LINDA
ARMANO

Conceptions of Territories

Indigenous Land Management and Multinational Property in the Northwest Territories of Canada

ZENIT

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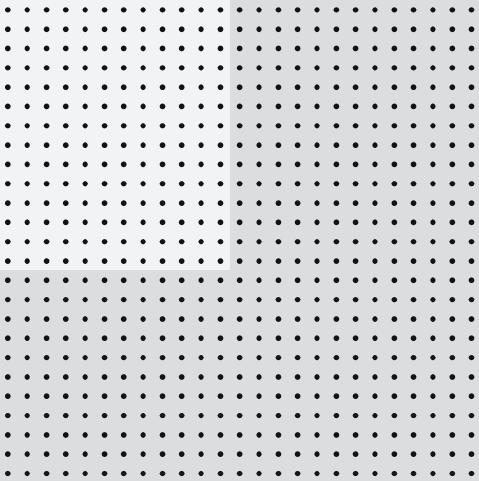
Indagini e ricerche
di storia globale



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The Journey: Inspiration for an Analytical Method

Northwest Territories, north western Canada. Setting off from Kelowna, where I worked at the University of British Columbia for more than a year and driving northwards along Highway 97 in British Columbia, I pass through the region of Alberta and traverse vast expanses of the forest before joining Highway 7 to then cross the border into the Northwest Territories. One of the first towns I meet in the southeastern part of the region is Fort Smith, which in the Chipewyan language is called *Thebacha*, meaning "beside the rapids". Indeed, there are numerous waterfalls along the Slave River here. Within this territory lies Wood Buffalo National Park, a natural park larger than Switzerland and famous for being the home of the wood buffalo after which it is named, a species of bison currently considered endangered. Driving further north from Fort Smith, I head deeper and deeper into a wilderness area. The streets are usually deserted and only occasionally do I meet a truck.

Stopping to refuel, I notice the faces of the people here, many of whom are Indigenous. With their skin weathered by the wind, they express calm confidence, their serious gaze fixed on an imperceptible point ahead. What might they be seeing? These eyes and faces are steeped in the physical and atmospheric uniqueness of these places.

My journey starts again. I drive on and reach my destination in that vast area of the Northwest Territories that extends beyond the so-called tree line, the edge beyond which no trees

grow and the tundra unfolds. The hunting and fishing activities carried out by the Native communities here have gradually been extended to include other activities introduced from outside, firstly gold mining and, later, the extraction of diamonds. For many centuries, however, explorers, as well as the officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, had considered this land completely sterile and unusable.

I finally reach Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories. I get out of my car and walk in search of the lake, the lake I had seen in so many books and websites, whose shores for centuries hosted only the traditional fishing activities of Indigenous peoples but have now become a tourist destination. I discover the lake at the end of the road: it appears suddenly as a bright idea. In that instant, I realise how my drive from the south of British Columbia to the far north of Canada, covering a total of 2088 km, might compare to a sound methodological path. During my period of fieldwork, this was to prove an absolute necessity.

Yellowknife, September 15, 2019

Introduction

Among the reasons that in recent years have encouraged many scholars to focus on the issues of sustainability and ethics in relation to luxury products (Raynolds 2002; Moor 2017) is the growing interest of consumers in both the environmental impacts caused by the industries that produce such goods and the labour management of disadvantaged socioeconomic categories. Such interest primarily regards workers living in those developing countries that are very rich in natural resources such as oil, precious metals, diamonds, and timber (Kjarsgaard, Levinson 2002; Okatei *et al.* 2017).

Given the growing number of consumers who are becoming increasingly sensitive to the ethical and sustainable implications of their purchases and to industrial management (Young 2003; Pollet, Develtere 2004; Pollet, Develtere 2005; Harrison *et al.* 2005; McGoldrick, Freestone 2008; Elder *et al.* 2012), many scholars now denominate the current historical period as the 'ethics and sustainable era' (Smith 1995; Crane, Matten 2007; Wilson 2010). In recent decades, the spread of issues relating to sustainability and ethics has also involved luxury goods which constitute a fundamental sector of the global economy (Luetchford 2007; Mutersbaugh *et al.* 2005; Kunz *et al.* 2020). Specifically, it was noted how ethical and sustainable characteristics applied to such products permit consumers to continue buying them without sacrificing their adherence to certain moral values (Ferguson 1994; Taylor 2005; Renard 2005; Getz, Shreck 2006; Eden 2009). Furthermore, ethical

and sustainable positions have also been embraced by some luxury groups, especially in the jewellery sector, with groups such as Tiffany and De Beers citing social and environmental responsibility as an intrinsic feature of their business models (Howard, Allen 2008; Cappellieri *et al.* 2020).

Although the sales of jewellery labelled as ethical and sustainable have grown in recent decades (Lin-Hi, Müller 2013; Crane 2001; Hilson 2014; Moraes *et al.* 2017), the heated scientific debate surrounding this topic shows how, at the same time, ethical consumption of luxury brands results also from growing consumer concerns about the real ethics of many of the supply chains of these goods (Berry 1994; Kapfere 1997; Davies *et al.* 2012).

The term 'ethical jewellery' refers to ornaments made with gold predominantly extracted in small-scale mines (mainly located in South America) and certified as fair trade via specific commercial systems such as the Fairtrade programme (Barbieri 2016) as well as diamonds designated as conflict-free (Shaw *et al.* 2007; Rettie *et al.* 2012). Of non-renewable natural resources, diamonds especially have attracted much discussion from activists and the media (Carrington *et al.* 2014) for their alleged role in the financing of contemporary wars (Le Billon 2006; 2008; Campbell 2002). In 1999, the Fatal Transactions campaign introduced the term 'conflict diamonds' to highlight the problem of the illegal sale of precious stones subsidising civil wars in Sierra Leone and Angola and the term 'terror diamonds' to arouse debate over the funding of Al-Qaeda specifically and international terrorism in general (Davies *et al.* 2012; Armano, Joy 2021; D'Angelo 2019). By combining images of amputated limbs and diamonds in the photographs that accompanied their articles and estimating the prices of the latter in death toll rather than dollars, the Fatal Transactions campaign began conveying the message that buying diamonds was tantamount to killing civilians belonging to socioeconomically disadvantaged categories (Le Billon 2006). However, limiting the trade in 'conflict diamonds' was not the only aim of the Fatal Transactions campaign. The message it wished to get across was

also that the capitalist system was to blame for its complicity in these illegal businesses and, hence, that consumers had to take responsibility when faced with such events to avoid being labelled as 'terrorist consumers', namely, people who indirectly helped to support the perpetuation of violence against civilians residing near economically underdeveloped mining areas in countries rich in natural resources (Nordstrom 2004). Within this panorama, therefore, diamonds acquired a fundamental role in influencing the orientation of consumers towards companies that claimed to adopt a sustainable long-term vision. Such a vision would address both environmental impacts and ethics related to socioeconomic categories considered disadvantaged (Vadakkepatt *et al.* 2020).

Faced with the threat of massive financial losses as a result of forms of consumer boycotts that were damaging diamond sales internationally, many mining multinationals adhered to forms of certification as proof of their desire to curb the illegitimate trade in precious stones (Ross 2006). Thus, the aim of the Kimberley Process, set up in 2003, is to ensure that the sale of rough stones exported by the nations adhering to the scheme does not finance civil conflicts or acts of international terrorism. However, it has been highlighted that the Kimberley Process cannot reduce fraud in the illicit sale of diamonds. This limitation is explained by the fact that the Kimberley Process tracks rough diamonds through to the polishing process but not to the final customer (Vadakkepatt *et al.* 2020). However, thanks to the positive economic effects of the diamond industry in its Northwest Territories, Canada was actively involved in the Kimberley Process from its inception and took the Chair in January 2004 (Gomes dos Santos 2015). Thanks to the certification signed by the Government of the Northwest Territories labelling the stones extracted in the Northwest Territories as ethical diamonds, since the early 2000s Canada has been advertised internationally as a country that exports diamonds mined in absolute legality. As a nation free from civil wars, this legality is underscored by the fact that there is no link between the mining industry and conflicts.

This monograph presents part of a wider multi-sited ethnographic research (Marcus 1995) that commenced in 2019 and is still underway. The research was conducted in the mines of Ekati and Diavik, located in the centre of Lac de Gras in the city of Yellowknife (the capital of the Northwest Territories), and in two Italian jewellers in Milan and Bologna both of which sell diamonds extracted from these two Canadian mines. The overall purpose of the research is to track the cultural interpretations that different subjects from different socioeconomic and political categories (miners, members of Indigenous communities resident in the Northwest Territories, staff of mining multinationals, jewellers and consumers) give to the concepts of ethical diamonds and, more generally, of ethics related to luxury products within the two ends of the Canadian diamond supply chain, namely, where they are mined and where they are retailed.

The feature that makes the Canadian diamond ethical at an international level is its traceability (Garcia Torres *et al.* 2019). In fact, the consumer can verify the Canadian ethical diamond's traceability by inserting the alphanumeric code that accompanies each diamond into a special database; each diamond also bears a laser-engraved image of a small maple leaf. These details enable the consumer to verify the origin of the Canadian stone, the mine from which it was extracted, and to learn about its characteristics not only once cut and polished but also the data referring to the stone in its rough state. By inserting the alphanumeric code into the database, the consumer can see its purity, cut, weight, and colour (McManus *et al.* 2020). The theme of traceability has thus become one of the main themes in the narrative that supports the corporate reputation of the diamond mining companies operating in Canada. Moreover, the Canadian government can leverage its transparent, honest and responsible economic and political conduct regarding environmental sustainability and ethics related to human rights and, specifically, in relation to the safety of workers in the workplace (Usunier 2007 Cestre 2007; Roth, Diamantopoulos 2009).

In general, the significance of this multi-sited ethnographic research carried out in two extremely different sociocultural, economic, and political contexts is that, on one hand, it highlights an imaginary group of 'ethical consumers' that purchase Canadian diamonds rather than African diamonds (or, more generally, diamonds with no certification), whose buying choices are guided by advertising narratives that emphasise fair labour practices for Indigenous workers in the mining sector and employee safety policies (regarding both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) for all those hired by multinationals in Canada. On the other hand, it draws attention to local problems that, in the Northwest Territories, are linked to the perpetuation of colonial policies which translate into the advancement of the private sector linked to the mining industry at the expense of Indigenous self-government in these areas. Such a view would fail to emerge from a simple analysis of the advertising narratives relating to Canadian ethical diamonds (Hall 2013).

Hence, thanks to this multi-sited investigation within a global context, it was possible to note that while consumers give enormous importance to the theme of diamond traceability, surprisingly they do not appear interested in knowing the objective details related to the social, political, and economic situation of the context in which the stones are mined.

The concept of traceability is commonly defined as 'the ability to identify and trace the history, distribution, location, and application of products, parts, materials, and services' (Garcia Torres *et al.* 2019: 85). The theme of traceability related to diamonds is often associated with other concepts including ethics, sustainability, transparency, relationship, affiliation, assistance help, support, teamwork, treaty, coalition, union, informed choice, etc. (Bäckstrand 2007; Gurzawska 2020; Carter, Easton 2011; Brammer *et al.* 2012).

The theme of diamond traceability, which currently represents one of the most controversial fields of research (Bloemer *et al.* 2009; Wang *et al.* 2019; Longo *et al.* 2019), is frequently taken as a

parameter in the evaluation of a jewel (Verlegh *et al.* 2005) and as an element to influence consumer choices (Roth, Diamantopoulos 2009; Usunier, Cestre 2007).

Some scholars claim that knowing the mine of origin is the principal guarantee that the diamond industry can provide to consumers (McManus *et al.* 2020) while in other studies the theme of diamond traceability is related to the issue of information governance (Bailey *et al.* 2016). The latter approach argues that product information, frequently created by governments and large companies, undergoes a series of transnational transfers within the value chains (Coff *et al.* 2008). However, discussing just a single concept of traceability cannot suffice. In recent years, especially when talking about luxury products, some authors have introduced concepts such as 'traceability for sustainability' (Garcia Torres *et al.* 2019) and 'ethical traceability' (Coff *et al.* 2008) to explain the consumers' need to be informed not only about the material aspects of the product but also the ethical and sustainable ones that will include information on the treatment of workers, the welfare of animals and respect of the ecosystem (Skilton, Robinson 2009; Bradu *et al.* 2013). Although analyses on this theme are lacking, some scholars have shown that knowing a product's traceability, especially if it is a luxury good, can influence consumer behaviour and lead to positive results such as word-of-mouth and loyalty (Marin *et al.* 2009). Despite the need for a more precise understanding of the underlying processes that guide the communication of a product's traceability and the consequent purchase behaviour, I was able to notice how the storytelling that accompanies such products acts as a reference frame to determine an emotional reaction in consumers. In these cases, through various means of communication such as advertising, films, music, etc. (Woodside, Sood, Miller 2008), the product functions as a mouthpiece for a positive morality that converges with the customers' ideals (Escalas 2004b; Holt 2004).

During my fieldwork, I observed with interest how information on the stone's traceability increased customers' level of trust

when the narrative of the jeweller included the guarantee that mining activities in Canada are not linked to civil wars or international terrorism. Thus, it seemed that the theme of traceability in no way stimulated the consumers interviewed to further investigate the social situation of the context where the mining takes place. The fact that many interviewees were unable to say where the Ekati and Diavik mines are located, despite having access to this information, clearly demonstrates this aspect. Furthermore, some consumers were unaware that Canadian ethical diamonds are mined in the Northwest Territories:

> I understand nothing about diamonds. However, I have always been a customer at *B.* jewellers. This is where I discovered that the Canadian ethical diamond respects ethical business practices throughout the supply chain, avoiding any exploitation of all workers employed. The finished product costs more because of these guarantees and I trust the information given. However, I do not know the mines from which these diamonds are extracted (L., customer of *B.* jewellers in Milan; cfr. Armano, Joy 2021).

This knowledge gap regarding diamonds and the mine of origin was filled by the customer's imagination when told the "story of the diamonds". Another customer interviewed admitted that:

> When I went to the *B.* jewellery store, they explained the story of Canadian diamonds and calmed any qualms I might have had. When I got home, I went on the Internet to investigate further. Then I went back to the jewellery store to collect the ring I had ordered, and I discussed some aspects of the mines with the jeweller. This approach convinced me to buy a jewel on which an ethical diamond was mounted. I have always known that many diamonds come from Africa where the working conditions are inhumane. That's why I have always had concerns about buying diamonds (G., customer of *B.* jewellers store in Milan; cfr. Armano, Joy 2021).

This testimony enables us to highlight the relationship between the fear the consumer has of making an unethical purchase, the trust arising from listening to the story of the Canadian ethical diamond as recounted by the jeweller, and his/her objective knowledge of the product. In this case, what can be considered the customers' objective knowledge of diamonds is mainly constructed by many of those interviewed through reading online reports on the working conditions in African mines. Thus, this consideration is useful to understand the mechanisms by which most of the people involved in this part of the research managed their lack of knowledge of Canadian ethical diamonds. Taleb (2007) suggests that many people tend to compensate for their ignorance on a given subject by relating it to themes on which they are already informed. Furthermore, in their study, Armano and Joy (2021) demonstrated that the ethical Italian consumers they interviewed tend to compare ethical jewels to Made in Italy products, thus bringing the concept of a little-known product closer to more well-known product categories. During this research, I also noticed that most of the consumers interviewed sought to compensate for their knowledge gap regarding Canadian ethical diamonds by searching for diverse information on the topic and building their knowledge in a process that advanced by exclusion:

> I can't imagine Canadian mines, but I can say what I imagine African mines to be like. Then from that, I can guess how diamonds are mined in Canada (U., customer of *R.* jewellers in Bologna; cfr. Armano, Joy 2021).

Many customers also used the concept of purity when talking about the Canadian diamond, related not so much to the material qualities of the diamond, but rather a series of physical and geographical characteristics that evoke the practically pristine Nordic environment (apart from the industrialisation of mining) in which the ethical diamond is mined (Schlosser 2013). When they imagined the context in which the stones are mined, they

described it as a utopian land, a sort of 'non-located' place that being unknown and unreachable, encouraged fantasies of harmony, happiness, and justice. This non-geographic place invites people to imagine timelessness. In fact, utopias are always alternative histories, that is, attempts to project yourself into an idyllic golden age outside the inexorable flow of everyday life (Menghi 1998; Ligi 2016). In the minds of consumers, the distant Canadian mining context from which ethical diamonds come was, therefore, envisaged as a fantastic, idealised land where people live in contact with uncontaminated nature.

Moreover, the concept of purity related to diamonds was also used by the customers interviewed to stress characteristics of value by describing the stone as more ethnically pure or morally correct towards human beings (Remotti 2010) within the precious stones sector.

Other consumers instead gave a summary image of Canadian and African mines reconstructed through fragments of information recovered from different sources:

> Very often films such as *Blood diamonds* with Di Caprio, talk about diamond mining in Africa, in the Belgian Congo region, etc. where the working conditions are extremely harsh. In documentaries I have seen little children or people who looked prematurely old, working in extremely tough, inhuman conditions. However, I know from what I have read that ethical diamonds come from Canada, and I also know that this country is highly developed in its approach to the treatment of workers as it is a first-world Western country with laws relating to the protection of labour. Therefore, I imagine the industrial reality of Canadian mines as being similar to that in European contexts (M., customer of *B.* jewellers in Milan; cfr. Armano, Joy 2021).

Some authors point out that the greater the willingness of people to find out about a given topic, the greater the confidence they place on information related to that topic (van der Toorn,

Tyler, Jost 2011). During ethnographic research in jewellery stores, I also observed that gaps in consumers' knowledge about Canadian ethical diamonds made many of them psychologically uncomfortable. In this regard, Shepherd and Kay (2012) suggest that to resolve an uncomfortable psychological state arising from a lack of knowledge on a subject, people would tend to legitimise and increase their trust in information that led them to feel more at ease. Hence, we could hypothesise that the wish of Italian ethical consumers to increase their knowledge of Canadian ethical diamonds may be explained by the fact that the luxury product thus enables them to be coherent and at ease with their value system. As one consumer I interviewed stated:

> When I went to buy a ring for my wife at *R.* jewellery store, the jeweller told me why he had started selling ethical diamonds. He explained the story of these diamonds and the history of traceability. The reasons why he offers his clients this type of jewellery is in line with my ideals. I felt comfortable with him because we understood each other. In my case, I wanted to give my wife the present of a ring with three diamonds mounted on it to symbolise our three children: the idea that these diamonds were also ethical and traced totally convinced me to make this purchase (L., customer of *R.* jewellers in Bologna; cfr. Armano, Joy 2021).

We can assume that traceability not only makes it possible to identify Canadian ethical diamonds and distinguish them from other diamonds, but it also allows consumers to unite the various parts of the supply chain in their minds by imagining each step of the path made by the stone from when it leaves the mine to its arrival at the end consumer. Unlike other uncertified stones, knowing about each link in the supply chain means the Canadian diamond takes on a recognisable connotation. Therefore, the identification of the Canadian ethical diamond also implies the concept of completeness (Remotti 2010). Indeed, thanks to the narrative, the traceability of the diamond created a compact and

complete path in the minds of ethical consumers that connected all the workers along the supply chain, as well as the Italian jewellers and the ethical customers, with the mine workers on the other side of the world.

By helping consumers to locate diamond mining within an economically developed country like Canada rather than in economically poor areas such as certain African states, traceability led the interlocutors to perceive the Canadian diamond as being of greater worth than other diamonds, though this value was more intangible than tangible. This perception was reinforced by the presence of industrialised mining systems in Canada (Srinivasan *et al.* 2004; Wang, Lamb 1983; Brun *et al.* 2012). It was also interesting to note how, in both jewellery stores, the rhetoric concerning the traceability of other precious metals certified as ethical (e.g., Fairmined gold) stressed issues relating to environmental issues (pollutants entering the environment) and social damage (impact on local Native communities and, therefore, the need to activate forms of support to prevent or alleviate such impacts). On the other hand, for the Canadian ethical diamonds, any information related to the safety of mine workers was considered secondary.

For this research, it was thus important to highlight that a specific narrative built around ethical diamonds relied above all on the concern of customers for the violation of the safety rights of workers involved in the diamond supply chain. In particular, the storytelling on the traceability of Canadian ethical diamonds incorporated and intertwined the following themes: The mine of origin, the knowledge available on the material characteristics of the diamond from its rough state to the final product, the guarantee that the mining activity in Canada was in no way linked to civil wars or international terrorism and the certainty that workers' safety regulations were in force throughout the entire diamond chain (Armano, Joy 2021).

As regards the sales in the two jewellery stores investigated, the narrative on ethical diamonds was also accompanied by a broader communication strategy that involved the adoption of respectful

behaviours and even charitable initiatives (for example, donations to associations for, say, cancer patients) thanks to the sale of ethical jewels (Armano, Joy 2021). The storytelling frequently aligned with the jewellers' personal values and these jewellers appeared to identify with the product they were selling. This meant that the narrative based upon traceability allowed consumers to familiarise themselves with the product thanks also to the jewellers' emotional involvement in the narrative. Indeed, numerous authors note (Ng *et al.* 2013; Spinelli *et al.* 2015; Antonio *et al.* 2019) that 80% of the communication strategy on which a product's storytelling is built focuses on emotional content while the remaining 20% is based on content related to brand awareness (Spinelli *et al.* 2015). For niche products such as ethical jewels, the narrative theme created around traceability, which also evoked the mine of origin (Antonio *et al.* 2019), was seen to be fundamental since the consumers were guided towards the choice of Canadian ethical diamonds by the emotional reassurance conferred by the theme of traceability. Another interesting aspect that the jewellers highlighted was the importance not only of the story's content regarding traceability but also how the story was told to the consumers. In addition to narration in the form of stories, the Milan jeweller told me that he frequently organises conferences in which he explains his experience as an ethical jeweller. In fact, the seller said that he is frequently invited to universities in Milan and to design schools:

> I have been invited to many world-famous design schools in Milan. For example, I have been invited to the Milan Polytechnic, the Catholic University, and the Brera Academy in Milan where I explained to the students how they could incorporate an ethical logic into the designing of their jewels. This way, they can stand out from others and increase their income (F.B., Milanese jeweller; cfr. Armano, Joy 2021).

Both jewellers interviewed agreed that information on Canadian ethical diamonds was more easily accessible when it was

disseminated not only in their stores but also at conferences held during trade fairs dedicated to fair trade. We can summarise this as follows: when the stories are narrated in the shops, it is the customers who go to the Canadian ethical diamonds, whereas in the case of conference organisation by the jewellers at fairs, it is the Canadian ethical diamonds that go to potential clients. The strategy of using the conference as a channel for disseminating data is not only an excellent way of making the narration accessible to a wider audience but it also endows the information with a degree of authority, with an official nature and, therefore, greater narrative power than it would otherwise have. The communication of information through a conference, therefore, transforms a simple commercial product into a cultural theme as well.

I thus observed that, in general, far from providing information on the objective origin of the diamond, the information on the traceability of Canadian ethical diamonds could mitigate consumers' uncertainty regarding the ethics of the jewellery supply chain by reassuring them that the diamond came from Canada. To understand this cultural feature, it may be useful to consider the well-known anthropological concept of 'identity obsession' proposed by Francesco Remotti (2010). In general, Remotti claims, individuals or groups make a massive use of the concept of identity in all sectors of their lives. Taking up the arguments of Zygmunt Bauman (2007), Remotti holds that this obsession with identity is a specific component of current times both in everyday life and within the social sciences. Until the 1960s, the social sciences never spoke of identity but rather addressed concepts such as alienation, dialectics, and structure. Nonetheless, the concept of identity that has come down to us through the history of Western philosophical thought is expressed in the formula A = A:

> If I say that this watch is this watch, I express the most irrefutable truth in this world, I express absolute certainty. The principle of identity is accompanied by the principle of non-contradiction,

> whereby A is not only equal to A (A = A) but is different from anything other than A (A ≠ not A) (Remotti 2010: 3).

Retracing the history of European ontological thought from the seventeenth century, Remotti also adds that the concept of identity has gradually been adopted as a necessary psychological tool to gain reassurance and certainty. Arguing along the lines of certain eighteenth century philosophers (i.e., David Hume), Remotti also contends that two essential elements are needed to identify something, namely, memory and imagination. Linking their discussion to that of Remotti, some authors (Park *et al.* 1994; Brucks 1995) argue that if the information on the traceability of a product is to be understood by consumers, the latter needs a previously consolidated competence comprising both subjective and objective knowledge that will enable them to recognise and store this information in their memory. However, memory has gaps (Remotti 2010). Therefore, applying these considerations to the present research, although memory is necessary, memory alone is insufficient to reconstruct the story of the Canadian ethical diamond. At this point, the imagination takes over: by incorporating the memory, it ensures that the path travelled by the diamond from the mine of origin to the final customer is envisioned.

Not knowing the mining context of the ethical diamonds, they purchased, it can be assumed that consumers simply relied on the information they were given by the jeweller and that their imagination was supported by storytelling about traceability. It should be emphasised, however, that the customers interviewed did not endow the traceability narrative with objective certainty but rather considered it a highly probable assumption. Nonetheless, the accuracy and authority of the information transmitted by the jewellers through their storytelling on the traceability of Canadian ethical diamonds meant that this narrative was perceived as sufficiently reliable to guide consumers' purchasing choices (Chen, Huang 2013; Choe *et al.* 2009). At the same time,

ethical jewellery storytelling allowed consumers to attribute a higher quality to Canadian diamonds that, in their eyes, were differentiated from uncertified diamonds.

1. The Context of Diamond Mining in the Northwest Territories: an Exploratory Phase

The long premise contained in the paragraphs above introduces the subject that this monograph will deal with in depth. While the existing analyses on Canadian ethical diamonds focus primarily on the decision-making criteria of consumers at the time of purchase (Shaw *et al.* 2007; Bloemer *et al.* 2009; Wang *et al.* 2019; Longo *et al.* 2019) and on the segmentation of green and ethical customers (Verlegh *et al.* 2005; Bloemer *et al.* 2009; Rettie *et al.* 2012), little is known about the mining context from which these stones come. The writing of this book, in part stimulated by the cognitive uncertainties of the Italian consumers interviewed, is designed to fill these gaps by concentrating the analysis on the diamond mines in the Northwest Territories from which ethical diamonds are extracted.

This research began in September 2019 and is ongoing. It should be noted, however, that due to the restrictive measures linked to Covid-19, the ethnographic investigation was split into several periods each of which were characterised by specific experiences in the field.

My initial departure to the Northwest Territories, specifically to Yellowknife, took place in September 2019. The goal in this phase of fieldwork was to build a network of interlocutors. The first step of my research proved unexpectedly fruitful, prompting me to reflect on specific theoretical considerations as well as permitting me to collect a substantial number of written documents.

From a theoretical point of view, during my stay in Yellowknife I became aware of how the mining companies operating in Canada, as well as the Canadian government, select the information to be publicly disclosed while concealing other items. This aspect

emerged particularly clearly when I found myself facing a paradox (Norgaard 2011) concerning international advertising narratives on ethical diamonds and a reticence, on the part of some people I met in Yellowknife (such as managers of mining multinationals, some Indigenous people, geologists, and engineers), to talk about ethical diamonds with me, a foreign researcher. Although this aspect might appear to be a failing, especially for social researchers (Harrowell *et al.* 2017), I nevertheless tried to construct the first reading of this phenomenon through referral to certain concepts including that of corporate oxymorons (Benson, Kirsch 2010). I thus noticed how the commercial communication of Canadian diamonds, which presents them as ethical and sustainable, selects suitable information and images to be publicly transmitted but omits revealing certain aspects to both the social researcher and international consumers, preferring to draw a veil over them. Specifically, Stuart Kirsch and Peter Benson (2010) claim that corporate oxymorons (embodied in concepts such as 'sustainable mining', 'safe cigarettes', etc.) are communication strategies used by companies to manage and neutralise criticism. The authors also note how certain terms disseminated by advertising campaigns and corporate slogans manage to increase corporate responsibility by strategically filtering the reality in which companies operate. Considering the concept of the ethical diamond as an example of a corporate oxymoron, we could hypothesise that it was created by using the critical discourse on African blood diamonds and replacing the warning against the latter with a supposed ethical reorganisation resulting from industrialisation. Furthermore, understanding the ethical diamond as a corporate oxymoron, it could be argued that the cover term obscures the original term. The combination of 'diamond' and 'ethical' could also include a tacit recognition by international consumers of the possible existence of a problem which, thanks to the political message conveyed in the advertisements, reassures the mind of an otherwise critical consumer. Furthermore, following the thinking of Kirsch and Benson (2010), despite its intrinsic contradiction, the repetition of

the term ethical diamond renders the concept familiar, plausible, and seemingly indisputable. The predefined outline of this product thus creates an ad hoc image for the market.

These considerations can be developed further by analysing the different meanings of the silence that I encountered in the field. In this regard, Eviatar Zerubavel and Eliot Smith used the concept of 'conspiracy of silence' (2010) to explain the attitudes through which people collectively silence things of which they are aware. By highlighting the difference between knowing and recognizing, scholars emphasise the fundamental but under-theorised tension between personal awareness and public discourse. Whether it is generated by fear, shame, embarrassment pain, etc., the conspiracy of silence revolves around what the authors call 'open secrets'. These are secrets known by all members of a group that, however, represent uncomfortable truths that might sometimes emerge despite attempts to conceal them. Zerubavel also argues that silence or co-denial of something implies a collective and collaborative effort both on the part of the generator and the recipient of information, with the latter acting as a facilitator (Zerubavel 2006).

All these considerations from this first phase of my ethnographic investigation, turned out to be extremely stimulating from an analytical point of view as they allowed me to formulate the following consideration: the closer I got to the mining context, the more the narrative on the ethicality of the Canadian ethical diamond was in part compromised by the silence of certain local actors who did not want to expose themselves on issues that could be sensitive and debateable.

This silence, in turn, facilitated the analysis of the information that companies publicly communicate to global consumers who are geographically and culturally distant from the mining context and the place where such reticence emerged and who are, therefore, unable to grasp the nuances and subtleties of the unspoken regarding ethical diamonds. To explain this phenomenon, it could be useful to draw a sort of theoretical parallelism with a physiological problem with our vision, namely, long-sightedness. We

could thus reason as follows: the further you move away from the mining context of the Northwest Territories, the more the concept of ethics that is linked to Canadian diamonds and conveyed by advertising narratives, becomes clear. On the other hand, the closer you get to the context under investigation, the more the concept of ethics becomes blurred, heterogeneous, fragmented, and difficult to understand.

My early phase in the field was also essential to initiate extensive research in the archives of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Center in Yellowknife. The documents I gathered there, later proved to be indispensable material for completing the information garnered through the interviews and ethnographic observation (Douglas 2001). The irreplaceable value of comparing the written sources produced by various actors such as reporters, journalists, staff of multinational mining companies, geologists, and Indigenous people, enabled me to highlight inhomogeneities and ambiguities in the discourse. In fact, they emerged from the written documents like encrypted codes. The comparison between documents drawn up by different actors brought to light the problem of how the colonisers' voices overshadowed those of the colonised (Dirks 2001). These sources also provided the items of information missing from the interviews I conducted later.

Thanks to these documents, I was able to ascertain that there has been an increase in the production of corporate and geological reports over the last decade, as well as reports on environmental monitoring within the borders of the Northwest Territories. However, terms such as 'ethical diamond' and 'ethics' never appeared. More specifically, while the term 'ethical diamond' was replaced with the generic word 'diamond', the word ethics was replaced with the word 'clean' (see Diavik Diamond Mine Northwest Territories, Canada Technical Report 2017: 85). This aspect supports the thesis according to which the narrative on ethical diamonds and the use of certain terms is aimed exclusively at an audience outside the mining context. All the company and geological reports analysed (about thirty in total), along with the hundred or so articles from

local newspapers that I divided approximately by decades (articles written before the opening of the diamond mines; articles written between the end of the 1990s and 2010; articles written between 2010 and 2020) and analysed, focused on two main macro-topics: On the one hand, the territory seen as a geological space to be explored for the discovery of new kimberlites for exploitation; And on the other hand, the theme of employment presented through Indigenous employment policies and through the increased GDP in the Northwest Territories engendered by the presence of the diamond mines.

The company and geological reports dealt with issues relating to environmental sustainability and projects in the short-medium-long term that might solve problems related to pollution. While there was mention of the development of employment opportunities thanks to the mining industry, these reports made no reference to the practical working conditions in the mines or the methods for recruiting or firing workers. I learnt of the latter issue from the articles published in local newspapers between 2010 and 2020. These articles describe the difficulties faced by the mining companies, especially in the two-year period 2019-2020 during which they were subjected to pressure from financial agencies that caused economic repercussions and primarily affected the Indigenous workers.

On the other hand, the reports relating to environmental monitoring contain constructive criticisms of the information appearing in the company reports and the geological reports. Specifically, environmental monitoring in the Northwest Territories is conducted by two teams, funded respectively by Diavik and Ekati, that also include representatives of Indigenous communities who provide advice to the diamond multinationals to mitigate the environmental impacts caused by the mines.

During my first ethnographic phase in Yellowknife, I began to outline the two main attitudes shown by the people I met in the field: on the one hand, subjects (mostly geologists) who re-proposed the contents of the advertisements that promoted the

Table 1. *Summary of the main topics covered in the written sources.*

	Territory	Work
Company reports	Excavation operations and characteristics of the territory using data provided by the government of the Northwest Territories.	Development of job opportunities in the region especially for Native people thanks to special training.
Geological reports	Descriptions of explorations to open new mining projects and build infrastructure. The establishment of relations with the government of the Northwest Territories, with the federal government and with the mining industries to provide geo-scientific data. The provision of data also to stakeholders, partners, suppliers, citizens of the region and the general public.	
Reports on monitoring of the environment	Monitoring of environmental impacts caused by the diamond mines.	The creation of relationships between Indigenous groups and public and private bodies.
Articles written in local newspapers before the opening of the diamond mines (1990s)	Exploration rush. Description of the diamond rush and discovery of kimberlites in the Northwest Territories.	
Articles written between 1998 and 2010		Growth of the economy in the Northwest Territories; increase in regional GDP; increase in jobs thanks to the mines.
Articles written in local newspapers between 2010 and 2020	Water and soil pollution caused by the Diavik mine.	Redundancies in the Ekati mine.

ethical commitments of the company and projects of economic philanthropy aimed at the Native communities and, on the other hand, a form of self-protective behaviour that led some individuals to explicitly refuse to talk to me about Canadian ethical diamonds (as did all the executives of multinational companies and many Indigenous and professional miners employed by mining companies). Above all, it was the Indigenous workers' behaviour that led me to discover the existence of certain sensitive areas in the international commercial communication of Canadian ethical diamonds. The attitude of these workers, as well as of company executives, led me to question the actual relationship between Indigenous people, who are also the main recipients of the mining companies' philanthropic projects. Trying to understand whether corporate governance was in effect also ethical, led me to question the codes of conduct that the company imposes on its employees and suppliers (Kaptein 2004; Stevens 2008). The presence of codes of conduct within the organisational communication system certainly allow companies to practice a form of control over their reputation (Kaptein, Schwartz 2008). Furthermore, by dictating the objectives that employees must achieve to keep their jobs, the company also requires them to adopt certain behaviours in the workplace to encourage their sense of belonging to the corporate community. Within these dynamics, I therefore interpreted silence as an attitude co-constructed by all the actors involved in the contractual bond.

2. The Context of Diamond Mining in the Northwest Territories: Second Phase

All plans for my second period of fieldwork were upset by the advent of Covid-19 which forced me to review the ethnographic methods to be used in this phase of my research. I do not wish to discuss here the possibilities of conducting ethnography among Indigenous peoples online or claim that it represents a new trend.

It is now recognised that fieldwork in anthropology embodies more than just a physical context in which to do research (Gupta, Ferguson 1997). That said, the notion of fieldwork is central to the anthropological discipline, both from a theoretical and a methodological point of view, and is very much identified with the anthropologist's profession. The field is also accepted as being indispensable for the researcher in terms of socialisation, as it increases the level of trust between the anthropologist and his/her interlocutors.

Specifically, any researcher who intends to develop an investigation (in any discipline) within the borders of the Northwest Territories must obtain a license after submitting their research project to a specific commission whose headquarter is inside the region. When this commission approves the project, it agrees to help researchers to establish relationships with certain members of the Indigenous communities to carry out their research. Progressively, I made contact with some indigenous teams (of which I prefer not to mention the name for privacy reasons). While the former is a group funded by one of the native Governments that support researchers in their investigations by connecting scholars with Indigenous communities and Indigenous political organisations, the latter is an association that provides support to Indigenous women living in the region who suffer physical and psychological abuse in both work or home life. Before introducing me to certain members of the native communities, the staff of these two groups organised phone meetings to train me on how to build a relationship with Indigenous people. In general, conducting field research among the Native peoples of Canada means establishing a relational process of knowledge negotiation with them. Although few theoretical references exist for this ethnographic approach, Margaret Kovach (2010) points out that Indigenous knowledge comprises a specific way of sharing knowledge through storytelling (Thomas 2005; Absolon, Willett 2004). She calls this process the 'conversational method' (Kovacha 2010: 40):

> The conversational method is a means of gathering knowledge found within Indigenous research. The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing a story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core (Kovach 2010: 40).

During these meetings, I was taught that Indigenous people often use the term 'protocol' to indicate how the researcher should act to build deep relationships with the Native people through conversation. This protocol consists of a series of cultural rules to which scholars must adapt so that these people, especially the elders[1], can share their knowledge. This approach to interaction is based on an Indigenous epistemology in which the relationship becomes the fulcrum for establishing any type of conversation (Wilson 2001). From an anthropological point of view, Kovach emphasises: 'Conversational methods are a means to ensure that activities are carried out in a manner that reflects community teachings and are done in a good way' (Kovacha 2010: 41). This method, therefore, not only enables academic studies to incorporate Indigenous knowledge in the corpus but also to understand how Native knowledge, traditionally transmitted orally from generation to generation, may also become a form of ethnographic methodology[2]. More generally, the sharing of

1. The elders play a vital role in Indigenous communities as they are considered the guardians of Native culture. Given their profound knowledge of the community's history, their role covers that of teachers, wisemen, healers and counsellors. Although elders are the custodians of their specific community's history, in all Canadian Native groups they are recognised as spiritual figures who base their lives on traditional teachings which they also seek to pass on to others.

2. There are numerous other examples of how relational reciprocity is used as the cornerstone of the ethnographic method. Bessarab (2008) speaks, for example, of the concept of 'yarning' referred to the Noongar population in southwestern Australia. As the scholar states, there are different forms of yarning (social yarning, collaborative yarning, therapeutic yarning, research yarning, etc.). Specifically, research yarning concerns a particular area of interest in which the relationship is constructed to achieve a certain

knowledge is the essential means of establishing any type of relationship in Canadian Indigenous culture. The concept of knowledge for Indigenous people is related to wisdom concerning the land and is expressed concretely through traditional subsistence activities and ritual practices. Specifically, Indigenous people use the physical characteristics of the territory in which they live as mnemonic devices to introduce oral narratives which, in turn, endow the landscape with cultural significance. This way of transmitting knowledge through storytelling is also used as a vehicle for building relationships. Hence, any researcher who conducts research among Canadian Indigenous peoples will become involved in this type of communicative relationship that combines epistemological importance with the opportunity to interweave the personal experiences of the researcher with that of the Indigenous interlocutor. By exchanging stories that enable those involved to build a profound and reciprocal relationship, the researcher also engages in self-reflection, thus promoting what Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1994) describe as critical subjectivity and self-awareness.

Although the conversational method is not based on strict tools and categories as it develops on the basis of the contents and the type of relationship established during the ethnographic research, we can still identify certain structural traits that all conversations between the researcher and members of Canadian Indigenous communities maintain. Thus, the conversational method is: 1. connected to a specific Canadian Native epistemology; 2. is relational; 3. is proactive; 4. involves compliance with a precise protocol modelled on Aboriginal epistemology; 5. involves informality and flexibility when new relationships are created; 6. is reflective and self-reflective (Kovach 2010).

aim. Furthermore, reflecting on narrative as a dialogic method that builds relationships, Maori researcher Russell Bishop introduces the notion of 'collaborative history' (Bishop 1999: 6) through which the researcher is positioned as a participant. Bishop explains that when both parties engage in a collaborative process, the relationship builds and deepens as stories are shared (Bishop 1999).

The phone meetings specifically with one of the indigenous teams underlined the importance of ethical aspects and the researcher's responsibility toward the people who would participate in the survey. After following these sorts of courses, my thinking on the ethical issues developed not only as they applied to the relations I was to establish with the Canadian Natives but also, in a broader sense, as I started to reflect on the direction being taken by the anthropological discipline, academia, and relationships between people in general. This issue emerged very early in my present research. In fact, this occurred immediately after I was granted funding for a Marie Curie Individual Fellowship by the European Union as I was then requested to prepare a detailed report clarifying any ethical problems related to my project. In my case, this comprised three main categories: 'Humans', 'Protection of personal data', and 'Non-EU countries'. Although I had been warned by several colleagues that preparing this document would require considerable effort, I embraced the opportunity to more deeply analyse certain ethical aspects that I had only managed to consider briefly in previous years. For instance, confirmation of my first assignment as a research fellow was subject to my signature on a document stating that the data I produced would be owned by the university; this prompted me to search for any document that might regulate the ownership and treatment of data in anthropology at a European level. I found the EASA's Statement on Data Governance in Ethnographic Projects, developed by the EASA Ethics Network, and chaired by Peter Pels (Leiden University). The paper is an excerpt from what is called the Leiden Statement on Data Management and Anthropology (Pels *et al.* 2018). This Statement consists of a single page that I kept on my desk for many months as a protective fetish. Specifically, those who were to evaluate my report wished to know whether I intended to collect data that would fall into the 'special categories of data'. This is a particular type of data which, according to article 9 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), may reveal 'ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade

union membership, data concerning health and data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation'. If you state that you will gather such data, you are required to justify this choice. In general, my reply explicitly stated that I would always present my interlocutors with the information document, the informed consent, and the declaration for the transfer of rights for any images, videos, or sound recordings.

