



# Territorial narratives: Talking claims in open moments

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Territory  
Narratives  
Mining  
Open moments  
Normative systems  
Land rights

## ABSTRACT

In the rural inland of northern Sweden, three mining projects are making the future of the land uncertain. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, we show how these potential mining interventions create ‘open moments’, turbulent events that destabilizes established claims to land. We analyse how actors such as reindeer herders, indigenous groups, local and national government and mining companies make claims to land, (i.e territorialising it) by drawing on discourses on environmental responsibility, sustainability, indigeneity or growth. By paying attention to language and knowledge production, we show how a multiplicity of actors narrate territory into being, allowing us to go beyond conventional notions of territory as produced ‘from above’ by the state or by counter-territorial movements ‘from below’. By ‘freezing time’ in the unfolding of the open moments we lend all these ‘territorial narratives’ equal space, in order to analyse the connection between actors and their relation to land. This allow us to show connections between what might otherwise be perceived as locked and antagonistic positions, but also how ongoing processes of territorialisation are influenced by and change peoples’ subject positions as the open moment unfolds on the ground.

## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades, mining companies, both national and international, have exerted increasing pressure on rural and indigenous lands in northern Sweden – a pressure encouraged by the Swedish state (Lawrence and Åhrén, 2016). The government’s desire to utilise forests, rivers and minerals in northern Sweden includes Sápmi,<sup>1</sup> the traditional homeland of the indigenous Sami people. These claims to land, which often impinge on local livelihoods, have created an institutional and material landscape of complex ‘legal pluralism’ of sometimes competing ‘normative systems’ (Tamanaha, 2008). Normative systems may be formal such as state legislation, rules that govern the global mining industry or environmental prescriptions or customary such as indigenous rights or local norms that regulate access to land. In studies of three mining projects in Storuman municipality in northern Sweden, we show how a potential mining intervention creates an ‘open moment’ (Lund, 2016) that brings to the surface competing claims to land as actors draw on different but also overlapping normative systems to reconfigure territory and relations to land.

Building on, but also going beyond Lund’s ‘open moment’ that he regards as being brought about by a rupture in existing relations of

power, we analyse what may take place in an open moment and the possible trajectories that can open up. We show how an open moment provides an opportunity to influence the future of land use, as it creates a space where actors can narrate territories into being. The narrators wedge themselves into the opening created by the mining project and mobilise narratives that draw on normative systems underpinned by discourses on environmental responsibility, sustainability, indigeneity or growth in order to ‘territorialise’ land. In particular, we show how a deeper analysis of such a moment in time reveals not only underlying structures and relations to land but importantly, throws light on how past colonial ruptures and present territorial injustices may be renegotiated and more equitable futures forged.

By focussing on people’s narratives in ongoing events, we analyse the constant making of territory that underpins daily life in open moments. We reveal how narratives – both big (and powerful) and small (less heard but nevertheless persistent) order everyday life and relations to land. In our analysis of the narratives in the open moment, we ‘freeze time’ (Arora-Jonsson, 2013:11) that is, we accord all narratives equal space, scrutinising narratives that reveal people’s relations to each other and the land in that moment.

Our focus on narratives as intrinsic to territorial processes allows us

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish part of Sápmi includes almost one third of the nation’s landmass and contain the Sami reindeer pastures. Sápmi also includes territories in Norway, Finland and the Kola peninsula

to bring insights to how stories of belonging and marginality (Ween and Lien, 2017; Arora-Jonsson, 2013) are as important in territorialising land as narratives about mining regions and economic growth (Vela-Almeida, 2018). We show how narrators' identities, along the lines of gender, class, education, ethnicity or 'place belongingness' (Antonsich, 2010), structure an open moment, but also how their subject positions may even change in an open moment.

Thus, by elaborating on this narrative approach to territory, we strengthen and deepen thinking on the making of territory in two important ways. Firstly, through our attention to narratives that surface in an open moment, we bring attention to a multiplicity of territorialisers, both dominant actors such as the state but also the less visible territorial processes involving peoples' every-day lives and their relation to land and place. We argue for an approach that goes beyond a state-centric 'from above' or counter/re-territorializing 'from below' approaches to the production of territory that opens up novel insights into how territory is produced and layered. Secondly, attention to a multiplicity of narratives bring insights into how narratives can intersect and cut across differences of what otherwise seem like entrenched and antagonistic positions among actors. Thus, we argue that rather than defining their positions for or against the mines, such an approach helps us identify new openings and relations across what might appear to be irreconcilable differences.

In the following section, positioning ourselves at the intersection of work on territory and narratives, we discuss the literature that enables us to analyse how territory is narrated into being. Next, we describe our methodology, followed by a history of land-use in Storuman. We go on to discuss the open moment in Storuman created by the potential mines and show how narratives - such as that of Swedish rural areas as the rightful place for 'sustainable mining' (c.f. Kirsch, 2014), of marginalisation and belonging (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2013) or a narrative of responsibility to place and environment cut across differences between actors.

## 2. Narrating territory in open moments

Research on mining in the Arctic and Sweden makes it clear that a mine heralds a future where land is drastically and irrevocably transformed and property and usufruct rights reconfigured (see Haddaway et al., 2019; Österlin and Raitio, 2020). In his work on colonialism in Indonesia and Ghana, Lund (2016:102) conceptualises the period of turmoil in property rights and breakdown of governing structures between state authority and the people as a 'rupture.' Drawing on a history of work (e.g. Moore, 2011; Moore, 1987; Das, 1995) that conceptualises how a turbulent event lays bare underlying structures, he uses the term 'open moment' to capture how 'risks and opportunities multiply' during a rupture. In our use of the term, the open moment does not necessarily signify a breakdown of the old and the assembly of new relations between state authority and property rights (Lund, 2016:1202–1203). Rather, we show that there does not have to be a rupture in existing relations, but that the mere notion of a mine and the change it portends can 'open the moment' for action and change. Relations to land are cast in doubt and the possibility of radical change is amplified. It is this space and moment of uncertainty in relations to and use of land and the narrating and remaking of territory that is at the heart of our inquiry.

### 2.1. Territory, land and property

Geographer David Storey (2012: 27) suggests that territories are bounded spaces, regulated, policed and instilled with meaning by people. Land, Storey explains, is the material part of territory and a key part of its production. Elden (2013:6) argues that territory or the 'relations between place and power' can be understood as a political technology comprised of ways of measuring land (as an economic resource) and controlling terrain (the strategic and political use of land). Territory is not static and is continually produced through spatial strategies by the

state that affect, influence and control resources and people in a bounded space (Storey, 2012; Painter, 2010; Cox, 2002). Painter (2010) draws attention to how state 'territorialisation' is carried out by a network of human and non-human actors (e.g. policy texts, public infrastructure or surveillance technology) in mundane every-day actions of government authorities. These include maintaining public infrastructure, tax-collection, creating surveys of the population or as we go on to show in our case, through granting concessions to mining companies.

