.⁵⁷ SAG quickly grew to become a transnational solidarity movement, with the established artist and activist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää as one of its leading members.⁵⁸ As Hanna Horsberg Hansen writes, while members had often been raised in boarding schools they took pride in their Sámi heritage.⁵⁹ Inspired by Indigenous anti-colonial movements around the globe, they supplied the Áltá Action with visual representation in a reinvented Sámi style, in so doing contributing to the regeneration of Sámi national consciousness.⁶⁰ Simultaneously, they challenged the exclusion of Sámi art from European art historical canons by building their own institutions and networks.⁶¹

The dam was completed in 1981, but in response to the protests a Sámi Rights Commission was set up, which recommended steps to enable the Sámi to ‘safeguard and develop their language, culture and way of life’.⁶² This phrasing, recorded in the 1987 Sámi Act and the Norwegian Constitution, led to the instalment of the Sámi Parliament in 1989 and to the 1992 Sámi Language Act. With this Act, the state vowed not only to protect Sámi from discrimination but to also undertake positive measures for the survival of Sámi culture.⁶³ Land rights, however, remained a moot point, and again reindeer were the central pawn. Following concerns about efficient land use, in 1978 the government had adopted a Reindeering Act aimed at protecting sustainable reindeer husbandry, but mostly by reducing herd sizes.⁶⁴ Its limited effect inspired the 2007 Act.

As SAG’s presence at documenta 14 shows and as is reinforced by the 2020 publication *Let the River Flow: An Indigenous Uprising and its Legacy in Art, Ecology and Politics*, which combines participant testimonies, contemporary Sámi voices and global networks of Indigenous solidarity, Áltá Action’s call for self-determination is far from outdated.⁶⁵ Indeed, with cultural – read ‘human’ – rights now protected, the ecological aspect of colonialism today has only intensified. This is communicated throughout Sápmi by artists such as the Finnish-Norwegian artist-led Ellos Deatnu! (Long Live Deatnu!) movement, which since 2017 has campaigned against salmon fishing regulations and for autonomy in the Deatnu River area.⁶⁶ In her recently published doctoral thesis, Sámi studies scholar Moa Sandström affirms the central role of Sámi artists in decolonial activism, or what she calls ‘artivism’.⁶⁷



Anders Sunna, *Colonialism Inc.*, 2016, mixed media, (dimensions unknown), photo: Michiel Brouwer

Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow: An Indigenous Uprising and Its Legacy in Art, Ecology and Politics*, Office for Contemporary Art Norway/Valiz, Amsterdam, 2020; Moa Sandström, 'Decolonising Artivism in Contemporary Sápmi/ Dekoloniseringskonst: Artivism i 2010-talets Sápmi', doctoral thesis, Umeå University, 2020

25 Harald Gaski, 'Indigenous Aesthetics: Add Context to Context', in Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal and Ulla Angkjaer Jørgensen, eds, *Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, 2017, pp 187–189

26 Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Verso, London, 2019, p 273. This corresponds to Indigenous scholars' writing on sovereignty, some examples of which are: Sharon H Venne, 'What Is the Meaning of Sovereignty?', M Gouldhawke, 1998, <https://mgouldhawke.wordpress.com/2020/08/02/what-is->

Sandström reads Anders Sunna's *Colonialism Inc* (2016) as illustrative of the gravity of the work of Sámi activist artists.⁶⁸ From a Swedish Sámi reindeer herding family himself, Sunna details the lack of rights of herders and the impact of national borders. Her painting shows four hollow-faced and disproportionately large central figures sitting around a table. They wear a red band on their upper arm, with the national arms of Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia where a swastika would have been. One of the state figures dangles a group of Sámi and reindeer over a black hole, their small size reflecting the distribution of power in the Arctic. Another figure paints a red border on a map, entrapping a reindeer herd. *Colonialism Inc* makes tangible the connections between state interventions and capitalism, as demonstrated by the 'Inc' of 'Incorporated'. The comparison between the Scandinavian states and Nazism, combined with the depiction of reindeer and herders as skeletons and her interpretation of the Sámi faces on the right as symbolising a mass grave, make Sunna's work legible as a clear accusation of cultural genocide as an interspecies project.

Let us now turn to ongoing animal colonialism in the Norwegian context, and tease out how Sara's work pushes a contemporary understanding of interspecies colonialism.

'There Is No Post Colonial': Recognition, Green Colonialism and Performed Sovereignty

If *Pile o' Sápmi Supreme* could be visually pleasing in the way that skulls or taxidermy inspire reflection on mortality, then Sara's pile of freshly severed reindeer heads in Tana Bru is an inescapable statement about

the-meaning-of-sovereignty-sharon-h-venne-1998/, accessed 27 September 2021; Taiaiake Alfred, 'From Sovereignty to Freedom: Towards an Indigenous Political Discourse', *Indigenous Affairs*, vol 3, no 1, 2001, pp 22–34; Vanessa Watts, 'Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!)', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol 2, no 1, 2013, pp 27–28; Marcia Langton, 'Sovereignty: 65,000 Years of Ancestral Links to Land', *Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements*, 2020, <https://www.atns.net.au/understanding-sovereignty>, accessed 1 September 2022

27 Associated Press, 'Norway Orders Reindeer Slaughter Days before Christmas', *The Telegraph*, 21 December 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/12/21/norway-orders-reindeer-slaughter-days-christmas/>, accessed 1 September 2022

28 For the final report arguing in favour of the Sámi herders see David R Boyd, 'Norway: End of Mission Statement', UN Commission of Human Rights, 23 September 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/mwc3jvtv>, accessed 1 November 2022.