In the academic field, ethical aspects are linked to the nature of the proposed research. The informants interconnected with this research were all adults and this fact certainly made the ethical aspects of the research easier to accommodate given that this excluded a whole series of critical issues related to research with minors, who are considered a particularly vulnerable community. On the other hand, conducting research with Indigenous people and knowing the necessity to follow standardised rules, meant that my permission to build a relationship with them, where it was possible, was strictly formalised and it was compulsory to formulate preliminary agreements that had to be accepted by both parties. These provisions regulated the protection of intellectual property and the dissemination of certain data. Thus, to ensure optimal development of the following phases of my investigation, which would perforce take place online through the two indigenous teams, rendered the protocol on the ethical aspects even more important. Therefore, I needed to consult certain articles (de Koning *et al.* 2019; Dilger *et al.* 2019). The most relevant was *Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology* by Ron Iphofen (2013) which proved to be fundamental as it provided food for thought on the anthropological approach to ethical problems, especially in the context of fieldwork. Iphofen is an independent consultant specialising in the ethical aspects of research who has a background in the social sciences, primarily in the sociology of medicine. While his approach is sometimes overly positivist – with remarks on a supposed 'objectivity' of the situation under study that the researcher might modify – the article does show that a Manichean attitude which clearly distinguishes between what is ethically right and

wrong, is untenable, especially in a discipline such as anthropology. My reading of this document prompted some epistemological and political reflections that highlighted the peculiarities of anthropological and ethnographic practice. The specific nature of the ethnographic method, therefore, requires the researcher to negotiate and verify his/her approach throughout the investigation, and, at a relational level, this goes well beyond the signing of any document such as informed consent. In fact, a consent form is not legally binding as it ensures that those participating in the research can withdraw at any time and with no justification needed. The risk is that the signing and presentation of all the necessary documents may simply act as a form of reassurance for an administrative apparatus whose performativity legitimises a logic that has little to do with anthropological sensitivity or epistemology (Raffaetà 2021). On the other hand, the phone meetings with the Indigenous teams profoundly captured the anthropological, and above all human, aspect of the relationship that I, as a researcher, could establish with the people of the Indigenous communities of the Northwest Territories. I cannot deny that at times I felt as though I were part of a mechanism larger than myself.

Since both groups were interested in my research topic and its potential implications, they helped me not only choose the interlocutors but also plan the steps of my investigation to establish a correct relationship with my interlocutors and interview them in my place. Moreover, some of the members of the native teams contacted certain Indigenous elders and chiefs[3] as well as Indigenous

3. Chiefs can be considered as political figures whose main role today is to mediate Indigenous culture with that of the colonisers. According to Manley Begay (2003) of the Navajo community and Dean of the Faculty of the Native Nations Institute at the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy and Senior Lecturer in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Arizona, it is possible to outline some characterizing features of the role of chiefs that are common to all the Native communities of North America: 1. a chief does not aim to accumulate goods for himself, rather his role focuses on his actions as a mediator; 2. the Indigenous concept of leadership incorporates the needs of his community; 3. a chief works with his people; 4. a female and male component is recognised in the power of each chief; 5. the religious and spiritual aspects are a fundamental component of the mediating role of any chief. Based on the Indian Act

employees (men and women) of the diamond multinationals. The elders belonged to the Dene and Tłı̨ chǫ communities, while the chiefs belonged to the Dene, Tłı̨ chǫ, and Gwich'in groups, as did the Indigenous male workers.

Thanks to the help of the staff of the associations, they also conducted for me three online talking circles, organised in May 2020 at the headquarters of The Native Women's Association. Eight women between the ages of twenty-two and forty-eight were involved in these circles. Some of these women were hired on a fixed-term basis by mining multinationals, while others were on the list for recruitment and had participated in training courses organised by the mining companies. None of these women worked inside the mine, but they were tasked with catering in the kitchens and canteens of the mining village. One woman served as a community adviser; her role was to connect the multinational mining companies with a range of Indigenous stakeholders. The staff of one of the teams contacted explained to me that, contrary to my first belief, the talking circles were well suited to the cultural background of these women and would allow them to share their work experiences and thoughts as a group on various situations they had experienced[4]. Furthermore, this method gave them time to reflect and contribute to the collective discussion with no obligation. Some scholars highlight that talking circles proved to be a valuable method to enable the native women to exchange

of 1876, it was established that each Indigenous group must have an elected chief and an elected councillor for every 100 members, with a minimum of two councillors and a maximum of twelve. It is clear, however, that this regulation is a product introduced externally as a result of the interaction between Indigenous communities and the federal government.

4. The staff of the native team explained to me how they commonly use the talking circle technique to discuss particularly difficult situations such as the consequences deriving from residential schools. The members of the association have noticed that people feel more comfortable when dealing with complicated issues from both a psychological and social point of view when using this method. As is customary in Indigenous culture the women involved in this research, together with the staff of the association, prepared lunches to share among them during the talking circles organised. It is normal for Native groups to offer food to be consumed together during their conversations.

reflections and also express feelings of mutual solidarity as well as share strategies for managing the difficulties they often encountered in the workplace and understand, together, useful paths for mediation between their cultural background and the economic and financial logic of the multinationals (Hall 2015).

Undoubtedly, the sample of people who participated in the interviews, conducted between September 2019 and June 2021, does not lend itself to generalisable conclusions due to its size. The importance of this lies in the fact that the native people, whose point of view often remains overshadowed in surveys as well as in most qualitative studies, have no opportunity to share narratives that may concern forms of structural violence and the resulting acts of resistance against any colonial and gender practices (Coulthard 2014) experienced in an extremely masculinised workplace.

Based on the debate between the macroeconomics of diamonds and Indigenous microeconomics in the Canadian region, this monograph will focus primarily on the specific aspect of the social, economic, and political change experienced by the Indigenous communities of the Northwest Territories produced by colonisation. This colonisation developed historically around specific economic activities of which the last chronologically is the opening of the diamond mines. From this perspective, the Northwest Territories currently appear as a context in which two particular concepts of territory coexist and, consequently, two forms of agency on it. On the one hand, there is the industrial and methodical drilling into the terrain to depths useful for mining while, on the other, there exists the culture of the First Nations[5] whose lifestyle has for millennia been based on hunting and gathering. Indeed, in this culture, the relationship with the land, which provides a fundamental resource for the native individual, is completely

5. 'First Nations' is a term used to describe the Aboriginal peoples of Canada who are neither Métis nor Inuit. This term came into common use in the 1970s and 1980s, replacing the term 'Indian' although, unlike the latter, the term 'First Nations' has no legal definition. While 'First Nations' refers to the Native peoples of Canada, 'First Nation' indicates a specific band or tribal group that shares the same territory.

different. While for traditional Indigenous communities, space is not consumed but crossed and managed, the former concept has for centuries, and predominantly, considered land as capital, and the various ways of using it, preserving it, or dispersing it have historically been constructed according to very specific political, economic and sociocultural characteristics and factors. These two models (the model introduced by the colonisers and the Indigenous one) for perceiving the territory, as well as managing and building it socially, have clearly conflicted since the eighteenth century. The entire colonial history of the Northwest Territories has been translated into a single idea and its implementation: Managing space as capital (or as a resource) means managing a form of power. The methods for controlling its use, of any resource present in the territory, have proved decisive in making this region a subordinate and enslaved space (Hall 2015).

The diamond industry in the Northwest Territories is currently the main economic activity of the entire region with workers converging here from all over Canada, the United States, as well as Europe, and Asia.

My research, the results of which are contained in this monograph, strongly impacted the theoretical and methodological slant of this analysis. Direct observation of social and cultural phenomena during the first phase in the field, the gathering, thanks to the indigenous teams, of information contained in the actions and words of the interlocutors, images, sounds, archival documents, and ideas (including the perceptive and emotional indications that accompanied them), were the bricks with which this study built its theoretical constructions. While the goal of my research was never to criticise the Canadian extractive industry, it was clear that from the very first moments of fieldwork, my intention was to reconstruct the historical relationships between Canadian government policies, the corporate logic of the mining multinationals, and the multifaceted reactions of the Indigenous communities of the Northwest Territories, required a careful evaluation of the cognitive methods and tools offered by anthropology.

3. Structure

This work presents themes from a wide-ranging activity of research and connects my experience in the Northwest Territories to previous investigative experiences in mining contexts: It uses the Indigenous perspective as an interpretative tool to highlight the economic, political, and cultural history of the Canadian region.

While the prose of the seven chapters into which this book is divided is appropriate to that required by science and non-fiction, I also wish to evoke fascination and the cultural richness inspired by places in the Northwest Territories throughout the long process of change that commenced with European colonisation (Coulthard 2010). To this end, I frequently use archival sources combined with ideas coming directly from the testimony of interlocutors.

The discussion also aims to appeal to a wider audience than the usual circle of academic experts and, therefore, often contains more information on historical and ethnographic examples than is required in a publication targeting specialists alone.

It should be noted that the information contained in this monograph is of a historical anthropological nature and includes phenomena that occurred over a long period. The basic approach is interpretative and can be defined as dynamic cultural anthropology, i.e., an anthropological analysis that considers the study of changing phenomena to be central and conceives human cultures not as static, uniform, and abstractly modellable products, but as fluid and conflicting processes in continuous change over time. Given this approach, the analysis requires diachronic depth, that is, a historical perspective. However, the chapters are not arranged according to strict chronological linearity. Such a structure would be a conceptual fiction as well as a historically incorrect interpretation of the causal links as these cannot be simplified to conform with the elementary logic of *post hoc, propter hoc*. Thus, the chapters are conceived as individual essays that can be read independently

yet, when taken as a whole, they offer an organic and unitary picture of the main social events and phenomena that have modelled the context in the Northwest Territories.

The first chapter opens with a description of the geographic, geological, and environmental aspects of the Northwest Territories. This chapter also presents the region's Indigenous communities, their cosmology, and the special relationship they establish with the land and its animals as well as their subsistence activities and ceremonial practices. All these aspects are seen as cultural traits that are closely interrelated and thus constitute a truly integrated system. The second chapter traces the history of European colonisation in the Northwest Territories, from the advance of the fur traders to the opening of the diamond mines, considering also the political and economic negotiations between native communities and the State for the Aboriginal rights in the region's territory. The third chapter analyses the contractual implications between native communities and diamond multinationals, also presenting new agreements between First Nations and industry that were introduced with the opening of the diamond mines to regulate the hiring of Indigenous people in these mines. After an analysis of the mining environment understood as a specifically male working environment, the fourth chapter introduces the perceptions of working in the mine of both male and female Indigenous employees. The fifth chapter that brings the book to a close, suggests possible future research paths concerning the refinement of methods for analysing the cultural interpretations of the concepts of ethics and sustainability concerning diamonds mined in Canada; the analysis of the more biographical dimension of the Nordic landscape in the Northwest Territories through the study of changes in balance concerning adaptations between human communities and the environment; the analysis of the daily activities and behaviours with which a group of people (in this case ethical consumers, but also Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers) manipulate the concepts of ethics and sustainability by relating them to certain ecological and productive contexts.

Chapter 1

The Northwest Territories

1.1. The Nordic Landscape: Geographic, Geological, and Environmental Aspects

The Northwest Territories are located in the north-western part of Canada, between the states of Yukon to the west, Nunavut to the east, and British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan to the south. The Northwest Territories currently include three regions within their provincial borders: the Arctic Archipelago, the arctic mainland, and the Mackenzie Valley area. Ice is perennial in the Arctic Archipelago and covers the sea for most of the year, limiting navigation. Although the eastern part of the Archipelago is slightly milder than the northernmost area due to its proximity to the open waters of the North Atlantic, it has higher rainfall than other parts of the Arctic. Furthermore, comparing it with other areas of the Northwest Territories, the Archipelago has cooler summers with an average of 10 °C in July.

Geologically, the territory of the Northwest Territories is composed of very ancient rocks formed by different sections of the craton, the old and stable part of the continental lithosphere, which makes up the Slave Craton (which extends into the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut), the Rae Craton (located along the northernmost part of Canada) and the Hearne Craton (which forms the Canadian Shield, the ancient geological core of the North American continent). These cratons form the basement rock of the region's Precambrian Archean and Proterozoic aeons

and, as such, are the subject of extensive research to understand the composition of the earth's crust and tectonic conditions on early Earth.

The Northwest Territories are also characterised by rich kimberlite deposits[1] from which diamonds are mined. Approximately 200 kimberlite pipes have been discovered since the late 1990s, twelve of which produce high-quality stones. The kimberlites intrude on the Archean basement of the Slave Craton. Precambrian rocks are covered with Quaternary glacial sediments. The kimberlites of the diamond mines currently open in the Northwest Territories are between 45 and 75 million years old and are mostly small conical pipe-like bodies extending to approximately 1,000 m below the surface of Lac de Gras. The morphologies of these vents have many joints and faults and consist mainly of volcanoclastic kimberlite which is dominated by olivine[2] and kimberlitic ash and by variable quantities of different sediments (especially mud), as well as by xenolithic material. The internal geology of kimberlites varies from simple single-phase pipes to complex bodies with multiple and distinct units of volcaniclastic kimberlite. From the analysis of the samples, the compositions of the entire rock suggest a significant loss of kimberlitic fines during eruption followed by a dilution of part of the surface sediment and the concurrent incorporation of kimberlitic ash. Diamond distribu-

1. The term kimberlite derives from the name of the South African city Kimberley where these rocks were first identified. The kimberlite chimneys are roughly conical rock formations, which on the surface appear as vertical chimneys with very steep walls with a diameter ranging from a few hundred metres up to about two kilometres. The interior of the kimberlite chimney is made up of ultra-basic igneous rocks. The kimberlite chimneys formed about 130 to 70 million years ago and are what remain of ancient volcanic conduits probably completed on the surface by a crater and a small cone of pyroclastic material. The volcanic apparatuses originated from a specific type of explosive eruption when the very fluid magma resulting from the presence of gas, rose directly from a depth of 100 to 300 km at great speed. The diamonds made up of closely linked carbon atoms which determine the hardness and compactness of the stone are stored inside the kimberlites.

2. This mineral is a type of nesosilicate. It is an isomorphic mixture of forsterite (magnesium-rich) and fayalite (iron-rich) which are extremely rare in nature. The name derives from the mineral's typical olive-green colour.

tion within the kimberlites reflects the quantity and quality of the mantle material of the individual eruption and depositional phases. The characteristics of the kimberlites of the diamond mines are consistent with the process described above as they are characterised by two specific phases: firstly, an explosive eruption which determined the formation of the vent consisting of fragmented material enriched with olivine, ash, and superficial sediments. And secondly, by infilling of the vent by direct deposition from the eruptive column and/or resedimentation of the materials from the crater rim.

From a geo-morphological point of view, the Mackenzie Valley in the Northwest Territories narrows to the north and widens to the south, advancing into the continental plains. To the west, the valley rises abruptly over the rugged region of the Cordillera that has peaks of over 2,700 m. It is also crossed by the Mackenzie River and its tributaries whose total drainage basin (1.8 million km^2) combined with the total length of all watercourses represents the largest water basin in Canada. Only the poorly drained northernmost part of the area falls within an area of permafrost (ground that continuously remains below 0 °C for two or more years) and supports muskeg, from the Cree *maskek* meaning 'grassy swamp'. The muskeg is a typical northern wetland, with vegetation and peat deposits. Peat is a living, partially decomposed organic matter consisting mainly of decaying brown moss, sphagnum plants and other semi-aquatic plant remains. Most of Canada's muskegs and bogs are less than 10,000 years old and are found in areas covered by the last ice age. As the glaciers retreated, their meltwater created vast plains, lakes, and depressions. Muskeg can, therefore, cover large areas and in the Northwest Territories, it covers the entire Hudson Bay. It also provides a habitat for various animal and plant species and birds such as owls nest in these wetlands. There are many insects in the muskeg, including large mosquitoes, as well as mammals such as caribou, beavers, muskrats, voles, and other rodents. The plant species typical of the muskeg environments include sphagnum mosses, shrubs, and coniferous trees

(such as spruce). Peat deposits contain many tons of carbon made up of decomposed organic material.

The upper Mackenzie Valley lies within the transitional zone of the boreal forest, where spruce and larch are common, while the lower Mackenzie Valley lies within the northern boreal forested area characterised by a large number of tree species including white birch, pine, balsamic fir, and aspen. When muskeg landscapes remain intact, they store carbon in the earth and prevent it from entering the atmosphere as carbon dioxide and methane. These greenhouse gases are released when muskeg is drained, deforested, burned, or degraded either through human activity or natural processes. Peat from the Northwest Territories is harvested and exported throughout Canada and sold as garden soil. This trade is regulated by provincial and territorial federal policies that control the environmental impact. Peat is also used to clean up oil spills and to filter air and wastewater. The raw materials used in some chemicals such as resins and waxes are also derived from peat, as are some skincare products.

These ancient geological phenomena have, therefore, given rise to the current characteristic morphological landscape of the Northwest Territories. The geological and geographical features of the region indicate a very low population density: about 0.03 inhabitants/km^2. In fact, many areas of the territory are covered by wonderful wilderness areas and immense expanses of sparsely populated tundra where any settlements are small. We should note that the terms 'wild' or 'wilderness' area is commonly used in the Nordic countries and define an 'uninhabited area in a natural state, at least 8 km away from a road or railway'. According to this definition, the largest wilderness areas in the world can be found in Canada, Brazil, Antarctica, Australia, and Central Asia.

Extending from north to south, the Northwest Territories are characterised by climatic differences. In the north, long, freezing winters are followed by short, cool summers and although the south is slightly milder, nowhere does the average February temperature rise above freezing. The mountains of the Canadian Shield

hinder the passage of milder ocean winds; the air is, therefore, forced to rise in altitude and cool down, thus releasing moisture in the form of rain or snow. Hence, in the lower Mackenzie Valley, especially in autumn and during the first months of winter, rainfall reaches an annual average of over one metre. By the time the winds that blow from the southeast have crossed the mountains and then dropped lower in the Mackenzie Valley, they have lost their humidity and are dry, thus producing a continental climate subject to considerable seasonal variations in temperature. In fact, towards the end of May temperatures can vary considerably, even rising to an average of about 20 °C. The Northwest Territories, however, remain a cold region, with winters bringing snow and ice for almost eight months of the year and, in the coldest period between January and February, temperatures that fluctuate between -30 °C and -40 °C. Moreover, temperatures in the tundra may drop much lower. In Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories, for example, winter lasts 225 days, beginning in early October and the ice remains intact until approximately early June. Snow cover can last seven to eight months in areas north of Yellowknife. Furthermore, spring does not come before mid-May in this area and lasts only until mid-July, that is, when the actual summer begins, a very short summer that lasts 25/30 days. The characteristic changes in the climate of the Northwest Territories are accompanied by an even more unusual phenomenon commonly called the 'midnight sun'. During the summer and for a number of days proportional to the latitude, the sun remains above the horizon even at night. As the latitude determines the period during which the sun is visible, the further north you move the longer this period lasts. The opposite phenomenon, i.e., the 'long night', occurs in winter when the darkness of night prolongs its darkness for a period equal to the presence of the midnight sun in summer. This characteristic photoperiod (together with the phenomenon of the northern lights) has a direct influence on the life cycles of the ecosystem and is of great cultural importance for all the region's Indigenous communities. Anyone who has lived for a period in

the Northwest Territories knows that strong winds can blow at up to 40-50 km per hour due to the high-pressure banks, greatly increasing the sensation of bitter cold, an inescapable companion through the short winter days, and lifting the snow thus creating tiny needles of ice.

The very harsh climate of the Northwest Territories, the extremes in the duration of daylight, and the low angle of incidence of sunlight, with long periods of penumbra and large differences in exposure, affect the normal development of vegetation and create characteristics that can be considered exclusive to these regions. Two different plant belts can be distinguished, that of the boreal coniferous forest (taiga), with a mix of broad-leaved forests mainly of birch and willow trees (in areas between 300 and 400 metres above sea level), and that of the tundra.

The taiga (from the Russian *taigá*, a term of Turkish origin) constitutes a fairly regular ring that extends immediately south of the tundra. The taiga is mainly composed of evergreen conifers[3] interspersed with broad-leaved trees and modest shrubby vegetation that forms a sparse undergrowth.

Another characteristic phenomenon of the flora of the Northwest Territories is the so-called 'vegetative reproduction' typical of many plants which, unlike conifers, do not use the wind as a pollinating agent. In these cases, reproduction does not depend on fertilisation of the seeds but on the secondary stems and shoots which detach from the parent plant and then develop independently, thus giving life to a new plant. This phenomenon

3. Conifers are the oldest surviving seed plants to date. They also thrive in environments that are prohibitive for most tree species such as areas at the edge of deserts, mountainous areas and subarctic regions. The property that makes conifers so adaptive and widespread depends on their cone or pinecone. A cone is a set of 'leaves' or scales designed to carry the spores that are gathered and protected in a dense bunch. For fertilization to occur, a pollen grain must have contact with an ovule produced by megaspores. To compensate for the lack of insects methodically flying from one flower to another, the only pollinating agent for conifers is the wind. Thus, they produce billions of pollen grains so that at least some of them fall in the right place. The seeds in the pinecone lie completely exposed to the air on the packed, dense scales, thus explaining the name gymnosperms, i.e., plants with naked seeds.

represents a further form of adaptation by the flora as the harsh climate does not permit the natural germination of seeds and the numerous species of insects that normally act as pollinators are absent. When the low temperatures of the cold season freeze the ground and block any water supply, the conifers of the taiga survive thanks to their high degree of xeromorphism as indicated by their needle-like leaves. Transpiration and chlorophyll assimilation remain inactive throughout the cold period and resume in the summer. Furthermore, the tissues of these plants, which can be exposed to temperatures as low as -50 °C, are equipped with efficient resistance mechanisms. However, knowledge of such mechanisms is still limited.

The boreal coniferous forest is distributed across the Northwest Territories in the southern, middle, and northern areas, with decreasing productivity. The mixed coniferous and deciduous forest of the southern taiga consists of a layer of trees about 25 metres high with pine (Norway spruce) and aspen, below which there is a layer of trees of roughly 16 metres in height with small-leaved lindens, maples, and elms and underneath we find a layer of bushes that cover between 30% and 80% of the surface (hazels and red honeysuckle) and a herbaceous layer.

The predominant tree species found in the middle taiga are larch, fir, and pine, with the Scots pine being the most common. Alongside these trees are some species of broadleaf trees, with birch being the most prevalent, especially white birch and aspen. The Natives of the region carefully work the birchbark for many hours using ancient techniques that require extraordinary manual skills; it is then used, together with products derived from hunting, to make artefacts such as glasses, vases, ladles, cups, bowls, and boxes that are sought after in the market for traditional handicrafts. Birch was also indispensable for building canoes. The canoes of all the region's Indigenous peoples were manufactured similarly and widely used until 40 years ago when industrially produced boats began to replace them. The Tłı̨ chǫ community, for example, built two main styles of canoe: a cargo canoe, generally 5 to 7 metres

long called *k'its'i*, and a smaller hunting canoe, about 3.5 meters long, called k'ielà or 'birch canoe'. The community's oral tradition suggests that spruce bark boats were also built in the past, albeit rarely. The hunting canoe had an average beam of 41 cm and a depth of 23 to 28 cm. The decks covered both the stem and stern and had a small birchbark roll sewn to the base of the foredeck to channel spray away from the canoe's interior. The stem and stern were constructed of curved planks of spruce. The rake and profile of the stem and stern were sometimes identical, although the rake of the stern was generally greater, providing a slightly higher profile. Thirty-five spruce ribs were set roughly 30 cm apart and were bevelled at the ends and wedged between the inwale and the bark. It is said that a canoe could be built in five days. Canoes were often built by several families and with men and women working together, although they generally had specific tasks. The men, for example, made the structural supports for the canoe while the women sewed the barks together. Even children were involved in the construction of the canoe, gathering the moss and roots required for the final sealing of the seams. The canoes were usually manufactured in the spring, from late April until early June when the trees were full of sap and it was easy to peel off the bark.

The shrubs and the grass layers of the taiga undergrowth develop according to the humidity and nutrients available. The undergrowth is generally poor and composed of mosses and heathers. The peat bogs that are mostly found in the colder areas, form hillocks in the tundra of approximately 3-6 metres in height and with a diameter of about 100 metres, often have a constantly frozen core.

The undergrowth and some more open areas of the taiga are characterised by heather moorland. The heather is a modestly sized brown-green shrub. The pink-purple blooms of the moorland scattered over the silent solitude of the flat, sandy hillocks stretching as far as the eye can see, offer an evocative and melancholy spectacle (Ligi 2003). The undergrowth covering the taiga of the Northwest Territories also hosts many varieties of moss and

tufts of caribou lichen that brighten the black background of the humus with a silvery hue. Natives need to know where to find the moorland areas given that the caribou's seasonal movements follow the gradual melting of the snow as they move in search of the birch groves and streams where the grass first turns green.

The term tundra, from the Finnish *tunturi*, meaning 'treeless hill', instead indicates the area that covers about 13 million km², a tenth of emerged land, which separates the sea and the Arctic ice from the forests.

In the Northwest Territories, the tundra characterises the barren lands, a vast area of about 1.280.000 km² which overall constitutes 10% of the total area of Canada. In summer, the reddish hue of the tundra in the barren lands is highly evocative, yet it is difficult to cross due to the surface water.

The essential feature of this area is permafrost. Unlike other deserts, in the barren lands, the tundra retains its water because the cold air cannot easily absorb water vapour and the permanently frozen subsoil hinders normal drainage. By gradually releasing its ancient ice reserves with the annual surface thaw, the permafrost provides the most important source of water in the tundra. This humidity is more than enough for the thin mantle of vegetation that grows on the surface, made up of mosses, lichens, buttercups, gentians, bush grasses, sphagnum, swamp plants, but sometimes also birch and dwarf pines, arctic poppies, and low dryads.

The most important form of vegetation in the barren lands is the densely branched caribou lichen, which can grow up to 15 cm. Lichen is formed through the symbiotic partnership of two separate organisms, a fungus and a green or blue alga. The fungus anchors itself to the rock and produces a mass of spongy tissue that holds large quantities of water. The alga is protected by this shelter that is rich in humidity and provides photosynthesis for the foods it shares with the fungus. There are numerous species of lichens present both in the undergrowth of the taiga and in the undergrowth of the tundra. Most of these plants provide the caribou's basic food throughout the year.

1.2. The Indigenous Peoples of the Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories have historically been inhabited by specific Indigenous peoples. To the north, are the Inuit while in the southernmost part where the diamond mines are currently located, there are numerous Dene nations. Three groups belonging to the Athabaskan linguistic family settled in three specific areas, inhabit this latter territory. In the past especially, these groups differed slightly from each other as regards certain variations in their spoken language and some traditional ceremonies. Specifically, these three groups comprise the Chipewyans (from which two further small groups descend, called Caribou Eaters and Northern Indians or Mountaineers by the first Europeans to arrive in the region), the Dene (which translated means 'people'; also known as Red Knives, Yellowknife or Copper Indians) and the Tłı̨ chǫ (also called Thlingchadinne, a term usually translated as 'Dog-Flank People'and, therefore, called Dogribs by European settlers).

The Chipewyan belong specifically to the northern Athabaskan linguistic group (Hearne 1795). Samuel Hearne, an explorer and trader hired by Hudson's Bay Company, was the first European to encounter this Native group and, between 1769 and 1772, hired some members of the Chipewyan community as expert guides to explore Canada's northern territories. At the time of the first contact with the European fur traders, the Chipewyan shared some areas of their territory with the Dene. Furthermore, Hearne's notes (1795) indicate that at the end of the eighteenth century this Native group mined and worked copper to make containers that they traded with Europeans. Thanks to the explorer's writings, we learn that at the time of his encounter with the Indigenous community, the Chipewyan were fighting with the Esquimeaux in the latter's territory. This data thus suggests that they inhabited a vast area extending from the northern barren lands to the south in the area that includes today's Yellowknife, which was also inhabited by the Dene. Hearne wrote that the Chipewyan were bordered to the west by the Beaver Indians, a numerically smaller Native

group, and to the northeast by the Tłı̨ chǫ. Like other Indigenous groups, the Chipewyan subsisted by hunting the caribou that they followed as the animals travelled to the northern shore of Great Slave Lake.

As trading outposts developed, two small groups of Chipewyan began associating with Europeans to trade beaver furs. A group of about eighty families, nicknamed Northern Indians or Mountaineers (Hearne 1795) by European traders, settled in the highlands between the boreal forest and Lake Athabasca. According to some elders, this group crossed with some members of the Lutsel K'e community coming from present-day Saskatchewan, who had settled around Lake Athabasca at the end of the eighteenth century[4]. On the other hand, the so-called Caribou Eaters occupied the barren lands where, rather than trading furs, they guided Europeans in their explorations of the territory while also providing them with food, hence the name, Caribou Eaters.

By contrast, the traders termed the Dene as Copper Indians or Red Knives and later Yellowknife. The following is from a document of Hudson Bay Company conserved in the archives of The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre:

> The Party embarked and were soon brought to the Entrance of a River which has received from the Traders the appellation of Yellow Knife after the Copper Indians whom they usually term Yellow or Red Knives. The Indians name it Beg hoo huley dezzé or Toothless Fish River.[5]

As they are today, the Denes were then settled on the northern shore of Great Slave Lake, although some archival sources document that at least until the mid-1800s, their settlements covered the area between Great Slave Lake and Lake Athabasca and between Great Slave Lake and the Fort Resolution trading

4. NWT Archives, Dené National.
5. NWT Archives, Hudson's Bay Company.

post[6]. The name given to them by the Europeans was linked to the fact that they knew how to extract and work copper. Some ethnographic documents written by the anthropologist Peter Fidler between 1930 and 1934 and preserved in the archives, report that the first European explorers who arrived in the region at the end of the eighteenth century, also stated that the Taltson River or *Tall chu dezza* meant, in the Dene language, 'Red knife'; hence the name given by the traders to this Indigenous group. Other sources, however, report that the name given to them also referred to the Yellowknife River located between the north shore of Great Slave Lake and Yellowknife Bay, an area where the Dene were present. Following the opening of new trade routes at the end of the eighteenth century, the Native group of Detah-N'dilo arrived in this area, from the north. After settling in Yellowknife Bay, this group was absorbed by the Dene.

Hearne (1795) wrote in his notes that, during the exploration of the area north of the Great Slave Lake made between 1769 and 1772, he sighted some Dene hunting caribou along the Coppermine River in the barren lands. On that occasion, Hearne also described a massacre of the Esquimeaux who tried to oppose the Dene and the Caribou Eaters who went north to hunt. Hearne also wrote that in the early nineteenth century, the Dene were known to Europeans for their looting of trading posts[7]. On one of these occasions, the Tłı̨ chǫ were also present and fought fiercely against the Dene:

> A war has ensued between the two tribes, for the sake of the few remnants of ironwork which was left among them; and the Dog-ribbed Indians were so numerous, and so successful, as to destroy almost the whole race of the Copper Indians.[8]

6. NWT Archives, Dené National.
7. NWT Archives, Hudson's Bay Company.
8. NWT Archives, Hudson's Bay Company, Hearne.

This massacre is also reported in another document dated 1820. This document also mentions the name of Akaitcho, a Dene chief who, together with his band, regularly traded furs at the Fort Resolution trading post and guided the European explorers to north of Great Slave Lake from the late eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century[9]. A document dated 1824, reports that on meeting with some traders at Fort Resolution, Akaitcho declared that he would not return to the northern shores of Great Slave Lake until he recovered from the pain of losing his men:

> For his part, he could not think of returning to the country where so many of his Relatives were so murdered and would remain with the Chipewyans until the time would efface the grief and anguish with which his bosom is inflicted on account of the untimely death of his Relations.[10]

This attack, led by Long Legs, the leader of the Tłı̨ chǫ, appears to have been a response to Akaitcho's continuing offensives against the latter. At that time, the Tłı̨ chǫ took advantage of the situation to extend into the area around Yellowknife Bay, on the western border of the Dene territory. In this regard, anthropologists June Helm and Beryl Gillespie (1981) stated that, from that moment on, the Dene and Tłı̨ chǫ began to share portions of the same territory. Nonetheless, many elders narrate that after the clash between the Tłı̨ chǫ and the Dene, Edzo (another Tłı̨ chǫ leader) met Akaitcho and some members of his band and brought peace between the two groups using the power of medicine[11] and oratorical strength.

Although the Tłı̨ chǫ extended to Yellowknife Bay in the nineteenth century, they had lived for centuries in the strip of land that separates Great Slave Lake from Great Bear Lake. They were

9. NWT Archives, Hudson's Bay Company.
10. NWT Archives, Hudson's Bay Company, Hearne.
11. Medicine, according to the NWT populations, is a spiritual power possessed by particular people and obtained with the help of supernatural animal beings.

called Dogrib by the Europeans, an English translation of the *Tłı̨ chǫ* word which means 'dog's flank' in the Cree language. This name refers to a legend describing this group's creation. In a document dated April 21, 1821, the explorer Franklin reported the following description:

> Dogrib consists of 380 Men, Women, and Children, and inhabits the Countries between Marten and Bear Lakes and westward on each side of the Banks of Mackenzie's River as far as the entrance into Bear Lake. All the Indians who trade at the different posts in the north-west parts of America, imagine that their forefathers came from the east, except the Dog-ribs, who reside between the Copper Indian Lands and the Mackenzie's River, and who deduce their origin from the west, which is the more remarkable, as they speak a dialect of the Chipewyan language.[12]

An 1840 census states that the Tłı̨ chǫ population numbered approximately 800 people[13]. Towards the late 1820s, the Tłı̨ chǫ moved their trade routes with Europeans from Old Fort Providence to the mouth of the Mackenzie River to avoid continuing clashes with the Dene. According to a document drawn up by A.J. Bell, Commissioner of the Department of Indian Affairs, the Tłı̨ chǫ settlements also extended along the banks of the Yellowknife River, to the extent that during the nineteenth century they founded their current four settlements which include Behchokǫ̀ (formerly Rae-Edzo), which is the most populous community, Wha Ti (formerly Lac La Martre), Gamèti (formerly Rae Lakes) and Wekweèti (formerly Snare Lake).

For the Tłı̨ chǫ, accustomed to living close to coniferous forests and along riverbanks, fishing as well as hunting for caribou, has always provided an indispensable part of their diet and to a far greater extent than for other Indigenous peoples in the region.

12. NWT Archives, Tłı̨ chǫ National.
13. NWT Archives, Tłı̨ chǫ National.

Their traditional fishing tools included nets, rods, hooks, lines, and traps. Unused fish provided food for their dogs. Living in a habitat rich in rivers and lakes, their main means of travel was the canoe which they also used to follow the herds of caribou and musk ox (Helm, Gillespie 1981). The Tłı̨ chǫ (as well as the other Native populations of the Northwest Territories) hunted caribou differently according to the seasons. In spring, they fenced off enclosures in which they trapped the animals that were then killed with spears, bows, and arrows. In the past as today, the Native people used every part of the caribou they killed: in addition to the meat, skins were used for clothing and to build shelters while ligaments and tendons were used for sewing, and bones and horns were made into weapons and tools.

Alongside the three Indigenous groups described, the Northwest Territories were also inhabited by the Slave Indians (*Deh Gah Got'ine* or *Deh Cho* in the Indigenous language), a small community that still lives at the western end of Great Slave Lake. Specifically, their territory extends from the mouth of the Mackenzie River to Hay River, near the border with the Alberta region (Helm, Gillespie 1981).

The Gwich'in (or Dinjii Zhuh) also live at the northwestern limits of the boreal forest, north of which only the Inuit reside. Originally, this group extended as far as present-day Alaska, crossing the Yukon and reaching the Mackenzie Valley. The population currently stands at approximately 3,440 people distributed in the areas of Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, Aklavik, and Inuvik. Today, however, many families maintain the tradition of building summer hunting and fishing camps close to the Mackenzie River Delta, east of the Anderson River, and west of the Richardson Mountains[14].

In addition to these small groups, other smaller groups include the Dettah (which means 'burnt point'), the Ndilǫ (i.e., 'end of the island'), and the K'ashot'ine (or Hareskin).

14. NWT Archives, Gwich'in.

Except for the Slave Indians, all the communities described belong to the northern Athapaskan linguistic-cultural group. American anthropologist James VanStone states that the Northern Athapaskan culture has been described as consisting not of a series of neat cultural entities, but as a cultural continuum carried on by a series of interlocking groups whose individual lifeways differed only in certain minor details from those of their immediate neighbors (VanStone 1974).

In general, the Athapaskan language family, consisting of 38 Aboriginal languages, represents one of the largest North American Indian linguistic families. Speakers of the Athapaskan languages name their group with terms whose meaning refers to 'person' or 'human being'. The Athapaskan language family is a branch of the Athabaskan-Eyak subgroup of the Na-Dené language, i.e., a grouping of three North American Indigenous languages which, in addition to Athapaskan, include the Haida and Tlingit languages which in turn include 22 sub-linguistic variants of which 20 belong to the Athapaskan language. Aside from the Northwest Territories, these latter languages are also spoken in Yukon, Alaska, southwestern Oregon, Northern California, New Mexico, and Arizona. A recent census also highlighted that the linguistic variants of the Athapaskan family represent one of the few cases of North American languages whose speakers are increasing in number. The most plausible explanation may relate to the rising awareness among many Native groups in North America, and in particular in Canada, of the importance of teaching and preserving Native languages as a form of enhancing and maintaining the community's cultural identity[15].

Language families belonging to the Na-Dené language exhibit a polysemic word structure in which the terms are made up of many elements linked in combination with other elements. Hence, a single polysynthetic word can incorporate information which when translated into English, for example, would require an entire sen-

15. NWT Archives, Dené National.

tence. Another feature of Na-Dené languages is the use of tones to diversify otherwise identical words. Furthermore, these languages clearly distinguish active verbs from static verbs.

VanStone argued that despite some variations in their speech, the Dene, Tłı̨ chǫ and Chipewyan communities nevertheless shared not only many linguistic traits but also numerous cultural traits. The author asserts that the membership in these units was not mutually exclusive: A person could, and usually did, have a social identity in all three (VanStone 1974).

Anthropologists Robert Javenpa and Hetty Jo Brumbach (1988) agree with VanStone stating, for example, that the social organisation of the Chipewyan is very similar to that of other Athapaskan-speaking populations. He affirms that the regional band exploited the total range of the band as identified by tradition and use. It utilised all the resources within the range, and this total territory provided sufficient food and other resources to sustain life except during periodic famines. Therefore, the regional band could exist for many generations.

As regards the band's composition, anthropologists describe the role of the family, and in a broader sense of kinship, as a basic unit for maintaining the community's integrity. In their work, the scholars highlight that most of the time, the various families making up the regional band were dispersed into smaller units. Regional band members, however, were related through a network of primary affinal marriage and consanguineal blood ties (Jarvenpa, Brumbach 1988).

In fact, within each band, smaller related groups were formed, usually made up of four or five couples with their offspring. Each nucleus consisted of about eight or nine people. Often, among these groups, further groupings were formed that were linked by common objectives such as hunting.

Currently, the communities recognise themselves both as belonging to political structures (e.g., Lutsel K'e Dènè First Nation, Deninu K'ue First Nation, etc.), as well as local groups made up of small settlements of families within a specific area and as mem-

bers of workgroups made up of people from the same family or friends who come together to carry out traditional activities. Over time, however, these groups have related to each other several times and in various ways. Even today, the education and support of children do not depend on a single family but, above all, on the extended families of both parents. If the mother or father belong to two different Indigenous communities, the clan of both parents will provide for the child's education. The raising of children is still formalised with specific rites of passage through which children acquire Native knowledge. For Indigenous people, children are considered gifts from the Creator and raising them is a sacred responsibility.

However, since 1996, Statistics Canada has begun publishing structural family profiles in the Indigenous population. In a 2001 census, a section was dedicated to the living conditions of children under the age of 14. The most important descriptive result was that this segment of the Native population was less likely to live with both parents than the non-Indigenous population[16]. It was also confirmed by surveys carried out in subsequent years, in which it was stated that the percentages of the possibility of living with the mother and father were 65% for Indigenous children and 83% for non-Indigenous children[17].

This problem is further complicated by another pre-existing issue relating to how to legally frame Indigenous groups. In 1876, the Indian Act established that a band constitutes the political and social structure common to all Native communities. Based on the regulations contained in the Indian Act, a chief and a council (chosen by the government) were imposed as forms of leadership at the head of each band. However, the model of a chief and a council as the head of the band was not easily accepted by the peoples of the Northwest Territories. On the contrary, Native communities traditionally recognised a person particularly respected for their

16. Statistics Canada, 2001.
17. Statistics Canada, 2007-2013.

wisdom as a group leader, that is, a person who could advise on the resolution of social disputes both in the larger group and in the various agglomerations between families or who knew how to create positive relationships and negotiate with neighbouring Indigenous groups.

1.3. Indigenous Cosmology

Based on the definition provided by the Canadian Institute of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian constitution has classified Indigenous traditional cosmology as follows: The cosmology held by First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples, and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Cosmology related to the traditional knowledge is specific to place, usually transmitted orally, and rooted in the experience of multiple generations. It is determined by an Aboriginal community's land, environment, region, culture, and language. Traditional knowledge is usually described by Aboriginal peoples as holistic, involving body, mind, feelings, and spirit[18].

This is, undoubtedly, an externally introduced definition that fails to grasp the profound link between Indigenous cosmology and the territory in which the native populations live (Bell, Shier 2011).

The features of the natural environment (such as the conformation of the land, the noise of the ice, etc.) and climatic factors (the cold, the colours of the northern lights, and so on), which manifest themselves with unusual intensity due to the circumpolar latitude, are constantly subjected to a symbolic moulding that is essential for the coordination of the Native people's subsistence activities (Ligi 2002). Thus, from the Indigenous point of view, the study of the environment cannot be limited to a series of ecosystemic factors that remain isolated and independent from human action. The environment must be interpreted as a historical product, or

18. https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2018_chapter9-chapitre9.html.

rather as the result of the interaction between a set of physical elements and a fabric of symbolic and cultural values, perceptions, and narratives without whose analysis the extreme northern environment would remain completely incomprehensible. The research problem that arises here is, therefore, the need to grasp the dynamics by which the Indigenous communities of the Northwest Territories build the sense of the places where they have settled.

