

Notes from a Projected Sacrifice Zone

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Abstract

The article explores a set of sacrificial logics that cluster around a prospective copper mine, situated on the bank of a fjord in the Norwegian Arctic. Analyzing the project as a “sacrifice zone” in the making, the argument first draws out some of the ways in which sacrifice is being used to conceptualize, compel, critique and justify a still-future resource extraction project. From there, it moves to discuss sacrificial logics that are at work, more covertly, in the language of planning decisions and reports. Finally, it uses the concept of sacrifice to decipher a curious public exchange between the mayor of the municipality and the director of the mining company—an exchange that reveals concealed dynamics when considered through the oscillation between “payment” and “gift”, with “sacrifice” as an obviated third term. In closing, the essay presents some general observations on the relationship between capitalism and sacrificial destruction.

Keywords

Sacrifice; mining; value; capitalism; violence; resource imaginaries

Introduction

From its origins as an agricultural term (Colten 2012) and in the mid-century planning jargon of the US nuclear complex (Kuletz 1998), the concept of



“sacrifice zones” has received a growing measure of attention in recent years—usually to describe forms of environmental violence, degradation and destruction that operate spatially, at the level of landscapes and regions. The term captures a relationship between destructive violence and disposability, or “sacrificability”, that helps foreground issues such as environmental racism (Bullard 1990), economic justice (Hedges and Sacco 2012), indigenous sovereignty (Endres 2012) and structural or “slow” violence (Nixon 2013). More generally, as a figure of loss or destructive surrender, the idea of sacrifice is particularly useful for interrupting narratives of frictionless transformation, including hegemonic imaginaries of global growth, trade and development—but also, potentially, for critically reframing issues such as resource extraction or the biopolitics of conservation and species management. In geography, recent interventions have used the concept of “sacrifice zones” to explore phenomena such as mountaintop removal (Scott 2010), subsurface land grabs (Shade 2015), oil spills (Colten 2012), carbon forestry (Nel 2015) and frac sand mining (Holifield & Day 2017). Starting from this, the following is an attempt to clarify and explore what the “sacrifice” in “sacrifice zone” might mean, and what it might be used for. What does sacrifice allow us to *name*;¹ as a heuristic, that other terms might not? I approach sacrifice primarily through the lens of violence²—treating sacrifice and sacrificial thinking as a bundle of techniques, practices, terms and devices by which the exercise of destructive violence can be erased, trivialized, naturalized, justified and rendered as innocuous or necessary. This framing is particularly relevant, I think, in a present moment saturated by violences that are strange, complex, novel and inscrutable³—many of which remain nameless, and therefore also (still) largely invisible. The argument unfolds through the analysis of a prospective resource extraction project, situated on the bank of a fjord in the Norwegian Arctic. Working through the case, I develop an account of sacrifice as (among other things) a form of hopeful destructive action: calculative but uncertain, oriented towards a future that it may or may not effect. Before I get to this, however, sacrifice is an ancient and complex idea, with a bewildering range of permutations. Let me sketch out three points of initial departure.

1. Kvalsund is a small town located in Finnmark, the northernmost region of mainland Norway, and also the name of the municipality it lies in: a large territory, some 1,846 km², but sparsely populated. A recent promotional brochure from the municipality lists its principal economic activities as “reindeer herding, mining, hydroelectrics, construction etc.”⁴ Most of its 1,050 inhabitants live in or near the eponymous town—which sits on the south bank of the Repparfjord, at the

¹On the sorcerous importance of naming, see Pignarre and Stengers (2011).

² Reinert (2015).

³ e.g. Nixon (2013).

⁴“Kvalsund Kommune—Aktivitets- og friluftskommunen”, http://www.kvalsund.kommune.no/getfile.php/3646158.747.ppuxuysfpf/20161012_TilflytterbrosjyreKvalsund_WEB.pdf, accessed April 3 2018.

site of an old ferry crossing from the mainland to an island called Kvaløya. Today, a bridge connects the island to the mainland—but in the old days, walking to the ferry crossing on the north bank, the path would have taken you past a strange tall stone, jutting out across the dark waters of the fjord. The stone has been there for a long time. Locally it is referred to as *stallo*, or *stállu*—a loanword to Norwegian from northern Sámi, the indigenous language of the area. In its original meaning, the word denotes a dark and threatening stranger: a folkloric figure, derived perhaps from stories of raiders, tax collectors, vikings and other violent foreigners down the centuries (e.g. Jernsletten 2011). In the old days (but perhaps not so long ago, perhaps even after the war, perhaps still) the stone was recognized as a *sieidi*: an entity of the landscape that could enter into relations of mutual favor with human petitioners, through acts of sacrifice (Oskal 1995; Sveen 1997; Reinert 2016a). People might offer up part of their fish-catch, meat from hunted animals or a share of tobacco in return for good fortune, particularly in fishing. This was sacrifice as a variation of the gift: a binding gesture that established reciprocity through destructive surrender (Mauss 2002 [1954]; Hubert and Mauss 1964). The stone would repay well the attention of petitioners, but woe to those who tried to cheat—or those who failed to repay what they received, neglecting the reciprocal bonds forged in the offering. Bad luck would inevitably catch up with them: accidents and divorces, drownings, bankruptcy, illness.

2. In the environmental literature, the term “sacrifice zone” usually refers to spaces, areas, habitats and tracts of land that have been destroyed, poisoned or otherwise rendered uninhabitable *in return for* some sort of benefit: technological or military advantage, scientific progress, economic benefit and so on (Kuletz 1998; Fox 1999; Bullard 1990; Scott 2010). Sacrifice here shorthands a modality of destructive spatial violence that operates—and justifies itself—within an economy of anticipated returns. *Something* has been sacrificed, for the gain of *something else*. Offering and return may belong to different orders of value, brought together—commensurated—in the sacrifice: the land may have seemed barren, useless, uninhabited, strategically unimportant, insignificant; its destruction, conversely, may have ensured a return in wealth, national security, energy independence, military advantage, the good of the many... Sacrifice thus articulates a particular relation between two terms, such that the destruction of one brings about the gain of an other. It also imputes an element of calculated, agentive will to the situation: a sacrifice does not happen by accident. Somehow, somewhere, a calculation has been made, a relation established between offering and return such that the destruction of the former appears justified and logical.⁵ A key valence of sacrifice, as a critical trope, is thus to force confrontation with the politics of equivalence: how many acres, how many lives, how many species, how many cancers, how many stillbirths, in return for what? What was the *value* of the offering, that its destruction is justified by the return?

