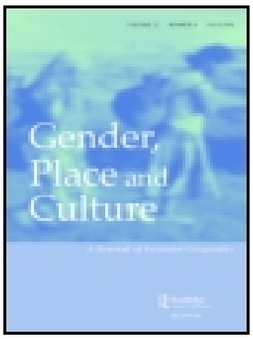

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Care through closure: mine transitions in the mixed economy of the Northwest Territories, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This article, emerging from a community-university research partnership, examines community concerns around diamond mine closure in the Northwest Territories, Canada, and Dene visions of post-extractive futures. The Northwest Territories is a region of the sub-arctic characterized by a political economy that combines settler and Indigenous modes of governance, production, and social reproduction, with an outsized settler engagement in resource extraction. In this article, we turn our attention to the under-examined social processes of mine closure in this region. In taking a feminist political economy approach to mine closure, we attend to the multiple labours of the northern mixed economy. We aim to unsettle the settler preoccupation with the mine itself, and rather, to centre the social reproduction of mining affected communities. Responding to calls for greater attention to the social aspects of mine closure, this paper brings together feminist imaginaries of care and reproduction with place-based insights regarding the gender of settler colonialism and Indigenous women's transgressive caring labours in northern Canada. It draws upon community-based interviews and talking circles, analyzing mine closure as both a site of ongoing settler colonial dispossession and as a space of resistance to ongoing colonialism through the assertion of Dene modes of life.

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Care work; mine closure; mixed economy; resource extraction; settler colonialism; social reproduction

Introduction

Mine closure, as it occurs in spaces made periphery, involves major regional ruptures that receive relatively little attention, especially in comparison with the public celebration and scrutiny that often accompanies the establishment of a mine. In this piece, we discuss processes of mine closure in the Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada, a region of the sub-arctic characterized by a

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political economy that combines settler and Indigenous modes of governance, production, and social reproduction. Drawing on interviews and focus groups with members of extractive-affected Dene communities, we aim to honour the ways in which the participants in this research discuss their own (post-extractive) futures in the context of the social reproduction of their communities, ongoing engagement with land-based economies that have persisted since time immemorial (Blondin 1997), and the heavy presence of the capitalist economy.

The NWT, Canada, has a long history of settler-imposed extraction; most recently, in the form of diamond mines. The first NWT diamond mine opened in 1998, and since then, the diamond mines have dominated territorial GDP, with contributions to the annual GDP ranging from 30-50% (GNWT 2019). However, just as quickly as they arrived, the diamond mines will leave: of the four diamond mines, Snap Lake closed unexpectedly in 2015, and Diavik, one of the two larger and longest-standing diamond mines, has opted for a planned closure in 2025, with major layoffs beginning this year. The two remaining mines, Ekati and Gahcho Kué, are pursuing expansions with the hope of extending their mine life, but even the most optimistic projections suggest these mines will close by 2035 (Figure 1).

In partnership with *Dedats'eetsaa: Tłı̨chǫ Research and Training Institute*, we have conducted community-based research on concerns around mine closure and Dene visions of post-extractive futures. Centring our analysis on relations of social reproduction, we seek to disrupt and unsettle capitalist narratives of 'bust' associated with mine closure. While noting the harmful impacts of job and auxiliary revenue losses that come with mine closure, in this paper, we draw upon participant narratives to situate mine closure in the broader context of Dene place-based relations of social reproduction. Learning from Dene ontologies and the praxis of Indigenous resurgence and feminist analyses that conceptualize social reproduction as a site of power, oppression and social change (Elias and Roberts 2016; Katz 2001), we approach social reproduction expansively, attending to human, non-human, land-based and intergenerational relations (Coulthard and Simpson 2016; Starblanket and Stark 2018). We examine the labour of social reproduction through multiple temporalities, from the immediate emotional, ecological, and caring labours required to manage the crisis of mine closure, to the longer-term land-based and relational labours of reproducing communities' modes of life (Coulthard 2014). Furthermore, in focusing on the labours of social reproduction – often feminized – this research genders the experience of mine closure, considering labours of caring for kin, community, and the land, and asking how mine closure practices (at multiple scales) might resist, rather than reproduce, extractive development.

Figure 1. Diamond mines of the Northwest Territories, Canada (image Courtesy of the government of Northwest Territories (GNWT 2019).

We begin by orienting our analysis, first, in theories of social reproduction and Indigenous feminisms and our own location as settler researchers. Next, we ground our analysis in critical scholarly literature on mine closure and extraction and care, as well as in the settler colonial context of extraction in the northern mixed economy. We then turn to community concerns, experiences, and aspirations surrounding mine closure, discussing the themes of social reproduction and care; caring for the land; and intergenerational learning. In so doing, we locate mine closure in expansive and transgressive expressions of land-based relations and the social reproduction of Indigenous communities that live with and beyond the confines of settler colonial capitalism. Thinking through transgressive acts of lifemaking, we approach mine closure as a fissure, a site of opening which can be used to make space for the work of reproducing communities and land-based relations so often obscured and exploited by extraction.