Property is important in relation to territory due to its legal authority. Property as a social relation that infers an enforceable claim to land, can be said to be realised through territorialisation (Blomley, 2016:225). Extrapolating from Blomley's accounts, property rights may be seen as enforceable rights to territory as they are normally enforced through actions informed by state or customary law. While we analyse how state territorialisation takes place through mining interventions, we also turn to work such as that of historian and legal scholar, Rose (1994) who shows how community norms are central in shaping property regimes.<sup>2</sup> Narratives are crucial in establishing these norms. Rose shows how property rights are in fact dependent on the ability of an actor to persuade others that such rights exist. For example, Peluso (2005) describes how non-governmental organisations in Indonesia mapped and documented customary property regimes where the government claimed that no prior property relations existed and contributed to changing the outcome of state territoriality. Rather than usurping state authority, this was, in fact, an appeal to the state to include local territorial configurations in state territorialisation.

We draw on Blomley's link between territory and property and insights on how narratives can shape property relations (c.f. Rose 1994; Fortmann, 1995) to analyse territorialisation not only as a state prerogative but also to analyse the making of territory and reinforcing property through narratives in the everyday.

### 2.2. Knowledge production

Territory is contingent on knowledge production. As ways of measuring and controlling land (e.g. moving from hand drawn political maps to GIS) change over time, so does our notion of territory (Elden, 2013). Scholars have shown how state agencies at various levels produce territory (e.g. Painter, 2010; Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995). For example, Vela Almeida (2018) demonstrate this in the production of 'mining territories' by the 'post-neoliberal state' in Ecuador where space was territorialised through government practices that naturalised mining activities on the ground in Cordillera del Condor region.

Knowledge production also takes place in policies. Policies too are narratives that address certain issues and tend to be characterised by an opening (where the problem is stated), a middle (where the policy addresses the issue) and an end (where the policy has solved the issue) (Roe, 1994: 37). Roe demonstrates how policy narratives are persistent, even in the face of empirical evidence that suggests that the policy might be misguided. Reminding us that policies have important implications for the ways in which political subjects think of themselves, Arora-Jonsson (2018) draws attention to how policies in the global North may be framed in relation to problems of the 'less developed' global South, not only to showcase their development and policy success but to justify (non)-interventions at home. We go on to build on such a relational analysis across the global North and South, to show how a narrative of Northern responsibility for mining is presented as the sustainable solution for the future. We study how by presenting both a problem and its solution, a policy narrative claims control over a distant future, increasing the narrators' ability to define space (c.f. Ween and Lien, 2017), that is, to territorialise it in the present and the future.

<sup>2</sup> A property regime is the relationship between individuals, property and the enforcing institution of property rights

Much knowledge production is legitimised by the past. In her work on in Zimbabwe, Fortmann (1995) shows how narratives legitimise claims to property by rooting them in history, reinforcing feelings that the claim is justified. Narratives are used to explain how the past has given shape to the present, as well to present visions about the future, furthering the legitimacy of a claim. We show how narratives are sustained and knowledge produced through the re-telling of local histories (c.f. Sack, 1983) of the land, its multiple uses and shifts in property rights. In their work in Norway and Australia, Ween and Lien (2017) point to how indigenous relations to land and resources are not readily translated into western traditions of law. In Sápmi, the nation states gave preference to legal knowledge about use and claims to land, rendering other ways of being with and 'belonging to land' unimaginable (Ween and Lien, 2017:142), thus privileging one 'normative system' (Tam-anaha, 2008) over others.

Thus, we pay close attention to how knowledge about land and belonging is produced, whether through a recourse to the past, in everyday interactions or in policy, to analyse how different actors produce territory.

### 2.3. Identity, positionality and territory

Feminists (e.g. McGrellis, 2005; Smith et al., 2016; Wastl-Walter and Staeheli, 2013) have broadened the discussion of territory and its boundaries to include sites and scales beyond the state, demonstrating how the production of territory is intertwined with personal identity and the body. Territory, they argue, is in part produced by the people that occupy and maintain a bounded space, giving form to lines of exclusion or inclusion. Control over bounded space becomes associated with certain identity attributes (e.g. gender or ethnicity) In his review of struggles for territory by indigenous peoples in South America, Halvorsen (2019) emphasises the different ways in which people understand and produce territory by claiming space through cultural practice (e.g. arranging carnivals or marking buildings with graffiti) or by maintaining practices that go against state law (e.g. gathering or hunting on traditional lands turned into state natural reserves). Moving away from western and colonial notions of state territory and rights to territory granted through property rights, Halvorsen, like Elden's (2013:6) notion of practices and ideas between place and power, suggests a definition of territory as "space appropriated for a political project" (Elden's, 2013:5), based on cultural practices.

Building on this insight, we show how indigenous territory is maintained through their narratives and presence/action and how this making of territory is part of producing indigenous identities, crosscut in turn by dimensions of power.

Antonsich (2010) writes that 'place-belongingness,' i.e. personal and emotional connection to a place, are central to a person's identity. In her work in northern Sweden, Arora-Jonsson (2013) shows how belonging was also generated through narratives of having been marginalised by the centre in the nation state, a (gendered) marginalisation that was contested as much as it was elaborated in dialogue with authorities. Here, we go on to analyse how tropes of belonging and marginalisation are central to the making of territory. 'Place-belongingness' highlights how land is connected to peoples' identities and the different ways in which they make claims to territory by living on the land, an aspect that has been explored especially within indigenous research (e.g. Halvorsen, 2019; Ween and Lien, 2017).

In sum, we draw on the literature above to analyse territorialisation not only as a result of state action but also of narratives in the everyday. We go on to study how territory is produced by different actors narrating past stories in relation to land, by producing knowledge in everyday interactions or through policy. In doing so, we draw, especially on feminist work on identity to analyse how territorial projects produce and can change subject positions at the same time as the production of territory is closely intertwined with identity. By putting all three themes presented above, in one frame it is possible to study territory/

territorialisation not only undertaken by the state and as counter territorialisation but to analyse the work of multiplicity of actors and the many intersecting openings among them in the ongoing making of territory.

### 3. Making territory in Sweden and Sápmi

Rural areas in the north of Sweden may be seen to have been at the centre of two trajectories. One, where the state created the 'glesbygd', the sparsely populated rural areas through policies from the 1950s that privileged the urban over the rural and encouraged a movement to the cities. In mainstream imaginations, urban areas, equated with economic growth and development were seen as the antithesis of the underdeveloped 'glebsygd', with rural inhabitants depicted as those who had been 'left behind' and with few future prospects (Arora-Jonsson, 2013:55-59).

In a parallel trajectory, the Swedish state continued its colonisation of rural territory by transforming or ignoring indigenous rights to land (Brännlund, 2012; Brännström, 2017; Brännström, 2018; Lundmark, 2006). By acknowledging the rights to land only of reindeer herders and not all Sami, state policies sowed discord among Sami groups (Lantto, 2014). That such policies has had lasting repercussions for indigenous land relations among Sami groups is evident in our study sites (Arora-Jonsson, 2019), in Sami policy texts on equality (Pounu et al., 2016) and in debates in the national news media (Renman, 2020).

