

Chapter 10 and the Epilogue explore the issue of Arctic justice then and now. The author concludes the book with notes on research and Inuit oral history, Inuit names, other place names, and extensive notes to chapters. The book is amply illustrated with maps and fascinating archival photos of people and places. I highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in northern politics, social justice and sovereignty issues.

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ROGUE DIAMONDS: THE RUSH FOR NORTHERN RICHES ON DENE LAND. By ELLEN BIELAWSKI. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003. 256 p., 2 maps, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$24.95; Cdn\$35.00.

When miners started digging billions of dollars in diamonds from the tundra of the Northwest Territories in 1998, there was great excitement. This was especially true among marketers, who quickly established a cachet for “northern” diamonds as “pure ice” harvested from the wilderness, untainted by the nasty civil wars and merciless human exploitation associated these days with the “blood diamonds” of conflict-ridden western and southern Africa. In *Rogue Diamonds*, freelance writer and anthropologist Ellen Bielawski suggests that the pitch is a lie; northern diamonds are just the latest chapter in a long saga of outsiders’ plundering the mineral wealth of aboriginal Northerners and desecrating their land. The only question is, did the Dene manage to get a slightly better deal this time? In a North still largely populated by First Nations but increasingly overrun with miners, this is a central issue.

Various Dene and Inuit groups have hunted what is now the diamond region of Lac de Gras for millennia. Southern treasure seekers began plaguing the Dene near the present city of Yellowknife in the 1890s and since then, they have never stopped coming or spreading out from there. Big strikes have resulted, in gold, oil, uranium, and lead, as well as less fruitful hunts among the ancient rocks for everything from beryllium to the mythic tundra mines of the “Yellowknives” Dene, so called because they carried weapons of copper. Bielawski observes that most wealth from these mines flowed south, while the damages, from toxic waste to alcoholism, remained at home. “[T]he government got royalties, the shareholders got their cash, and the First Nations got the shaft,” says Yellowknives chief Darrell Beaulieu (p. 158).

In the mid-1990s, the Australia-based mining conglomerate BHP applied for diamond-mining permits for what may be the biggest development ever, thus re-igniting a decades-old dispute over whether the Dene had extin-

guished their rights to Lac de Gras in turn-of-the-century treaties. (The Inuit arguably did so by drawing the boundaries of Nunavut just north of the lake.) While still claiming the land, the Dene recognized that the diamond mines were coming whether they liked it or not; they needed to strike a compromise deal. Enter the white Alaska-born Bielawski, hired by members of the tiny below-tree-line community of Lutsëlk’é to help them negotiate for environmental protection and a share of the riches.

The book centers on a series of meetings, to which Bielawski was party, held among BHP, Native groups, and the government; but there are complications straight off. For one thing, few living Dene have even been to remote Lac de Gras since their settlement decades ago into towns like Lutsëlk’é. For another, the treaties, layered onto ancient enmities, fracture the Dene. Lutsëlk’é winds up aligned with the Yellowknives, who are more or less pitted against the Dogribs, their onetime lethal rivals for Lac de Gras. Most of all, Lutsëlk’é, like other communities, suffers typical isolation from the southern culture claiming the land: on a granite peninsula, they “hunt caribou, fish trout, gather berries, dry meat, make moccasins and collect welfare” (p. 22). Older people do not even speak English, never mind have vocabularies that include words like “dewatering” (BHP’s delicate term for the process of draining entire lakes and killing all that is in them so that diamonds can be strip-mined from their beds). To bridge this disconnection, the communities hire sympathizers like Bielawski and whole cadres of other white professionals, including lawyers, engineers, and business consultants.

The result is a weirdly abstract procession of hearings, faxes, and phone calls—all largely among the outsiders, not the Dene, who often sit out. These mediators deal with legitimate questions: What will mines do to the Barrens’ water? Will they affect the caribou migration? And, mainly, how many dollars will BHP offer the Dene for their acquiescence? Bielawski probes these complex issues, but she often gets bogged down in bureaucratic procedures instead. Her blow-by-blow replays of long, lawyerly hearings that confused even the participants, along with details about headphone batteries, testing of microphones, and arrangements for coffee and donuts, can be excruciating. “Oh, I’m so tired of this,” says Yellowknives co-chief Jonas Sangris at one meeting where he does show up. “I want to go hunting” (p. 217). You can’t blame him; large swaths of the book will inform readers with professional interest in the subject, but may just bore others.