⁵See Reinert (2015); also Reinert (2007).

3. Inevitably, any study of the sacrificial dynamics in a sacrifice zone is also complicated by the normative dimensions of sacrifice in its *aneconomic* modality, as a figure of religious and moral thought. Beyond destructive trade-offs and calculation, sacrifice in this sense denotes a mode of moral or virtuous action that is premised on renunciation, and that disregards return beyond its own intrinsic value. In many traditions, the truly moral sacrifice renounces all reward, being constituted as an end in itself rather than a means. Thus understood, sacrifice echoes the structure of Derrida's "impossible" gift (1991, 1995): the pure, selfless act that collapses the moment it names itself as such and enters into the temporal economy of exchange and expectation. It is a point of empirical interest how concepts of sacrifice as renunciation enter—or not—into the broader political economy of sacrifice zones, particularly in their early or anticipatory stages.

Three logics or modalities of sacrifice; each in its own way pertinent. Focusing on the site of the first, Kvalsund, the analysis in the following draws on material from an ethnographic research project about the sacrificial logics of northern resource extraction⁶—encompassing conversations, discussions, guided walks, participant observation and media analyses conducted over a period of several years.

The situation can be outlined relatively simply. Nussir ASA is a private company that aims to reactivate an old copper mine near Kvalsund.⁷ The company takes its name from the deposit it seeks to mine—which is named, in turn, after the Sámi name for a mountain in the area. Geologically, the Nussir deposit forms part of the so-called Raipas supergroup.⁸ Estimates of its magnitude vary, but in September 2014 the director of Nussir ASA announced that the deposit might contain as much as 66 million tonnes of copper ore⁹—making it a world-class deposit, and the largest copper deposit ever found in Norway. The project to mine this deposit unfolds within the so-called *Nordområdesatsingen*—an ambitious national strategy, sustained over several administrations, to develop and invest in the “northern regions”, or High North.¹⁰ To minimize operational costs, the proposed plan for the project involves a marine tailings disposal solution (currently legal in Norway and a small handful of other countries in the world).¹¹

⁶ Estonian Research Council grant PUT30, “Life in the Sacrifice Zone: Biopower, Territoriality and Ruination”; see Reinert 2015, 2016a, 2016b. The argument also builds on a decade of prior ethnographic research in the region, e.g. Reinert 2009.

⁷ http://www.ngu.no/sites/default/files/06_Rushfeldt_NussirASA.pdf, accessed April 3 2018.

⁸ http://aps.ngu.no/pls/utf8/geoenhet_SokiDb.Vis_enhet?p_id=179434&p_spraak=N, accessed April 3 2018.

⁹ “Nussir fant 22 millioner tonn ekstra kobbermalm”, *Nord* 24 September 30 2014. <http://www.nord24.no/nyheter/article7612672.ece>, accessed April 3 2018.

¹⁰ See for example Angell et al. (2010); see also Dale et al. (2018).

¹¹ The situation may be changing. As of early 2018, the current government has imposed a moratorium on new marine tailing disposals until 2021, but this may not affect licenses granted before the moratorium came into power. <https://frifagbevegelse.no/arbeidsmanden/regjeringen-sier->

Approximately two million tonnes of waste from the mine are to be deposited in the fjord annually, initially for a period of 15 years. The waste will consist primarily of crushed rock, residual metal and a range of chemical substances that are used in the refinement process. Particulate copper is especially toxic to marine organisms,¹² as are many of the chemicals scheduled for use in the mine.

Locally and nationally, resistance against the project has focused particularly on the consequences of this disposal—which activists and independent scientific experts have estimated as being both catastrophic and largely unknown, due to shortcomings in the impact assessment provided by the company.¹³ Life in and around the fjord will, by most estimates, be severely affected. Skeptics support their projections of calamitous impact with evidence from other marine tailing sites along the Finnmark coast, where the aquatic environment has suffered severe and lasting effects. Advocates of the mine may contest the severity of the impact, but even the most enthusiastic supporters admit that there will be “moderate” damage, and that the environmental impacts of the mine will have to be “weighed” against its projected benefits.

Broadly speaking, the situation thus revolves around a basic trade-off: a range of negative effects, environmental and otherwise, to be suffered *in return for* “something else”: jobs, wealth creation, modernity, in-migration, a chance to kickstart the economy and throw off centuries of marginality and underdevelopment. Controversies arise over issues such as the magnitude (and distribution) of the adverse effects; the validity or legality of the “trade-off”, e.g. clean water or reindeer pastures for mining sector jobs; and the appropriate timescale on which the effects of such a decision should be assessed, as well as the question of who decides them. Critics argue that the negative effects will not be outweighed by the benefits, which will accrue primarily to distant investors and corporate stakeholders; that existing impact assessments underestimate the negative effects of the project while inflating projections of local job creation and wealth generation; that economic metrics distort the decision-making process, by forcing unquantifiable goods—such as home, beauty, belonging, well-being—into a singular matrix of value that misrepresents their importance; and that short-term policies which disregard costs to future generations are wildly inappropriate for the management of landscapes that have been inhabited for millennia, and whose lifespans are measured in the hundreds of millions of years.

ja-til-gruver-men-nei-til-sjodeponi-for-avfallet-gruvebransjen-er-skuffet-6.158.525579.f60c2bcf4c, accessed April 3 2018.