29 Tove Rømo Grande, 'The Norwegian Government Ordered Massive Slaughters of Reindeer: Indigenous Sami Reindeer Herders Disagreed but Were Not Heard', *Sciencenorway.no*, 25 February 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/5btxdtvd>, accessed 1 November 2022

30 'The Indigenous World 2021: Sápmi', International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 18 March 2021, <https://www.iwgia.org/en/sapmi/4248-iw-2021-sapmi.html>, accessed 1 September 2022

murder. With flesh and fur still on, eyes closed and carefully arranged, the frost mitigating the smell of decay, the reindeer are martyrs to Norwegian nationalism. The national flag is planted on top as if claiming territory, demanding that we ask whose land is being taken right this moment, and at what cost. Reindeer become synonymous with Sámi land and culture: there is no separation between animals, humans and nature.

Prompted by Sara's statement that 'there is no post colonial', I look to Glen Coulthard's writing to demonstrate that Norwegian decolonisation today remains incomplete. A reading of the 2007 Act shows that sustainability arguments in reality veil further exploitation. Drawing from Félix Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm, in which artistic expression is capable of rupturing commonly accepted interpretations of reality, and producing new understandings of it by crystallising how political, cultural, environmental and economic spheres interact, I interpret Sara's work as articulating how various colonial interests come together in the reindeer culls.⁶⁹ 'Articulating', here, I understand as being a way of making visible that comprises both research and witnessing. As such, *Pile o'Sápmi* allows for a teasing out of how this colonialism functions in an interspecies context, the violence of which I interpret as a performance of colonial sovereignty.

In *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014), Coulthard critiques Charles Taylor's 'politics of recognition' by drawing from the Canadian settler colonial context.⁷⁰ According to Taylor, public recognition of the cultural identity of the formerly colonised as equal is essential to reconciliation.⁷¹ Coulthard, however, shows that recognition by the state in practice reproduces colonial power relations.⁷² He explains that Taylor's argument hinges on three crucial misinterpretations of the writing of Frantz Fanon, who initially formulated the importance of recognition for collective emancipation from the coloniser.⁷³ First, Coulthard emphasises the power dynamic in granting recognition, insisting that inclusion in the settler state holds no real liberation for the colonised. Second, the predominantly cultural focus of recognition politics diverts from the economic dimensions of colonialism, allowing exploitation to persist. Third, within colonialism there is no mutual reciprocity. Recognition serves to make Indigenous peoples identify with the settler state, but the state itself needs only 'land, labour and resources' from them.⁷⁴ Therefore, the state, courts and policy makers limit recognition to the cultural context in which the colonial power dynamic itself is not at risk, and ostensible decolonisation thus masks ongoing encroachment.

Corresponding to Taylor's vision of reconciliation, shortly after the aforementioned Acts linguists such as David Corson and Ole Henrik Magga (Norwegian Sámi) praised the Norwegian policy of recognition as an exemplar to other settler colonial nations.⁷⁵ However, a few decades later it is visible that all three of Coulthard's critiques apply. In addition to the inevitable power dynamic of the Norwegian state granting recognition within settler society, this recognition remains limited to the cultural. As noted before, the Acts focus on the preservation of language, culture and way of life. The protection of political or economic autonomy is cunningly left open. Revealingly, the Sámi Parliament is an advisory body without the right to veto and is financially dependent on the state, rendering its existence largely symbolic.⁷⁶ The 2007 Act, which does cover economic sustainability, claims to protect 'ecologically, economi-

- 31 See Salmi and Heino, 'Tangled Worlds', op cit; Eva Maria Fjellheim, 'Honourable Court: "Baajh vaeride arrodh! Let the Mountains Live!"', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, p 120
- 32 I base this description of duodji, the exact definition of which is a point of debate, on Gunvor Guttorm, 'The Power of Natural Materials and Environments in Contemporary Duodji', in Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal and Ulla Angkjaer Jørgensen, eds, *Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, 2017, pp 163–177. See also Irene Snarby, 'Jodi lea buoret go oru: Better in Motion Than at Rest. Iver Jåks (1932–2007)', in García-Antón, ed, *Sovereign Words*, op cit, pp 64–65.
- 33 Svein Aamold, 'Unstable Categories of Art and People', in Aamold, Haugdal and Angkjaer Jørgensen, eds, *Sámi Art and Aesthetics*, op cit, pp 15–16; Gaski, 'Indigenous Aesthetics', op cit
- 34 Some duodji practitioners would object to the extension of the term *duodji* to contemporary art forms, but I go with Gaski's argument that duodji does not exist in a vacuum but is responsive to context and thus develops over time. See Gaski, 'Indigenous Aesthetics', op cit, p 188. Guttorm also distinguishes between duodji as a concrete handicraft product, and duodji as an idea that lives on more flexibly, for instance in Sara's work. Gunvor Guttorm, 'Duodji and Its Stories', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, p 257.
- 35 Taru Elfving, 'Leena Valkeapää & Oula A Valkeapää: "Manifestations"',

cally and culturally sustainable reindeer husbandry... for the benefit of the population conducting reindeer husbandry itself and the society in general'.⁷⁷ Reactions to the 2013 cull decree show that, in reality, this protection leaves much to be desired. Let us trace how *Pile o'Sápmi* articulates the government's interpretation of sustainability as a further erosion of the herder's independence while being carefully designed not to compromise the state's interests in land, labour and resources.

