

# Constructing an 'Old Norwegian Land'

*Spitsbergen and the early history of Norwegian Arctic  
Imperialism, 1896-1925.*



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## Abstract

The history of how it was decided in 1920 that Spitsbergen (Svalbard) should become Norwegian was shaped by the construction of a historical narrative about the loss of a medieval Norwegian empire in the Arctic Ocean, and a political desire to reclaim it. This phenomenon has been commonly referred to as *ishavsimperialisme*, or *Arctic imperialism*. This thesis aims to tell the story of *Arctic imperialism* and the people who supported it. How did they construct a narrative of Spitsbergen belonging to Norway? What influence did they have on the decision to try and gain sovereignty over the archipelago, and on the creation of the Spitsbergen treaty at the Paris Peace Conference in the fall of 1919 until its signing in 1920?

Through a broad survey of Norwegian newspaper sources between 1896 – when Fridtjof Nansen’s *Fram* expedition returned and triggered a debate about a Norwegian annexation of Spitsbergen – and 1925, when Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago was actualized, as well as transcripts of parliamentary debates and documents from the Norwegian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, I explore the ideological birth and influence of the Arctic imperialists. I argue that for much of the period, their notion that Spitsbergen was *rightfully* Norwegian was relatively marginal in the broader public discourse, and that there was a notable degree of reluctance and disinterest towards Spitsbergen. I show that this *status quo* only changes significantly from 1916, and that by 1918 and the end of the First World War, the combined interests of Arctic imperialists and Norwegian businesses on Spitsbergen convinced the government to work towards sovereignty over the islands. Finally, I explore the relatively negative reactions to the treaty among Arctic imperialists, and show how they struggled but eventually succeeded to create a narrative of the Spitsbergen treaty as a Norwegian triumph.

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Oslo, June 2022

Simen Eriksen Hustoft

# List of abbreviations

## Political parties

*Abbreviation: Full name / English translation (ideology)*

DNA: Det Norske Arbeiderparti / The Norwegian Labour Party (Socialist)

V: Venstre / Left (Liberal)

FV: Frisinnede Venstre (Liberal conservative)

H: Høyre / Right (Conservative)

## Newspapers

*Name (Place of publication) – Party affiliation or ownership*

*Aftenposten* (Kristiania) – Unaffiliated,  
conservative

*Agderposten* (Arendal) – Venstre affiliated

*Bodø Tidende* (Bodø) – Venstre affiliated

*Bratsberg Amtstidende* (Skien) –  
Høyre affiliated

*Dagbladet* (Oslo) – Venstre affiliated

*Den 17de Mai* (Oslo) – Venstre affiliated

*Eidsvold* (Oslo) - Unaffiliated

*Finmarkens Amtstidende* (Vadsø) –  
Høyre affiliated

*Folketanken* (Risør) – Venstre affiliated

*Gula Tidend* (Bergen) - Unaffiliated

*Haalogaland* (Harstad) – Venstre affiliated

*Hardanger* (Odda) – Venstre affiliated

*Harstad Tidende* (Harstad) – Høyre affiliated

*Hortens Avis* (Horten) – Venstre affiliated

*Lillesands-posten* (Lillesand) –  
Venstre affiliated

*Lister og Mandals Amtstidende* (Mandal) -  
Unaffiliated

*Lofotposten* (Svolvær) - Unaffiliated

*Morgenbladet* (Kristiania) – Unaffiliated,  
conservative

*Møre* (Volda) - Unaffiliated

*Nordlandsposten* (Bodø) – Høyre affiliated

*Nordlandskysten* (Sandnessjøen) - Unaffiliated

*Nordre Bergenhus Folkeblad* (Florø) –  
Venstre affiliated

*Nordre Trondhjems Amtstidende* (Levanger) –  
Høyre affiliated

*Norig* (Skien) – Venstre affiliated

*Oplandenes avis* (Hamar) – Venstre affiliated

*Skandinaven* (Chicago) - Unaffiliated

*Social-demokraten* (Oslo) – DNA affiliated

*Spejelen* (Trondheim) – Venstre affiliated

*Stavanger Aftenblad* (Stavanger) –  
Venstre affiliated

*Tromsø Stiftstidende* (Tromsø) – FV affiliated

*Vestfinmarken* (Honningsvåg) –  
Høyre affiliated



# Introduction

In a closed session of the Norwegian Parliament in the spring of 1919, Foreign Minister Nils Claus Ihlen (V) announced that the government intended to ask for the recognition of Norwegian sovereignty over the Arctic archipelago of Spitsbergen.<sup>1</sup> With the end of the Great War, Norway had reason to demand reparations for their losses at sea, as well as their general cooperation with the Entente during the war. At the urging of several newspapers and of the Norwegian minister in Paris, the Norwegian government had decided that one of their requests to the Supreme council at the Paris Peace Conference would be Norwegian sovereignty over Spitsbergen.<sup>2</sup> There had generally been a Norwegian presence on Spitsbergen for a long time, but during the war, Norwegian economic interests had grown to be dominant on the archipelago. Receptions among parliamentarians were mixed. C.J. Hambro (H) argued that Norway had a historical right to the possession of Spitsbergen, going all the way back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and that reclaiming Norwegian sovereignty was the only right thing to do. On the other hand, Bernhard Hanssen (FV) believed Norwegian sovereignty would yield low profits and lead to a costly and difficult administration. Several others were reluctant and somewhat unconvinced, yet the government's motion was allowed to proceed without formal protest.<sup>3</sup> Hambro's historical interpretation and expansionist ambitions were part of a larger political complex, which historians have dubbed *ishavsimperialisme* or *Arctic imperialism*. This ideological framework was, as Hanssen shows, far from the consensus within Norwegian political discourses, but it would have a crucial role in shaping the fate of the remote Arctic archipelago of Spitsbergen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The history of the process in the 1900s and 1910s that led Spitsbergen from anarchy to being put under Norwegian administration, what is generally called 'the Spitsbergen question' and its resolution, involves a broad gallery of actors and structures. Many scholars have written

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<sup>1</sup> I must immediately clarify two stylistic choices. First, I will use the name "Spitsbergen" when referring to the archipelago which is today called Svalbard. I make this choice because that was its official name for most of the period of this thesis. Second, when I mention Norwegian party politicians in elected office, I have chosen to consistently disclose their party in a shortened version within parentheses. A brief explanation for these is found on page *viii* of the front matter. The same section discloses party affiliations of the newspaper sources I use, but I will not disclose this information in the text as I deem it of somewhat less direct relevance.

<sup>2</sup> «The Supreme council» was the title for the council consisting of the leaders of the victorious states in the Great War: Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the USA.

<sup>3</sup> *Møte for lukkede dørrer, Stortinget, 8 mars 1919.*

histories of the Spitsbergen question, both comprehensive and focused on specific aspects. Though I would definitely argue that the scholarship on this subject has become more precise over time, there is seventy years of research which has all contributed to the broader understanding of this historically unique process. Through focusing on the small group I refer to as Arctic imperialists, who engaged themselves with the Spitsbergen question, the goal of this thesis is to nuance and expand on the written history of the Spitsbergen question, while suggesting some degree of corrective to the broader strokes with which the subject matter has been painted previously.

In particular, the history of the Spitsbergen question has tended towards a realist narrative, in which states are both the frame of reference and are awarded agency and personality – to the detriment of the actual persons and groups hidden behind them. Leonard Smith writes in *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*: «Realist storylines revolve around states, often conceived as individuals and represented metonymically through their leaders. To realists, sovereignty within states matter relatively little.”<sup>4</sup> Such has also been the case with the road to Norwegian sovereignty over Spitsbergen. With the power of hindsight it can definitely be tempting to form a narrative where one constructs a perceived continuity in the Norwegian public’s and elite’s interest in Spitsbergen stretching back decades before the Spitsbergen treaty was signed in 1920. That narrative, however, ignores both the inner life of the Norwegian body politic in the matter, and how key actors and the broader elite contended with external influences and ideas over time. When I refer to ‘elites’ in this thesis, it is meant as a general term for politicians and academics, explorers and business tycoons as well as others who do not fit these labels but were famous and/or influential. In short, actors with a notably higher-than-average ability to have their statements heard, influence decision-making and create discourses. This actor-centric approach allows for localizing the push for Norwegian sovereignty over Spitsbergen within the broader Norwegian public. Margaret MacMillan wrote in the conclusion of her history of the Paris Peace Conference: “When war came in 1939, it was a result of twenty years of decisions taken or not taken, not of arrangements made in 1919.”<sup>5</sup> MacMillan is referring here to causes for the outbreak of the Second World War. However, her philosophy is indicative of how I will conceptualize the process of Spitsbergen becoming Norwegian: not as the steady growth of a seed planted at some point in time, but three decades of decisions taken or not taken, and in this case, opinions held, lost and gained. In short: my

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 493-4.

interest is in how the idea of Spitsbergen as a Norwegian space was *constructed*, and who constructed it.

At the core of the history of the Spitsbergen question, we find the ideological phenomenon of *Arctic imperialism*, and its architects and proponents, the *Arctic imperialists*. I use these terms as a direct translation of what has been referred to in Norwegian historical research as ‘ishavsimperialisme’. Arctic imperialism as a political movement was a ‘big tent’, and its actors defy simple categorization. They were politically and culturally diverse, belonging to different political parties and were in opposition and agreement on various issues. What connected them into a tangible network was the common motivation of constructing a narrative of Spitsbergen as belonging to Norway. Through the study of discourses within news media and their filtration into political debates and processes, I show how this network grew and constructed a coherent argument for the Norwegian annexation of Spitsbergen which ended up becoming dominant in the Norwegian discourse. Through this, I contribute an alternative narrative of how the Norwegian government came to demand Spitsbergen in 1919, of how the Spitsbergen Treaty was created, and of its reception. The overarching questions the thesis seeks to answer concern themselves with both ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘how’ and ‘why’: First, what was Arctic imperialism, and how did it relate to the Spitsbergen question? Second, who were the Arctic imperialists, and how and why did they work to influence the government and public opinion towards an annexation of Spitsbergen?

## Scope and structure

The subtitle of the thesis declares it an ‘early’ history of Arctic imperialism. As with any periodization, this requires qualification. It could easily be argued that Norwegian Arctic imperialism has existed for longer, particularly as a cultural phenomenon. The Norwegian exploration of the landmasses across the Arctic in the medieval era was an important subject for national historians throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and led to expansionist ideas from early in the century.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, said medieval exploration could *itself* arguably be categorized as a form of imperialism in the Arctic by Norwegians. When I call this an early history of Arctic imperialism, I am referring to Arctic imperialism as a concrete political program of expansionism in the Arctic by actors subscribing to a particular view of Norwegian history, identity, historical rights and current geo-political standing. Through establishing a narrower

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<sup>6</sup> Berg, “From ‘Spitsbergen’ to ‘Svalbard’”, 160-1.

definition, it is easier to identify the key actors involved in this political movement. Furthermore, I define this period as ‘early’ because the scope of the thesis does not include the conflict that arose in the 1920s and was resolved in the 1930s between Norwegian actors and the Danish government over the political status of (East) Greenland, in which Norwegians in the 1920s and again in the 1930s disputed Denmark’s sovereignty over the island.<sup>7</sup> I also do not discuss any of the Antarctic explorations and annexations undertaken by Norwegians in the 1920s. A ‘complete’ history of Arctic imperialism, even applying my narrow definition of the term, would necessitate a broader scope, both temporally and geographically.

Though the thesis will primarily focus on the period between circa 1910-1925, I have chosen to adopt the periodization 1896-1925. I begin my thesis in 1896 because I argue that this is the first year we see a major public display of expansionism towards Spitsbergen in Norway. The Spitsbergen question then laid relatively dormant until ca. 1907, when the Norwegian government initiated a discussion between interested states which eventually built up to a conference in 1914. However, these discussions did not become particularly prominent in newspapers until around 1910. 1925 is the year of the official Norwegian acquisition of Spitsbergen, and as such concludes the discourse this thesis concerns itself with in most ways.

The thesis is divided into four sections, organized chronologically. Section One begins in 1896 and discusses the origins of the modern discussion about Spitsbergen through the identification of actors and arguments in an 1896 debate which took place in newspapers about whether or not Norway should claim Spitsbergen for itself. This section will also house a short genealogy of the concept of *terra nullius* and its relation to Spitsbergen, before concluding with an overview of how the core arguments of Arctic imperialism were shaped and popularized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Section Two begins in 1910 and follows the development of discourses about the Spitsbergen question in light of the Spitsbergen conferences in the early 1910s and their aftermath. I conclude by looking at the consolidation of Norwegian interests on the archipelago in 1916 and the developments that led to the decision to raise the question of a Norwegian annexation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In Section Three, which begins in 1919, I focus on the process of creating the Spitsbergen treaty in Paris, and the discussions around the treaty in Norwegian newspapers and the Norwegian parliament. The particular goal in this section is to show how the collision between the broad program of Arctic imperialism and the influence of more pragmatic state and business interests shaped the debate and outcome at the Peace Conference. Finally, in Section Four, beginning in 1920, I examine the aftermath

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<sup>7</sup> See Blom, *Kampen om Eirik Raudes land*.

of the treaty, how Arctic imperialists antagonized their perceived opponents for the outcome, and how they finally got to define the narrative and came to peace with the political realities.

## Key Concepts and Terms

The subject of this thesis involves the use of many closely related terms and concepts, where the distinction between each might seem trivial but is highly relevant. Examples include the difference between sovereignty and property, or between annexation and occupation. If left unexplained, it would be easy for readers to assume that the meanings are equal and that I am simply imprecise in my language use. This is further complicated by the fact that some imprecision is bound to happen in the translation of texts to English from another language. An example is how one chooses to translate the Norwegian word ‘land’; it does not in any decisive way favor any of the English terms ‘nation’, ‘country’, ‘realm’, ‘land’ or ‘state’ over the other. Therefore, I devote this subsection to the, however brief, discussion of some key concepts and terms.

Defining *nations* and *nationalism* is a task that could easily encompass the full length of this thesis. As a matter of convenience more than principle, I lean primarily on the basic definitions proposed by Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm for this thesis. Anderson writes that the nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>8</sup> Hobsbawm nuances the view, arguing that any *a priori* definition of a nation will essentially always find an exception. He writes, “[...] it is more profitable to begin with the concept of ‘the nation’ (i.e. with ‘nationalism’) than with the reality it represents. For the ‘nation’ as conceived by nationalism, can be recognized prospectively; the real ‘nation’ can only be recognized *a posteriori*.”<sup>9</sup> Essentially, as defined by Anderson, some broad common denominators are useful in defining the concept of the nation, but as Hobsbawm points out, any attempted definition of the nation as reality is shaped by the construction of said nations themselves. However, the nation as defined within the concept of nationalism is different. My stance is that within this context, Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ becomes a particularly useful tool. For this thesis, therefore, the ‘nation’ is primarily defined within the boundaries of how it is imagined and defined by Norwegian nationalists.

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 9.

For this thesis, the concept of *imperialism* needs to be distinguished from *Arctic imperialism*. Imperialism becomes an unwieldy term if one does not apply a very broad definition. As John Darwin argues, imperialism is rarely one easily definable concept: “Each [definition] suffers from the difficulty that while it might fit (at best) one case of European empire-building, it breaks down completely when applied to the next.”<sup>10</sup> Darwin proposes a generalized definition put forward by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, defining modern imperialism as “a function of [the] process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy”.<sup>11</sup> This broad definition could be useful to us, but necessitates that we define Arctic imperialism as something separate, less procedural and more ideological. By Arctic imperialism (or in Norwegian, *ishavsimperialisme*), I refer to an ideology of building a (specifically) Norwegian empire in the Arctic sea, based upon the idea of reclaiming possessions which were believed to have belonged to Norway in the medieval period, but had been lost during the time of unions with Denmark and Sweden. Imperialism in the Arctic has of course occurred within other states than Norway, so I want to clarify that I use ‘Arctic imperialism’ as a shorthand for ‘Norwegian Arctic imperialism’. The term *ishavsimperialisme* was used by Hans Fredrik Dahl, who defined it as a period of Norwegian expansionism, which began in the 1890s and ended in the early 1930s, and was “brought forth by strong, nationalist currents.”<sup>12</sup> The term seems to have been in contemporary use in the 1920s, with newspaper *Social-demokraten* using it in 1926.<sup>13</sup> It was applied in slightly different wording as “arktisk imperialisme” by Wilhelm Keilhau in 1938.<sup>14</sup> Niemi reiterated the term in 1994, writing that “[the nation building of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century] in Norway [...] gave dramatic manifestations especially in the north, [...] in tendencies to imperialism, by historians dubbed *Arctic imperialism*, from the border regions towards Russia, to Svalbard and Greenland.”<sup>15</sup> In *Norsk Polarhistorie II*, a whole chapter is awarded the title “Ishavsimperialisme”. Einar-Arne Drivenes uses the term broadly to describe the connection between exploration and expansionism in the Arctic in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He concludes that “[the] attempts to Norwegianize the Polar regions in the north through scientific work was no sensational and uniquely Norwegian practice. To the contrary, [...] Norwegian scientists who were preoccupied with the Arctic fall neatly in line with the

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<sup>10</sup> Darwin, “Nationalism and Imperialism, c.1880-1940”, 343.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson and Gallagher, “The Imperialism of Free Trade”, cited in Darwin, “Nationalism and Imperialism, c.1880-1940”, 343.