Sami usufructory rights to land are today mainly enforced through the Reindeer Farming Act (RFA) of 1971, a law that gave shape to the Reindeer Herding Communities (RHC) that are both an economic association of reindeer herders and denote the reindeer pastures (territory) that a RHC governs (Enoksson & Sunesson, 2020). Only about 10% of the Sami population are members of RHCs (Sami information centre website (2021)). Most Sami cannot invoke the RFA to make claims to land, creating a dividing line between reindeer herding and non-reindeer herding Sami (Lantto and Mörkenstam, 2008). This line is intersected by gender. According to the Sami Parliament<sup>3</sup> Gender Equality program (Pounu et al., 2016), traditional livelihoods of all Sami have been marred by colonial practices to the point that the Sami livelihoods are constructed as masculine activities and in Sami households, it is often Sami women who are pressured to look for education and employment elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Within reindeer herding, both ownership and herding is dominated by men (Enoksson and Sunesson, 2020) and as a result this gives women less voice over decision-making in the RHCs as representation there is based on reindeer ownership (Arora-Jonsson, 2017: 66).

Allard and Brännström (2021) write that a successful route for Swedish Sami to recover lost rights to land is through the Swedish courts. While an important tool for indigenous people to reclaim rights, they acknowledge that it narrows the scope in which land is claimed to legal proceedings. In line with our discussion on knowledge production above, their work shows how a landmark ruling that awarded the Girjas RHC sole hunting and fishing rights to land, was contingent on them producing credible accounts of a history of land use that challenged the history produced by the Swedish state. We go on to study how such processes take shape in our study sites.

### 4. Methods and material

We carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Storuman municipality in

<sup>3</sup> The Sami Parliament is a both a government agency and an electoral body formed by Sami political parties. The Sami Parliament governs matters of Reindeer herding, Sami languages and culture. However, it is a Swedish government institution and its role as a platform for Sami self-determination is limited by state legislation.

<sup>4</sup> Not unlike farming and forestry more widely in Sweden.

Västerbotten County in northern Sweden in relation to 3 mining projects: a potential gold mine outside the village of Barsele, potential nickel mining in Rönnbäcken and the Kyrkberget project (a fluor spar mine outside the villages of Blaiken and Strömsund). The projects have exclusive rights to ore deposits deemed feasible for large scale extraction.

#### 4.1. Fieldwork

The fieldwork was carried out over a period of 11 weeks (August 2017– March 2020). We conducted 60 interviews with 36 men and 24 women in the villages including civil society members and government officials in Storuman Municipality. The interviewees were between the ages of 16–93 with a median age of 56. Västerbotten County (the main form of land ownership affected by the mines) is male dominated (SCB, 2019). Thirteen interviewees out of 60 identified themselves as indigenous Sami, 2 of whom belonged to a RHC and 3 who practiced reindeer herding. This is of note since due to a history of assimilation, segregation, racism and inter-marriages, identifying as Sami is fluid and not a given. For example, one man had registered himself as a Sami at the Sami parliament in order to be able to vote in the Sami parliament election, but did not consider himself a Sami in any other sense.

We interviewed local inhabitants who had taken a public stand in relation to the mines, participated in resistance networks or spoken up for the opportunities that a mine could provide and also asked them to refer us to others in order to develop our sample of interviewees. To include perspectives from people that in their professional capacity or in their everyday lives might be affected by the mining projects but had not taken up a public position regarding the mines further selection was conducted. Initially we targeted civil servants in local government (whom are prohibited from making public statements) and people active in civil society organisations within the villages and from which we expanded our pool of interviewees through snowball sampling. The research participants can be divided into people who were likely to experience direct impact of the mines (28 men 17 women): villagers, landowners, reindeer herders, indigenous groups, those involved environmental management and societal planning (11 men and 5 women) such as municipal planners, forest managers or those who worked with local governance and development (15 men and 6 women): politicians, association members and those (4 men and 2 women) who represented the mining companies/projects. Sometimes roles overlapped, for e.g. a local politician could also be a landowner. Most interviewees that we were directed to were men since men are predominantly the landowners. We thus made a concerted effort to also talk to women in the communities.

We have given all interviewees fictitious names and all were given the opportunity to react to their portrayal in the text before we submitted the paper. Three interviewees made comments about their portrayal in the text but no one asked to be removed. We have avoided direct quotes when we address issues that we identify as sensitive.

The interviews lasted 1–3 h, were semi-structured, with both general questions and questions designed for that particular research participant (e.g. asking about municipal mining politics with local politicians). The questions aimed to establish a person's background and position in the community (asking them to recount parts of their lives, how they come to live in a particular place, family relations) and to understand how they related to the land: questions about belonging, land use, land rights, affect and economic dimensions. We also asked about their relation to the mining projects, what actions had been taken, how things had changed and how they viewed the future.

We also carried out participant observation in the villages that enabled us to spend time in the landscape and open up for informal conversations about the place. These conversations gave us insights from people whom we otherwise might not have talked to, due to their professed disinterest, frustration or lack of knowledge about the mines. We also attended public meetings including an OECD conference on

mining in Skellefteå in northern Sweden. Participating in seminars, following discussions and informal conversations with attendees helped us understand how expert knowledge, the interests of the mining industry and policy development shape narratives about mining in relation to development and responsibility.

#### 4.2. Material

The fieldwork material consist of interview transcripts and observation notes, transcribed and treated as text. Policy documents and reports included the National Mineral Strategy, a CERD statement report against the mining project in Rönnbäcken, three municipal reports on the impacts of and attitudes towards mining investments in Storuman and four reports from Swedish Geological Survey. We also studied websites of associations and companies involved with the mining projects including the Mining Resistance Network website, Facebook communities, the mining companies' sites, the website for the Vapsten Sami cultural association and the government funded page 'Mining for Generations' and the Storuman Municipality website. Finally, we also studied newspaper articles and reports about the mining projects published in regional and national media. A list of the studied sites are included in [Appendix A](#).

#### 4.3. Methods of analysis

In our analysis of the material, we searched for stories about space, place and land use. We paid attention to how a person's subject position influenced both the way the narratives were produced and the effect this had on the mobilisation of the narrative and subsequent connection to normative systems (c.f. Fortmann, 1995). Policy documents (c.f. Roe, 1994) as well as websites were also examined to study how land and space were assigned different purposes (e.g. a strategic resource, a homeland or a cultural site, in need of development) and how artefacts such as maps and manifestos were used to define and lay claim to space, e.g. the marking of indigenous sites in municipal planning documents.

In order to address the divergent aspects of territorial production, we approached the stories in the material as narratives that defined and made claims to land. We identified the larger discourses on which they drew based on how their recurrence but also in relation to previous literature that showed how they were more than personal recounts of events. For example, we show how the Swedish government produces a narrative where 'mining is conflated with sustainable development' Kirsch (2010; 2014). Building on Tamanaha's (2008) work on how 'legal pluralism' can enable actors to draw on different normative systems to enforce their rights, we show how actors legitimise their narratives into enforceable claims to land.