In a work published in 1944, Maurice Le Lannou defined geography as the study of the man-environment relationship, indicating how subjects could specifically affirm themselves in a place through their presence even before their actions, that is, through their work and productive activity. The idea that Indigenous peoples have of themselves is, in fact, characterised by considering themselves immersed in an anthropic space built of social relations, historical events, and knowledge accumulated over the centuries as well as ceremonial practices, subsistence activities, and natural conditioning. In other words, through the centuries they have established a deeply emotional, symbolic, and economic bond with the natural environment and have developed sophisticated forms of Native ecological knowledge based on sensory perceptions, linguistic expressions, and cultural codes. Thus, the profound relationship that the Native people establish with the earth also involves the sphere of a person's health and general well-being. To explain this complex interrelation, in which the protection of the ecosystem is also deeply related to people's health, the Indigenous groups of the Northwest Territories use to reflect on the fact that the man-environment relationship can take the form of a complex and dynamic form of reciprocity, namely, a relationship of interdependence that involves the material and symbolic (ideational, sensorial) spheres of human activity and existence at the same time (Wilson 2003). Based on historical sources and oral tradition, we can also identify and concretely locate specific places considered sacred within the Native territory with a reasonable margin of certainty. Such locations are considered sacred because particular feats were performed there by ancestors in the past. The

well-being of the Indigenous people depends on having access to these places. This perspective contains an active metaphor of taking care of the territory and human life at the same time. Regarding this, Mimmo Pesare suggests:

> The term 'place' automatically intervenes between the concepts of inhabiting and care. In fact, if inhabiting may be interpreted as the fundamental anthropological action of man [...], care will be reconstructed as a mode and category through which inhabiting is expressed while places (the antithesis of spaces) are obviously the direct object of the clause that inhabiting conjugates, and care declines. Leaving the active metaphor of humanity (the theme, in fact, of inhabiting) as a background working, the relationship between places and care opens a path of reflection that is completely inscribed in the discourse on the security of places and their ability to produce *Geborgenheit* (security in the sense of well-being deriving from the feeling of belonging to a particular place). The condition of this sense of security and emotional trust that the passage of spaces to places produces has, however, as a condition of verifiability, precisely, the philosophical-pedagogical category of Sorge, the taking care of the places themselves (Pesare 2006: 85-86).

Following on from Pesare's discussion, when the Natives of the Northwest Territories describe the overall well-being resulting from being in their Native land and especially in certain sites that they consider sacred, they express a particular feeling of security.

This perception is also used to describe taking responsibility for the person who is collectively assisted to reconnect both to the earth and the cultural history of the community in the period of pre-contact with Europeans. In this way, places do not constitute a mere physical setting for social interaction, rather, they exert some sort of power over the people who inhabit them.

The feeling that relates the person to his/her territory is common to all Canadian Indigenous communities. However, this link with the land has been seriously endangered over the last few cen-

turies mainly due to colonial practices that created various forms of political and cultural assimilation, including the residential school system, that has produced social repercussions on at least four generations of Indigenous people. Specifically, the residential schools, rooted in the notion of the colonisers' racial superiority, created a system consisting of a network of schools established in 1876 and aimed at the Natives of Canada (Inuit, First Nations, Metis) with the purpose of 'civilising' them. The sharing of Native culture and language was prevented by separating children from their families at the age of four. Children were forbidden to speak any Aboriginal language or to express subsistence practices and traditional rituals. These schools were founded after the approval of the Indian Act of 1876 by the Canadian governmental body, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and administered by various religious organisations (Canadian Catholic Church, Canadian Anglican Church, and United Church of Canada). Compared to other schools in Canada, the residential schools were underfunded, and a poorly qualified staff usually oversaw the schools' teaching and administration. Furthermore, the time devoted to teaching was substantially less than in other schools aimed at non-Indigenous children. The Aboriginal children were not given any school education apart from religious education. In some cases, they were provided with professional training to prepare them for work as unskilled labourers in a variety of industrial sectors[19].

The Indigenous children in the residential schools experienced violence of various kinds, including sexual abuse, and there were numerous deaths caused by epidemics of tuberculosis and smallpox that received an inadequate medical response. From the early years of the twentieth century, doctors and government inspectors were already reporting, albeit sporadically, the violence occurring in these residential schools as well as noting conditions of malnutrition, unsanitary housing, and overcrowding. After visiting 35 Canadian residential schools in 1907, Peter Bryce (1922), a

19. https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/.

medical inspector with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, denounced the poor health conditions to which the children were subjected and their high mortality rate caused predominantly by tuberculosis epidemics. In 1922, Bryce published a book entitled 'The Story of a National Crime: Being an Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada; The Wards of the Nation, Our Allies in the Revolutionary War, Our Brothers-In-Arms' in the Great War, in which he argued that the residential schools were a national crime. Despite his accusations, the residential school system continued until 1996, when a Royal Commission released its final report on the veracity of the abuses that had continued for more than a century within these institutions. Once the claims of abuse had been objectively demonstrated, the federal government publicly apologised to the First Nations for the physical and psychological crimes committed therein. That same year, the government allocated $ 350 million to establish foundations to take care of the mental health of the Indigenous survivors who had suffered violence in residential schools[20].

Nonetheless, some research shows that most of the children who survived residential schools failed to go beyond the ninth grade or enter any work sector (Hall 2013). This aspect, directly connected to precarious housing conditions, has also led to excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs by many Indigenous veterans. Some studies have also highlighted that more women than men attended these residential schools and that such women were less likely to marry than those who managed to escape the assimilationist policy implemented through these institutions and had continued to live within their communities (Kaspar 2014).

In recent years, the tragic events experienced in the residential schools have been presented as genocide and equated with the Holocaust in so far as they gave expression to a desire to destroy an entire civilisation deliberately and violently. Some authors have described residential schools as specific cultural genocide

20. https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1571589171655.

programmes in which children, removed from their communities, were deprived of the rights of ancestral knowledge linked to their territory (Claes, Clifton 1998). Unfortunately, the dramatic effects caused by the residential schools are still visible. Indeed, health problems continue to be substantially higher among Aboriginal groups than among non-Aborigines. However, existing studies have so far failed to systematically evaluate the factors at the root of these Indigenous health issues (Kaspar 2014). The aetiology of the health status of Native people who attended residential schools is also obscured both by the inability to evaluate Indigenous conceptions of health and disease and to include the impacts of colonial assimilation of Native groups in the assessments (Idler, Benyamini 1997). The First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey conducted in 2015 found that 47% of respondents who attended residential schools rated this type of institution as the main factor in their existing physical and mental health problems[21].

Thus, the Native view is fundamental today to restore the balance of the Indigenous person based on Native cultural values. The most commonly used practice is to spend time in sacred places where Natives can experience their ancestral link with the land. The Natives declare that the process has beneficial effects on the person's self-esteem as they can regain a sense of security deriving from belonging to their community.

One of the multiple meanings of their perception of the land could be roughly translated into the concept 'living the good life'. This latter expresses a state of harmony, of general well-being based on strong community relationships and the cultural identity obtained through a connection with the land. This concept is, therefore, more comprehensive than the biomedical concept of health understood as the absence of illness.

Some authors speak of 'therapeutic landscapes' (Wilson 2003) to explain the role of landscapes in shaping health. Since Wilbert Gesler introduced this concept in 'Therapeutic landscapes: Med-

21. https://cwhn.ca/en/resource_en/results/residential%20school.

ical issues in light of the new cultural geography' in 1992, many scholars have applied it to understand the connections relating place, identity, and health. The most important theoretical result determined through the use of this concept was the exploration of the healing benefits associated with the symbolic and material aspects of places (Wilson 2003). However, it must be recognised that the concept of therapeutic landscape is a Western theoretical construct that may help to understand the culturally specific dimensions of the connections between health and place yet fails to fully grasp the sacral influence of the site on a person's health (Gesler 1992).

To fully understand the link between the land (called Shkagamik-Kwe), the cultural construction of the individual and community identity for the Indigenous communities of the Northwest Territories, it is necessary to explore other research in which scholars give attention to the relationship between native people and their territories. For example, Wilson (2003) highlights the concept of health explained through mino-pimatisiwin in detail. In general, the concept of health in the Indigenous cultures of Canada is a complex notion that can be also explained through the particular conception of the medicine wheel which is divided into four sections representing the four directions: Giiwednong (North), Waabnong (East), Zhaawnong (South) and Epngishmok (West).

According to the Native peoples, as well as to some extent literature, all four elements of life (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual) are represented in the four directions of the medicine wheel. These four elements are intricately related and interact with each other to build a strong and healthy person. The balance between the four components of the medicine wheel extends beyond the individual context and encompasses the life of the entire community, which is expressed, also in a diachronic sense, through the relationships with their ancestors as well as with the spiritual beings that permeate specific places. Indigenous people say that to build a healthy person, the individual must undertake a journey and temporarily leave the community both spatially and spiritual-

ly. As also explain Wilson (2003), during this journey, the individual explores all dimensions of the medicine wheel.

Indigenous people state that the earth guarantees good health thanks to its ability to keep all four elements of the medicine wheel alive. In other words, by using what the earth offers, people can maintain the balance necessary for their own well-being. Thus, traditional subsistence activities are also embedded in the medicine wheel that, in addition, shape good social relationships. These relationships, in turn, nurture a state of individual well-being. For indigenous people, the land refers to the central goal in life which is to try to live life in balance. It is striving to positively develop oneself and live life in balance through the interconnection of the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual processes of striving to positively develop oneself. Just as one quadrant influences the next in the medicine wheel, the perception that indigenous have of their territories can be considered a lifelong process that involves developing the body, mind, heart, and spirit. Therefore, healing is not just referring to recovering from an illness or fixing a problem; it is a journey and something they work towards every day throughout whole lives. In a communal culture, healing for Indigenous people not only involves the individual but also the community and family (Wilson 2003).

In general, the relationship with the land has always been an important component in the life of all the cultures of Canadian Native peoples. Prior to contact with Europeans, most Indigenous groups could be described as cultures whose subsistence depended directly on the land. Many Indigenous people no longer live in close contact with the land as once they did, although they still highlight the importance of the land for maintaining their culture. A common aspect of all Canadian Aboriginal peoples is the conception that the earth shapes all spheres of life: from spirituality to material survival, emotional and physical well-being, and social harmony (Mercredi, Turpel 1993).

In the native communities of Canada, people consider the earth as a female entity that provides all the tangible and intangi-

ble aspects that are fundamental to life (Wilson 1993). When describing the earth, for example, the Tłı̨ chǫ elders refer to it as an entity capable of contributing to the continuation of all aspects of daily life.

The concept of the land expressed by the elders is, therefore, very distant from the extremely simplified Western idea of 'being immersed in nature'. The earth provides all the resources (food and medicine) necessary for people's survival. There is also a strong link between food and medicine in the Native communities of the Northwest Territories. Some plants, berries but also animals, which are also supplied by the earth, are consumed not only for nutritional reasons but can also be used for medical purposes. Indigenous people make medicines with goldenseal or fungus from trees or tree roots and barks and different things. As Wilson (1993) highlights if someone is sick with an illness indigenous make him some medicine. The author affirms that for native communities it is important to recognise that the land represents more than just a physical location of healing. In fact, it must be understood as part of an intricate relationship in the indigenous everyday lives between the physical, spiritual, and symbolic realms of our identities.

Thanks to the intermediation of a native team, an elder explained how this deep spiritual connection with the earth is not an automatic response triggered by being in contact with nature asserting that the land is like Mother Earth and native people are always connected with her.

Despite the research conducted on traditional medical practices (Gesler 1992; Wilson 1993), the importance of the spiritual component in traditional Indigenous medicine in the Northwest Territories is still poorly understood. Many elders stress the importance of the spiritual aspects contained in traditionally used medicines. He further explained how, unlike Western medicine, spirituality is considered an important part of health. He explained that herbal medicines can't be arranged like Western medicine because there is a spiritual component that becomes weaker when it is analyzed.

Therefore, it is difficult for medical practitioners in the Western world to understand it. Western medicine is the physical, mental, and emotional but not the spiritual. He highlighted that in the Native world, everything comes from the heart. When an individual is feeling ill, traditional medicines can be used to alleviate illness. In this sense, both the nutritional properties of food and the healing benefits of medicines are necessary for health.

Cedar, tobacco, and sage are considered sacred medicines commonly used for healing the body, mind, and spirit, as well as a means to connect to the earth and the Creator (Wilson 1993).

The worldview of the Indigenous communities of the Northwest Territories also involves the existence of supernatural beings. The founding legends of all the region's Aboriginal communities tell of a mythical time in which men, animals, or supernatural beings could switch shapes by mutating into the other's form and establish marriages (Andrews 2004). The belief that the earth is full of spirits also implies that staying within certain sites preserves mental and physical health thanks to the presence of such entities. Many indigenous people claimed to communicate with the spirits of rocks and trees especially in times of difficulty. It seems that this practice allows individuals to focus on the situation to be resolved.

In these cases, it is not the trees or stones in themselves that are venerated, this worship is directed towards something different that these elements incorporate and express. This aspect shows how complex and polysemic the natural elements are. However, the rock or the tree maintains a semantic crystallisation. This means that the natural element itself is considered sacred; sometimes, for example, the sacred place is indicated by a rock in which a spiritual entity manifests itself, sometimes or at the same time, it is the spiritual entity that inhabits the interior of the rock. For the Native religious consciousness, the hardness, roughness, and permanence of matter are a hierophany. There is nothing more immediate and independent than the fullness of its strength and there is nothing nobler and more terrifying than the majestic rock, the

boldly erected block of granite. The petrified manifestation of the sacred: 'above all, the stone *is*. It continues to remain itself and endures; most important of all, it *strikes* you' (Eliade 1996: 222). Before your body bangs against a rock or a tree, they attract your attention. They reveal something that transcends the precariousness of the human condition, they represent an absolute way of being. For Mircea Eliade, the resistance of a rock:

> Its inertia, its proportions, as well as its strange contours are not human: They attest to a presence that dazzles, terrifies and threatens. In its size and its hardness, in its shape or colour, man encounters a reality and a force belonging to a different world (Eliade 1996: 223).

Obviously, this is not a petrified spirit, on the contrary, as the Indigenous people explained, a rock is a concrete representation of a spirit's symbolic dwelling.

In general, this sacredness can gradually extend to the cultural place around a rock or a tree (or any other natural form). In these cases, in anthropology, we talk of *mana*, a technical term used for over a century to indicate the power to do extraordinary, amazing, extreme things, or to appear in extraordinary form. Places and things can have mana, superhuman entities have it and it can be acquired by human beings. For example, there is a traditional belief that certain ancestors (such as shamans or brave chiefs) turned into sacred rocks or mountains upon their death. According to the complex web of ambivalence embodied in this cosmology, a natural element, like the food hunted and collected in the land, acquires – and does not simply represent – a sacred power that simultaneously delineates the sacredness of an entire place. For this reason, the Indigenous people interviewed by the native teams explained that participating in certain traditional activities such as storing tobacco, hunting, or gathering medical herbs and berries, also makes people feel good. They told that hunting and eating caribou meat restores or maintains health as the animals are an integral part of the land. The Natives also explained the important

benefits for emotional healing acquired through the practices of hunting, capturing animals with traditional techniques or fishing, and gathering vegetables (Wilson 1993).

This statement embodies the idea that traditional subsistence activities provide a direct link between people and the earth which in turn supports health and healing.

The experience of the relationship between land and health is considerably more complex than can be described. Firstly, this relationship involves the entire Native cosmology which, according to the elders, is 'written in the earth'. Furthermore, men and women are linked to the land in different ways, above all because of the different roles they have as hunters and gatherers (Mercredi, Turpel 1993). Moreover, although the studies conducted have so far highlighted the positive therapeutic agents determined by the so-called therapeutic landscapes, some of the information that emerged during some informal conversations also suggested aspects that allude to negative relationships with the land that may worsen a person's state of health. This is the case, for example, of the narratives that focus on the northern lights. In fact, inherited wisdom states you should not whistle if the northern lights appear while you are inside certain sacred sites. Such behaviour would unleash the anger of the ancestors who would harm people's bodies provoking sickness and even death.

According to the Native cosmology of the communities in the Northwest Territories and based on the relationship between humans and the earth, the history of their peoples is divided into various eras characterised by the meeting and the commencement of negotiations with new populations, including the colonisers.

John B. Zoe (the Tłı̨ chǫ chief who led the claims for Indigenous land rights after the opening of the diamond mines in the early 2000s) classifies Indigenous history of the past three centuries based on agreements and treaties between Native inhabitants, traders, mining industries, and the government. Zoe further states that the Tłı̨ chǫ cosmology conceives new relationships as forces to bring about change and thus structure a new era. In 2005, at

the meeting sponsored by Subcommittee on Aboriginal People reviewed Bill C-14 which aimed to initiate an Aboriginal Land Claims Agreement between the Tłı̨ chǫ and the Government of the Northwest Territories, John B. Zoe gave a speech addressed to the members of the Cabinet Committee that addressed the symbolic meaning that his people gave to this agreement. In his speech, Zoe pointed out the centrality of the earth as a repository of his people's history in which historical references are captured through place-names and songs. Some reports highlight that in the Tåı̨chǫ̀ world, people did not have a written language but they had an oral history that was documented on the lands. A past event has a marker in the form of a place name that describes the event of the time. Natives know from oral history and the place names that the Tåı̨chǫ̀ agreement is not the only agreement that they have had. It is an extension of earlier agreements. From the place names and from what they are told and shown by the elders, one of the first agreements that they had was with the animals that we rely on in order to coexist. To neutralise our passing on those lands we make offerings to the land so that those animals will continue to sustain us in the environment to which they are accustomed. Indigenous rely on these principles to make our case for environmental assessments; they have the responsibility to protect the environment and to ensure that the animals are protected to sustain their continuance. It is those principles that natives use in a modern world and modern management (Olson 2012).

Place names are indispensable for Indigenous people to remember the relational continuity between a people, a place, and the symbolic history of a site linked to the deeds of an ancestor. The place-names also refer to multiple agreements that took place over the centuries in particular sites. Zoe stated that every past agreement continues to be reiterated and adapted to the present time so that the wisdom of past agreements is incorporated into the negotiations underway. Agreements are also the indispensable component for the mythical founding of the Native peoples as told in legends. In these stories, the conflicts between animals and

humans were resolved through an agreement led by a peacemaker (also human or animal) within a site that retains the spiritual power of this action (West 2006). An example is given by the area where Old Fort Rae stands (also called Nı̂hsı̀h Kö by the Tłı̨ chǫ) where it is said that the marriage between Yamǫ̂ǫ̈zha's (the Tłı̨ chǫ's mythical ancestor) and a female beaver took place[22]. The Tłı̨ chǫ tell us that on that occasion Yamǫ̂ǫ̈zha negotiated an agreement with the animals present, generating a mutual exchange of cultural values, principles, and social norms. Close new relations were established during the negotiations, which guaranteed the protection of the land by all the living beings who crossed it. Although we could draw upon numerous examples to illustrate the link established between the Indigenous people and the land through agreements, the Ayonikl site is particularly significant for the Dene and the Gwich'in who narrate that the two populations were created in this place. Specifically, the story takes place at a time in Dene history long ago when humans and animals could change form. Dene history is divided into two great periods: The time of the 'Old World' when animals and humans could change form and lived together. This was succeeded by the 'New World', a time when humans and animals took their final form. In the New World, people and animals lived in harmony, abiding by rules of mutual respect and conduct. These are the rules that guide hunters to respect the animals that give themselves food. Indigenous are living in the New World today. As told by an elder from Colville Lake, the story of Ayonikl begins in this way: In the ancient days, indigenous people (the Inuit, the Gwich'in, and the Dene) lived together. The big war that happened at Ayonikl was because of two children that were fighting one another over an owl. Everyone began to fight because of the children and it is said that the battle was so fierce that there was a lake of blood formed on that hill. Finally, an elder stood and asked the people to stop fighting. Everyone went their separate ways, and even the languages

22. NWT Archives, Tłı̨ chǫ National.

changed with time. A lone dog wandered toward Gwich'in country and that represents the Gwich'in. A young man wandered to the Arctic coast and that represents the Inuit. That is why the Inuit are so agile. The children ran towards Great Bear Lake; they represent the Neyagot'ine [*DelIne people*]. That is why the people of Bear Lake are so energetic. An elder stayed here, and he represents the people who live here today. That is why the people of this area are so wise. Generally, these stories are not interpreted for young people and are told without the explanation that ends the story of Ayonikl, above (Wilson 1993).

The ancestral agreement between various ancestors that occurred in a specific place is still commemorated today through 'land payment' practices which consist of offering tobacco, or other medicinal herbs, to a specific site. During a formal interview, one elder recounted how this practice reaffirms the values of respect and mutual solidarity between humans, animals, and the earth. In other words, this act regenerates the spirit of the past agreement.

These principles are still handed down from generation to generation through the repetition of songs, stories, and place names and incorporated through specific dances.

The mnemonic link between site features, oral narration, and historical events is well documented in many societies that retain rich oral traditions (Feld, Basso 1996; Hirsch, O'Hanlon 1995). One of the characteristics common to many of these populations is their (semi-) nomadic lifestyle over vast territories, in which the various sites are intimately known and codified with specific names that form the basis of a complex ethnogeography in which the physical world and the group culture come together in a semiotic whole. The interpretation that Indigenous people provide of the concepts of natural and cultural landscapes is difficult to compare with Western categories of landscape.

This form of ethno-pedagogy on which the entire education of the Indigenous person is based is transmitted to children from an early age. The elders also state that young people must understand

the profound meaning of a story through their personal experience which provides the means for acquiring knowledge. In this way, the elders teach the young to think independently and to build strong personalities (Wilson 1993). During the trips through the land, children listen to the stories told by adults. Once adults, they will replicate this behaviour with their children to preserve traditional culture. In doing so, the elders claim that the earth fortifies a strong identity in young people and provides them with the rules for living in society.

Although today the link between land and Indigenous culture still represents a system in which mental, cultural and environmental states are interconnected, some elders argue that currently, with the engagement of many Indigenous people in diamond mining, this profound holistic knowledge is crumbling.

1.4. Caribou Hunters

Antoinnette Helmet, an elder of the Tłı chǫ community commenced a public speech held in September 2019 at the Yellowknife library stating that traditional activities are not merely a means of subsistence for Natives but take on a profound cultural significance that shapes their entire community life. At the same conference, she stressed that scholars do not devote enough attention to the socio-cultural implications involved in the negotiation processes between traditional subsistence systems and the capitalist and financial activities that have established themselves in the Northwest Territories. Indigenous subsistence activities, sometimes defined with the term domestic production from a legal point of view (Kuokkanen 2011), unite different areas of social life and are dictated by seasonal trends. For this reason, some scholars define them as a 'seasonal, integrated economy' (Hall 2013). Traditional activities include all the practices necessary to procure food and make clothes, keep warm and build shelters. Many studies have defined Indigenous subsistence as a highly complex notion that

includes vital economic, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Subsistence means much more than mere survival or minimum living standards. It enriches and sustains Indigenous communities in a manner that promotes cohesiveness, pride, and sharing. It also provides an essential link to, and communication with, the natural world of which Indigenous are an integral part (Wilson 1993).

At the heart of traditional Native activities, there is no exchange for for-profit or logic of competition; rather sustenance is communal. The surplus is usually shared on festive and ceremonial occasions, and the person sharing those goods increases his or her social prestige in the group. The subsistence-oriented economy, which today also includes a type of mixed economy, also ensures social reproduction. In fact, authors have stated that subsistence activities link the generations and the extended family into a complex network of associations, rights, and obligations. This network both reflects and re-creates the social order and gives meaning and value to each person's contributions and rewards (Kuokkanen 2011).

The fundamental principles of the traditional economy are sustainability and reciprocity understood as practices that maintain community relations. Hence, there is an indissoluble link between knowledge and subsistence. Antoinnette continued her speech by saying that indigenous activities in the native communities are governed by unwritten laws and beliefs that ensure the survival of families and villages. They include codes of customs and behavior that ensure a proper spiritual relationship between humans and animals and conserve resources. They strictly define the rights and duties and the obligations and privileges of tribal members. These laws operate effectively without any system of patents, land titles, or restrictions except self-imposed restrictions that have their origin in the Natives' age-old knowledge of and reliance on the natural world.

The Northwest Territories are the habitat of certain animals traditionally essential for the subsistence of Indigenous communities. Among these animals, the main one is the caribou (or reindeer) (*Rangifer tarandus*, Linnaeus 1758). The caribou is a deer

with a coat that is thick but not woolly and is uniform grey in winter and yellowish-grey in summer. The mane on its neck is always evident[23]. The muzzle and nostrils are covered with hair, an adaptation that enables it to search for food even in the snow. The coarse, dense hairs have a hollow shaft to promote thermal insulation. The reindeer's hooves are highly characteristic and being wide and spreadable they permit the animal to walk on muddy or snowy ground without sinking. The hoof is made up of two clearly divided halves, while the accessory metapodials[24] (that have now disappeared in artiodactyls) are well developed, with small independent hooves similar to those of the moose or roe deer.

As with any other mammal that is distributed over a large area, there are many breeds of caribou or reindeer that differ according to their geographical location. In line with the trend to avoid excessive subdivision of different types within the same species, we can recognise three subspecies in Europe and Asia, and six in North America, two of which subspecies, *Rangifer tarandus dawsoni* (Queen Charlotte Islands caribou) and the *Rafinger tarandus eogroenlandicus* (Eastern Greenland caribou), are now extinct. As for the caribou present in the Northwest Territories, biologists have distinguished different types. In 1944, for example, the biologist J.G. Wright, in an article published in the Canadian Geographical Journal, presented five additional subtypes of caribou found in the region:

– those summering on the Dubawnt and Kazan Rivers and wintering in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba;

23. From the family of cervids (Cervidae) and belonging to the order Artiodactyla, the caribou has an average height of about 100-130 cm at the withers. The weight varies but is generally between 90 and 270 kg (in males). The American subspecies are larger than the Eurasian ones. The reproductive period runs from mid-September to mid-October. The duration of gestation varies between about 7 and 8 months. The number of calves per birth is 1, although occasionally 2 calves can be born. Females reach sexual maturity at 2 years, while males mature later. The maximum life span is about 25 years.

24. Bones of the posterior medial part of the legs of quadrupeds.

- those summering on the lower Kazan River and eastward and wintering in southern Keewatin;
- those summering in southern Keewatin and wintering in northern Manitoba;
- those summering in the Wager Bay–Back River area and wintering on lakes on the Back River, Aberdeen, and adjacent lakes and north of Baker Lake;
- those summering in Boothia and Melville Peninsulas and wintering farther south (Wright 1944).

In general, all these subtypes belong to the subspecies typical of the tundra and that of the taiga that differs from the forest reindeer which has smaller antlers than those of the tundra caribou despite being larger, probably because the average nutrition level is higher. The map below shows the ranges of the different types of caribou herds in the Northwest Territories. The diamond mines have been opened in the part of the territory marked out in light green.

Caribou management systems also vary. The movements of forest caribou do not take place at altitude and with extensive migrations but within a network of pastures located at the same altitude and covering shorter distances. Across the northern hemisphere, the caribou live in the desolation of the tundra and taiga and can tolerate temperatures as low as -50 °C in environments where strong winds and blizzards are a daily occurrence for about nine months of the year. To adapt to the harshness of the winter climate, warm-blooded animals can reduce blood circulation to less protected parts of the body. On the other hand, caribou are seriously disturbed by the swarms of insects that attack them in July and August. In this period, therefore, at the height of the short subarctic summer, they usually migrate north where the air is cooler and there are fewer mosquitoes and gadflies[25].

25. Flies and mosquitoes are a big problem for the caribou, forcing them to travel far. For example, *Oedemagena tarandi*, the reindeer warble fly, lays its eggs at the base

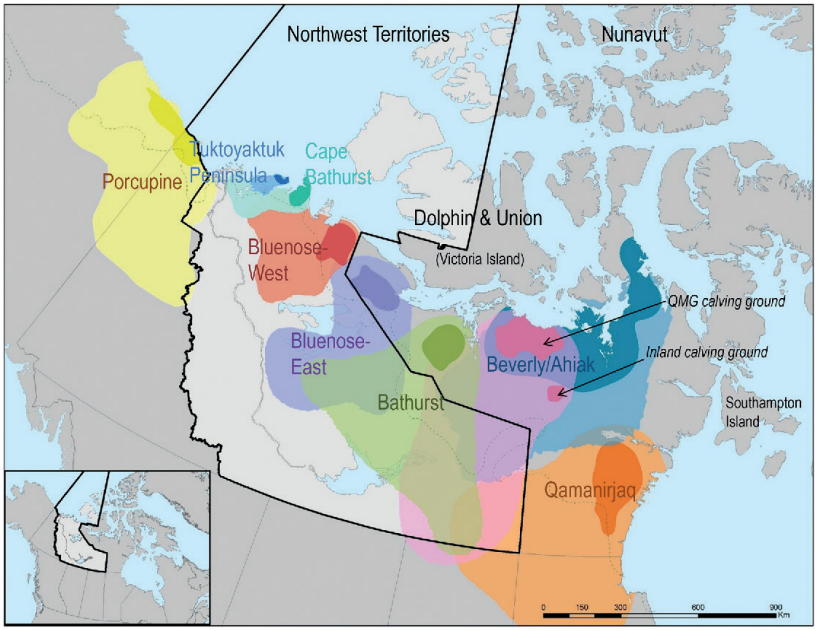

Figure 1. *Historical Northwest territories barren-ground herd ranges and calving areas (1996-2018; https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/services/barren-ground-caribou).*

A fundamental element whose importance cannot be overlooked in the study of the biology and ethology of the caribou is that this animal is constantly in motion and requires vast spaces to survive. This aspect is clearly connected to the origins of the nomadism of the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories. The need to find food is the primary factor that pushes the caribou to migrate, often covering distances of 200 to 300 kilometres. The possibility of surviving the long harsh winter depends on their ability to find nourishment even under the snow. The snow cover is raised and removed with blows from

of the hair of the caribou and its larvae bore into the skin causing acute suffering for the animal. In the summer, during mosquito invasions, a caribou can lose up to 125 g of blood a day. Since the arrival of insects coincides with the period when the caribou moult, they are particularly vulnerable to insect attacks and will travel great distances to avoid them.

the hooves of the animals' front legs until the underlying vegetal layer is exposed. However, the herd must move continuously because as the snow is compressed by the trampling of the animals it becomes so hard that they are no longer able to dig into it. Therefore, whenever possible through the winter, the caribou are forced to wander over a vast territory. Although from year to year (especially before the opening of the diamond mines), their movements follow roughly the same patterns, the choices regarding the most appropriate time to move and the best trail to follow are never automatic events as they are strictly influenced by local conditions. The anthropologist James G.E. Smith wrote in 1976:

> While the caribou herds typically follow the same patterns year after year, there are those occasions in which they for no apparent reason move in different directions, or their foraging ranges may shift from year to year. It has also been suggested that there are long-term cyclical fluctuations in the population, as is the case with other faunal species. Long summers or warm winters may delay the early winter migration, and herd movements or dispersal may be affected by the amount of snowfall. Great forest fires periodically occur, affecting the behavior of the caribou and thus of man. The dynamics of the boreal forest and tundra ecology thus include to some degree elements of uncertainty, to which Chipewyan social organization must be adapted (Smith 1976: 14).

The second factor that determines the movements of the caribou herds is related to calving. Information on the location of the caribou calving areas has been collected in the Northwest Territories since the 1950s. Despite the deviations of the routes after the opening of gold mines from the 1930s, the caribou migrations for calving were, at least until the early 2000s, almost stable. A significant synchronisation of mating was found that inevitably generates an increase in the size of the herd and an equally rapid dispersion. A high synchronisation of mating favours a similar

synchronisation of calving and, therefore, a prompt reforming of the herd.

Despite the profound process of social change initiated by colonisation and industrialised mining, the whole culture of the Native groups of the Northwest Territories still revolves around the seasonal cycle of the herds. Moreover, the complex traditional knowledge necessary for hunting caribou still relies on the perception and interpretation of precise environmental signals. The localities between which the Indigenous people still move seasonally to follow the herds are never neutral points that can be defined by abstract geographical coordinates, on the contrary, they are significant nodes in networks of micro-experiences in which memories and tales intertwine with sensorial perceptions of atmospheric agents (the intensity of the wind, the thickness of the ice) and real-life episodes (the death of a caribou and so on). Nonetheless, especially over the last century this knowledge linked to the seasonal variations of the landscape has gradually changed and adapted to technological innovations and slow climatic changes. The correct interpretation of the smallest changes in the natural landscape and observation and understanding of changes in the behaviour of caribou are crucial factors when hunting. Archaeologist Bryan Gordon, recording the close relationship between Indigenous groups and the herds of caribou built over the centuries, states that signs of human band and caribou herd affiliation have been accumulating since humans and caribou first entered the Barrenlands. Pile slab inukshuit made by Thelon and Dubawnt River hunters mark the route of the herd returning to the forest. I have little doubt that modern seasonal movements vary due to overhunting, forest fires, and human impingement on the caribou range, but calving ground locations have remained stable for centuries, based on aerial surveys and the archaeological record (Gordon 1996).

Older documents report the traditional knowledge on which the sustenance of the natives depended, based also on other animals but primarily on the caribou. Hearne (1795), in fact, wrote in his book that the Northern Indians who trade at the Factory,

as well as all the Copper tribe, pass their whole Summer on the barren ground, where they generally find plenty of deer; and in some of the rivers and lakes, a great abundance of fine fish. The Chipewyans and Copper Indians of the Great Slave Lake region did not stalk the caribou herds in the manner in which the Europeans were accustomed to hunting game animals. Instead, they moved in anticipation of the caribou herds. The Chipewyans and Copper Indians travelled to specific locations year after year based upon their knowledge of herds' movements within their territory – a territory coincident with the territorial range of a particular caribou herd.

Hearne also provided some examples of the traditional caribou hunting techniques practised by the Natives. He stated that on the thirtieth of June he arrived at a small river, called Cathawhachaga, which empties itself into a large lake called Yathkyed-whoie, or White Snow Lake. Here he found several tents of Northern Indians, who had been some time employed spearing deer in their canoes, as they crossed the above-mentioned little river. In general, he explained, these Indians make use of the single paddle, though a few have double ones, like the Esquimaux: The latter, however, are seldom used, but by those who lie in wait to kill deer as they cross rivers and narrow lakes. With them, he came to a branch of Conge-ca-tha-wha-chaga River, that was on the North side of which he found Copper Indians, who were assembled, according to annual custom, to kill deer as they cross the river in their little canoes (Hearne 1795).

The Indigenous groups would build seasonal settlements located in specific areas of the territory which were crossed by the herds of caribou from late spring. Thanks to Hearne it is possible to rediscover the ancient methods for capturing animals, many of which are still used today. He described that when the Indians design to impound caribou, they look out for one of the paths in which a number of them have trod, and which is observed to be still frequented by them. When these paths cross a lake, a wide river, or a barren plain, they are found to be much the best for the

purposes; and if the path runs through a cluster of woods, capable of affording materials for building around, it adds considerably to the commodiousness of the situation (Hearne 1795).

The explorer also asserted the hunting methods used within the boreal forest in the Northwest Territories. He described how the pound was built by making a strong fence with bushy trees, without observing any degree of regularity, and the work is continued to any extent, according to the pleasure of the builders. He had seen some that were not less than a mile round, and he informed us that there are others still more extensive. The door, or entrance of the pound, was not larger than a common gate, and the inside was so crowded with small counter-hedges as very much to resemble a small maze; in every opening of which they set a snare, made with thongs of parchment deer-skins well twisted together, which are amazingly strong. One end of the snare was usually made fast to a growing pole; but if no one of sufficient size can be found near the place where the snare was set, a loose pole was substituted in its room, which was always of such size and length that a deer cannot drag it far before it got entangled among the other woods, which are all left standing except what was found necessary for making the fence, hedges, etc. The pound being thus prepared, a row of small brush-wood was stuck up in the snow on each side of the door or entrance; and these hedge-rows were continued along the open part of the lake, river, or plain, where neither stick nor stump besides was to be seen, which made them more distinctly observed. These poles, or brush-wood, were generally placed at the distance of fifteen or twenty yards from each other and ranged in such a manner as to form two sides of a long acute angle, growing gradually wider in proportion to the distance they extend from the entrance of the pound, which sometimes was not less than two or three miles; while the deer's path was exactly along the middle, between the two rows of brush-wood. At this point they waited, having pitched their tents with a view of the caribou trail. Indians employed on this service always pitch their tent on or near to an eminence that affords a commanding prospect of the path

leading to the pound; and when they saw any deer going that way, men, women, and children walk along the lake or river-side under cover of the woods, they got behind them, then stepped forth to open view, and proceeded towards the pound in the form of a crescent. The poor timorous deer finding themselves persuaded, and at the same time taking the two rows of brushy poles to be two ranks of people stationed to prevent their passing on either side, ran straight forward in the path up the path till they got into the pound. The hunters would close in, and block up the entrance with some brush trees, that were being cut down and lie at hand for that purpose. The deer being thus enclosed, the women and children walk around the pound, to prevent them from breaking or jumping over the fence, while the men were employed spearing such as are entangled in the snares and shooting with bows and arrows those which remained loose in the pound (Hearne 1795).

Before the advent of firearms, the main tools for hunting caribou were bows and arrows that are used sporadically even today. Hunting techniques are still handed down from generation to generation as they were in the past. For example, elders teach that when the caribou cross an area to head further south at the end of summer, it is necessary to wait a day before starting hunting. In fact, once the herd leaders have passed unharmed, the rest of the animals believe they are safe from possible dangers. On the other hand, if a caribou leader were to be killed, the herd might change its route. This policy is directly connected to a knowledge of behavioural mechanisms that developed with the evolution of the species. Like other ungulates that live in open plains where it is impossible to hide to defend themselves from predators (primarily, human beings and wolves) the caribou have developed a social structure that revolves around greater herd size and synchronised mating and calving.

As demonstrated by several ethological studies, caribou herds are very loose structures to which members can be added or removed without any significant effects except during the mating period. However, there is a complex hierarchical structure, ac-

cording to which adult males dominate over other subadults or elderly males and females. Within the male group, rank is usually linked to the strength of the antlers and dominance can be particularly important in the more delicate periods of the caribou's life, for instance, during particularly long and harsh winters when competition for food is high (Van Oort *et al.* 2005). The teaching of the elders focuses on avoiding any loss of precious food resources and hence the importance of setting up a summer camp in good time but also warns against following the herds to distant pastures without adequate consideration of abrupt climate change. Their teaching also stresses the importance of correctly evaluating the areas where the pastures first turn green and, vice versa, those that are more subject to sudden night frosts at the end of August.

As the Natives follow the caribou herds, they try to keep the animals united by checking that they have the right food at the right time and that the life of the animal takes place *naturally* until slaughter. In September, after spending the summer grazing in the tundra areas, the caribou must be grouped and driven to abandon the summer pastures to move south before the winter arrives. Many animals wander over a vast territory and some Indigenous families sporadically resort to the use of small helicopters to locate them and report their position to those on the ground, who can then reach them and bring them back to re-join the herd.

The life of the Native groups of the Northwest Territories still revolves around the caribou: they follow them in their summer movements, as they return in autumn and then follows the slaughter and finally the drying of the meat in the tents built near the houses in the cities or villages. Nevertheless, mixed economic models based on both subsistence and a wage economy have been experienced by the Indigenous people for a long time. A letter dated December 5, 1916, written by H.J. Bury (Secretary of Department of Indian Affairs) and entitled *Re: Amendments to the North West Territories Game Act* reports:

> The Indians and the Eskimo of the North West Territories rely absolutely on the game of the country to enable them to live. Certain species of game such as the moose and caribou provide them with the means of sustenance, whilst the fur-bearers afford them a means of livelihood (Bury 1916).

In another report, written in 1930 by the Inspector of Department of Indian Affairs C.C. Parker, we read:

> The Indian hunter goes inland with a small outfit of traps and a limited supply of provisions and ammunition. He has to depend upon hunting and fishing for feed for his family and his dogs. This frequently means that he is obliged to follow the food sources which are not always in a section where fur bearers can be trapped. Sustenance must necessarily come first (Parker 1930).

To understand some general characteristics of how human beings, *inhabit* the places, it is convenient to think of the vital space of an organism in terms of ecosystems, i.e., conceiving the biotic community and environmental unit as an *integrated whole*. The notion of an ecosystem[26] (which consists, for example, in calculating exactly the load capacity, formulating estimates on the levels of consumption and energy production, evaluating the efficiency of human groups in relation to types of different activities) may not be used concretely in research. Nevertheless, this approach can be extremely useful as a conceptual tool, as it obliges us to rethink the relationship between society and environment (man/space, nature/culture), no longer considering it as a clear dichotomy but in terms of systemic interrelations. On the one hand, this means bearing in mind that certain cultural institutions can play a role in the self-regulatory mechanisms of the system; on the other hand,

26. According to Ellenberg's (1973) definition, an ecosystem is an interacting system between organisms and their inorganic environment which is open but has to a certain degree the ability to self-regulate.

highlighting the idea that human groups and natural space are integrated into a network of material exchanges and interdependencies that connect all members of the biotic community to each other and to some significant physical features of their habitat. The following testimony offers a representation of an integrated system, in which the alteration of one element inevitably determines a chain of micro and macro changes throughout the system. Here, the point is not so much the idea of a stable balance typical of some rather elementary functionalist (or organic) paradigms that have little relevance to current theoretical debate, but rather the idea of interconnection between elements, phenomena, events, people, perceptions, etc. that characterises the most effective contemporary analyses of complex systems theories (Bocchi, Ceruti 1996). In a report written in 1997, that is, before the opening of the diamond mines, Kevin Giroux (Dene chief) stated:

> For seven days straight you couldn't even cross the barren lands. It was like a traffic jam. Caribou are standing outside your door. They aren't even scared of you. We would sit there and watch the caribou cross for 7 days the barren lands. That was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen.[27]

Some years later, in 2004, when both the diamond mines were in production, Giroux instead wrote:

> It's 2004. With the De Beers mines, we go out there and it's not just the quantity, the quality of the caribou has gone down. Before they look all healthy and bushy tail. You could tell if they were fat by their bushy tail, it would jiggle. Lately, they don't get the proper nutrition, the fat's not as good. The tails are droopy. They don't stick up nice and perky. The meat isn't as good. I noticed there's a chemical taste to it, gasoline, diesel, engine taste to it. Hewey Arden and I would hunt.