Theory/methods

In centring relations of care though mining transitions/closure, we employ the feminist political economy concept, social reproduction, as our guiding analytic. Social reproduction refers, broadly speaking, to 'the varied processes involved in maintaining and reproducing individuals and societies over time' (Strauss 2013); diverse labours, both paid and unpaid, they are united by their purpose and by their quality. As Katz (2001) writes, social reproduction is the 'fleshy, messy, indeterminate stuff of life' (711). Contra research that exclude reproductive labours from analyses of social struggle, change, and, indeed, power relations altogether, feminists have argued that this 'indeterminate stuff of life' is a potent site of struggle (Elias and Roberts 2016): of exploitation and oppression and of resistance (Hill Collins 2002; Davis 1981). We likewise borrow from feminist political ecology (FPE) to understand caring labours as transformative environmental ethics (Bauhardt and Harcourt 2018), and so speak to FPE's assertion that care work be framed as politicized resistance to capitalist exploitation of human and non-human life, rather than an essentialized and gendered responsibility for the environment (Elmhirst 2015; MacGregor 2006).

We take a multi-scalar and multi-site approach to social reproduction, examining the ways in which people, their modes of life (Coulthard 2014), and their human and non-human relations are reproduced through labours that are paid and unpaid, public and intimate, institutionalized and informal. As black feminist theorists of care have argued, social reproduction and care that occurs at the community level is often obscured (Banks 2020), and, for marginalized communities, the labours that reproduce these communities – very survival – are political labours of resistance (Hill Collins 2002). By centering our analysis around care as transgressive, we are responding to Lahiri-Dutt's (2012) call for a new contemporary feminist agenda in mining research – rejecting 'victimhood' tropes and attending instead to the complex ways men and women exert agency within mining contexts. Certainly, in the context of ongoing attempts at dispossession and elimination of Indigenous peoples in the settler colonial context, the social reproduction of Indigenous communities is transgressive and transformative labour.

Our approach to social reproduction emphasizes both human and non-human relations. Cree/Salteaux scholar, Gina Starblanket, and Turtle Mountain Ojibwe scholar, Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, articulate human experience 'as situated within relations of interdependence with all of creation and living in a way that carries out our responsibilities with these relationships' (2018, 177). Thus, the relations that shape human experience are weighted with responsibility, both to one another and to the land. Land, here, is understood not as object to be acted upon, but as within these relations. Dene scholar, Glen Coulthard, and Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg scholar,

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's conception of 'grounded normativity' (2016), informed by Indigenous placed-based practices, teaches respectful relations between humans and non-humans across nations and generations, and with the land.

As settler researchers, we are, in some ways, outside of these relations, while also implicated in the ongoing processes that dispossess Indigenous communities of the resources to reproduce them. Dr. Hall and Ms. Ascough are both settler researchers living on Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Territory. Dr. Hall conducted the research in this article on Dene land and through Dene community-university research partnerships. Thus, we proceed carefully from our own location and partial knowledge. We conducted this research on Dene land through community university research partnerships. Guiding questions were established through Dr. Hall's membership in *We Will Not Be Banned From Our Land*, a community-research network led by Dedats'eetsaa: The Tłı̨chǫ Research and Training Institute. This network supports research oriented towards understanding and improving the wellbeing of Tłı̨chǫ Dene people and the land. Dr. Hall received guidance on the design and implementation of this research. Dr. John B. Zoe, the Chair of Dedats'eetsaa and a Tłı̨chǫ knowledge holder, provided guidance throughout, helping to develop an approach grounded in respect for community knowledge. While the publishing of this article is an academic 'end', of sorts, as Sylvestre et al. write (2018), academic timelines diverge from community timelines and community-research relations, which, in this case, are ongoing. Through an ethic of reciprocity (Castleden et al. 2012), the lead author continues to work with Dedats'eetsaa in sharing the themes herein in ways that are useful for both internal community work, and for solidarity/knowledge exchange across Indigenous communities facing mine closure.

In partnership with the Tłı̨chǫ First Nation, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, and a northern environmental NGO, Ecology North, we began our inquiry with four community focus groups and twelve preliminary interviews, with approximately 135 participants from Yellowknife (31 participants), Behchokǫ̀ (32), N'dilo (38) and Dettah (22). These focus groups and interviews were complemented by a second set of fifteen interviews with Dene community members, conducted over Zoom due to COVID travel restrictions; altogether, Dr. Hall spoke with seven women and eight men. In focus groups and interviews, our primary goal was to hear about key community concerns regarding diamond mine closure in the region, and shared goals and visions for the post-diamond economy. These interviews were coded thematically and collaboratively, according to a dialectical approach to inductive and deductive coding. In this piece, all participant names have been replaced with a pseudonym, and all identifying information in anecdotes has been removed. Ultimately, our theoretical groundings and community-based commitments have shaped our emphasis on community relations of care that tie together

the (extractive) past, present, and future, rooted as they are in place. In the following sections, we locate our analysis, first, in the literature on mine closure, and second, in the socio-economy of the northern mixed economy in Canada.