There is often a disparity in power between normative systems, due to the difference in the ability to enforce a certain set of norms (Tamanaha, 2008). However, by 'freezing' time and activities when analysing the material generated from the interviews (Arora-Jonsson, 2013: 11) we lend all the narratives we encounter in the 'open moment' equal weight. This means that 'we take as important that which was said and done at the particular time to explain the present. The actions taken and words used we took as exemplars and acts that solidify meanings and indicate underlying structures of meaning rather than being properties of specific people' (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2013: 11). In this way it is possible to understand how actors whose actions and narratives are often disregarded in the more visible contradictory positions that take precedence over time, also do influence the outcome of territorial struggles and how relations produced in the midst of open moments may provide the openings for change.

### 5. Land use in Storuman

Storuman is situated in the *glesbygd* in northern Sweden and has been the site of natural resource extraction. The websites of Storuman

municipality describe the area as having long been home to production forestry eight hydroelectric power plants and more recently, a wind power park consisting of 99 wind-turbines. The presence of such infrastructural activities has shaped both landscape and social relations (Edlund, 1989). The state, private companies or private landowners own large tracts of production forests. A majority of Swedish forests are owned by men (SCB, 2019), and forest governance is a largely white male enterprise (Laszlo Ambjörnsson, 2021). This also reflects how forest ownership and management is organized in Storuman.

In the interviews, it was clear that the hydroelectric dams had left lasting memories and emotions. The power plants brought employment, but as valleys were flooded, the dams resulted in a devastating loss of property. In Rönnbäck, the regulation of the waters resulted in the flooding of the valley of Björkvattdalen, and many inhabitants, a majority of whom were Sami, had to relocate (Strand and Ronnhed, 1992). Interviewees lamented both the loss of land and the low compensation granted by the state. One resident remarked, “They [our ancestors] were fooled [by the state lawyers] and then forced to leave.”

Storuman municipality is home to two RHCs, *Vapsten* and *Ubmeje tjeälddie*. There are also two other major Sami organisations in Storuman, *Vapsten Sitje* and *Vapsten Lappby*. In the early 20th century, the Swedish state forcibly relocated Sami communities from northern to south Sweden. The relocated northern reindeer-herders came to replace the southern Sami in the *Vapsten* RHC and with the passing of the RFA, the northern group secured control over the RHC. The process led to deep conflicts between the two groups (Lantto, 2014). Differences between the Sami communities have continued to colour Sami relations, also in relation to the Rönnbäck mine (Arora-Jonsson, 2019). The conflict is between the reindeer herding *Vapsten* RHC on the one hand and *Vapsten Sitje* and *Lappby* on the other. *Vapsten Sitje* and *Lappby* consist of South Sami. The former protect the interests and heritage of South Sami, while the latter works to reclaim the lost reindeer grazing rights.

Storuman has been (and still is) heavily shaped by state territoriality. Like most of the municipalities in the northern inland, infrastructure, property relations and land use have been shaped towards resource extraction and in its wake other claims to land have been ignored or overruled. The coming of the three mining projects, just like the recent wind power park, can be seen as a continuation of this territorial configuration.

## 6. Mining in Sweden and Storuman

The mining projects in Storuman and the ways they ‘open up’ territorial configurations needs to be put in relation to mining practices in Sweden and how these are shaped through contemporary mining politics, policies and history. Mining in Sweden stretches back to the middle ages and plays a key role in the Swedish national economy (Geijerstam et al., 2011). Today, Sweden is the largest exporter of iron ore in the EU (SGS, 2019), shedding light on the position mining holds in Swedish politics. Two governmental agencies are tasked with overseeing and administering the mining industry, the Geological Survey of Sweden (SGS) and the Mining inspectorate (MI). Both agencies produce documents, maps and policy texts in which they define areas of ‘national interest’ for the mining industry.<sup>5</sup> In addition to SGS and MI, the permitting process is also mediated through the Environmental Courts and the County Administrative Boards. In most matters of mining permitting processes, municipalities in Sweden have only an advisory role.

The *Mineral Strategy* (2013), the central document guiding the Swedish government’s stance on mining is a ‘policy narrative’ (Roe, 1994) that begins with describing mining and minerals as strategic resources for Sweden’s economic and technological development. After

<sup>5</sup> See Hallberg & Reginiussen (2018) for a recent example relating to the availability of critical raw materials in Swedish bedrock.

making a case for the under-utilisation of minerals in Sweden (i.e. presenting the lack of extraction as a problem to be overcome), the authors state that since mines are dependent on mineral-rich areas, other types of land use within those areas need to adapt or shift to make room for the mines, supplying a solution (*Mineral Strategy*, 2013: 26). The solution reduces other claimants and land users to “other” business interests.<sup>6</sup> The *Mineral Strategy* is an exemplar of how the Swedish government looks to the market and state bureaucracy to regulate mining in Sweden (Anshelm et al., 2018), turning issues of indigenous rights and land struggles into administrative problems.

In Storuman, mining is a recent activity. The first operational mine was a gold mine that started in 2005 in Svartliden, in the eastern part of the municipality. The goldmine is now depleted, but the Australian owner, *Dragon Mining* (2015), hopes to expand its operations in adjacent sites. Two failed and infamous zinc mining projects, *Blaiken* and *Svartträsk* established between 2008 and 2012 had considerable negative environmental impacts and continue to leak toxic metals into adjacent rivers and lakes (SGS, 2021a; SGS, 2021b).

The mining projects we study in Barsele, Rönnbäcken and Kyrkberget, are claims to land sanctioned by two different permits from the state, i.e., exploration and concession permits, and are as such expressions of how state territoriality shape a budding mining region. State territoriality is not expressed through mining practices, but through the permitting processes. Exploration permits are bounded tracts of land which give the owner exclusive rights to explore the land for minerals (SGS, 2016). They grant access to far larger areas than an eventual mine, and within their boundary, the company can obtain detailed information about the bedrock. The permits are also used to protect potential ore deposits from rivaling exploration companies. A concession permit ensures the holder exclusive usufruct rights to the minerals within the area designated for extraction. Concession permits last for 25 years and within that time-period, permits can be sold to another mining company if extraction is deemed viable (SGS, 2016).

## 7. ‘Open moments’ in Storuman

The introduction of the potential mining projects opened up for uncertainty over land and a melee of claims, actions and emotions. Through the lens of this open moment we analyse how specific territorial narratives are mobilized and (re)territorializes land in Storuman 1) through the production of technical, historical and personal knowledge about the land and places 2) by politicising the present through narratives of belonging, marginalisation and identity and 3) by staking claims to territory through narratives of responsibility and morality.

We identify several different normative systems’ (Tamanaha, 2008) in which people anchored their narratives: Swedish state legislation, the capitalist/economic normative system associated especially with the mining industry, environmentalism, indigenous rights as well as on a normative system of customary rights and cultural norms. In contrast to state legislation, the latter also go beyond formal laws and regulations. As we show ahead, there need not be clear-cut lines between normative systems or narratives. For example, to a certain degree, state law acknowledges indigenous rights and at the same time, indigenous rights are tied to both customary rights and international legislation.