Sara's meticulous translation and printout of the Act for documenta 14 demands attention to the details of exactly how conservation policy impacts much more than just reindeer. Although on paper reindeer husbandry is protected, in reality the Act makes herders more vulnerable. It is a top-down structure, transferring all authority to the government, which assumes the right to decide on the right of pasture, the size of the herd and the right to own reindeer.⁷⁸ This right is reserved only for experienced herders deemed of 'authentic' Sámi descent.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the phrasing covers the interests of both herders and the state, which entails an inherent clash of ecologies: at the root of the problem between the Sámi and Scandinavian states is an entirely different conceptualisation of what a sustainable ecosystem looks like.⁸⁰ Kathrine Ivsett Johnsen and colleagues write that 'because of an asymmetrical power relation between Sámi ontology and the dominant "modern" ontology, the former is suppressed by the latter'.⁸¹ Indeed, as Tyler and colleagues demonstrate, the government's profit-driven interpretation of 'sustainability' in practice leads to a heightened vulnerability of reindeer husbandry to environmental and human infringements.⁸² By reducing the size of herds and their pastures and eliminating 'non-productive' males or elderly animals in the cause of more efficient meat production, Sámi strategies for coping with the harsh environment are destabilised: it leads to social imbalance, problematic access to food as strong males are essential for breaking ice or snow, lack of protection from predators and a homogeneous gene pool that increases the herd's susceptibility to disease.

Not only is authority transferred as are neoliberal standards imposed; the Act shows little commitment to preserving husbandry as a viable livelihood. Conservation priorities to bring predators back to their original numbers in spite of habitat loss means that the majority of calves perish.⁸³ And though the Act grants the right to financial compensation, the requirement to provide the carcass for inspection first is barely realistic.⁸⁴ Tellingly, the Act also fails to mention meat prices. Despite an official agreement between herders and the government, in reality the price is dictated by an oligopoly of slaughterhouses.⁸⁵ Just like bison hunting in North America, gradual appropriation of Indigenous animal 'resources' leads to precarity, and eventually to assimilation. While the Sámi explain the growth of their herds as a strategy of resilience, the Norwegian state frames it as a 'tragedy of the commons' in which herders act out of individualism and greed.⁸⁶ This is accompanied by a revival of stereotypes of the 'primitive' Sámi as ignorant about the environment, sanctioning governmental intervention even though the Sámi have lived sustainably for centuries.⁸⁷ As Tor A Benjaminsen and colleagues describe, herders' knowledge of the complex socioecological system of which they are a part is overruled by a colonial paradigm in which Indigenous peoples' knowledge is regarded as inferior and 'non-scientific' as opposed to selective research that supports the opening up of resources.⁸⁸

Vdrome, <https://www.vdrome.org/lena-oula-valkeapaa>, accessed 27 September 2021

- 36 Leena Valkeapää, 'When Do I Exist', *Art Journal Open*, http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?page_id=10951, accessed 27 September 2021
- 37 Nicholas Tyler et al, 'Saami Reindeer Pastoralism under Climate Change: Applying a Generalized Framework for Vulnerability Studies to a Sub-Arctic Social-Ecological System', *Global Environmental Change*, vol 17, no 2, 2007, p 192
- 38 Ibid, pp 191–193
- 39 Johan Turi, *An Account of the Sámi* [1910], Thomas A DuBois, trans and ed, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2011, available online at T A DuBois, <http://www.tadubois.com/varying-course-materials/Muitalus-translation-without-articles.pdf>, accessed 1 September 2022. See also David Corson, 'Norway's "Sámi Language Act": Emancipatory Implications for the World's Aboriginal Peoples', *Language in Society*, vol 24, no 4, December 1995, p 496
- 40 Guttorm, 'The Power of Natural', op cit, p 164
- 41 Patrik Lantto, 'Borders, Citizenship and Change: The Case of the Sami People, 1751–2008', *Citizenship Studies*, vol 14, no 5, 2010, pp 545–547
- 42 Julie Livingston and Jasbir K Puar, 'Interspecies', *Social Text*, vol 29, no 1, 2011, p 3
- 43 Ibid, p 4
- 44 Joseph Pugliese, *Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2020, p 5
- 45 Ole Henryk Magga, 'The Sámi Language Act', in Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, eds, *Linguistic Human Rights:*

Sara's reference to the 'pile of bones' photograph invigorates the relation between culls and the loss of Indigenous independence, but it also adds another layer: by corroding self-determination and forcing Sámi into the settler economy of debt and credit, the settler state gains access to natural resources just as Coulthard predicts. This corresponds to David Harvey's notion of 'accumulation by dispossession', the history of which is deeply entangled in colonialism.⁸⁹ In *Let the River Flow*, historian Ivar Bjørklund describes how contemporary Norwegian colonialism is mainly propounded through narratives of sustainable development and conservation, in which intrusions on husbandry or fishing rights are backed by liberal growth policies.⁹⁰ Aili Keskitalo, a former Norwegian Sámi Parliament president, calls this 'green colonialism'.⁹¹ Indeed, the government's concern with sustainability appears to be an empty gesture. According to herders, overgrazing is a minor problem that can be attributed to specific herders and their herds, and can be solved on a small scale.⁹² Therefore it should not lead to the large culls it becomes the pretext for. In fact, grazing is proven to prevent thawing of the permafrost and thus has a mitigating effect on global warming.⁹³ The motivation behind posing reindeer as an environmental hazard can be found in the Act itself: here it states that the number of reindeer is determined on the basis of available grazing resources, leaving overgrazing as the only legitimate basis for culls.⁹⁴