¹²See for example

http://www.ushydrotech.com/files/6714/1409/9604/Impacts_of_Copper_on_Aquatic_Ecosystems_and_human_Health.pdf, accessed April 3 2018.

¹³“Kritisk til undersøkelsene i gruvesakene”, *High North News* August 27 2014.

<http://www.highnorthnews.com/kritisk-til-undersokelsene-i-gruvesakene/>, accessed April 3 2018.

A number of factors further complicate the situation. Kvalsund lies in northern Norway, a historically complex geographical space—defined by centuries of internal colonialism, uneven center-periphery dynamics and asymmetrical resource flows. It is also situated within the transboundary region known as Sápmi, the ancestral land of the indigenous Sámi people.¹⁴ Patterns of colonial violence may be less widely recognized here than in more acknowledged settler societies, such as the United States or Australia, but the realities run parallel: expropriation of land and resources, policies aimed at the intentional destruction of language and culture, forced resettlement, racial discrimination, stigmatization, physical violence, state terror and domination. A key element in the Norwegian colonization of the north was “Norwegianization”—a policy of cultural eradication that directed against the indigenous Sámi by the Norwegian government from the early 19th to the end of the 20th century. Kvalsund was traditionally a coastal Sámi settlement but was, as others have noted, “heavily” Norwegianized (Paine 1957). Today, its inhabitants identify primarily as Norwegian, rather than Sámi¹⁵—though this is, in no small part, the result of complex historical processes of erasure, assimilation and language loss. To enter such a space as a researcher, from outside, demands (at the very least) acknowledgment of the complex histories of colonial violence, control and exploitation that have shaped the land and its people—and that continue to shape them today, sustaining the not-so-postcolonial present of Sápmi. My argument here does not directly explore indigeneity or the complex colonial history of Kvalsund¹⁶—but in recognizing sacrifice as a problem of obviated violence, and of justice, it does attempt to address some of the moral and theoretical obligations entailed by working on colonized land.

As I write this, the Kvalsund mine has yet to begin operations, and is still not scheduled to start up for some time. Describing Kvalsund as a “sacrifice zone” is thus an anticipatory move, in contrast to more common uses that narrate the sacrifice as already happened, deploying the term as a critical or diagnostic tool to render existing phenomena, events and relations visible. This anticipatory re-description also reflects the observation that a sacrifice extends beyond its immediate temporal or material context, refusing reduction to the coordinates of a singular act. For a sacrifice to be consummated, many things must first be in place.

Three meanings of sacrifice

In later sections of the essay, I discuss some of the more indirect permutations of sacrificial logic. First, however, I want to sketch out some simple,

¹⁴<https://www.unric.org/en/indigenous-people/27307-the-sami-of-northern-europe--one-people-four-countries>, accessed April 3 2018.

¹⁵Exact numbers are unknown, but a 2014 document from the district administration indicates that of the 1,050 inhabitants, approximately 150 are registered as voters in the national Sámi parliament. <http://www.kvalsund.kommune.no/getfile.php/2580775.747.rrtsqstfqs/UTREDNING+-+SAMISK+SPRÅKFORVALTNINGSOMRÅDE.pdf>, accessed April 3 2018.

¹⁶Although see Reinert (2016a, 2016b).

direct examples of how ideas of sacrifice thread themselves through discussions about the Nussir project, and resource extraction in northern Norway more generally.

In English, the term “sacrifice” doubles as a noun and a verb. In Norwegian, its most obvious translation as a verb is the relatively colloquial “å ofre”—roughly equivalent to “giving something up” and used casually, usually without the somber theological implications of the English term. As a noun, sacrifice might be rendered into “en ofring”, referring to a formal or ritualized act of sacrifice, or “et offer”, denoting both an act of sacrifice and what has been sacrificed (or given up). “Offer” in Norwegian also has a third sense: like Hebrew and in some other languages (Halbertal 2012), the term for sacrifice can also denote a victim, say of crime or natural disaster. Explicit references to sacrifice permeate discussions surrounding the Nussir project, as well as the more general debates about the future of extractive industries in Northern Norway—and about how the Norwegian state is to position itself relative to the new resources exposed by a thawing Arctic.

The first and most obvious way in which it is used, in this context, is as a marker to denote an exchange or trade-off in which one thing is “given up” for another—capturing (or conjuring) a relation between two terms such that one comes at the expense of the other. In 2010, for example, a survey conducted for the Norwegian national broadcasting corporation concluded that “[people in Finnmark] think it’s alright to sacrifice nature for jobs”¹⁷. Nearly half the population of Finnmark, the survey found, were willing to accept major “interventions into nature”—as long as this led to more jobs. As one respondent put it, “what do we need all this nature for if no one wants to live here, or has the opportunity to work?” Used thus, sacrifice typically establishes an either-or scenario that calibrates projections of economic growth or benefit—i.e. more jobs, profits, increased wealth, development—against concern for issues such as environmental conservation and wildlife. Either there are “jobs”, or there is “nature.”

A second, more complex use deploys the term to problematize loss—particularly, to disrupt imaginaries built around the smooth, frictionless transformation of resources into wealth. In February 2013, the Sámi artist Mari Boine tweeted: “Mining is not compatible with reindeer herding. Shall we sacrifice this ancient livelihood on the altar of Mammon?”¹⁸ Around the same time, at a series of open town-hall meetings across Finnmark, the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature asked “Shall we sacrifice nature in Finnmark for the sake

¹⁷ “Synes det er greit å ofre naturen for arbeidsplasser”, *NRK Nordnytt* September 8. <http://www.nrk.no/nordnytt/synes-det-er-greit-a-ofre-naturen-1.7283257>, accessed April 3 2018.