Mine closure: an emerging concern

In technical terms, mine closure (or remediation) refers to the processes outlined by the mining industry to properly shut down a mine: this includes ensuring that the mining site is left safe, with its contaminant wastes managed, and the land returned to a physically and chemically stable state (Field 2019; Beckett and Keeling 2019), as determined by state and industry standards. However, belying its name, as Keeling and Sandlos (2017) note, mine closure or abandonment does not 'constitute an end to the material and social relations that mining generates' (379). Instead, closure is usually the longest phase of a mine's life (Monosky and Keeling 2021), and it brings with it a new set of labours, and social impacts (Field 2019; Bainton and Holcombe 2018).

In Canada (Field 2019), and internationally (Bainton and Holcombe 2018), there is new attention to planning for closure. The Mining Association of Canada (MAC), for instance, articulates in its *Towards Sustainable Mining* (TSM) Guiding Principles that in conjunction with community consultation and values, mine closure plans ought to entail returning 'mine sites to viable and diverse ecosystems' (2008, 1). In practice, however, for the most part, mine closure processes remain markedly apolitical, largely focused on technical fixes for waste management, and lying far outside of community-based concerns and demands (Beckett and Keeling 2019; Ureta 2016). Expanding this critique, Tara Joly (2021) observes the ways in which 'reclamation' is shaped through settler capitalist emphases on productivity, or the 'use value' of land (9). These 'fixes' are informed by corporate assessments of the land, overlooking, as Beckett and Keeling (2019) argue, community values associated with site cleanup. They recommend an 'expanded definition of mine remediation that encompasses concepts of social justice, repair, mediation, reconciliation, and care' (217).

The relations between care work and mining (Perez and De La Puente 2020), in all its phases, are relatively under-theorized in scholarship. Moreover, pronunciations of care in mining contexts are both materially oriented towards land remediation practices (Ureta 2016) and articulated through emotional labours. For instance, studies on closure at the Ravensthorpe nickel mine in Australia and the Elliot Lake uranium mines in Canada, alike emphasize community socio-economic disorientation wrought by the mines' closure, highlighting the gendered labour required to tend to these social

relations in transition (Pini, Mayes, and McDonald 2010; McDonald, Mayes, and Pini 2012; Mawhinney and Pitblado 1999).

In mining-affected Indigenous communities, mine closure not only disrupts immediate day-to-day socio-ecological reproduction, but also necessitates a broader form of recovery and repair for relational, land-based, and community modes of life. For instance, the damage incurred during a mine's life cycle prompted researchers to examine post-mining scenarios imagined by residents in Qamani'tuaq, Nunavut, three years prior to the mine's closure. Here, residents indicated that mine closure would need to be accompanied by mental health services, job skills training, childcare, and improved infrastructure to ensure the community's future resilience and avoid the worst-case scenario post-closure, including health concerns, food insecurity, and unemployment (Rixen and Blangy 2016). These processes of care are intertwined with ethics of justice (Tsosie 2015; Beckett and Keeling 2019) and call for redressing inequalities wrought by settler colonial development projects. Included, too, are the healing processes of humans, non-humans, and the land: Joly (2021) recounts a teaching from Métis education scholar, Sarah Loutit, who described human and nonhuman elements of the oil sands-damaged landscape 'growing with' one another, engaging in 'healing as a relational process' (16).

While the International Council on Mining and Metals dictates that community participation is central to successful mine closure (2019), Kuyek (2011) notes that affected Indigenous communities are consulted against a backdrop of the 'long history of trespass and pillage by the very structures of colonialism that now seek their counsel' (5). It is evident, then, that the violence which maintains mining projects in settler colonial contexts extends through closure and beyond. In the following section, we briefly sketch the context of settler colonialism and extraction in the Northern Canada.

Mining, mine closure, and the Northern mixed economy

Canada, a settler colonial state, was built through processes of resource extraction. While in the first few centuries of European development of Canada, resource extraction was almost exclusively conducted through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the region, today Canada is a global mining giant with extractive projects around the world. Because of this heavy past and presence, there is a presumed inevitability to resource extraction as a pillar of development in the Canadian settler state. However, in this paper we interrupt the settler preoccupation with the mine itself – a preoccupation that extends, and is, indeed, intensified in times of closure – by emphasizing diverse approaches to land and livelihoods practiced in Canada, often by women, and especially by Indigenous peoples. Indeed, Indigenous communities – especially in northern Canada – continue to

engage in land-based labours oriented around reproducing and caring for the land, animals, and one another (Coulthard 2014; Zoe 2014; Abele 2009). These labours exist alongside, and in tension with, the extractive economy (Scottie, Bernauer, and Hicks 2022; Parlee 2015), which is particularly pronounced in the north, imagined by Canadian and transnational elite as a 'hinterland', or depository of resources.