<sup>12</sup> Dahl, *Norge mellom krigene*, 27. All translations are mine.

<sup>13</sup> “De norske grønlandere”, *Social-demokraten*, 29 April 1926.

<sup>14</sup> Berg, *Norsk utanrikspolitikk etter 1814*, 62.

<sup>15</sup> Niemi, “Norge og Russland i nord», 20. Original: «I Norge ga dette seg dramatiske utslag især i nordområdet, [...] i ansatser til imperialisme, av historikerne kalt *ishavsimperialisme*, fra grenseområdene mot Russland til Svalbard og Grønland.»

Western scientific tradition of the era.”<sup>16</sup> As can be seen, I propose a slightly narrower definition of the term than previous scholars, focusing on imperialism as concrete expansionist political ambitions. This creates a distinction between *imperialism* as a term that may be applied generally to the Norwegian annexation of Spitsbergen, and *Arctic imperialism* as explaining the specific politics of a specific group at a specific location and time.

The distinction between *sovereignty* and *property* is important in the context of the Spitsbergen question, and particularly its solution. *Property* refers to the recognized occupation of land by a state or another juridical or physical person. *Sovereignty* refers to the exclusive jurisdictional and political rights inhabited by, with few exceptions, a state. Or, as Alan James puts it quite simply, “sovereignty is used to refer to the extent to which a state is free to behave as it wishes”.<sup>17</sup> Andrew Fitzmaurice writes that, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, legal questions arose about whether or not property and sovereignty could be seen as separate to one another. The idea was born that property “could be established outside sovereignty and, indeed, that sovereignty was created to protect those rights.”<sup>18</sup> In the scope of this thesis, this is complicated by the fact that for most of the period from the 1890s and into the 1910s, Norwegian media and politicians seemed to use ‘property’ as a phrase implying not only occupation or ownership, but also sovereignty. However, this perception changed over time and especially in the late 1910s, and the distinction is important to make so as to not create confusion when discussing the two concepts in light of the Spitsbergen treaty of 1920.

I have to make a practical distinction in this thesis between *annexation* and *occupation*, even though the two can theoretically overlap. In Fitzmaurice’s framework, occupation is used as the term for claiming the possession of land, including by a sovereign state. To avoid confusion, I must define the occupation of a larger piece of land (as either property or sovereignty) by a state as *annexation*, while *occupation* refers to smaller property claims by private actors. The reason for this distinction is that *occupation* was the widely accepted term used in newspapers, debates and treaty preparations to refer to the many claims made by private and juridical persons on Spitsbergen.

Finally, two more terms related to the previous paragraphs, *commons* and *terra nullius*. The former refers in a general sense to areas that are not subject to the sovereignty of any states. Historically, various legal terms have been used, and several of them have unclear or fluid interpretations. *Commons* becomes a useful term, then, to imply the concept of an absence of

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<sup>16</sup> Drivenes & Jølle (eds.), *Norsk Polarhistorie II*, 256.

<sup>17</sup> James, “The Practice of Statehood in Contemporary International Society”, 457.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzmaurice, “Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions”, 27.

state sovereignty, without making further implications about the political or juridical nature of that absence. *Terra nullius* was a term that was widely agreed upon to describe the political status of Spitsbergen in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term had been used in some situations previously, but as Fitzmaurice argues, in every case it was used the interpretation warped.<sup>19</sup> In the specific case of Spitsbergen, it was used to imply not just the absence of sovereignty, but the denial of any state's right to claim sovereignty.<sup>20</sup> In practice this means that when Norway was granted sovereignty over Spitsbergen, its status as *terra nullius* ended, but the stipulations of the treaty meant that it remained a global *commons*.

## Historiography

In his master thesis from 1996, Leif Johnny Johannessen divides Norwegian research on the Spitsbergen question and the Spitsbergen treaty into two schools: The “Mathisen school”, named after Trygve Mathisen and the “Berg School”, after Roald Berg.<sup>21</sup> The former was dominant until the early 1990s, while the latter presented a paradigm shift, which was arguably still taking place at the time when Johannessen submitted his thesis.

The Mathisen School emphasized economic factors and interests as the most important explanation for the resolution of the Spitsbergen question, arguing that it was the economic actors (primarily business interests) who were the dominant force in driving the issue forward both in Norway and in other countries. It is named after Mathisen based on his 1951 dissertation, *Svalbard i internasjonal politikk: 1871-1925*.<sup>22</sup> Adherents to this school include Willy Østreng, who included the word “økonomi” (“economics”) in the title of his 1973 dissertation *Økonomi og politisk suverenitet: Interessespillet om Svalbards politiske status*.<sup>23</sup> The explanation of economic interests as the primary factor in Norwegian policy towards Spitsbergen was prominent among most Norwegian scholars in the period.<sup>24</sup>

The Berg School, which Johannessen himself adheres to, presents a new model of explanation, accentuating what he calls “national self-assertion” (“nasjonal selvhevdelse”). Johannessen uses the terms “self-assertion” and “prestige” somewhat interchangeably, but chooses the term self-assertion to accentuate the importance of the Spitsbergen question as a

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<sup>19</sup> See Fitzmaurice, “Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions”, 302-331.

<sup>20</sup> Fitzmaurice, “Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions”, 312.

<sup>21</sup> Johannessen, “Den nasjonale selvhevdelses vei”, 6-12.

<sup>22</sup> Mathisen, *Svalbard i internasjonal politikk*.

<sup>23</sup> Østreng, *Økonomi og politisk suverenitet*.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Skagestad, *Norsk polarpolitikk* and Tamnes, *Svalbard og stormaktene*.



part of Norwegian identity building and cultural distancing from the other Scandinavian countries.<sup>25</sup> He attributes Roald Berg and his dissertation *Norsk utenrikspolitikks historie 1905-1920* (which was published as *Norge på egen hånd: 1905-1920*) as the major turning point, alongside Thor Bjørn Arlov's works on the history of the Archipelago.<sup>26</sup> The Berg school embraces cultural historical explanations and particularly the study of nationalism in order to explain the process in which Norway was granted Spitsbergen. The authors however largely adhere to the nation as a primary frame of reference, which obscures transnational and sub-national narratives.

A second turn takes place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this time away from the national and towards the individual level. This is well exemplified by Mary Katherine Jones' work on her Ph.D. thesis titled "Perceptions, Persuasions & Power. The textual shaping of Spitsbergen (Svalbard), 1895-1920: An international view".<sup>27</sup> In one of the articles of her thesis, Jones borrows the term "Spitsbergen Literature Lobby", a term coined by Elen C. Singh.<sup>28</sup> Singh uses the term to establish how "a spate of publications" which took place at the end of the Great War, aimed at policy makers in order to lobby them in this or that direction with regards to Spitsbergen.<sup>29</sup> Jones, in the article and in her thesis in general, explores the influence of a broad range of individuals and interest groups in shaping the discourse around Spitsbergen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Others have gone in a similar direction. Urban Wråkberg has studied the general role of scientists and explorers of the Arctic in building national identities around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and specifically their role in the creation of the Spitsbergen treaty.<sup>30</sup> Dag Avango et al. have contributed a major survey of the transnational exploitation of resources on Spitsbergen since the 1600s.<sup>31</sup> Berg has also been a part of this turn, focusing on the actor perspective of constructing the Norwegian-ness of Spitsbergen in "From 'Spitsbergen' to 'Svalbard'. Norwegianization in Norway and 'The Norwegian Sea'" published in 2013 and on the particular influence of the relationship between mining tycoon John Longyear and U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing in "Norway, Spitsbergen, and America, 1905-1920", published in 2017.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Johannessen, "Den nasjonale selvhevdelses vei", 8-9, 21-31.

<sup>26</sup> Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*. See also Arlov, "Fem teser om Svalbards historie" and Arlov, *Svalbards historie* (unpublished as of Johannessen's work on his thesis).

<sup>27</sup> Jones, "Perceptions, Persuasions & Power".

<sup>28</sup> Jones, "Spitsbergen Literature Lobby".

<sup>29</sup> Singh, *The Spitsbergen (Svalbard) Question*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Wråkberg, "A.E. Nordenskiöld in Swedish memory"; Wråkberg, "Vetenskaplig expertis och nordområdets naturresurser".

<sup>31</sup> Avango et al, "Between Markets and geo-politics".

<sup>32</sup> Berg, "From 'Spitsbergen' to 'Svalbard'"; Berg, "Norway, Spitsbergen, and America".

Arlov has furthered his research into the discovery and naming of Spitsbergen in 2020 with “Maps and Geographical Names as Tokens of National Interest”, placing discussions of Spitsbergen’s discovery and renaming as ‘Svalbard’ into a more international historical context.<sup>33</sup> The importance of tourism for the development of Spitsbergen in the public consciousness has been explored by among others Ulrike Spring, Bård Kolltveit and John T. Reilly.<sup>34</sup> The research of particularly the last decade has gone a long way in moving the explanations for Norway’s expansion to Spitsbergen past the national frame.

Furthermore, the Spitsbergen question has been widely researched within histories of international law. Particularly, the legal concept of *terra nullius* has led scholars to study Spitsbergen. Andrew Fitzmaurice in his research on the relationship between sovereignty and occupation has traced the genealogy of the concept primarily back to discussions of Spitsbergen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, explaining interpretations of *terra nullius* and how they changed over time, even in relation to Spitsbergen.<sup>35</sup> Christopher Rossi has written a *longue durée* history of the shared exploitation of Spitsbergen’s resources in an effort to understand both the limitations of sovereignty present in the Spitsbergen treaty and more recent disputes over resources in and around the archipelago.<sup>36</sup> M Zadorin has made similar inquiries, making the argument that disputes over the treaty can be explained as stemming from an ambiguity over the degree to which the concept of *terra nullius* lives on in the treaty.<sup>37</sup> Questions of sovereignty more broadly and its development as a concept at the end of the Great War has been covered extensively in the research of Leonard V. Smith, who has both generally discussed perceptions and understandings of sovereignty among the peacemakers after the war, and more specifically the interpretations of U.S. Secretary of state Robert Lansing.<sup>38</sup> His work helps bring specific issues like the Spitsbergen question into a broader political context.

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<sup>33</sup> Arlov, “Maps and Geographical Names as Tokens of National Interests”.

<sup>34</sup> Spring, “Cruise Tourists in Spitsbergen around 1900”; Kolltveit, “Deckchair Explorers”; Reilly, *Greetings from Spitsbergen*.

<sup>35</sup> Fitzmaurice, «Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions»; Fitzmaurice, “The Genealogy of Terra Nullius”.

<sup>36</sup> Rossi, “Terra Nullius and the ‘Unique’ International Problem of Svalbard”. See also Rossi, “A Unique International Problem”.

<sup>37</sup> Zadorin, “The doctrine of ‘common territory’ vs ‘terra nullius’”.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*; Smith, “The Wilsonian Challenge to International Law”.

## Methodology

To identify the views and ambitions of Arctic imperialists in the period I have chosen, I will primarily use Norwegian newspaper sources to study the developing discourses on the subject. Several historians of the Spitsbergen question have used newspapers as sources.<sup>39</sup> However, the use has tended to be in the service of accentuating an existing point or to indicate a public interest in the question. Such spurious use may give the impression of representing popular interest, but it problematically ignores taking into account the width of representations present across news media and, even more importantly, weighing interest against *disinterest*, e.g. when newspapers do *not* cover the issue. Through an extensive search of the digitalized newspaper library hosted by Nasjonalbiblioteket (NB), my primary source work has two main goals. Firstly, to identify the broader debate on the subject, with a focus extending past those papers and editions which showed the largest interest in the question. Secondly, to gauge how constant interest was in Spitsbergen across news media in the period. Through this, I achieve a provincialization of Arctic imperialism within the larger debate, which illuminates how the elite-driven program gained an over-dimensioned influence, as well as how the more radical notions of Arctic imperialism met plenty of reluctance within the broader political elite. I also aim to explain the complexities of the Spitsbergen treaty by proving that the Spitsbergen discourse in Norway was itself filled with differing views and ambitions. The keyword search of newspapers in the NB database was done through a ‘fuzzy’ search for the terms ‘Spitsbergen’ and ‘Svalbard’ throughout the period, using hits per month to identify moments of increased interest and more closely inspecting these moments.<sup>40</sup> This method has allowed for a broad view of the discourse, capturing many different views and degrees of interest.

In reading and analyzing newspapers, I have considered both form, content and context, showing consciousness not only to text, but also to placement inside the paper, who the readership of the paper was and what political profile the paper had. This method has been useful in enabling me to understand how interested different newspapers were in the issue (and how interested they believed their readers to be), which fraction of society Arctic imperialism

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<sup>39</sup> See for example Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*.

<sup>40</sup> A ‘fuzzy’ search means that the search engine allows a certain deviation, in this case one letter, from the search phrase entered. In practice this means that even if the transcription had misread “Spitsbergen” as “Spivsbergen”, it would still return a hit. Especially in newspapers written with a gothic typeface, this proved necessary.

first emerged within, and whether or not there was a correlation between party politics and the variation in views about Spitsbergen.

Additionally, I have examined debates in the Norwegian parliament. This has allowed me to show how debates in the public sphere shaped and developed arguments from national politicians. Finally, I have used archives from the Norwegian legation in Paris surrounding the process that took place during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. This has allowed me to illuminate how the discourse of the previous decades influenced, directly and indirectly, the process leading up to the creation and signing of the Spitsbergen Treaty.

The goal of this selection of sources has been to make public debates and the open exchange of ideas that took place the focus of the thesis. I have aimed to create a view of the history of the Spitsbergen question that avoids narrowly focusing on those, in either academia, business, politics or bureaucracy who were most closely involved with the process. The reason being that these actors may give the historian an exaggerated view both of the question's importance, sustained interest and continuous development in the period.

## 1. Imagining an Arctic Empire

In 1596, news came to Europe that Willem Barentsz had discovered a new landmass in the Arctic, far north off the coast of Norway. Barentsz had died before being able to return from the voyage, but his crew returned with maps of the land that they had christened *Spitsbergen*. Whether this constituted the discovery of the archipelago or not came under dispute at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a subset of Norwegian historians, explorers, politicians and newspaper editors formulating and spreading a theory that Norwegians had actually discovered the archipelago as early as 1194.<sup>41</sup> While it will remain practically impossible to ever definitely prove or disprove this theory entirely (not to mention that this dichotomy ignores a third option, that Russian pomores might have been active on the archipelago since before either), 1596 remained the internationally recognized point of Spitsbergen's discovery.<sup>42</sup> What can be said for sure is that the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of large-scale exploitation of the natural resources around Spitsbergen. This in turn led to a competition for the property rights over the remote islands. The Dutch, British and Danish-Norwegian all attempted at various points during the 17<sup>th</sup> century to claim Spitsbergen as their possession.<sup>43</sup> The first

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<sup>41</sup> Berg, "From 'Spitsbergen' to 'Svalbard'", 168.

<sup>42</sup> See Rossi, "Terra Nullius and the 'Unique' International Problem of Svalbard", 146.

<sup>43</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 67-73.

conflicts over property rights over Spitsbergen came in 1613-14, in a dispute between Britain and the Netherlands. During the dispute, Britain rejected the claim that Barentsz had discovered the archipelago, claiming that Hugh Willoughby had discovered it as early as 1555. The Netherlands responded by commissioning a dissertation disproving that claim of earlier discovery.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, a connection was created very early between the idea of the first discovery of Spitsbergen and the right to ownership of the archipelago. Denmark-Norway did not make a similar claim of first discovery at the time. There was a claim raised by King Christian IV, but it was rather defended on the assumption that Spitsbergen was connected to Greenland, and as such belonged to him.<sup>45</sup> A Norwegian annexation was discussed at two more points before 1896. First in 1871, when the Swedish government, on the insistence of Finnish-Swedish explorer A.E. Nordenskiöld, raised the question of recognizing Spitsbergen as a property of the Norwegian crown. Due to Russian protests and a lack of interest from the Norwegian government, little came of the Swedish push.<sup>46</sup> Then in 1892, the Norwegian government made a demand to their union partner Sweden that Spitsbergen be given to Norway. This demand must be seen in the context of the strong antipathies towards the Swedish-Norwegian personal union at the time, and was part of a list of demands that were likely made to be unreasonable and impossible for the Swedish government to accept.<sup>47</sup> No state succeeded in securing exclusive property rights over Spitsbergen, and it existed essentially, though not always without friction, as a commons for over three centuries after Barentsz' discovery in 1596. As technology made travel and communication faster, simpler and more inexpensive, Spitsbergen became less remote, and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was frequented by fishers, whalers, explorers and tourists. Additionally, after the 'scramble for Africa' in 1884-85, the Arctic and Antarctic had become home to practically the last uncolonized landmasses in the world. Northern European empires turned their eyes to Spitsbergen. Then, a new theory of discovery was presented: The theory that it was actually Norwegians who had discovered the islands, a full 400 years before Barentsz' voyage. This chapter will explore the popularization of this theory, and how it grew to be utilized as an argument for property rights by first discovery.

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<sup>44</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 67-68.

<sup>45</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 219-26.

<sup>47</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 231-2.