¹⁸ Boine, Mari. “Gravedrift er ikke forenlig med reindrif. Skal vi ofre den urgamle næringen på mammons alter? Det er det som er det store spørsmålet.” Twitter, February 13 2013. <http://twitter.com/MariBoine/status/301490535930138624>, accessed April 3 2018.

of mines, energy and oil?”¹⁹ Sacrifice served here as a trope that helped crystallize long and complex political processes into the form of a pivotal decision. It was also invoked as the figure of a destruction obviated by dominant narratives of wealth, progress and development—part of a line of argument that centered on making the prospective losses visible, tangible, *real*. At rallies and anti-mining protests, demonstrative banquet tables overflowed with local seafood—highlighting what stood to be lost, imposing materiality (and life) as a hard limit to the vertiginous, speculative calculations of politicians, investors, local planners and company spokespeople. Activists circulated images of pristine fjords and undisturbed landscapes with rhetorical tag-lines, underscoring their uniqueness and irreplaceability. As one activist summarized the Kvalsund case, at a presentation during an after-rally strategy meeting in Oslo: “Someone comes in to destroy what you love. What do you do?”

A third use of sacrifice, finally, invokes it in its aspect of virtuous or necessary renunciation, as the surrender of something valued for the sake of a “higher” purpose: national benefit, say, or the good of “society”. In an interview broadcast on national news in April 2000, for example, Erling Fløtten—the Finnmark regional director for the Confederacy of Norwegian Enterprise [*Næringslivet Hovedorganisasjon*, NHO]—stated that he condemned indigenous resistance against mining in Finnmark on moral grounds:

It is immoral. You cannot demand of society that you be sustained and given a standard of living equal to others *if you are not willing to sacrifice something* [“ofre noe”] to acquire this standard of living.

In an interview six years later—standing now as board member of FeFo, the body that administers 95% of land and resources in Finnmark—Fløtten reiterated his stance.²⁰ Local opponents of mining, indigenous or otherwise, were *selfish*, in the sense that they were unwilling to “give up” something they valued in return for social goods that they either demanded or had already received. With this, Fløtten was effectively reframing the benefits of citizenship, and of participation in the national project, within a moral economy of reciprocity that demanded local repayment. Against this, critics could point to the geographically uneven distribution of these “sacrificial” repayments, and the equally uneven distribution of the power to determine and compel them—and how this problematized the universal aspirations of citizenship itself, as a political project. Who determined the repayment of citizenship? Why must some sacrifice their land and livelihoods, but not others? As many asked, rhetorically: what if the mine were situated on the banks of the Oslo fjord, on the doorstep of power rather than a remote corner of the

¹⁹“Skal vi ofre Finnmarksnaturen for gruver, kraft og oljeutbygging?” Presentation. <http://naturvernforbundet.no/finnmark/diverse/skal-vi-ofre-finnmarksnaturen-for-gruver-kraft-oljeutbygging-article28731-2067.html>, accessed April 3 2018.

²⁰Aslaksen, Eilif. 2006. “Vil ha gruedrift snarest,” *NRK Nordnytt* January 24. <http://www.nrk.no/nordnytt/vil-ha-gruedrift-snarest-1.115259>, accessed April 3 2018.

Arctic? Would ministers impose such sacrifices on their constituents? Or was the *sacrifice* of a fjord something one could only demand so easily from the remote periphery—from territories tallied already as sacrificable, expendable, within the body politic of the state? “Finnmark has been sacrificed so many times already” a local activist remarked, laconically, during a smoking break at a fundraiser in Kvalsund.

Normative concepts of sacrificial renunciation and repayment also play a more general role in national debates around resource extraction.²¹ Narratives of wealth generation, progress, modernization, self-sufficiency, independence and geopolitical security construct a common future good—local, regional, national, even continental—through the imposition of certain negative local effects: *suffering* these effects, in the final tally, needs to be justified. Prospective gain is a carrot, moral obligation is a stick. In March 2012, for example, voicing strong support for new resource extraction projects, then-minister of fisheries Helga Pedersen argued that “Norway feasts [*fråtser*] on consumer goods, and we are therefore *morally obligated* to put our mineral resources to use.”²² Through consumption, Norway had, as a nation, incurred an obligation that was not economic in nature; it could be honored only by “putting to use” mineral resources that had yet to be extracted.²³ Refusing this obligation would constitute a moral failure²⁴—particularly, she argued, for critics and protestors, who used smartphones

²¹ To give an example, I had one version of this argument explained to me a few years ago by a Swedish geologist at an environmental impact workshop in Rovaniemi, Finland. The argument unfolds along lines parallel to the climate justice and runs as follows: current global standards of living and technology are based on centuries of ongoing mineral extraction in the developing world. Given this, the refusal of Western countries to extract their own mineral resources would be “unfair”, as it would leave the burden of sustaining technological development on the third world—while Western countries themselves continued to benefit from extractions past and current. In refusing this calculus of historical responsibility, anti-mining protestors also deny their moral duty to the rest of the world, to contribute equally to the good of all. Their refusal disregards centuries of inequality, exploitation and resource colonialism—tangled histories whose moral imperatives, the geologist argued, the mining companies themselves were responding to. To abstain from resource extraction was to refuse an obligation generated by the sacrifice of others before you; resource extraction was, in this view, a call to justice, and to equality: to all countries an equal share, also of the costs.

²²“Vil ha fart i gruveplanene,” *Altaposten* March 7 2012.

²³ In framing arguments for resource extraction as a matter of repayment, advocates like Pedersen veer close to reifying the market itself as a kind of moral person, an entity to whom moral debts can meaningfully be owed. Such arguments invest the market with a kind of phantasmal personhood, imbuing it with the power to compel a double gratitude, and a double repayment: first, an economic repayment, paid to providers in return for goods; and second, a kind of moral debt, owed and repaid to the market itself—as *the provider that makes provision possible*. Distinctions between sacrifice “to” (a being) and sacrifice “for” (a cause) begin to blur (Halberty 2012).