Northern Indigenous economies stretch across the Territories and northern Canadian provinces, but the focus of this discussion is the NWT, a territory nearly twice the size of Texas and currently home to just over 40,000 people, approximately half of whom are Indigenous (GNWT 2018a). The rocky land and cold climate of the NWT meant that, traditionally, Indigenous subsistence economies relied primarily on hunting, trapping, fishing, and foraging; practices of drying and preserving meats and making teas and medicines from the local bush; and using skins and fur for clothing and household goods (Nahanni 1992; Blondin 1997; Asch 1977). Today, approximately 30% of NWT households access more than half their food through subsistence activities and community distribution (GNWT 2018a). While relationships to capitalist production within the mixed economy vary across NWT communities and peoples, and over time, the commitment to protecting the land and pursuing land-based activities characterizes contemporary northern life.

While many northern Indigenous people use wage labour, including extractive labour, to meet their household needs and to support and subsidize land-based activities (Harnum et al. 2014), the extractive industries have also brought ecological, social, and economic harm to communities across the Territory, taking far more than they contribute to community social reproduction (see, for example, Scottie, Bernauer, and Hicks 2022; Gilday 2000). At the time of writing this piece, the major shift in the NWT's extractive economy is the contraction of the diamond mining industry. The diamond mines, established at the turn of the 21st century, followed on the heels of gold mine closure, and reproduce the territory's settler history of capitalist development rooted in resource extraction. While past extractive ventures relied upon Indigenous workers for their expertise, full-time and formal employment was usually targeted for settlers coming up from the South; however, as part of a broader shift towards Indigenous employment in the extractive industries (Mills and Sweeney 2013), engagement and employment commitments to the territorial government and Indigenous communities, diamond mines now target local Indigenous workers for employment and, across the mines' lives, northern Indigenous people have made up approximately 25% of the workforce (GNWT 2018b). Thus, the closure of the diamond mines will have much heavier labour implications for northern Indigenous communities than past mine closures.

Community discussions of closure: mining transitions, care, and social reproduction

In interviews and talking circles, research participants expressed a range of experiences with the mines themselves, and feelings about closure; unsurprisingly, many worried about job loss, while others saw the closure of the mines as a welcome relief. Across all interviews, however, was a deep attention to community and land-based relations, and the caring labours which sustain them. Through the following themes, we discuss, first, the ways in which the diamond mining industry has shaped care and social reproduction in northern Indigenous communities and how participants see their caring roles through mine closure/transition. Next, we emphasize the ways in which care extends to the land, both in terms of the land caring for human and non-human animals, and human responsibility to and reciprocity with the land. Finally, we honour the tight relations between past, present, and future by discussing research participants' emphasis on approaching mine closure through what has been learned in the past while holding with the interests of youth and future generations at the heart of their analysis.

Care and social reproduction

There is a discernable tension to how the mines have fragmented forms of care within northern Indigenous communities, and in extraction-affected communities around the globe (Mayes 2020; Silva-Segovia and Salinas-Meruane 2016). The large-scale open mines are at a great distance from most northern communities and operate through a Fly-in/Fly-Out (FIFO) structure. As observed in Mazer et al.'s analysis of Inuit women's experiences of nickel mining in Nunavik (2022), the spatial divide between work (at the diamond mines) and home places heavy new demands on the social relations of northern Indigenous communities, emphasizing and retracing gendered divisions of labour as men take on 'productive' waged labour at the mines while women perform reproductive, caring labours in the home (Hall 2022). To be sure, Indigenous women work at the diamond mines as well, but often for shorter time periods and in more precarious positions in comparison with their male counterparts – in large part due to the tensions between their workplace and community/household/land-based labours. The temporality of mining regimes, however, means that now these caring labours, which sustained the family, community, and self through capitalist impositions, are being reoriented towards new concerns, and the open gaps the mines leave behind.

While the focus of our interviews was mining transitions and closure, and post-extractive economies, almost all research participants began their discussions of the anticipated impacts of mine closure with an analysis of how social relations, and especially care and social reproduction, had shifted

during mine life. The gendered stratification of work under the FIFO mining regime and the subsequent feminization of social reproduction had a noticeable impact on both men and women. Julie, whose husband worked at the mines for several years, said, 'It just seemed like I was a single parent like half the year, like I have done everything'. Men were likewise aware of the emotional stressors of the mine's fracturing of family life; for instance, Anthony stated that although he liked working up the mines, the longer he was there, the more he realized that he was 'missing out on things back home, like family and kids' birthdays…or a family member passing away and you can't go home because you are stuck up there working'. Because of this loss, another man, Christopher, found a job in town instead, explicitly citing his ability to go out on the land with his family on weekends as a significant perk of his new work.