### 7.1. Producing and mobilising knowledge: making maps, uncovering histories and the battle over expertise

Open moments in Storuman generated different forms of knowledge about the mining projects, as actors narrated territory in contrasting ways. State and mining company narratives drew on maps, histories and

<sup>6</sup> See Lawrence & Åhrén (2016) for a description of how the Swedish state turn Sami usufructory rights to reindeer pastures into “interests”, potentially weakening the Sami RHC’s claims to land.

symbols, but at the same time, actors opposed to the mining projects use the same artefacts and their own histories to challenge state territorial claims, producing their own narratives to unravel those mobilised by their opponents. Even in the latter, narratives could be anchored in the same normative system of state law.

When state actors reproduce a narrative in which Sweden can be divided into mining regions, mining companies and lobby groups that produce market projections, technical reports and feasibility studies naturalise mining as the preferred land use. At the OECD conference on mining in Skellefteå (participant observation, 2019-06-13) narratives on mining regions were produced and mobilised in the interactions between civil servants, politicians, policy-makers and the mining industry as they discussed how mining regions and state legislation could be shaped to deal with potential mining investments. Participants included representatives of mining companies, think tanks, politicians and civil servant and three panellists from three indigenous communities, all of whom were middle-aged men. The conference became a platform where the narrative of the ‘mining regions’ (c.f. [Vela-Almeida, 2018](#)) was reaffirmed. In workshops and lectures on the mining industry’s future, participants at the conference produced ‘expert knowledge’ on mineral extraction and mining politics. Together the conference participants both constructed and mobilised a coherent narrative of what constitutes a ‘good mining territory’ how such a territory should be governed. The indigenous representatives were heard in two different forums and while they were critical of the emergent narrative of the mining territory, their calls to include steering mechanism such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) were politely listened to and then ignored.

In Storuman, mining company actors recounted how data from drilling and through geophysical analyses of the landscape was turned into reports and projections about profits from mineral extraction. The land that the mining companies explored was thus territorialised into ‘mining regions’ through the production of knowledge about the land. Regardless of the projects current low activity, the permit is used to attract investors. Resistance to the mines by the Sami groups in the area led to an inquiry by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) that criticised the Swedish state for violating Sami land rights ([CERD, 2020](#)). While the state, through the Mining Inspectorate declared the criticism irrelevant, the project came to a halt in 2016 due to the efforts of the resistance network but ultimately to a rapid decline in nickel prices. Despite a moratorium on activity on the ground, the company continues to produce geophysical reports, and to report on changes in nickel price and in May 2021, the company, now under the ownership of BlueLake Minerals, announced that they were preparing a pre-feasibility study on the project ([BlueLake minerals, 2021](#)). This information imbues the mountains targeted by the project with mining potential, based on imagined profits that could be made from a future mine. Thus, Nickel Mountain did not only lay claims to land through permits but also lends strength and credibility to their claims by mobilising a narrative of mining regions where their project is described as a preferable use of land.

The local government in Storuman has also been a part of knowledge production that shapes the narrative of the mining region. In response to the coming of the mining project, a ‘visionary report’ was produced by a consultant agency contracted by Storuman municipality.<sup>7</sup> In the report *Investment effects in Storumans Municipality 2015–2030* ([Lindahl et al., 2016](#)), the authors present scenarios of how mining projects would benefit the local economy. The report, meant to be the basis for informed policy in Storuman was, during an interview with one of its proponents, referred to as a “propaganda text” for promoting a predefined political trajectory. Producing knowledge to frame the mining projects locally was part and parcel of taking control over the uncertainty in the open moment. Local government, international institutions, mining

companies and state agencies here all contribute in different ways in the knowledge production that is intrinsic to the narrative of a mining region, which is rapidly redefining land and land use in Storuman. Anchored in state law and an economic/capitalist normative system, the narrative bring together actors across scales and legitimizes their different claims to land.

Documents and artefacts were not only the preserve of official actors but also inhabitants. Contrary to state agencies and mining companies’ knowledge production on the mining nation, technical knowledge about mining was also used by local inhabitants to question the legitimacy of mining projects and counter their territorialising effects. Landowners in Barsele and Gunnarn collected and saved mining documents to be able to challenge mining projects such as that of the Canadian company Agnico-Eagle (AE) gold mining project in Barsele. The Mineral Act ([Sweden. Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 1991](#)) stipulates that in mineral exploration, landowners are to be provided with work plans, detailing how and where exploration activities would be carried out on their land, where the drilling would take place and the roads that they would build. Maja, a geo-biologist related that this information could be used to regulate AEs’ access to land. As a spokesperson for her father’s estate, Maja, who had worked with mineral exploration in the past, challenged AE’s progression in the area, and questioned their professionalism, challenging the credibility of their plans. She used the workplans to oppose the company’s claims to land. She made use of the material produced by the mining companies as well as state policies and legislation, to regulate AE’s actions on the lands that they had claimed through exploration permits. Drawing on the same normative system (i. e. state law) as AE, Maja managed to make changes to details of company practice. She suggested that the key difference between her and many farmers and landowners was a difference in knowledge. Other landowners, villagers, local civil servants and politicians described the processes around the opening of a mine as highly complex and hard to grasp. To engage with the mining projects, it was felt that you needed to have the right expertise and resources. Maja’s actions reveal how a person’s level of education might be just as or more important to make a successful claim to land as holding property rights, as she uses her knowledge to disassemble the territorial narrative of the mining region.

Sami groups used a repertoire of sources that drew upon a normative system of indigenous rights. In Rönnebäcken, a member of the resistance network explained how they had been documenting the actions of the mining company and their responses. They collected formal letters of appeal against the permitting process, officially issued permits for mineral exploration as well as material that would lend credibility to a different narrative, that of an indigenous past. They wrote local histories, collected maps on the historic boundaries of indigenous property and invited biologists to carry out inventories of biodiversity at the mining sites. Biologists from a nationwide environmental organisation listed endangered and rare flora and fauna and created material that supported both environmental and indigenous claims. Thereby they made connections to both indigenous and environmentalist normative systems. The knowledge they produced and the artefacts they collected became intrinsic parts of these systems (c.f. [Rose, 1994](#)). The resistance group used this knowledge to challenge mining projects, anchoring the current struggle in a history of the Swedish state’s colonisation of Sami land ([Lantto and Mörkenstam, 2015](#)) as well as modernist systems of environmentalism and preservation of biodiversity.

As we sat in the kitchen of an elderly Sami woman, Stina, active in Sami politics all her life, she kept excusing herself to fetch a book, documents on past land judgments, minutes from meetings or to show us past photographs of her family in the landscape - evidence that her belonging to this land was beyond doubt. She drew on her deep knowledge of history and strengthened her story with old documents to make a credible narrative legitimised by a normative system of indigenous rights, thereby reaffirming the undisputable existence of indigenous territory. Other Sami actors also showed us documents from the past to prove claims. The documents, evidence of belonging to that land,

<sup>7</sup> As a response to a previous critical report by Beland Lindahl et al.,(2016)

revealed a people who had the right to call themselves Sami with legitimate claims to the land. Artefacts such as photographs and old maps combined with personal histories were important in producing knowledge about an indigenous territory. This knowledge was used to gather people around a narrative of an indigenous land, a narrative that was in sharp contrast to that of a mining region.