The notion of overgrazing is thus deployed to clear land for resource extraction. In the last fifty years over a quarter of reindeer habitat has been lost to profit-yielding projects such as wind farms, tourist cabins, dams, roads and power lines, privatisation and domestic grazers, and losses are expected to increase at a faster rate.⁹⁵ Since 2013, the same year as the decision to cull reindeer, the government has offered financial encouragements to northern municipalities to facilitate mineral extraction (the bulk of Norwegian minerals is believed to be located in the north of the country).⁹⁶ Mining is meant to take place in peaceful coexistence with the environment and Sámi community, but herders contradict this claim, insisting that the mines and their infrastructure will cut off migration routes and disturb calving grounds.⁹⁷ The fact that reindeer are seen as unsustainable while investments in ecologically destructive infrastructure and resource extraction are pursued, indicates that environmental concerns have become the justification for the appropriation of land for exploitation of its valuable resources, in short: green colonialism.

Pointing to Norwegian animal colonialism amid incomplete recognition, partial conservation policy, recycled colonial stereotypes and land grabbing, however, does not capture the full extent of *Pile o'Sápmi*. Hugo Reinert describes the shock Sara's initial pile of bones caused: 'it tore open the asphyxiating mildness of national debates, manifesting in a torrent what the quiet, soft-spoken colonialism of the north – patient as it is, understated, polite, and bureaucratic – kept under wraps'.⁹⁸ The dead bodies stacked in triangle composition and the flag waving on top, in uncanny likeness to Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819), convey despair, starvation, a call for support.

Pile o'Sápmi's affective force thus inserts emotion into a debate that is denied all but an economic lens. Since their initial protest performances outside court houses and at documenta 14, *Pile o'Sápmi*'s bones have continued to spiral around the artworld. Skulls reappeared in smaller



Máret Anne Sara, *Loaded – Keep Hitting our Jaws*, 2019, reindeer jaws, photo credits: Máret Anne Sara



Máret Anne Sara, *Shouts from the Shit Flood*, 2016, mixed media, photo credits: Máret Anne Sara



Máret Anne Sara, *Snared/ Gielastuvvon*, 2018, reindeer lassoes, photo: Libor Galia

Overcoming Linguistic Discrimination, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1998, p 220

- 46 Corson, 'Norway's "Sámi Language Act"', op cit, p 495
- 47 Andrea Smith, *Indigenous Peoples and Boarding Schools: A Comparative Study*, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Eighth Session, New York, 2009, pp 19–21, available online at United Nations, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/E_C_19_2009_crp1.pdf, accessed 1 September 2022
- 48 Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja, 'Early Sámi Visual Artists: Western Fine Art Meets Sámi Culture', *Barents Studies: Peoples, Economies and Politics*, vol 1, no 1, 2014, pp 11–40. Savio came from a herding family but never practiced husbandry due to health issues.
- 49 Ibid. See Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja, 'Traditional Sámi Culture and the Colonial Past as the Basis for Sámi Contemporary Art', and Svein Aamold, 'Representing the Hidden and the Perceptible', in Aamold, Haugdal and Angkjaer Jørgensen, eds, *Sámi Art and Aesthetics*, op cit, pp 99–121 and pp 69–97 respectively
- 50 Hautala-Hirvioja, 'Early Sámi Visual Artists', op cit, pp 36–37; Katya García-Antón, 'Speaking Earth to a World in Reverse', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, p 228
- 51 Aamold, 'Representing the Hidden', op cit, p 80
- 52 Hautala-Hirvioja, 'Early Sámi Visual Artists', op cit, p 37
- 53 Lantto, 'Borders, Citizenship', op cit, p 551
- 54 Corson, 'Norway's "Sámi Language Act"', op cit, pp 499–500. Following the Sámi Language Act 1992, the Sámi language is now

flags and street installations and at protest marches. In 2019 Sara arranged leftover jawbones as a collar in *Loaded – Keep Hitting our Jaws*. These bones as bodily attire speak to previous, more haunting works, such as *Shouts from the Shit Flood* (2016), in which a female figure is almost consumed by a skirt of reindeer skulls, pointing jaws at her head like guns: visualised is the psychological burden of continued colonial oppression, embodied like a weight on one's shoulders.⁹⁹ *Gielastuvvon (Snared)* (2018), in which reindeer lassoes hang suspended like a noose, connects the exceptional number of suicides among young Sámi herders with the endless legal struggle over reindeer:¹⁰⁰ the lassoes symbolise the trap, rather than protection, that is Norwegian law to the Sámi.

Speaking not only about politics but also about the affective force of reindeer culls, *Pile o'Sápmi* opens up discussion of another purpose of the violence: the psychological repercussions of the culls are not a secondary effect of Norwegian colonisation, they are a central feature. When read in combination with Blom Hansen and Stepputat's writing on colonial sovereignty, Sara's work insightfully shows how Norwegian land grabbing goes deeper than economic greed and is a performance of sovereignty over the Sámi. Blom Hansen and Stepputat explain that sovereignty is the result of demonstrating the capacity to commit excessive violence with impunity and is therefore performative.¹⁰¹ Whereas sovereignty is conventionally understood as exercised for recognition by other states, they argue that it is also inherently unstable within the state. The internal sovereignty of the state is achieved by inflicting violence upon human bodies and local communities that form a 'state of exception', as a disciplinary demonstration to render all citizens governable subjects.¹⁰² According to Blom Hansen and Stepputat, in the colonial context sovereignty is especially precarious and based on the short-term construction of exploitable populations, therefore relying on even more excessively violent displays of power.