## Nansen's return and the idea of 'Svalbard'

Although the claim that Norwegians discovered Spitsbergen in 1194 seems to originate from an account by geologist Baltazar Keilhau as early as 1831, the theory remained relatively dormant until it once again was brought up by historian Gustav Storm in 1890.<sup>48</sup> And while the idea of an annexation of Svalbard was brought up by the Swedish government in 1871 and by the Norwegian government in 1892, we see the first real public debate about Spitsbergen in the mid-1890s. In 1893, explorer Fridtjof Nansen had set out on a voyage into the Arctic ice sheets. The goal of the expedition was to drift with the ice sheets across the North pole with the expedition ship *Fram*. The movement of the ship through the ice turned out to be much too slow, and the expedition was eventually aborted, with both Nansen and crew finding their way back to Norway in 1896.<sup>49</sup> With Nansen's return, nationalist fervor was rampant, paying no mind to the fact that his mission had failed in its primary objective. Øystein Sørensen writes that Norwegian nationalism had been developing explosively since the Swedish-Norwegian union reached a point of crisis in 1893. He writes that "in the midst of this development, Fridtjof Nansen and his crew returned from one of the most daring expeditions anyone had heard of [...] In a time of increasing Norwegian nationalism, Nansen became Norway's undisputed national hero."<sup>50</sup> On top of this, the 1890s had seen the proliferation of mass tourism on the Spitsbergen archipelago, with many cruises embarking due north, and Vesteraalens Dampskibsselskap announcing their intention in 1896 to build a hotel in the Advent fjord (the location where Longyear city would be founded a few years later).<sup>51</sup> The fact that 1896 marked the 400-year anniversary of the Barentsz expedition likely also increased the awareness of Spitsbergen. In the midst of this nationalistic fervor and 'Nansen fever', the newspaper *Eidsvold* made a suggestion, which would lead to a not insignificant debate in newspaper columns in the following months. The short editorial said:

SPITSBERGEN is an archipelago which no country has yet demanded property rights over. Geographically speaking it is closest to Norway, and the Norwegians are also the people who are most commonly seen in the waters there, and most often have wintered on its uninhabited shores. This summer, Norway has so to speak acted as the host who has guided the foreigners around on the islands. As it can be predicted that the archipelago from here on will see visits every year by others than merely trappers and

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<sup>48</sup> Berg, "From 'Spitsbergen' to 'Svalbard'", 162, 168.

<sup>49</sup> Sørensen, *Fridtjof Nansen*, 33-58.

<sup>50</sup> Sørensen, *Fridtjof Nansen*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Spring, "Cruise Tourists in Spitsbergen around 1900", 43.

scientists, the question of property rights should be raised. Should it not perhaps be time that a query is raised to the various European powers, if anyone would have objections to Norway formally taking Spitsbergen into possession?<sup>52</sup>

The core argument of this editorial shows that a coherent historical and legal argument for a Norwegian title on Spitsbergen either did not yet exist or had not been popularized. There was no claim of first discovery or of the scale of occupations on the islands, nor directly of the degree of economic interests Norway held up there compared to others. Rather, it was simply a statement of who knew the archipelago better. Also noteworthy is the relatively mild and unaggressive tone with which the editorial was written. The development of Arctic imperialism in the next decades would create a rhetoric that was much more aggressive, suspicious and in some instances downright defensive. Another newspaper, *Den 17de Mai*, gave their support to *Eidsvold*'s suggestion two days later, writing that “[i]f Spitsbergen is of little value now, it can still *gain* value. And it will never be easier than now to have our sovereignty there approved.”<sup>53</sup> On 16 September, *Aftenposten* wrote a lengthy article exploring the idea, choosing not to actively endorse it, but providing an elaboration on the failed attempt by Sweden to claim the islands (for Norway) in 1871, and suggesting that a burgeoning tourism business on the archipelago could raise the legitimacy of Norwegian claims.<sup>54</sup> On the same day, *Eidsvold* revisited the issue, attempting to confront the more practical issues of their suggestion. In a humorously notable case of accidental prescience, they wrote that “while the entire territory would be proclaimed Norwegian property, there should be access for people of all nations to hunt along the coast and with state funding create trapping stations on the land.”<sup>55</sup> Just as soon as the idea of Norwegian Spitsbergen was floated, so too were ideas of limitations on the exclusivity of Norwegian property rights. The following days and weeks saw debate between newspapers, with *Eidsvold* on one side and *Aftenposten* (who had doubted their way to a negative position) and *Norges Sjøfarts Tidende* prominent on the other, about whether there

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<sup>52</sup> “Spitsbergen”, *Eidsvold*. 10 September 1896. Original: “SPITSBERGEN er en Øgruppe, som intet Land hidtil har krævet Eiendomsret til. I geografisk henseende ligger den nærmest Norge, og Nordmændene er ogsaa det Folk, der hyppigst sees der i farvandene og hyppigst har overvintret paa de ellers ubeboede Strande. I sommer har Norge saa at sige været den Vært, der har vist de fremmede omkring paa Øerne. Da det kan forudsees, at Øgruppen herefter aarlig vil blive gjæstet ogsaa af andre end Fangstmænd og Videnskabsmænd, turde vel Spørgsmaalet om Eiendomsretten komme op. Mon det ikke skulde være paa Tide, at der rettedes Forespørgsel til de forskjellige europæiske Magter, om de havde noget at indvende mod at Norge formentlig tog Spitsbergen i Besiddelse?”

<sup>53</sup> “Spitsbergen”, *Den 17de Mai*. 12 September 1896. Original: “Um Spitsbergen er av lite verd no, so kan det *faa* verd. Og aldri vil det falle lettare en noa a faa vaart raadevelde der godkjent.”

<sup>54</sup> “Et herreløst Land”, *Aftenposten* (morning edition). 16 September 1896.

<sup>55</sup> “Spitsbergen”, *Eidsvold*. 16 September 1896. Original: “[...] medens hele Territoriet erklæres for den norske Stats Eiendom, skal der være Adgang for alle Magters Undersaatter til paa lige Fod med norske Undersaatter at drive Fangst ved Kysten og med Statens Bevilling at oprette Fangststationer paa Land.”

was value in a potential Norwegian annexation. The editorial board of *Aftenposten* was negative towards the idea, but on 29 September, an anonymous contribution to the paper by a reader claiming to “speak for several more”, pronounced an enthusiastic and bold typed “Yes!”, emphasizing that “Now is the time”, and signing off the letter with the word “Fram!” (“Forward!”), an allusion to Nansen’s expedition ship with the same name.<sup>56</sup> In a similar but even more direct tribute to Nansen and his polar expedition, *Bratsberg Amtstidende* excitedly suggested renaming the archipelago from Spitsbergen to “Framland”.<sup>57</sup> The same newspaper had, a few days earlier, begun building a more cohesive nationalist argument for an annexation. On 24 September, they argued that Spitsbergen (alongside Bear Island and Jan Mayen) were situated in what Norwegians had recently renamed “The Norwegian Sea”, and that it was only when these lands were again possessed by Norway that “these waters in truth will become ‘the Norwegian sea’, which should and must be strived towards”.<sup>58</sup> The paper was relatively early in considering the question of Spitsbergen as a national question. They theorized the Arctic and thereby Spitsbergen as a primarily Norwegian place, a concept which would grow to become a cornerstone of Arctic imperialism.

This brief discussion in 1896 tapered off by winter, and showed that as of yet, skepticism seemed to outweigh enthusiasm for a Norwegian expansion into the Arctic. What is important about this specific debate is that it showed the two sides of the discussion that would dominate the discourse until 1919, and their rhetorical anchor points. Those who wanted to see Spitsbergen become Norwegian based their arguments in national sentiments, while those opposed or lukewarm to the idea focused primarily on the potential future returns (or lack thereof) such a move would entail. A coherent historical argument as would be popularized in the next decades was not yet in use. In fact, history, particularly the history of the Swedish-Norwegian push in 1871, was used as an argument to the *disadvantage* of *Eidsvold*’s suggestion. It showed how any attempt to annex Spitsbergen would be blocked by Russia. The Russian Empire’s opposition to an annexation in 1871 seemed to have left a lasting impression, and Russia would remain a primary concern of all sides of the discussion even beyond the resolution of the Spitsbergen question in 1920. Perhaps the most interesting outcome of this debate was how *Eidsvold*, when confronted with these critiques, suggested limitations of sovereignty so similar to those that would eventually be worked into the Spitsbergen treaty two

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<sup>56</sup> “Bør Spitsbergen søges erhvervet som norsk Besiddelse?”, *Aftenposten* (morning edition), 29 September 1896.

<sup>57</sup> “Spitsbergen”, *Bratsberg Amtstidende*, 17 September 1896.

<sup>58</sup> “Fram-land”, *Bratsberg Amtstidende*, 24 September 1896, 1. Original: “Da først vil hint Farvand i Sandhed bli «Det norske Hav,» hvad der bør og maa tilstræbes.”



decades later. That the interests of other states was so quickly accepted and the solution being to retain Spitsbergen's status as a de facto commons area, gives the impression that the idea of Spitsbergen as a commons was deeply ingrained in the public. The debate also shows how the early beginnings of Arctic imperialism were deeply intertwined with exploration and cultural nationalism. The act of exploration was nationally motivated all over Europe, and in many cases fanned the flames of imperialism and colonialism.<sup>59</sup> Generally, however, this had not yet been the case in the hostile climate and infertile lands of the Arctic. In countries like Great Britain, calls for annexation of the archipelago would mainly grow in the 1910s alongside the coal industry and awareness of the archipelago's mineral richness.

I have shown here how Arctic imperialism in Norway from an early point was less interested in economic benefits than it was with national rights and prestige, and how its seeds were fertilized by a combination of nationalist sentiments towards Sweden and the accomplishments of Norwegian explorers in the 1890s. Norwegians were not alone in trying nor succeeding to break records and pioneer in or from Spitsbergen in the 1890s. Few days before news arrived of Nansen's safe return, newspapers reported that British explorer Sir William Martin Conway had become the first to cross Spitsbergen on foot.<sup>60</sup> On the day before the news of Conway, Norwegian newspapers had reported on Swedish explorer Salomon August Andrée, who was about to set out on a mission to reach the North Pole by balloon from Spitsbergen.<sup>61</sup> In short, between advertisements for and reports from cruise trips, political debates as a by-product of Nansen fever, various other expeditions and so forth, Spitsbergen was filling a larger amount of column inches than before. The archipelago was growing into a known place, a place you could hear about, read about and even visit if you could afford it. Yet calls for a Norwegian annexation met lukewarm reactions. In the following decades, Arctic imperialism would find an increasing number of followers who in turn worked to create a coherent argument for the cause. The steady rise in activity on the archipelago also created debates within the realm of international law, where attempts began to define and understand its political status more clearly.

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<sup>59</sup> See Kennedy, *Reinterpreting Exploration*, 1-3.

<sup>60</sup> "Udland", *Dagbladet*. 8 August 1896.

<sup>61</sup> See *Bodø Tidende* and *Lofotposten*, 7 August 1896.

## *Terra Nullius* and the construction of a legal framework for Spitsbergen

In an article published in 1917, International law scholar and then U.S. Secretary of state Robert Lansing dubbed the Spitsbergen question a “unique international problem”.<sup>62</sup> The characterization seems apt, at least by the 1910s. Before the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the archipelago had no real permanent inhabitants, save perhaps the odd trapper who could stay there for extended periods. However, with the establishment of coal mining operations, the first venture taking place in 1899, businesses increasingly established permanent towns on Spitsbergen.<sup>63</sup> For scholars of international law, this led to the need for a new examination of its legal status. The islands were possible to occupy, which meant that they remained outside any state’s control because there was an unspoken *agreement* between the interested states that it should be kept that way.<sup>64</sup> The first real declaration of Spitsbergen’s status (that is, one that was not merely a series of unrecognized claims as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century) came into being in 1872, as a direct result of the Swedish request to annex the archipelago in the previous year. The diplomatic move led to a prolonged exchange of notes between Sweden and Russia, agreeing the land should be considered *terra nullius*; not merely unclaimed land, but a land that no state was allowed to claim exclusive possession over.<sup>65</sup> The agreement vaguely established a kind of *condominium* mentality between the two states, agreeing that issues relating to Spitsbergen should be the co-responsibility of the two to solve. Christopher Rossi writes that the question arose of what *terra nullius* meant in the context of Spitsbergen:

Did it preclude possession by states as a confused or commingled expression of *res communis*? Did it imply a condominium arrangement among interested parties? Did it require formal multilateral legal administration through treaty creation? Or did it express a beachcomber’s delight, bestowing treasures upon privateers who were lucky or capable enough to fall first into possession of ownerless property?<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Lansing, “A Unique International Problem”.

<sup>63</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 245.

<sup>64</sup> Fitzmaurice, “Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions”, 311-12.

<sup>65</sup> Rossi, “Terra Nullius and the ‘Unique’ International Problem of Svalbard”, 150-51. Rossi argues that the regime proposed does not really fit with any conventional understanding of the term *terra nullius*, but as previously disclosed I (although somewhat anachronistically) use the term to refer specifically to the legal status of Spitsbergen in this period.

<sup>66</sup> Rossi, “Terra Nullius and the ‘Unique’ International Problem of Svalbard”, 154.

The somewhat dissatisfying yet contextually important answer is that it was all of those things, either sequentially or at the same time. There was a *de facto* condominium between states with interests on the islands when it came to making decisions about them, which led to attempts to formalize an international administration in the first half of the 1910s. The fact that multiple states were so motivated by the fear of another annexing Spitsbergen first implies that there was some sense of a *res communis* or commons. And while all this took place, non-state actors (both explorers/scientists and businessmen, and quite often the former acting as an agent of the latter) were claiming occupations left and right, creating a confusing, contradictory and ultimately un-administrable web of property claims.<sup>67</sup>

It was in this context that international law scholars took on the task of both defining the legal status of Spitsbergen and suggesting how it could be developed and changed. According to Andrew Fitzmaurice, it was Italian jurist Camille Piccioni who popularized the term *terra nullius* concerning Spitsbergen in 1906.<sup>68</sup> Piccioni argued that the islands had been “until now *terra nullius*”, and thought sovereignty by a single state to be preferable, yet made impossible by the fact that several states had viable claims.<sup>69</sup> From there, the juridical interpretation of *terra nullius* solidified, which meant that any change in status for the archipelago was a challenge to a perceived existing legal regime. Two important questions emerged: First, one of how the status could be combined with administration, and second, whether it was mutually exclusive with any kind of sovereignty. The first question occupied American international jurist James Brown Scott, who argued in 1909 that as a consequence of international agreements Spitsbergen had remained *terra nullius* despite being occupied, and that in the same vein, international agreements could lead to an administration of the islands which did not compromise that status.<sup>70</sup> The second question was explored by Robert Lansing in his aforementioned article. The article was published during the Great War, in 1917, but was prepared before he was appointed as Secretary of State, meaning before 9 June 1915.<sup>71</sup> Lansing’s hypothesis was that *political sovereignty* could be established and maintained without *territorial sovereignty*. In other words, a state could hold the exclusive right to make and enforce laws and regulation over a territory, while not at the same time owning exclusive rights to hold and distribute property rights over that territory.<sup>72</sup> As will be seen in section Two

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<sup>67</sup> See Brugmans & Reymert, *Herfra mot vest til Grønlandshavet*.

<sup>68</sup> Fitzmaurice, “Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions”, 311.

<sup>69</sup> Fitzmaurice, “Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions”, 311.

<sup>70</sup> Fitzmaurice, “Terra Nullius and the Polar Regions”, 313.

<sup>71</sup> See “The Appointment of Mr. Robert Lansing as Secretary of State.”

<sup>72</sup> Lansing, “A Unique International Problem”.

and Three, these various legal interpretations and proposals would become an important context and frame for all attempts at resolving the Spitsbergen question.

## ‘Svalbard’ and the construction of a Norwegian claim to Spitsbergen

For those wishing to annex Spitsbergen, questions of discovery and occupation remained important aspects to international law for those wishing to annex Spitsbergen. With occupations being temporary in nature until the beginning of coal mining, Arctic imperialists in Norway developed a growing interest in the question of discovery. After the debacles of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it had grown to be generally accepted that the Dutch had been the ones to discover the archipelago. With the Dutch retaining few interests in Spitsbergen by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this on one hand made discovery an unused argument for title, but on the other provided an opening for its use given a different theory of discovery. With the theory having been raised at two points during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the “Svalbard” mentioned in Icelandic annals could actually be Spitsbergen, several Norwegians got to work with both proving the probability of the theory and popularizing it. Thor Bjørn Arlov calls this construction “The Svalbard myth” (“Svalbard-myten”), I will refer to it as the ‘1194 theory’ as to not confuse the discovery theory with the broader mythos which was built up around Norwegian Arctic Empire and former sovereignty over Spitsbergen.<sup>73</sup>

Gustav Storm formulated the theory in 1890, but it did not garner much attention until 1898, when Alexander Bugge repeated the claim in the journal *Kringsjaa*, in an article that was reproduced in several newspapers.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, rebukes of the theory entered Norwegian newspapers before it ever gained much recognition. *Bergens Annonce-Tidende* printed a correspondent letter in 1896 where the correspondent, about to embark on a cruise to Spitsbergen, wanted to “give the audience an introduction to the history of this land which these days puts so many thoughts into motion.”<sup>75</sup> In the letter the correspondent brings up the 1194 theory, but gives it little credit and concludes that even though it was not unlikely that Norwegians believed there was land to the north of Finnmark, “the land was in reality

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<sup>73</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 319.

<sup>74</sup> See “Vore forfædres Opdagelsesreiser i Polaregnene”, *Tromsø Stiftstidende*, 7 July 1898. The same text under the same title was published in *Folketanken*, 4 May 1898.