Accessing and mobilising knowledge about indigeneity as a way of claiming land was also evident at a meeting of the municipal committee for Sami issues (2019–02–25). At the meeting, city planners and Sami representatives, both from the civil society and the RHCs marked out important cultural sites on maps to guide municipal development. The plan was meant to protect Sami heritage, but was also a public recognition of indigeneity. In such a case, the narrative of indigeneity was mapped on to the normative system of state laws, and at the same time confirmed the authority of the municipality in matters concerning indigenous lands.

These processes of knowledge production both by the inhabitants as well as state agencies and mining companies shows how the mobilisation of knowledge and how linking knowledge to normative systems are acts of establishing credibility when narrating land into territory.

## 7.2. Making Territory in the present: Narratives of marginalisation and belonging

In this section we focus on how inhabitants mobilise narratives of marginalisation, belonging and identity to define space and their access to land, sometimes through networks that extended well beyond the place itself. While these territorial narratives were not always related to the mining projects, they become entangled with them as they contested the mining projects' claims to space as yet another example of the 'colonisation of their attachment to place' (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2019).

### 7.2.1. Marginalisation from rightful claim to territory

Much like in other places in Sweden's northern inland, a narrative of having been marginalised by central authorities (Arora-Jonsson, 2013) evoked a collective belonging to territory and cut across many otherwise divided accounts by various actors. Relations between the northern inland and urban centres and especially in relation to Stockholm were recurrently described by inhabitants as a colonisation, marginalisation and exploitation of their homes. Descriptions of living in a region defined through an unequal relationship between the centre and periphery were plentiful. Talking about how resources from peripheral areas were extracted without any benefits to the region and its people, a young Sami woman pointed out the irony in that although their region supplied electricity to the south, their local community centre had to be shut down because they had no money to pay the electricity bill. Elderly Sami inhabitants related how Sweden had colonised the mountains near the Norwegian border in a process that went on as late as the 1920's. They spoke of growing up in the aftermath of these times, where the Swedish State, through reconfigurations of property regimes (or by ignoring them), stole their rights to land.

In a telephone conversation, Olof, a man living near the Barsele mine, related a story that we had come to recognise and which could be summarised as

"We don't want the mine, but we have no right [or way to oppose it]."

According to Olof, there was no point in meeting up for an interview as there was nothing anyone could do about the mining project anyway.

'If the company wants a mine, there will be a mine.'

In his view, time after time, it had been made clear that when it came to the riches of the north, local inhabitants did not matter. Olof narrated a history of the northern inland as a colony to the powers in the south in all but name, drawing on a discourse of colonialism. His story was of a

territory where the voices, rights and interests of local citizens were at odds with that of large companies and the Swedish state. A similar description was given by Erik, a landowner from Rönnbäcken. He explained that the government and large companies never cared for the people in these areas. His story was about how his family had their land stolen from them by the state, and that now the mines would do the same, so it was better to just accept it and see how one might benefit from the projects.

In an interview with Göran and Ines, an elderly married couple from Gunnarn who owned land affected by the Agnico Eagle project in Barsele, Göran looked over to his wife and smiled,

We have grown jaded...all these dams and power plants and all kinds of projects. ... you can't kill yourself over them. But still... we don't like it. [...] It's like they pull out the rug from under you, where you stand. And these large companies, they don't care about the little guy [...] We just have to let them work, we can't stop them. Because then Uncle Blue [the police] would come and get you

While this statement may be regarded as acceptance in face of external pressures, there was also an underlying message of endurance, of persevering in face of unjust state practices. By keeping alive the narrative of marginalisation, they were also reaffirming their place as citizens with equal rights as that of those in cities but that were being denied to them (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2013). An example of more active resistance was related by Henrik from Tärnaby (2020-03-09), who claimed that although hunting was not permitted on public land without hunting permits given out by the County Administrative Board, people still hunted on public land in the mountains. Henrik explained that what was now public land used to be the village commons, and therefore many people asserted hunting and fishing rights as rightfully theirs. Through hunting, the hunter challenges state territoriality and redefines the forest as a place where hunting can take place (c.f. Holmes, 2007). In contrast to Maja's reliance on law, this territorial narrative contested state law and was anchored in a normative system of customary rights, maintained by the communities that made use of hunting grounds.

Göran and Ines described their marginality as enduring against the odds. They drew upon a larger normative system of national belonging and in that sense territorialised space as belonging to them, although they were unable to do much about it besides being stoic and independent. Stories of marginalisation and stoic endurance, while overtly signalling acceptance, also portrayed an underlying story of struggling communities against state power and market interests. While this appears as acceptance, their narrative kept alive and reaffirmed an attachment to land. They brought to the fore rights they were being denied as citizens in the wider nation, evoking a quiet counter-territorialisation. This narrative of marginalisation was evident in stories across the board among the people we interviewed and tied people together to the place. It explained how land became territorialised by external interests (e.g. mining companies or the state). It also provided a basis for mobilising opposition against external land claims, also by actors who had conflicting claims to land themselves. However, while the narrative of marginality brought together actors across Storuman, through a shared experience of being marginalised it does not necessarily stand in conflict with the mining projects' claims to land. Erik's statement of how the potential benefits of the mining company also draw upon the same narrative, showing how the narrative of marginality and that of the mining region overlap.

### 7.2.2. Belonging and identity

In Storuman, belonging was described in two different but connected ways. The first was a belonging to place that made you a legitimate voice on land issues. This form of belonging was an expression of a person's identity, tying the person to a specific territory (Wastl-Walter and Staeheli, 2013; Antonsich, 2016). It was a narrative that enabled claims to land based on normative systems of the nation but also to customary

and indigenous rights. The second was belonging described as resources that belonged to a specific actor or group.

In Rönnbäck these contradictory understandings of belonging shaped the conflict between the local resistance group and the mining company. For shareholders and representatives of the company, belonging was about ownership of land, that is, of having exclusive access to the land in order to extract minerals, claims enforceable through state legislation. In contrast, was belonging of citizenship as described above as well as the members of the resistance-network expressed themselves, was a belonging to the land itself, making them legitimate claimants. They did so based on their families having lived there since time immemorial and on their traditional livelihoods (e.g. hunting, fishing, foraging and reindeer herding) tied closely to the landscape. Here, we can see how belonging is narrated differently, but nonetheless belonging is understood as a way of having certain rights to a specific area of land. In the narrative of the mining region, the land belongs to an owner, while in the narrative of an indigenous territory, belonging indicates an intimate connection to the land. Mats, a farmer and landowner whose family had lived and worked in Gunnarn for five generations expressed both forms of belonging. He recounted that his forest property was the place where he learnt to tend to nature.

“This place...is a family farm. Everyone who shares my surname comes from this farm.”