As the mines close, in some ways the gender order instituted by the mines is reproduced, while in other ways it is reconstituted and resisted. Discussions around closure elicited gendered concerns around the ensuing financial and social fallout for male mine workers, with women revealing internal conflicts as their relief the mines were closing gave way to fears for male workers. For instance, Emily said that, after speaking with her son's father, she was 'not worried about myself, but I'm worried about him and everybody else that works there too, that rely on that income specifically'. These concerns expressed by women combined real worry about their family's – and, here, family was articulated by all participants in terms of extended kin, not nuclear family – ability to meet their day-to-day needs without mining wages, but, in almost all cases, the larger concern was around the wellbeing of the mine workers as they lost the purpose and stability associated with their job. That household finance concerns were somewhat secondary can be explained, in part, by the makeup of household work: while women were taking on greater responsibility for social reproduction, by far the majority continue to work in wage labour themselves (Hall 2022).

Men were likewise concerned by their own wellbeing, with some fearing they might struggle to reintegrate into the community. This they attributed to the FIFO model; as Kyle explained, 'it takes a special breed to be a miner where you're two weeks in and two weeks out. That in itself is life changing'. Anthony described the impact of long-term employment in the mines as reshaping masculinities, stating that 'Some of those guys have been working there for years, so they are going to lose a part of them[selves] when the mine closes'. The attachment research participants expresse to the mines was complicated by experiences of racial and gendered discrimination, intertwining experiences of harassment with difficulties advancing professionally. Kyle explained that while the mining company had committed to offering training and advancement programs for mine workers from his First Nation, no opportunities arose until he pushed the company to follow through on

this promise. His story aligned with widespread concern that the mining companies had not adequately delivered on plans to train Indigenous mine workers – thus leaving, in their closure, several generations of 'low-skilled' labourers without training for work outside the mines. As Louisa put it, 'even if we have local companies that get the contracts…the employees, we're still at the bottom of the grid with no promotion'. Kyle concurred, saying, 'when we talk about the legacy from diamond mines…the talk was that there'd be educated Tłı̨chǫ coming out of there…but really…we don't even have a single Tłı̨chǫ engineer'. Concerns about training and education through mine transitions and closure – of older mine workers who had worked throughout the diamond mine lives, but were still not old enough to retire, but especially of younger community members entering the workforce – were a major theme in interviews and talking circles, and will be discussed below.

In continuity with other cases of mine closure, in Canada and internationally (Pini, Mayes, and McDonald 2010; McDonald, Mayes, and Pini 2012; Mawhinney and Pitblado 1999), female research participants took seriously the caring labours necessary for closure, with many arguing for the need for increased formal mental health support. For example, Rachel stated that counselling and supports were complementary to job transitions to help mine workers shift into new industries. Employment in the diamond mines has, in many instances, taken workers away from community work on the land, and has manifested in increased material dependencies on extractive wages, which were embedded in everyday social life. For instance, Christopher explained that the 'biggest change is that lots of people have stuff, like they worked [at the mine] that long and …own homes and vehicles'. While people have benefitted from their wages, – as Margaret said, 'there's money…it provides housing for everyone, more food' – diamond mine work has led to increased costs of living and debt, which will exacerbate the impacts of job loss and closure. As Joe said, 'everybody is getting evicted from their homes, can't pay [their] mortgage… how are our expenses going to be covered?'. Participants worried that, as a result of extractive revenues largely flowing south (both to federal/territorial governments and extractive companies), community members would face these challenges without the legacy of improved social infrastructure, arguing that 'you have still have to go to Yellowknife for groceries. It kind of makes you think about the development part and who is doing what and what is happening. It makes you think, what is really being done?'

More broadly, without minimizing the deep material and emotional impacts of closure, many participants spoke with hope about the possibility of greater kin and community cohesion following mine closure. Recognizing the real social harms of family separation due to FIFO mining, Julia said, 'you can't buy love, you can't buy things for kids and replace that with love'.

This highlights that the nature of recovery needs to be as encompassing of social life as the ruptures elicited by the mining regime – attending to the caring labours which sustained communities through the mine's life, and which will continue to reproduce communities long after closure.

Care for and from the land

Concerns for the social aspects of mine closure found home in worries for non-human animals and the land, in how the mines had changed the land in their opening, and if the land would recover after their closure. These impacts moved beyond physical scarring, as community members explained how care – done for the land, and by the land – had likewise undergone significant changes under extractive regimes. These disrupted reciprocal relationships again necessitate new forms of care, as community members mourned the changes to their environmental and social landscapes, while still centering caring labours as creating a post-extractive future. Importantly, these labours foreground the transformative potential of care as environmental ethic, repairing land and bodies, while simultaneously confronting destructive capitalist hegemonies (Bauhardt and Harcourt 2018; Tronto 2017).