<sup>75</sup> “Til Spitsbergen”, *Bergens Annonce-Tidende*, 29 July 1896. Original: “[...] har jeg fundet det heldigt at sætte Publikum lidt ind i det Lands historie, som i disse Dage sætter saa mange Tanker i Bevægelse.»

discovered by a Dutch expedition in 1596”.<sup>76</sup> The theory slowly grew into prominence in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly helped along by Gunnar Isachsen, who participated in and led a series of expeditions to Spitsbergen. Throughout the 1900s, he used any opportunity to perpetuate the 1194 discovery narrative, including lectures, newspapers and scientific journals.<sup>77</sup> It was subsequently reiterated by Fridtjof Nansen in his major historical work published in 1910, *Nord i Tåkeheimen*, and others, like self-taught historian Macody Lund, an enthusiastic Arctic imperialist and later Mussolini supporter.<sup>78</sup> It was also perpetuated by Adolf Hoel, who participated in several of Isachsen’s Spitsbergen expeditions, as well as leading several of his own in the 1910s.<sup>79</sup> The theory slowly caught hold during the 1910s and by the time of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, it was the dominant narrative within the Norwegian delegation. There was, however, still tangible skepticism in the Norwegian parliament even in 1919, with Johan Rye Holmboe (FV) referring to “this alleged old right”.<sup>80</sup> It also seems the theory did not hold much water internationally, judging by the fact that even the Norwegian delegation in Paris’ close ally, the French geologist Charles Rabot, wrote it off as unlikely in 1919.<sup>81</sup>

As I will show in the following section, the 1194 theory and the name ‘Svalbard’ became essentially a mark of identity for burgeoning Arctic imperialists. It became closely tied with parts of ‘målrørsla’ and was interpreted (or perhaps mistaken) as a *landsmål* specific word for Spitsbergen. The theory became intertwined with the work of Arnold Ræstad, who in 1912 published his dissertation *Norges høihetsret over Spitsbergen i ældre tid*, mapping out historical agreements, claims and treaties in an attempt to show a historical continuity of Norway’s allegedly continuous sovereignty over the archipelago since the middle ages.<sup>82</sup>

The theory also easily fit into a broader narrative about what Norway had lost during the long centuries of union with Denmark followed by Sweden. This led to the adoption of both the theory itself and Arctic imperialism more broadly by parts of a movement called ‘norskdomsrørsla’ (literally, ‘the Norwegian-ness movement’). ‘Norskdomsrørsla’ is a definition for a group, which prided itself on being grass roots, but as Reidun Høydal argues it

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<sup>76</sup> “Til Spitsbergen”, *Bergens Annonse-Tidende*, 29 July 1896. Original: “Landet opdagedes dog i Virkeligheden først av en hollandsk Expedition i 1596 [...]»

<sup>77</sup> Berg, “From ‘Spitsbergen’ to ‘Svalbard’”, 168. See also: Isachsen, “Reiser på Spitsbergen 1906 og 1907” and “Hvem opdagede Spitsbergen?”, *Nordre Trondhjems Amtstidende*, 1 September 1908.

<sup>78</sup> Nansen, *Nord i tåkeheimen*, 415; Berg, “From ‘Spitsbergen’ to ‘Svalbard’”, 168; Seland, *Macody Lund*.

<sup>79</sup> Drivenes, “Ishavsimperialisme”, 178-197.

<sup>80</sup> Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8 mars 1919, 14. Original: “[...] denne Norges formentlig gamle ret.”

<sup>81</sup> Rabot, “The Norwegians in Spitsbergen”, 212.

<sup>82</sup> Ræstad, *Norges høihetsret over Spitsbergen i ældre tid*.

was largely led by an elite, many of whom were based in Kristiania.<sup>83</sup> The primary goal was the implementation of *landsmål* as the official written language rather than the more Danish-influenced *riksmål*, but their political and cultural program stretched much further.<sup>84</sup> Just like *landsmål* was an attempt to construct (or rather reclaim, according to them) a Norwegian identity separate from Denmark and Sweden, the 1194 theory was an attempt to construct a pride over Norwegian might and prestige before the unions. Therefore, as I will illuminate moving forward, this movement became an important arena for the growth of Arctic imperialism. Finally, it is worth noting that Arctic imperialism in no way became *limited* to supporters of *landsmål* and shunned by supporters of *riksmål*. ‘Norskdomsrørsla had their apparent counterpart in the group called ‘Lysakerkretsen’, a *riksmål* writing group centered more whole-heartedly around Kristiania, where among others, Fridtjof Nansen was considered a member. The two groups have usually been portrayed as antagonists, but as Høydal argues, they often found common ground.<sup>85</sup> The Spitsbergen question was an example of this, with *landsmål* papers leading the charge side-by-side with people like Nansen, Macody Lund and Adolf Hoel, all of which were urban, Eastern-Norwegian *riksmål* supporters.

## 2. Towards Rule of Law on Spitsbergen

In newspapers, interest for Spitsbergen slowly tapered off after the brief debate in 1896, only to return to any real relevance in the 1910s.<sup>86</sup> This dip in interest was likely due to a combination of the developments leading to the dissolution of Norway’s personal union with Sweden in 1905, and to the fact that interest in the issue simply had not taken a strong hold of neither the Norwegian population at large nor the elite. Within the political sphere, the issue also lay mostly dormant until talks began about creating an international regime for Spitsbergen around 1910. The need to revisit the political situation on the archipelago had grown more relevant with the increasing presence of the coal industry. Support for a Norwegian annexation was not uttered in the Norwegian parliament until 1919.<sup>87</sup> When the Norwegian minister in Paris, Baron Wedel Jarlsberg (“Wedel” from here on) raised the possibility of asking for Spitsbergen as reparations

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<sup>83</sup> See Høydal, “Norskdomsrørslas akademikarar”.

<sup>84</sup> *Landsmål* and *riksmål* are known today as *nynorsk* and *bokmål*, respectively.

<sup>85</sup> Høydal, “Norskdomsrørslas akademikarar”.

<sup>86</sup> Save for another brief discussion in 1899, see Berg, *Norge på egen hand*, 152.

<sup>87</sup> Though, as was later discussed in regards to this issue in the Norwegian parliament, it had not been the norm for foreign policy to be a subject of discussion in parliament.

after the war in 1919, the idea still faced skepticism. This chapter will show how the rhetoric of Arctic imperialism was adapted and developed within a segment of the ‘norsksdomsrørsla’ sympathetic press. Furthermore, I will discuss how, when the issue came to the fore in 1919, the rhetoric used by the most sympathetic parliamentarians and diplomats echoed the rhetoric that had been honed by the Arctic imperialists throughout the decade prior. This rhetoric is visibly contrasted with the relative indifference that reigned around the Spitsbergen question in most newspapers, and among many politicians. Finally, I will show how the onset of the Great War gave fertile soil to Arctic imperialism and helped it out of relative marginality and into the mainstream.

## Attempts at an international solution

In a contrast to the far livelier discussion on the status of Spitsbergen 14 years earlier, when the Norwegian government announced in 1910 that they were arranging an international conference aiming to establish an international regime for the administration of Spitsbergen, Norwegian newspapers were mostly positive and/or disinterested in any debate on the subject. When the preliminary results of the first conference between representatives from Norway, Sweden and Russia were announced in the same year, it was met with little debate. When the issue was raised two years later in the King’s speech to parliament, some papers can be observed maneuvering into opposition against the process.<sup>88</sup> For the sake of context, I will briefly touch on what the core contents of the Spitsbergen agreements of 1910-1914 were. In 1909, Norway reached out to other governments with interests on Spitsbergen, inviting them to initiate a discussion as to “exchange opinions on an improvement of the conditions on the archipelago of Spitsbergen.”<sup>89</sup> The premise of the discussions according to the Norwegian invitation was that any change in Spitsbergen’s international status as ‘no man’s land’ should not be up for discussion. The regime was to build on international cooperation and arbitration, and rules were proposed specifically to hinder all contracting states from claiming any kind of annexations on

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<sup>88</sup> It should be noted that whenever the Norwegian king spoke at the opening of parliament, he recited a speech that was written by the sitting government.

<sup>89</sup> “Spitsbergen-konferansen: Amerikas Stilling”, *Oplandenes Avis*, 18 January 1910. Original: “[...] i den hensigt at utveksle Meninger om en Forbedring av Forholdene paa Øgruppen Spitsbergen.” The invitation went out to Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Russia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA.

the archipelago.<sup>90</sup> While Norwegian newspapers at the time mostly supported the process (or at the very least voiced no active opposition), Arctic imperialists saw an opportunity to speak up.

The first few years of talks about an international regime met few critical questions in the press as well as in parliament.<sup>91</sup> The 1194 theory would however develop and become part of a broader argument for Norway's historical sovereignty over the archipelago. It especially gained foothold within the *landsmål* press, the proponents of *landsmål* being closely related to 'norskdomsrørsla'. However, most newspapers were supportive of the process. In relation to the international conference in 1910, *Morgenbladet* published an article looking in depth at the discovery and political position of Spitsbergen. In its first paragraph, they summarized the general perception in both international political circles and Norwegian newspapers at the time:

For a long time, both Norwegians and others have longed for a safeguarding system, and as the interests on the Polar island have grown larger and larger with the increasing exploitation of its natural riches, an ever stronger feeling has emerged of how necessary it is that conditions up there become regulated, that the colliding interests do not just solve their disputes through vigilante justice, but that an internationally recognized administration is established, of a judicial and controlling nature.<sup>92</sup>

This echoed a short article written a week earlier in which the paper said that the Norwegian initiative was "worthy of all possible praise".<sup>93</sup> The 16 July article was positive towards the prospect of an international regime, but interestingly still employed much of the rhetoric that had been and would be employed by Arctic imperialists to criticize the treaty. Around the time of this first conference in 1910, *Morgenbladet* was one of the more actively interested newspapers, and their positivity towards an international regime on Spitsbergen met little resistance from other newspapers. An interesting exception came in the same newspaper only

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<sup>90</sup> See "Spitsbergen-Konferansen", *Skandinaven*, 19 June 1914, and "Nordmenn og russar i strid um eign paa Spitzbergen", *Spegelen*, 10 June 1914.

<sup>91</sup> Based on a search through the parliamentary records, there was no real opposition to the process. However, it should be noted that generally foreign policy was strongly centralized and left to the devices of the foreign ministry, and generally not discussed in open parliamentary sessions. It was pointed out in a closed-door meeting on 8 March 1919 that the parliament had never been allowed to discuss the political situation on Spitsbergen. See *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget, 8 mars 1919*.

<sup>92</sup> "Spitsbergen", *Morgenbladet*, 16 July 1910. Original: "Længe har man baade blant Nordmænd og andre følt Savnet av en betryggende Ordning, og eftersom Interesserne i Polarøen er blit større og større med den voksende Utnyttelse av dens naturlige Rikdomme, har man faat en alltid sterkere Følelse av, hvor paatrængende nødvendig det er, at Forholdene deroppe blir regulert, at de kolliderende Interesser ikke bare løser sine Tvister gjennom Selvtaegt og Næveret, men at der etableres en internationalt anerkjendt Myndighet av dømmende og kontrollerende Art."

<sup>93</sup> Untitled, *Morgenbladet*, 9 July 1910. Original: "Vi har det Indtryk, at den norske Utenriksministers Initiativ er al Ros Værd [...]."



eight days later, on 24 July. The article, titled “Norges historiske Eiendomsret til Spitsbergen” (“Norway’s historical property rights over Spitsbergen”) was published anonymously, but it was written by the self-taught historian Macody Lund.<sup>94</sup> He defended at length the claim that Norwegians discovered Spitsbergen, and that Norwegians had the strongest claim to ownership over the archipelago. It ended with a rebuttal against the current Norwegian policy. He wrote that Norway now “invited Sweden to meddle in an old Norwegian rightful land, which Norwegians have discovered and always owned and in unmeasurable times had their work in,” and sarcastically asking if it was “the teaching that our Weakness should be our Strength which had taught us to so honorably maintain our forefathers’ bloodily earned rights?”<sup>95</sup> This kind of accusatory and aggressive rhetoric was novel from the Arctic imperialists. In the following years, it would become more and more regularly seen in Norwegian newspapers.

There was a low level of focus and debate on the international process and Spitsbergen’s political status in newspapers throughout the period from 1910-1914. The exception is found mainly in the *landsmål* press, with papers like *Gula Tidend* and *Spegjelen* showing active frustration with the whole process. It is not unlikely that when discussing the stance of *Gula Tidend*, one is actually discussing the personal politics of its chief editor, Johs. Lavik. This is in fact heavily hinted at in an article in *Haalogaland* in 1925.<sup>96</sup> However, as mostly all Norwegian newspaper articles in this period were written anonymously, I attribute views to the paper generally rather than Lavik specifically. At the official opening of the Norwegian parliament in 1913, King Haakon said in his speech that “In January 1912, negotiations have taken place in Kristiania between Norwegian, Russian and Swedish delegates regarding Spitsbergen. A protocol was signed, containing a revised draft for an agreement on Spitsbergen and concurrently on a number of occupations.”<sup>97</sup> This small and seemingly neutral piece of information led to negative reactions within the two aforementioned *landsmål* newspapers. *Gula Tidend* simply slightly rewrote the passage from the speech in order to make their opinion clear, writing that “Swedish, Russian and Norwegian delegates had met in Oslo a year ago. There they had agreed that Norway will abandon its old right to Svalbard to a consortium of the

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<sup>94</sup> Seland, *Macody Lund*, 145.

<sup>95</sup> “Norges historiske Eiendomsret i Spitsbergen”, *Morgenbladet*, 24 July 1910. Original: “Og dog har Norge i sin nye Arbeidsdag invitert Sverige til at blande sig op i et gammelt norsk Rettighetsland, som Nordmænd har opdaget og alltid eiet og i langsommelige Tider hat sin næring i [...] Er det Læren om, at Svakheden skal være vor Styrke, som har lært os til saa ærefuldt at opretholde vore Forfædres med blod forsvarte Rettigheter?”

<sup>96</sup> “Svalbard. En del av Norge”, *Haalogaland*, 14 August 1925.

<sup>97</sup> King Haakon, “Trontale”, reproduced in *Aftenposten*, 23 January 1913. Original: “I januar 1912 har der fundet forhandlinger sted I Kristiania mellem norske, russiske og svenske delegerede angaaende Spitsbergen. Der undertegnedes en slutningsprotokol med ændret udkast til overenskomst om Spitsbergen og udkast til aftale om en del okkupationer af grundstykker sammesteds.”

three countries, which means the Russians, who are the strongest, hold all power up there.”<sup>98</sup> *Spegjelen*, a sister newspaper of *Gula Tidend* in Trondheim, went further:

We recall the “revised draft” which showed how much the foreigners dared to offer Norwegian people, and how much Norwegians were not ashamed to partake in. A dangerous collusion would be the consequence if Norway should commit to letting Russia and Sweden preside over Norwegian properties.<sup>99</sup>

Here we see how the two papers began to shape the different aspects of early Arctic imperialist rhetoric into a coherent argument: The use of allusions to (legal, historical) rights, and a deep-seated skepticism of other nations, their motives and interests. This somewhat foreshadows the development in the rest of the decade, where Arctic imperialists would become increasingly preoccupied with the historical argument, in contrast to the broader public debate which seemed more interested in economic and political benefits in the present and future. *Gula Tidend* and *Spegjelen* were also largely uninterested in discussions about the practicalities of rule over Spitsbergen, finding it sufficient to establish that it *was* Norwegian property. *Property* was the primary legal or political term used to discuss the Norwegian claim on Spitsbergen at this point. This term, and particularly its relation to the overlapping but separate concept of *sovereignty*, will become increasingly important moving forward, as I argue that their use in newspapers and parliament should be seen as corresponding to the concepts of *territorial* and *political* sovereignty, respectively. Increasingly these newspapers also began to name and shame Norwegians who they believed to be subverting or counteracting Norway’s rights on Spitsbergen. In July 1913, *Gula Tidend* published a scathingly written article about Russia’s interests in the Arctic. They wrote that “[Russia’s] arms are reaching more and more for Svalbard,” pointing to large Russian occupations on the archipelago. Then, discussing a recent occupation, they pointed out that “among others it was Postmaster Egede-Nissen who helped

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<sup>98</sup> “Kulturbilæte”, *Gula Tidend*, 27 January 1913. Original: “[...] det hadde vore svenske, russiske og norske sendemenn ihop i Oslo fyr eit aar sidan. Der var dei samde um at Noreg gjev fraa seg all sin gamle rett paa Svalbard til eit samstyre av dei 3 land, og dette vil atter segja at russen som er den sterkaste, hev all rett deruppe.” Note how *Gula Tidend* not only used the name “Svalbard”, but also “Oslo” rather than Kristiania. This is indicative of the Norwegianization politics of the newspaper.

<sup>99</sup> “Utriksministeren”, *Spegjelen*, 8 February 1913. Original: “Vi minnest ‘det ændrede utkast’ som synte kor mykje utlendingane vaagar seg til aa by norske folk, og kva norske folk ikkje skjemdest for aa vera med paa. Ei faarleg samrøring vilde verte fylgda, um Noreg skulde binde seg til aa late Russland og Sverik styre norske eignar.”

them with that.”<sup>100</sup> The implication was quite clearly that this actor was at best motivated by self-interest or at worst disloyal.