For Mats, the forests were both economic security and sites of belongingness (Antonsich, 2010). Tina, a Sami and member of the Rönnbäck resistance network reflected on the history of state intervention and the strong connection between belonging to the land and having the right to its resources,

It is state policy that legitimises interventions on land. Policies decide, “Now we will do this and that is for that and so on”. That is an exercise of power. .... for us it is definitely something to think about. Who can define this place? And who can define Sápmi? And who has done so throughout history and here in this place [...] All the interventions that have taken place...We are not even represented .... or allowed to raise our voices although we have always lived here. So the interesting question is: Who has the right to define the place, who can do it? And what tools do we have?

By questioning the right to define a place, Tina brings belonging, rather than property, as way to claim rights to land. Drawing on this ‘sense of belongingness’ (Antonsich, 2010) the resistance network in Rönnbäck successfully mobilised resistance strong enough to subvert the mining company’s claims to land, not by virtue of holding contemporary property rights but through bringing to the fore a narrative of indigenous past and present.

In the open moment, when territorial configurations are made uncertain, identities can be called into question. Erik who lived close to the Rönnbäck mine was of Sami descent but did not necessarily identify himself as Sami. He questioned how people could define themselves as Sami without any connection to reindeer-herding, which he saw as an integral part of being Sami. He argued that claims to indigeneity were not enough to make claims to land if you did not at the same time practice reindeer-herding and were a member of an RHC. Claims to land rooted in a narrative of indigenous identity could thus be challenged in the open moment by questioning who had the right to call themselves indigenous. Tina and Erik’s words point to the link between identity and territory.

The open moment led to the resurfacing of conflicts over land and identity between the Southern Sami community and the members of Vapsten RHC. However, confronted with plans for the mine, the two groups overlooked past differences and took a joint stance against the mine. Despite the entangled history of conflict between the groups, a shared narrative of belonging took shape. While both groups came together in their petition to CERD, the underlying struggle over land

rights remained and gained new momentum in the open moment. The Vapsten RHC asserted their position as an actor with usufructory rights based on their membership in the RHC, to which the South Sami did not have access. In their cause against the mine, both groups activated networks consisting of forums well beyond the place itself - such as the Sami Parliament, the national parliament, the Nordic Sami council and indigenous movements across the world - that gave legitimacy to their claims based on a narrative of indigeneity and belonging. The Rönnbäck project became connected to a larger story of exploitation and violation of indigenous rights on a global scale and coincided with falling nickel prices to stall the planned mine. The open moment provided wholly new possibilities for groups to take place in deliberations that previously had been inaccessible. The uncertainty opened up for the Sami who lacked membership in the Vapsten RHC to make claims to land. And while this mobilisation was successful in subverting the claims of the mining company, it also turned into a struggle between the two groups over who could be considered a legitimate narrator.

Although most actors on the ground often described mining as an issue that was too technical to comprehend (c.f. Envall, 2018), they nonetheless took part in (re)producing narratives wherein mining projects were presented as a threat, as a necessary evil or a future possibility. The political potential in these narratives of belonging and marginalisation becomes apparent in open moments as they coincide with narratives on taking responsibility for economic development, environmentalism and/or indigenous rights.

### 7.3. Territorialising through growth and environmental protection: narratives of responsibility and morality

Mining projects were presented, especially by official authorities, as a responsible step towards creating a “new, green and sustainable society” and as developmental projects that could change the trajectory of rural decline. In such narratives of responsibility, being against a mine was seen as being against the survival of the local community. These narratives drew on discourses of the northern inland as territories in need of development. These actors connected narratives of responsibility with the normative systems of state legislation and capitalist/economic norms.

At the local government, the chairman<sup>8</sup> of the Municipal Board in Storuman too described the mining projects as possibilities of turning rural decline in the *glesbygd* into growth. Growth was seen as an increase in population and potential taxpayers. The chairman was active in promoting the mining projects as large-scale investments that would aid the local economy, granted that they passed the permitting process. Although he stressed the importance to adhere to the formal permitting processes and thus downplayed the municipality’s ability to influence decisions regarding the mining projects, he also took steps to ensure the opening of the mines. When the Kyrkberget project had some of its permits revoked by the County Administration in Västerbotten, the chairman took it upon himself to write a letter to the Swedish government. In the letter he described the positive economic impacts the mine would have for the municipality, describing Storuman as a site in need of external investments. In his reasoning, mining projects would counter the effects of their marginal position in the country, making them part of a narrative rooted in normative systems economic growth and state legislation.

In contrast, for others such as the Sami and environmental groups, taking responsibility for future generations was about protecting the environment and communities from exploitation. They drew on discourses of environmental protection and indigenous rights. The resistance network’s invitation to biologists to do an inventory of biodiversity at the mining site was an effort to show what was being

<sup>8</sup> The chairman represents the leading party in the municipality, which since 2006 is the liberal Centre party.

risked by exploiting the minerals in the mountains.

Contesting the narrative of responsibility through economic growth, the Left party in Storuman has taken a formal stance against the mining projects. According to one politician, mining projects are yet another example of the Swedish state and private companies' attempt to exploit the northern inland, which partly aligns this narrative with narratives on marginalisation. His argument was bolstered by reports on how mining has done little to increase the population and that a majority of the studies on the benefit of mines are ex-ante and show no evidence of growth in the region with mines. Furthermore, estimates of growth disregard the huge costs of environmental clean-ups (Lesser et al., 2016). The Left thus both challenged the narrative of responsibility presented by the chairman and appealed to environmental concerns.

In interviews as well as in texts such as the *Mineral Strategy* (2013), the municipal report on investment effects (Lindahl et al., 2016) and in news editorials (From et al., 2019) mining in Sweden is presented as

'needing to take responsibility for the minerals we use.'

The narrative is grounded in state legislation and in appeals to sense of superiority by asserting that Swedish mining and environmental legislation is better equipped to ensure "sustainable mining" than most other countries where mining takes place. This was exemplified by a member of the Christian Democrat party during a public lecture in Tärnaby on 'The Electric Car and the hunt for Metals' (participant observation 2019-02-26), where she argued for the need to extract cobalt in Sweden. She argued that by not doing so and wanting increased production of car batteries at the same time, Sweden was actively contributing to child labour in Congo's cobalt mines. In her iteration of the narrative of responsibility, she contrasted Storuman with other less responsible places in the global South, in this case, mining sites in Congo. A moral responsibility can be seen as being used to territorialise Swedish rural spaces by invoking Sweden's responsibility as a democratic and equal nation. In contrast, Congo was described as a place where laws and regulations did not work. Sustainable and responsible mining in Sweden was thus framed in relation to the existence of an "other," seen as irresponsible and unable to govern itself. Such a narrative of responsibility in relation to what are portrayed as the not-so-developed countries of the global South (Arora-Jonsson, 2018) stipulated that access to land was a question of taking responsibility, not only for your own village but for the whole world.