Inspired by how *Pile o'Sápmi* communicates the haunting quality of reindeer culling, I suggest that the sovereignty of the state in the Norwegian context is performed by inflicting violence not only on the human body but also on the animal body on which this human body depends. After all, the animal body forms the true state of exception today, as it can be non-criminally put to death.¹⁰³

Sara's work makes palpable a sense that the piles of bones produced by government policy function as symbolic demonstrations of power over the lives of Indigenous peoples. Reading bison slaughter from an Indigenous epistemological perspective in which bison are attributed personhood and are part of society allows Hubbard to emphasise the psychological trauma of the loss of animals for Plains Indigenous peoples, who experienced this as a form of genocide.¹⁰⁴ In the case of the Sámi and reindeer, the large numbers of animals culled at the hands of the settler nation become a proxy for the human body. What results is a message that the state is not only not there for the Sámi, but is free to inflict harm with impunity. In light of the historical effects of bison killings in North America, these piles of bones demonstrate that the state can easily erase Sámi culture. By referencing the for-profit killing of animals on which Indigenous communities depend through the pile of bones photograph, Sara thus establishes a connection between the Sámi and global Indigenous struggles for land, recognition and preservation of cultural identity – importantly, showing how the animal body can be an arena for colonial politics.

taught at different Norwegian universities and the Norwegian policy of cultural recognition is recommended by several scholars as an example to other settler colonial nations.

- 55 Hanna Horsberg Hansen, 'Sámi Artist Group 1978–1983: Otherness or Avant-Garde?', in Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson, eds, *Decentering the Avant-Garde*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York, 2014, p 256; Katya García-Antón, Harald Gaski and Gunvor Guttorm, 'Introduction', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, p 8
- 56 Horsberg Hansen, 'Sámi Artist Group 1978–1983', op cit. SAG is also known as the Máze Group (Mázejoavku) after the place where it was founded in 1978. It was disbanded in the 1980s, but around Documenta 14 the Office of Contemporary Art in Norway and the Sámi Parliament supported members to revive it. See 'Indigenous Residency: A Gathering in Máze to Relaunch the Mázejoavku Housing and Studios', OCA Norway, 9 May 2017, <https://www.oca.no/press/releases/9576/a-gathering-in-maze-to-relaunch-the-mazejoavku-housing-and-studios?lang=en>, accessed 1 September 2022.
- 57 Irene Snarby, 'The Sculpture of Iver Jáks and the Question of Sámi Aesthetics', in Aamold, Haugdal and Angkjær Jørgensen, eds, *Sámi Art and Aesthetics*, op cit, p 122. This connotation of handicraft is why Sámi artistic expression was excluded from art historical canons and included in ethnographic discourses. See Horsberg Hansen, 'Sámi Artist Group 1978–1983', op cit.
- 58 Valkeapää was Oula A Valkeapää's uncle. For an overview of his political

Locating Decoloniality in Interspecies Ecologies

Pile o'Sápmi demonstrates that, for the state, sustainability more often means death rather than life, both for the reindeer and for Sámi culture. However, it also offers a glimpse beyond colonial violence and the depletion of complex ecosystems. Aligning with both Cusicanqui's and John's notion of decolonisation, doing decoloniality means not only unveiling contemporary forms of colonialism but also practising decolonial ways of being. In this last section I read Sara's work in conversation with Sámi ecological aesthetics and its implementation in activist art. This allows for an understanding of *Pile o'Sápmi* as going beyond articulating colonialism: it stages a countering force to this spectacle of sovereignty, but also redefines sovereignty by upholding an embedded interspecies ecology and as such escapes the violence it bears witness to.

In Oslo, *Pile o'Sápmi Supreme* was a veil hanging in front of the court as if unveiling what the state really is: a colonising power.¹⁰⁵ The veil simultaneously veils and unveils, in the same way the skulls both mask and unmask in a continuous dance of mockery. Looking closely, a subtle colour difference is visible, two bands of light and slightly darker skulls running vertically in allusion to the Sámi flag. On the one hand, then, the flag reads as a reference to the entangled loss of reindeer and Sámi identity, like Sunna's work. Simultaneously, though, the frayed edges, the skulls and the work's eerie presence evoke a pirate flag, taunting the state by turning up at institutions meant to convey justice and benevolence. Continuously reassembling at public demonstrations and at international art platforms, the veil becomes a protest banner and the skulls a trickster figure that the Norwegian state is unable to eliminate. As such, *Pile o'Sápmi Supreme* undercuts the performance of sovereignty, challenging Norway's self-portrayal as a benign welfare state with recognition and sustainability as its priority.

