

Transnational American Studies, Ecocritical Narratives, and Global Indigeneity: A Year of Teaching in Norway

SARA L. SPURGEON
Texas Tech University

The Background

Texas and Norway may appear to be worlds apart—one flat, arid, and sprawling across the vast US West, the other green, mountainous, and defined by its waters. Yet they face surprisingly similar challenges resulting from economies built on the oil industry in a world now wracked by climate change. What historical, cultural beliefs about the natural world, and the human relationship to it, led Norway and Texas to their present conundrums? How should we think about competing claims to natural resources, or the argument from many Indigenous communities that defining nature as a set of resources is precisely what created our current climate crisis? What other worldviews and epistemologies might shed light on how to live sustainably on the earth, or help guide us to a less precarious future?

These are the questions I explored along with my students, as a researcher and teacher, in 2019/2020 when I was the Fulbright Scholar in American Literature and Culture at the University of Bergen (UiB) in Bergen, Norway's second largest city. This standing position at UiB is housed in the Department of Foreign Languages, where English is the most popular area of concentration for both undergraduate and graduate students. Each year a different Fulbright scholar brings a different set of scholarly interests to teaching there. I was told by English program faculty that one reason my application for the Fulbright position was selected, in a year in which there were so many applicants that it took two weeks of Zoom interviews just to get through the finalists, is the growing interest among Norwegian students in the area in which I

proposed to teach: Literature, Social Justice, and Environment, from one petro-state with a colonized Indigenous population to another. The Norwegian professors' intuition was correct, and my classes at both the graduate and undergraduate levels enrolled record numbers of students eager to engage a transnational approach to American Studies.

Like the LSJE (Literature, Social Justice, and Environment) Program in the Department of English at my home institution, Texas Tech University, my courses at the University of Bergen were structured on the assumption that issues of race, colonialism, and the environment have always been transnational, and likewise, have been embedded in American literature and culture from its beginnings. Most of us know Thoreau wrote *Walden* but sometimes forget he also wrote "Civil Disobedience," a text that would famously inspire both Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. Edward Abbey's MA thesis did not celebrate the beauty of American deserts but examined the moral implications of political violence deployed in their defense. John Muir not only helped convince Theodore Roosevelt to found the National Park system but his vision of the parks as virginal, people-free wildernesses resulted in the forced removal of Yosemite's Native American inhabitants in order to turn the valley into our first wilderness park—a park which would then adopt the cartoon image of an "Indian Brave" to grace its front entrance. More recently, Carolyn Merchant has written on the connections between slavery and soil degradation in the US South. Gloria Anzaldúa's metaphor of the borderlands originates in the geographic and psychosocial space of the US–Mexico political boundary, and Cherríe Moraga writes about the everyday experience of the environment for queer women of color, defining environment as home, work, food, and body.

None of this is as isolated from contemporary or historical Norway as may first appear. Today, younger Norwegians especially are coming to terms with the fact that many of the ships involved in the global trade that supplied the US South with enslaved Africans were built in Norway, and often captained by Norwegians. Norwegian investors grew wealthy enabling the traffic in human beings, and many Norwegian towns and cities are currently debating what to do about statues in their public squares erected to honor these men, and whether prominent streets bearing their names should be rechristened in the wake of BLM protests that sprang up in every major Norwegian city in the summer of 2020. Emphasizing the ties between social justice and environment that cross political boundaries, especially in petro-states like Texas and North Dakota, the economy of Norway in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has grown increasingly wealthy from, and dependent on, the extraction and sale of oil and natural gas, frequently removed from lands whose ownership is contested by Indigenous Peoples. Just as the Native American protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock sparked a new era of Indigenous organizing in the US centered on the understanding that sovereignty and social justice issues are inextricable from environmental concerns, Sámi protests against the construction of the massive hydroelectric dam project on the Alta River in northern Norway from 1979–1981 helped

launch the current revival of Sámi language, culture, art, and political activism in Norway and across the European far North.