²⁴In a critical opinion piece from April 2013, local planner Tom Ness rejected this logic, dismissing Pedersen’s claim “that Norway as a nation must contribute, that we must sacrifice [*gi et offer*] to satisfy the needs of the world market for copper.”—“Nei til Sjødeponi!” *Hammerfestingen* 18 April.

and other consumer electronics that depended, directly or indirectly, on extracted resources. Her argument is striking not least for how an implicit puritan critique of over-consumption (“Norway *feasts*”) is transformed into a moral imperative to provide markets with more raw materials, so as to enable the manufacture of more consumer goods. The moral sacrifice is implicitly one of atonement—but an atonement that fulfills itself, ironically, by facilitating what it atones for.

To sum up, then, I have briefly outlined three significant ways in which notions of “sacrifice” operate in the context of the Kvalsund mining project:

- one, as a figure of exchange that structures the field of values into opposing camps;
- two, as marker of an irreplaceable loss that disrupts narratives of “smooth” transformation;
- three, as a call to virtuous action, compelled by moral obligation.

The list is partial, but it suffices to establish that “sacrifice” is a locally active concept, variously used to describe, critique, justify and compel. The sacrifice may be represented as morally urgent, or as illegitimate; as a simple trade-off, or a trope of violent, irreversible destruction; as a figure of commensuration, like in the first example, or of absolute rupture and incommensurability, as in the second. The permutations are numerous, but the field of sacrificial activity does not necessarily coincide with that of sacrificial discourse. One of the questions I want to explore here is precisely the relationship between sacrifice conceptualized *as such*, overtly, and processes that may operate through sacrificial logics but without being represented or understood that way: the tension, that is, between sacrifice as an *emic* and an *etic* category (Harris 1976). The distinction is troubled, here, by how ideas of sacrifice already circulate through the space of the Nussir initiative, as part of the vocabulary through which the project itself is constituted, conceptualized and critiqued. In one sense, describing Kvalsund as a “sacrifice zone” simply recapitulates the terms on which the project already exists—with the specification that to critics, the sacrifice is unjust; to advocates, morally necessary. Attempting to move past this point, the next two sections examine less obvious examples of sacrificial logic that are at work alongside the uses I have already discussed.

Sacrificial planning

In a 2014 letter to the Department of Modernization (NFD 2014), the Norwegian Ministry of Industry and Fisheries stated that “[d]ecision in [the Nussir case] depends on a weighing [*avveining*] of the advantages and disadvantages of the mineral project” (NFD 2014: 2). The authors went on to describe

<http://www.nussir.no/media/2013/2013-04-18%20%20Hammerfestingen%20-%20Nei%20til%20sjoedeponi.pdf>, accessed April 3 2018.

implementation of the Nussir project through a series of calculated trade-offs, all of which balanced detrimental consequences, losses and risks against (invariably) the projected economic benefits of the development. With regard to the consequences of marine disposal, for example, “the ministry considers it *unlikely* that marine disposal in this case will have significant negative economic consequences for commercial fishing, marine use or *unacceptable* environmental consequences” (NFD 2014: 2; emphasis added). These projections established, with sovereign authority, a range of unequal—and uncertain—distributions of gain and loss. In the process, they also disregarded a range of public statements by the national Institute of Marine Research,²⁵ Sámi political parties,²⁶ conservation organizations²⁷ and other expert bodies, all of whom expressed strong concerns regarding the impact of marine disposal on local ecosystems and livelihoods.

The trade-offs posited in the letter are dramatic, even brutal. With regard to indigenous reindeer pastoralism in the area, the Department stated that “positive ripple effects from mining activity... clearly exceed the possible negative consequences for reindeer husbandry” (NFD 2014: 2). According to reindeer herders in the affected areas, the gamut of these “possible negative consequences” includes disturbance, pollution and loss of pasture areas—to the point where pastoralism in the area will likely become unviable.²⁸ Norwegian reindeer husbandry is an indigenous livelihood, protected under a range of binding international treaties—something the quantitative economic projections in the letter neatly sidestepped.

Similar sacrificial dynamics are in evidence across the breadth of reports, strategies, missives, statements and communiqués associated with the ongoing push to “develop” the north. A useful example, striking but not unique, is a 2013 report commissioned by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, entitled *Sector Analysis of the Mineral Industry in Norway* (Didriksen et al 2013). The report was a collaboration between Vista Analysis, a social science consultancy, and Sweco AS, one of the companies employed by Nussir ASA for its (contested) impact assessments.²⁹ According to the report authors, their official brief from the ministry included developing a scenario where the government facilitated maximal extraction of resources, “even where this contradicts stated present-day political

²⁵ https://www.imr.no/filarkiv/2014/03/horingsuttalelse_utslippssoknad_fra_hi_7-3-12-klif.pdf/nb-no, accessed April 3 2018.

²⁶ <http://www3.nsr.no/website.aspx?displayid=58618>, accessed April 3 2018.

²⁷ <http://www.nussir.no/environmental-pub/tailings/hoeringsuttalelser/2012-05-15%20Norske%20lakseelver%20-%20%20Hoeringsuttalelse.pdf>, accessed April 3 2018.

²⁸ <http://www.nussir.no/environmental-pub/zoning/hoeringsuttalelser/2011-09-07%20Reinbeitedistrikt%2022%20Mikkel%20Nils%20M%20Sara%20Hoeringsuttalelse.pdf>, accessed April 3 2018.

²⁹ e.g. <http://www.nussir.no/environmental-pub/zoning/Sweco%20Reguleringsplan%20Konsekvensutredning%20Nussir%203jun11.pdf>, accessed April 3 2018.

objectives” (2013: 15). Their report discusses a number of requirements for “realizing maximum capacity”—including “radical moves” to simplify the regulatory process; reducing the number of supervisory bodies; tax breaks to attract international capital; the state taking control of the planning process from local councils... The list goes on, a sort of surreal checklist for a state apparatus sacrificing itself to itself. The authors themselves underline that the scenario described in the report “will entail a complete transformation of significant elements of [Norwegian law] and current practice” (2013: 16). Realizing “maximum capacity” will require “acceptance of certain negative consequences that to some degree will have to be compensated financially” (2013: 15).