*Gula Tidend* and the more short-lived *Spegjelen* would remain relatively isolated in their views towards Spitsbergen within the broader press until the downfall of the international process caused by the declaration of war in Europe. As the parties met to a conference in the summer of 1914 to settle the issue, Norwegian newspapers reacted with neutrality or support, save for the aforementioned newspaper segment. Even *Spegjelen* seemed to have somewhat lost their enthusiasm for a Norwegian annexation. However, the onset of global war turned some fears into realities, and Spitsbergen’s abundance of coal would be spotlighted and cause reconsideration and new paradigms in the Norwegian public.

## Increasing Norwegian attention and presence

The Great War almost immediately brought discussions on the resource security in Norway. On 3 August 1914, a short piece in *Møre* lamented: “We are low on coal and grains in Norway now. The railroads and fleet are the only ones who have enough. The private supply of coal has been meager lately. If we now had had Svalbard (Spitsbergen).”<sup>101</sup> The next day, 4 August, it was reported that Russia had laid claim to the coal reserves on Spitsbergen.<sup>102</sup> The insecurity over access to resources, and increasing scarcity of coal on the European continent as the war effort escalated, began slowly tilting views of Spitsbergen in Norwegian newspapers. The new reality of the war gave fertile ground for Arctic imperialist arguments to take hold in the mainstream in a way they had not before. Fears over access to coal was a catalyst, but it did not constitute the sole argument for a Norwegian claim to Spitsbergen. During the Great War, and especially in relation to the sale of the American Arctic Coal Company to Norwegian buyers and subsequent establishment of Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulsyndikat (SNSK), the rhetoric of historic rights began to blend together with more pragmatic considerations. Still, while nationalist fervor in relation to the war also shaped views on the Spitsbergen question, the subject of a Norwegian annexation of the archipelago remained infrequently discussed.

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<sup>100</sup> “Russland”, *Gula Tidend*, 31 July 1913. Original: “Dei rekkjer armarne meir og meir ut etter Svalbard [...] Det var m.a. postmeistar Egede-Nissen som hjelpte til med det.” Adam Egede-Nissen was a prominent Labour Party politician with strong ties to the Russian revolutionary movement.

<sup>101</sup> “Kol og korn”, *Møre*, 3 August 1914. Original: “Kol og korn hev me lite av i Norig no. Jarnvegane og flaaten er dei einaste som hev kol nok. Den private koltilførsel hev vore liten det siste. Hadde me no havt Svalbard (Spitsbergen).”

<sup>102</sup> “Russland tar Kullene paa Spitsbergen”, *Lister og Mandals Amtstidende*, 4 August 1914.

Furthermore, while enthusiasm towards an annexation grew, Arctic imperialism remained popular mostly among those who were already believers.

The role of coal in the Norwegian economy was largely to power transport and industry. Outside of the needs of transportation, a large degree of the general supply of electricity came from hydroelectric dams. Roald Berg points out that this need to power industries with coal was the reason John Longyear had started a venture on Spitsbergen in the first place. Longyear's original plan had been to invest in the opening of an iron mine in Finnmark. However, realizing that the mine had no logical close by source of power other than the Pasvik River, where regulation for hydroelectric power would have diplomatic consequences towards the Finns and Russians, he had the idea to power the mine with coal from Spitsbergen.<sup>103</sup> In 1913 Norway imported around 2.28 million tons of coal, 98% of that from Great Britain (and only 30 000 tons from Spitsbergen).<sup>104</sup> With trade between Norway and Britain growing more arduous and insecure, some held the opinion that more self-sufficiency was needed. However, a large debate never manifested, as the delivery of coal from Britain never actually stopped. Britain was diligently maneuvering to steer Norwegian trade and allegiance towards them and away from the Central Powers. Incidentally, it was this Norwegian dependency on a steady British coal export that largely motivated the Norwegian government to abandon proper neutrality and move towards playing favorites with the Entente – an important precursor to the fact that Norway was able to ask for Spitsbergen as 'reparations' at the end of the war.<sup>105</sup>

On 12 June 1915, the northern Norwegian local newspaper *Nordlandsposten* wrote that "We are still able to receive coals from England, even though they are expensive. But no one knows, the way the situation is escalating, how long that will last."<sup>106</sup> The paper asked, almost rhetorically: "Why does one not go to Spitsbergen for coal? This question has been raised by many lately."<sup>107</sup> What this article – along with several others<sup>108</sup> – shows, is that though the question of Spitsbergen coal grew more relevant, it was not necessarily seen as a reason for a full Norwegian takeover of Spitsbergen, but limited to a call for Norway to begin properly tapping into its coal resources. Public perceptions still seemed mixed. This can be exemplified by the noticeable backlash when the name "Svalbard" was used officially for the first time in

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<sup>103</sup> Berg, "Norway, Spitsbergen, and America", 27-8.

<sup>104</sup> "Hvorfra faar vi vore kul", *Vestfinmarken*, 26 February 1915.

<sup>105</sup> See Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*, 193-207.

<sup>106</sup> "Brændselsspørsmålet. Vor kulforsyning", *Nordlandsposten*, 12 June 1915. Original: "Endnu faar vi nemlig kul fra England selv om de er dyre. Men ingen vet, slik som situationen tilspidser sig, hvorlænge det vil vare."

<sup>107</sup> "Brændselsspørsmålet. Vor kulforsyning", *Nordlandsposten*, 12 June 1915. Original: "Hvorfor gaar man ikke til Spitsbergen efter kul? Dette spørsmåal er reist av mange i den senere tid."

<sup>108</sup> See for example "Grubeliv på Spitsbergen", *Morgenbladet*, 5 August 1915, and "Spitsbergens kulfelter", *Nordlandskysten*, 24 November 1915.

parliament. In a recommendation out of one of the parliamentary committees regarding the funding of a clerical presence on the archipelago, the name “Spitsbergen” was substituted for “Svalbard”, likely the result of a strong desire in one or more committee members to Norwegianize the name. Several newspapers practically queued up to satirize and criticize the linguistic move. In *Social-demokraten*, it was humorously asked whether the inhabitants of Spitsbergen should be called “Spitsborgere” (“Spitsburghers”). The punchline was that the only “Spitsburghers” were the members of Parliament who had decided to rechristen the archipelago as Svalbard.<sup>109</sup> *Oplandenes Avis* wrote that “Spitsbergen is not a good enough name for the ‘maalmændene’ anymore”.<sup>110</sup> The name change was criticized in the parliamentary session as well, by representative Ole Martin Gausdal (DNA), who said that “If it didn’t say ‘Spitsbergen’ in parentheses, no one would understand what this [‘Svalbard’] is supposed to mean.”<sup>111</sup>

In 1916, the American John Longyear sold his Arctic Coal Company to a syndicate of Norwegians, who founded a new coal company, SNSK.<sup>112</sup> This event led to a notable increase in Arctic imperialist rhetoric. In April, *Finmarkens Amtstidende* celebrated the Norwegian purchase by inventing in a headline an extension of the Norwegian king’s title: “King Haakon of Norway and Spitsbergen.”<sup>113</sup> According to *Harstad Tidende*, the industry journal *Bergverksnyt* went further in their rhetoric, writing that:

The grand purchase of the Arctic Coal Company’s coalmines exclusively by Norwegians belongs [...] among the great national moments. It was a great patriotic effort, the consequences of which we can barely fathom. Instinctually we feel that here we have received ‘a province added to the country’. [...] Like how the English named their mines in their language, we should not forget the old Norwegian name. Svalbard Kulgruber. There is a Norwegian triumph in that very name. A fanfare.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> “Spørsmål og svar”, *Social-demokraten*, 6 February 1915.

<sup>110</sup> “Spitsbergen”, *Oplandenes avis*, 6 February 1915. Original: “SPITSBERGEN er ikke et bra nok navn for maalmændene lenger.” ‘Maalmændene’ (literally translated as “the language men”) was the term used for parliamentarians and other elite members who fought for ‘landsmål’ as the official language of Norway.

<sup>111</sup> “Stortingets møte igaar”, *Morgenbladet* (morning edition), 5 February 1915. Original: «Hvis der ikke i Parentes stod Spitsbergen, vilde ingen forstaa hvad det skulde bety.”

<sup>112</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 268-71.

<sup>113</sup> “Kong Haakon av Norge og Spitsbergen”, *Finmarkens amtstidende*, 15 April 1916.

<sup>114</sup> “Svalbard – Spitsbergen”, *Harstad tidende*, 6 May 1916. Original: “Det store kjøp av The Arctic Coal Co’s kulgruber for helt norsk regning, hører [...] til de store nationale øieblikkes handlinger. Det var et stort patriotisk krafttak, hvis fulde følger vi knapt aner. Instinktmæssig føler vi, at vi her har faatt ‘en provins til landet lagt’ [...] vi [bør] likesom angelsakserne døpte gruberne i sit sprog, saa bør vi heller ikke glemme det gamle gode norske navn. Svalbard kulgruber. Det er som en norsk opsang i selve det navnet. En fanfare.”

Several newspapers made large headlines when news broke of the purchase, including *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Fædrelandsvennen*, some of whom decorated their front pages with photographs from Advent bay (the location of Longyear city) or maps of Spitsbergen with the coal fields in question highlighted.<sup>115</sup> Noticeably absent in the immediate reactions were any allusions to wider Norwegian claims. The nationalistic rhetoric was intact, using phrases like ‘in Norwegian hands’ and generally speaking of the sale as a sale to *Norway* rather than to *Norwegians*. It did however lead to ideas of annexation somewhat gaining broader support. Throughout April and May 1916, more papers began to take into use and/or educate their readers about the name “Svalbard”.<sup>116</sup> *Bergens Annonce Tidende* published a piece in which they called for Norway to stake its claim on Spitsbergen.<sup>117</sup> *Hortens avis* cited a similar demand from *Gula Tidend*, but pessimistically contemplated that the chance had passed Norway by, and now it was likely too late.<sup>118</sup>

The purchase of the Arctic Coal Company caused high-ranking politicians to become more deeply entangled with the Spitsbergen question, yet they remained cautious and reactive towards the Arctic imperialists. Norwegian Prime Minister Gunnar Knudsen (as a private citizen, according to himself, and not as the Prime Minister) invested in the newly formed SNSK, meaning he now had direct economic interests in the archipelago and its political situation.<sup>119</sup> When interviewed, Knudsen’s emphasis was on clarifying firstly that his investment was unrelated to the policy stance of the Norwegian government regarding Spitsbergen, and secondly to reiterate that Norway’s view remained that Spitsbergen was and should stay *terra nullius*.<sup>120</sup> This may have had diplomatic reasons. Thor Bjørn Arlov argues that the primary reason was maintaining a good diplomatic standing with Great Britain, who still supplied an overwhelming majority of Norway’s coal supply.<sup>121</sup> It might be an underemphasized point as a backdrop for the Spitsbergen treaty, how high-ranking Norwegians directly involved with the process in Paris had a potential interest in allowing enterprise on Spitsbergen to be as free as possible. The same sentiment holds true for the American John Longyear, who after the sale of his company bought a large share of the stocks in the new

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<sup>115</sup> See all of the mentioned newspapers editions released on 5 April 1916.

<sup>116</sup> In particular several papers cited the *landsmål* paper *Norig* in their demand that the name Spitsbergen should be replaced. See for example *Nordre Bergenhus folkeblad*, 25 April 1916 *Hardanger*, 25 April 1926 and *Lillesands-posten*, 28 April 1916.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in “Den svenske Presse om Spitsbergensaken”, *Morgenbladet*, 16 April 1916.

<sup>118</sup> “Ingen mands land”, *Hortens avis*, 10 April 1916.

<sup>119</sup> Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*, 267.

<sup>120</sup> “Kulfelterne på Spitsbergen”, *Agderposten*, 11 April 1916.

<sup>121</sup> Arlov, *Store Norske 75 år*, 67.

Norwegian company that followed.<sup>122</sup> Outside of the Arctic imperialists, those who were involved with the Spitsbergen question stood to gain from limiting the ability of any state to regulate the islands economically.

The 1194 theory and the historical argument for Norway's rightful ownership over Spitsbergen had slowly taken hold within its niche, while the war had made the archipelago look somewhat more attractive to everyone else. Now however (and especially with the simultaneous announcement that a Bergen based consortium was planning to buy the British coalfields), a new argument had gained viability: The simple fact that Norwegian owners soon held practically the entirety of economic interests and presence on the islands.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, while not every outlet seemed interested in or enthusiastic about a Norwegian administration on Spitsbergen, active skepticism towards the historical rights argument had become sparse. While interest in the question of annexation was still middling, the need to secure a supply of coal and the major private investment in taking over most of the industry and infrastructure on the islands had made claiming Spitsbergen seem less risky and more sensible. There are few signs that the Arctic imperialists had gained a major popular following in the years leading up to the Paris Peace Conference, but within the sphere of the powerful in Norway, they would gain enough ground to be heard by the government by 1918.

## The Road to Paris

During the period of the Spitsbergen conferences from 1909-1914, there was a near consensus in news media in respecting the *terra nullius* status of Spitsbergen. The Arctic imperialist counter-argument was largely marginal and rarely broke through into other parts of the public discussion. While there was occasional spillover, there remained a clear distinction in the intensity of ambitions and rhetoric between the few actively invested newspapers and the newspapers more broadly. While the historical argument grew more and more prominent and coherent within Arctic imperialist milieus, the broader public remained more gripped by pragmatic arguments regarding the present and the future. Even though the Spitsbergen conference optimistically planned to meet in half a year's time after it was cut short by the July crisis in 1914, the onset of total war eventually rendered that plan impossible, voiding the work that had been done to create an international regime on Spitsbergen. In this vacuum, Arctic

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<sup>122</sup> Arlov, *Store Norske 75 år*, 70.

<sup>123</sup> The Arctic Coal Company ran the largest enterprise on the island. Additionally, the purchase included an annexation that had previously housed the British *Northern Exploration Co.*

imperialists still struggled to define the premises of the discussion, but in the latter half of the war years, opposing arguments grew more and more faint. Meanwhile, Norwegian elites in both government and science entangled themselves economically in the Spitsbergen question. Throughout 1916, Norwegian business owners established themselves as the dominant economic factor on the archipelago. The press largely covered this as a boon in its own right, and the question of sovereignty or a legal regime on the islands remained largely undiscussed.

Throughout the period leading up to the end of the war, this remained the status quo in the discourse about Spitsbergen. 1917 saw a major worker conflict in Longyear city, which was said to be causing socialist radicalization of the workers there and as such surely added to the desire for a governmental presence there in the following years.<sup>124</sup> Still, the question lay relatively dormant until the end of the war. Then, in November 1918, a couple of news outlets proclaimed that the coming peace conference would be the opportune moment for Norway to ask for Spitsbergen. For a neutral party in the war, Norwegian losses had been substantial. 49% of the Norwegian trade fleet had been lost, and more than 2000 Norwegian citizens had died at sea.<sup>125</sup> Additionally, Norway had been a valuable trade partner for the Entente despite its neutrality, earning it the nickname “the neutral ally”.<sup>126</sup> *Haalogaland* wrote on 4 November 1918 that Norway deserved reparations after the war, that both Russian and German interests must be considered void, and that “We do not expect much [...] but there is *one* reparation we could receive: We could again gain recognition of our old sovereignty over the old Norwegian land: Svalbard.”<sup>127</sup> The matter seemed to engage several readers particularly of Venstre-affiliated newspapers around the country. A reader behind the pseudonym “F.H.” asked in *Dagbladet*: “Would it not be worth the trouble to [...] do something so that Norway – which would only be right – could receive the archipelago which in Norwegian is named Svalbard, and in German, Spitsbergen?”<sup>128</sup> Another, under the pseudonym “Smaaborger” (literally, “Petty bourgeoisie”) wrote what could most aptly be characterized as an Arctic imperialist manifesto in *Nidaros*. In it, not only did he demand Spitsbergen, but a full restoration of his imagined Old Norwegian Empire. This included the repatriation of Spitsbergen, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and even the Orkney islands, about which he claimed there was an unresolved

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<sup>124</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 297.

<sup>125</sup> Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*, 255-6.

<sup>126</sup> Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*, 251-2.

<sup>127</sup> Cited in Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*, 269. Original: “Vi venter os ikke stort [...]. Men *en* erstatning kunde vi faa: Vi kunde faa anerkjendt igjen vor gamle overhøihet over det gamle norske land: Svalbard [...].”

<sup>128</sup> “Svalbard”, *Dagbladet*, 19 November 1918. Original: “Kunde det ikke være umaken værdt aa [...] gjøre noget for at Norge – som ret og rimeligt vilde være – kunde faa den øigruppe som paa norsk heter Svalbard og paa tysk Spitsbergen?”



question even though they had firmly belonged to Scotland for over 400 years.<sup>129</sup> This reader provides a fascinating glimpse into the most radical corner of Arctic imperialism, possessing an impressive understanding of Scandinavian medieval history, but far less of the practical possibilities within early 20<sup>th</sup> century diplomacy. Nevertheless, it is possible that these letters to primarily Venstre-affiliated newspapers built conviction within Gunnar Knudsen's (V) government that they should act.

There was a combination of several other likely factors that the government was receptive to the idea. Since the beginning of the 1910s, Norwegians' economic stakes in Spitsbergen had grown past all other states. The government had a clear right to ask for reparations for the war, but it was unlikely they would be able to extract it from Germany directly. Germany and Russia had both been diplomatically sidelined. In early 1919, the Norwegian minister in Paris, Baron Wedel, sent the Norwegian foreign ministry a letter with suggestions about what demands should be made at the forthcoming conference in Paris. These included technicalities such as border agreements in Northern Norway, more outlandish ideas like taking over African colonies from the Germans, and importantly, Spitsbergen.<sup>130</sup> The foreign ministry got quickly to work, and soon the parliament had also been brought on board. However, as we shall see, the discussions were full of skepticism, and the resulting treaty would be controversial.