The Sámi are the Indigenous People inhabiting much of the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, an area known collectively as *Sápmi*. They are likely most familiar to Americans as the reindeer herders whose haunting musical traditions inspired Disney's *Frozen* franchise. In an interesting example of transnational Indigeneity and solidarity, Norwegian Sámi activist Niilas Somby, one of the most high-profile protestors of the Alta Dam project who lost part of one arm when a bomb intended to sabotage the construction exploded prematurely, was given sanctuary by the Haudenosaunee Nation on their reserve in Canada. In 2016, when the Standing Rock protests began, many Sámi traveled to North Dakota to support the Standing Rock Sioux in their battle to stop the DAPL pipeline from passing under the Missouri River, which supplies the reservation's drinking water.

Such cross-cultural, global connections are not as surprising as they may seem. Barry Lopez suggests in *Arctic Dreams* that the Arctic bioregion, essentially a massive circle around the North Pole that cuts through modern nation-states in Europe, Asia, and North America, is a much more logical frame of analysis for thinking about the land and its inhabitants, human and other-than-human, than the arbitrary political lines of the various nation-states that fragment it. The Indigenous Peoples who inhabit the Arctic bioregion, have long recognized this, and have long warned that the environmental consequences of worldwide petroculture are nowhere more apparent than in the Arctic. Their art, literature, and activism frequently highlight the social networks connecting the nodes of Sámi, Inuit, and Canadian and Alaska Natives, for example, pointing out that these are reflections of the complicated nodal networks also connecting landscapes, waterways, weather patterns, ocean currents, and plant and animal species, all now reeling under the impact of global climate change.

The Teaching and the Learning

As I built syllabi for my Norwegian classes, I structured the readings and films around a series of questions designed to help students identify and explore links between literature, social justice, and the environment in the US and Norway in ways that would illuminate the global, transnational nature of these concerns. What do Native American protests at Standing Rock have to do with climate change, we wondered? How is police violence in Ferguson, Missouri, connected to lead-poisoned children in Flint, Michigan? Do the Appalachian Coal Country roots of the opioid epidemic have anything to do with the experiences of a migrant farm worker in California, the life of a Black child in inner-city Baltimore, or with a dystopic sci-fi film by a Native American director starring a First Nations actress who is part Kanien'keha:ka and part Sámi?

To the works I regularly teach in my LSJE (Literature, Social Justice, and Environment) classes at Texas Tech University, such as Helena Maria Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*, Leslie Marmon Silko's

Ceremony, and Steven Soderbergh's film *Erin Brockovich*, I added trans-Indigenous texts and several works by Norwegian and Sámi authors and filmmakers. Vendela Vida's *Let the Northern Lights Erase Your Name* and selected works of Sámi writers Matti Aikio and Ailo Gaup from the anthology *In the Shadow of the Midnight Sun: Contemporary Sámi Prose and Poetry* are available in English translations. Sámi artist, activist, and writer Máret Anne Sara's YA fantasy/speculative fiction novel *Ilmiiid Gaskaas* was written and published in North Sámi (one of the most widely spoken variations of the Sámi language) in 2014 and translated into Norwegian, then English as *In Between Worlds*. It wrestles with the contemporary fallout from nearly a century of official "Norwegianization" policies as they threaten to sever connections between members of a Sámi family and between young Sámi and their families' traditional grazing lands.

In place until the 1970s, Norwegianization policies were depressingly similar to those enacted by US and Canadian settler governments—mandatory boarding/residential schools where children were frequently beaten and sexually abused; mandatory Christianization, the banning of all aspects of Indigenous culture, from language to clothing to music; and often an overt assault on traditional epistemologies regarding the human relationship with the other-than-human world. In Sápmi (as it exists on all sides of the Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Russian borders) the impact of these policies reverberates through generations. Today many Sámi youth struggle to retain their languages and traditional attitudes toward the natural world along with what many consider one of the bedrocks of Sámi culture—reindeer herding. The intimate, almost familial love for the land that undergirds herding is often deemed primitive superstition by Norwegians.