The commensurating function of financial compensation here, in rendering land, livelihoods and environments destructible, is obvious. It is less clear whose acceptance the report refers to—but what it *does* specify is the role of the state in providing economic compensation to the affected. Companies themselves will have to provide compensation, but with an important caveat: “negative environmental consequences”, the consultants state, “will have to be compensated economically as far as possible *without affecting the profitability of the companies involved*” (2013: 16; emphasis added). For the remainder—that is, for compensations that would affect profitability—the state will step in and provide a safety net. Effectively, the report moves the state into place to suspend market mechanisms—so as to guarantee the profit margins of environmentally destructive activities *even where they are not profitable*.

This seems worth restating: the report deploys the state as a guarantor that protects destructive capitalist extraction projects from the consequences of their actions—ensuring that destructive consequences to the tax-payer are compensated, through the state, by the tax-payer. This sleight of hand depends, in turn, on a logic of economic commensuration that can dematerialize destructive effects, rendering them as compensable, and thereby make massive destructive interventions plausible. Loss is neutralized, transformed into an abstract quantum of “value”—a quantum that can always, by definition, be restituted in kind. Of course, as reindeer herders in the area will tell you, “reindeer don’t eat money.”³⁰

The report consistently puts economic valuation to work to neutralize and erase the effects of the violence it imagines. Things become destructible to the exact degree that their “economic value” can be calculated, and “appropriate” compensation offered. Consequences for the indigenous pastoralism in the area can be ignored, because its quantified “value” is lower than the projected returns from mining. Euphemistic terms such as “acceptable loss” and “compensation” conceal (and facilitate) destructive operations on a massive scale. As long as loss and gain are quantified in the same currency, the projection of gain can outweigh any

³⁰ For decades, piecemeal financial compensation for lost pastures has obscured the massive dispossession of pastoral land across the entire region; see e.g. Reinert (2009).

present loss—by positing (or promising) a future in which the total sum of value will be higher. In an important sense, within this mode of calculation, there *will have been* no violence: because economic commensuration reduces the effects of violence to an economic loss—and any economic loss can be nullified by a gain that exceeds it. What we have here, in other words, is a system of sacrificial destruction—of things being destroyed, in return for something else—that functions *through the erasure of its own destructive violence*. Focusing on sacrifice as a figure of destruction, the activists I described earlier were thus effectively using the *idea* of sacrifice to sabotage a *system* of sacrificial violence—by foregrounding the erasures and equivalences that enable it to function, and which make projects such as Nussir thinkable. René Girard, who argued that sacrifice is undone in the revelation of its logic (e.g. 2011: xi), would have been proud.

The contested gift

So far I have discussed some overt uses of sacrificial language, and the covert but still recognizable logics of sacrifice at work in planning documents and “official” discourse. In the following I want to push the figure of sacrifice further, to experiment with its usefulness as a heuristic. I do this by focusing on a somewhat curious public exchange that took place in 2014, between the mayor of Kvalsund and the director of Nussir ASA.

Speaking in March 2012, then mayor of Kvalsund Ragnar Olsen stated emphatically to the press that Nussir ASA would, in return for access to the resources of the area, be expected to provide tangible returns: “You can’t just come in and help yourself to the resources, [the company] must *give something back* too” (emphasis added).³¹ Two years later, in May 2014, Norwegian media reported that negotiations between Kvalsund and Nussir ASA had stalled—precisely on the issue of that “something back.” Speaking for Kvalsund, the mayor was now advancing concrete demands: specifically, he was demanding one percent of the gross annual revenue of the company, a share then estimated at 10 million NOK (approximately 1.7 million USD).³² Company headquarters must also be based in Kvalsund, he said, and the “headquarter function” must be “real”; all senior personnel must have their offices in the village, and all employees were to live and pay taxes in the municipality. The demands were prompted, in part, by a shift in the circumstances for the project. At the time, the recently elected conservative government were re-evaluating the property tax system—and if that were to change, the municipality risked being left, as the mayor put it, with “buttons and scraps [*knapper og*

³¹“Vil ha fart i gruveplanene”, *Altaposten* March 7 2012.

³²“–Det går for tregt,” *Finnmark Dagblad* May 11 2014.

<http://www.finnmarkdagblad.no/nyheter/article7348748.ece>, accessed April 3 2018.

glansbilder].”³³ The mayor was at pains to formulate these demands in a diplomatic manner. “This is neither a gift nor a tax,” he stated, “but an investment that will also benefit Nussir”—eliding terms of obligation in favor of an appeal to (mutual) profit.

Nussir CEO Øystein Rushfeldt rejected these demands, stating that the company “[could] not give money in the form of *pure gifts*” (emphasis added)—rejecting also the idea that the company might be obligated to the municipality, and that the money might constitute a return term. In his words, “we can not turn up as a company in a municipality and create a special mechanism that only applies to us. This will create complications for all other companies.”³⁴ The issue of precedent was particularly salient here because Nussir ASA is the first major new mining venture in Finnmark for decades,³⁵ and a test case for the future of mining in the Norwegian Arctic.

As the director of a mining company, Rushfeldt was performing accountability—to investors, shareholders and other companies in the same sector—by resisting a novel mechanism that would cut into profit margins. Invoking tradition is a common strategy among northern mining advocates, who often emphasize continuity with the past of a hundred years ago and more—when “company towns” like Kirkenes and Kiruna flourished under the protective umbrella of mining companies that built schools, roads and kindergartens. The line of argument tends to minimize the enormous changes that have transformed the corporate sector, and the corporation itself, over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries. Following precisely in those lines, Rushfeldt had a counter-proposal:

All major Norwegian mineral companies have extensive agreements for contributing to voluntary activities in the municipalities where they operate. This includes organizations, associations, sports and marching bands. This is a good tradition, and we of course want this in Kvalsund too.³⁶

The offer is interesting, not least because it establishes that the issue was not gifts in general—but specifically, the idea of *money* as a gift. The issues here are complex and merit some further unpacking.