27. NWT Archives, Dené National. Chapter V: Akaitcho and the Dogrib-Yellowknife Conflict.

> He would shoot a caribou from the boat, we would give thanks, and then eat the meat right from the caribou. You can't anymore, the caribou is all buggy. The ecology was all messed up, it's not just the caribou, everything is messed up.[28]

The caribou are also currently threatened by sports hunting for tourists and foreign miners employed by diamond mining companies. The latter, who have no knowledge of Indigenous hunting techniques, kill the first caribou that they see.

Furthermore, especially since the 1950s, the opening of the mines has pushed the Natives to progressively transfer from their villages to the city, thus partly eroding the intimate knowledge of the land and animal behaviour that derives from a direct experience of the environment. Nevertheless, even today Natives build summer camps for hunting. The elders continue to pass down their knowledge on how to use the various parts of hunted animals, an aspect of the greatest importance as regards the caribou of which each part is used. Tents are made from the skin (still built for shelter in the summer pastures and for drying meat next to the houses). The skin is also used to make clothes and ropes. The best skins for garments are those of animals killed between early August and mid-October. It usually takes eight to ten caribou hides to make a winter garment for an adult man, while a tent requires about thirteen skins (Gordon 1996: 43). The bones and horns are used to make knives and other artefacts. The marrow is also the only easily available source of fat both for food and lighting (Ligi 2002).

While the caribou is the primary animal for subsistence, other animals too are fundamental to the Native communities such as the elk that live in the southern part of the region, the ducks that cross the barren lands in spring and autumn, and the beavers that are hunted for their fur throughout the year. In addition, the Natives use the musky mouse for meat and skin. Moreover, the nu-

28. NWT Archives, Dené National. Chapter V: Akaitcho and the Dogrib-Yellowknife Conflict.

merous waterways contain various types of fish that are a valuable source of food throughout the year. Angling for fish under the ice in winter requires no other process than cutting round holes in the ice from one to two feet diameter, and letting down a baited hook, which is always kept in motion, not only to prevent the water from freezing so soon as it would do if suffered to remain quite still but because it is found at the same time to be a great means of alluring the fish to the hole; for it is always observed that the fish in those parts will take a bait which is in motion, much sooner than one that is at rest (Gordon 1996).

Nets are also used for fishing: when left in the water in the winter period it is possible to catch a large number of fish under the icy surface of a lake.

Hunting techniques have changed over the centuries. If, as reported in some documents dating back to the first half of the nineteenth century, one of the hunting methods used was to draw the animals closer by miming their behaviour and wearing skins of animals killed[29], this technique has now fallen into disuse. Nevertheless, there is an interesting passage in June Helm's book, *The People of Denendeh* (2000) in which she states that despite the technical changes, the hunting of caribou and other ungulates is still based on ancestral knowledge. The anthropologist explains in her book that hunts organised by the band councils of the four Dogrib communities [Rae-Edzo, Wha Ti, Gamiti, and Wekweti] were taking place at the same time and in the same general area. The camp locations had been chosen carefully the week before. Hunters first referred to satellite maps distributed weekly to the communities by the Department of Resources, Wildlife, and Economic Development (RWED), which show the locations of fourteen collared caribou cows. These, affirms the scholar, are usually posted on a bulletin board near the band office and always attract lots of attention. The RWED study is designed to examine the impacts of recent diamond mine exploration and development on the Bathurst

29. NWT Archives, Tłı̨ chǫ National.

Caribou herd, which numbers nearly 350,000 animals. The satellite transmitters on the collars send signals once every five days for six hours. Biologists in Yellowknife download the location data and maps are prepared and sent to the communities. Once a general hunt location was chosen, the bands then sometimes charter a small plane to scout for caribou, and ultimately, specific locations for the camps. The caribou are widely distributed in small groups ranging in size from a few animals to thousands, over an area of many thousands of square miles. The preparation in locating suitable sites is necessary because the bands use expensive aircraft charters to move hunters and camp supplies to the caribou. In contrast, just a generation ago hunters travelled to the barren lands by canoe and were consequently much more mobile and able to cover large distances in pursuit of caribou. With the use of aircraft, the camps are set up at locations where caribou are fairly numerous and hunters range from camp on foot. Consequently, it is important to choose areas where sufficient numbers of caribou are moving through to make a successful hunt (Helm 2000).

Sporadic references to the use of planes during hunting date back to the end of the 1950s:

> Chief Casaway made an appeal to the Superintendent to secure air transportation to haul caribou meat from the Barrens to Snowdrift. The Chief explained that the fishing had not been too good and that there was no big game or caribou within many miles of Snowdrift. The Chief said he would like to organise a large hunt in the barren lands if caribou could be located. It was felt that the distance would be so great that the Indians would not be able to haul all of the meat back to Snowdrift and that there would be too much waste. The Superintendent advised that he would write and request an authority to charter an aircraft for such a project, and advise the Chief before they went on a hunt (Kerr 1959).

Although this practice is not very common today, the use of airplanes during hunting is often recognised as a useful means

of covering long distances. This technique has allowed greater and faster access to the barren lands but only for those who can afford to rent a plane. However, the people with sufficient economic resources are predominantly foreigners and non-Indigenous employees of multinational mining companies (Kulchyski, Tester 2007).

Such unscrupulous hunting of large numbers of caribou and other animals means not only that there are fewer animals for the subsistence of the area's Indigenous inhabitants but also poses a threat to Native culture that has always attributed a strong symbolic value to the animals in this territory.

Despite the importance of these socioeconomic practices for the First Nations, some scholars wonder if it still makes sense to speak of subsistence when in reality Indigenous communities are increasingly involved in capitalist production logic. Poppel states, for example:

> From an economic viewpoint, it is often emphasised that traditional hunting and fishing activities, taking place at a distance from modern infrastructure and market opportunities, can represent a 'barrier' for broader participation in the market and thus limit access to what is provided from the market economy: not only wage income but also access to credit, subsidies and market-related transfer payments (Poppel 2006: 65).

Viewed from a capitalist and financial perspective, corporate expansion in Indigenous companies is considered a parameter of progress. This evolutionary matrix vision, therefore, presupposes that the final cultural and economic destination is represented by the industrial logic. However, Indigenous economies should be considered neither 'premodern' nor 'anti-modern' as they possess alternative paths of economic development that transcend business logic. The current economies in the Northwest Territories are actually mixed economies, given that Indigenous subsistence coexists with the exploitation systems of non-renewa-

ble resources. Nevertheless, the Indigenous economy continues to play a considerable role in the communities. In a practical sense, mixed economies consist of a set of subsistence practices, production of raw materials, wage work, absorption in industry, and involvement in policies related to social assistance, welfare, pensions, unemployment benefits, etc. Although the subsistence economy no longer fully satisfies the needs of the Native people, it continues to play a fundamental cultural role. Specifically, the subsistence economy represents 30% of the production and income of the communities in the Northwest Territories. Furthermore, considering the rapid and massive advance of the mining industry in the region and the fact that the traditional economic practices are performed almost exclusively by women and elders, this percentage appears proportionately high (O'Neill 2004). Peter Usher clarifies how the Indigenous economy survives next to the industrial economy in the northern regions of Canada. He asserts that the two modes of production in the North today are the domestic and the capitalist. The capitalist model has been superimposed on the pre-existing domestic mode, but the latter survives in a modified form. The two coexist not as isolated, unconnected enclaves, but rather as interrelated parts of a larger social formation, that of industrial capitalism on the frontier (Usher 1982).

In fact, many scholars have recognised the impossibility of separating the wage economy from the economic forms of subsistence in two distinct spheres as it is conceived by a capitalist vision. After conducting research with the Yellowknife Dene community, Hugh Brody (2002) notes that if income were rigidly divided into the traditional and modern economic sectors, it would not be easy to place guiding in one or the other. In fact, income from guiding illustrates how misleading such a dichotomy can be. In theory, the Indians' earnings can be broken into the equivalent gained domestically (mean from trapping and hunting, fish, berries), and wages from working for others. In practice, these cannot readily be disentangled. Guides work for others, but in separating them

from the traditional sector, cultural and historical associations are lost. It is this dichotomy of traditional and modern that creates this confusion.

Attempts within many studies to outline dichotomies between subsistence and market economies have resulted in misleading analyses (Kuokkanen 2011). Another feature of mixed economies is the consideration that wages are an additional means of supporting subsistence activities and do not replace them. Traditional activities in the Northwest Territories currently require a certain amount of cash to purchase the materials and equipment needed to conduct them. Brody (2002), however, underlines the difficulty, as well as the erroneousness, of fixing an economic or monetary value on the products obtained from subsistence activities.

In Canada, all traditional economic structures are currently interrelated with industrial activities imported from outside. Joyce Green (2002) points out that the world of globalised capitalism drives not only colonial governments but, increasingly, Aboriginal ones. Some pursue profits and capitalist methods like union-busting. Some seek accommodation with capitalist development that might benefit Indigenous communities. Those who would choose non-capitalist alternatives are at odds with the dominant culture, political ideology, and economic structure.

Some scholars have also introduced the term 'Aboriginal capitalism' to explain the hybrid economic forms that can see the continuation of Indigenous subsistence practices, albeit marginally now, alongside economic forms that are linked to industry, through corporate alliances, in which Indigenous communities manage to reap benefits in terms of revenues and profits (Altamirano-Jimenez 2007). According to some authors, however, the introduction of wages in the Native communities of the Northwest Territories has actually placed the Indigenous inhabitants in debt, thus further increasing the power of multinationals and the State over them (Fontaine 2002).

1.5. The Cultural-Ecological Context of the Northwest Territories: an Example of an Integrated Whole in Constant Evolution

The various testimonies reported in the previous paragraph raise interesting considerations in the anthropological field. As the anthropologist Fiorenzo Facchini argues, the expression 'cultural adaptation' (1988) can refer to the cultural responses to the challenges of the environment, responses that consist both in concretely modifying it and the choice of strategies that satisfy the needs of individuals or groups. From this perspective, there is no doubt that culture has inverted the terms of the problem of adaptation. In other words, with the advent of culture, it is no longer the environment that influences humans, but rather the opposite, humans modify the environment to render it more suited, above all, to their biological characteristics. In this sense, we can speak of a slowdown in natural human selection (Ligi 2003)[30]. Hence, culture has undoubtedly been an extraordinary factor in the success of our species, at least up to this point in our history (Facchini 1988, 1995). From an anthropological perspective, culture can thus be considered as a form of highly refined adaptation to the environment, which has allowed human beings to overcome their biological incompleteness in various ways (Geertz 1973)[31]. A vast literature has been produced on the concept of culture and this specific definition of culture, which tends to primarily highlight the adaptive aspect of the human relationship with the surrounding world. However, this is certainly not the only approach possible and it naturally lends

30. Although we should not forget that humans have introduced new selective factors of, we could say, a cultural order such as pollution, mutagens, etc.

31. Human beings' main weakness compared to all other animals is the fact that humans are not born with the biological and instinctual equipment necessary to live in a particular biological niche. Nevertheless, thanks to culture, which is a component that gives humans a great advantage over other animals, human beings have colonised the globe and managed to settle in almost all natural habitats.

itself to various criticisms[32]. Similarly, the problem of the relationship between society and the environment has been tackled by a host of scholars[33] whose works may emphasise, in different ways, the processes by which the environment might influence society, as in the case of determinist schools of thought (Ratzel 1882-1891); or, conversely, on the fact that humans would always have the ability to circumvent natural constraints and adapt the environment in which they live to their benefit (as in the case of the possibilist schools of thought; Vidal de la Blache 1903). Given a different conceptualisation of the society/environment relationship (underlying the advance from the now outdated nature/culture dichotomy), it is interesting to draw attention to the idea of reciprocity, or of a *dialogic relationship* as effectively expressed by Marshall Sahlins as being preliminary to a deeper integrated approach (systematic or connectionist). Specifically, the scholar argues that our most recent forebears, who notably include American anthropological researchers, present a contrasting position to the old idea of a mechanical action of natural forces on a purely receptive humanity. Rather, environmental possibilism implies that cultures act selectively, if not capriciously, on their environments exploiting certain possibilities and ignoring others, that the environment is essentially passive presenting itself as an inert configuration of possibility and limits to development. The current theoretical outlook that, generallly, constitutes the integrated approach, suggests an idea of reciprocity, that is, of a continuous dialectical exchange between

32. In anthropology, the critique of the strict opposition between nature/culture (and animality/humanity) has been tackled by various authors, of whom I consider it appropriate to mention Philippe Descola (2005, 2013), Eleonora Fiorani (1993), Sergio Dalla Bernardina (1996, 2003 and 2012) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (2003, 2004 and 2010). Moreover, I believe it is right to point out that it was Lévi-Strauss who commenced this type of reflection in the field of anthropology. Indeed, he introduced the consideration, which runs through most of his works, for a necessary rapprochement of the two opposing poles if we are to identify the common substratum of human traits that are universal and shared by all humanity, beyond the multiple cultural differences.

33. Interesting critiques of the literature on this topic can be found, for example, in: Solinas 1991; Ingold 1994.

human communities and their environments. As it adapts, culture transforms the landscape, responding to changes that it set in motion itself (Sahlins 1976: 123-124).

So, the experience of the place, of the natural environment created daily through this dialogue and this relationship of reciprocity, constitutes a first, very general but profound, form of an experience of inhabiting. As remembered us Francesco Remotti (1993), culture is a 'dwelling', an intervention that modifies the space and the bodies that inhabit it through the production of 'clothes' (costumes/customs), which give bodies and souls an imprint, a certain style or fashion, a particular form of humanity.

This approach enables us to reflect on the theoretical and ethnographic implications of some new interpretative strategies of the human-environment relations that emerged in the literature of biological anthropology (Ingold 2002), in which the dialogue with geography (human, economic, regional, of peoples, historical, etc.) is considered indispensable. The originality of the scientific contribution to the study of social dynamics from the point of view of its localised character has been highlighted by many authors of various backgrounds and with different theoretical options (Pinchemel 1996; Ingold 200). Fernand Braudel expressed this point very clearly: 'In its fullness, geography seems to be the study of the space of society, or at the deepest level of my thinking, the study of society through space' (quoted in Italian in Pinchemel 1996: 28).

The environment is a polemological object and, as such, is contested and claimed by different subjects, outside and within the individual communities that live there and that manage it, since even the so-called local populations are not uniform (as will be shown later) but consist of groups moved by different interests that cannot be resolved. These heterogeneous interests are linked to discourses and ideologies that legitimise, sometimes in a contradictory way, certain environmental management practices. One of the tasks of contemporary anthropologists who focus their analyses on the complex context of the Northwest Territories is

to reveal the repercussions and contradictions of these discourses when they are applied, implemented, and institutionalised in the context of specific political, social, and economic relationships and certain environmental contexts (Hall 2013). In other words, it is a question of considering not only the interplay of the representations and rhetoric that social actors present and the use they make of such discourses to negotiate with their interlocutors and persuade them of the legitimacy of their interests and point of view regarding the land, but also to take into account how the positions of the subjects may change according to the events that influence their strategies.

Thanks to the wide-ranging approach of experience in the field, anthropological analysis in the context of the Northwest Territories can undoubtedly contribute by highlighting the oppositions of different subjects (colonisers and Indigenous inhabitants; multinational mining companies, State and First Nations; elders, Indigenous chiefs, and miners; Indigenous men and women employed in the mining industries) involved in the long sociopolitical, economic and cultural negotiation and evaluate the existing power relations concerning certain issues, both at local and trans-local levels. It is thus possible to position considerations on the Indigenous cultures of the Northwest Territories within this theoretical perspective to examine the structural ecological-cultural changes that occurred following the colonial conquests which led, gradually, to radical changes of a political and territorial nature and regarding economic and social conditions that have, in part, negatively affected the reciprocal human-environment relationship that Native inhabitants originally had. The Northwest Territories, in this sense, represent a favourable ground for analysing how two types of cosmologies, the Indigenous and the Western, have associated and dissociated themselves in the course of history up to the present moment. On one side, we have the Western cosmology, which is absolutely dualistic; it considers nature to be universally codified and given, neutral and objective, and that humans are free to intervene and act incisively on it regardless of its 'natural-

ness' (Lanternari 2003). The environmental reality is conceived as a neutral, empty stage on which man acts for the uncontrolled exploitation of its natural resources. Many scholars have highlighted how with colonialism this way of understanding nature has been exported to new lands where other cosmologies and ontologies regulated human-environment relations in completely different ways. This has led to the devastating consequence of forced imposition of one's vision of ecology and the natural world on the local ecological vision (Lanternari 2003; Descola 2013). These reflections are part of what Lanternari (2003) calls 'ecological interference' which, in this case, could be more precisely defined as 'ecological colonialism' since it involves the attempt to remove a certain type of naturalist ontology and impose an alternative ontology by using specific ideologies as well as physical violence (Descola 2005), implemented through political and economic actions.

The worldview of the Indigenous groups of the Northwest Territories, on the other hand, maintains that every living and the non-living organism is an essence in constant evolution, the result of both its encounter with the environment (Ingold 1994) and of specific person-places-animal relationships in which every organism or element involved in the relationship influences and modifies the configuration of everything to which it relates. Therefore, it follows that the relationship itself is the result of the encounter with everything around it, as the context of its development. In these terms, therefore, the land as seen by the Native inhabitants is both steeped in history and capable of incorporating new relationships from the outside which in turn modify the entire integrated system.

In an attempt to grasp the symbolic meaning of the land for the Native peoples, Åke Hultkrantz (1994) spoke usefully of an integrated ecosystem perspective. Natural elements integrate the cultural, religious, historical, and natural dimensions of phenomena and social experience. It is not important to provide a definitive interpretation as regards a doctrinal system, as their most profound value consists in connoting the geographical

space and the animal and human communities settled there, to preside over a given environment by welding together two key principles of the land, which for Hultkrantz are animalism and territorialism. Hence, by applying the concept of an integrated ecosystem perspective to this study, we can say that the Natives' use of the environment *expresses*, rather than *causes*, their activities and their cultural orientations. The environment provides tools for cultural creativity, it does not determine it in the strictest sense. In other words, the positioning of communities in the territory, as well as that of sacred sites, assumes the shape of a network that covers and connects entire portions of the landscape. As we have seen, for the Natives of the Northwest Territories, sites are never built environments but are specific zones (a lake, a mountain, a hill) or single elements (a rock, a tree, a cave) of the natural environment in which the individual communities are located. These elements or areas are associated with a meaning beyond the immediate and concrete one of being part of a habitat. Through this added layer of meaning, the Indigenous people have integrated the purely visible dimensions (e.g., the shape of rock) with the, we could say, *invisible* dimensions of the landscape (namely, the spiritual element that inhabits the rock). This means that if an Indigenous person were to cross a certain territory in the company of an outsider, the two travelling companions would not see exactly the same things when looking at the landscape along the way. In fact, only the Native has learned (from his/her father, grandfather, or from the elders) to distinguish, for example, among the thousands of bodies of water hidden in the taiga, the presence of other plant and animal forms useful both for subsistence and to integrate the person with the ancestors hosted in that place.

At this point, we can derive some important theoretical considerations: a place is rarely made up of natural data alone nor of sensory perceptions alone (or the combination of data and perception), rather it is also constructed by a profound projective and imaginative activity. For an Indigenous person, the land is

also the product of legends, stories, memories, desires, and so on. Living in a place, therefore, means subjecting a neutral space to a dense, daily activity of complete symbolic interpretation (Ligi 2002). In other words, it is a process involving the humanisation of space. The symbolic fashioning of the environment through characteristic sites, such as that done by Indigenous people who over centuries have tamed the immeasurable vastness of the tundra in the Northwest Territories, makes it possible to give the places a historical-emotional depth that each day transforms the environment of the tundra and taiga. Thus, an environment perceived by foreigners as dangerous and hostile becomes a familiar and reassuring environment for those who feel at home there.

Regardless of their significance as signs of a Native cosmology, the dissemination of rocks, mountains, trees, lakes, rivers, and numerous other sacred sites across the width and breadth of the territory in the Northwest Territories preserves the fundamental effect of giving places a *structure of feeling* (Massey, Jess 2001). For the Indigenous people, the sensory and emotional perception of space and its effective use (hunting, fishing, gathering) are also fused at a linguistic level, constituting a single highly integrated corpus of traditional knowledge and skills, not simply *expressed* in practice, but directly and continuously *generated* by it. There is no doubt, however, that in the symbolic, mediatic, political, economic, and financial complexity of this period, conducting subsistence activities effectively means mediating between experiencing places steeped in values and events and the concepts of private property that are, instead, integral to multinational mining companies.

Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that the study of the interconnections between traditional values and the land, shifts the analysis from the study of Native, static and reconstructive forms of classification, to dynamic, fluid and ambivalent forms of symbolic manipulation of the environment that give the landscape its value as an ethno-anthropological cultural asset just like a group of tools, folkloric festivals or a repertoire of traditional

songs. Hence, it becomes essential to study the transformations of the landscape at an ecological level in connection with the changes of the social groups (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that reside there and of the historical, economic, and political events that it undergoes.

Chapter 2

Economic Use of the Northwest Territories

2.1. Early Contacts between Indigenous and European Communities

The Northwest Territories are an excellent context for studying the patterns of expansion of European settlers and the effects that this expansion has had on this rural area of Canada[1]. In this context, it is possible to analyse the changes induced by colonisation and the socioeconomic transformations of Indigenous peoples caused by the State's actions, which in turn have created forms of dependence and established new political and economic relations with Native communities. Studying these processes means analysing the historical relationships of dependence and subordination that have left evident traces on the sense of places and environmental dynamics, especially after the opening of the mines. The process of social change produced by colonisation in the Northwest Territories and affecting certain categories, especially young people, has centred primarily on the land. Thus, the expansion of the colonisers and their political actions and economic structures have had repercussions on the Native ways of managing, enhanc-

1. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defined rural areas as areas with a low population density, with less than 150 inhabitants per square kilometre. According to the OECD, we can distinguish between three types of rural areas: rural areas within functional urban areas; rural areas with access to functional urban areas; and finally remote rural areas.

ing, or making use of the environment and, in some cases, has transformed their perceptions and representations of the land. Colonisation in the Northwest Territories, as well as in Canada in general, involved a clash between two forms of humanity and two models of existence, between two forms of anthropisation based on contrasting conceptions of nature and on two very different ways of relating to space.

Proceeding chronologically, we should remember that the name of the region originally identified a vast territory acquired in 1870 by the British Crown and Hudson's Bay Company, a company founded in 1670 for trading fur in American territories[2]. The fur traders, initially based in Montreal, spread throughout Canada, reaching the Northwest Territories in 1786, the year in which they established the first trading post in the region between the southern shore of Great Slave Lake and the Slave River Delta, an area that coincides with today's Fort Resolution. In the same period, traders also created various outposts for the fur trade along the Great River, later referred to as the Mackenzie River (Hall 2013).

During the eighteenth century, Hudson's Bay Company traders moved north to the northern shores of Great Slave Lake, establishing another trading post called Fort Providence (now Old Fort Providence). On that occasion, the traders created a small branch of Hudson's Bay Company, which they called the North West Company, whose goal was to push north along the banks of the Mackenzie River. However, the impervious environment and the extreme climatic conditions of the subarctic and arctic areas forced these traders to establish close relationships with the Indigenous communities of the territory especially for food supplies

2. Hudson's Bay Company currently owns and operates department stores in Canada, the United States, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Although it was originally based in London, its headquarters are now in Brampton, Ontario. HBC is owned by NRDC Equity Partners, an American private investment firm that bought the company in 2008. HBC operates the following retailers: Hudson's Bay, Lord & Taylor, Saks Fifth Avenue, Saks OFF 5TH, Galeria Kaufhof, Sportarena and Galeria Inno. In 2017, HBC had revenues of $ 14.3 billion and owned assets worth $ 12.2 billion. It is a public company listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol HBC.

(caribou meat and a type of berries called *jewa etsìtle* in the Native languages of all the Indigenous groups of the region), means of shelter and clothing to protect them from the very harsh temperatures. From the Natives, the traders learned how to separate the caribou meat from the fat and how to dry and crush it using a particular hammer. The ground meat, combined with the berries, produced a high-calorie food that could be preserved at length called *pemmican* by the fur traders. Europeans also learned from the Indigenous people how to build canoes suitable for travelling long stretches of river which they then used when setting out to explore the barren lands (Hall 2015).

From 1790 until 1821, the North West Company operated several small trading outposts on the northern side of Great Slave Lake which included: an outpost known to have stood on Moose Deer Island, although the name is not recorded in archival sources, and which was presumably founded in 1806 (though some documents report that it was established in 1786)[3]; (Old) Fort Providence, which was located near Yellowknife Bay; Mountain Island, located not far from the Fort Rae outpost (now Old Fort Rae) created by Hudson's Bay Company in 1852; and Old Fort Island south of Whitebeach Point (Paci, Villebrun 2005). These last two outposts were built near two important paths used for hunting activities, mainly by the Tłı̨ chǫ community. The elders of the Dene and Tłı̨ chǫ communities recount that their ancestors also traded with Europeans in other locations than those of the outposts and within a vast area that stretched from the southern shore of Great Slave Lake to the northern part of the barren lands.

We know from archival sources that both North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company also traded fur and meat with the Dene peoples in a small area called the Red Knife Post, which was located on the shore of Great Slave Lake, between the mouth of Hay River and Big Island and the Mackenzie River. From this point, goods were traded south to Fort Chipewyan and northwest

3. NWT Archives, Dené National.

to an area called Bear Island along the McVicar Arm tributary of Great Bear Lake[4]. Although there were several outposts, whose names appear in the trade records of the two companies, the principal one was Fort Resolution located on the southern shore of Great Bear Lake. This outpost became known above all thanks to explorers such as Hearne, Franklin, Fidler, and MacKenzie who, between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, opened new trade routes along the Slave River (then called the Athapuscow River), the banks of the Lake Athabasca and the area that connected it to Great Bear Lake.

The expansion of North West Company's businesses in the present Northwest Territories and its informal independence from Hudson's Bay Company caused friction between the two trading groups and in 1821 the latter company took permanent control of the outposts founded by the former.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Fort Resolution was frequented by all the major Indigenous groups of the region. At that time, the various Native communities that shared the area around Fort Resolution traded furs with Hudson's Bay Company without entering into conflict and competition with each other. Therefore, while the Dene and Chipewyans were based on the northeastern and southeastern shores of Great Slave Lake, the Slaves Indians occupied the area between Great Slave Lake and Athabasca Lake[5]. Later, however, the Tłı̨ chǫ settled on the northwestern shore of Great Slave Lake and in the area between this and Great Bear Lake[6]. The territorial division between these groups reproduced the traditional division of the territory for hunting and fishing which had regulated relations between the various Native groups for centuries (Pike 1967).

From the second half of the nineteenth century, Catholic priests (of the order of Oblates of Mary the Immaculate), as well

4. NWT Archives, Dené National / Assembly of First Nations Office (NWT).
5. NWT Archives, Dené National.
6. NWT Archives, Tłı̨ chǫ National.

as Protestant ministers, established their churches in the main commercial outposts. Although the former built a church at Fort Resolution in 1852, they did not have a permanent residence there until 1858, when St. Joseph's Mission was founded. The Yellowknife archive contains a letter written by Father Émile-Fortuné Petitot, a priest at Fort Resolution, in which he described the Natives who traded furs in the area with Hudson's Bay Company:

> The Saint-Joseph's Mission was founded by Mgr Faraud five years ago [1858]. There, I replaced the R.P. Eynard, who left some days after my arrival to visit the Dogrib natives who inhabit the shores of the end of the lake [most likely the north-west corner of the lake]. The Indians who frequent the mission Saint-Joseph are the Montaignais or Chipewyans, whose proper name is Dènè, that is to say, the 'real men'; the Yellowknives or Tratsan-ottiné, and the Indians of lac aux Buffles: Edjiéré troukénadé (Petitot 1863).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, specifically in 1880, the British Crown also added the Arctic islands to the Northwest Territories, thus expanding the borders of the State.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Fort Resolution continued to be the primary fur trading centre in the Northwest Territories. As reported in a letter dated 1902, written by Hugh Richardson (Commissioner present at the signing of Treaty 11, which will be discussed below) and kept at The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Center in Yellowknife, we learn that a further six small trading posts were established around Fort Resolution in the last decade of the nineteenth century[7]. In the 1930s, however, the Great Depression also affected the fur trade sector, causing many employees of Hudson's Bay Company to go freelance and later to move to the mining sector.

In 1933, gold deposits were discovered in the area around Yellowknife; in 1934 the city was founded and in 1937 it was officially

7. NWT Archives – Hudson's Bay Company.

recognised as a mining village[8]. The current capital of the Northwest Territories was known even before the opening of the mines when it was still a village. The city owes its name to the explorer Hearne who noted how the area's Indigenous communities that he encountered at the end of the eighteenth century were familiar with copper working.

During the 1930s, the fur trade became a secondary activity compared to the mining industry and Fort Resolution definitively lost its status as the region's economic and administrative centre. This primacy passed to Yellowknife when, in 1967, it was elected capital of the Northwest Territories. Yellowknife is located on the Canadian Shield, a vast arctic expanse with a bedrock extending from the Great Lakes to the Arctic Ocean where coniferous forests gradually give way to taiga and tundra. Although the opening of the gold mines dates to the 1930s, geological explorations in the area around Great Slave Lake began at the end of the nineteenth century and intensified during the first two decades of the twentieth century, a period that coincides with the signing of Treaties 8 (1898) and 11 (1921). These Treaties are agreements between the Indigenous communities and the federal government for the occupation of the Native territories.

2.2. Indigenous Treaties for Managing the Exploitation of Natural Resources

From a political point of view, the Indigenous groups of the Northwest Territories call their land *Denendeh*, a word that in the Athabaskan language means 'The Land of the People'[9]. Denendeh is currently the vast territory extending from central Alaska to Hudson Bay for a total of approximately 1.000.000 square kilometres.

8. https://www.miningnorth.com/.
9. Territorial Archaeologist, PWNHC.

Denendeh is home to the Dene Nation, a political organisation established in 1969 based on Treaties 8 and 11 which gather together a collection of regulations for the management of Reserves and the exploitation of natural resources present in the region's Indigenous territory. The Dene Nation, therefore, includes several Native groups living in Denendeh: the Yellowknife Dene, the Tłı̨chǫ, the Dettah, the Ndilǫ, the Chipewyan, Slavey Indians, the K'ashot'ine and the Gwich'in[10].

Between the late 1800s and the first two decades of the 1900s, the federal government negotiated treaties with Native peoples of the Northwest Territories to extinguish the Aboriginal Title (established in 1763 when it was included in the Royal Proclamation) on Indigenous territories. With the Aboriginal Title, it was ruled that Native communities could claim their rights following the occupation of their lands by settlers (Barclay 2015). Across Canada, the State's purpose was to use the land within its borders for settlement and economic development projects. Starting from the seventeenth century, the colonial history of Candia has been studded with a series of political treaties (11 in total) that are still in force today. These treaties, which have created a level of friction, stipulate regulations on the management of territories inhabited and managed by Indigenous communities (Coates, Morrison 1986).

From the end of 1500, English, French, and Dutch settlers came into contact with the Indigenous communities and took advantage of the Native peoples' trading routes (which still have both economic and religious value today) and began laying the foundations of what would later prove to be an operation of deterritorialisation (Borrows 2010). In the early 1600s, the British Crown began to establish a series of treaties with Canadian Indigenous peoples. These documents were formally recognised by the British Crown as agreements designed to encourage peaceful relations by specifying a series of obligations and benefits for both parties according to the territories (Coates, Morrison 1986). The treaties

10. Busse/NWT Archives/N-1979-052:7798.

were signed after the constitution of the Canadian Confederation on July 1, 1867[11]. Following the establishment of Canada as a State, the Canadian First Nations, through the federal government, continued to maintain the agreements made with the British Crown in the treaties adopted for the management and exploitation of natural resources present in Native lands in exchange for economic and political support. However, the Natives claim that this support is often inefficient.

A document dated 1887, which coincides with the period preceding the discovery of non-renewable resources present in the vast arctic and subarctic portions of Canada, reports the words of the Superintendent General of Indian affairs, Thomas White, who wrote: 'Within this vast region the Indians are not very numerous. The parts that have been explored are reported to be for the most part unsuitable for agriculture[12]. At the end of the nineteenth century, with the advance of gold diggers and settlers who moved up through central Alberta (which still falls within the area of Treaty 6), passing through Edmonton (area instead included in Treaty 7) as far as Pelly River near the Klondike mine in present-day Yukon, however, the government also needed to regulate the territories that extended from northern Alberta to northeastern British Columbia and northwestern Saskatchewan as well as the area south of Hay River and Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. The first draft of Treaty 8 was written in 1891. In 1898, it was simplified and in 1899 it was drawn up in its final version[13]. However, it does not include Providence, Rae-Edzo, Yellowknife, and the area where the diamond mines are located in Great Slave Lake (Spilsbury 1981)[14]. This treaty was approved by a private Commis-

11. Legislative Services Branch, Consolidated federal laws of Canada, Access to Information Act, laws-lois.justice.gc.ca.

12. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, NWT Archives.

13. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Indian Affairs: RG 10, Volume 3848, File 75, 236-1.

14. It is estimated that Treaty 8 negotiations at the end of the nineteenth century involved some 2,700 Indians and 1,700 Métis (i.e., people born of Indigenous people and settlers) at the time of signing. NWT Archives, Hudson's Bay Company.

sion and signed by Commissioners David Laird, James McKenna, and James Ross on June 21, 1899, at Lesser Slave Lake (Barclay 2015)[15]. The third paragraph of Treaty 8 clarifies its main purposes:

> It is Her desire to open for settlement, immigration, trade, travel, mining, lumbering and such other purposes as to Her Majesty may seem to meet... and to obtain the consent thereto of Her Indian subjects... so that there may be peace and good will between them and Her Majesty's other subjects, and that Her Indian people may know and be assured of what allowances they are to count upon and receive from Her Majesty's bounty and benevolence.[16]

While paragraph 5 states:

> The said Indians do hereby cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada, for Her Majesty the Queen and Her successors forever, all their rights, titles and privileges whatsoever, to the lands included.[17]

By contrast with Treaty 8, the approval of Treaty 11 was the subject of many vicissitudes. The important oil fields of the Mackenzie Valley had been known since 1880. Towards the end of the

15. A letter dated April 25, 1898, and written by the Dene Yellowknife, the Slaveys and the Dogribs settled within the territories of Treaty 8, sent to the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, states their firm intention to keep the traditional activities (economic and ceremonial) on their lands although there is no reference to the issue of the new borders (Forget 1898). It can, therefore, be assumed that Clifford Sifton, the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs at the time, was aware a year before the final draft of Treaty 8 of the resistance he would encounter by continuing with the issue of this document. Only on September 22, 1899, in a Commission headed by Superintendent Sifton, was the 'Report of Commissioners for Treaty No. 8' drawn up, stating that the Native inhabitants were concerned about their rights to hunt and fish in the territories controlled under Treaty 8. In response to these concerns, the Superintendent wrote to representatives of Indigenous bands that the government would guarantee these rights.

16. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Treaty 8, June 21 1899-Glenbow Archives/NA-949-87.

17. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Treaty 8, June 21 1899-Glenbow Archives/NA-949-87.

nineteenth century, however, exploratory drilling in the northwestern areas of Canada increased, reaching its peak just before the major oil strikes in Norman Wells (Northwest Territories) in the summer of 1920 (Finch *et al.* 1993).

Nonetheless, the Mackenzie Valley only belatedly received federal government attention. The government became aware of the economic potential of the far north of the Northwest Territories when some members of the Geological Survey of Canada who was traversing the area and mapping the region, hypothesised the possible presence of minerals (especially gold). Although the results of these explorations were promising, the harsh climate, geographic isolation, and the high costs for transporting goods envisaged for the survival of the workers required to start any mining activity discouraged the government representatives from incorporating this part of the Northwest Territories into Treaty 8 at the end of the nineteenth century or, indeed, creating another treaty ad hoc. The federal government, therefore, preferred to consider this area profitable only for the beaver fur trade. The establishment of an outpost of the North-West Mounted Police at Fort McPherson in 1903 was a first, albeit minimal, sign of increased attention (Fumoleau 1975).

Initially, this outpost simply represented an extension of the sovereignty of the Canadian government which encountered the Indigenous communities residing in the Mackenzie Valley for the first time. Due to the difficulties presented by the climate, the police forces at Fort McPherson were forced to look for help to the Indigenous communities with whom they often also negotiated food and other subsistence goods. This attitude, therefore, encouraged the Natives to collaborate more frequently with the police, helping them with transport by sledge and welcoming them to their camps. On the other hand, the police forces played a strategic role as mediators between the Government and the First Nations (Morrison 1985).

In 1907, H.A. Conroy, a Treaty 8 inspector, was sent to the northern Mackenzie Valley. The purpose of his expedition was to

visit Indigenous bands and report on their way of life to suggest the measures necessary for managing the communities residing in the northernmost areas of Canada to the federal government (Fumoleau 1975)[18].

Despite the government's continued refusal, several traders from Hudson's Bay Company[19] also wrote a letter to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1910 asking them to consider creating a treaty for the Mackenzie River Valley. They justified this request by claiming that the collateral expenses of the fur trade far exceeded the relief funds provided by the government to extend trade routes north[20].

The Indigenous bands based in the Mackenzie Valley (in particular the Tłı̨ chǫ) did not ask the government to enter into a treaty with them until 1912[21]. However, the Indigenous people did feel the need to have formal guarantees before the imminent opening of mining activities in the area in which they lived. In fact, the Native communities anticipated serious threats to the continuation of their subsistence and ceremonial activities from the advancement of settlers for the exploitation of mineral and oil resources (Morrison 1974).

Only following new explorations suggesting the great potential for oil exploitation in the Northwest Territories did the government add Mackenzie Valley to its agenda[22]. The process for the

18. His report states that the Native communities of Mackenzie Valley lived in desperate hygienic conditions with the consequent spread of contagious diseases unspecified by the author. For these reasons, Conroy reasoned, these bands needed immediate help from the federal government through a possible extension of Treaty 8 to include the Mackenzie Valley (Fumoleau 1975).

19. Founded in 1670, Hudson's Bay Company is the oldest stock merchandising company incorporated in the English-speaking world. It controlled the beaver fur trade in the Northwest Territories, as well as in Canada's arctic and subarctic areas overall.

20. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Dené National / Assembly of First Nations Office (NWT).

21. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Tłı̨ chǫ Government / Assembly of First Nations Office (NWT).

22. In 1913, in response to Indigenous requests, the federal government sent Thomas Fawcett, chief inspector of the Department of Indian Affairs, to the Mackenzie Valley to examine the Native summer settlements along the Mackenzie River (Morrison 1974).

constitution of Treaty 11 began on January 16, 1921, when a public notice was issued informing Indigenous communities and Métis living in the Mackenzie Valley of the arrival of a government Superintendent to extend Treaty 8 into the northernmost areas of Canada (Morrison 1985). For the signing of the treaty relating to the Mackenzie Valley, Conroy, the Inspector who had also stipulated Treaty 8, was sent to Fort Providence in June 1921. Conroy's testimony describing the difficulties he encountered during negotiations with the Natives of the valley can be seen in a document kept in the inventory of the Indian Affair Record Group, which contains all the existing documents relating to Canadian treaties:

> At first, the Indians at this point were nearly unanimous in their decision to let 'well enough' alone and to remain in the condition in which they had been heretofore, but after several talks and explanations, they all entered into Treaty.[23]

Although the original hypothesis was to extend Treaty 8 to encompass the Mackenzie Valley as well, Conroy, together with some members of his party, decided to create a treaty specifically formulated for the northernmost territories. Hence, Treaty 11 was signed between Conroy and the Indigenous communities of the Tłı̨ chǫ, Gwich'in and Sahtu and incorporated more than 950,000 km^2 in the present Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut.

Commenting on Wendy Aasen's report entitled *The Spirit and Intent of Treaty 8 in the Northwest Territories* (1994)[24], in his book

The purpose of this investigation was to protect both the Indigenous inhabitants and, above all, the non-Indigenous people living in the district, from subsequent incursions by the new settlers.

23. Conroy to Scott, 11 July 1921, PAC, RG 10, Vol. 4042, file 336,877.

24. Wendy Aasen, a researcher at the University of Northern British Columbia, was commissioned to write the important report *The Spirit and Intent of Treaty 8 in the Northwest Territories* (1994). The aim of this report was to draw up the contents discussed during the 'Constitutional Development Steering Committee' established by the government of the Northwest Territories for the creation of the Nunavut region. Aasen's report is fundamental as it includes the testimony in court of the priest Rene Fumoleau during the 'Paulette Case' in which discussion took place on the different interpretations

Legacy: Indian Treaty Relationship (1991), Richard T. Price, Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta in the Faculty of Indigenous Studies, explains the motivations of the Canadian government to create Treaties 8 and 11 to acquire legal title to western and northern lands for farming, railways, mining, and other types of development; To peacefully settle the west with immigrant farmers; to keep the costs of this westward expansion at a minimum, and in particular to avoid costly wars with Indian and Métis inhabitants; to stop American expansion into Canada's western and northern territories, and to protect these territories, and to respond, to some degree, to Indian requests for treaties and treaty benefits (Price 1991).