The teenage brother and sister at the heart of *In Between Worlds*, children of reindeer herders who are already in between worlds as the novel opens, live in a Norwegian-dominated town, attend Norwegian schools, and enjoy pleasures typical of contemporary teenage life revolving around video games, cell phones, and, in this case, riding dirt bikes at a local motocross track carved out of a chunk of what Norwegian townsfolk see as empty, unused forest, but which local Sámi see as the only nearby place offering good winter grazing for reindeer. The siblings often rebel against what appears to them as their parents' old-fashioned attitudes, until they are accidentally transported into the land of the ulda-people from Sámi folklore. The ulda-people are just like the Sámi, but they live in a kind of parallel universe to our own world. The siblings discover that in the world of the ulda-people, the Sámi were never colonized by Norwegians. Despite these differences, their world and ours are connected, and the environmental damage from over-development and clear-cutting in our own reality is killing the forests and rivers of the ulda-people's land.

This text in particular, or more precisely the saga of its author, helped students better understand the desperate ties binding Indigenous sovereignty, traditional lifeways, and protection of the environment for Indigenous Peoples across continents and the borders of nation states. Máret Anne Sara's novel was written as the first in a

proposed trilogy, and although it was well-received (nominated for the Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Prize in 2014), she was forced to delay work on the English translation of the second book in order to support her brother, Jovsset Ánte Sara. He was the primary plaintiff in a series of public proceedings against the Norwegian government. Contradicting the findings of its own scientists, Norway claimed that Sámi reindeer herds were overgrazing certain tundra lands which the government, coincidentally, wished to open up to mining. The government implemented an obligatory cull of each herder's reindeer, which Máret Anne Sara's brother and other plaintiffs claimed reduced herd size, especially for young herders who typically have fewer animals, to such an extent it was tantamount to enforced bankruptcy of an entire generation of Sámi. The Norwegian Supreme Court ruled against Jovsset Ánte Sara in 2017 (The Associated Press 2017), but his case was brought on appeal to the Human Rights Council, the United Nations body charged with promoting and protecting human rights, especially those of oppressed minorities and colonized Indigenous Peoples. The UN Human Rights Council decided the case in his favor. In 2019, while I was teaching at the University of Bergen, the Norwegian government appealed the Human Rights Council's decision, thus dragging out the legal proceedings and requiring further investments of money and time from Sámi communities and from their writers and artists like Máret Anne Sara.¹

Setting aside her writing to focus on her work as a visual and performance artist, Sara drew attention to the case by hanging a massive steel-wire curtain supporting four hundred bullet-ridden reindeer skulls outside Norway's Parliament Building in Oslo. Calling her art installation *Pile o' Sápmi*, Sara writes that the title, which she deliberately created in English to facilitate global visibility, also "references 'Pile of Bones,' the Indigenous name for the place where the Cree nation stacked buffalo bones to anchor the animals' spirits to the land, thereby ensuring their continued presence in what is today known as Western Canada ... [as well as] trophy mountains of bones [that] testified to the buffalo massacre that served to dispossess Indigenous peoples of the land and pen them into reserves."²

My Norwegian students, many of whom were vaguely familiar with the case, began following it in earnest, and researching the work of Máret Anne Sara. They discovered that *Pile o' Sápmi*, which has since traveled as an exhibit around Scandinavia as well as to a number of other European countries, was also intended to draw attention to issues of waste in larger Norwegian, European, and Euro-American cultures by utilizing skulls removed from newly culled reindeer which were allowed to rot on the curtain as part of the piece's performative and interactive nature. "If the freshly slaughtered reindeer heads provide the nose and eye with uncomfortable reminders of decay," Sara explains, "the bullet holes at the center of their skulls reveal the colonial killing system's disrespect for Indigenous processes that would have preserved and utilized every part of the dead animals."³