Sandström details that Sámi activist art not only insists on Sámi perspectives as a point of departure, hence destabilising national narratives, but also performs self-determination.¹⁰⁶ Like the herder extending a lasso towards the state figures in Sunna's *Colonialism Inc*, so Sara creates a temporarily decolonised space by realising a moment in which the Sámi set the terms. According to Sandström, this makes Sámi protest art central to the decolonial practice of actualising that which exists outside of colonial power. But Sara offers something more than political retort. *Pile o'Sápmi* is easily read as another instrumentalisation of animals for artistic purposes, where reindeer become the material resource for political power play or pose as metaphor for human conditions. However, the centrality of duodji values to Sámi culture and ecological approaches, reflected in Sámi art throughout its anti-colonial history, indicates that more is at stake. Whether or not the work of a contemporary artist can be a form of duodji remains a point of discussion, even for Sámi experts.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, in at least three aspects Sara's work can be read as a continuation and reinvention of the site-specific approach to animals, the Arctic environment and human agents that is found throughout Sámi art history.

Firstly, Sara draws from Sámi visual language, for instance through wearing traditional Sámi clothing or the *gákti*, which is also a form of duodji. On the occasion of the protests in Oslo, she wore the *gákti*

and artistic significance, see Harald Gaski, 'Nils-Aslak Valkeapää: A Powerful Poetic Manifestation', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, pp 205–215.

- 59 Horsberg Hansen, 'Sámi Artist Group 1978–1983', op cit
- 60 For an overview of their protest art surrounding the Áltá Action, see Magne Ove Varsi, 'The Áltá Action in Images', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, pp 57–84.
- 61 García-Antón connects this practice of centring Indigeneity to Cusicanqui's tending towards decolonial world-building. García-Antón, 'Speaking Earth to a World in Reverse', op cit, p 249
- 62 Magga, 'The Sámi Language Act', op cit, p 223
- 63 Ibid, p 220
- 64 Ivsett Johnsen, 'The Paradox of Reindeer Pasture Management', op cit
- 65 García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, 'Introduction', op cit, p 9
- 66 Aslak Holmberg, 'Ellos Deatnu! – Long Live the River Deatnu! Indigenous Sámi People's Struggle for Self-Determination', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, pp 139–152. Ellos Deatnu! is led by Niilas Holmberg, Outi Pieski and Jenni Laiti.
- 67 Sandström, 'Decolonising Artivism', op cit
- 68 Ibid, pp 247–249
- 69 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, trans, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indianapolis, 1995, pp 18–22, pp 90–92. Guattari's definition of aesthetics as not just art or that which is aesthetically pleasing, but as both a mode of being in

inside out, which traditionally expresses indignation.¹⁰⁸ The lasso or *suohpan*, which she used in *Gielastuvvon*, is an important tool of reindeer herders, a knot tying together the various facets of the relationship between herder and reindeer, and of existence in the Arctic: Sara writes that 'the *suohpan* is a tool for capturing, rescuing, playing, improving the skills or even to kill'.¹⁰⁹ The flag in *Pile o'Sápmi Supreme* is a direct continuation of SAG in its heyday, its first unofficial design made by the aforementioned Synnøve Persen. When compared with the tassled shawls worn by Sámi women, the veil of skulls is invested with another layer of meaning, a layering of layered reality itself.

Second, Sara's process of artistic production is informed by duodji values. Her installations display meticulous arrangement, reusing the skulls over and over again.¹¹⁰ Sara invests a deep sense of care in her sourcing and use of materials, reclaiming the heads from industrial slaughter, attentively wiping off the snow at the Tana Bru court and afterwards cleaning the skulls with great care for use in other works.¹¹¹ The way in which all parts of the reindeer are used and reused in different installations is similar to duodji values of craftsmanship, responsible handling and prolonged use, as explained by Guttorm and Irene Snarby.

Third, Sara's focus on reindeer can be linked to artists like Turi, Skum or Savio, whose animal-filled landscapes symbolise a spiritual and reciprocal relationship to the environment, in line with Gaski's definition of aesthetic value as arising from a holistic approach to life. Sara explains that her art stands in relation to traditional knowledge, like stories of the *ulddát*, underworld people who herd reindeer and share the land and water with the Sámi.¹¹² Their presence inspires ecological responsibility from an understanding that one's actions will impact unknown others. In Sara's words, the pile at Tana Bru and the skulls in *Pile o'Sápmi Supreme* communicate a 'spirit and energy of land, animals and life'.¹¹³ This corresponds to Sámi ecologies in which reindeer are interspecies companions pivotal for survival and are also attributed personhood and spiritual significance.¹¹⁴ In contrast to the pile of bones photograph, the reindeer in *Pile o'Sápmi* are more than a heap of bones or slaughter residue; they are a connector, a guide between two worlds – of Sámi and European audiences, the tangible and the spiritual, the past and the future – making Sámi interspecies ecologies present where they are no longer 'meant' to be. In the end, for the Sámi, reindeer have always been more than a material resource.

It is exactly in this practice of upholding decolonial ecologies that Azoulay locates a form of sovereignty that is opposed to the imperial sovereignty of the state. This worldly sovereignty comprises the various site-specific ways of being, often Indigenous, that are not identical but are translatable across continents as the freedom to practice responsibility for one's surroundings among more-than-human structures of existence. Their power lies not in domination but in resisting colonial ecologies of extraction and destruction. In response to animal colonialism, John writes that survival, resistance and healing lies in regenerating those human–animal relationships and frameworks targeted by it.¹¹⁵ Sara's work makes clear that also in Norway, decolonisation cannot take place without listening to the Sámi as ecological experts, and recognising reindeer as an important agent linking cultural, economic, political and environmental domination and resilience.

the world and of artistic expression as visualising and potentially altering this by affecting our perception, overlaps to a certain extent with Sámi approaches to material culture and ecology.