The environmental devastation of extractive regimes is well-documented, and the Canadian diamond mines are no exception. Community members discussed at length the ways the mines had damaged the surrounding environment, citing contaminated waters and poisoned fish, arsenic in the ground, dusty air near the mines, and shifts in the migratory patterns of animals, particularly caribou, but also noting changes in the habits of rabbits and birds. Trevor explained the damage clearly: '[if] they don't clean up the mine … then all these animals will not be protected … there will be sickness in the water and the trees and the birds'.

Recognizing the breadth of extractive ecological impact, we focus here on the relationship between human and non-human social reproduction, care, and the land. This focus is guided by teachings on relations between humans, non-humans and the land (Maynard and Simpson 2022; Coulthard and Simpson 2016), rather than seeing the land as a discrete object to be used/exploited/protected/enjoyed. As Christopher put it, 'Water is life for everything, and I hope that doesn't change'. Concerns about mine contaminants led Edward to explain his reticence to engage in mine cleanup (gold mine or diamond mine remediation) – a major source of local employment lauded by industry and state – through his observation of the ways in which arsenic levels from the gold mines were impacting fishing opportunities. He described interacting with mined land as 'scary' even as the mines were being cleaned.

These concerns highlight the impact of the mines of the land's own ability to care for human communities, approaching the land as agent

(Coulthard 2010). This loss was captured in community members' concerns about their ability to continue subsistence activities on the land, most significantly through the shifts to caribou migratory patterns, which participants consistently attributed to diamond mining activities and the larger context of the capitalism-induced climate crisis (Dedats'eetsaa 2022). Multiple individuals explained that the noise from blasting through rock, the dust and chemicals poisoning food sources, and subsequent scarring to the land, had all driven caribou herds away from the surrounding areas, with Matthew explaining that the caribou were 'going further east because of the mines', making hunting difficult as 'the further they go, the further I have to go get it'. Margaret said it took nearly twelve hours to simply find caribou 'just to provide for your family'.

In line with Dene scholarly and community publications (Blondin 1997; Dedats'eetsaa 2022), participants discussed caribou as a central component of the land's enactment of care for the community, as caribou meat is an essential food source, with 'a lot of people depending on caribou in the winter' (Christopher). The disruption of this mode of care wrought by damage done to land intersects with the ways in which wage labour – especially demanding wage labour away from the community, like mine work – imposes upon and impedes community land-based work and intergenerational education. As Kyle explained:

> [The mines had an] impact on our sustenance or our main traditional food of the caribou… And that was, for time immemorial, our home state. That's where we put food on the table. And what was promised to us initially was that, we're going to introduce you into the wage economy and you'll no longer need that…type of lifestyle. Today it's a major impact for the Tłı̨chǫ. And that may be the real legacy that's left behind.

In discussing this legacy, participants consistently named the responsibility that mining companies have towards cleanup, reflecting an ethic of justice in remediation (Tsosie 2015; Beckett and Keeling 2019). As Carol put it, the mining companies 'have all the billions of dollars from our diamond mines' and so, according to Rachel, ought to clean 'anything that is toxic to the environment'. These calls for the justice of remediation efforts, however, were coloured by the presumed inaction of the mining companies, with Anthony remembering his supervisor saying the plan for recovery was to fill the hole with water, explaining to him that 'You spend all this money to get that rock and material to the surface …[but] it is too much money to put it back; it would double the money spent'. This aligns with existing literature which highlights that even when implementing remediation projects, mining companies fall short of thorough care for the land (Joly 2021; Beckett and Keeling 2019).

Approaches to care rooted in Indigenous modes of life (Coulthard 2014) are expansive by contrast; for instance, Kyle explained that responsible closure needs to involve 'more of a holistic approach and really have traditional knowledge be the center of your remediation'. Margaret drew upon her knowledge of the land as it was during her childhood in envisioning what it would look like to heal the land from mining. In this way, the visions of healing the land expressed by participants were more than an expanded or more holistic approach to mine remediation; rather, their visions were grounded in Dene modes of relating to land, and, thus, an expression of possible future modes of development – beyond extraction, grounded in place-based ontologies – that could emerge from closure and care of and by the land. This speaks more broadly to the transformative potential of caring labours to reconstruct and reinvent personal and political lifeworlds (Bauhardt and Harcourt 2018, 4), while still attending to the need to not only revalorize but redistribute caring responsibilities across formal and informal societal sectors (Wichterich 2015).