### 3. Spitsbergen at the Paris Peace Conference

The decision to bring the Spitsbergen question to the Paris Peace Conference set in motion a major apparatus of officials and experts in the Norwegian government and its embassies. The groups working closest with the issue was dominated by two distinct interest groups: Arctic imperialists and the coal companies. While the former was tasked with establishing and documenting the rightfulness of the Norwegian claim and arguing for it, the latter received much of the operative responsibility for how the regime on Spitsbergen would look in practice. In this section, I will explore the anatomy of the Spitsbergen treaty and the process and discussions that led to its creation. I will show how the Norwegian delegation in Paris was dominated by Arctic imperialists, yet the premises of the treaty were laid by business interests,

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<sup>129</sup> Smaaborger, "Ret og gammel uret", *Trøndelagen: Mindreutgaven av Nidaros*. 26 November 1918.

<sup>130</sup> Wedel to Ihlen, 26 October 1918, RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001.

which would end up revealing that the interests of the two groups were not entirely harmonic. I will also discuss the debate about Norway's claim for Spitsbergen in the Norwegian parliament, illuminating the broad range of views it met.

## Creating an equitable regime

The Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920 bears the perhaps dubious honor of being among the few acts of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference to survive (at least to survive unaltered) into the present day, and is as such a document that remains worthy of further inquiry. There have been various attempts by scholars to explain the anatomy of the treaty in a historical context, and provide frameworks for understanding the various stipulations of the treaty.<sup>131</sup> A brief introduction of the contents and formulations of the treaty will simplify the further discussion of its creation. It opens with the following formulation: “Desirous, while recognizing the sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen, including Bear Island, of seeing these territories provided with an equitable regime, in order to assure their development and peaceful utilization.”<sup>132</sup> This opening statement, and particularly the caveat of an “equitable regime” against the sovereignty of Norway, establishes what the treaty was written to achieve. It corresponds well with the ideas presented in Robert Lansing's 1917 essay on the Spitsbergen question, in which he proposed that *territorial* sovereignty could be divorced from *political* sovereignty. This meant that while Norway would have political sovereignty (Norwegian law is the law on Spitsbergen), territorially the archipelago would remain a *de facto* commons (meaning the Norwegian government and Norwegian citizens would not have exclusivity of access or rights to the land, waters or resources of Spitsbergen). In practice, this manifested itself in the treaty by way of the first article establishing Norway's “full and absolute” sovereignty, and the remaining articles incurring limitations on that sovereignty. The treaty defined that citizens of any contracting state were free to engage in occupations and economic activity on the islands, and that the Norwegian government was restricted from imposing any form of discrimination. Furthermore, the Norwegian government was not allowed to extract any kind of tax revenue from the archipelago other than what was strictly necessary to fund the administration of Spitsbergen itself. Ships headed for Spitsbergen were to not be faced with restrictive harbor fees or other taxes when using a Norwegian port as a part of the voyage (which was practically

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<sup>131</sup> See for example Mathisen, *Svalbard i internasjonal politikk*; Østreng, *Økonomi og politisk suverenitet*; Ulfstein, *The Svalbard Treaty*; Dahl & Jensen (eds.), *Svalbardtraktaten 100 år*.

<sup>132</sup> For a full reproduction of the Spitsbergen treaty, see the appendix.

necessary). Additionally, there were stipulations that Norway needed to propose a legal regime for the mining activity on the archipelago, a proposal that the other original contracting states had access to challenge.

It seems a logical assumption in hindsight that other interested states inserted these limitations, being skeptical of Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago, and indeed many have, among both contemporaries and later historians. For example, Roald Berg writes that “Norway *had to accept* servitudes that guaranteed the continued use of the Islands by international investors and prohibited military use of the islands”, while Valur Ingimundarson writes that “[in] short, mainly due to British pressure, the treaty afforded the nationals of signatories with equality with regards to various rights and activities”.<sup>133</sup> However, examining previous drafts of the treaty (and even documents from the treaty process in the first half of the 1910s), most limitations were thought up wholly or in part by the Norwegians themselves. The Norwegian delegation proposed most of the articles present in the final treaty. While some formulations and policies were relatively constant from the first attempts at a treaty between Norway, Sweden and Russia in the early 1910s, it is particularly interesting to look at the Norwegian *Spitsbergen committee* and the draft they presented to the Norwegian government in 1919.<sup>134</sup>

The Spitsbergen committee (which must not be confused with the Spitsbergen *commission*, the group appointed by the supreme council in Paris to create the final treaty) was tasked with drafting a treaty and supplementary law proposals for the Norwegian government. It was led by jurist and former politician Fredrik Stang d.y. (H), and otherwise consisted of two members of the Norwegian Mapping Authority (Norges geografiske oppmåling), the director of the Norwegian Maritime Authority (Sjøfartsdirektoratet) and three board members from SNSK. From the accompanying memo the committee delivered alongside their draft treaty, it is made evident that they attempted a lot of pre-emptive diplomacy. Formulations like “The perception of the committee has been that without these concessions to the other interested countries, one cannot hope to be granted the sovereignty over Spitsbergen for Norway” show up in various forms.<sup>135</sup> It is likely the case that the committee wanted to account for externalities

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<sup>133</sup> Berg, “Norway, Spitsbergen, and America”, 32 (emphasis added); Ingimundarson, “The Geopolitics of the ‘Future Return’”, 898.

<sup>134</sup> For a full reproduction of the Spitsbergen committee draft, as well as the draft created by Baron Wedel, Fredrik Stang d.y. and Henri Fromageot, see Østreng, *Økonomi og politisk suverenitet*, 104-111.

<sup>135</sup> “Motiver for Traktat vedrørende Norges høihetsret over øgruppen Spitsbergen”, 25 June 1919, 6. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001. Original: “Men komiteen har opfattet saken saaledes, at uten disse indrømmelser til de øvrige interesserte lande, vil man ikke kunne gjøre sig haap om at faa høihetsretten over Spitsbergen overført til Norge.”

and deliver a draft that recognized the interests and reservations of other countries. It should, however, be mentioned that the broad freedoms awarded to companies and private citizens in the draft were likely to be highly beneficial towards the business interests that were dominant in the committee. The relatively free access to occupations (for persons, not states), freedom of passage and shipping, as well as limitations on taxation present in the final treaty all exist in relatively similar formulations in the draft.<sup>136</sup> While arguments between diplomats and within political circles generally used the frame of *national* interests, the limitations were actually proposed by and arguably to the benefit of private enterprise. This was not only true in Norway. The only great power in Paris to voice ambiguity or reservations towards Norway's sovereignty over Spitsbergen was Britain, where business interests, particularly the Northern Exploration Company, aggressively lobbied for a British annexation throughout 1919.<sup>137</sup> A series of letters between the Norwegian minister in London and the Norwegian foreign ministry reveals how a conference of the Royal Geographic Society in London in December 1918 had turned out to be a thinly veiled attempt of the Northern Exploration Company to influence the view of British power holders about Spitsbergen and argue for British sovereignty.<sup>138</sup> As mentioned, the final treaty greatly resembles the draft from the Spitsbergen committee. The most significant change was that whereas the committee had heavily interconnected the treaty with the creation and function of the League of Nations, this was removed from the final treaty.<sup>139</sup> This draft was followed by another draft, which was presented to the Spitsbergen Commission in Paris. This second draft was formulated by the Norwegian legation alongside Fredrik Stang d.y. and the French jurist Henri Fromageot, who had received a mandate from the French government to formulate a draft. The mandate demanded that the draft ensured the continued rights of anyone who had previously made occupations, that Norway not use the islands for military operations or installations, and the right of any interested nation to sign onto the treaty.<sup>140</sup> The Norwegian foreign ministry protested against these drafts being used without the possibility for the various

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<sup>136</sup> "Forslag til Traktat vedrørende Norges høihetsret over ögruppen Spitsbergen", 25 July 1919. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001.

<sup>137</sup> Ingimundarson, "The Geopolitics of the 'Future Return'", 896.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from Vogt to the Norwegian foreign ministry, 10 December 1918. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001.

<sup>139</sup> A decision which may have been consequential for the longevity of the treaty. The committee discussed what would become of the treaty if the League of Nations ceased to exist, but argued that the Norwegian claim to the archipelago would at that point be cemented well enough for it to remain in their hands. Given the fact that when the League failed, Spitsbergen ended up evacuated for years during World War II, and the subsequent Soviet protests against the continued recognition of Norwegian sovereignty, one can only speculate how things had shaped out if the treaty was dependent on the League.

<sup>140</sup> Letter from Wedel to Ihlen, 19 July 1919. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001.

relevant Norwegian ministries and authorities to assess them and give their recommendation, but Wedel had agreed to a tight schedule following pressure from the Supreme Council.<sup>141</sup>

## The Norwegian Spitsbergen discourse in 1919

Within Norwegian politics, there was less concern with bringing old historical rights to justice than about whether it was *worth it* for Norway to accept the responsibility for the administration of Spitsbergen *vis-à-vis* the costs. Benjamin Vogt, the Norwegian minister in London, summarized this when he wrote that he had said to the British foreign minister Curzon:

[It] seemed to me as if Norway was doing the [great] powers a favor if it took over this administration, that the costs and inconveniences were guaranteed, the benefits doubtful, and that I personally would advise my government against taking on this responsibility if the limitations in our rule were too many or too intrusive.<sup>142</sup>

This sentiment mirrored the discussion as it had unfolded in the Norwegian parliament that spring. In the minutes from a closed-door meeting of the parliament on 8 March 1919, foreign minister Ihlen (V) presented the proposal to ask for Spitsbergen, and informed the parliament about much of the correspondence that had taken place thus far between Norway and other countries. While this was merely an orientation for the parliamentarians, and the actual proposal had been approved in committee against just one vote, the mood was pensive in the room. Some commented that they doubted whether this would be a profitable venture for Norway. Others were more enthusiastic. Importantly, few protested the claim first made by Otto B. Halvorsen (H) that the Norwegian government needed to make the other interested parties “aware that in this matter we have changed our view”.<sup>143</sup> Bernhard Hanssen (FV) was the next speaker, and elaborated the point: “That Norway has left its previous stance, which it itself had presumed as proponent [...] that it should be no-man’s land, [...] Then one suddenly changes tactics, changes

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<sup>141</sup> See No. 371, Letter from Ihlen to Wedel, 16 July 1919; Letter from Wedel to Ihlen, 19 July 1919; No. 384, Letter from Ihlen to Wedel 26 July 1919 . RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001.

<sup>142</sup> No. 1523, Letter from Vogt to Ihlen, 19 August 1919. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001. Original: “[...] at det for mig stod, som om Norge gjorde magterne en tjeneste, om det overtook dette styre, at utgifterne og ubehagelighederne var det sikre, fordelerne tvilsomme, og at jeg for min del vilde fragaade min regering at paata sig dette hverv, hvis indskrænkningerne i vor raadighet blev for mange eller for nærgaaende.”

<sup>143</sup> *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8. mars 1919*, 12. Original: “[...] opmærksom paa, at vi her har ændret opfatning [...]”

fronts, and establishes a new program without informing the interested powers.”<sup>144</sup> Several speakers in the debate concurred that this was a change of mind and policy, rather than a continuation of previous ambitions. Those who felt most strongly about a Norwegian annexation of Spitsbergen had largely adopted the rhetoric honed by Arctic imperialists in the preceding decade, whilst those less involved with the issue mostly discussed practical diplomacy and economics. The former evoked the idea of historical Norwegian rights and claims, while the latter concerned themselves with the profitability and viability of Norwegian sovereignty. The first is aptly illustrated with C.J. Hambro’s (H) speech, in which he said that “Since Harald Hardraade’s days and until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spitsbergen has been recognized as Norwegian territory [...] It is of importance to our country that we do not without further consideration give away the last remnant of the great Arctic realm we once possessed.”<sup>145</sup> Johan Rye Holmboe (FV), who gave a lengthy explanation of his skepticisms about Spitsbergen’s prospects for profitability, perhaps best exemplifies the latter. He opened his speech by saying that “It is possible that it in an international view could be of some interest, and that it could be worth the trouble to enforce this alleged old Norwegian right. I have asked for the word [...] to warn against this perception that the possession of Spitsbergen would represent any significantly valuable asset for the Norwegian state.”<sup>146</sup> Prime Minister Gunnar Knudsen’s (V) approach to the issue was to talk about safeguarding Norwegian interests on the archipelago, mainly meaning the coal industry, and to emphasize that, more than anything else, the Norwegian government was offering to bear a burden on behalf of all interested parties.<sup>147</sup> This was the winning argument among the parliamentarians; that Norway had large interests on the islands and that this made it in the country’s best interests to make sure that a predictable administration was established on the archipelago, and that it did not fall into the hands of other states. The latter was further problematized by Knudsen, who named this as the primary problem with the proposed regime that had stranded in 1914. Said Knudsen: “I will just mention the one thing, that one could imagine that Swiss laws should apply to Norwegian workers and

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<sup>144</sup> *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8. mars 1919*, 12. Original: “At Norge har forlatt sin tidligere holdning, som det selv har forandlediget som forslagsstiller, [...] at det skulle være ingen mands land, [...] Saa forandrer man pludselig her taktik, forandrer front, og gaar over til en ny linje uten at underrette de interesserte magter.”

<sup>145</sup> *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8. mars 1919*, 24. Original: “Fra Harald Haardraades dage og indtil det 19de aarhundrede har Spitsbergen været anerkjendt som norsk territorium, [...] Det har en betydning for vort land, at vi ikke uten videre gir fra os den sidste rest av det store arktiske herrevælde som engang var Norges.”

<sup>146</sup> *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8. mars 1919*, 13. Original: “Det er mulig, at det i international henseende kan ha nogen interesse, og at det kan være et offer værd at hævde denne Norges formentlig gamle ret. Jeg har bedt om ordet [...] for at advare mot den opfatning, at besiddelsen av Spitsbergen skulde representere noget særlig lønnende og værdifuldt aktivum for den norske stat.”

<sup>147</sup> *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8. mars 1919*, 40-44.

administrators.”<sup>148</sup> Knudsen was referring to the principle from 1914 that the laws applied on Spitsbergen should be decided by who occupied the land and owned the assets on which a crime happened. With this somewhat absurd example in mind, it was better that *Norwegian* law applied to the islands. The question of territorial sovereignty (e.g. ‘property rights’) was mostly left undiscussed. It is however noteworthy that Andreas Kristian Andersen Grimsø (V) said the following: “Does one have any guarantee that no other foreign power will take the land into possession, if it is not now decided [...] that our country receives *property rights over Spitsbergen – or at least sovereignty?*”<sup>149</sup> I once again assume that the idea of property vs. sovereignty here corresponds roughly to what Lansing defined as territorial vs. political sovereignty. This statement seems to tell us that while an international regime had been taken off the table, Norwegian politicians were still open to a solution that stopped short of Norway having exclusive rights to the archipelago.

In other words, when the mood within Norwegian politics changed and a majority grew to support a Norwegian request for Spitsbergen, their primary concern was to secure Norwegian economic interests. However, much of the Arctic imperialist program was adopted as a part of the official argumentation towards the Supreme council and Spitsbergen commission in Paris. This can largely be chalked up to the group of people who were selected to assist with creating the Norwegian claim, and who generally took the keenest interest in the process. Particularly worthy of mention is Gunnar Isachsen, who worked closely with Charles Rabot to prepare the Norwegian case in Paris.<sup>150</sup> As previously mentioned, Isachsen had been one of the most prominent propagators of the idea that Norwegians discovered Spitsbergen in 1194 throughout the 1900s and 1910s. Other noteworthy contributors to the process in Paris were Adolf Hoel and Arnold Ræstad, both enthusiastic proponents of Arctic imperialism, the latter having published probably the most thorough examination of historical treatises concerning the archipelago in an effort to establish a perceived precedence for Norwegian rule.<sup>151</sup> Baron Wedel, who was the central organizer of the affairs in Paris, also received a number of letters from enthusiastic supporters.

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<sup>148</sup> *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8. mars 1919*, 42. Original: “Jeg skal bare nævne den ene ting, at man tænkte sig, at schweizisk lovgivning skulde anvendes overfor norske arbejdere og funktionærer.”

<sup>149</sup> *Møte for lukkede dører, Stortinget 8. mars 1919*, 47. Original: “Har man nogen sikkerhet for, at ikke nogen anden, fremmed magt tar landet i besiddelse, hvis man ikke nu faar det avgjort [...] at vort land faar *eiendomsret til Spitsbergen - eller ialfald overhøihetsret?*” Emphasis added.

<sup>150</sup> Jones, “Spitsbergen Literature Lobby”, 37.

<sup>151</sup> Jones, “Spitsbergen Literature Lobby”, 50-51. See also Ræstad, *Norges høihetsret over Spitsbergen over Spitsbergen i ældre tid*.