In the concluding chapter of his book, entitled *Why Have a Treaty?,* Price summarises the reasons why Canada's western territories were included in the treaties. For the Professor the importance of the treaties is based on acquiring legal title to western and northern lands by which the government intended to erect legal structures to permit non-Indians to live on Indian land; instilling 'peace and good will' by which the government intended to impress law and order structures on the treaty lands, for the protection of Indians but also to for the protection of settlers, colonists, immigrants prospectors and oil workers who might fear the

given to Treaties 8 and 11 by, on one hand, the government and, on the other hand, the Indigenous communities. Specifically, Francois Paulette, chief of Fort Smith, along with sixteen other community chiefs in the NWT (including the Dene Yellowknife and the Tłı̨ chǫ) presented their protest to the Land Titles Office in Yellowknife on September 6, 1973. Aasen's reanalysis of the interviews by Judge William G. Morrow who presided over the court in the 'Paulette Case', as well as the recorded testimonies of some members of the Yellowknife Dene community, described how the latter, despite close study of the texts of Treaty 8, failed to understand the meaning of the term 'surrender' and the idea of 'cession of their land title or rights' from a conceptual and, therefore, cultural point of view (Aasen 1994: 17-18). As testified by the Dene Yellowknife during the sentence, the Dene who signed Treaty 8 in 1899/1900 believed that it sanctioned a peaceful collaboration that would allow them to continue to carry out their economic activities and ceremonial practices in their territory. They thus concluded that, given the priority of this question, the problem of territorialisation dictated by Treaty 8 was, in 1898, secondary to the concern of the Native people to continue to carry out their traditional practices on their lands.

Indians; informing the Indians as to what 'allowance they are to count upon and receive' from the federal government in exchange for their rights to their traditional lands; leading the Indians to peacefully acquiesce in the changing conditions' as settlers, colonists, immigrants and prospectors moved into and through their lands (Price 1991).

In contrast with the past, today even the federal government has publicly recognised (albeit in a purely formal sense) the different interpretations given to the treaties by the Native peoples and the State. This difference certainly originates from the different cultural visions of the two parties involved, especially as regards the concepts of land and property. Specifically, the extremely profound relationship that binds Indigenous communities to their land is in contrast to the State's conception whereby land is valued as a resource for exploitation. Based on this concept, from the time of the earliest Treaties, the settlers had already established strict borders that failed to coincide with the previous Indigenous territorial divisions. Although over the last forty years, members of many Native communities have looked to their elders to act as an 'oral archive' that allows them to retrace the corpus of narratives that can reconstruct the traditional territorial divisions, as well as the Native belief systems linked to the earth, such practices of colonial deterritorialisation of Native territories have undermined the traditional cultural, economic and social links of Indigenous communities with their land.

The current section 35(1) of the Canadian Constitution[25] regulates the protection of the rights of Aboriginal peoples, which include the First Nations, the Inuit, and the Métis, within Canadian territory. Although since the 1980s there has been an increase in initiatives to involve Native communities and the federal government to promote the self-government of the Native peoples, no official agreement has been reached throughout the nation (Armano 2019a; 2020). When the Constitution Act was

25. British North America Act 1867.

passed in 1982 – added to the previous British North America Act of 1867 – the Treaties were incorporated into the Canadian constitution. The Constitution Act can, therefore, be considered a container that gathers within the Canadian Constitution the innumerable political battles of Indigenous communities over the centuries to negotiate their land rights with the government in various ways as well as their fight against colonial deterritorialisation. While different political forces claim that the recognition of Indigenous self-government has been achieved given that it is included in the Constitution, the First Nations continue to negotiate through treaties their rights to celebrate ceremonies, preserve and pass on their languages and traditional activities in their territories.

2.3. The Mining Industry in the Northwest Territories

Massive mining industrialisation in Canada began in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the major production centres was in Sault Ste. Marie, in present-day Ontario. In 1875, the United States Navy began operating a graphite-producing mine at Cumberland Sound on Baffin Island. In 1883, during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, copper and nickel deposits were discovered near Sudbury in Ontario. Thanks to the massive discoveries of copper in Canada, this mineral was used for decades for producing Canadian pennies (Dana 2014). In 1920, the large Canadian penny was introduced consisting of 95.5% copper, 3% tin, and 1.5% zinc (Bernauer 2010).

The first gold rush in northwestern Canada began in the same years: it is commonly referred to as The Klondike Gold Rush. The second half of the nineteenth century is remembered as a period of massive migrations of explorers in search of gold, especially close to certain locations such as the areas around the Klondike rivers (in the Yukon) and Yukon (between the Yukon and Alaska) in which about 400,000 kg of gold were collected between 1897

and 1898. Writer Jack London was among the many who took part in this gold rush and his most famous novels (such as *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*), as well as many of his short stories, were influenced by his experience in the Canadian north. Another well-known author linked to the gold rush, whose original hut in Dawson City still exists, was the Scottish poet Robert William Service, who described the struggle for survival in Canada's frozen north in many of his poems.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, gold rushes in northwestern Canada also expanded into the Northwest Territories, attracting not only lone explorers but also mining companies. The search for gold in the region was initially concentrated in the Yellowknife River, while exploration for lead and zinc focused on the shores of Great Slave Lake.

In 1900, students conducting explorations for the Geological Survey of Canada mapped the area between Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake as the barren lands were expected to be potentially rich in gold and other minerals. Between 1910 and 1920, mining prospector Gilbert LaBine discovered radium and silver at Great Bear Lake thanks to this mapping. This discovery led not only to the opening of the first mines in this area but, thanks to some of LaBine's hypotheses, also to the search for other non-renewable natural resources, such as oil which was discovered in 1921 in Norman Wells.

From the late 1920s, Cominco Ltd. (a mining company founded in 1906, a subsidiary of Canadian Pacific Rail based in Trail, British Columbia, and formerly called The Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada Limited) increased funding for geological exploration in search of mineral deposits in the area around Great Slave Lake. In 1938, this led to the opening of Con Mine for gold mining. Aerial exploration played an important role at the time as it made it possible to search the vast areas of the Northwest Territories.

Cominco Ltd. was also responsible for opening other mines in the Northwest Territories such as the Thompson-Lundmark,

Ruth, and Ptarmigan gold mines as well as the Pine Point silver mine and the Polaris zinc mine. The mines of Cominco Ltd. immediately had a significant impact on the economic performance of the Northwest Territories, thanks especially to the rich production of ore extracted from Con Mine and Pine Point mine[26].

The silver and radium mines at Great Bear Lake ceased production during World War II. However, the demand for war minerals such as uranium led to the opening of new mines in the region. During the war years, many explorations were conducted to find tungsten and tantalum in the Northwest Territories but the scarcity of these minerals did not lead to the opening of any mines.

The mining industry in the Northwest Territories was very active in the post-war period. In fact, the federal government invested huge capital in the construction and modernisation of the infrastructure. Further discoveries of gold near Yellowknife in the 1950s led to the opening of Giant Mine and Discovery Mine and the community of the current capital of the Northwest Territories grew to the point that it became a real city and in 1953 established its first City Council. In the 1950s, the road leading to the Pine Point mine was modernised. After an evaluation of the economic growth brought by this mine, in 1955 the federal government financed the project for the construction of the railway that passes near Great Slave Lake. Pine Point mine was permanently closed in 1988. Further silver deposits were exploited at Great Slave Lake with the opening of Echo Bay Mine and Terra Mine, while tungsten was mined between 1962 and 1986.

A steady rise in the price of gold during the 1970s brought new life to the gold mines near Yellowknife, to the extent that Giant Mine opened further open-pit wells during the decade. In the same period, however, both Canadians and international consumers began to develop greater awareness of the impacts of the mining industry on the environment and the Indigenous communities, putting pressure on mining companies to consider

26. NWT Archives, Cominco Ltd. Fonds.

this aspect when opening further mines. Furthermore, in recent years, mining production has also been influenced by new political developments relating to land claims by the First Nations that also began to demand stricter environmental controls by the government. Nonetheless, today the Northwest Territories are dotted with mines, many of which are abandoned. This presence is extremely serious both as regards environmental damage and repercussions on the health of the region's residents. Moreover, such sites violate the guidelines for mine reclamation included in the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2004: 2) which requires that mining be considered a temporary use of the land and, as such, plans for both closure and reclamation must be included during the initial planning phase.

The start of the gold mining industry near Yellowknife marked the beginning of a new political and economic interaction between the State and the private sector. From then onwards, there was an increase in strong political and financial collaboration; the continuation of Indigenous subsistence and ceremonial activities were still permitted but there were inevitable changes relating to the seasonal routes of the caribou herds (Armano 2019b).

The diamond industry, structured on the existing relationship built between the State and the previous mining industries has, however, added a new form of partnership with Indigenous communities. Whereas before the 1990s members of Native communities were employed by mining companies simply as woodcutters (men) and cooks (women) and company reports held in the archives show that hiring Indigenous people was not a primary objective for the gold mining companies[27], the multinational diamond mining companies have launched long-term projects to create solid relationships between industry and Native groups. In fact, by incorporating the centuries-old political negotiations between the First Nations and the Government regarding the recognition of Indigenous rights in the territory in their plans of cor-

27. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Mining.

porate social responsibility, for the diamond multinationals, the employment of Aboriginal personnel in their mines represented one of the priorities to be publicly communicated both locally and globally. The most striking product of this new relationship between industry and Native groups was the issuing of Impact and Benefit Agreements (IBAs) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These agreements are generally still in force and define the governance of natural resources not only in the Northwest Territories but in all northern regions of Canada (Keeping 1999). As will be specified later, since the opening of the first diamond mines in the Northwest Territories, IBAs have been planned as a form of regulation of employment quotas for Indigenous workers hired both by diamond multinationals and subsidiaries for polishing and diamond cutting (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010).

With the opening of diamond mines and the establishment of strong relationships between some Native communities and multinationals, many elders raised further concerns about the preservation of the Indigenous territory and, consequently, of the traditional subsistence activities and ceremonial practices.

Among the elders' major concerns is the fact that the opening of mines, firstly for the extraction of gold and then, more intensively, of diamonds, have pushed the herds of caribou away from their seasonal routes.

Due to these changes caused by the mining industry, the Indigenous inhabitants now have to go much further north to hunt caribou than in the past. Some studies report that before the diamond mines opened, the caribou herds used to pass very close to Fort Resolution, while now they enter the barren lands (Beaulieu 2010). In a report on information recorded during an indigenous community's meetings organized in Yellowknife, has been written that the caribous used to come up to the BHP mine, whereas nowadays they have modified their migrations[28]. A former Indigenous

28. Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management. 2014. We have been Living with the Caribou all our Lives: a report on information record-

miner employed in Diavik confirmed, during the conversation organised by one of the indigenous team, that for about the last twenty years the caribou have been pushed out of their traditional migration areas. This former miner also denounced the violation of Native land caused by the construction of infrastructure to reach the mines. When asked who built the links to reach the mines, he replied that were been the mines. He asserted that the roads that people living in the region now use were built on the old caribou trails.

All these statements underline how the winter routes of the caribou used always pass over the frozen Lac de Gras that is now crossed by ice roads used by the trucks that connect Yellowknife to the diamond mines. In fact, the mines were opened on Native territories and, more specifically, within their ancestral routes.

Since 2006, the Northwest Territories Department of Natural Resources has developed a programme called the Caribou Management Plan to monitor the shifting of herd routes caused by mining explosions. The following management plan is shown on its website:

> A management plan for the Bathurst caribou herd has also been developed. Interest in the Bathurst caribou herd grew in the 1990s with a surge in mining activities on the herds' annual ranges. Since then, two diamond mines have been built on spring migration and post-calving/summer ranges and a third diamond mine is under construction. The diamond mining companies monitor caribou abundance and behavior in the vicinity of the diamond mines; however, uncertainties remain about the cumulative effects of the mines on the caribou.[29]

ed during community meetings for 'Taking Care of Caribou – the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West, and Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou Herds Management Plan'. Yellowknife, NT.

29. NWT, Environmental and Natural Resources (n.d.). NWT Barren-ground Caribou (Rangifer taradus groenlandicus), http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/live/pages/wpPages/caribou_information.aspx.

Nonetheless, fifteen years later, the management plan promoted by the Department of Natural Resources has not achieved the desired objectives. On January 1, 2010, a ban on caribou hunting was imposed on the Aboriginal populations of the region. However, this measure sparked protests from the Natives. Therefore, on 7 October 2010, an agreement was signed between some of the Indigenous communities (including the Dene, the Tłı̨ chǫ, and the Gwich'in) and the Department of Natural Resources which permitted Native groups to hunt a number not exceeding 150 caribou per year[30].

In addition to the innovative emphasis given to the hiring of Indigenous workers, the diamond industry has also introduced a new mining regime in the Northwest Territories suited to the geographical location of the diamond mines in the centre of Lac de Gras. This working model is known as 'fly-in-fly-out' (FIFO) and has become increasingly popular in the mining sector in recent years. Workers are transported to the mine by air and stay temporarily on site. At the diamond mines of the Northwest Territories, the work rotations are organised with two weeks 'in-mine', for twelve working hours a day, and with the workers residing in the mining village located next to the mine, and then two weeks 'off-mine' when the workers return home. Some elders and chiefs of the Indigenous Yellowknife Dene and Tłı̨ chǫ communities who were interviewed by many scholars (i.e. Hall 2015), however, stated that this mining model contrasts totally with the organisation of Indigenous subsistence activities as well as the system of raising children in the traditional family and, more generally, with the maintenance of Native culture due to the numbers of young Indigenous people working in the mine. From the point of view of Native communities, this aspect is particularly serious as the continuation of traditional ceremonial practices and subsistence activities has long been used against the government as an instrument of decolonisation to reaffirm Indigenous rights in the

30. http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/live/pages/wpPages/caribou_information.aspx.

territory (Getty 1994). When Indigenous men stay for two consecutive weeks in the diamond mines, they are necessarily absent from their communities, and this erodes the very essence of Native culture from within. As regards the management of the mining industry, clearly the FIFO model differs totally from traditional methods of managing work at the mines where the mining town not only brought together the employees working each day in the mine but also hosted their families. It has been noted, however, that in many cases, the 'mining town' model can lead to the serious problem of the village being abandoned when the mining activity concludes, transforming the residential site into a ghost village. The FIFO structure, on the other hand, based on an intermittent stay by workers, allows for the institutionalisation of the element of temporariness through a specific relationship between variable capital (workers) and fixed capital (infrastructure) (Peck 2013). The institutionalisation of impermanence refers, specifically, both to the intermittent stay of individual workers whose rotations allow the production cycle to be maintained and to the fact that, once the mine has been closed and reclaimed, the mining village too will be dismantled.

2.4. The Diamond Mines in the Northwest Territories

The diamond mines opened in the Northwest Territories were Ekati, Diavik, Gahcho Kué Diamond Mine (all three still operational), and Snap Lake Mine (closed in 2015). These mines share the common trait of being located within lakes: Ekati and Diavik are located in the centre of Lac de Gras, Gahcho Kué Diamond Mine is in Kennady Lake, while Snap Lake Mine was located in Snap Lake. The first two diamond mines built in the Northwest Territories were Ekati and Diavik. The latter are open cast mines formed by various kimberlite pipes. These pipes are carrot-shaped hollows consisting of a particular type of excavation called a pit (typical of flat areas) that ends downwards with vertical shafts

connected to each other through horizontal tunnels. The material extracted by benching, a series of horizontal steps with near-vertical surfaces between them, is removed through the vertical shafts and subsequently brought to the surface through the horizontal tunnels. The kimberlites of the two mines are similar in terms of rock quality to the diamond mines of South Africa and Russia. In fact, all these mines are located under or near large lakes whose waters are retained by dikes built to avoid flooding the kimberlite pipes which extend (as in the case of the Ekati and Diavik mines) up to 1,000 metres below the lake's surface (Goldenberg 2010).

The discovery of kimberlites containing diamonds in the Northwest Territories is linked, through epic tales, to the figure of the Canadian geologist Charles Fipke. The archival sources contain a host of articles from local newspapers published in the 1990s that speak of this discovery. The thrilling adventure of the conquest of an impervious nature by man, who fearlessly challenges the extreme northern environment, is also present in Kevin Krajick's book entitled *Barren Lands: An Epic Search for Diamonds in the North American Arctic* (2001) in which the author provides a detailed account of the discovery of the kimberlites by Fipke that started the diamond exploitation in Lac de Gras:

> Having neglected to bring a pickax on this particular trip, Charles Fipke was nearing the bottom of a seven-and-a-half-foot hole in the snow and ice by tearing at some rocks with the small pick-end of a geologist's hammer. His son Mark was at the distant top, shouting down curses about the cold, the wind, the risk of dying, and the uselessness of it all. Charles Fipke [...] was not going to stop until he got what he wanted: a twenty-pound bag of sand and gravel from the frozen earth at the bottom. Twelve years into this mad prospecting enterprise there seemed to be no end in sight. That is unless you considered the empty bank account, the crystals of wind-driven snow now eroding their faces, the cold progressing up their limbs, and the fact that they were a several-week walk from town in the middle of the tundra (Krajick 2001, VII).

For Fipke and his workmate Stewart Blusson, the tireless search for kimberlites in the Northwest Territories lasted roughly a decade. During this time, the two geologists travelled across the Northwest Territories in search of indicator minerals within the barren lands, scouring hundreds of kilometres from the Mackenzie River valley, east to its source near Lac de Gras. However, Fipke's claim to fame was his intuition that in the Arctic environment the so-called mineral trains may transport the indicator mineral hundreds of kilometres from the original kimberlite chimney (Higginson 2009). The geologist was aware of the existence of a long volcanic crater that flowed under the Rocky Mountains. In 1982, Fipke and his colleague Blusson obtained a mining concession covering 80,000 square miles along the Canadian chain of the Rocky Mountains. The two geologists also knew that De Beers had begun searching large swathes of the Northwest Territories for diamond-bearing minerals, from the Mackenzie River Delta to Fort Simpson and east of the region to Lac de Gras. These clues led the two geologists to found the Dia Met Minerals company in 1984 in Kelowna. Later, in 1989, Fipke and Blusson's Dia Met Minerals company, which financed the two geologists' exploration programmes, approached BHP Billiton to form a partnership. Meanwhile, Fipke continued his quest relentlessly (often accompanied by his son Mark) with the decision to fly over the area around the Arctic Circle by helicopter, using a magnetometer to trace the variations in the magnetic field that could suggest the presence of kimberlite. After many exhausting hours of flying, the geologist concentrated his attentions around Lac de Gras, a few hundred miles south of the Arctic Circle whose natural environment is characterised by large areas of bare rocks. Based on investigations of mineral samples, Charles Fipke estimated the presence of a concentration of diamonds of over 60 carats per 100 tons under the waters of Lac de Gras, of which about a quarter could be of excellent quality[31]. In August 1990, the joint venture between BHP

31. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-Fipke.

Billion, Dia Met, Charles Fipke, and Steward Blusson was signed. In 1991, Charles Fipke found a further concentration of 68 carats per 100 tons at a depth of 8 metres. From that moment, the shares of the company founded by the two geologists soared and in 1998 the Ekati mine (the Indigenous name of Lac de Gras) was opened and became the first diamond mine in the Northwest Territories, followed by the Diavik mine in 2003.

Generally, the life cycle of a mine of a similar size to the Canadian diamond mines is between 25 and 30 years and consists of five main phases[32]. The basic phases of a mining project include geological exploration, during which there is analysis of the sites where it is assumed there are minerals indicating the deposit. This is followed by a phase of technical and financial evaluation with studies on the feasibility of the project. This crucial step consists of iterated analyses of core samples drilled from the site examined, which in turn produce more and more detailed levels of geological assessment and financial planning. At this stage, the mining company (or other investors, including individuals, partners, private or public shareholders, and financial institutions that have a direct interest in mining initiatives) play a crucial role in evaluating the feasibility studies. The final assessment of the feasibility of the mining project is, however, commissioned to a competent third party, generally a research body that will give or withhold approval for mine production after a period of between six to twelve months. In addition to this series of assessments, there will be the feasibility analysis of the host government which, if it considers the project valid, begins to strengthen relations with the investor or with the multinational that guarantees that the project is financially sound. However, before making a decision, the government awaits the approval of all the assessments previously reviewed. If even one aspect of the project fails during the evaluation phase, all

32. In general, the duration of a mine's production depends on the size of the extractive resource and the rate of depletion of the deposit, ranging from a minimum of three years up to several decades.

planning will collapse. From a financial point of view, the mining industry is an extremely risky business. Hence, each process must be subjected to a refined analysis to anticipate any possibility of failure before building the mine. When the assessment phase is successful, the project passes to the next phase which is the most capital-intensive transition within the life cycle of a mine. This phase requires additional technical feasibility and costing plans. Firstly, this phase includes the advance procurement of the large equipment that will be used for excavation. The delivery times of the equipment, which coincide with the period between sending an order and receiving the goods, can be lengthy. In 1997 and 2000, the delivery times for some of the mobile equipment (trucks, loaders, drilling machines) for the construction of the Ekati and Diavik mines was up to eighteen months. In addition, the made-to-measure trucks for each mine had delivery times of up to two years[33]. The archival documents underline that in this phase, in addition to technical efficiency, there was also an absolute need for bureaucratic efficiency, as delays in the bureaucracy would have led to an increase in construction costs.

Before the fourth phase of the mining cycle could begin, namely, the actual excavation of the mines, sites were built for auxiliary works (such as processing sites), as well as housing for the workers. Construction of a large mine, such as those in the Northwest Territories, takes about three years. The construction of open cast mines is preceded by the 'pre-washing' for the removal of waste material. For Ekati and Diavik, many millions of tons of waste materials were excavated during this process, contributing significantly to the construction costs[34]. In this phase, part of the waste

33. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-Rio Tinto.

34. There is no trace in the archival documents of either the precise quantity or the tons of overburden or the costs of this phase. The archival sources only report that enormous volumes of bare rock material were transported by trucks escorted along the ice roads built on Lac de Gras and that, once they reached Yellowknife, they caused temporary blockages of communication routes (NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-BHP Billiton).

material, i.e., material containing no quality ore, was stored for future reclamation work[35].

During the final stages of construction, the two mines were put into service. This means that the operation of the various installations such as the processing plant was tested. The Ekati and Diavik mine facilities include patented technology licensed and covered by a confidentiality agreement. The equipment suppliers are almost all based in Yellowknife (or in any case in Canada), which ensures timely control to ensure that all the installation procedures of the machinery have followed the correct procedure[36].

The construction phase of the two mines was handled by the multinational mining companies as a separate project managed by a special team with a strictly pre-established timetable. Given the huge costs of this construction phase, the goal of the multinationals was to start production as quickly as possible to recover the costs. The actual production phase is commonly called 'extraction' or 'exploitation'[37]. During this phase, however, exploration activities generally continue with the aim of ensuring continuous and long-term planning of the mining activity.

The last phase of the mine's life, which forms part of the initial phase of project planning, is the closure and reclamation of the mine site. This phase usually coincides with the exhaustion of mineral deposits. The archival documents of Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton report that in mining projects the closure activities include environmental rehabilitation, the disposal of real estate and movable assets, the termination of contracts and the termination of the employment relationship with a specific provision for compensation of employees and, where applicable, also their family members[38]. The Ekati and Diavik projects envisaged re-em-

35. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining.

36. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-BHP Billiton.

37. Specifically, the extraction can also refer to the processing of minerals separated from the waste material. On the other hand, exploitation is used above all in a legal context and refers to the extraction and construction of the mine.

38. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-Rio Tinto; NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-BHP Billiton.

ployment of workers in another mine within neighbouring areas as a form of compensation. The Rio Tinto reports also explicitly mention Canadian legislation that requires mining operators to set aside funds during the mine's production cycle to cover environmental restoration costs after closure. These funds, held in a trust account, are considered an efficient deposit both for ongoing maintenance during the operational life of the mine and for significantly reducing costs, times and effort during final closure[39].

The Ekati and Diavik mines can be accessed by plane from Yellowknife and Edmonton as well as by seasonal ice roads built on Lac de Gras. These roads can be used in winter when the waters freeze due to the extremely rigid climate with temperatures near the mines dropping as low as -70 °C. Companies and specialised contractors are hired from year to year to rebuild these roads as well as to maintain them during the winter months. These ice roads are from 400 to 600 km long and are mainly travelled by trucks that transport materials and mining tools to and from the mines.

2.5. The Ekati and Diavik Mines

Once the licenses had been obtained and agreements signed between the government and Indigenous communities, construction of the Ekati mine began in 1997. The articles of local newspapers conserved in the archives describe in detail the agreements between the companies BHP Billiton[40] and Dia Met[41] and the federal and territorial governments for the opening of the mine. These sources also report the names of the various consortia involved by the diamond companies for the construction of Ekati. These included the Construction Alliance, which included other contractors such as JT, Ryfran Electric, Clark Builders, Adco North,

39. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-Rio Tinto.
40. https://www.bhp.com/.
41. www.diamet.com.

Nahanni, GAP Electric, Hay River Mechanical and JSL that are responsible for providing the materials for the mine's construction. On the other hand, the Finning and Transwest Mining Systems companies provided manpower including mechanics specialised in the use of the machinery used in the various processes of the mine construction (Coumans 2002). Det'on Cho Nahanni Construction was instead commissioned for the construction of the mining village while Procon Holding was called to supervise the work of the underground tunnels[42].

Ekati was put into production in 1998 and reached its production record in 1999 with one million tons of rough diamonds. This is not surprising, as the number of diamonds presents just below the surface is much higher than diamonds found in deeper kimberlite cones. Another excellent milestone achieved by Ekati was in 2010 when a 78-carat diamond was mined[43]. In November 2002, BHP Billiton started selling Ekati mine diamonds under the Aurias brand. In 2013, Dominion Diamond Mine UCL[44] (a subsidiary of Rio Tinto) bought the BHP Billiton stake while the other half remained with Archon Minerals until 2017 when the two companies signed an agreement to convert Archon's stake into a royalty equal to 2.3% of all future gross income from diamond mining in Ekati's buffer zone. From a mining point of view, a buffer zone refers to the area where there are both a mine and one or more human communities that can be damaged from a health point of view due to the extractive industry. In May 2020, Dominion Diamond entered into an agreement with an affiliate of The Washington Companies, after which The Washington Companies acquired the majority of Dominion's businesses. The reason for this operation lies in the presentation, in April 2020, of an application for creditors' protection[45] because of the interruption of the global diamond trade

42. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining.
43. https://www.mining-technology.com/projects/ekati/.
44. https://www.ddmines.com/.
45. https://nnsl.com/yellowknifer/breaking-dominion-diamond-mines-files-for-insolvency-protection/.

caused by the Covid-19 pandemic[46]. Under the agreement, subject to court approval, DDJ Capital Management, and Brigade Capital Management, two investment consulting firms, were to acquire nearly all of Dominion Diamond's businesses in exchange for taking on $ 146 million in debt[47]. Dominion Diamond also owns a 40% stake in Diavik, but the creditors' protection petition did not involve the latter mine. In late 2020, Dominion Diamond executives publicly stated that, in January 2021, bidders would provide the $ 146 million needed to reopen the Ekati mine. Therefore, at the end of 2020, the company recalled 60 previously laid-off employees in anticipation of the mine's reopening at the beginning of 2021. The mine remained closed for nine months, from March 2020 to December 2020, and the only remaining active staff were those in charge of maintenance. Considering that around 1.400 workers are normally employed in the mine, the closure in 2020 had an extremely negative impact on the region's overall economy.

Nonetheless, even though the company originally planned to sell its shares to affiliates of The Washington Companies, the deal fell through due to objections from Dominion Diamond's insur-

46. However, the analysis of various local newspaper articles published online over the last decade would show that the problems related to the layoffs in the Ekati mine are not only related to the closure of the mine due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, articles dating back to July 2016 report the risk of dismissal for 300 Dominion Diamond employees (see https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/dominion-diamond-ekati-risk-of-temporary-layoffs-1.3664020). The reason was allegedly the fire that broke out, in June of the same year, in the processing plant inside the mine. Some wells were closed while the plant was being fixed to reduce costs. In July 2016, 75 temporary contractors were fired (see https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/ekati-nwt-mine-layoffs-diamond-1.3660170). Another problem for the multinational emerged in 2018 when it was forced to postpone the construction of a new well due to delays in issuing licenses by the government. The reason for this delay would seem to lie in the regional government's evaluation of the environmental impact that this well would have caused in the waters of the lake. It appears that, on that occasion, Dominion Diamond requested that the government should loosen the parameters for air and water quality (see https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/diavik-ekati-diamond-mine-expansions-1.3613174). It could, therefore, be assumed that the beginning of the crisis for Dominion Diamond dates back to a few years earlier than the closures imposed by the pandemic.

47. https://www.nnsl.com/yellowknifer/firms-make-successful-bid-to-buy-dominion-diamond-mines-assets-for-more-than-146-million/.

ers[48]. However, in February 2021, the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta approved the sale of the shares to Dominion Diamond DDJ Capital Management LLC and Brigade Capital Management LP. Under the terms of the agreement, the two companies would acquire all of Dominion Diamond's assets related to the Ekati mine providing a $ 70 million working capital facility to fulfil Dominion's obligations to its employees, including their pensions, the Canadian government, including restoring the land at Ekati, and its Impact Benefit Agreement partners and other Indigenous groups communities[49].

Despite this passage of the mine's shares, Dominion Diamond retains a stake in the supervision of a geological exploration project in Lac de Gras just south of Ekati and Diavik.

Although 2020 was an extremely difficult year from a financial point of view and that of employment and the fact that the situation created by Covid-19 caused a block in diamond production and sales, it did see a reconsideration of work management for miners. GlobalData's analysis showed that from early April 2020 more than 1,600 mines were suddenly closed globally[50] as they were considered potential focuses for the spread of the virus given that miners work in close proximity. Following these sudden international closures, Ekati, as elsewhere, has begun to consider a transition to automation and remote extraction. The sudden shift to teleworking, telemedicine, and online education brought about by closures for Covid-19, has prompted growing interest in the idea of using remote machinery operation in the mining sector too. This would mean that miners would no longer work in the mine but can operate machinery away from the work area thus reducing both physical risks (mainly caused by blasting

48. https://nnsl.com/yellowknifer/purchase-of-dominion-diamond-mines-ekati-assets-falls-through-company-says/.

49. https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20201214005249/en/Dominion-Diamond-Mines-Granted-Court-Approval-for-Sale-of-Ekati-Mine-to-DDJ-Capital-Management-and-Brigade-Capital-Management.

50. https://www.globaldata.com/covid-19/.

to break up the rock) and health risks (relating to occupational diseases such as silicosis, arthrosis, etc.), as well as limiting interruptions in production like that seen in 2020[51]. Executives of multinational mining companies operating in the Northwest Territories have also indicated that automation could improve family-work management for Indigenous workers who are often forced to choose between separation from their families or work opportunities[52].

Until October 2021, the Diavik mine was a joint venture between a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, Diavik Diamond Mine Inc. (60%), with Dominion Diamonds Diavik Limited Partnership owning the remaining 40%. Since November 2021 Rio Tinto has become the sole owner of Diavik Diamond Mine in the Northwest Territories of Canada, continuing its leading role in the Canadian diamond industry. A transaction has been completed for Rio Tinto's acquisition of the 40 per cent share held by Dominion Diamond Mines in Diavik, following the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta's approval.

The Diavik kimberlite conduit in which the diamonds are found is smaller than that of other diamond mines located in different parts of the world such as South Africa, but it is very rich in minerals of the highest quality. As early as the 2000s, therefore, Tiffany & Co acquired a 14.3% stake in the polishing business of rough diamonds mined in Diavik. The mine consists of three kimberlite pipes and is located on an island of 20 km² in Lac de Gras. The construction of the mine began in 2000 and represented

51. Mining automation was first introduced in 2008 with Rio Tinto's *Mine of the Future* project. The first mine to experiment with this process was Resolute Mining, a gold mine in Mali. Other examples are also found today in Australia where Rio Tinto and Fortescue Metals have strongly implemented automated processes in which workers operate machinery from roughly 1,200 km away. Such experimentation has highlighted benefits regarding both productivity and cost as the machines can be operated up to 22 consecutive hours a day. The autonomous machines can also be programmed to complete certain processes without continuous monitoring by a supervisor. For example, the driverless trucks can continue to carry out the work of moving the material and thus clearing tunnels.

52. https://www.mining-technology.com/.

a real challenge due to the environmental context in which it is located. In fact, the mine is sited 222 km south of the North Pole and suffers winter frosts caused by polar winds that can lower the temperature to below -75 °C.

As they do for Ekati, the archive sources also allow us to reconstruct the history of the construction of the Diavik mine. Local newspaper articles report that Kiewit Corporation[53], a construction company founded in 1884 with headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska, signed three contracts with multinationals to build the mine between 2000 and 2003. The first contract involved a cost of CAD58 million or fast-track mobilisation of more than 800 loads of equipment and supplies for the construction of the mine facilities[54].

Within a year, an industrial town had been built on the island where the mine stands, with accommodation for the workers in small containers, each with a couple of beds and a desk, along with maintenance shops, offices, a diesel power plant, water, and sewage treatment facilities, and an ore processing containment structure. A 1,600-metre-long airstrip was also built on the island capable of handling the Boeing 737s that transport workers from Yellowknife or Edmonton. The island also has fuel storage areas, quarry facilities, and sedimentation ponds. The success of the first step of the works led to the signing of the further two contracts assigned to Kiewit Corporation, which provided for the construction of the 3.9 km dike to retain the waters of the lake so they would not flood the mine, as well as for overburden removal and concrete work. Production for diamond mining in Diavik took place in January 2003. Production from the mine is expected to run until 2023. From the outset, it was estimated that the mine would produce around 100 million carats of diamonds worth more than CA $ 10 billion over 20 years of activity[55].

53. https://www.kiewit.com/.
54. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining.
55. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining-Rio Tinto.

In 1999, Diavik Diamond Mine Inc[56]. and Dominion Diamond Diavik Limited Partnership entered into an environmental and socioeconomic monitoring agreement with the government of the Northwest Territories in which all parties committed to providing not only training but also employment and funding programs aimed at the local Indigenous people and, in general, residents of the northern regions of Canada. Compared to Ekati, Diavik is committed to establishing closer links with certain First Nations in the region. In 2001, the mining companies completed the negotiation of partnership agreements, through a contract called the Socio-Economic Monitoring Agreement (SEMA), with five Indigenous groups of the Northwest Territories which include the Tłı̨chǫ government, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, North Slave Metis Alliance, Kitikmeot Inuit Association and Łutselk'e Dene First Nation. The agreement provides for privileged cooperation between the mining multinationals and each group, through the organisation of training for future Indigenous workers in the mine and other business opportunities for the five Native groups involved. To facilitate the achievement of the objectives stipulated in the agreement, the First Nations gave permission to use their territory for the opening of Diavik in exchange for a series of measures aimed at mitigating the environmental impacts caused by the mine and the guarantee of employment for a number of Indigenous people as miners, diamond polishers, ore transporters or in other duties as stipulated by SEMA. Since 2004, alongside the implementation of the *Ready for the Job* programme, the mining multinationals have increased ad hoc pre-employment, recruitment, and retention initiatives to encourage Aboriginal employment of the five Indigenous groups mentioned above. In April 2014, the First Nations involved in the diamond multinationals founded the Communities Advisory Board (CAB)[57]. The CAB is still in existence and aims to monitor not only the environmental impacts

56. https://www.riotinto.com/en/operations/canada/diavik.
57. https://www.yellowknife.ca/.

but also the disruption of traditional Indigenous activities caused by the diamond industry. The team provides recommendations to multinationals to compensate for this damage and also uses traditional knowledge useful for understanding the changes in the region's fragile ecosystem.

Despite the agreements between multinationals and Native communities regarding the recruitment plans and the training of young Indigenous workers, the contracts undoubtedly represent the most delicate point of the negotiations between the various actors involved. From the construction phase of the mine, the agreement provided for the hiring of workers, mainly from the northern regions of Canada (thus extending employment opportunities not only to residents of the Northwest Territories but also attracting people from Nunavut). The agreements also stipulated that 40% of the workforce in the mine was to be Indigenous[58]. However, some studies highlight a failure over the years to respect this last agreement in particular (Caron *et al.* 2020). Research carried out by the Canadian government in 2013[59] that aimed to investigate the results of partnership agreements with Indigenous groups also highlighted that in December 2013, a total of 997 workers were employed at Diavik (covering various specialisations such as geologists, engineers, miners, etc.), of whom 485 came from the Northwest Territories and the neighbouring area of the Nunavut region called Kitikmeot[60]. Of the 485 employees resident in the two northern regions, only 171 were Indigenous inhabitants.

Alongside the *Ready for the Job* programme and initiatives for the recruitment of Aboriginal workers, in 2005 Diavik Diamond Mine Inc. added the *Aboriginal Leadership Program* (ALP) that is still active today. The training offered by this programme focuses not only on providing knowledge on mining, but also provides

58. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining.
59. https://www.statsnwt.ca/recent_surveys/.
60. https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/.

practical and cognitive tools to build infrastructures that connect the various towns close to the North Pole with the capital, Yellowknife.

Despite the good intentions supported by such political and economic actions, some studies show that Indigenous workers are unlikely to create a career. One of the causes of this problem is the inability of employers to understand and specifically address the needs and concerns of Aboriginal workers (Caron *et al.* 2019, 2020; Pearson, Daff 2013). To compensate for this difficulty, the representatives of the Indigenous groups involved in the agreements with the mining multinationals, therefore, argue the need to increase the possibility of a partnership between Native communities and the mining industry. In this way, in their opinion, new partnerships would improve the socio-economic conditions of many Indigenous communities and release them from the grip of poverty that they experienced before the opening of the diamond mines. Some scholars (Brereton Parmenter 2008; Caron *et al.* 2019) have, however, noted the existence of rivalry between Indigenous communities to access job positions in mining companies. Furthermore, while some people saw the mining industry as a solution to socio-economic problems for their communities, for many others the mine did not create enough jobs for the Natives of the region.

From archival documents, we can learn that even today there are executives of multinationals who visit Indigenous communities scattered within the regional borders[61]. In addition, at various times of the year, multinationals organise job fairs in Yellowknife and post job advertisements online. There are also frequent radio, television, or social media advertisements, as well as press releases in various communities. By crossing articles published by scholars with some archival documents drawn up by chiefs of the Tłı̨chǫ and Yellowknives Dene First Nation governments[62], it is clear,

61. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Diamond Mining.

62. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Tłı̨chǫ Government / Assembly of First Nations Office (NWT).

however, that mining companies tend to give priority to members of the communities with which they have entered into agreements, followed then by representatives of the surrounding communities with which they have not yet signed any agreement. This would perpetuate a disagreeable competition between communities for the opportunity to attend training and the hope of being hired (Caron *et al.* 2019, 2020; Pearson, Daff 2013). This situation has further worsened in recent years due to a strongly clientelistic system that sees some jobs assigned to people previously selected ad hoc (Caron *et al.* 2019). Despite this upstream choice, companies publish official hiring documents as if candidate selection were by means of merit-based tests. The importance of knowing the right people to have the opportunity to enter the mining workforce, especially at the higher positions within the industry hierarchy, has also been revealed in various studies (Pearson, Daff 2013; Brereton, Parmenter 2008; Caron *et al.* 2020).

Chapter 3

Contractual Relationships between Indigenous Communities and Multinational Mining Companies

3.1. Links between the Impact and Benefit Agreements and the Aboriginal Title

Article 29(1) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples declares that:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programs for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.[1]

In contrast to the 144 nations who agreed to these principles, Canada, together with other nations including Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, voted against the Declaration. As a result, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Northwest Territories are currently impacted not only by extractive industries (gas and petroleum mines) but also by large-scale deforestation in the south of the region[2].

1. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN GAOR, 61st Sess., UN Doc. A/RES/61/295 (2007).

2. The impact of oil pipeline construction in the Northwest Territories on the environment and Indigenous health is a topic that arose during my visit to Yellowknife. It was brought to my attention in an informal conversation with an elder of the Délı̨nę community that has been profoundly damaged by the uranium industry. Although the topic of oil pipeline construction is beyond the scope of this research, it is worth noting

that the Indigenous people in the region have also equated the environmental impact of exploiting this non-renewable resource with the effects of diamond mining. The construction of oil pipelines has had an especially negative impact on the Délı̨nę̀ community. This community consists of approximately 800 people and is located in the Sahtu region, one of the five administrative regions in the Northwest Territories. It overlooks the shores of the Great Slave Lake, roughly 480 km north of Yellowknife. Délı̨nę̀ is the only Indigenous community to occupy this land area. Between 1934 and 1939 and 1943 and 1962, this area operated as a site for uranium exploitation (Port Radium) before silver mines were opened there from 1962 to 1982. While the uranium mines were still operating, most of the Délı̨nę̀ men worked transporting bags of radioactive uranium. In that period, tons of uranium waste were poured directly into the lake, killing the fish and various aquatic plant species that formed the basis of the Indigenous peoples' diet. Port Radium was managed by Eldorado Resources, a Canada-based company under the control of the British Crown. The uranium was mined, milled, and sold to the government of the United States for the Manhattan Project which was set up to produce nuclear devices. Consequently, for years entire Indigenous families were exposed to landfill pollution. Because they were not warned of the dangerous nature of these minerals, they did not take any precautionary measures while working for the mining company. In areas subject to land claims (such as the Sawmill Bay area), highly radioactive areas were detected but efforts to cleanse the soil and surface water did not begin until 2005 with the Canada-Délı̨nę̀ Partnership project. Following this, the area around Port Radium was deemed safe for up to three months of human activity (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2009). The Délı̨nę̀ elder told about the devastating long-term effects that uranium extraction had on his community, going so far as to describe a 'village of widows' resulting from the devastating impact of carcinogens that killed two generations of men who worked in mining. In an attempt to recover from the impact of these losses, the women invited several government Secretaries to their communities to testify to their twenty-year struggle to convince the federal government to clean the area. They also wished to record their public apology for having unwittingly participated in the process of making nuclear weapons. In 1998, a delegation of Délı̨nę̀ elders, chiefs, and activists went to Tokyo to take part in ceremonies commemorating the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombing victims during World War II. They wished to make a public apology for having unknowingly taken part in uranium extraction for the creation of atomic bombs. This journey was recorded by Peter Blow in his documentary *Village of Widows*. In the early 2000s, the Délı̨nę̀ people were also involved in the Northern Gateway Pipeline Project proposed by the Canadian oil and gas company, Enbridge. This involved building 1,177 km of oil pipelines from the bituminous areas of the Alberta region all the way to the Pacific coast of British Columbia, through the Northwest Territories. According to the project, the oil pipelines would transport 525,000 drums of petroleum per day. The project would cost 5.5 billion dollars and involve the construction of two oil pipelines: one for transporting the petroleum from Bruderheim in Alberta to the port of Kitimat in British Columbia, and from Kitimat to the western United States and the international markets of Asia; and another to create a natural gas condensate transported directly to the eastern United States. Due to the presence of hydrocarbon liquids, the condensate is a highly toxic mixture. Most of these oil pipelines are currently located underground, with the exception of a few pipes that cross some waterways in the Northwest Territories. The Heiltsuk people (more commonly known as the Bella Bella) supported the Délı̨nę̀ in opposing the gas pipeline. In 2006, in solidarity with

The FIFO model used by the diamond industry in the Northwest Territories is in perfect alignment with the Canadian government's decision to vote against Article 29 of the United Nations Declaration. This mining system was introduced to the region at the beginning of an era marked by global concerns about environmental sustainability and the respect of vulnerable socioeconomic groups. However, it not only introduced innovative methods of labour management but also imposed a new interconnection between industry and traditional lifestyles leading to a clash between two contrasting concepts. On one hand, we have a concept of land as property to be exploited for economic and financial objectives while, on the other, land exists to be managed and maintained for future generations (Coulthard 2010).