- 70 Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2014
- 71 Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in Amy Gutmann, ed, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994
- 72 Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, op cit, p 25
- 73 Ibid, pp 33–42; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1963], R Philcox, trans, Grove Press, New York, 2004
- 74 Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, op cit, p 40
- 75 See eg Corson, 'Norway's "Sámi Language Act"', op cit; Magga, 'The Sámi Language Act,' op cit
- 76 García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, 'Introduction', op cit, p 12
- 77 See chapter 1, section 1 of the Reindeer Husbandry Act, op cit
- 78 Ibid, chapter 5, section 32
- 79 For an elaboration on the condition of 'authenticity' for recognition, see Elizabeth A Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2002.
- 80 Tor A Benjaminsen et al, 'Misreading the Arctic Landscape: A Political Ecology of Reindeer, Carrying Capacities, and Overstocking in Finnmark, Norway', *Norwegian Journal of Geography*, vol 69, no 4, 2015, pp 219–229; Law and Joks, 'Indigeneity, Science, and

Conclusion

Inspired by *Pile o'Sápmi*'s insistence on the centrality of reindeer, I have mobilised John's concept of animal colonialism to trace the Sámi's long colonial history. This interspecies lens allows us to read Sara's work as simultaneously doing two things. First, her project presents a comprehensive critique of how cultural, economic and political colonialism have historically converged in intrusions into the interdependence between the Sámi and reindeer. Her installations effectively demonstrate that today these intrusions are escalating in forced culls which affect Sámi livelihoods, their haunting violence functioning as a performance of sovereignty over those allegedly protected by Indigenous rights. Combining Sámi critiques with broader Indigenous writing on decolonisation, and alongside a close reading of state reindeer policy, I have shown that the Norwegian policy of post-colonial recognition is indeed focused mainly on the cultural while it continues to transfer decisive power and economic privilege to the state. Sara's work thus unmasks the government's concern for the protection of the environment from reindeer as a hollow legitimisation for the appropriation of land.

Second, and this is where art as activism is uniquely pertinent, *Pile o'Sápmi* refuses to be determined by the settler state. Through appropriations of public space, picking at the edges of Norway's carefully woven reputation, Sara performs a political exterior, creating Sandström's decolonial moments, which persist beyond the totality of colonial power. In turning to a reflection of duodji's ecological aesthetics in Sámi artistic expression, it is possible to appreciate *Pile o'Sápmi* as doing Cusicanqui's practical work of upholding decolonial worlds, carefully tending to the sovereignty that exists in ecologies of entanglement in a moment where climate crisis becomes a new legitimisation for green colonialism.

On a broader level, this article demonstrates that also beyond its original locality, John's move to decentre the human in our understanding of colonialism and decolonisation holds an important challenge for postcolonial studies.¹¹⁶ It illuminates a larger blind spot concerning colonialism as an interspecies project, which often persists in situations that otherwise go unseen. Moreover, attention to this site-specific conflict provides opportunities to rethink the value of artistic expression, by bringing Cusicanqui's notion of decolonial work to bear on a Sámi artistic activism that both articulates Scandinavian colonialism and materialises a world outside it. Likewise, in response to hollow neoliberal recognition, Coulthard argues that contemporary forces of colonisation and exploitation need to be confronted by direct action and the resurgence of cultural traditions as alternatives to the capitalist settler colonial state, for which networks of resistance and solidarity need to be established.¹¹⁷ This is where I propose a reading of the emerging Sámi presence in the international artworld as an opportunity for both building networks among subpolar Indigenous peoples and exerting political pressure. But most importantly, *Pile o'Sápmi*'s power lies in articulating intricate interspecies ecologies that are positioned as more liveable options for relating to animals and, by extension, the environment.