A closely related text that generated so much engagement from students I arranged a second, public screening and discussion in one of the University of Bergen's

theaters was the documentary *Oaivveskaldjut* (*Give us our Skeletons!*, 1999) by Sámi director Paul-Anders Simma. The film, in North Sámi and Norwegian with English subtitles, directly engages the Sámi history of struggle with the Norwegian government on both cultural and environmental levels. Niilas Somby, the Alta Dam protestor who is also the subject of *Oaivveskaldjut*, was eventually allowed to return to Norway from his exile with the Haudenosaunee in Canada after the Norwegian government triumphed and construction of the Alta Dam was completed. In the late 1990s, Somby fought a prolonged legal battle, recorded by filmmaker Paul-Anders Simma, to retrieve the skull of one of his ancestors, Mons Somby, who had helped lead the 1854 Kautokeino Rebellion against the Norwegian government. Mons Somby's head was gifted to the Anatomical Institute in Oslo after Somby and another leader of the rebellion were executed by decapitation—an eerie foreshadowing of one of the outcomes of the US Dakota War of 1862 in which scores of Norwegian immigrants participated.

The US Dakota War, in what is now called Minnesota, began as a hopeless gesture of defiance by a small group of starving Dakota people. Over in little more than five weeks, the initial stages of the rebellion led to military tribunals ordering more than three hundred Dakota people to be hanged. Although the death sentences of most were commuted by Abraham Lincoln as there was no evidence any had actually participated in the raids on white settlers' farms, thirty-eight men and boys were hung in Mankato, Minnesota, on December 26, 1862, in what remains the largest mass execution in US history. Soon after, Congress passed legislation making it illegal for the Dakota to live in Minnesota (a law still technically on the books today). To ensure the Dakota were totally driven from Minnesota, a bounty was created, awarding money for every Dakota scalp turned in. In the months leading up to the rebellion, a Dakota leader named Little Crow, who had signed the Mendota Treaty in 1858 and visited President James Buchanan in the White House, repeatedly begged Indian Agents and missionaries at Fort Ridley, where warehouses full of food promised to the Dakota people by the treaty were being guarded by the US Army (and many claim, sold by them to corrupt traders on the black market), to hand over the Dakota's food. He explained in a meeting with the Army, US Indian agents, and traders that scores of his people were on the verge of starvation, to which the traders' representative, Andrew Myrick, infamously replied "As far as I am concerned, if they are hungry let them eat grass."⁴ Little Crow led the first raids in the rebellion. He was killed on July 3, 1863, his body dragged down the main street of Hutchinson, Minnesota, firecrackers placed in his ears and nose and lit, before he was scalped and decapitated, and the bounty for his scalp duly paid. Little Crow's scalp, skull, and other bones were acquired by the Minnesota Historical Society and displayed in the Minnesota State Capitol building for decades until being returned to Little Crow's grandson, Jesse Wakeman, for burial in 1971.⁵

Niilas Somby's quest to retrieve the skull of his ancestor from the Anatomical Institute in Oslo and return it home for proper burial is documented in Simma's film

along with two parallel storylines—Somby’s work with the Alta Dam protestors in 1979–1981 (they were attempting to block the construction of the dam on the Alta River near Kautokeino because it would flood huge areas of grazing land needed for reindeer herds), and the scientific racism Somby encounters, which Simma records, as Somby attempts to repatriate his ancestor’s head. The film includes interviews with researchers at the Anatomical Institute who cannot understand Somby’s desire to bury the skull which they consider their legal property. They proudly show Somby the Institute’s vast collection of skulls of Indigenous Peoples from around the world, including one from an Inuk man for which they had to trade another museum two Sámi skulls “like trading baseball cards.”⁶ The Institute’s director clearly believes this will convince Somby to give up his quest in light of the “very important work” the scientists are doing.