The opening of the diamond mines in the Northwest Territories also saw the introduction of the Impact and Benefit Agreements (IBAs) from the end of the 1990s. IBAs are agreements between the industry and Indigenous groups that determine the types of governance of non-renewable resources within Indigenous territories[3]. For Indigenous communities, the IBAs introduced hiring quotas, access to work skills training courses, joint ventures between Indigenous diamond cutting and polishing companies and multinational companies, financial compensation for opening mines in Indigenous territories, environmental monitoring measures to assess the impact of mining on the water, soil, and air, and mitigation measures curbing the effects on traditional Indigenous practices. The multinational companies guarantee the development of profitable socioeconomic relationships with the region's

several groups of environmentalists, fishermen, and other residents, the two First Nations signed a document stating that the construction of the gas pipeline would destroy entire terrestrial and aquatic habitats, owing to the discharge of large amounts of toxic substances which could even pose a threat to human communities. In the early 2000s, local activist Jessie Housty was at the forefront of organising public lectures to raise awareness of the danger caused by pollution from gas extraction, and to plan resistance efforts. Despite countless protests, the Canadian government approved the gas pipeline project in June 2014.

3. https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/our-natural-resources/minerals-mining/10858.

Indigenous groups. However, it should be noted that the clauses in the agreements are legally structured to prohibit any kind of protest against the mining industry by the Indigenous people (O'Faircheallaigh 2010).

As we will see in more detail later, what makes the IBAs unusual is their confidentiality. In fact, these contracts were signed in secret between the executives of the multinational mining companies and the chiefs of the Indigenous communities, who had previously signed a treaty (Treaty 8 or Treaty 11) with the state.

Under Canadian law, both Indigenous communities and multinational mining companies are considered interested parties (Hall 2015). While the Indigenous groups champion Aboriginal land rights, the latter seek to obtain licenses for geological explorations. Laforce, Lapointe, and Lebuis (2009) state that the Canadian mining industry is based on the free mining principle. In their article, they, in fact, define a series of measures that permit and even privilege free access to ownership and exploitation of mineral resources. In most contemporary societies influenced by Western law, they state that the notion of free mining includes not only the possibility of freely acquiring ownership rights of the mineral resources of the territory, but also provides guarantees concerning the right to engage in exploration to seek out these resources, and, in case of discovery, the right to extract them (Laforce *et al.* 2009).

On the other hand, several possibilities are available to Indigenous groups, at least in theory. These could be used to safeguard their territories and traditional practices from the environmental deterioration caused by industrial works imposed externally. Firstly, federal and provincial environmental statutes to protect the Indigenous communities' land could theoretically be made available. Unfortunately, however, as highlighted by a number of studies, Canadian legislation has failed in this area, both from a legislative and procedural point of view (Collins, Murtha 2010); this is because Canadian legislation has excluded Indigenous people from meaningfully taking part in political decision-making processes. Under federal and provincial environmental legislation,

critical decisions concerning balancing the damage to the ecosystem with economic and financial interests are left to the government, often at the expense of the First Nations (Hall 2015). The situation has changed slightly since the early 2000s when the Native people's requests to assess the environmental impact of exploiting non-renewable resources (using their Indigenous knowledge) were included in the legislation. However, this does not mean that such an assessment is taken into account in the final decision-making process. The definitive decision rests with the government that decides whether the environmental damage of certain industrial operations outweighs their financial benefits. Therefore, even this element of the legislation continues to support a policy that is ineffective with regard to Indigenous people's land rights (Coulthard 2014).

However, beyond ordinary law, if environmental damage threatens Indigenous people's health and lifestyle they may appeal to the Charter and invoke their right to life, liberty, and security of person. Furthermore, where the place in question is also of spiritual value, the First Nations may invoke Section 2(a) of the Charter, arguing that environmental damage is also a violation of religious freedom. Another way to protect environmental rights for the benefit of the First Nations relates to the British Crown's fiduciary duty. It is common knowledge that the Crown has a duty to maintain peaceful relationships with the Aboriginal peoples. This duty is separate from the Constitution. Although the Crown normally focuses on analysing violations of section 35 of the Constitution of Canada in order to justify them, it is nevertheless formally obliged to safeguard the First Nations. While all these opportunities exist in theory, they have never been validated in practice[4]. Nevertheless, Lynda Collins and Meghan Murtha (2010)

4. Kelly Lake Cree Nation v. British Columbia (Ministry of Energy and Mines) (1998), [1999] 3 C.N.L.R. 126 (B.C.S.C.). Should the public law mechanisms fail, private law solutions may be available to address the environmental contamination of Indigenous lands. This may be an avenue for future litigation, but it does not adequately represent the rights of Indigenous peoples before the federal government.

argue that Aboriginal land rights claims have the advantage of being a formally ongoing obligation. In other words, they maintain that the Crown's fiduciary duty is neither a temporary contract nor a merely unilinear duty. This duty, by its very nature, demands respect for the integrity of the land from all involved. Nonetheless, scholars warn that a structured analysis of the fiduciary duty relating to Aboriginal law jurisprudence is still embryonic and, as such, is fertile ground for future research.

Indigenous people also have recourse to a series of measures, falling under the Aboriginal Title category, which legislates the protection of the land against environmental damage caused by industrial operations. The Aboriginal Title is a subcategory of the so-called Aboriginal Rights. It can be applied when a First Nation demonstrates that they occupied a specific area of the territory prior to the assertion of British Crown sovereignty[5]. In addition to proof of pre-sovereignty occupation, the Indigenous community claiming the Aboriginal Title must continue to occupy the territory. The Aboriginal Title is governed by constitutional requirements deriving from British political jurisdiction. In Common Law, the sovereign is the overlord of land ownership in all British colonies, even though the land is shared with the Indigenous peoples. This means that there is no such thing as absolute land ownership. In Canada, therefore, the private property possessed by any landowner stands on land that is still held by the Crown. In some instances, partial rights to a piece of land may be obtained. Within this framework, the Aboriginal Title provides protection against any type of trespass. Should the Court affirm the Indigenous community's failure to demonstrate their connection with the territory at the time of the colonisers' occupation, it is still possible, under Canadian law, to verify their current occupation by evidencing a real continuation of their ties to the territory. Possessing the Aboriginal Title is not, therefore, taken for granted, but is rather a legal description qualifying the right. In British Common Law, the title to the land is based

5. Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010 at para. 143.

on prior possession of a set of abstract legal powers over a place (Hall 2015). The only certainty is the inalienability of the Crown's power over the land. Moreover, in the Constitution of Canada, the Indigenous land right is considered a collective prerogative of the whole community. It is not classified as a form of sovereignty, since this status belongs only to the Crown. Thus, British authority over Indigenous lands means that territories in Canada cannot be sold or granted to third parties. The Constitution also makes it clear that the proprietary arrangement pertaining to Aboriginal peoples, defined with the term *sui generis*, holds political weight equal to other proprietary interests[6]. As will be seen below, this type of arrangement allowed for the introduction of diamond mining to Indigenous lands in the Northwest Territories.

Proving the Aboriginal bond to the land, however, involves cross-cultural interpretation and the use of comparative law methodologies. This approach determines both the land right and the means needed to ascertain this connection. Nevertheless, there are numerous cases where the interpretations that emerge during rulings critically highlight the limitations of current regulations in this area. For example, in the 2005 Marshall III ruling[7], Justice LeBel took the opportunity to challenge the rigorous test used to determine whether the Indigenous communities can claim Aboriginal Title. In particular, he criticised the current assessment for proving Indigenous land ownership, claiming it is saturated with Western concepts and does not adequately reflect the relationships that the First Nations have with the land (Collins, Murtha 2010). The following consideration is especially significant:

> If the aboriginal title is a right derived from the historical occupation and possession of land by aboriginal peoples, then notions and

6. Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010 at para. 143.

7. R. v. Marshall; R. v. Bernard, 2005 SCC 43, [2005] 2 S.C.R. 220 [Marshall III]. On this occasion, the question was raised as to whether the First Nations rights also extended to issues of logging on land under the Crown's control. The Supreme Court decided that they do not.

> principles of ownership cannot be framed exclusively by reference to common law concepts. The patterns and nature of the aboriginal occupation of land should inform the standard necessary to prove aboriginal title. The common law notion that 'physical occupation is proof of possession' remains, but the nature of the occupation is shaped by the aboriginal perspective, which includes a history of nomadic or semi-nomadic modes of occupation.[8]

Furthermore:

> The nature and patterns of land use that are capable of giving rise to a claim for the title are not uniform and are potentially as diverse as the aboriginal peoples that possessed the land prior to the assertion of Crown sovereignty. The fact that a tract of land was used for hunting instead of agriculture does not mean that the group did not possess the land in such a way as to acquire aboriginal title. Taking into account the aboriginal perspective on the occupation of land means that physical occupation as understood by the modern common law is not the governing criterion. The group's relationship with the land is paramount. To impose rigid concepts and criteria is to ignore aboriginal social and cultural practices that may reflect the significance of the land to the group seeking title. The mere fact that the group travelled within its territory and did not cultivate the land should not take away from its title claim.[9]

Following LeBel's description of the relationships between Indigenous communities and their territory, an account of their livelihood practices, and a presentation of the community rules governing members of the society and their relationships with other Indigenous groups, the Supreme Court declared that the Aboriginal Title includes the right to exclusive use and possession of a territory, provided it bears a connection with the Indigenous

8. *Ibid.* para. 131.
9. *Ibid.* para. 136.

community. These connections are thus thought of as a 'quality', defining the profound cultural significance which Indigenous people attach to the landscape (Andrews et a1.1998; Feld, Basso 1996).

Interpreting the status in this way would thus authorise Aboriginal Title holders to object to any environmental damage caused by unwanted operations on their land from outside. Furthermore, this definition of Aboriginal Title makes it possible to obtain an interlocutory injunction against any industrialisation that destroys the ecosystem of territory falling under the Aboriginal Title (Hirsch, O'Hanlon 1995).

In spite of these opportunities, there are two main obstacles that stand in the way of Indigenous people effectively using the Aboriginal Title to defend their environmental rights. Firstly, the need to legally prove the actual applicability of the Aboriginal Title requires a significant amount of time and energy. Secondly, repeated violations against Indigenous people over the years pose a real challenge in terms of limiting this ongoing tendency.

Another possible source of rights that would safeguard Indigenous land in the Northwest Territories lies in reviving the contents of the treaties which approve the continuation of hunting, fishing, and trapping. Much of the jurisprudence overseeing the treaties has arisen from a conflict between the continuation of traditional Indigenous practices and government regulation which seeks to conserve landscape assets. Nonetheless, adhering to the treaties may involve considering a sustainable use of the land threatened by industrial operations of resource exploitation[10]. Furthermore, the existence of a treaty imposes a constitutional obligation on the government to justify any breach of such a right. In other words, government actions or laws that violate a right in the treaty relating to environmental protection cannot be allowed[11].

10. Xeni Gwet'in First Nations v. British Columbia, 2007 BCSC 1700, [2008] 1 C.N.L.R. 112.

11. Sparrow, *supra* note 32; Canada v. Peters, 2001 BCSC 873, [2002] 1 C.N.L.R. 85.

In the search for compatibility between maintaining traditional practices and landscape asset conservation regulations, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples came to the following conclusion:

> First Nations would not consider making a treaty unless their way of life was protected and preserved. This meant the continuing use of their lands and natural resources. In most, if not all the treaties, the Crown promised not to interfere with their way of life, including their hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering practices. [...] First Nations [shared their lands] on the condition that they would retain adequate land and resources to ensure the well-being of their nations.[12]

Similarly, in their analysis of Treaty 8, Monique Ross and Cheryl Sharvit (1998) state:

> When a generous and liberal interpretation is given to Treaty 8, and when the Aboriginal understanding and oral terms are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the right to pursue usual vocations of hunting, trapping, and fishing was in effect a guarantee that the treaty's Aboriginal signatories would be able to continue to earn a livelihood from these activities. Further, the government's ability to take up land, and thus exclude the effective exercise of treaty rights to hunt, trap, and fish on such lands, was limited and likely did not include all the purposes for which trees are harvested today. For example, clearcutting was not anticipated in 1899, nor was the scale of the logging operations which are carried out in the boreal forest.[13]

12. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Looking Forward, Looking Back, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1996) at 174.

13. Monique M. Ross & Cheryl Y. Sharvit, "Forest Management in Alberta and Rights to Hunt, Trap and Fish Under Treaty 8", (1998) 36 Alta. L. Rev. 645 at 651.

To support the above, the same authors cite the passage in Justice Wilson's verdict relating to the Horseman case:

> It seems to me to be of particular significance that the Treaty 8 Commissioners, historians who have studied Treaty 8, and Treaty 8 Indians of several different generations unanimously affirm that the government of Canada's promise that hunting, fishing, and trapping rights would be protected forever was the *sine qua non* for obtaining the Indians' agreement to enter into Treaty 8. Hunting, fishing, and trapping lay at the centre of their way of life.

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Nonetheless, in most cases the rights of Indigenous people over their territory conflict with regulations that limit or prohibit outright the Indigenous communities' practices. The reason for this may be that, unlike the treaty stipulating an agreement between the

14. Horseman was a member of the Horse Lakes Indian Band community, residing near Grande Prairie in Alberta. In 1983, with authorisation under Treaty 8, Horseman hunted some moose for subsistence purposes. Other members of his group helped him to transport the catch to the community. However, once they arrived on site, a grizzly bear took over the dead moose. The bear attacked Horseman, who killed it in self-defence and decided to skin it and keep its hide. He did not possess a licence under Alberta's *Wildlife Act* to hunt grizzly bears or skin their hides. In 1984, Horseman bought a grizzly bear hunting licence and sold the grizzly hide, since he needed money to support his family. He was then accused of illegally trafficking the bear hide in violation of section 42 of the *Wildlife Act*.

15. [1990] 1 S.C.R. 901 at 911.

Indigenous community and the British Crown, in Canadian legislation the Indigenous right over the land involves verifying that the territory was occupied upon the arrival of the colonisers (Coulthard 2010). Therefore, while the rights contained in the treaties concern the expectations both of the Crown and the Indigenous people, they cannot be easily applied to the Indigenous right to safeguard the environment (Collins, Murtha 2010). Instead, recognising the Indigenous land right rests on two fundamental assumptions. On one hand, the Indigenous peoples may argue that the right to carry out traditional practices must be interpreted as a right to environmental protection in the Indigenous sense of the term. On the other, the courts may recognise that conservation and sustainable management are consistent with strengthening Aboriginal rights and that environmental damage is incompatible with such rights.

In the Northwest Territories, the environmental assessments are generally regulated via the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* which uses an integrated system of government institutions to manage land and water use in the Mackenzie Valley. The *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* is managed by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board[16], supported by several land and water use planning boards. The environmental assessment of the Northwest Territories is a three-step process involving a preliminary screening, an environmental assessment, and an environmental impact review.

16. The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board is a co-management committee responsible for the environmental impact assessment process in the Mackenzie Valley. In 1998, the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* established the Review Board as an independent administrative tribunal. Although the federal government enacted this legislation, the law itself was the result of land claims made in the Northwest Territories. According to the government, this legislation began to give the Aboriginal people in the Mackenzie Valley a greater say in resource management and development. The Review Board consists of nine members, all appointed by the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. The chairperson is generally appointed after the election by the other members of the Review Board. The other eight board members are appointed by the federal and territorial governments and by the Aboriginal land claim organisations. The Review Board is therefore a co-management board, consisting of an equal number of Aboriginal land claimants who are appointed by the government.

In 2014, as part of a broader initiative to modernise and streamline the regulatory process, changes were made to the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*. However, the First Nations opposed amendments to the law that would have eliminated three regional councils and created instead a single council to regulate land and water use in the Mackenzie Valley. In March of the same year, the federal government used the *Northwest Territories Devolution Act* to give the regional government greater decision-making powers over regulatory regimes for authorising large industrial projects in the region[17].

Included in the updates to the Northwest Territories regulatory regime are the Territorial Quarrying Regulations[18]. These regulations envisage participation by the Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories in assessing the impact caused by large extraction projects on the land (Hall 2013). In particular, the *Impact Assessment Act*, in recognition of the special relationship between the British Crown and the First Nations, includes Indigenous people in projects to identify in advance the potential impact that certain economic activities may have on the inhabitants and their treaty rights. Involving the Indigenous communities means developing partnerships during the early planning stage of industrial projects in the region. Furthermore, the *Impact Assessment Act* supports flexible participation approaches when working with the Indigenous communities, in the hope that agreement may be reached with the industries (Matthews 2008). All the First Nations partners in the project must be listed in the Indigenous Engagement Plan. In addition, the manner in which the Indigenous people can be consulted and actively involved in the project is determined. Each Aboriginal group involved is also assigned consultation protocols, i.e., guidelines which the Indigenous people must adhere to[19].

17. The *Northwest Territories Devolution Act* consists of a series of measures to change land and water use regulations.

18. https://lois-laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,_c._1527/page-1.html.

19. https://www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/services/policy-guidance/practitioners-guide-impact-assessment-act/guidance-indigenous-participation-ia.html.

The overall purpose of this set of measures, however, is still to provide the government, the Indigenous people, and the general public with information about the results achieved thanks to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (also known as the Agency).

In relation to diamond mine regulation, subsection 36(3) of the *Fisheries Act* sets out regulations primarily on the release of arsenic, copper, cyanide, lead, nickel, zinc, suspended solids, and radium-226 into lakes and rivers. The regulation establishes specific authorisations for the use of waters that are home to numerous fish species. Nevertheless, mine owners can request that the regulations be modified so that they can deposit mining waste, such as waste rock, into them. To do so, they must argue that the water is not home to flora and fauna that are important for the livelihoods of the First Nations. Prior to requesting a proposed regulation change, the areas that may be affected by mining waste disposal must be identified and confirmation of the presence or absence of fish is required. In particular, Annex 2 of the *Fisheries Act* contains a list of waters designated sterile deposit areas. Other areas can be added by means of a regulatory amendment. Moreover, subsection 36(3) of the *Fisheries Act* does not apply to a metal mine that ceased commercial operations before June 2002, a diamond mine that ceased commercial operations before June 2018, or to the mining for minerals and metals from watercourse sediments. The northern regions of Canada are home to a variety of ecosystems as well as a wealth of natural resources. These regions also fall under the *Environmental Rights Act*, which ensures that the biological diversity and productivity of ecosystems in the Northwest Territories are protected, providing residents with the tools they need to ensure that their rights are upheld by said territories (Caine, Krogman 2010). The *Environmental Rights Act* works in conjunction with other regulations set out by the regional government which authorise operations that use water, land, and air. As well as environmental protection, the *Environmental Rights Act* makes provisions for matters concerning land claims and Indigenous rights. A number of academics (Galbraith, Tkacz 2007; Noble, Birck 2011) have noted

that, by appealing to jurisdictions such as the *Environmental Rights Act* and the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act,* Aboriginal communities are carrying out a greater number of private negotiations with proponents of mining projects as a way of managing their effects and ensuring local communities can benefit from mining developments. Even though projects to engage the Indigenous community in environmental protection and monitoring practices have increased in the last few decades, the influence that Indigenous groups have on such projects is still overestimated[20]. The main reason for this is that there is no third-party body to manage the relationships between Indigenous communities and the government, as these types of regulations are also included in governmental policy institutions that can influence the participants' decision-making.

Furthermore, Indigenous people are not distinguished from other socioeconomic groups in Canada that are classed as marginalised. This limits them when it comes to using their Indigenous knowledge to express their perspective on the environmental damage caused by mining (Lane 2006; Lahiri-Dutt 2015). It was also noted that the *Environmental Rights Act* and the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* overlap with the IBAs, with the two often influencing each other (Noble, Hanna 2015). This is despite the fact that the IBAs have a different legal basis, constituting private contracts between the communities and the multinational diamond companies. Regardless, the proposals made by the First

20. While government data on the increase in economic well-being in the Northwest Territories is available, it is extremely difficult to access documents that would make it possible to analyse the environmental damage and socio-cultural impact that mining has had on Indigenous communities since such investigations are not in the interests of the state or multinational diamond companies. Despite this, in 2005 the Indigenous communities formed an environmental monitoring team to study the impact of the extractive industry. Noting the increased coordination of Indigenous groups, the federal government sponsored and funded a study on the impact of mining on Aboriginal communities in the region. However, upon discussing this with some elders of the Yellowknife Dene community, they relayed a question that one elder, Judy Charlo, publicly put to her community in 2005: 'Who is this research for? The white people? Or is it for the Native people?'.

Nations during all these negotiations may address issues related to environmental mitigation and business and employment opportunities for Indigenous people. This has caused some misunderstandings, also within the existing literature. While some authors (Galbraith, Tkacz 2007; Noble, Birck 2011) argue that the IBAs are more successful in addressing Indigenous needs, others (Caine, Krogman 2010) see them as problematic mechanisms that weaken the enforcement of the *Environmental Rights Act* and the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*, benefiting the industries in the First Nations' territories.

Since the early 2000s, the diamond industry has used the IBAs to treat Indigenous communities as stakeholders in order to promote a business plan with an ethical and sustainable image around the world (Piper 2009). This process, which downplays Indigenous land rights and eliminates their power to challenge the extractive business in their region, serves to sanction a deal between industry and Indigenous groups who provide their land and support to multinational corporations in exchange for labour. From a regulatory perspective, the IBAs are official contracts between Aboriginal bands and private businesses that use a business relationship to impose obligations on both signatory parties. For such a relationship to be permitted, the British Crown uses the clause of the IBAs to cede the decision concerning potential business involvement to the Aboriginal peoples. This negotiation process does not involve the federal and regional governments. While this type of agreement (dating back some forty years) originally regulated negotiations between Indigenous people and any kind of outside industrial operation, the IBAs now mainly exist to legitimise the relationship between First Nations and the mining industry. Within this arrangement, the role of women is all but non-existent (Prno 2007).

Given that the content of such arrangements is much more detailed than the land claim agreements, it is important that the IBAs are closely analysed. In addition, IBAs have now become the most widely accepted routine way of conducting business between

Indigenous people and multinational companies while also allowing for a great deal of corporate autonomy (Coulthard 2007).

Although the IBAs are based on secret agreements between the multinational companies and the Indigenous groups, it is well known that the provisions always vary depending on the circumstances and the type of relationship established between the extractive industry and the Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the IBAs' overall structure is based on a number of specific features (Sosa, Keenan 2001) which concern provisions for work contracts to ensure that the region's Indigenous inhabitants have access to employment, mining industry participation quotas, preferential social categories for hiring, and termination and redundancy arrangements. IBAs also include economic development plans that address ways to bolster relationships between Indigenous businesses that are collateral to the mining work (such as diamond polishing and cutting businesses) and multinational diamond companies. There are also plans for improving the well-being of residents, implemented through an array of projects that range from building infrastructure to setting up educational offerings and curricula in schools.

There is no pre-established structure for drafting IBAs, as the content depends on the requests of the signing parties. Nevertheless, they do consistently contain an introductory segment that introduces the parties involved in the relationship, provides information about their legal duties and rights and underlines the agreement's proposals and objectives (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010). If the regional government is involved in the agreement, the IBAs will also contain a description of its role and objectives. This section may also include a description of the project, its stages and how long it will last, the size of the mine, and the infrastructure required (Coulthard 2007). This information serves as a benchmark to be referred to throughout the agreement process. According to the mining companies, it aims to reduce the likelihood of future disagreements. Furthermore, identifying the various stages of the project can also be useful for planning social and vocational

projects (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010). Companies can also include a clause in the introduction that discourages the First Nations from opposing a mining project. An example IBA, compiled by the multinational mining company BHP, states that:

> In consideration for the company entering into this Agreement, the group in question will not object to the issuance of any licenses, permits, authorisations, or approvals to construct or operate the Project required by any regulatory body having jurisdiction over the Project.[21]

In the agreement established between the First Nations and the multinational mining companies following the opening of Ekati, this clause prevented the Indigenous treaty signatories from opposing the Northwest Territory Water Board's decision to grant a water licence to BHP (Caine, Krogman 2010). They were also denied compensation for the environmental impact of the mine (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010). As pointed out by several Dene and Tłı̨ chǫ chiefs who were informally interviewed in Yellowknife, this type of clause should be avoided, especially when the IBAs are negotiated at a very early stage of the mine's production, namely, when the mine's impact on the environment is still very uncertain.

3.2. The Indigenous Employment Clause within the IBAs

The IBAs also often include a clause stating that the mining company must give priority to certain Indigenous companies when awarding contracts. This will set out the supply of certain types of goods and services which the Aboriginal companies offer, and which are needed for the mining (Prno 2007). In the absence of an Indigenous company providing such services or goods, it is

21. A reproduction from the NWT Archives/Quoted in Keeping, 1999a at 77.

possible under the IBAs to request that the winning non-Indigenous company employs a certain number of Aboriginal people. It is often pointed out in the documents that companies consisting of Indigenous personnel do not possess sufficient technical, institutional, or financial expertise to provide the goods and services needed to win the contract (Caine, Krogman 2010). In some IBAs, this problem is resolved by funding workshops on how to prepare proposals for multinational mining companies, or by requiring some non-Indigenous companies to work alongside Aboriginal companies to assist them so that they win the funding (Sosa, Keenan 2001). The IBAs may also include unbundling contracts. These consist of breaking a project down into smaller, simpler contracts structured around the Indigenous company's objectives. To facilitate this, a joint committee of First Nations and multinational company members may be also formed to ease communication and engagement between the parties signing the agreement (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010).

The IBAs also include a section relating to Economic Development and Business Opportunities. This section may include information from scholarly analysis and research. For example, the IBA cited above refers to the National Household Survey on the overall socio-economic situation of Canadian Aboriginal groups, describing how in 2000, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada allocated a budget of $ 8.2 billion to financially support Canada's Indigenous communities. Seventy per cent of this budget was distributed among educational programmes, health care plans, and infrastructure development[22]. The allocation of these funds was politically justified by the desperate needs of the reserves' Indigenous residents, which included difficulties with links and transportation owing to underdeveloped infrastructure (Coulthard 2010). The survey referenced in the IBA also estimated that non-Indigenous Canadians resident in rural areas earned approximately $ 4492 more annually compared to Indigenous people resident in

22. AANSI 2019.

the same areas, and $ 2250 more annually compared to Indigenous residents in urban areas. Furthermore, non-Indigenous workers on reserves earned double that of the Indigenous workers in the same location. Commenting on this data, Aragon (2015) notes a 17% increase in per-capita income in the Northern Territories, or $ 3000 per year, for Indigenous people included in the treaties, and a 41.2% increase for those employed by multinational diamond companies. The multinational mining companies are able to use the IBAs to interact directly with the Indigenous chiefs (whose community is subject to a treaty) to reduce costs arising from the legal duty to seek consultation and from jurisdictional disputes which may emerge between young Aboriginal people, the federal government, and the territorial government. Aragon noted how the number of IBAs increased in the Northwest Territories thanks to the acceleration of the negotiation process and a greater financial incentive (including more jobs for Indigenous people and higher per-capita wages) for communities included in Treaties 8 and 11.

Analysing the findings of the report entitled *An Analysis of the Socio-Economic Outcomes of Aboriginal Peoples Living in Communities Associated with Self-Government Agreements, 1991-2011*, compiled by the Northwest Territories government in 2010[23], Pendakur and Pendakur (2015) rigorously assess the impact that the IBAs have on the day-to-day lives of the Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories. The comparison between the Comprehensive Land Claims[24] and Self-Governing Agreements[25] following the implementation of the IBAs provides us with interesting informa-

23. https://www.statsnwt.ca/.

24. Comprehensive Land Claims are land claims implemented in areas where the treaty planning is not yet complete. In these areas, agreements known as 'modern treaties' are generally negotiated between an Aboriginal group and the federal or territorial government. These types of treaties regulate the use and management of land and resources for all parties in the agreement. Some treaties have also included provisions for Aboriginal self-government. The treaty rights give entitlement to constitutional protection.

25. Self-Governing Agreements are agreements signed between the federal government, the government of the Northwest Territories, and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation to further promote the right to self-governance and to land claim negotiations. The agreements lay the groundwork for the Northwest Territory Métis Nation Consti-

tion. From a legal standpoint, the federal government explicitly requires the mining companies to use IBAs as a negotiation process between the First Nations and the government, with mediation performed by the mining companies in most Comprehensive Land Claims and Self-Governing Agreement negotiations. Specifically, the mining companies are required to hire a set number of Indigenous, Inuit, or Métis workers (Prno 2007). The two authors note that by implementing the IBAs, the welfare levels of communities included in Self-Governing Agreements and Comprehensive Land Claims have increased by up to four percentage points when compared to the period before the diamond mines entered production. However, this benefit is unevenly distributed. While the Comprehensive Land Claims have increased their score by 44% following the opening of the mines, the Self-Governing Agreements saw virtually no increase[26].

3.3. The Regulation of Indigenous Women in the Constitution of Canada. Socioeconomic Links between Subsistence and Wage Labour in Mining

Although Canada is bound by a number of legal and political instruments aimed at safeguarding the rights of First Nations people residing in mining areas, the government has merely upheld laws and policies arising from international obligations[27]. That is, the Canadian government applies certain international standards to address the rights of Indigenous people within the country's mining areas. Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which was concluded in 1989, was the first international instrument introduced in Canada and not bound to

tution, recognising the Métis governments as legislative authorities with the power to continue providing programmes and services to their people.

26. A reproduction from the NWT Archives/Quoted in Keeping, 2010 at 50.

27. See *Baker c. Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration)* [1999] 2 SCR 817, point 70.

assimilation policies that exclusively concerned the protection of Indigenous rights[28]. Specifically, this convention supports the recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples[29]and equal rights between women and men in the workplace. In particular, Article 3 of Convention 169 states that the provisions must be applied without discrimination to Indigenous men and women. The International Labour Organization provides guidance specifying what constitutes direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination relates to standards, policies, or practices that exclude certain individuals or put them at a disadvantage. Indirect discrimination, on the other hand, occurs when seemingly neutral measures have a disproportionately negative impact on a particular group of people[30]. Convention 169 recognises the Indigenous and tribal peoples as a special group of stakeholders with the right to set their own development priorities which are consistent with the life of their community. Articles 6 and 7 of the Convention embrace the principle that Indigenous peoples should always be consulted before decisions to implement an economic project are taken[31]. In particular, Article 7 states that governments must guarantee Indigenous peoples the right to pursue their own economic, social, and cultural priorities (Baluarte 2004). Convention 169 also addresses land rights, a topic of crucial importance in the context of exploration and the exploitation of resources by the mining industry. With particular regard to land rights, Article 14(1) recognises the rights to ownership and possession on the part of the peoples who have resided for centuries in the land in which they carry out their livelihoods. Article 15, on the other hand, deals with issues relating to natural resources, affirming both the protection of Indigenous peoples and their involvement in using and managing the natural resources in their territory.

28. 67 Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (adopted 27th June 1989, entered into force on 9th May 1991) 28 ILM 1382 (ILO Convention 169).

29. ILO Conventions 107 and 169.

30. ILO Convention 169 (No. 67) Art. 3.

31. ILO Convention 169 (No. 67) Art. 7.

In cases where the state retains ownership of mineral resources, the governments must establish procedures for consulting all members, both male and female, of the Aboriginal communities. Convention 169 is not unique in its explicit mention of women. The rights of Indigenous Canadian women may also be protected through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This requires the state to adopt measures ensuring women and children are fully protected in all aspects of life, and to do so in collaboration with the First Nations[32]. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also reinforces the formal declaration in Convention 169 that the state must obtain the First Nations' consent before approving any mining project in their territory. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also recognises the Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. This includes economic, social, and cultural development in which women play a fundamental role (Prno 2007).

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights also exists to support Indigenous women for the impact of the extractive industry. This covenant enshrines the protection of a series of benefits in the mining sector, such as rights to an economically and culturally adequate standard of living, safe working conditions, social security, and education support (Baluarte 2004). In particular, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights emphasises the importance of ensuring equal rights for Indigenous men and women with respect to economic, socio-cultural, and political entitlements[33].

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, aimed exclusively at Indigenous women, should also be acknowledged. It sets out an agenda to protect In-

32. UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Doc A/RES/61/295 (2nd October 2007) (UNDRIP). Although Canada was one of four countries that originally voted against the Declaration in 2007, it officially removed its objection in May 2016.

33. CESCR General comment No. 21, 'Right of everyone to take part in cultural life (Article 15(1)(a) of the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights)', UN Doc E/C.12/GC/21 (21st December 2009) subsection 7.

digenous women against socioeconomic discrimination in the areas of employment, education, health, the community, and family. Canada is one of the member states who signed this convention. Article 3 of the convention requires the state to commit to eliminating discrimination against Indigenous women by any person, company, or public or private organisation[34]. It also urges the state to take measures to facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous women in mining businesses (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010).

These guiding principles were definitively approved by the United Nations in 2011 and are addressed to the state and the mining companies[35]. They are characterised by three main regulatory themes relating to the protection of the rights of Indigenous women. Firstly, the state must protect the latter against any human rights violations by third parties, especially private companies, through appropriate policies, regulations, and decisions. Secondly, the companies must act with absolute diligence to avoid violating the rights of the most vulnerable people and to prevent the industry from causing any negative impact. Thirdly, those who have fallen victim to harm by multinational mining companies should have the right to compensation. These principles, therefore, compel the state, faced with the advance of the mining industries, to prove itself to be proactive and to establish legal and policy frameworks capable of assessing and monitoring any violations of women's rights by business enterprises (Barrera-Hernández 2006).

Although the Canadian government is bound by a number of national duties regarding Aboriginal rights, enforcing the various

34. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (adopted 18th December 1979, entered into force on 3rd September 1981) 1249 UNTS 13 (CEDAW). Discrimination is defined by Art. 1 ibid: 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field'.

35. Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises UN Doc A/HRC/RES/17/4 (6th July 2011).

measures usually entails a complicated process of recognising that any violation has occurred. Compensation can only be awarded if the applicant can demonstrate Aboriginal Title to the land. This aspect has been shown to be, to a greater or lesser extent, explicitly discriminatory against a large portion of Indigenous women. To be precise, women born to a single mother are not entitled to this compensation. To comprehend this, a broader analysis is needed. In 1869, the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* was passed, stating that any Indigenous woman married to a non-First Nations man would lose her 'Indian' status and any other rights to which her band is entitled. This statute gave rise to the concepts of 'status Indian' and 'non-status Indian' in Canada (Miller 1989), whereby the Indigenous woman's decisions sanctioned her transition from one category to the other. During the timeframe in which the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* was enforced (from the late nineteenth century until 1985) an aggravating circumstance was added whereby an Indigenous woman marrying a man without Indian status was forced to permanently separate from her community. On the contrary, if a non-Indigenous woman married an Indigenous man, she would have acquired the status of an Indian. These discriminatory regulations continued to uphold colonial objectives. Namely, to maintain a rigid assertion of the racial differences between the colonisers and the Indigenous people to reinforce the superiority of the former over the latter (Stoler 2001). From a regulatory point of view, the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* was, therefore, able to incorporate the mixed marriage practices that had been implemented since the beginning of the nineteenth century to aid the success of the Europeans' trade in the far north of Canada, which depended on their ability to assimilate into the Indigenous communities through marriages (Prno 2007).

Implementing *The Gradual Enfranchisement Act* resulted in the creation of the Métis social category, that is, the children of a European man and an Indigenous woman. These were classed as Indigenous people who were, however, no longer Indigenous by law and whose offspring were conclusively considered to be of Euro-

pean descent (Coulthard 2007). By the mid-twentieth century, the Métis were organised into roughly 50 distinct political groups in the Northwest Territories[36].

When Bill C-31 was enacted in 1985, there were only 350.000 Indigenous people in Canada who were status Indians. Because Bill C-31 allowed people who had lost that status to regain it, about 100,000 people reclaimed their Indian status before 1995. Nevertheless, the cultural and demographic harm inflicted by the loss of so many Indigenous women's Indigenous status, across an entire century, remains incalculable (Coulthard 2014).

In addition to legal difficulties, children of Indigenous women and men of European descent applying for Indigenous status also face socio-cultural challenges. It is vital that these people receive traditional knowledge from their elders; knowledge which, in the family setting, is generally passed down by grandmothers. In Indigenous communities, elderly women are the mouthpieces of Indigenous wisdom, to the extent that children brought up by their grandmothers are considered potential elders. Retaining the traditional culture, therefore, plays a crucial role in the raising of children and grandchildren. Practice traditional knowledge, developed over time, allowed to lead to ecological instruction for children that achieved several goals at once: Children learned how to manage and preserve local resources; they listened to stories and were taught the importance of nature and its interconnectedness, and they also learned valuable social skills of interaction and communication. As a science instruction, it was comprehensive in terms of developing the whole person (Turner *et al.* 2000).

If they are denied access to their traditional knowledge, they will be unable to meaningfully fulfil their duties to the community such as assisting the elders. The First Nations, therefore, face an additional threat arising from their inability to access knowledge. This is the result of a series of discriminatory prac-

36. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 1, Sec. 6.2, 150.

tices enabled by government regulations. Because many children are born to single mothers, C-31 is perceived by Indigenous people as yet another strategy to drastically deplete the Indigenous population and undermine the assertion of the Aboriginal Title, which also requires proof of continued subsistence practices and traditional culture (Coulthard 2010). In addition to the precarious nature of renewed entitlement through C-31, many Indigenous women have been generally frustrated and traumatised by being prevented from fully engaging in traditional practices and ceremonies. The experience reflects a struggle against colonial prejudice that continues to label Indigenous knowledge as a cultural phenomenon particular to marginalised minorities (Coulthard 2014).

Because the *Indian Act* caused such disadvantages, Indigenous women took on a crucial role in challenging gender discrimination across Canada during the twentieth century. In 1971, Jeannette Corbiere Lavell and Yvonne Bedard, two Indigenous women who had both lost their titles as 'status Indians' after marrying men of European descent, challenged the discriminatory sections of the *Indian Act* in court. However, the Supreme Court ruled that the *Indian Act* did not discriminate against Indigenous women who married non-Indian men because, by losing their status, they gained the legal rights of non-Indigenous women. Lavell's words were recorded in official sources:

> The *Indian Act* has imposed upon us a patriarchal system and patriarchal laws which favour men. Only men could give Indian status and band membership. At one time, only men could vote in band elections. By 1971, this patriarchal system was so ingrained with[in] our communities, that 'patriarchy' was seen as a 'traditional trait'…even the memory of our matriarchal forms of government, and our matrilineal forms of descent were forgotten or unacknowledged. Some legal writers argue that it was the federal government alone, and not Aboriginal governments, which discriminated against women. In fact, the Aboriginal male governments and organizations were part

> of the wall of resistance encountered by Aboriginal women in their struggle to return to their communities.[37]

While the Supreme Court of Canada quickly put an end to the debate in the case of Lavell and Bedard, in the late 1970s Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet woman from Tobique (New Brunswick) presented her case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. In 1981, Lovelace won her cause and Canada was accused of violating the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The government was therefore forced to declare its intention to amend the discriminatory sections which deal with granting Indian status (Coulthard 2014).

After significant consultation, the proposed amendments became law, and in 1985 C-31 was enacted and integrated into the *Indian Act*. Consequently, Indigenous women married to men of European descent, as well as children born from that union, are currently entitled to apply for Indian status and its relative benefits. Despite this achievement, this amendment is not without its problems. By granting these women and their children Indigenous status, the government has extended the ability to exploit Indigenous land to non-Indigenous people married to Aboriginal women. In addition, conferring Indigenous status to children is only possible if both parents' names appear on the birth certificate. Should the son or daughter of a single mother apply for Indigenous status, they would be ineligible under C-31 section 6(2) (Hall 2013).

Status Indian rights include welfare, coverage of medical expenses, coverage of certain medical care for children, counselling spaces for drug and alcohol abusers, home medical care for the elderly, parental leave for mothers, and financial support for secondary education. However, censuses have shown that the number of single mothers has grown exponentially since the mid-1990s. Of these, 28% have children in the 0-15 age group[38]. Crucially, these

37. A.G. Canada v. Lavell [1973] S.C.R. 282.
38. NWT Archives, Cominco Ltd. Fonds.

women and their children are unable to benefit from health support plans and general social support programmes, cannot find work, and are not eligible to apply for grants to support their children's education (Coulthard 2014).