In face of the resistance to mining, mining companies justified their claims to land by pointing to society's need for modern green technology. The head of operations (COO) at the Agnico Eagle mining project in Barsele, suggested that without metals, we would not be able sit in the room where we conducted the interview, as metal was used in everything around us. Following this reasoning, the COO argued that if someone was against mining projects but still willing to use modern technology such as mobile phones, this person was being hypocritical. Accepting the opening of new mine was described as a way for people taking responsibility for their own consumption and a natural consequence of modern life. Interestingly, AE's operations target gold. According to the *World Gold Council* (2021) (of which AE is a member), 90 % of global gold demand is for jewellery or to be stored for economic security. Gold has limited importance for the future of green technology, but in the narrative mobilised by the COO, it became connected to a discourse of technological innovation in order to legitimise their claims to land.

The COO's argument echoed statements made at the OECD conference in Skellefteå where policy-makers and mining companies foresaw a green mining boom to meet the demand for metals needed for green technologies. At the conference, increased mineral extraction was presented as an inevitable part of a green future, and areas rich in minerals were targeted for meeting the demands for this future. By invoking future needs, rural land was to be appropriated for the grand project of making a sustainable future for the world. However, this was countered

in other interviews. According to Tina,

"I think that the argument [that we need to take responsibility for sustainability] is ugly, as it is used to give people a bad conscience..... What Sweden is really exporting...with iron ore, is a poor system for how mines should be managed...of how one can act in mining areas towards local communities, what demands we can put on companies [...] At the moment, these companies go into countries and say "you can rest assured because we are doing what we do in Sweden! But there are no demands on companies to [...] act humanely or respect indigenous rights (here)....."

Tina criticised how the narrative of responsibility was used to make claims to land built on false premises. For her, responsibility entailed caring for and living off the land and the environment and protecting it for future generations. Her narrative connected to different normative systems – that of indigenous rights and environmentalism, but in a very different way. Responsibility framed in terms of environmentalism and indigeneity were contrasted with those where responsibility and an environmentalism that promoted sustainable extraction of minerals as a moral imperative.

Attempts to define the future by officials were, as we argue, attempts at controlling uncertainty and closing the open moment. On the other hand, by bringing attention to biodiversity and environmental concerns, others tried to keep it open by drawing on normative systems of environmentalism and indigeneity. Narratives of responsibility and morality emerged in the open moment to explain why the mining projects needed to be pursued or contested. "Taking responsibility" territorialised land in different ways.

## 8. Conclusions: Openings at the intersections of making territory

In this paper we have argued that the fluid and continuous production of territory (defined as a 'space appropriated by political projects' (c.f. Elden, 2013; Halvorsen, 2019; Storey 2012) can be understood through an analysis of narratives mobilized in an 'open moment.' An open moment (Lund, 2016) or a turbulent event lays bare the power relations structuring the place (Das, 1995; Moore, 2011; Moore, 1987). By taking such an open moment as a point of departure and analysing the narratives produced in that moment, we show not only underlying structures but also how territory is made in the everyday by a multiplicity of actors, both from above and below, power exerted over land and change is possible.

As we show, the narratives produced in that moment were based in different normative systems (Tamanaha, 2008) and were vital in making lasting claims to space and thereby for the production of territory. Our narrative approach revealed how a multiplicity of actors, both 'from above (e.g. state and mining companies) and below (e.g. villagers or local associations) used narratives to make powerful and lasting claims to land. While the mining companies made use of state law as well as stories of potential development of green technology and employment to make their claims to land, people living in the villages compiled histories and made inventories over biodiversity to form narratives that made contrasting or opposing claims to the same land.

Our approach where we froze time and accorded all narratives equal weight (Arora-Jonsson, 2013:13) also revealed how narratives overlapped and intersected and not only conflicted with each other. This enabled us to move beyond the perspectives of 'above' and 'below' by showing how actors linked up around- or contested certain narratives. This is exemplified by how the narratives on marginalisation and belonging, though seemingly apolitical, were mobilised and reproduced by actors who had divergent positions regarding the mining projects. Marginalisation ties in with narratives of development and economic growth, but also with narratives of colonialism and indigenous lands.

Finally, territorial narratives provided us with insight into how

territorialisation is both intertwined with and can change subject positions on the ground. While property and usufruct rights were and remain important to the production of territory in Storuman, identities shaped along the lines of gender, ethnicity, class and level of education were central to the mobilisation of territorial narratives. Actors operating in the open moment used narratives to steer the future of land use by calling upon different normative systems, and in doing so had to present themselves as credible narrators. Credibility was dependent on an actors' subject position, but, as the examples of Tina and Maja, it does not need to entail property or usufruct rights that are often dependent on being male. In their case, education and a profession in the mainstream society and/or living on the land were dimensions of power that intersected to legitimize their voices. Like Fortmann (1994), we show that the claiming of space and land is connected to the subject positions of the narrators and their ability to mobilise actors around a legitimate claim to land.

We have shown how claims to land and natural resources is equated with taking responsibility for the development of 'green technology'. By paying attention to territorial narratives it is possible to expand our understanding on how actors take possession over land, not only through legal means or force, but also by drawing upon discourses that make their claims to land appear self-evident and morally just. As such, territorial narratives can be a tool to address the injustices and the reproduction of colonial practices in contemporary natural resource extraction.

#### *CRedit authorship contribution statement*

**Arvid Stiernström:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Seema Arora-Jonsson:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition.

#### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

#### **Acknowledgments**

This project was funded by FORMAS – A Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development, Project number: 2015-00327.

#### **Appendix A. Text material**

##### News articles:

Published: 2013-11-09 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/gruvan-inte-livsviktig>

Published: 2014-07-01 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/regeringsbeslut-om-gruvdrift-rattsprovas>

Published: 2014-07-15 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/kritiken-mot-gruvplaner-vaxer>

Published: 2014-10-31 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/renagarna-forlorade-igen>

Published: 2015-11-13 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/krav-pa-gruvbolaget-avveckla-tillstanden>

Published: 2016-05-17 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/kanadensiskt-foretag-storsatsar-i-barsele>

<https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/6701302> 2017-05-22

Published: 2019-01-17 <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7133913>

Published: 2019-02-11 <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7153100>

Published: 2019-09-29 <https://www.svd.se/sluta-hyckla-om-meta-llbehovet>

Published: 2019-11-12 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/vasterbotten-mecka-for-mineraljagarna>

[botten/vasterbotten-mecka-for-mineraljagarna](https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/vasterbotten-mecka-for-mineraljagarna)

Published: 2020-12-07 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/vasterbotten-fn-s-uppmaning-till-sverige-om-ronnbacksgruvan-gor-om-gor-ratt>

##### Webpages and Social Media:

Agnico Eagle, Barsele project webpage, available at: <https://www.agnicoeagle.com/English>

[/exploration/exploration-projects/barsele/default.aspx](https://www.agnicoeagle.com/English/exploration/exploration-projects/barsele/default.aspx) accessed 2021-09-12, accessed 2021-09-12

Bluelake mineral webpage, Rönnbäcken projects, available at: <https://bluelakemineral.com/en/projects/nickel/> accessed 2021-09-12

Business Sweden webpage Mining for Generations, available at: <https://www.miningforgenerations.com/>, accessed 2021-09-12

Investments effects in Storuman Municipality 2015-2030, available at <https://www.storuman.se/Nyheter/investerings effekter-2015-2030/>, accessed 2021-09-12

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