Students in my classes visibly cringed while watching this portion of the film, insisting such attitudes in Norway had changed since the 1990s, and this sentiment was repeated by the larger audience of students, faculty, and others who came to view the film at the public screening. Many said they had learned about the Sámi and their history of colonization by the Norwegian state, with varying degrees of whitewashing and euphemism, in school, and the Alta Dam protests are recent enough to still be at the forefront of public memory. However, historic archival footage utilized by the filmmaker clearly shocked them to such an extent that some became openly emotional, with several on the verge of tears. This footage, mainly from the 1930s through the 1960s, includes film of Norwegian archaeologists openly robbing Sámi graves for their skeletons, the forced sterilization of Sámi women and girls at so-called psychiatric hospitals ostensibly set up to prevent “inferior racial specimens” from reproducing but which, like the arrests of three hundred random Dakota boys and men in 1862, simply swept up any Sámi perceived as troublemakers, and the use of forcibly hospitalized patients for medical experiments involving drugs and other therapies, including disturbingly graphic footage of a young Sámi woman, naked and strapped to a table, convulsing violently as she undergoes electroshock.

Pietari Kaapa’s “Northern Exposures and Marginal Critiques: The Politics of Sovereignty in Sámi Cinema,” helped Norwegian students make sense of this horrifying, mostly hidden, part of their history, and also aided them in understanding how and why the processes of settler colonialism function so similarly across continents and cultures. They found especially useful the work of Patrick Wolfe, who points out that the purpose of the native in settler colonialism is to disappear so that the colonizer may occupy the native’s land and extract wealth from it guilt-free. The pursuit of wealth extracted from the land that will flow to settlers, not to natives, can become such a powerful obsession, Wolfe and others argue, settlers are willing to destroy the land they fought so hard to occupy, in part to claim every last bit of wealth to be had from it, and in part to justify the horrifying deeds done to acquire the land in the first place.⁷ Many students said they understood for the first time the depth of passion that motivated some Sámi to resort to what they had previously thought of as outrageous

levels of violence in the past or perplexing levels of stubbornness today in their determination to preserve traditional lifeways like reindeer herding even if it means spending years (and millions of kroner) in protracted legal battles over land many Norwegians think of as empty, useless wilderness.

The terrifyingly transnational nature of settler colonialism is nowhere more evident than in the story of the eager participation of Norwegian immigrants in the US Dakota War. As Norwegian historian Karl Jakob Skarstein explains in *The War with the Sioux: Norwegians Against Indians 1862–1863*, Little Crow's desperate attempt to lead his small band out of starvation was gleefully seized upon by the US government as an excuse to wage all-out war against the entire Dakota Nation (especially as gold had recently been discovered in Teuton Sioux treaty land), and to launch an invasion against them from Minnesota west into Dakota territory. In these last great battles of the Indian Wars, US soldiers rode out of Camp Pope in the Minnesota Valley in June 1863. Skarstein notes, "Less than a year earlier Little Crow's people had lived here, but by this time the Sioux's tipis had been replaced by white military tents ... The Norwegian immigrants were well represented," with at least two hundred forty of the three thousand soldiers assembled having been born in Norway.⁸

Among those were Mathias Fjellhaugen, who signed on immediately when the US government called for recruits to join the war against the Dakota. Fjellhaugen wrote to his brother-in-law, explaining: "The Indians had to be driven away so that we could live there in peace."⁹ Where Fjellhaugen and his family wished to peacefully live was on Dakota land specifically ceded to the Dakota by treaty. The settler colonial claim to innocence, the drive to engage in what Anne McClintock calls "victor victim reversal" so obvious in this framing of participating in ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide only because one wishes to live in peace, is not limited to uniformed men wielding rifles. In her study of land theft by Norwegian immigrants in the early 1900s at Spirit Lake in North Dakota, Karen V. Hansen focuses on the story of Norwegian women who deliberately homesteaded on the Spirit Lake Reservation:

The history Scandinavians tell about themselves does not include ... land taking on the reservation. Norwegians like my great-grandmother did not come to be settler colonialists or to usurp the place of others. They deeply resented having been colonized by Danes and Swedes and could not conceive of themselves as occupying an oppressive position in a foreign country.¹⁰

Nor could they admit to the irony of resenting their homeland's colonization at the hands of Swedes and Danes, while justifying Norway's own "oppressive position" colonizing the Sámi and occupying their stolen land, even as they defiantly built their houses on a Dakota reservation.