One I would like to highlight is Ella Anker, who at the time was a correspondent for *Dagbladet* and an avid Arctic imperialist. On 13 February, Anker sent Wedel the manuscript for a three-part article series titled “I skandinavismens tegn” (“In the sign of Scandinavism”). Not accepted at the time for publication in *Dagbladet*, it was eventually published in six parts by *Gula Tidend* between 28 February and 6 March. The exposé is an enlightening summary of the worldview of the Arctic imperialists of the time. In Anker’s mind, the old Norway had been a proto-empire, stretching from the Murmansk coast in Northern Russia to America, to Spitsbergen in the North and the British Isles in the south. While it is true that there are traces of Norwegian colonies or presence in all of these places, it is definitely anachronistic to frame it as a cohesive entity, both spatially and temporally. Norway, according to Anker, lost this empire due to their trust in their neighbors Denmark and Sweden. Fooled into a union where they were promised equality, Norway was swallowed by Denmark, who slowly but surely either stole the Norwegian lands for themselves (as with Iceland) or gave them away as bounties after Denmark’s wars (like Jämtland and Herjedalen to Sweden) or for no particular reason at all (like the Orkney islands to Scotland). Anker’s underlying thesis is that the important conflict between Norway and its neighbors was Norway’s “natural” desire to look westwards for friendship, to Britain and later to the USA, whereas Sweden and Denmark were oriented towards the Germans. Denmark was further characterized as cunning and ruthless in its treatment of Iceland, whom she argued had been forced into agreements that would eventually lead to a Danish annexation of the island by way of settler colonialism. Finally, she turned to Sweden, who she argued had set into motion a plot to unite the Scandinavian countries along with Finland and the Baltic countries under the Swedish crown during the war, in a “[...] North Germanic section of Mitteleuropa. Stockholm would be the capital of this German speaking nation.”<sup>152</sup> With this Swedish agitation in mind, Anker argued, Norwegians should not be surprised if Sweden ended up receiving Spitsbergen and becoming their new neighbor in the Arctic Ocean.<sup>153</sup> She ended with an appeal that Norway abandon their “entente” with the Nordic countries and become a “free independent nation – a free independent member of the free League of Nations without political alliances to any side or in any form.”<sup>154</sup> Anker’s six-part article was essentially a political manifesto in which she compiled the basic worldview and

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<sup>152</sup> Ella Anker, “I skandinavismens tegn III: Sverige og Spitsbergen”, 1. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001. Original: “[...] som en nord-germansk avdeling av tysk Mitteleuropa. Stockholm skulde være hovedstaden i dette tysktalende rike.”

<sup>153</sup> Ella Anker, “I skandinavismens tegn III: Sverige og Spitsbergen”, 4. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001.

<sup>154</sup> Ella Anker, “I skandinavismens tegn III: Sverige og Spitsbergen”, 4. RA/S-1720/2/D/Da/L0161/0001. Original: “[...] et frit selvstendig rike, -- et frit selvstendig medlem av Nationernes frie forbund uten politiske alliancer til nogen sider eller av nogen art.”



politics that constituted Arctic imperialism. She largely echoes and extrapolates on the views seen from ‘Smaaborger’ the year before, and weaves in a deep contempt for Norway’s former union partners. With Wedel surrounded by this group of people directly or peripherally involved with the Spitsbergen process in Paris, the historical narrative that was formed was as expected. The limitations that were inserted into the treaty, however, seemed to be accepted as a necessary evil, factored in from the start by the Norwegian delegation and provoking no reactions inside the group.

## 4. Arctic Imperialism After the Treaty

There was fanfare in newspapers about the Spitsbergen treaty, which came in three waves. The first came as it was made clear in September 1919 that the Supreme council had agreed Norway would be granted Spitsbergen. The second came after the signing of the treaty at the Quai d’Orsay. Then, finally, the third wave came as the Norwegian parliament formally gave a green light for the ratification of the treaty in July 1924. Generally, what attention the treaty received was largely positive, but the limitations of the treaty led to discord, especially among those papers which had been the strongest proponents of a Norwegian Spitsbergen. *Gula Tidend* once again led the charge, and their rhetoric became more aggressive and, in particular, more concerned with the dangers and ills of *Scandinavism*. In the political sphere, ambiguity reigned as neither those strongly in favor nor those more skeptical of the process seemed particularly pleased. In the following, I will explore how the differing perceptions of Spitsbergen came to a fore in what became a rather muddled debate, as all sides attempted to simultaneously support the core of the treaty and oppose its contents.

### A pyrrhic victory for Arctic imperialists

As had been the case before, interest for the Spitsbergen treaty was not massive in most newspapers except for at the most crucial intersections. For example, when the treaty was ratified by the Norwegian parliament in 1924, *Aftenposten* devoted the entire morning paper to the event under the headline “Svalbard under Norwegian sovereignty”. There were background articles on the history of the archipelago, explanations of its importance, even a poem.<sup>155</sup> The

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<sup>155</sup> “Svalbard under Norges suverenitet”, *Aftenposten* (morning edition). 22 July 1924.

critical discussion of the treaty largely took place within a handful of newspapers, with *Gula Tidend* at the center. After the treaty was signed by Baron Wedel on February 9 1920, most papers offered it merely a notice inside the paper. Few let it onto the front page. The exceptions were interestingly *Aftenposten*, alongside *Gula Tidend*. *Gula Tidend*'s front page was covered with a large photo of the signature ceremony and the headline “Landmark day in Norwegian history”, and a two-page article opening with the sentence: “Finally, Svalbard has returned to Norway”.<sup>156</sup> The article went on to praise the resolution of the Spitsbergen question and Baron Wedel, who they essentially framed as the sole architect. They also, as they had a habit of doing, chastised and shamed all those who had taken part in the earlier Spitsbergen discussions and thereby legitimized Svalbard's status as *terra nullius*, and those who otherwise had not worked hard enough to claim Svalbard for Norway.<sup>157</sup> The paper proclaimed the treaty signing a complete victory. The actual document, however, would not be made public until about a week later, and its publication slowly changed the mood, even though they initially seemed neutral to the imposed limitations. The following years saw the paper sitting uncomfortably between the desire to lend legitimacy to the document and the need to criticize the regime that had been decided upon.

It is evident that the honeymoon period had worn off in 1923, when a stray comment showed up in relation to the ongoing discussions between Norway and Denmark over who had the rightful claim to eastern Greenland. The Greenland question led the paper to rail against Denmark, various Norwegian politicians and any sentiment of cooperation between the Scandinavian states, the infamous *Scandinavism* warned about by Ella Anker among others. In an article on 8 January 1923, the paper pointed to how the treaty had given Denmark the role as arbiter in the treaty, and wrote that “In the Svalbard Treaty, Norway has agreed to make a Dane the arbiter for any property disputes. A Dane, nominated by the Danish government!”<sup>158</sup> The indignation of the old colonizer Denmark having a say in what happened on Norwegian soil was tangible. A month later, they were even more explicit about their dissatisfaction with the treaty, sarcastically remarking in another article about the Greenland question that “Concerning Svalbard, we prefer to have dominion over it only in the sense that we provide a free-of-charge police service”.<sup>159</sup> Far from their original enthusiasm, the Arctic imperialists

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<sup>156</sup> “Ein merkedag i Noregs saga”, *Gula Tidend*. 17 February 1920. Original: “Ja, no er Svalbard kome attende til Noreg.”

<sup>157</sup> “Ein merkedag i Noregs saga”, *Gula Tidend*. 17 February 1920.

<sup>158</sup> “Vakt i gjevær!”, *Gula Tidend*. 8 January 1923. Original: “Etter Svalbardtraktaten hev Noreg nemleg gjenge med på å gjera ein danske til oddemann i alle eigedomstrætor. Ein danske oppnemnd av den danske regjeringi!”

<sup>159</sup> “Dersom avtalen um Grønland vert vedteken”, *Gula Tidend*. 8 February 1924. Original: “Svalbard råder me yver helst berre på den måten, at me fær lov å halda gratis – politi.”

grew increasingly disillusioned with the proposed regime on Spitsbergen. But at the same time, the treaty was the sole document affirming Norway's sovereignty over the archipelago. This is probably the reason that *Gula Tidend* never entertained the idea of rejecting the treaty entirely. It is clear that for the newspaper, territorial sovereignty was equally important as political sovereignty, but having one was still better than having either. This is, at its core, the somewhat confused position the Arctic imperialists had to adapt in the early 1920s.

Foreign Minister Ihlen (V) had been repeatedly criticized by *Gula Tidend* before, and came back into the light because of the Greenland question. They berated him for allegedly having communicated to Denmark in 1919 that Norway would not get in the way of them claiming ownership of Greenland. The words had been uttered, but were originally said by Prime Minister Knudsen (V), but as chief diplomat, Ihlen received the blame.<sup>160</sup> The offer was made as a *quid pro quo* in order to get support in the Spitsbergen question in return, similar to how signals were given to Sweden that Norway would support their claim to Åland.<sup>161</sup> To the Arctic imperialists at *Gula Tidend*, however, it bolstered their view of Ihlen as weak and a supporter of the dangerous *Scandinavism*. The discourse created by the paper declared good and bad actors, and used this to rationalize their complicated relationship with the treaty. As the following subsection will show, this perception of the situation as somewhat paradoxical was not unique to the media; it was also prominent within the political debate.

## The enduring doubts of the parliamentarians

Whereas initial reactions in the press were celebratory, the following discussions of the Norwegian parliament revealed lukewarm reactions to the treaty. C.J. Hambro (H) was notably skeptical. In the debate over the foreign affairs budget in July 1920, Hambro said in parliament that he did not personally wish to accept Spitsbergen under the circumstances which had been brought forth by the treaty. Hambro particularly criticized the idea of the right of other nations to have access to Spitsbergen. Pointing to the conferences and attempted solutions to the Spitsbergen question in the previous decade, he said that the Foreign ministry should not have been willing to “[go] and gift the whole world Spitsbergen, which without contention had been Norwegian land for 800 years”.<sup>162</sup> Hambro also repeatedly requested that the contents of the

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<sup>160</sup> Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*, 281.

<sup>161</sup> It was reported by the Swedish minister in Paris that Wedel-Jarlsberg had given his opinion that Sweden should receive Åland. Berg, *Norge på egen hånd*, 276.

<sup>162</sup> S.Tid. 2621(1920). Original: “[gaa] hen og foræret den smlede verden Spitsbergen, som ubestridt gennem 800 aas hadde været norsk land.”

treaty be subject to a detailed debate in parliament.<sup>163</sup> In Hambro's view, a lacking understanding of Norway's history with the archipelago had spoiled the process, an allusion perhaps to another Norwegian debate on the restitution of Norwegian archives and documents from its former union partners.<sup>164</sup> In Hambro's eyes, this lack of a written memory of old treaties and diplomatic acts might be to blame for the fact that the still relatively young Norwegian foreign ministry did not know about Norway's old sovereignty over Spitsbergen.<sup>165</sup>

Hambro fulfilled his own request, and went into more detail about his qualms with the treaty when the parliament discussed its ratification in 1924. He was now deputy chair of the Foreign Affairs and Constitutional committee, and delivered the committee's recommendation on the issue. The committee's judgment was harsh in its criticism of the process surrounding the treaty, and did not veil their displeasure with the result. The written recommendation stated that:

[The treaty's] Article I "recognizes Norway's full and absolute sovereignty over the Spitsbergen archipelago", while the proceeding articles substantially deteriorate the value of this sovereignty.<sup>166</sup>

The committee went on to spell out their issues article by article. The treaty, in their opinion, did not grant Norwegian citizens any rights that were not also granted to other contracting nations, and the archipelago was territorially and economically open to all contracting parties equally. Furthermore, Norway was restricted from implementing any tariffs or taxes that favored Norwegian interests over foreign. In their view, Norwegians were not able to control their own communication stations or conduct their own research without the consent of the other contracting parties. The committee took issue with Article 3, where ships from all contracting parties "shall have the right to put into Norwegian ports on their outward or homeward voyage" for embarking or disembarking passengers or cargo. It also specified that these ships should "not be subject to any charges or restrictions whatever which are not borne by the nationals, ships or goods which enjoy in Norway the treatment of most favored nation".<sup>167</sup> To the committee, this read as a loss of sovereign rights not only on Spitsbergen, but

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<sup>163</sup> See S. Tid. 52(1920) and O.Tid.539(1920).

<sup>164</sup> See Fure, *Alt til Norge*, 9-48 for an introduction to 'arkivsaken', the dispute over archive materials after the breakup of the Swedish-Norwegian union.

<sup>165</sup> S.Tid. 2621(1920).

<sup>166</sup> Innst.S. LXIV (1924). Original: "Dennes artikkel 1 'anerkjender Norges fulde og uindskrænkede høihetsret over Spitsbergenøgruppen', mens de følgende artikler væsentlig forringer værdien av denne høihetsret."

<sup>167</sup> Appendix: The Spitsbergen treaty, article III.

also in mainland Norwegian ports.<sup>168</sup> The committee went on to agree that since the treaty had already been signed and ratified by several nations, there was little point in arguing further on specific points of the treaty. They concluded with a hope that “in the long run, these points in the treaty which in the Norwegian perception are not satisfactory, will be of little practical consequence”, and that Norway would succeed in “exploiting effectively this old Norwegian land”.<sup>169</sup>

Arctic imperialists were blurring the distinction between *sovereignty* and *property*. It is not unlikely that there was some degree of intention to this. Andrew Fitzmaurice argues that territorial sovereignty emerged among jurists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a superior form of occupation within a framework of progressive theories of history: “Territorial sovereignty, [19<sup>th</sup> century jurists] argued, was only to be found in modern states. Such states were to be placed higher in the progress of history and therefore possessed superior rights”.<sup>170</sup> With the narrative of the Arctic imperialists being centered around the idea that Norway would have been an advanced modern empire if not for the subjugation to Denmark and Sweden, gaining territorial sovereignty over Spitsbergen was an important way of showing that Norway was making up for lost time and becoming a modern, independent nation.

Presenting the committee’s recommendation to the Norwegian parliament, Hambro reiterated the worries of the committee, and again criticized how previous governments had handled the Spitsbergen question. However, speaking only briefly, he also praised the Norwegian negotiators and pointed out that the treaty represented something better than the current lawlessness on the islands.<sup>171</sup> After Hambro, Waldemar Larssen (FV) from Finnmark spoke. Larssen echoed the criticisms of the committee, and lamented that northern Norwegian fishers and trappers were granted no reward for their work and no special privileges on Spitsbergen.<sup>172</sup> Finally, foreign minister Christian Michelet (H) and parliament member Nils Skaar (V) spoke on the subject, and while both were somewhat more optimistic, neither the Member of Parliament from former government party Venstre nor the foreign minister said a word against the criticisms raised.<sup>173</sup> After a remarkably short debate, in which many concerns and critiques were raised, the motion to ratify the treaty was passed unanimously.

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<sup>168</sup> Innst.S. LXIV (1924).

<sup>169</sup> Innst.S. LXIV (1924). Original: “Imidlertid tør man haabe at det i det lange løp vil vise sig at de punkter i traktaten som ikke for norsk opfatning er umiddelbart tilfredsstillende, vil faa liten praktisk betydning, og at det nu under norsk herredømme maa lykkes norsk foretagsomhet og norsk dygtighet at utnytte effektivt dette gamle norske land.”

<sup>170</sup> Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property & Empire*, 6-7.

<sup>171</sup> Beh.S.Tid. 2741 (1924).

<sup>172</sup> Beh.S.Tid. 2741-42 (1924).

<sup>173</sup> Beh.S.Tid. 2742-43 (1924).

## From no-man's treaty to Norwegian Triumph?

With the treaty ratified, it was decided that Spitsbergen would be renamed to 'Svalbard' and the islands officially become Norwegian on 14 August 1925. On that day, the French publicist Georges Parmentier wrote in *Aftenposten*: "In 1905 Norway baffled the entire world with its peaceful revolution, which secured their full independence. Today – 20 years after the Karlstad agreement – the nation celebrates the official acquisition of Spitsbergen, which is now Norwegian soil."<sup>174</sup> Parmentier supported the Norwegian narrative of their first discovery and occupation of the archipelago, but wrote that as an argument the claims were so old that they "risk losing all their value".<sup>175</sup> Baron Wedel was the one who, in Parmentier's eyes, located the winning argument: "Spitsbergen is a natural extension of Finmark, the geological features of its mountains and directions of its fjords show that it in days gone [...] was part of the Norwegian realm. The geological proof holds juridical power."<sup>176</sup> While Parmentier's emphasis on the geological argument as the winning one seems exaggerated and ignores that most of the Great Powers were essentially positive to Norwegian sovereignty for pragmatic reasons, it is interesting that he made a point of rebuking the influence of the historical argument, which had been the core of the Arctic imperialist *raison d'être* for three decades. *Haalogaland* gave a summary of how the Spitsbergen treaty had come to pass which put the responsibility more clearly on the changing and differing views of the Norwegian political elite:

There was a time when Norwegian foreign policy was to get Svalbard recognized as "no man's land". There were few who fought against this, but they existed. Then came the World War. And voices were raised to say that Norway again should have their old lands up in the ice. Among those who fought most eagerly was editor Johs. Lavik in *Gula Tidend*.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Georges Parmentier, "Spitsbergen blir norsk jord: en diplomatisk seier", *Aftenposten* (evening edition), 14 August 1925. Original: "I 1905 forbauset Norge hele verden ved den fredelige revolution, som sikret det hel uavhengighet. I dag den 14de august – 20 aar efter Karlstadoverenskomsten – feirer landet den officielle overtagelse av Spitsbergen, som nu er blit norsk jord."