Economic returns from the Nussir project will come primarily through the destructive transformation of non-economic entities (landscape, rocks, pasture

³³A Norwegian idiom for inadequate payment that also echoes, probably by accident, the apocryphal story of how Manhattan was purchased for “beads, buttons and other trinkets” (Burrows and Wallace 1999: xiv).

³⁴“Forhandlingene stoppet opp—krangler om 10 millioner,” *NRK Troms* May 8 2014. <https://www.nrk.no/troms/uenig-om-1-prosent-1.11706130>, accessed April 3 2018.

³⁵Along with Arctic Gold, a project (currently inactive) to reactivate a gold mine in a reindeer pasture area near Kautokeino.

³⁶“Forhandlingene stoppet opp—krangler om 10 millioner,” *NRK Troms* May 8 2014. <https://www.nrk.no/troms/uenig-om-1-prosent-1.11706130>, accessed April 3 2018.

grounds) into alienable economic goods—primarily copper, but potentially also other materials such as gold—to be sold for profit on the global market. These profit margins will depend on a range of factors, including global fluctuations in the price of copper—a factor amplified further by the high cost of operations in Norway compared to other copper-producing countries such as Chile. For the Nussir project to remain profitable, the global price of copper will have to remain at a much higher level than for its principal international competitors. This is not a new issue: the landscape around Kvalsund is dotted with traces of earlier attempts to mine the copper deposits in the region, with the oldest visible remains dating back at least a century or two—a rubbled crater or two, streaked with the iridescent green of copper; a couple of shafts up in the hills, drilled some time in the 19th century by an overseas company. The largest and most recent of these installations, Folldal Verk, operated through most of the 1970s; its remains provide large part of the infrastructure that Nussir ASA aims to reactivate.

Current Norwegian law specifies that the state is legal owner of all heavy metals in Norwegian soil. This includes gold, copper, titanium and all other metals with a weight over 5 grams per cubic centimeter.³⁷ Mining companies pay annual fees for exploration and extraction rights, as well as a tithe of 0.5% to the landowner [*grunneier*] when extracting minerals owned by the state; an additional tithe applies in Finnmark, currently set to 0.25%.³⁸ Unlike the oil industry however—which pays a 51% special tax on income from oil extraction, in addition to conventional taxes—there is no specific tax on mineral resource extraction. There are also no direct economic rewards or incentives for municipalities that host mining projects—a point which local politicians, activists and mineral prospectors have also criticized.³⁹ Presently, in short, direct economic benefits to Kvalsund from the Nussir project will consist primarily of income tax from company employees settled in the township, plus a very limited property tax on the holdings of the company. Local anticipations of wealth are sustained within a neoliberal imaginary of “trickle-down”, “ripple effects” and “sector synergies”⁴⁰—although again, critics point to the fact that automation has radically transformed the role of mining labour since the heydays of the “company town”; that mining increasingly requires highly skilled technical labour; and that mining operations will likely depend in large part on rotating shift labour by trained migrant workers—most of whom will not settle in Kvalsund, and therefore will not pay taxes there.

³⁷ https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2009-06-19-101/KAPITTEL_1, §7, accessed April 3 2018.

³⁸ https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2009-06-19-101/KAPITTEL_10, §56, accessed April 3 2018.

³⁹ “Mineraljeger slakter norsk gruvestrategi”, *Nationen* March 15 2013. Reportedly, the Norwegian Mineral Industry is developing proposals to address this issue, e.g. with a 0.3% tax payable to municipalities. As of present, however, nothing seems to have come of this. Caroline Lund, “Mineralutvinning: Kommunenes posisjon og rettigheter”, presentation at the *Utmarkskommunenes Sammenslåing* national conference, 24 April 2014.

⁴⁰ See Reinert (2016b).

The exchange that underwrites the projected profit margins from the Nussir project thus occurs, primarily, between two parties: the state, as the legal owner of heavy metals in Norwegian soil, and Nussir ASA, as the company that acquires from the state the right to mine these resources and sell them on the global market. The state gains a limited return, in the form of fees and general taxes—but Kvalsund itself, and its residents, remain formally external to the exchange: a third party whose cooperation and resources are offered, not for a guaranteed effect but in the hope of wealth accruing through indirect means. The three-way relationship thus involves two distinct logics of return: The *state* stands to gain a formally specified and predictable economic benefits—but the *municipality* offers itself, and its resources, in a mode of faithful anticipation, waiting (hopefully) for the promised return.

This point is worth bringing more clearly into focus. One way to distinguish sacrifice, analytically, is to specify it as involving, in some necessary sense, the destruction of an offering—with the additional stipulation that the destruction be implicated in the mechanism of the return. Sacrifice thus understood establishes a relationship mediated by the destruction of a focal object.⁴¹ Destruction makes it *irreversible*, unlike the gift: burned money does not reconstitute itself, killed oxen do not come back to life, slain Isaac will not be restored. It is also *uncertain*, in the sense that the return or effect is not guaranteed. Moshe Halbertal, for example, develops an account of sacrifice built around the anxiety of the supplicant that the offering might not be accepted by its recipient (2012). Such uncertainty is easily transposed into more general terms: some intelligible logic—divine favor, say, or economic laws—serves to link the destruction to an expected return, but its operation is not guaranteed. The act may or may not produce the desired effect: right there, as it happens, sacrifice is a gesture of hope. In its aftermath, the sacrificant waits uncertainly.