The author is at her best when on the land itself. In interludes like a boating trip on vast Great Slave Lake, where her elderly Dene hosts unerringly find their way, or a snowmobile hunt where she witnesses the spray of blood and the ancient rituals of butchering a caribou, her descriptions are vivid and dead-on, and they say far more about the aboriginal connection to the land than months of hearings. Her assessment of the diamond mines (which she barely glimpses) is less convincing: she suggests, among other things, that they will poison fisheries and caribou for

hundreds of miles. Maybe; but she presents no evidence. It is all based on her premise: “Diamonds smell to me. ... Of arrogance. Of greed. Of irrevocable change to the land” (p. 138). On the other hand, she points out that BHP’s own appraisal, which concluded that the mines won’t hurt the environment at all, is also cursory. In other words, readers must more or less choose between competing ideologies.

As for the people of Lutsëlk’é, she says they are divided. Some want the wages from mine jobs, others are against any mining, and “[e]veryone else is on a spectrum between the two extremes” (p. 200). We get little more than that sketch, and Bielawski has the courage to admit why: she is a stranger here, unable even to make good bannock or pick berries at a decent clip, never mind get inside people’s hearts. This is perhaps the book’s main weakness: we end up knowing far more about the author than about the Dene. To be fair, maybe this is the only way it could be. This is her memoir, not a formal study.

In 1996, Lutsëlk’é and other groups reached “impact-benefits agreements” with BHP, which outline certain protections to the land and benefits to the First Nations, but leave the ultimate question of land ownership for yet more hearings, still to come. Did the Dene do better this time? That information is missing, too: the agreements are secret. From Bielawski’s hints, we know that they probably involve royalties, preferential contracts, and some up-front cash. Also, as part of a wider plan, a commission is monitoring the mines’ long-term environmental impacts. Bielawski herself offers no before-and-after picture of land or people; and to be fair, maybe it is too soon. She has obvious passion for the primeval spaces of the north, and respect for its people. Thus armed, she might some day consider going back to Lutsëlk’é—and the tundra beyond—to get the full story.

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NARRATING THE ARCTIC: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF NORDIC SCIENTIFIC PRACTICES. Edited by MICHAEL BRAVO and SVERKER SÖRLIN. Canton, Massachusetts: Science History Publications/USA, 2002. ix + 373 p., 38 b&w illus., 11 maps, endnotes, index, no separate bibliography. Hardbound. US\$39.95.

A better title for this innovative collection of nine essays might have been “Selected Cultural Perceptions of the Far North Resulting from Danish and Swedish Scientific Investigations.” The actual title—*Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*—suggests greater inclusiveness than it delivers. Indeed, the editors’ introduction admits (p. 10) that “the narratives...presented

here are particularly those of two Nordic countries, Denmark and Sweden” and explains that the latter two countries were empires of long standing, of which Norway had formed a part at one time or another from the Middle Ages until 1905. This editorial premise leaves an impression of evasiveness, as does the lack of a clearly defined time frame for the work as a whole.

This volume, in fact, represents Danish and Swedish views so exclusively that neither Norway’s past contributions and perceptions nor its current evaluations figure at all. The editors briefly acknowledge Fridtjof Nansen’s scientific standing (p. 7), but there is no mention anywhere of his scientific contributions or those of such well-known Arctic investigators as Roald Amundsen and Otto Sverdrup. Written several years after Norway had achieved independence, Nansen’s book *In Northern Mists* (1911) became very influential both at home and abroad, along with his other writings, and it is still regularly cited. While much of the historical and cultural information it contains is outdated or wrongheaded, that is also true of works by Vilhjalmur Stefansson and Knud Rasmussen, among other notabilities so ably discussed in the present work. The point is that as a field scientist, explorer, and gifted writer, Nansen helped to create precisely the kind of northern cultural narrative with which the present work is otherwise concerned.

Archaeology is not represented among the field sciences considered important in building Nordic perceptions of the Arctic, but the reader will otherwise find a great deal of substance in these pages. The editors generally succeed in achieving their stated aim of creating bridges among several disparate fields in order to interpret specific cultural narratives created by the confluence of past scientific investigations of far northern environments. Directly and indirectly, the book also considers the relationship between center and periphery as it charts its course through three main analytical categories, named “Meta-Narratives of Northern Nations,” “Claims and Controversies in the Field,” and “Technologies of Indigenuity.”

The book’s two editors came well prepared for this multidisciplinary undertaking. With a broad background in the history and philosophy of science as well as in geography, the English scholar Michael Bravo is familiar with the potential conflict between indigenous knowledge of the Arctic and the information acquired by means of modern science. In his essay “Measuring Danes and Eskimos,” he also reflects thoughtfully on the implications of an anthropological focus on pure racial features. As a historian of science and ideas, Bravo’s Swedish co-editor, Sverker Sörlin, knows the debate arising from the involvement of field and environmental sciences with the growing internationalization of science in the past two centuries. In the present book, he uses this background to particular advantage in his essay “Rituals and Resources of Natural History: The North and the Arctic in Swedish Scientific Nationalism.” Central to this chapter is a careful account of the impact on international science and on Swedish