Indeed, a number of participants raised the socio-ecological possibilities that open up with mine closure as a counter to the problems they anticipated around job loss. Contra Western capitalist approaches to development that position the economy outside of and separate from so-called 'nature' (see, for a critique of this, Elmhirst 2015; Bellamy Foster 2000), many participants grounded their visions of economic recovery from mine closure in ecological care and repair, pointing to the land itself as sustaining the community through closure. For instance, several individuals who had never wanted to work for a mine, all women, cited their willingness to take on jobs within remediation and recovery projects; a form of work, that, unlike extraction, has the potential to align with commitments to land, animals and community. As Alice said, 'I know [closure's] going to affect the workers … [but] I think it will be good for the whole area'.

Modes of care for and from the land were central to participants' discussions around mine closure and redressing its impacts on the community and surrounding environment. As Margaret put it, 'everything you need is on the land'. Indeed, many participants drew on their traditional knowledge, including elders' descriptions of the land, in their visions of future land-based health: however, these visions were not a desire to move back in time, but rather, integrated knowledge of the past with attention to the present conjuncture and care for youth and future generations. It is to this form of care that we now turn.

intergenerational knowledge and learning

Using the past as a guide for the present and future in the face of looming mine closure, for many participants, land-based activities were a means

through which caring labours could be directed, particularly in sustaining the community through hardship. Going out on the land and other traditional modes of subsistence production were explained as important means of connecting to kin, ancestors and the living, particularly in contexts where care and land-based connection had been disrupted by the FIFO model. For instance, Margaret explained that her father, who had worked in the mines throughout her childhood, had 'always tried to make time for us…so he would come home and go hunting and go out to the land and do trapping and fishing to bring meat home to the family'. She stated that when she got older, 'I just said fuck it, you know, [and] I started going out with my dad more on the land'. Similarly, Anthony said that it was his grandfather and uncles growing up who had taught him to appreciate hunting and trapping. Traditional knowledge in its intergenerational connectivity thus functioned as a caring labour, a means of reproducing the community, and caring for the land through and beyond the capitalist mining regime.

Indeed, the intergenerational sharing of traditional knowledge and engagement with community forms of land-based distribution and reproduction both act alongside and in resistance to the imperatives of capitalist wage labour (Asch 1977; Dombrowski et al. 2013) Yet despite the centrality of subsistence and traditional labours as a form of care, settler-colonial capitalism, exemplified by the mining industry, has fundamentally disrupted traditional knowledge economies. Sarah said that, 'I can't just go out [on the land]. You have to have the skills and the experience and that knowledge. Otherwise, you're kaput. You need skills to be out there'. Other community members agreed, attributing the lack of connection to traditional ways of living to reliance on mining work; for instance, Matthew explained that 'nobody is picking up the way of it – it's mostly diamond mines and educations now', while Yvonne clarified that it was a generational gap, as 'Some people are still going trapping, but [not] people our age …they don't know how to survive in the bush, because they are always going to the mine'. While many discussed the ways in which work in the diamond mines had taken them from the land, some participants argued that there was not a corresponding 're-skilling' in preparation for other forms of extractive or industrial labour, owing in large part to how the mines had under-served Indigenous workers, who have disproportionately held lower rank and more precarious jobs in the industry. As Robert said, 'a lot of people [at the mines] have worked with leadership roles, supervisors, management, and they were all non-Indigenous'.

Thus, participants' discussions of the future, and future generations, often navigated both frustration and engagement with the settler-imposed economy, alongside land-based and community commitments of care and regeneration. Community members articulated their need to see children thrive within the existing world, and still move beyond its colonial limitations by

reclaiming Indigenous modes of living. Many focused on the need for education and training for the youth. Kyle, for instance, explained that he had taken the mining jobs to provide for his family, because he wanted his children 'to be better than I ever was, and if that's becoming western educated, having more doors available to them …then that's what I'll do, right?'.

The willingness to sacrifice to see children well-educated and in command of upward mobility within capitalism was thus a fraught form of care in all its aspects. Important, however, was the community's strong emphasis on the centrality of balancing between the settler-imposed systems and Indigenous modes of being in the world. For example, Beatrice said, 'young school kids should be taken out on the land more often'. Trevor spoke to the intergenerational connectivity of those experiences, stating that youth 'learn from their friends and family, parents talking to them and all this feedback… giving these good opportunities… sending your kids off to do important stuff. That's what we're here for. That's why we're here and we're still standing, that's why'.

In some ways, then, for participants, formal education sat alongside going out on the land and passing down traditional knowledge as stabilizing counters to the precarious temporality of the mining regime in the context of the mixed economy. Margaret, a young woman who had grown up with the mines, articulated her hope that mine closure could mean 'positive impacts, like people would go out more in the bush, and maybe people were start practicing their culture more and maybe like people are going on to start going out on the land. Maybe it'll push people in a direction that is different from how we grew up'. Eric, an Elder, concurred, stating that 'there is a lot of younger generation getting into mining and they're probably succeeded a bit more, but once it dies out, it means that you have to go further…so the story is looking at the social impacts of mine closure, and transitions are not always based on the transition to the next mine and to the next house, but the transition back to where we started'.