The very public negotiation between Olsen and Rushfeldt, municipality and company, brings this sharply into focus—as a tug of war around the attempt to specify, ahead of time, the terms of an “obligation to reciprocate” that might bind the recipient. The dynamic of the exchange also hinges on a peculiarity in the Nussir ASA media strategy—which is focused, in large part, on the persona of its eloquent and charismatic director, Øystein Rushfeldt. Over the years, the campaign to engineer local support for the Nussir project has used a range of personal, even intimate tactics: from Rushfeldt deploying his own body in political stunts, publicly

⁴¹To Mauss and Hubert, for example, sacrifice was an asymmetrical and destructive modality of the gift that imposed, on its (nonhuman) recipient, an “obligation to reciprocate” (Hubert and Mauss 1964)—compelling them to give back in equal or greater measure. Or rather, it *sought* to compel the recipient in this way. The return and the outcome remained uncertain: the intended recipient might reject the offering, or fail to be bound by it.

growing his hair to protest slow bureaucratic processes;⁴² to Rushfeldt jovially attending town-hall dances, taking local politicians on “informal” fishing trips, inviting himself to tea with opponents, writing “hurt” letters to newspapers in response to critique, and so on. This directorial public persona is earnest, well intentioned and vulnerable. Its affable intimacy is used—very effectively—to police the tone and content of debates, constantly translating systemic critique into a personal attack (“of course I wouldn’t do that, I am hurt you would even suggest it”) and mediating the presence of powerful transnational interests through a personable human body.

In the figure of Rushfeldt, Kvalsund thus finds itself negotiating with two entities that occupy the same body: a *human* person, bound (at least in theory) by expectations of propriety, decency and appropriate response; and a *corporate* person—an abstract nonhuman entity bound not by social expectations, but rather by factors such as stakeholder profits or the law. The former is obvious, the latter tactically concealed. Throughout the exchange, the dual human-corporate entity Rushfeldt is continuously at work to shift expectations—and potential obligations—away from the corporate person, towards the human. In describing a transfer of money as “a pure gift”, Rushfeldt is attempting to police, preemptively, the possibility of incurring obligations that would bind Nussir ASA *as a corporation*, extending beyond his own declarations of good will. Gifts retain an air of beneficence and benign patronage, after all, firmly controlled by the donor—but the danger of money was that it might reveal itself as something else, something it must at all costs be pre-empted from appearing as: a return term, meager *but binding*, on an irreversible offering.

Conclusion

Figuratively speaking, the Nussir project hangs in the span of time that separates an initial designation of the victim—as sacrificable, to be sacrificed—from the material consummation of the act. This position affords a privileged perspective, illuminating aspects of the sacrificial dynamic that appear less evident in hindsight—including those powerful admixtures of hope, urgency and anticipation that structure the present as prior to an event that has yet to come, orienting it towards uncertain future outcomes. Here and now no one knows what is to come, every outcome is contested—and whether the mine happens or not, no solution can satisfy all the parties. Within this space, I have tried to draw out some of the points where logics of sacrifice are at work, and to thread them: to capture their richness and complexity, their embeddedness in quotidian modes of thought, speech, praxis and governance.

⁴² “Lot håret gro i protest”, *NRK Troms* April 29 2014, <https://www.nrk.no/troms/lot-haret-gro-i-protest-1.11689538>, accessed April 3 2018.

In many of its permutations, sacrifice works as a mechanism that surrenders or destroys a “lower” or “base” value in return for benefits that accrue in a “higher” one: the destruction of material goods for spiritual benefit, for example, or of living beings for divine favor; or, as in Kvalsund, the sacrificial demand that villagers accept the local consequences of mining as a sacrifice for the nation, the good of all. Models of sacrifice as sublimation have been paradigmatic not only in Christian theology, but also (by derivation) for many of the key European and American writers on the psychology, sociology and anthropology of sacrifice, from the 19th century onward (Keenan 2005; also Strenski 2003). Sacrifice, in this guise, mediates between distinct or incompatible values; today, inevitably, such mediations are framed within the material horizons of contemporary global capitalism—and its intricate enmeshment (historical, material, conceptual) with sacrifice. From Franklin to Schumpeter to the contemporary architects of “austerity”, many of the foremost theorists of capitalism have advanced sacrifice—in some form or other—as necessary, intrinsic, productive, desirable or virtuous (Hoeller 2012). Georg Simmel argued that capitalism encodes a sacrificial mechanism at its very heart, in the elemental gesture of giving up one thing for another (2004: 80-81), the continuous transformation of commodities into money, money into commodities. In commensurating previously unrelated terms, economic valuation renders their value in such a way that the gain incurred from the loss of something can calculably, and objectively, exceed the value of retaining it. This makes it a sacrificial machine *par excellence*—a logic that makes sacrificial destruction *realistic*, thinkable on immense new scales, in global permutations.

In *Economies of Abandonment* (2011), the anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli develops her diagnosis of “late liberalism” around the notion of “sacrificial love”—a modality of time that views the present from the perspective of the *future perfect*: a future in which all losses yet to come have been redeemed, all returns fulfilled. Through this displacement, sacrificial love effects “a totalization in which the present becomes a mode of pastness by being projected into a perfected future” (Povinelli 2011: 168). From this vantage, the uncertainty of sacrificial action is dissolved; questions that seem urgent *now* appear irrelevant or unimportant. Will the offering be effective? Will the anticipated return materialize? Through a sleight that short-circuits time, sacrificial love posits a future of the *will have been*—in which the offering *will have been* effective and the losses today *will have been* justified, by returns that *will have been* received. In this move, the loss, suffering and violence of the present can be made to disappear—because once the checks are made, the columns balanced, they *will have been* compensated; in the strange, abstracted world of economic equivalence there *will have been* no loss, no suffering, no violence. In this way, sacrificial love subsumes the present, swallowing it in the dreamlike, continuous movement to a promised future—a future of growth, prosperity, well-being for all. The wealthier that promised future, the more discontinuous it becomes to the destructions that supposedly herald its arrival. With this, capitalist time becomes legible as a continuous, hopeful

destruction of the present—a conflagration in which everything burns, for the sake of a future that destroys itself in the fulfilment of its own conditions.

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