Although there has been some legal progress, Indigenous women married to men of European descent complain that they are socially and culturally marginalised, even within their communities of origin, and also experience tension with their families. This aspect is especially keenly felt when marriage with a non-Indigenous man fails. In addition, although the impact is slightly less severe than that of residential schools, many women who have been forced to move away from their community after marrying a non-Indigenous man lose familiarity with their native language, subsistence practices, and symbolic ritual traditions that are tied to the land (Hall 2013).

The legacy of the *Indian Act* has therefore permanently undermined the likelihood of equal opportunities for Indigenous men and women. In addition, despite various conventions and plans to consult Indigenous people before planning an economic operation, Indigenous women complain that they are entirely excluded from negotiations such as IBAs. Although this has been brought to the attention of community chiefs, and although the IBAs emphasise the will to give greater labour rights to Indigenous women, none of these documents have ever featured a specially dedicated section on the employment of Indigenous women and their wages (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010). In other words, even though they are mentioned in the IBAs, no recruitment programme has ever been specifically designed for them.

Negotiations with mining companies tend to be centred around the chief who, following a council meeting that includes a few male members of his group, is responsible for seeing that the interests of his community are upheld. Nevertheless, there have been instances of some Inuit women being involved in negotiations with extraction companies. A particularly noteworthy case was that of Voisey's Bay in Labrador. Indigenous women signed

clauses with multinational mining companies, aimed at defending their traditional practices and safeguarding the environment (Fontaine 2002). Members of numerous Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories remember the Voisey's Bay IBAs for the financial benefits they brought to Indigenous groups in that area, the extensive involvement of the First Nations in decision-making, and the roles played by certain Inuit women, some of whom even acted in the capacity of chiefs (Hall 2013).

In addition, although the Canadian government has publicised the need for Indigenous women to also be actively involved in plans relating to the *Environmental Rights Act*, Indigenous women in the Northwest Territories complain of limited opportunities to participate in decision-making. Specifically, in the processes aimed at preventing the impact of industrial operations on the environment and on the traditional economy (Hakim 2004; Coulthard 2014). Indigenous women claim that the *Environmental Rights Act* has primarily emphasised involvement in employment rather than the well-being of Indigenous communities, in which women play a key role. In particular, the *Environmental Rights Act* praises mining employment opportunities in the Northwest Territories, largely ignoring the importance of subsistence practices for Aboriginal people. Indigenous economic systems have undoubtedly been severely compromised as a result of the combination of industrialisation and colonial policies (Fontaine 2002). Consequently, women in Indigenous communities, who are increasingly reliant on wage labour from companies, are under-represented in the socioeconomic sphere. The absorption of women as workers into multinational mining companies not only erodes the subsistence economy (Kuokkanen 2011), it also constitutes a corporate attempt to commodify low-cost female labour (Caine, Krogman 2010). Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) argue that the current downgrading of subsistence is due to the view that wage labour is the only means by which Indigenous people may enter the economic sector. Even from the standpoint of Canadian law, this assumes that Indigenous subsistence practices are merely sup-

plementary activities to be carried out in your spare time. According to the academics, the model of wage labour is industrial male labour, not the work of mothers and women in providing for the immediate needs of everyday life, especially children and old people. It is hardly surprising, then, that equality for women in wage labour (equal pay, equal jobs, and equal promotion) means that they must increasingly adopt ways of living that have been shaped by men (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999).

Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen also highlight that the hiring system for Indigenous women and Indigenous people, in general, is based on a patriarchal and colonial ideology that does not equalise economic benefits between men and women. They also testify to workplace discrimination manifesting in unstable, underpaid, and solely fixed-term employment, as well as physical harassment and verbal aggression by male colleagues, particularly non-Indigenous men.

Chapter 4

Hiring Indigenous People in Mining

4.1. Mining as a Male Work Environment

The significant increase in economic development in the Northwest Territories due to diamond mining has also inevitably increased the demand for labour. While the government and industry perceived the Indigenous people of the Northwest Territories to be a barrier to extractive advancement in the 1970s and 1980s since the late 1990s there has been a massive shift in the way that multinational mining companies view the hiring of both male and female Indigenous people (Coulthard 2014). While Indigenous populations could provide a workforce in the vicinity of the mining sites, they were also viewed as a source of cheap labour (Hultin, Åkerman-Börje 2014) for carrying out low-skilled tasks (Caron *et al.* 2019). Although Indigenous groups are more involved in this industry than in the past, the Aboriginal communities, especially certain social categories such as that women, only benefit financially from mining to a limited extent (Caron *et al.* 2020).

Major barriers to hiring Indigenous people include a lack of specific skills or work experience in the extractive industry (Haley, Fisher 2012) which conflicts with the managers' priorities of productivity over integration. Studies on these challenges are unfortunately still scarce and tend to focus primarily on the mining situation in Australia and New Zealand (O'Faircheallaigh 2006; Pearson, Daff 2013; Parmenter, Trigger 2018). Little

has been written on mining work conditions experienced by Indigenous people in Canada.

Across the world, the large-scale mining industry is generally dominated by male work environments. This strongly conditions the identity of the miners and of other workers who provide ancillary services to operate the mine. Such individuals are understood to occupy a profession with specific, recognised cultural traits (Abrahamsson, Johansson 2020). Some studies go so far as to identify a 'mining culture' and forms of 'andropoiesis' (Armano 2018; Berger, Alexander 2019) to explain how miners essentially represent themselves as 'male' and, as such, consider themselves the only ones able to enter the mine[1]. Leaving aside the historical and cultural context surrounding the large-scale extractive industry, it has been observed that miners use masculine values to construct cognitive cultural categories with which to describe themselves (Armano 2018). In mining ideology, the mine is often symbolically compared to a woman (Zanini 2016). This has frequently been found to be the case in historic documents (such as Georg Agricola's *De Re Metallica*, published in 1556), and appears to have continued in later periods up until recently, so much so that mine galleries are still often called by female names (Armano 2018). In some cases, symbolic parallelism between the gallery and the womb has also been mentioned (Eliade 1956), to the extent that analogies have been drawn between the first descent into the tunnel and birth. According to this metaphor, you are born as a miner, a vocation that requires you to take on the mine by demonstrating dominion over nature, matter, and even yourself and your emotions. The significance of this dominion (which represents your capability of working in the mine) continues to serve as the structural basis for gender separation in mining work, even as the extractive industry is hiring more women now than in the past.

1. The term 'andropoiesis' is based on the concept of anthropopoiesis, coined by Francesco Remotti (2013) (*anthropos*, from the Greek for 'human being', and *poiesis*, from the verb 'poiein' meaning to fabricate, shape), describing the possibility of building cultural human beings who interpret, understand, and use the reality that surrounds them.

The parallel between the economic value and the courage gained by working in a mine is another aspect that contributes to mining work's masculine image. Generally, in rural areas undergoing industrialisation as a result of mining, mining work attracts workers for its financial rewards that are almost exclusively aimed at men (Abrahamsson, Johansson 2020). Comparing the salaries of those hired by extractive businesses with those of other blue-collar workers, it is clear that the former is extremely high, and that mining is perceived to be highly stable employment. In the Ekati mine, for example, a skilled miner (a position which normally excludes Indigenous people) earns an average of CA $ 62,163 annually[2]. Various authors have identified other typical characteristics of 'mining culture', including a penchant for risk (Zanini 2016), a tendency towards dissipation (Armano 2018), and alcohol abuse (Sibilla 2004). Scholars maintain that all such attributes tend to contradict the miserable and somewhat unrefined image of miners employed by the industry that dominated much historic, economic, and anthropological literature until a few decades ago. This rhetoric is gradually being replaced by a depiction of the pride that miners take in their profession, undertaking risky and strenuous work which, because of these very characteristics, bolsters the worker's prestige and social status.

Another striking aspect found in the extensive literature on different industrial mining settings is a kind of fault line, a social and professional boundary between locals and miners (many of whom are foreign) leading to a widespread tendency to create separate cultural sub-communities which can persist over long periods. This also seems to be the case where forms of mining industrialisation have intertwined with colonial policies. The formation of these sub-communities of professional miners has led to broad comparisons being drawn between them, but they have also prompted and called for the development of models to identify what distinguishes them (Abrahamsson, Johansson 2020; Armano 2018).

2. https://www.glassdoor.ca/Salary/Dominion-Diamond-Mines-Salaries-E1154948.htm.

Several such models now exist, put forward on different occasions by historians, demographers, economists, sociologists, and anthropologists. The seminary attempt by British sociologist Martin Bulmer (1975), who outlined the mining community's sociological models, remains exemplary. It is worth noting how the author justified the creation of these models by pointing to traits and factors that are so widespread as to be almost universal. Firstly, Bulmer underlines the physical isolation, economic dominance, and extreme nature of extraction work. Secondly, he highlights occupational homogeneity, the prevalence of multiple relationships involving every aspect of the miner's life, solidarity in the job, characteristic family set-ups, and equally characteristic demographic features. Although much is dependent on the historical and economic context of the host community in which the mining community is based (Viazzo 2016), the two of which coexist with varying degrees of success, these factors give rise to a plethora of models (Bulmer proposes four). Other elements that should not be overlooked are the size and lifespan of the mine and, above all, the type of mineral extracted. Several studies have in fact highlighted how the exploitation of precious metal, iron, coal, and salt mines tend to correspond to different forms of labour organisation, types of infrastructure, and socio-demographic arrangements (Armano 2018; Cerri, Zanni 2006). It is also entirely clear that a careful distinction must be made, at least from a conceptual and typological perspective, between predominantly small-scale and often family-run mining operations, both in the present day and the past, and large industrial enterprises which from the early modern age onwards have relied on the work of specialised personnel (Armano 2018). In addition, the literature often ascribes artisan or industrial operations to specific geopolitical contexts. This was especially true from the 1990s, for example, when narratives about African blood diamonds and ethical Canadian diamonds began to be disseminated across the world. Discourses on diamonds extracted in Africa, including in academic literature (e.g. D'Angelo 2019), describe traditional management

practices. This is the case whether or not a legal license exists, and often involves informal extraction, making it impossible to obtain clear information on how workers are managed, output, revenues, digging operations, and even the locations of the mines (Kyba *et al.* 2019). On the contrary, accounts, and studies concerning Canadian diamonds describe industrial management, strong economic growth, and the protection of workers through special protocols (Shaw *et al.* 2005; Schlosser 2013).

Another distinctive demographic trait of the mining community is the higher mortality rates of miners compared to both the women living in the same communities and men in other occupations (Sibilla 2004).

Close analysis has historically revealed a greater tendency for immigrant miners to marry women older than them. Some scholars speculate that these pronounced age differences partly reflect a tendency to marry rather elderly widows, often with children. This is exceptionally unusual in other social categories but widespread among immigrant miners (Viazzo 2016).

Michael Haines (1977) has also pointed to the rapid attainment of 'wage maturity' by miners, and, in general, by all male workers employed in the mining industry, and the almost total exclusion of women from the labour market in mining districts. The author also theorises that the rapid physical decline of those employed in mining is matched by a high wage reward.

On the basis of these studies, it is impossible to ignore the fact that many authors are convinced that similar environmental conditions (especially physical and social isolation), together with certain organisational requirements in the mining industry, tend to produce a set of distinctive characteristics that vary only slightly between districts (Armano 2018). Sociologists such as Bulmer (1975) and also Ricardo Godoy (1985), as well as archaeologists such as Bernard Knapp and Vincent Piggot (1997), support this viewpoint. They argue that the discovery that certain ecological, demographic, political, and economic characteristics recur in both modern and historically attested mining and metallurgy

communities, crossing spatial and temporal confines, means that such characteristics are likely to have occurred even in communities from far back in history, knowable only through archaeological documentation. However, this is the domain of Antiquarians. Abrahamsson and Johansson (2020) state:

> Explanations for the long survival of this kind of almost obsolete masculinity expression is that in mining, as in other male-dominated industrial organizations, workplace cultures are often based on brotherhood, male bonding, male socialization, and identification, as well as the exclusion of others: mainly women; office staff; management; and people from other countries, other cultural contexts, and subcontracting companies. This controls and reinforces the similarities between workers. This can be understood also as a 'workers collective system', a normative system based on class consciousness and a culture of resistance by people in order to gain informal control over the work situation, a system that functions as a buffer or protector against the demands of production and hard work. Such processes can also be discussed in terms of organizational disobedience and misbehaviour (Abrahamsson, Johansson 2020: 267).

The factors outlined so far demonstrate the conceptualisation of a socio-cultural and economic structure underpinning mining industrialisation that has been passed down to us over centuries, bringing with it a specific version of masculinity that goes hand in hand with mining. However, upon attempting to identify traits with which to piece together a female image within the mining work environment, it becomes evident that there are gaps in our knowledge.

The socioeconomic aspects outlined thus far also seem to be relevant to the diamond mines of the Northwest Territories. In the Diavik mine, for example, 87% of the workers are male while 13% are female, percentages that have remained virtually unchanged since the mine was opened. As regards underground work, the percentage of male workers increases to 95%. Furthermore, since

the early 2000s, the average wage in the Diavik mine has increased by 15% for male workers and 3% for female workers[3].

The employment of women in the Northwest Territories diamond mines, as with the employment of Indigenous people in general, falls under the *Ready for Job* programme, in accordance with the World Vision campaign launched in Canada to combat the international trade of African blood diamonds (De Boeck 2008)[4]. This programme is a two-week course which must be completed in order to access professional training (subsidised by the state and the extractive industry) to become a mine worker. The project involves all of North America and is in line with more general vocational training programmes aimed at poor socioeconomic groups, which often include Indigenous people. With regards to the diamond mines in the Northwest Territories, the *Ready for the Job* programme has primarily focused on training Indigenous staff in auxiliary mining skills. Countless good intentions are put forward by training and hiring programmes for Aboriginal personnel, as well as programmes specifically designed for hiring Indigenous women in a mining setting. Nevertheless, Indigenous people face a myriad of difficulties both in being hired by multinational diamond companies and, once employed, in dealing with social discrimination in the workplace as a result of colonial policies and the hegemony of the capitalist development model (Hall 2015). Despite the various training schemes promoted by the *Ready for the Job* programme, multinational companies prefer to bring in professional labour (both male and female) from the outside rather than train Indigenous personnel residing in the Northwest Territories (Caron *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, some Indigenous workers on a contract or a waiting list complain about the withdrawal of their welfare payments as soon as they have worked in the mine even for a short period (one week, for example). Renewing payments involves lengthy administrative procedures (Pearson, Daff 2013).

3. Diavik Mine-Dominion Diamond Mines Report.
4. https://idrf.ca/project/getjobready/.

Some authors, therefore, speculate that masculinity in mining operates as a negative force that works against the integration of Indigenous staff, and as a social and gender barrier to Indigenous women's inclusion in the extractive industry (Kelan 2018; Abrahamsson, Johansson 2020). The fear of being considered less masculine is also clearly seen in the sexist slang often used to castigate non-Indigenous men who are less willing to take physical risks in mining settings. Abrahamsson and Johansson (2020) argue that this masculinity tends to increase as one descends underground and is less evident in tasks that are not undertaken directly inside the mine. Scholars also note, however, that women entering a male-dominated workplace, such as that mining, poses a challenge to the collective masculine identity. To confront this, gender normative systems, grounded in and maintained by the separation of the sexes, would be put into action. This persistence of masculine hegemony in the extractive industry seems to be enabled by continuing to hire as few women as possible. Should more women be hired, a clear delineation between male and female tasks would emerge (Lindgren 1985).

The diamond mines in the Northwest Territories are comprised of new industrial set-ups. This is thanks to both the introduction of advanced technology capable of extracting diamonds in a hostile ecological area – such as that of the subarctic zone – and to safety protocols for workers. However, the policy for managing the recruitment of Aboriginal workers is deeply anchored in Canada's colonial policies (Hall 2015). Indigenous people, especially women, find it extremely hard to maintain their Aboriginal cultural practices within the scope of such policies, even when they are hired by multinational mining companies. This phenomenon, deriving from the Indigenous cultural background, has led to an increase in other types of oppression towards Aboriginal people, something which has not been the case for non-Indigenous employees in the extractive industry. This may even take the form of verbal abuse and dismissals, as Indigenous people in the workplace are subject to colonial and gender-based abuses (Hakim 2004).

4.2. Employment and Equality in Hiring: Contractual Issues and Observations from Indigenous

In addition to stipulating work contract provisions, IBAs may also include clauses that provide Indigenous communities with economic benefits on top of the salaries of those hired by multinational companies. These benefits include royalties and fixed or one-time cash disbursements (Gibson, O'Faircheallaigh 2010).

Representatives of First Nation governments included in the treaties are also allowed to be involved in the mining company's board of directors. Furthermore, the IBAs push for equity investment in mining development, with the aim of investing in the development of Indigenous skills and the diversification of their economy, while also providing administrative training for some Indigenous people who are to be employed directly within the mining companies (Prno 2007). Nevertheless, such equity investment is often impeded by the Indigenous people's initial lack of capital. The IBAs also set out compensation for those who suffer financial losses due to mining[5].

Indigenous worker employment provisions are central to the IBAs. However, it is extremely difficult for Indigenous people to enter the mining workforce, primarily due to their different cultural backgrounds (Caron *et al.* 2020). The most difficult adaptation for Aboriginal people is the arrangement of 12-hour shifts in the mine and two weeks in the mining town, as envisaged by the FIFO model (Hall 2013). The IBAs include complex employment provisions including, for example, policies for primarily hiring workers with mining experience. This very often excludes Indigenous people (Caron *et al.* 2019). In this regard, we must question whether the multinational diamond companies operating in the Northwest Territories are acting ethically, as portrayed around the world. This response from an ex-miner (now a diamond valuer) from the Tłı̨ chǫ community who worked in the Ekati mine typi-

5. A reproduction from the NWT Archives/Quoted in Keeping, 1999a at 85.

fies the situation that the mining company is ethical with workers, but, as he asserted, he can only speak for himself because he is single, with no kids or wife. He defined the mining as bittersweet. He explained that his colleague started to hate the mining work when he had to choose his job or his family. The interviewee's colleague was a good miner, but he ended up quitting because he had to be closer to his family. He affirmed that many miners have to love the mine to hate it and have to hate the mine to love it.

Although this individual uses subjective variables, he reveals how the symbolic complexity attached to the land that derives from Indigenous cosmology, continues to persist even when working in the mine and can even influence the Indigenous worker's behaviour. Some wives of Indigenous miners belonging to the Tłı̨ chǫ community have seconded this assertion. They argue that, although diamond mining has brought economic benefits to the people of northern Canada, it has also disrupted traditional family equilibriums, leading to a form of single-parenting, or children raised by grandparents when both parents work for multinational mining companies. The indigenous team talked about the concern of some wives of miners employed in the mines. One of them asserted that her husband was a miner at Diavik mine. In the beginning, all components of her family were happy, because they had more income. But when the children were born she was alone because her husband had to go to the mine. Moreover, because he has to work, he doesn't get to see all their birthdays and he is not always at home for Christmas.

In the Northwest Territories, where rates of domestic violence against Indigenous women are five times higher than the national average, the absorption of men into the mining industry has also increased the economic dependence of wives and girlfriends on their partners, with some disastrous social outcomes (Hall 2013).

Furthermore, when discussing the supposedly benevolent attitude of the multinational mining companies publicised across the world, an elder of the Tłı̨ chǫ community gave me his version of the mining industry's attitude. It differs greatly from that of most

of the young miners informally interviewed. He asserted that the multinationals' purpose has nothing to do with Indigenous populations. The capitalist accumulation at all costs is manifested through the ongoing exploitation and destruction of Indigenous communities.

Andrews (2004), in his articles, asserts that the land is life. People do not control the land; the land controls people and their actions. He also describes a landscape imbued with rivers of meaning (Andrews 2004; Zoe 2010).

The greatest threat posed by the diamond industry, according to Indigenous people of the region, is the imbalance it causes in the traditional family (Hall 2013). For Indigenous inhabitants of the Northwest Territories, the traditional family is a basic social unit that may also consist of multiple cooperating nuclear families including parents with children, grandparents, and the siblings of parents. Very often the members of this nucleus reside together. These extended families are sometimes organised into households of 20-30 people, connected by bilateral kinship (cognatic groups) and a common residence. As is often the case in settings with such social structures, particularly in habitats undergoing intense ecological stress, these groups are characterised by working together in a significantly egalitarian manner when performing subsistence practices throughout the year. Technically, from an anthropological point of view, we could define this social organisation as a residential group of cooperating families, in which political leadership is exclusively familial and in which there is no permanent institutionalised hierarchy, following the model of the so-called band societies which are likewise organised into cognatic groups (Ligi 2016). The only individuals who bear special social significance within these cooperating families are the elders, who are viewed almost as medicine-men. That is, they not only preserve the history of their community and its resulting wisdom; they also act as shamanic-like performers of rituals who, as needed, will interrupt their daily activities to enter into a trance, often aided by the repetitive sound of drums and a continuous flow of chants. In

this extraordinary state of consciousness, the elders' natural gifts allow them to undertake out-of-body journeys to predict the future and, most importantly, heal other members of the group. A key aspect that is typical of these egalitarian groups (that also applies to the entire community) is the lack of a cultural conception of private land ownership.

This aspect of the Indigenous cultural worldview is not considered in the clauses of the IBAs. In fact, the multinational diamond companies, as well as the regional and federal governments, dismiss Indigenous subsistence economies or mixed economies as backward and therefore incompatible with the industrial rationale (Kuokkanen 2007). On top of this, there is the issue of an imbalance in economic opportunities and compensation for mining damages, causing significant socioeconomic inequalities among the region's residents (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), and within the Aboriginal groups themselves. This inequality is evident when certain individuals are favoured, such as particular chiefs or young miners, who may have access to a small amount of mining profits (Laforce *et al.* 2009; Kuokkanen 2007). One of the main reasons for these inequalities is shortfalls in the implementation of the IBAs' clauses. A number of chiefs informed me that the ancillary companies responsible for supplying materials or machinery to the multinational extraction companies are often not Indigenous and do not even hire Indigenous personnel. Nevertheless, the Aboriginal groups are currently overwhelmingly dependent on the mining business. Indeed, a young Indigenous miner told some members of the staff of one indigenous team: 'It should be having kind of the skills where we could rely less on the mines' (S. Dene community). Indigenous people are aware that the IBAs are being used to spread a political distraction strategy in the region, diverting the Indigenous communities' energies away from decolonisation and channelling them into establishing business relationships with multinational companies. Discussing this matter, Rebecca Hall (2013) raises the subject of industrial colonialism, particularly

evident in Canada's northern regions which are rich in non-renewable resources.

In his public lecture at The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, William, chief of the Gwich'in community, traced the economic and social history from the opening of the diamond mines to the present day. He explained that in 1996 the Northwest Territories were undergoing a period of austerity. The federal government cut various funding, including for social services aimed at Indigenous people. At the same time, the state pushed Indigenous groups to engage in so-called business opportunities, the main one being that proposed by the diamond industry and which came into force two years later. The chief stated that the claim that marginalised, underserved communities simply accepted these agreements (such as IBAs) between the Indigenous people and the multinational companies was inaccurate. Rather, they were forced to acquiesce to a particular kind of outside business to survive. The issue is actually much more complex. During the first negotiations between diamond companies and the First Nations, many land claims in the Northwest Territories had not yet been resolved. This led to a disagreement between the First Nations and the state at the end of the 1990s concerning the rights of the Indigenous people to their territory, including areas where the mines are located. In this instance, Indigenous communities were recognised as having no legal rights, only informal ones. This meant that when the First Nations began negotiations with the diamond businesses, the state had not yet recognised that they held rights to their land (Coulthard 2010). Because of this, extraction companies classed them simply as stakeholders and not as communities who had resided in those territories for centuries and therefore possessed Aboriginal rights to the land (Hall 2015). Within this bureaucratic and financial landscape, Indigenous communities were treated by the state in exactly the same way as the mining companies: as stakeholders. William also recalled how, during the opening of the Ekati mine, his people began negotiating with the multinational and encountered numerous instances of unequal

treatment within this relationship. The Canadian government set a 60-day deadline within which the negotiations between the society and five groups of Indigenous peoples in the region had to be concluded. However, the Indigenous people were not informed of the meetings with the multinational company taking place in Yellowknife. Moreover, these meetings were organised in July and August, when the Indigenous people are preoccupied with traditional hunting and fishing practices and therefore reside in temporary camps which may be very far from the capital. Given their absence from most of the meetings with the companies, the federal government recorded that Indigenous people had no concerns regarding the impacts of mining on their land and traditional practices. In light of this, William recalled during his public lecture how the negotiations with the multinational diamond companies began with obligations that were highly frustrating for the Indigenous people. The state and company-sponsored 'equal negotiations' label therefore was and continues to be, entirely fictitious. Even to this day, the chief explained, the negotiations are structured in a way that is difficult for the Indigenous people to understand, both culturally and linguistically (Indigenous languages constitute the only spoken and comprehensible form of oral communication for elderly people especially). Faced with such evidence, the Indigenous groups of the region soon realised that the mines would open with or without their consent and, even if they were to consent, they would receive inadequate economic remuneration.

Although the changing socioeconomic conditions had 'forced' the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories to resort to highly exploitative paid labour in the mines, we should also evaluate the Indigenous cultural interpretations of this compulsion if we are to avoid serious ethnographic misunderstandings.

From the informal data collected through the conversations, we know that some informants were hired by the mining companies after enrolling in the Ready for the Job programme and attending the training courses it provided. Ready for the Job was funded in North America in conjunction with the 2008-2009 fi-

nancial crisis and was promoted in the Northwest Territories in the same period. This was during a hiring freeze affecting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous personnel in the mining industry.

Some people met in the capital recalled that during the period that the training programme was being introduced, the city of Yellowknife was plastered with posters that read who wanted to be a Rocker. These posters also reported that future miners could earn up to $ 100.000 annually (Bell 2017: 82).

One worker stated that many men in his community began to think that such an amount could set them up for life if they started a career in mining. However, some of the people interviewed stated that, despite attending the training courses, they had difficulty being hired by the mining companies.

Interlocutors explained that the training courses were particularly focused on learning the appropriate language and behaviour to adopt in front of employers. They recounted how the course trainers constantly urged them to change their habitual attitudes. Many also raised the concept of a 'readiness register'[6]. According to Asif Agha (2004), this refers to a linguistic repertoire associated with certain social practices assumed by those who seek to reproduce them. The author, in discussing the acculturation of people into certain linguistic registers, states that those who are exposed to such socialisation must also acquire a deep understanding of the socio-cultural values shared by the group into which they must integrate. Furthermore, in the case of registers associated with

6. Linguist T.B. Reid (1956) introduced the term 'register' to academic literature in reference to a discussion on the functional differences in the use of various types of language. Reid asserted that expressive forms show differences in register when expressions are deemed appropriate for different social situations. Although the scholar's basic intention was to connect linguistic forms to action, several aspects of the formulation were left incomplete. While there is still no structured and unified theory as to how conversation relates to certain social situations, there is also a gap in our understanding of how the use of a register can stray beyond appropriate use within particular scenarios. Some of the immediate difficulties encountered when applying Reid's concept of register stem from the terminology itself. 'Register' is a noun that also has a plural form. Its plural form implies that registers are sets of objects which can be unambiguously counted and identified (Agha 2004).

certain occupations, the scholar argues that there are widespread socioeconomic and political imbalances whereby certain individuals ranking socially lower in the occupational hierarchy are compelled to reshape their language and behaviour. Agha argues that although the use of a register may have little to do with the performance of an occupational task, rather its use generates social identity paradigms connected to linguistic forms. For a register to work successfully within a group context, it must therefore be socially recognised and chosen from a range of expressive means endowed with inherent pragmatic values. Furthermore, for a register to be effective it must operate within boundaries consisting of social semiotic processes within which it can find expression. Thus, a register can exist only when it is established by socio-historical processes. That is processes by which the forms and values of a register are recognised as belonging to a specific group of speakers while also forming part of processes of institutional coding, as in the case at hand. In this case, the registers operate as rules of law that facilitate access to circumscribed, specialised, or select social circles. Conversely, for those who do not share a standardised language appropriate to a given context, such a rule of law is absent. According to Agha, institutions frequently play a formal role in promoting proficiency in using a linguistic register. They accomplish this through specialised training programmes for specific occupations. As such, a register can be considered a kind of sociolinguistic snapshot of particular users who belong to a certain institution or social group.

According to some studies, employers believe that the behaviour and linguistic style of Indigenous people that are employed by multinational mining companies and which stem from their cultural background, are the main barriers to appropriately using linguistic registers in mining environments in the Northwest Territories (Bell 2017; Hall 2013). For this reason, the *Ready for the Job* training course places particular emphasis on workplace behaviour and language, with the aim of training Indigenous mining staff not so much in the technical aspects of mining work, but

rather in how they should envision themselves, how they should conduct themselves publicly, and how they can construct specific social rights which can be adapted to the rationale of the market (Caron *et al.* 2019).

According to one Indigenous worker who was informally interviewed, the director of the Yellowknife-based training agency described the *Ready for the Job* programme as one of the tools required to transform the Indigenous person into a good worker. The agency director would frequently invite a large number of Indigenous people to his office as a way of welcoming them to the training course before it began.

In addition to the testimonies, I found some interesting articles speaking about the *Ready for the Job* programme (Bell 2017; Caron *et al.* 2019). These works explain some 'Attitudes' that trainees should adopt. In particular, Bell (2017) affirms, in her article, that positive behaviour is a state of mind. Individuals with positive attitudes approach activities and people with expectations of positive outcomes. This optimism motivates them to work hard within their families, schools, jobs, and communities. People with positive attitudes do not blame others for problems. They think about a situation, determine what is within their control and authority, and then decide what actions to take.

This excerpt is of interest as it demonstrates the use of a moralising lexicon that focuses on the emotional state of trainees. The latter are urged to adjust their psychological attitude in order to be ready for the world of work. During some conversations I also had with people from different parts of Canada, it became apparent that the soft skills expected in this kind of job program were defined by the training course as devices for maintaining a positive attitude before superiors and as educational tools to encourage participants to accept their workplace responsibilities. Some of these individuals explained that from early on in the training they were required to use first-person statements. They were also urged to defer to the employer, including making eye contact while speaking and not crossing their arms. Employers believe that re-

quiring these attitudes encourages clear and open communication. Trainees were consistently reminded to first help themselves and then others in the workplace. In addition, family ties were seen by those conducting the training as a barrier to success in the job. Explicitly drawing on the concept of the readiness register, financial independence was also encouraged, while sharing your salary with the community (as Indigenous people are wont to do) was viewed negatively by the trainers. Schematically speaking, the readiness register consisted of two essential characteristics. Firstly, it was referential, in that it simulated conditions that did not yet exist in the workplace, but which could be encountered. The training also never raised practical issues concerning mining training, solely addressing the behavioural conduct to be followed within the company. Secondly, the readiness register focused primarily on the participants' psychological states to modify and adapt them to the company's demands (Bell 2017). Some participants encountered took personality tests at the beginning and the end of the training provided by *Ready for the Job*. During the course, these tests were justified as tools to help the trainees view themselves differently, making them 'ready for life'. Many workers also stated that, during the training course, the trainers considered them unable to assess their potential and convey it in their work.

The personality test at the end of the two-week training course consisted of a questionnaire with fifty multiple-choice questions. Trainees were required to respond using a rating scale ranging from strongly agreeing to a statement to strongly disagreeing. For example, some of the questions addressed whether, in the working environment, career goals were clear to them and whether trainees were confident in their ability to complete challenging tasks on the job, or what choices they might make to achieve their goals (Caron *et al.* 2020). All of the trainees repeatedly expressed their profound confusion as to why the course did not provide any practical training for working in the mining industry. They all agreed that the trainers placed the most emphasis on preparing for the selection interview to get a job in mining, despite the fact

that all of the people met expressed difficulty in speaking publicly about themselves using the competitive language expected by the managers. Some informal interlocutors acknowledged how this attitude revealed a significant contrast between the Indigenous cultural conception of the self and that expected by the company.

Despite concerns over the linguistic and behavioural styles to be adopted, some participants affirmed their wish to pass the *Ready for the Job* final test. Passing the test allowed them to attend an additional course, lasting 12 weeks, entitled the *Rocker Programme*. It took place on a simulated mining campus and involved other male and female prospective workers from across the region, as well as non-Indigenous mining professionals (Bell 2017). When trainees were told who had passed the test and would be able to attend the next course, some of them asserted to began to adopt the language that the trainers had taught them, which extolled individual responsibility, to please the trainers and future employers. By the end of the first training course, there was already competition among some of the participants (Caron *et al.* 2019). The simulated campus was based far away from the Indigenous communities. The aim was to replicate the working conditions that one would experience at Ekati and Diavik (Caron *et al.* 2020).

Bell (2017) explain, through her research, that from the start of the *Ready for the Job* course, Indigenous people interviewed by her were also informed that if they passed the final test, during the *Rocker Programme* they would eat three meals a day, be subject to strict codes of conduct, and not be allowed to drink alcohol, and be supervised by guards around the campus to ensure no one strayed back into the community or the town. The participants were also made aware that, at the end of the 12 weeks of training, dinner would be held for them as a reward for passing all the tests set out in the *Ready for Job* programme. During both training courses, all prospective workers had to take various quizzes on the topic of communication style. Her interlocutors also stated that the trainers aimed to provide trainees with theoretical models for evaluating themselves. Before the final questionnaire, course participants were given half a

day to use True Colors International's personality assessment tools. This is a standardised model for analysing your own and other people's personalities. The test uses four colours (orange, green, blue, and gold) to distinguish four personality types. The participants' temperaments are classified according to their colour test results.

During the 12-week training, all participants were guided through an exercise on how to deal with a dissatisfied customer. The interlocutors stated to the staff of the indigenous teams that this exercise fell outside the scope of mining and involved a role-play in an auto repair shop.

These exercises highlight how the soft skills taught during training involve the adoption, and teaching, of certain commodified communicative acts (Urciuoli 2008). However, all the respondents observed that the soft skills promoted during the courses were not only at odds with their Indigenous background but also clashed with the social norms often found in certain highly masculine work environments such as the mining industry.

In the present research, one informal informant told me that not all the participants passed the first test. Many stopped at the final test of the two-week course and were not able to proceed to the *Rocker Programme*. With regards to the above-mentioned rules by Bell (2017), those who did attend the 12-week course reported that the guards could often be bribed with cash payments. The interlocutor recounted how the guards would provide the trainees with alcohol and marijuana for monetary rewards.

As is documented by some scholars (i.e. Caron *et al.* 2020; Bell 2017), it is possible to know that at the end of the course, the trainees had to complete another personality test. It was similar in structure to the previous one and consisted of a 100-question quiz. In these studies is reported that some of the informants managed to pass this test. Furthermore, the women who went on to take the test stated that their scores were lower than those of all the Indigenous men.

Bell (2017), in her article, describes that indigenous people have to take the final test of the 12-week course. Starting from her ex-

perience, it was possible to know that a few days before the test, the training agency decided to replace the end-of-course dinner with baseball caps featuring the agency's logo. However, the trainers reassured the trainees that an official ceremony would be held for those who passed the test. The scholar also informed that they could not be immediately employed by the multinational or polishing and cutting companies, but they could wait at least a couple of months without receiving any responses. As the anthropologist has highlighted in her research, only some Indigenous men and very few Indigenous women, who proved themselves particularly in line with the vision of potential employers, could be hired straight away. She argues that this was not thanks to the training, but rather to their past experiences in various business settings.

In the same study, Bell (2017) also refers that interlocutors judged some of the trainers' behaviour as being extremely poor. The scholar asserts that trainers usually use to arrive late on a daily basis. They also made promises which they did not keep (as well as cancelling the end-of-course dinner, the salaries promised to those hired by mining companies turned out to be fictitious). In her article, the author describes that on the day of the test at the end of the *Rocker Programme*, the trainers were late yet again, and some trainees forced open the door of the classroom where the test was to be held. She also recounts how some people distracted the guard, while others smashed the door open with a bar. The informant explained to her how these acts of resistance created a strong sense of solidarity between the Indigenous participants at that moment. While the trainees began to label the trainers as irresponsible, their actions also showed the limits of the readiness registers as desired by the companies. Therefore, Bell concludes that it is no surprise that these individuals were not admitted to the final test: In accordance with what they were taught on the course, their behaviour was deemed to be solely their responsibility.

Bell also asserts that, during her research, some selected trainees, meanwhile, were no longer entitled to apply for welfare pay-

ments as they were labelled as potentially employed in the mining companies, nor could they look for another job since they might be called to work at the mining company at any time.

Ready for the Job is not the only tool that gives access to mining work in the Northwest Territories. The Indigenous workers also described the opportunity to apply directly to the extraction companies.

4.3. Perception of the Mining Work Performed by Indigenous Workers

Indigenous workers are generally relegated to low-level positions that do not require special qualifications. Some interlocutors told that the few qualified Indigenous workers (who had experience in other mines outside the region) had been forced to abandon underground work: Balancing family, community life, and work proved to demand with the numerous overtime shifts (which exceeded the expected two weeks per month). The information relayed by the informants aligns perfectly with research carried out by other scholars on the conditions experienced by Aboriginal workers employed in the mines of the Northwest Territories (Hunter, Gray 2006; Hughes, Hughes 2010; Hultin, Åkerman-Börje 2014; Major, Kovács 2017; Caron *et al.* 2019; 2020). These studies highlight how multinational companies expect homogeneous behaviour among Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers as regards punctuality and work efficiency, as well as maximum compliance with safety conditions in the mine. The scholars' findings highlight how the employers expect an initially lower performance from a newly-hired Indigenous person in the extraction industry than they do from a non-Indigenous new hire. They believe that the Aboriginal worker requires more time to learn how to carry out a task and to adapt to a productive rationale. For this reason, many managers affirm a kind of natural selection favouring Indigenous workers who are more willing to adapt to the pace of the industry

(Caron *et al.* 2020). Those who find themselves unsuitable for this work, therefore, tend to resign of their own volition. Below is part of an interview carried out by Caron *et al.* (2019) on this subject:

> There is a proportion of Indigenous employees who are very reliable, and very punctual. [...] But there is still a group of employees who come for only a year, they are absent a lot, we have to dismiss them for absenteeism, they come back a year later. So, our expectations have not been perfectly satisfied, but we are aware that we must contribute to change this culture of work (Caron *et al.* 2019: 110).

Managers point to Indigenous employees' low education levels, which may also cause difficulties in quick learning during training (Major, Kovács 2017). Increasing Indigenous education would therefore shorten the time it takes for Aboriginal employees to begin mining work and adapt to it, end their reliance on welfare programmes, and allow them to become architects of their own future progress (Hunter, Gray 2006).

Existing research that examines the perspectives of multinational company employees reveals how managers are pressured to hire Indigenous people, primarily to gain access to natural resources on Aboriginal territory (Maru, Davies 2011; Coulthard 2014). In other words, by hiring Indigenous workers, multinational companies would increase Aboriginal communities' willingness to expand across their land (Hall 2013).

According to the interlocutors, when a multinational company hires Indigenous workers, the former is always aided by a number of Indigenous mediators, usually chiefs, who disseminate the recruitment notices to their communities on behalf of the companies. In addition to informing management about potential Aboriginal workers to hire from his community, the Indigenous mediator assists Indigenous employees with their integration into the mine. Moreover, if an Indigenous worker has a dispute with their superior, the Indigenous mediator will intervene to help resolve the situation.

According to some scholarly research, many directors believe that training Aboriginal workers should be the government's prerogative, especially where employees are from communities that have not signed an IBA with the multinational company (Caron *et al.* 2019; 2020; Hall 2015). Nevertheless, the managers would agree to hold training, co-funded by the state, that would also reach individuals from Indigenous groups who have not signed agreements. The interlocutors informed me that in very rare cases the managers organise personalised courses to boost the careers of Indigenous employees who best integrate into the mining work environment. In some cases, several course sessions are held near the worker's community of origin. For workers from communities that have signed agreements with the company, the courses may even be held in the Indigenous language (Caron *et al.* 2020). Nonetheless, Indigenous people place little value on career advancement, especially if it results in giving up community and family life, which they consider far more important (Haley, Fisher 2014). From the company's perspective, this greatly complicates integration into the work environment, especially in the first six to twelve months after employment (Dockery, Milson 2007). Therefore, retaining Aboriginal employees and ensuring they adapt to the pace of work in the extraction industry represents one of the major challenges faced by mining companies. To meet the needs of Indigenous employees, companies have recourse to a pool of on-call workers who can fill in for last-minute absences owing to, for example, funerals of loved ones or other urgent family matters (Caron *et al.* 2019). In recent years, multinational companies have started to increase bonuses and promotions to encourage the retention of Indigenous employees, although these methods appear to be completely ineffective (Waxin *et al.* 2018). Various surveys of Indigenous diamond mine workers in the Northwest Territories have shown that the biggest factor in keeping them in the job would be lower taxes during the time of their employment in mining[7].

7. A reproduction from the NWT Archives, Ref. Mining.

The managers also report difficulties in recruiting Aboriginal staff. To present new job opportunities in mining, directors may have to visit communities scattered across the region several times. On such occasions, it may be the case that the company staff is unable to find any interested candidates to hire (Hultin, Åkerman-Börje 2014; Caron *et al.* 2019).

Interlocutors also informed that multinational mining companies hold quarterly job fairs in Yellowknife. During these, they sign new collaborative programmes with the Indigenous communities and specific local Aboriginal associations (such as those in charge of environmental monitoring). During these job fairs, the directors hold interviews for hiring both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, mostly from the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon. Job fairs are also promoted within the capital's schools of the Northwest Territories, where senior students are invited to job interviews to work in the mine (Caron *et al.* 2020). In addition, once a year the multinational companies invite a few elementary and middle school classes to visit the mining village as part of a three-day outing (Major, Kovács 2017). Caron *et al.* (2019) explain the attitude of the Indigenous people during the job interview. The authors assert that they use to not talk about their skills.