For me, an unexpected part of the class discussions engaging these issues that underscored again the transnational nature of social justice and claims to land still playing out today in battles over Indigenous sovereignty involved Norwegian students challenged to explain their nation's history with the Sámi to fellow students who were immigrants to Norway, often from Eastern Europe or Turkey. They were majoring in English or working on MA degrees in UiB's Department of Foreign Languages, but most had not grown up in Norway and so were not familiar with all the unspoken assumptions about Sámi peoples often held by Norwegians, especially Norwegians in the southern part of Norway, where Bergen is located and where few Sámi communities survive today. Every Turkish student in both my undergraduate and graduate classes, however, immediately made connections between Sámi, Native Americans, and the Kurds' struggles for autonomy in Turkey, where policies similar to Norwegianization aimed at stamping out Kurdish culture and language have been in place, and violently resented by Kurds, for decades.

As interested as Norwegian students were in global Indigeneity, however, the topic they found most compelling was petroculture. At the end of the Fall 2019 semester, graduate students even petitioned their department to try to find a permanent faculty member who could develop and regularly teach a course on petrofiction. Norway's sovereign wealth fund, known in Norway as the *oljefundet* (oil fund), holds over one trillion dollars, making it the largest wealth fund in the world. As a nation famed for its dedication to environmental sustainability and strong green policies, Norway's paradox is that its wealth fund has amassed that astounding amount of capital by investing surplus revenues from the petroleum sector, often in petroleum stocks, including stock in Energy Transfer Partners, the Dallas, Texas, based corporation that operates DAPL, the Dakota Access Pipeline. Many Norwegians are employed directly or indirectly by the petroleum industry, and many students told me Norway's generally high salaries for blue-collar jobs, unlike the poverty-level wages common in the US, are due in no small part to Norway's two large, powerful oil unions whose settlements set the standard for other unions' contracts and help raise salaries in non-unionized industries, as well.

At the same time, Norwegians, with a large chunk of their nation located above the Arctic Circle, are exquisitely aware of the slow-rolling catastrophe that is global warming. For young Norwegians especially, this is *the* major issue of their time. The Norwegian Green Party, environmentalists, and Sámi activists pressured the government for years to wean Norway off its petroleum economy, and after nearly a decade of wavering, in 2019 the government finally announced the oil fund would no longer invest in petroleum stocks, unless the company in question also invested in sustainable energy. The announcement was headline news in Norway, but many of my students saw the move as too little, too late.

A number of the students chose to write essays on the use of oil imagery in Viramontes's novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*. I had initially been puzzled by their enthusiastic response to this text, which follows a young Mexican American girl, whose family are

migrant farm workers in California, picking oranges, grapes, and tomatoes under the blazing heat of a desert sun. It seemed about as far away from the lives of Norwegians as anything I had on my syllabus. But they were drawn to one scene in particular, in which the protagonist, Estrella, thinks about the La Brea Tar Pits which she has been told consumed the bones of an ancient girl, now forgotten, transmuting her body into tar. She then looks at the nurse in the clinic who has taken her family's last dollar to treat the pesticide-poisoned boy, Alejo, only to tell them after a cursory exam that she can do nothing and they need to drive the boy to a distant hospital. The nurse is blithely unconcerned that, because she took the last of their money, the family now cannot afford gas for their car, let alone a payment to another clinic. Estrella realizes she and the other farm laborers are simply a commodity to be used up for the convenience of white Americans, no different from tar or gasoline. As she studies her desperate family and the dying Alejo, she concludes "The oil was made from their bones, and it was their bones that kept the nurse's car from halting on some highway ... It was their bones that kept the air conditioning in the cars humming, that kept them moving on the long, dotted line on the map. Their bones."¹¹ In discussing this scene in class, one student declared, "Right now the older generation in Norway that's dragging their feet in shutting down our oil industry is doing the same thing to us in reverse time. They tell us it's for our own good, and the money in the oil fund will benefit us in the future, but that oil is made from our bones and the bones of our children, if we ever get to have any."