The future for youth in the wake of mine closure was thus a balance between cultivating tools for economic success, while simultaneously embracing and developing traditional modes of living. Louisa stressed that no matter where her children went to school, she wanted them to remember where they came from, stating that, 'you don't have to be in our community, you don't have to be in our nation…it's okay to be different, it's okay to change, but don't forget where you came from, where your family comes from, where your culture comes from'. Likewise, Eric explained that in the wake of mine closure, it was important to 'continue drawing towards the skilled knowledge development, as well as to push younger people to go into higher education with an objective to ground people so that they kind of know where they're from, and build upon their identity, rather than having to convert to somebody else'.

To foster stronger relationships with the land and share traditional knowledge, multiple community members suggested investing in culture camps for youth. Liam explained that he was trying to help his parents set up a traditional camp for his children and wanted to see the same for other youth, 'because everyone has parents…but not everyone has teachers'. To Taylor, a back-to-the-land program was essential as part of the processes of mine closure, 'because if we are going to try to have control of the land we have to know what's out there, encourage the young people to get out on the land more'.

The desire to see future generations thriving in both worlds point again to the complicated but central role that caring labours play in facilitating pathways out of the mining regime. Even as community members articulated the need for better education, they likewise pushed to maintain strong ties to traditional modes of subsistence living. As Louisa put it, 'Why not do both, why not keep training traditionally and locally and keep adapting, learning, yet…go back to historical ways, the traditional ways, blending in both'. Mine closure must again be read holistically – in tension with the disruptions that colonial capitalism has wrought on Indigenous lives, the scars of which will persist through closure and beyond – and yet continually healed through acts of care for the community, the land, and the next generation.

Conclusion

This paper emerged as a response to both community (Dedats'eetsaa) and scholarly calls for greater research into the holistic social aspects of closure (Bainton and Holcombe 2018). We have examined closure from the lens of voices from extractive-affected Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories, Canada, and in the immediate context of the contraction of the NWT diamond mining industry. Contemporary diamond mine closure is best understood as a series of overlapping closures and transitions: many research participants had experienced mine closure before, and, even as mines remain open, because most participants and/or their family members were employed in lower-status, more precarious jobs, they brought existing experience of mine job loss or work stoppage to their concerns about forthcoming closure.

Across interviews and talking circles, we identified three themes: the role of social reproduction and care in mining and mine closure/transitions; the extension of care to the land and by the land; and the tight relations between past, present, and future generations. These themes intersected, as commitments to the land shaped both approaches to care and visions of and by the youth and future generations, while the labours of social reproduction emerged as day-to-day enactments of a world, or mode of life, that both attends to and expands beyond the dominance of settler colonial

capitalism. To that end, community members addressed what Wendy Harcourt terms the 'challenge for the future' by rooting alternatives in 'community needs, which are inter-generational and gender aware, based on an ethics of care for the environment' (2014, 1325). We have argued that the multi-temporal and violent nature of mine closure's disruptions to physical and emotional landscapes necessitate multiple forms of caring labours as both recovery and resistance. These caring labours – feminized and politicized, as they are – must attend to the immediacy of closure, including ecological and community concerns, and address the lasting damage wrought through settler colonial extractive development. And, indeed, in contexts where caring labours and social reproductive work underpin the recovery of Indigenous land and community after mine closure, care work becomes transgressive, challenging the supremacy of the settler colonial state, while resisting the extractive logics that support it. Recovery is therefore a holistic endeavour and, in northern Indigenous communities, conceptualized as a balancing act: recovering traditional worlds to inform new futures, while still ensuring security and thriving under capitalism. As Margaret explained, 'I love practicing my culture. I remember in school, the chief had this quote: 'be strong like two people'. That was the quote we always had growing up. You know, be strong like two people in the modern way and the traditional way. Learning how to balance the two, it took me a long time to learn.'

Margaret's contribution draws upon a key Tłı̨chǫ teaching: to be strong like two people (Zoe 2014). This orientation captures the complex combination of pragmatic concerns around access to (settler state) education and training, and land-based, relational commitments to community-led closure and post-mine development. This expansive approach to mine closure does not dull the sharpness of the harm that comes with closure – the ecological scars, financial hardships, and emotional identarian and interpersonal harms. Instead, participants' visions for the future resist the totality of extractive violence, by locating diamond mine closure in the context of the caring labours which will continue to reproduce the land and the community. As Alice put it, when the mines close, 'it would be good…to go back to the way it was before would allow the land to become healthy again, and allow caribou, and all different type of wildlife to come back. And things will look a lot better for Tłı̨chǫ people'.

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