Traditionally, many Indigenous Canadian and North American cultures emphasise humility and discourage self-promotion (Haley, Fisher 2014). Indigenous people are therefore more comfortable speaking about their interests rather than what they are capable of doing (Waxin *et al.* 2018).

For managers, social networks are an effective way of reaching Indigenous people. This is especially the case with young Indigenous women who, being generally more introverted than the young men, can use social networks to view job notices in private. When interested in a position, these young women do not respond by sending an online message, but rather delegate a male family member to call or visit the company offices in person (Caron *et al.* 2020).

Once hired by the extraction companies, the new workers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous, male and female) are taken on a

tour of the mining village by a few engineers, so that they can familiarise themselves with the work environment. Once their visit to the village is complete, they begin a technical training course on the work they are to undertake (Hunter, Gray 2006).

Indigenous people are also provided with ad hoc training to help them integrate into the job. The first part of this training is often carried out by chiefs of the future workers' communities, who operate as mediators between the Indigenous people and the mining company. At the end of the course, the workers are entrusted to a non-Indigenous overseer who sees through their social integration process (Major, Kovács 2017). From their training until they start work in the mine, Indigenous workers are constantly monitored by a mentor (normally an experienced worker) who supervises the new employees as they perform their tasks. The more experienced employee not only teaches the new hires techniques for performing the job, but they also have the critical role of building and maintaining good relationships between the employees and management (Caron *et al.* 2019). Such a practice has been mentioned in much research on various mining projects, showing how an experienced worker acting as a point of contact for new employees is also intended to create an optimal working environment in situations where people from different cultural backgrounds cross paths (Hunter, Gray 2006; Hultin, Åkerman-Börje 2014). However, it has also been mentioned that these mentors ought to be sensitive to Indigenous people's needs and have a minimum awareness of Indigenous lifestyles (Hultin, Åkerman-Börje 2014). Nevertheless, other studies have revealed that an overly paternalistic approach by the experienced mentor discourages Indigenous employees from opening up in the work setting, as they are wary and fearful of possible psychological retaliation from a worker they perceive as superior (Parmenter, Trigger 2018).

Management believes that even interactions between employees should be based on positive partnerships. Some scholars have argued that the more Indigenous workers hired, the better the working atmosphere in the mine (Caron *et al.* 2019). Despite

more relaxed working relationships, many non-Indigenous workers complain to their managers about numerous cases of absenteeism on the part of their Indigenous colleagues, for the reasons mentioned previously (Hall 2013). On the other hand, informal informants told that directors disapprove of Indigenous employees making complaints regarding forms of racism experienced in the workplace (mostly in the form of loaded verbal slurs) rising, for example, the voice.

However, the views of employers as presented in various studies seem to completely fail to grasp the discomfort experienced by Indigenous employees as expressed in the conversations. Many research shows the managers generally extolling the positive working atmosphere created by the interculturality of the workers and the satisfaction felt by Indigenous workers in earning their own income and being financially independent (Hultin, Åkerman-Börje 2014; Major, Kovács 2017). Moreover, employers believe that the diligence shown by some Aboriginal employees in the workplace is a testament to their full integration. However, directors maintain that more work needs to be done on those employees who continue to show too much attachment to their community of origin (Hunter, Gray 2006). It is with this in mind that employers are urging the regional government to fund more training programs within Indigenous communities, as a way of incentivising Indigenous people to enter the workforce (Hall 2013). Furthermore, some directors believe that the training courses should encompass the extraction industry more generally, also presenting job opportunities in the fields of gas and petroleum. Such training would support transitions from one industry to another, without leading to resignations or unemployment (Caron *et al.* 2019). Although managers, on the whole, view Indigenous employees' work positively, studies show that there are only a few cases of Indigenous workers standing out as success stories (Hultin, Åkerman-Börje 2014).

For a more multi-faceted description, it is worth accompanying these accounts with the perspectives of other workers. A non-Indigenous geologist relayed to me the following:

That darkness and solitude that many of my fellow geologists describe… it's true! In the Diavik mine, I even saw, 600 metres below ground, the mechanics adjusting the machinery, the trucks, to transport the extracted material to the surface. I mean these guys here fix the brakes, and change the tyres. One tyre cost $ 30,000. They were, if you can believe it, 600 m below ground, where it's a constant temperature, when it could reach – 50°C outside in winter, and they were saying: 'It's nice in here!' It was almost a familiar environment for them. I mean, you're 600 m below ground with these trucks with gigantic wheels, and they are adjusting, destroying, smashing, and organising. The mine partly depends on such people […]. When the mines were opened, the Indigenous people were pleased that something was starting to happen there. But, you know, with such a rapid change where these diamond mines appear out of nowhere in 20 years… you'd need psychologists for that. They [*the diamond companies*] defend themselves like this: 'We have taken this away from you, but we're also giving you a lot'. So, compared to Africa, where they take and give basically nothing, maybe even Brazil… I don't know the situation in Siberia… maybe Siberia is a bit more controlled because you can't escape from Russia. What they've done in Canada is definitely more ethical compared to the rest of the world. You should see what happened in Australia, even if it is, I think, a place similar to Canada. They say they will be watching out for everything to go back to the way it was in the Northwest Territories. We'll need to see if it really will. Because they're digging another mine nearby, so when will this end? When will everything go back to normal there? Anyway, the GIA [Geology Institute of America] is telling me that there had already been a collapse in diamond prices, and then Covid… these are precarious times for them too […] The directors of the multinational companies told me that one downside which they were unable to resolve was to do with the locals, the Indigenous miners who, in the 15 days when they return home, are wrecked. So, they spend 15 days in the mine when they have to keep on the straight and narrow, and this is the only bit they've been unable to resolve. During the 15 days when you're there, you're on a regimen, you can't

> drink alcohol. This shows consideration for your performance in the mine. However, in the 15 days when the Indigenous miners are back home, they wreck themselves with alcohol (F. geologist).

This testimony is of interest in that it provides an interpretation of the mining environment not only from a geologist's perspective but most importantly from that of a non-Indigenous person employed in the mine, revealing one way in which he perceives the Indigenous workers. It is worth noting how, according to the above testimony, those who consume alcohol appear to be mostly Indigenous miners who, when monitored by the company regimen, manage to distance themselves from alcohol abuse, but as soon as they leave the site it appears they can no longer be prevented from adopting behaviours deemed deplorable. In actual fact, a large body of literature indicates that excessive alcohol consumption is a cross-cultural habit common among miners in general (Armano 2018; Zanini 2016; Viazzo 2016). Some have even used these assumptions as a basis for trying to outline a kind of psychological profile of mining culture (Armano 2018). Because of the nature of their work, miners often find themselves excluded from the security systems that other work settings may provide and guarantee:

> Normality is a source of security and is linked to an entire network of safeguards (legal work, family, status) which provides psychological stability (Sanga 1989: 4).

The miners, on the other hand, find themselves in a position of existential precariousness. This is true both physically, in that they run the risk of accidents, occupational illness, and death, and socio-culturally, as historically they have often been rejected by communities not engaged in extraction operations. Such a rejection may take the form of linguistic, cultural, and marital barriers. In the case of the mines in the Northwest Territories, this may also be due to the formation of sub-groups within the community of mining

workers, in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers stand out and are seen as adopting more or less unacceptable behaviours, especially by those who hold a vision similar to that of the company. Some researchers (e.g., Armano 2018) have highlighted that the miner undergoing such a precarious and existentially high-risk regime, far from being psychologically damaged, views their status positively. Insecurity translates into stimulation, professional pride, and passion for the job. However, one Indigenous former miner who worked in the Ekati mine, after becoming a diamond valuer, admitted that he felt like a really hard worker. He admitted that he didn't feel like he was given the full opportunities. Another Indigenous miner, during the interview with the indigenous team, stated that he gradually grew to enjoy working in the mine. He stated that the perception was as if a man gets tied up in it like it's something that comes from within. In many cases, miners seem to experience mining work as a constant source of novelty as declared by another former miner. This latter affirmed he liked to work inside the mine. He explained that when a miner is in the underground and the material needs knocking down, the 12 hours of work goes by fast.

Although this is the only example of an Indigenous miner integrating apparently seamlessly into the mining rationale, it raises interesting issues that may also apply to other geographically and culturally distant mining settings. The argument could be made that, despite the workplace risks, miners find themselves unable to cease mining, partly because they enjoy showing off their skills to their peers and overcoming the risks involved. This is reflected in their lifestyle, which renounces a whole host of financial safeguards. This element has also been documented in other studies (Armano 2018; D'Angelo 2019). With this in mind, I would like to share some findings from my previous research conducted among Alpine miners. A former miner who worked in a mine in Trentino Alto Adige told me:

> I remember, when there were two bars here, we would get plastered, sometimes even on Sunday. One bar would close at eleven and so

> after we'd head to another one in the car. I left with my mining pay in my pocket and returned on Wednesday skint. It was the life I lived there.
> *That is, you earned and you spent?*
> Yes, because wine did nothing to me, I could drink seven or eight litres of it a day when I was young, and it did nothing to me. I was just a little happier than usual and that was it. I remember spending my mining pay in three, four days. They were nice paycheques, too.

This testimony shows the overturning of 'normal' values. Their anxiety, caused by an awareness of physical uncertainty rather than financial insecurity (mining has always paid more than many other occupations)[8], is also evident from the rejection of safety nets, centred around a sense of stability. Such safety nets are bound up with repetitive regimens and come at a price: freedom. In essence, being static, or at least imagining we are static and living as little as possible, reassures us. Doing so drives away anxiety, fear, and the unknown (Armano 2018). The overturning of socially recognised values is linked to transgressive behaviours. The same miners often convey a kind of cultural attitude that rejects the accumulation of finances.

This appears to be shared across the professional mining community in various parts of the world (D'Angelo 2019). Against this background, alcohol consumption takes on particular significance, giving rise to interesting anthropological interpretations. The Indigenous miner, thanks to the nature of their work, can afford to squander their salary, as was also the case for miners working in the Alps. This attitude, however, must be interpreted in the context of a subsistence economy, as is the case in traditional Indigenous societies and was the case in traditional mountain societies. Even where agricultural production is minimal, the concept of purchasing food is culturally alien in such cases:

8. This is also evident from ancient European mining by-laws.

> You feed yourself [...] on what you have grown yourself. Wage-earners, on the other hand, buy their food with money. The financial and psychological novelty of a salary that allows for an (albeit small) amount of purchasing power in subsistence economies can help us understand an entire attitude of economic retaliation: those who have found themselves marginalised [...] and have been obliged to work as wage earners are determined to put their new economic weight on the scales of social relations. They have become people who can spend (Pianta 1976: 86).

Such spending is coupled with superfluous behaviour that is considered socially reprehensible such as alcohol consumption and frequenting bars. The often-excessive consumption of wine (or other alcoholic beverages) by miners, as part of habits resembling the type of exuberance typical of public holidays, gives us pause to consider the economic aspect (Armano 2018). Wine is associated with after-work hours, a time for freedom that offers an alternative to daily life and work shifts. The geologist cited above explored this in his discussion on the company regimen in the Northwest Territories mining village. Alcohol abuse among miners could also be interpreted as a way of displaying physical endurance and proving your courage to yourself and fellow miners, as well as providing an opportunity for a social gathering (Pianta 1976).

4.4. Perception of the Mining Work Performed by Female Indigenous Workers

Work performed by women in the Northwest Territories diamond mines is protected by specific regulations that fall under the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission – Code of Practice* (WSCC-CP). According to subsection 18(3) of this regional occupational safety act, employers and employees must follow the provisions set out in the WSCC-CP unless there is an alternative course of

action, applied on an ad hoc basis, capable of making greater improvements in worker health and safety (Hall 2013). WSCC-CP provides a list categorising forms of workplace harassment. This includes unwelcome behaviour and comments that undermine a person because of their religion, cultural affiliation, skin colour, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, familial status, disability, age, or nationality. Harassment broadly includes any action that poses a threat to a worker's health and safety. The WSCC-CP also specifies that particular forms of sexual harassment include disagreeable and unwelcome offensive sexual comments, gestures, or contact. Sexual harassment, according to the code, includes direct or implied threats of retaliation for refusing to comply with a request of a sexual nature, viewing pornographic material in the workplace, direct or indirect sexual invitations or requests, and refusal to work with colleagues due to discrimination based on sexual orientation (Goldenberg 2010).

Supervisors must be trained to spot any abuse taking place in a mining setting early and must carefully follow the regulations set forth by the WSCC-CP and the Constitution of Canada on this issue. Supervisors, therefore, have a critical role in preventing certain violent acts. The WSCC-CP also contains a list of signs of harassment that the supervisor must pay attention to. These include absenteeism from work, decreased motivation, lower job performance, and higher staff turnover (Hakim 2004). To adapt to circumstances, the WSCC-CP also includes a protocol that the supervisor must follow upon noticing the above-mentioned signs. First and foremost, they should speak privately with the individual concerned to find out if they have been subjected to unwelcome behaviour by colleagues.

They must also make the victim aware of the course of action to be taken should misconduct take place or be repeated against them. The employer must then outline policy and legal avenues which are capable of protecting the victim, report the abuse to upper management, as well as hold sessions from time to time to raise the workers' awareness of these issues.

In spite of the codes of conduct set out in the WSCC-CP, women employed in mining in the NWT face a number of challenges, chief among them sexual abuse (Badenhorst 2009). Women employed in the extraction industry often find themselves working side by side with men. Studies have highlighted how the proximity between men and women in mining settings fosters moments of isolation in which sexual abuse and other types of physical and psychological harassment can occur (Hall 2013; O'Hare, O'Donohue 1998). According to some research, these abuses are coupled with difficulty in integrating into the workplace. In these instances, male colleagues normally refuse to provide the support which new female workers require to integrate into the work team (Caron *et al.* 2020; Hakim 2004).

Gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment undoubtedly affect the psychological well-being of female workers, leading to stress-related responses such as emotional trauma, anxiety, depression, anger, and low self-esteem (Hall 2013). Workplace stress also has repercussions on physical health, leading to sleep-related illnesses, stomach issues, and ulcers[9]. In light of this, we may conclude that, while mining companies are obliged to comply with corporate social responsibility goals by hiring individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, such individuals, especially Indigenous women, are exposed to physical and psychological risks (O'Hare, O'Donohue 1998; Hakim 2004).

In the case at hand, most of the Indigenous women informally interviewed were hired on a temporary basis as sorters, cafeteria staff, and cleaners, while others were hired by diamond polishing and cutting companies. The sorters worked 12-hour shifts and were subject to the regime set out by the FIFO model. This meant they were away from home for two weeks a month (Hall 2015).

Some scholars describe the countless difficulties some female indigenous workers experienced in the workplace once hired by

9. http://www.miningsafety.co.za/dynamiccontent/124/Are-we-doing-enough-for-the-safety-of-female-miners.

multinational mining companies (Hall 2015). Furthermore, they have noticed that most women used to avoid discussing their working life openly and informally. Only a few broached the subject, albeit with extreme embarrassment (Hall 2013). In an attempt to fill in the missing information that I could not obtain through the interviews, I analysed many articles from local newspapers which very often reported cases of Indigenous women, employed in the mining industry in various regions of northern Canada, being mistreated and sometimes even sexually abused in the workplace[10]. These articles also reported that most female Indigenous workers in the extraction industry would rather resign than report mistreatment by miners and other mine workers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) (Hall 2013). Some of these articles also revealed that the women do not know their harassers and tend not to report the abuse to their employer, either due to fear, embarrassment, or not knowing to whom they might turn[11].

The information found in local newspaper articles, combined with the telling silences of the majority of the women met in the research field, is in line with the findings of a number of scholars (Hall 2013; O'Hare, O'Donohue 1998; Hakim 2004). There has been some research indicating that sexual harassment seems to go underreported precisely because women avoid talking about it (Pons, Deale 2010). Studies have also revealed that employees, both male, and female, are often unaware of the proper processes for reporting these issues (Grobler *et al.* 2011). In these works women, in particular, do not report violence because they believe that the offenders will not be adequately punished (Anderson, Taylor 2006). Grobler *et al.* (2011) cite the main reasons for which workplace harassment is underreported. Firstly, there is the fear of losing the job, followed by potentially being viewed as a troublemaker. There is also a widespread assumption that reporting

10. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-mines-indigenous-women-1.6128059.

11. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuit-women-mining-pauktuutit-1.5980179.

harassment would not change anything. These factors are exacerbated by apprehension about being accused of causing the harassment, reluctance to draw public attention to private matters, and the prospect of causing significant emotional stress in lengthy and costly legal proceedings.

The consequences of sexual harassment can therefore be emotional and financial as well as physical. Sexual harassment can create a hostile work environment and thereby affect productivity. Workers who have been sexually harassed may experience feelings of fear and powerlessness (Anderson, Taylor 2006).

The current literature investigating such issues in the mining industry provides the same definition of sexual harassment as the WSCC-CP. Studies which have been published therefore agree that this type of harassment encompasses unwanted physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct (Pons, Deale 2010; O'Hare, O'Donohue 1998). Physical abuse of a sexual nature refers to all unwanted physical contact, such as brushing against, touching, or forcibly fondling a person (Grobler, *et al.* 2011) as well as sexual violence and rape (Pons, Deale 2010). Verbal abuse which falls under sexual harassment includes unwelcome innuendos, comments with sexual overtones (Pons, Deale 2010), sexual anecdotes or jokes, catcalling, and repeated invitations to go out (Grobler *et al.* 2011; O'Hare, O'Donohue 1998). Sexual harassment can be viewed as an abuse of power whereby perpetrators use their position to exploit subordinates (Hall 2013). While these abuses may occur in any work environment, they are more common within certain work settings such as mining (Coulthard 2007). Although both men and women can be victims of sexual harassment, research suggests that women are more likely to experience sexual harassment than men (Wharton 2006; Hall 2013). According to Anderson and Taylor (2006), approximately half of all female workers employed in a work environment with a disproportionately male to female ratio experience some form of sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime.

There are several theories as to why sexual harassment might take place in the workplace. The most common are socio-cultural

theories of a predominantly feminist leaning that investigate the social and political contexts in which this type of harassment occurs (Dockery, Milson 2007). In this research, scholars postulate that sexual violence reflects the differential distribution of power and status between the sexes in society at large. Sexual harassment is therefore seen as a means of maintaining male dominance over women within the economy and particularly within the workplace (Tangri *et al.* 1982). According to the sociocultural theory, men and women are socialised in such a way as to preserve this framework of domination and subordination (O'Hare, O'Donohue 1998). This theory maintains that men are socialised to be more aggressive and women to be passive and sexually attractive (Tangri *et al.* 1982). This argument also relates to the organisational theory that sexual harassment occurs in the workplace due to power differences created by hierarchical organisational structures (O'Hare, O'Donohue 1998; Hall 2013). Some scholars believe that superiors often use their power to intimidate and control their subordinates for their own sexual gratification (Tangri *et al.* 1982). The organisational theory therefore sheds light on aspects of business that foster sexual harassment. However, this perspective gives little consideration to individual variations in the victim's behavioural responses (Anderson, Taylor 2006).

In general, the literature shows that Indigenous women can admit to having experienced some form of harassment (Hall 2015). In some research, women can express that their male colleagues saw them as sexual objects. They are also described as the targets of vulgar jokes and threats. All of them sensed the men's desire to maintain dominance over them. Some female workers, whose testimonies are collected in some studies, stated that the aggression was mostly carried out by miners, whereas other professionals (such as geologists, engineers, or managers of the multinational companies) maintained a cold detachment from them (Anderson, Taylor 2006).

According to the existing literature, it would be important to question if the indigenous women employed in the mining com-

pany are aware of the provisions set out in the WSCC-CP and of the safeguards they should have recourse to in the face of acts of violence was of crucial importance. It would also be important to suggest the scheduling of workshops organised to raise awareness of the WSCC-CP, and the option to appeal to it should the need arise. Furthermore, it would be fundamental that these documents should be available for every mining employee. All these aspects also highlight that although company policy exists to coordinate and regulate particular aspects of labour relations, there is often a discrepancy between theory and practice.

Although physical and psychological harassment is the most common workplace concern for Indigenous women, the subject of job performance safety was also raised by some research (Schlosser 2018). Since the opening of the diamond mines in the Canadian region, mining companies have paid close attention to implementing policies that ensure the safety of the miners (Badenhorst 2009). All workers, in fact, are provided with equipment including overalls, gloves, safety shoes, hard hats, goggles, and ear defenders (Appel 2012).

Scholars show also that women often claim they were not physically strong enough to perform certain tasks, particularly operating the sorting machinery. Some women report, in these studies, that the strong vibrations from operating certain equipment would tend to affect their menstrual cycles (Anderson, Taylor 2006). Furthermore, such machinery should not be used by pregnant women, as this could increase the chances of miscarriage. Another documented cause for concern for many workers is the dust produced in the mine. In general, miners are aware of how dust affects the lungs, eyes, and ears, as well as skin rashes (Armano 2018).

Some informal interlocutors also informed me that a very common physical problem in extremely cold environments, such as the diamond mines in the Northwest Territories, is the so-called 'white hand.' In essence, this is a kind of freezing of the extremities of the limbs due to very low temperatures.

Considerations for Future Studies

Fieldwork in socio-cultural anthropology is often surrounded by an aura of mystery, a sense of the mythical most likely established during subject experts' first ventures into the field (Ligi 2016). Such mystique is at least partly the result of much of the research's geographical distance and exoticism. This ethnographic work, typically undertaken by a lone anthropologist through full immersion in a setting culturally different from their own, is more often than not an extraordinary experience that stands out against the knowledge-building methods used in other human sciences. In every respect, it poses an intense cognitive and emotive challenge, an all-consuming personal investment that frequently ends up shaping the researcher's own personality. During their fieldwork, many anthropologists not only feel strong empathy for the people they meet but often find themselves developing a sense of personal responsibility for both the physical and psychological well-being of their interlocutors. This experience, now an integral part of the discipline, is primarily the result of the intersubjectivity of ethnographic research, whereby researchers may be subjected to pressures and challenging relationships with those they encounter and must reconcile the subjects' rationale with the aims of their research.

Such challenges (which are part and parcel of the anthropologist's work) give us pause to consider the consequences that the scholar's actions will have on the interlocutors. While there is no rigid code of ethical behaviour that anthropologists must follow

during fieldwork (something which, in my view, would be difficult given the uniqueness of each ethnographic study), I believe that constantly reflecting on the researcher's actions can be a means to improving anthropological practice, increasing efficiency in professional conduct, respecting the rights and sensibilities of informants, and at the same time perhaps increasing the benefits for those with whom the researcher interacts.

This monograph is the first step towards broader multi-sited ethnography which aims to analyse more fully, and within the same conceptual frame, highly diverse and geographically distant socio-cultural, economic, and political worlds. Understanding how to handle the concept of globalisation and conducting ethnographic research in a global context are certainly not new issues in anthropology (Ong, Collier 2005). The concept of globalisation is present in anthropological studies, especially to explain the local effects of strategic economic, political, and social decisions occurring at the international level and the mixed responses they invoke, including local practices of resistance to global powers (Burawoy 2000; Comaroff, Comaroff 2001). Considering Anthony Gidden's claim (1994) that global practices have the distinct ability to decontextualise and recontextualise themselves in different cultural settings, we can now look to the experimental intellectual landscape embarked upon by a number of anthropologists in recent years (Strathern 1999; Rabinow 2003; Law 2004; Holbraad, Pedersen 2017; Holmes, Marcus 2008). Their new windows of research (inspired by Giddens' claim) are an indication of the ethnographic problems that need resolving. The field's challenges have resulted in some intriguing opportunities, such as overcoming traditional anthropological dichotomies between, for example, nature and culture, and the human and non-human, whereby non-human and non-living forms are seen as an essential components capable of mobilising human practices and behaviours. The next step in this research would be to conduct a more in-depth examination of the cultural interpretations of the concept of the ethical Canadian diamond in the context of global interconnectedness. Such a theo-

retical slant will undoubtedly require personalised analytical tools to comprehend the role played by human actors who are linked to objects (such as the diamond) and who are bound up with narratives about ethics and sustainability. These actors also mobilise commercial and governmental practices, as well as various forms of consumerism, all of which interact in a complex tapestry.

Building on this monograph's conceptual thread, future research should explore how social practices are centred around the Canadian diamond. The latter is known to provoke global discourse on the climate emergency and on which behavioural practices are deemed culturally ethical. There has been in-depth research on ethical luxury consumption, particularly on ethical jewellery (i.e. Moraes *et al.* 2017; Amarilla *et al.* 2020; Cappellieri *et al.* 2020). However, it has typically focussed on just one social context. Therefore, the next monograph which is based on the research herein will focus on the link between extraction and sales environments, which make up the start and end points of the supply chain.

Two major trajectories emerged during the research carried out in jewellers in Italy and the Yellowknife socio-cultural environment. Regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds, the majority of those interviewed in the overall research used these lines of thought to structure their concept of ethics and sustainability concerning Canadian diamonds. According to one such trajectory, many people associate the particular relationship established between multinational mining companies and Indigenous communities with ideas of ethics and sustainability. According to the other, ethics and sustainability are linked to a special emphasis on safety protocols aimed at workers in Canadian mines. Of course, the interpretations contained within these two trajectories are not concordant: As has been demonstrated in this monograph, some of the informants, especially those who are Indigenous, view concepts of ethics and sustainability through a variety of subjective lenses (familial, economic, and cultural). Elders of Indigenous communities provide another explanation of these concepts, re-

lating them to their cosmogony and interpreting the influx of the multinational diamond companies on their territory as further destruction of traditional (economic and ceremonial) Indigenous practices.

In the table below I have provided a summary of the main topics that arose during interviews, with the interlocutors categorised by their socio-cultural group.

The ideographic map below summarises the perspectives of all interviewees on the concepts of ethics and sustainability in relation to Canadian diamonds and diamond mining in the Northwest Territories.

The different cultural interpretations of the Canadian diamond also evoke images of a particular landscape. As summarised by Umberto Eco (2013), there are invented places, such as the Bas-

Table 2. *Interpretations of the concepts of ethics and sustainability which arose during interviews.*

Informants	Ethics	Sustainability	Negative Aspects
Geologists	Before entering the mine, workers must put on protective gear. New employees, as well as visitors invited by companies, are provided with brief training and made to take a test. Workers are well-paid, working 12-hour shifts a day and being away from home for two consecutive weeks a month. During these two weeks, they must follow a strict regimen and alcohol is prohibited.	The impact of mining on the environment is constantly monitored, especially on the Lac de Gras lake. Attention is paid to caribou routes.	Development of job opportunities in the region especially for Native people thanks to special training.
Professional miners	Being ethical means treating the workers fairly. Although their work is hard, they benefit from career progression and are well-paid.	Multinational mining companies monitor the environmental impacts.	

Informants	Ethics	Sustainability	Negative Aspects
Indigenous miners	Being ethical means treating the workers fairly and giving job opportunities to northerners. The number of Indigenous people who can work in mining is established when multinational corporations and Indigenous communities enter into Impact of Benefit Agreements (IBAs). For Indigenous people, the mine represents the only source of monetary income. In hindsight, the mines being the only source of employment for Indigenous people is something that should be avoided.	Multinational mining companies try to stay alert to the environmental impact, even though regulating pollution levels is the government's prerogative. Nevertheless, an environmental impact has been identified (in the decline in caribou numbers, for example) and this is undoubtedly due to the mines.	Many people prosper thanks to mining. However, due to the earnings from extraction work, many Indigenous miners drink and take drugs. There have even been deaths.
Elders	Being ethical is encapsulated by the concept of Vital Energy (Andrews 2004) which drives all that exists in community life (language, ceremonies, and traditional subsistence practices). To protect Indigenous culture, external impacts need to be filtered out so that younger generations can enjoy their traditional practices as well as the knowledge which has been passed down for centuries, just as previous generations did before them. It is important to uphold the tradition which allows them to remember whom they are through the telling of ancestral stories, relaying the particular acts their ancestors performed in certain parts of the territory.	The land is life. People do not control the land; the land controls people and their actions (Zoe 2010). The land is steeped in cultural significance and is defined as a blanket woven from strands of stories centuries old. It is, therefore, necessary to restore what was there before they came into contact with the colonisers, when there was mutual respect between animals and humans. The government failed in environmental sustainability because it wanted to legally eliminate Indigenous people from land management. This also meant that the importance of traditional knowledge was not recognised, thus paving the way for mineral exploration.	They do not consider mining to be ethical because it leads young people to show off their money, become greedy, drink, and take drugs. The opening of mines is perceived as a form of land theft and therefore contrary to Indigenous culture. Mining has resulted in environmental degradation and altered the migrations of some animal species such as caribou.

Informants	Ethics	Sustainability	Negative Aspects
Wives of Indigenous miners	Greater economic well-being.		Disruption of traditional family equilibriums with repercussions for children's upbringing.
Jewellers	An ethical diamond is something that is not soaked in the blood of those stuck under mines that have collapsed. An ethical diamond is one whose workers have performed quality work, have been paid fairly, and have not been exploited. All of this is what constitutes the ethics of an object. This is ethics for living and for people. Whenever we only ascribe value to money, people suffer and die, and we all lose out. People must come first and money second. If it works, the money will come on its own.	The Earth is one. European, American, Russian, and Chinese policies have great responsibilities. And then there are the forgotten countries which we must reconsider. The economy should not be a kind of robbery, where some countries are exploited and the environment is damaged.	
Italian customers	Being ethical means respecting all the people who work in the supply chain that brings the jewellery to the customer. Mining workers must not experience exploitation and must be well paid. Ethical diamonds are a just compromise between blood diamonds and synthetic diamonds.	It would be better not to dig up the earth at all, but ethical Canadian mines, compared to African mines which are the home of blood diamonds, seek to respect the environment as much as possible through the implementation of environmental protocols.	

tiani fortress in *The Tartar Steppe*, fictional places inspired by real locations, and pretend places that can be identified with real places. There are vanished lands that nevertheless may have existed in ancient times, such as the Antarctic. There are legendary lands

Table 3. *How informants involved in the research view ethics and sustainability.*

Informants	Concepts
Elders	Ethics as Vital Energy: everything that shapes life. Sustainability is stewardship of the land, not ownership.
Wives of miners	Bittersweet ethics and sustainability: greater economic income but family disintegration and abandonment of traditional practices.
Indigenous miners	Bittersweet ethics and sustainability: company ethics for single miners, but not for those with families. They must also decide between continuing to maintain traditional practices or working in the mine.
Company workers	Ethics as job security. Sustainability as environmental monitoring.
Italian consumers	Everyday ethical paternalism: wealthy people showing responsibility towards socio-occupational groups perceived to be in difficulty by making the right purchases.
Italian jewellers	Aesthetic justice: standing out from the competition by selling ethical jewellery.

whose existence is doubtful and others that are undeniably the stuff of fiction, such as the Shangri-La described in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, of which tourist imitations abound (Ligi 2016). Eco also reminds us that there are lands whose existence is only attested by Biblical sources, such as the earthly paradise or the land of the Queen of Sheba, and that many people have discovered true lands by believing in them.

Which category do the Barren Lands and the landscape of the Northwest Territories, where the diamond mines are located, belong to? If we follow Schlosser's logic (2013), Canada's northern landscape could fall under the following three categories: An environment seen as a living being that requires conservation, a territory shaped by economic interests, or a landscape celebrated as a space untouched by human endeavour. In agreement with Schlosser, Danita Burke (2018) notes that while the first category

is certainly typical of Indigenous peoples, the last two are peculiar to governments, the corporate world, and global consumers, for whom a northern landscape is seen respectively as something to be managed politically and exploited economically, or to be admired visually. While this monograph has analysed the different relationships that Indigenous communities, the government, and multinational companies have with the land, a later volume should address how consumers of Canadian diamonds view the landscape. We may, however, use this opportunity to outline some notions of the Canadian landscape held by the consumers interviewed. When discussing the diamonds extracted in Canada, they automatically think of the landscape as a panorama, a piece of nature framed in a certain perspective, a scene admired from a belvedere. In short, a kind of aesthetic, pictorial Renaissance conception of landscape.

This way of viewing landscape proved to be very different from that of, for example, the geologists interviewed. Freeing the landscape from its 'view' connotations, the latter constructs a coherent synthesis of potential vistas. This more complex notion of landscape lies at the heart of expressions such as 'northern landscape', 'arctic landscape', and so on. These expressions do not refer to an image of the world as it appears from a specific, physical point of view (such as a peak or a hillock). Rather, they refer to a coherent sequence of potential images, each connected, each differing slightly, and each demonstrating the same basic elements, bound together in constant and quintessential coordination. This is how we might think of the broad concept of geographic landscape. Of course, the first and the second way of understanding landscape (of consumers and geologists respectively) are not entirely different and appear to be interdependent. From an anthropological point of view, it is important to underline the fact that these two conceptions of landscape both allude to the environment's visible manifestations. That is a set of natural elements arranged in specific relationships of space, size, location, and morphology in a given location. However, as each of us knows, the concept of

the landscape must be expanded to include the entire range of *tangible* (not just *visible*) factors that characterise it, give it its landscape connotations, and even make it unique and unforgettable. For example, sounds: The rushing of running water, the rustling of foliage, the sound of traffic on the road, and so on. Hot, cold, tactile, and meteorological (wind, humidity, etc.) sensations, and, of course, smells, such as the scent of resin in the pine trees or the smell of undergrowth in the tundra, are part of the landscape.

However, many invisible or unnoticeable phenomena nevertheless contribute to a landscape's visible qualities, such as the effects of the climate on the layer of vegetation, or the hydrography on the types of soil. Even more important are the invisible socioeconomic phenomena that shape the *visible* aspects of a landscape: Different societal structures usually have a bearing on whether you will find scattered cottages or concentrations of large, compact residential areas. Such factors fall under the third conception of the landscape, used in the social sciences and certain branches of geography. In it, the relationship with a sentient observer (and therefore the emotional impression left by the landscape) is essential, but so is the relationship with a complex set of active determining factors, as well as social, economic, and political practices which directly entail anthropic action in the environment. We must also remember that the landscape is constantly changing and mutating. This changeability can be accidental, temporary, periodic, or seasonal, such as the interchange of natural elements (light, dark, colours, wind strength, etc.) between autumn and winter, which has an effect on the management of caribou herds in the Northwest Territories. The landscape can also be subject to significant changes, or rather has always been the product of the accumulation of significant (medium or long-term) changes across history. Natural landscapes thus technically become humanised landscapes (which by now are the majority) and exhibit countless manifestations of the cultures that inhabit them or that have passed through them: Communication routes, gas pipelines, straightening and embankment of river courses, and so on (Ligi 2002).

In addition to these conceptions of landscape, there is the Indigenous idea of land, consisting of a kind of minimal yet extremely profound syllabary that ties communities to their land. As we have seen, for the Indigenous communities of the region (but also for all Aboriginal Canadian peoples) this has meant building a highly effective Indigenous system for surviving in the extreme northern environment over the course of many centuries. Such a system partly depends on the direct link between spirituality, subsistence, and territory. Despite undergoing profound changes as a result of colonisation operations, to this day the Indigenous people view the land as a polysemic web of spiritual, economic, and political elements which they experience directly as they make long journeys within a certain area of territory.

Having outlined the varying conceptions of landscape, it is clear that how one formulates the idea of landscape depends on research goals and strategies.

In recent decades, Canada has also used policy to strive to bring together the image of an arctic and subarctic landscape with the building of a socio-cultural identity (Heininen *et al.* 2015), summarised in the slogan 'Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future' (Heininen *et al.* 2015: 28). The goal of this identity policy is, above all, to influence residents' perceptions of the north by instilling in them the notion that they are the only ones who can shape their own destiny. This rhetoric can be traced back to specific recent historical events ultimately relating to the transit of ships in the Arctic Ocean, better known as the Northwest Passage, which connects the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. With regards to these specific economic scenarios, the northern Canadian population has been openly urged for decades to support the government in implementing national jurisdiction to approve more stringent rules, particularly to the detriment of Russia, affecting foreign ships that pass through that area of territory (Stokke 2014). Like Canada, Russia owns certain segments of maritime routes in the Arctic Ocean, and both countries insist on implementing their jurisdiction on ships in transit. Faced with this dilemma, the United

States criticises both countries, claiming that the segments of the respective northwest and northeast sea passages cannot possibly be considered internal waters and must instead be considered transit crossings, as per Article 38 of the UNCLOS. The United States would therefore support the idea that a ship in transit should not be required to apply for any crossing permits or follow any national jurisdiction when undertaking sea passages in the Arctic Ocean (Byers 2013).

The Canadian government also requires the northern residents' support on various other issues, including such disparate matters as melting ice in water where the ships are in transit and the Indigenous claims on lands bordering the Arctic Ocean and home to, among other things, oil and gas fields (Burke 2017).

Moreover, despite having been a leading nation during the Kyoto negotiations, Canada withdrew from the international climate change debate in 2011, making it statistically one of the lowest performing countries for environmental protection.

While at the national level the Canadian government is perceived as having little concern for climate measures (Burke 2018) and environmental protection in comparison to its interest in subsidising extractive industries (including heavy fossil fuels, metals, and precious stones), at the international level the Paris Agreement allowed the current administration to show its commitment to ensuring the protection of the arctic ecosystem and to carefully monitoring drilling in the north of the country. From an international perspective, therefore, Canada assumes the role of a diplomatic and responsible actor who promotes the rights of Indigenous minorities and cooperates with them.

It would therefore appear that Canada is currently struggling to balance internal socio-political issues with its international reputation. The latter promotes rhetoric that conceals such conflicts behind specific narratives and particular images of a pristine northern landscape (Burke 2017; 2018; Byers 2013; Hilde 2014).

In the famous essay *Space and the spatial ordering of society* (1998), Georg Simmel states that the image of a given place within spe-

cific boundaries is not comprised of spatial structures with social meaning, but rather social facts formed in the space. This space should not only be understood in a physical sense. Rather, the sense of place can also involve spaces that are imagined and constructed to be presented to a particular audience. Spaces that are understood and delimited in this way also consist of symbolic worlds and specific historical conceptions. A highly significant opportunity for research remains available, as summarised by Michael Foucault (1980):

> A whole history remains to be written of spaces – which would at the same time be the history of powers – from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat (Foucault 1980: 27).

Anthropologically speaking, the idea of landscape construction is therefore centred around the connection between the natural environment and social practices, often characterised as power relationships (Ligi 2016).

All this culminates in the theory that these various cultural, political, economic, scientific, and publicity constructions of the northern landscape demonstrate that the environment has never been objectively conceptualised by a human group but has always existed as a set of potential practices. Places (imagined, photographed, narrated, measured, or represented in maps and charts) can always be interpreted on multiple levels and contain a plurality of overlapping meanings, sometimes contradictory. This includes the meaning that a place has for its planners, managers, organisers, inhabitants, those who rule over it, and those who retrace its history. These are worlds built by specific human activities and presented to a specific audience.

Armando Fumagalli (2013) asserts that the ability to tell stories in a highly technological age and in globally interconnected cultural contexts is one of the main skills that can empower a nation. The author argues that it is becoming increasingly common to use remarkable stories to put forward one's point of view in society and

across the world, to achieve various economic, political, social, and cultural outcomes. Fumagalli also argues, drawing on Frédéric Martel's *Mainstream* (2010), that in the complex interdependencies that govern the relationships between nations during this so-called era of globalisation, the 'soft power' technique is critical in influencing international affairs and improving national image and prestige. Following Martel's reasoning, the author affirms that soft power makes it possible to exert a non-coercive power of attraction that can influence the thoughts and behaviours of individuals, as well as laws and market models, even on a global scale. Soft power, therefore, means exerting influence through the recounting of particular cultural values such as the ideals of freedom, sustainability, ethics, and democracy, which can also be represented through certain products, as in the case of diamonds mined in Canada.

A country's global influence is normally established at the expense of other states. Establishing influence means creating an abstract map of geopolitical imbalances that have real economic, social, political, and cultural repercussions (Hudson, Brent Ritchie 2006). In order to describe these particular, well-studied interconnections, we can turn to that which Martel (2010) defines as 'content industries'. These include the media which is used to disseminate certain messages, the messages themselves, particular products and brands, and the role played by small and large companies, governments, and local populations, each of whom, in their own capacity, has a unique influence in giving the stories being told their narrative slant. These stories are what Daniel Boorstin referred to, in 1962, as 'pseudo-events'. This concept is used by the author to explain the media's growing tendency to create illusory, inauthentic events in order to highlight certain pieces of information while obscuring others. Such pseudo-events are disseminated to the public to support the goals of political actors. Within this extensive map of global stories, where a country's prestige is based on having an identity that stands out from that of (often subordinate) competitors, Boorstin defines the act of selecting and focusing on specific topics as the spectacularisation of information (1962). In other words, bearing in mind

the media's rationale, those who produce the information to be disseminated are aware that the public always expects something new and exciting and demands more than that which current affairs can offer. And so, to compensate for the shortcomings of real news, the ad-hoc pseudo-event directs media and public attention to specific items of information, narrated through a simplistic and stereotyped representation of reality, and usually discourages rational analysis of the situation by emphasising its emotional component (Foa 2018).

These various ways of narrating and imagining the Canadian subarctic environment are typical of the post-modern age, when everything is pluralistic, fluid, and uncertain, experience is fragmented, and separate moments exist side by side while being impossible (or at least difficult) to connect (Jedlowski 2009).

To conclude, the concepts and observations presented here outline a broader research roadmap. Specifically, one that addresses the cultural meanings mobilised by the ethical Canadian diamond. This should include a series of endeavours, summarised as follows: 1) Refining methods for detecting and analysing the cultural components that comprise the concepts of ethics and sustainability, exploited by the mining industry within the Northwest Territories and by the in-store Canadian diamond. 2) Identifying and analysing the more strictly *biographical* dimension of the Northwest Territories' northern landscape by studying shifting balances in the relationship between human communities and the environment, as well as the individual and community micro-history rooted in these places. 3) Identifying and analysing the daily activities and behaviours which a group of people (e.g., ethical consumers, but also Indigenous miners or geologists hired by multinational diamond companies) use to control the concepts of ethics and sustainability in specific ecological and production contexts.

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