<sup>175</sup> Parmentier, "Spitsbergen blir norsk jord". Original: "Men det historiske argument risikerer at miste sin verdi [...]."

<sup>176</sup> Parmentier, "Spitsbergen blir norsk jord". Original: "Spitsbergen er Finmarkens naturlige forlængelse: formen, dets fjeldes geologiske beskaffenhet og fjordenes retning viser, at det i fordums dage [...] utgjorde en del av det norske rike. Den geologiske begrundelse har rettens kraft."

<sup>177</sup> "Svalbard. En del av Norge", *Haalogaland*, 14 August 1925. Original: "Det var en tid norsk utenrikspolitikk aa faa Svalbard erkjent som 'ingenmannsland'. Det var bare faa i Norge som bekjempet dette, men de var der. Saa kom verdenskrigen. Og røster hevet sig for at Norge skulde faa igjen sitt gamle land oppe i isen. Blant de som kjempet ivrigst var redaktør Johs. Lavik i 'Gula Tidend'."

This explanation too perhaps oversimplifies and puts an uneven amount of credit in the hands of Johs. Lavik and *Gula Tidend* specifically. However, I have shown that what *Haalogaland* wrote essentially was the case. The Arctic imperialist narrative, while no doubt exaggerating the role they and their heroes had played, was right to say that a Norwegian annexation of Spitsbergen had not been the continuous goal of but a small subset of the Norwegian elite. In forming their narrative, Arctic imperialists also began to declare who were (and thereby who were not) worthy of thanks for making Spitsbergen Norwegian. The protagonist was Wedel, alongside actors such as Charles Rabot, Arnold Ræstad, Adolf Hoel and Gunnar Isachsen (these three were thanked by Wedel himself) as well as Macody Lund. Much more peripheral names such as Colonel Henrik Angell (who had fought for the French in the war and had been an aide for Wedel during the peace conference) and Richard With (shipping tycoon who had established one of the early regular passenger routes to Spitsbergen) also showed up in papers.<sup>178</sup>

Thor Bjørn Arlov characterizes the acts and plans of the Norwegian political elite with regards to Spitsbergen in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as “cautious but goal-oriented”.<sup>179</sup> This perception occludes the inner workings of the Norwegian elite’s attitudes towards and general interest in Spitsbergen in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The presumption is that the Norwegian government, particularly its Foreign ministry, worked continuously towards Norwegian sovereignty over Spitsbergen after the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905.<sup>180</sup> This might hold true for some key actors, but it ignores the broader picture. Actors like Gunnar Knudsen, who had been a factor for much of the period, never felt an urge to claim publicly that this had been the case. Ihlen remains one of the longest serving foreign ministers in Norwegian history, serving from 1913 until 1920. He had died a few months before this August day in 1925. However, the fact that Arctic imperialists had come to view him as an antagonist in Norway’s struggle for the archipelago meant he was largely left out of the coverage in August 1925. The collective processing of the treaty’s shortcomings for the Arctic imperialists had involved much energy spent placing blame for the failure. By 1925, however, those who had been denounced by the Arctic imperialists had largely disappeared from the stories, with the Arctic imperialists themselves being propped up as the protagonists of the narrative.

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<sup>178</sup> See “Svalbard norsk land”, Stavanger Aftenblad, 14 August 1925; “Den fyrste norske landvinning etter dansketidi”, *Gula Tidend*, 15 August 1925; “Svalbard er fra i dag en del av Norge”, *Aftenposten* (morning edition), 14 August 1925.

<sup>179</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 314.

<sup>180</sup> Arlov, *Svalbards historie*, 314-15.

The aftermath of the Spitsbergen treaty was a discourse in which no one whole-heartedly took up the mantle of defending the contents of the agreement. As parliamentarians and newspapers alike looked upon the limitations of the treaty with great disappointment, those who stood to benefit from it, that is the industrialists on Spitsbergen, stepped into the background. Combined with pressure and dragging of feet from other interested states, specifically Britain, it seemed like the treaty came close to feeling indefensible for Gunnar Knudsen, who played with the idea of tossing it out entirely.<sup>181</sup> However, it was ultimately more important to everyone involved that it was established beyond doubt that Spitsbergen would belong to Norway and not to anyone else. Beyond their voicing of concerns and frustration, they refused ever to go so far as to say that the alternative was better. Having created a legal framework that they sold as sufficiently advantageous, and having won through in granting the archipelago a new, Norwegian name, the mood was harmonious and celebratory as the Norwegian flag was raised in August 1925 – on what was now called Svalbard.

## Conclusion

The history of Norway's annexation of Spitsbergen, the conclusion of the so-called Spitsbergen question, is shaped by the history of the nationalist and expansionist ideology that evolved within parts of the Norwegian elite in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century dubbed *Arctic imperialism*. Fostered by a combination of nationalists constructing a distinct Norwegian cultural identity and people with strong sentimental and economic ties to the Arctic in general and Spitsbergen in particular, Arctic imperialism over time attracted a wide and decentralized group of influential people from science, business, the press and politics. The movement grew throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but gained traction in the 1910s and particularly during the Great War. The lobbying of Arctic imperialists must be given credit for the fact that Spitsbergen was brought up by Norway at the Paris Peace Conference. However, the largely unorganized group showed itself to be unable to control several aspects of the process that led to the Spitsbergen treaty, most importantly the writing of the two different draft treaties which by-and-large laid the premises for the final result. The first draft, which influenced the second, was written mainly by business interests, and the second alone by Wedel and the French jurist Henri Fromageot with support from Fredrik Stang d.y. The result was that many of the stipulations that were seen as concessions

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<sup>181</sup> "Ljoskasting på 'nordisk samarbeid'", *Gula Tidend*, 4 March 1921.



by the Arctic imperialists were pre-meditated by the Norwegian delegation before the commission in Paris began working. The fact that no one in the political sphere had a strong sense of ownership to the final result, perhaps except Wedel himself, caused the narrative in the aftermath of the treaty to become one-sided, with outlets like *Gula Tidend* on offense and no one stepping up to defend the treaty. Prime Minister Knudsen, who had appeared hesitant towards the process throughout, suggested that it might not be worth claiming the sovereignty over Spitsbergen at all. As the Norwegian parliament finally ratified the treaty and sovereignty was marked in 1925, one side had all but defined the narrative of the previous decades.

The image of Spitsbergen or Svalbard as a rightful part of Norway had existed since (at least) the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but only grew to any real prominence in the 1910s. Sweden had attempted to annex the islands in 1871 on behalf of Norway, but Norwegian politicians showed little interest. While the thought was raised by the Norwegian government again in the early 1890s, it was done mostly as a protest towards the union with Sweden. The idea gained some traction in the nationalistic fervor of the late 1890s, but fell away again until it began its slow return in the 1900s and into the 1910s. By 1919, there was still not a clear consensus that Spitsbergen was particularly important for Norway to hold. In other words, the establishment of a narrative about Norway's right to sovereignty over Spitsbergen was primarily constructed in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those who participated in the construction of that narrative did so as part of a larger agenda to construct a Norwegian-ness, a project to build a Norwegian identity distinct from and antagonistic towards Swedish and Danish influences. Arctic imperialists built a national nostalgia over a Norwegian Empire they imagined to have existed in the medieval period, before Norway went into a personal union with Denmark. Their expansionist mindset was motivated by a desire to right perceived historic injustices and more deeply establish Norwegian independence and self-determination. This introspectiveness and sense of injustice by foreign nations created an overarching suspiciousness within the group, which made it difficult to accept concessions made towards the Great Powers, and former union partners Denmark and Sweden, in the treaty.

Outside this group however, the process was largely driven forward by people with economic interests on the archipelago, for whom there were clear advantages in creating an administration and rule of law on Spitsbergen, but also in it remaining a transnational space, open to anyone willing to establish businesses there, and it remaining exempt from various dues such as taxes, tariffs and Norwegian port fees. This dichotomy created clear tensions towards the final result, but more pragmatic Norwegian politicians mostly did not receive blame or face anger as it was directed primarily towards other states. In the end, the Arctic imperialists

accepted and celebrated the treaty, canonizing Baron Wedel as its architect, and making peace with those they perceived to have sabotaged the process.

When scouring through a relatively large well of primary sources in search of a relatively specific and sometimes marginal historical question, it is hard to avoid becoming subject to a certain degree of confirmation bias. This is the case for historians who have constructed explanations for the Spitsbergen question before me, and surely it is for me as well. I have argued that historians have tended to write a history of the Spitsbergen question which overemphasizes the influence of certain individuals and groups, and exaggerates the continuity in the work inside the Norwegian government to achieve Norwegian rule over Spitsbergen between the mid-1890s and 1925. To attempt to nuance this view, I have suggested an explanation which focuses on positioning *Arctic imperialism* and the people who built the political project, the *Arctic imperialists*, within the discourse about Spitsbergen in the same period. I have identified their historical and ideological roots, explored how their rhetoric, numbers and influence developed over time, and I have contrasted them against those within the same elite circles who can *not* be defined as Arctic imperialists to show the width of opinions which led to the decisions taken throughout the period. Any explanation type is flawed and none of them definitive, but by simultaneously provincializing Arctic imperialism and using it to contextualize the views and decisions of the broader Norwegian political elite, I hope to have contributed to the work of loosening the history of Spitsbergen from the constraint of the national frame. This will hopefully be a beneficial tool in further understanding the deeper cultural and political context that led to a Norwegian annexation of the Arctic archipelago, which in 1925 became known as Svalbard.

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## Appendix: The Spitsbergen Treaty

**Treaty between Norway, The United States of America, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Ireland and the British overseas Dominions and Sweden concerning Spitsbergen signed in Paris 9th February 1920.**

The President of the United States of America; His Majesty the King of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India; His Majesty the King of Denmark; the President of the French Republic; His Majesty the King of Italy; His Majesty the Emperor of Japan; His Majesty the King of Norway; Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands; His Majesty the King of Sweden,

Desirous, while recognising the sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen, including Bear Island, of seeing these territories provided with an equitable regime, in order to assure their development and peaceful utilisation,

Have appointed as their respective Plenipotentiaries with a view to concluding a Treaty to this effect:

[Names of plenipotentiaries not reproduced here.]

Who, having communicated their full powers, found in good and due form, have agreed as follows:

**Article 1**

The High Contracting Parties undertake to recognize, subject to the stipulations of the present Treaty, the full and absolute sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen, comprising, with Bear Island of Beeren-Eiland, all the islands situated between 10° and 35° longitude East of Greenwich and between 74° and 81° latitude North, especially West Spitsbergen, North-East Land, Barents Island, Edge Island, Wiche Islands, Hope Island or Hopen-Eiland, and Prince Charles Forland, together with all islands great or small and rocks appertaining thereto.

**Article 2**

Ships and nationals of all the High Contracting Parties shall enjoy equally the rights of fishing and hunting in the territories specified in Article 1 and in their territorial waters.

Norway shall be free to maintain, take or decree suitable measures to ensure the preservation and, if necessary, the re-constitution of the fauna and flora of the said regions, and their territorial waters; it being clearly understood that these measures shall always be applicable equally to the nationals of all the High Contracting Parties without any exemption, privilege or favour whatsoever, direct or indirect to the advantage of any one of them.

Occupiers of land whose rights have been recognized in accordance with the terms of Articles 6 and 7 will enjoy the exclusive right of hunting on their own land: 1) in the neighbourhood of their habitations, houses, stores, factories and installations, constructed for the purpose of developing their property, under conditions laid down by the local police regulations: 2) within a radius of 10 kilometres round the headquarters of their place of business or works; and in both cases, subject always to the observance of regulations made by the Norwegian Government in accordance with the conditions laid down in the present Article.

### **Article 3**

The nationals of all the High Contracting Parties shall have equal liberty of access and entry for any reason or object whatever to the waters, fjords and ports of the territories specified in Article 1; subject to the observance of local laws and regulations, they may carry on there without impediment all maritime, industrial, mining and commercial operations on a footing of absolute equality.

They shall be admitted under the same conditions of equality to the exercise and practice of all maritime, industrial, mining or commercial enterprises both on land and in the territorial waters, and no monopoly shall be established on any account or for any enterprise whatever.

Notwithstanding any rules relating to coasting trade which may be in force in Norway, ships of the High Contracting Parties going to or coming from the territories specified in Article 1 shall have the right to put into Norwegian ports on their outward or homeward voyage for the purpose of taking on board or disembarking passengers or cargo going to or coming from the said territories, or for any other purpose.

It is agreed that in every respect and especially with regard to exports, imports and transit traffic, the nationals of all the High Contracting Parties, their ships and goods shall not be subject to any charges or restrictions whatever which are not borne by the nationals, ships or goods which enjoy in Norway the treatment of the most favoured nation; Norwegian nationals, ships or goods being for this purpose assimilated to those of the other High Contracting Parties, and not treated more favourably in any respect.

No charge or restriction shall be imposed on the exportation of any goods to the territories of any of the Contracting Powers other or more onerous than on the exportation of similar goods to the territory of any other Contracting Power (including Norway) or to any other destination.

### **Article 4**

All public wireless telegraphy stations established or to be established by, or with the authorization of, the Norwegian Government within the territories referred to in Article 1 shall always be open on a footing of absolute equality to communications from ships of all flags and from nationals of the High Contracting Parties, under the conditions laid down in the Wireless Telegraphy Convention of July 5, 1912, or in the subsequent International Convention which may be concluded to replace it.

Subject to international obligations arising out of a state of war, owners of landed property shall always be at liberty to establish and use for their own purposes wireless telegraphy installations, which shall be free to communicate on private business with fixed or moving wireless stations, including those on board ships and aircraft.

#### **Article 5**

The High Contracting Parties recognize the utility of establishing an international meteorological station in the territories specified in Article 1, the organization of which shall form the subject of a subsequent Convention.

Conventions shall also be concluded laying down the conditions under which scientific investigations may be conducted in the said territories.

#### **Article 6**

Subject to the provisions of the present Article, acquired rights of nationals of the High Contracting Parties shall be recognized.

Claims arising from taking possession or from occupation of land before the signature of the present Treaty shall be dealt with in accordance with the Annex hereto, which will have the same force and effect as the present Treaty.

#### **Article 7**

With regard to methods of acquisition, enjoyment and exercise of the right of ownership of property, including mineral rights, in the territories specified in Article 1, Norway undertakes to grant to all nationals of the High Contracting Parties treatment based on complete equality and in conformity with the stipulations of the present Treaty.

Expropriation may be resorted to only on grounds of public utility and on payment of proper compensation.

#### **Article 8**

Norway undertakes to provide for the territories specified in Article 1 mining regulations which, especially from the point of view of imposts, taxes or charges of any kind, and of general or particular labour conditions, shall exclude all privileges, monopolies or favours for the benefit of the State or of the nationals of any one of the High Contracting Parties, including Norway, and shall guarantee to the paid staff of all categories the remuneration and protection necessary for their physical, moral and intellectual welfare.

Taxes, dues and duties levied shall be devoted exclusively to the said territories and shall not exceed what is required for the object in view.

So far, particularly, as exportation of minerals is concerned, the Norwegian Government shall have right to levy an export duty which shall not exceed 1 per cent of the maximum value of the minerals exported up to 100 000 tons, and beyond that quantity the duty will be proportionately diminished. The value shall be fixed at the end of the navigation season by calculating the average free on board price obtained.

Three months before the date fixed for their coming into force, the draft mining regulations shall be communicated by the Norwegian Government to the other Contracting Powers. If during this period one or more of the said Powers propose to modify these regulations before they are applied, such proposals shall be communicated by the Norwegian Government to the other Contracting Powers in order that they may be submitted to examination and the decision of a Commission composed of one representative of each of the said Powers. This Commission shall meet at the invitation of the Norwegian Government and shall come to a decision within a period of three months from the date of its first meeting. Its decisions shall be taken by a majority.

#### **Article 9**

Subject to the rights and duties resulting from the admission of Norway to the League of Nations, Norway undertakes not to create nor to allow the establishment of any naval base in the territories specified in Article 1 and not to construct any fortification in the said territories, which may never be used for warlike purposes.

#### **Article 10**

Until the recognition by the High Contracting Parties of a Russian Government shall permit Russia to adhere to the present Treaty, Russian nationals and companies shall enjoy the same rights as nationals of the High Contracting Parties.

Claims in the territories specified in Article 1 which they may have to put forward shall be presented under the conditions laid down in the present Treaty (Article 6 and Annex) through the intermediary of the Danish Government, who declare their willingness to lend their good offices for this purpose.

The present Treaty, of which the French and English texts are both authentic, shall be ratified.

Ratifications shall be deposited at Paris as soon as possible.

Powers of which the seat of the Government is outside Europe may confine their action to informing the Government of the French Republic, through their diplomatic representative at Paris, that their ratification has been given, and in this case, they shall transmit the instrument as soon as possible.

The present Treaty will come into force, in so far as the stipulations of Article 8 are concerned, from the date of its ratification by all the signatory Powers; and in all other respects on the same date as the mining regulations provided for in that Article.

Third Powers will be invited by the Government of the French Republic to adhere to the present Treaty duly ratified. This adhesion shall be effected by a communication addressed to the French Government, which will undertake to notify the other Contracting Parties.

In witness whereof the abovenamed Plenipotentiaries have signed the present Treaty.

Done at Paris, the ninth day of February, 1920, in duplicate, one copy to be transmitted to the Government of His Majesty the King of Norway, and one deposited in the archives of the French Republic; authenticated copies will be transmitted to the other Signatory Powers.