- Difference', op cit; Ivsett Johnsen, Svein Mathiesen and Inger Marie Gaup Eira, 'Sámi Reindeer Governance in Norway as Competing Knowledge Systems: A Participatory Study', *Ecology and Society*, vol 22, no 4, 2017, pp 424–447
- 81 Johnsen et al, 'Sámi Reindeer Governance', op cit
- 82 Tyler et al, 'Saami Reindeer Pastoralism', op cit, p 198
- 83 Ibid, p 199
- 84 Ibid, p 200. See chapter 1, section 4 of the Reindeer Husbandry Act, op cit. If the carcass is even found, it is often not possible or economic to collect and transport it from the remote pastures.
- 85 Tyler et al, 'Saami Reindeer Pastoralism', op cit, p 201. Ivsett Johnsen, 'The Paradox of Reindeer Pasture Management', op cit. Previous laws forbidding traditional Sámi-owned slaughterhouses means that they are dependent on these slaughterhouses. See also Ivsett Johnsen, 'The Paradox of Reindeer Pasture Management', op cit.
- 86 Ivsett Johnsen, 'The Paradox of Reindeer Pasture Management', op cit
- 87 Benjaminsen et al, 'Misreading the Arctic Landscape', op cit. The use of colonial stereotypes to support green colonialism is discussed in James Fairhead, Melissa Leach and Ian Scoones, 'Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature?', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol 39, no 2, 2012, pp 251–252.
- 88 This situation is described very succinctly, and the reductive science of the state unpacked, by Benjaminsen et al, 'Misreading the Arctic Landscape', op cit. Several scholars delineate how global capitalism and its colonial excesses come with a monoculture of scientific discourse. See Fairhead et al, 'Green Grabbing,' op cit; Vandana Shiva, 'Biodiversity, Intellectual Property Rights, and Globalization', and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, João Arriscado Nunes and Maria Paula Meneses, 'Introduction: Opening Up the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference', in Boaventura de Sousa Santos, ed, *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, Verso, London, 2007, pp 272–287 and pp xix–lxii respectively; Mignolo, 'The Global South and World Dis/Order', op cit; and Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2014.
- 89 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p 149
- 90 Ivar Bjørklund, 'The Áltá Action as a Sámi Conflict: Forty Years Later', in García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow*, op cit, pp 48–49. On fishing rights issues, see Law and Joks, 'Indigeneity, Science, and Difference', op cit.
- 91 Saami Council, Tråante Declaration, Trondheim, 2017; García-Antón, Gaski, and Guttorm, 'Introduction', op cit, p 9; Normann, 'Green Colonialism in the Nordic Context', op cit
- 92 Andreas Breivik, 'Forced into Politics', *Kunstkritikk*, 13 December 2017, <http://www.kunstkritikk.com/nyheter/forced-into-politics/>, accessed 1 September 2022
- 93 Preservation of the permafrost keeps greenhouse gases trapped in the soil, prevents local warming of the tundra and has a mitigating effect on global warming by reflecting sunlight back into the atmosphere. See Sari Stark and Henni Yläne, 'Grazing in the Arctic Peatlands: An Unknown Agent in the Global Carbon Budget', *Environmental Research Letters* 10, 2015, pp 1–2; and Mariska te Beest et al, 'Reindeer Grazing Increases Summer Albedo by Reducing Shrub Abundance in Arctic Tundra', *Environmental Research Letters* 11, 2016, p 10.
- 94 See chapter 7, section 60 of the Reindeer Husbandry Act, op cit
- 95 Tyler et al, 'Saami Reindeer Pastoralism under Climate Change', op cit, p 199
- 96 Ivsett Johnsen, 'The Paradox of Reindeer Pasture Management', op cit
- 97 Ibid
- 98 Reinert, 'The Skulls and the Dancing Pig', op cit
- 99 Elizabeth Schippers, 'Art as a Political Tool: An Interview with Máret Anne Sara', Berlin Art Link, 9 June 2020, <https://www.berlinartlink.com/2020/06/09/art-as-a-political-tool-an-interview-with-maret-anna-sara/>, accessed 1 September 2022
- 100 Ibid; Christine Karijord, 'Why Do Indigenous Boys Commit Suicide?', Elisabeth Bergquist, trans, *High North News*, 6 April 2018, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/why-do-indigenous-boys-commit-suicide>, accessed 1 September 2022
- 101 Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, 'Introduction', in Blom Hansen and Stepputat, eds, *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants and States in the Postcolonial World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2005, pp 1–20
- 102 Those who live in a 'state of exception' are seen as outsiders and as a threat to the political community. In the colonial state, they are often the colonised Indigenous peoples. They are represented as less human and therefore vulnerable to excessive, alleged disciplinary violence. See Blom Hansen and Stepputat, 'Introduction', op cit, p 18.
- 103 Lynn Turner, Undine Sellbach and Ron Broglio, *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018, p 4
- 104 As Hubbard writes, the attribution of personhood to non-human beings is central to many Indigenous ontologies. See Salmi and Heino, 'Tangled Worlds', op cit; George E Tinker, 'An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice', in Jace Weaver, ed, *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, p 165; Linda Hogan, 'First People', in Linda Hogan, Deena Metzger and Brenda Paterson, eds, *Intimate Nature: The Bond between Women and Animals*, Fawcett Columbine, New York, 1998, p 12; and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, Peter Skafish, trans, Univocal, Minneapolis, 2014, pp 57–58.
- 105 Reinert, 'The Skulls and the Dancing Pig', op cit
- 106 Sandström, 'Decolonising Artivism', op cit, pp 247–249
- 107 See note 34
- 108 Guttorm, 'Duodji and Its Stories', op cit, p 254
- 109 Sara, 'Gielastuvvon' ('Snared'), We Who Support Jovsset Ante, 2 November 2018, <https://www.whosupportjovssetante.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Gielastuvvon-2018.pdf>, accessed 1 September 2022
- 110 Reinert, 'The Skulls and the Dancing Pig', op cit
- 111 On her social media, Sara writes about her values of reuse and care for animal-sourced materials: 'for Indigenous peoples, animal matter, like everything found in nature, should be consumed and used with respect, bearing in mind the seven generations which are to come after us'. Sara, Instagram, 22 September 2021, https://www.instagram.com/pl/CUIBp_koodP/, accessed 1 September 2022.

- 112 Sara, 'Indigenous Stories, Indigenous to Global Survival', in García-Antón, ed, *Sovereign Words*, op cit, pp 144–145
- 113 Schippers, 'Art as a Political Tool', op cit
- 114 Salmi and Heino, 'Tangled Worlds', op cit, pp 277–278
- 115 Pugliese argues that if war is an inherently biopolitical project of destroying entangled life forms, then defiance exists in small acts of interspecies care after trauma. Pugliese, *Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human*, op cit, pp 203–204.
- 116 Other examples of Indigenous writers pressing for similar interspecies understandings of colonialism are Belcourt, 'Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects', op cit; Hubbard, 'Buffalo Genocide', op cit; LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, op cit; Watts, 'Indigenous Place-Thought', op cit; and Todd, 'Refracting the State', op cit.
- 117 Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, op cit, pp 170–173