The Takeaway

Thanks to transnational American media, my students were all familiar with Texas (and generally knew more about Standing Rock, DAPL, and Energy Transfer Partners than my students at Texas Tech University). They were delighted to find out where I was from, and in my first few weeks at UiB, many laughingly asked if I knew the common slang term for "crazy" among young Norwegians is "Texas." "Wow, that party at Lene's house last night was totally Texas!" they might exclaim. As we followed the threads of BLM protests in Bergen and calls to remove statues of slave traders from their hometowns, my students would often trace those threads back to Texas—to cotton fields and the wars against the Comanche they had all seen in Hollywood westerns. Texas is such a large state, they would say, it must have an enormous Native American population, right? No, I told them, and we read about Mirabeau Lamar, President of the Republic of Texas, and his war of extermination against tribal nations in 1838. We learned that in 1859 most reservations in Texas were terminated and their inhabitants forcibly relocated to Oklahoma. This was known as the "Texas solution." "Wow," my students muttered. "Ethnic cleansing. That's so ... Texas." Who worked those Texas cotton fields once the Kiowa and Comanche, the Caddo and Wichita were slaughtered or driven out? Right, Texas was a slave state, and Norway built slave ships.

It turns out many of the threads connecting Texas and Norway are coated in both blood and oil. Just as the Sámi are frequently spokespeople for the environment in Norway, pleading for a balance between oil and water, money and blood, and are frequently left cleaning up the mess from mineral and petroleum extraction on their lands, the Standing Rock Sioux and other tribal nations now clean up oil leaking from Energy Transfer Partners's supposedly leak-proof pipeline, while profits, like the pipeline's oil, flow out of Indian Country straight to corporate headquarters in Dallas with regular stops to deposit millions of dollars annually in Norway's national oil fund.

The Standing Rock Sioux call the pipelines "black snakes." They connect Norway and Texas, North Dakota and Sápmi, simultaneously enriching settler communities and poisoning Indigenous ones, slicing across reindeer grazing lands and Buffalo commons, slashing through the lives of migrant farm workers in California, opioid-ravaged coal miners in Appalachia, and Indigenous survivors of residential schools in the US, Canada, and Norway. But as my Norwegian students realized, these black snakes don't just bind the past and the present or Europe and the Americas; they are strangling the future of the entire planet, forging a world in which university students in one of the wealthiest nations on Earth now wonder if they'll even have the chance to raise children in a collapsing climate, or if, like the girl swallowed by the La Brea Tar Pits, their bones and the bones of their children will be consumed by an oil-soaked future.

Notes

- ¹ Katya García-Antón, "Máret Anne Sara," "Public Exhibition," *documenta14.de*, online excerpt from *documenta 14: Daybook*, ed. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel, 2017), no page noted, <https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13491/maret-anne-sara>
- ² García-Antón, "Sara."
- ³ García-Antón, "Sara."
- ⁴ William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1921), 233.
- ⁵ "Did the Minnesota Historical Society display the remains of Taoyateduta (Little Crow) at the Minnesota State Capitol?" "The US-Dakota War of 1862," *Minnesota Historical Society*, May 8, 2012, <https://www.usdakotawar.org/frequently-asked-questions/1325>
- ⁶ Paul-Anders Simma, dir., *Give Us Our Skeletons!* (New York: Icarus Films, 1999), DVD.
- ⁷ Patrick Wolfe and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Settler Colonialism, Then and Now: A Conversation between Patrick Wolfe and J. Kehaulani Kauanui," *Politica Società* 2, (2012): 248–49. <https://nycstandswithstandingrock.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/kauanui-wolfe-2012.pdf>

- ⁸ Karl Jakob Skarstein, *The War with the Sioux Norwegians Against Indians, 1862–1863* (Grand Forks: The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, 2015), 182.
- ⁹ Skarstein, *The War*, 185.
- ¹⁰ Karen V. Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 235.
- ¹¹ Helena Maria Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 148.

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