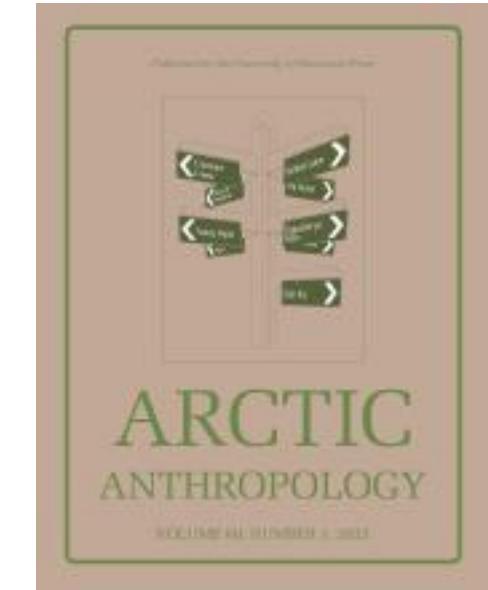


# ARCTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Research Article | Articles

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## From Homeland to Mining Frontier and Back

**The Resource Imaginary and First Nation Narrative Reinhabitation in the Central Yukon**

Susanna Gartler

*Arctic Anthropology*, May 2025, 60 (1) 63-85; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3368/aa.60.1.63>

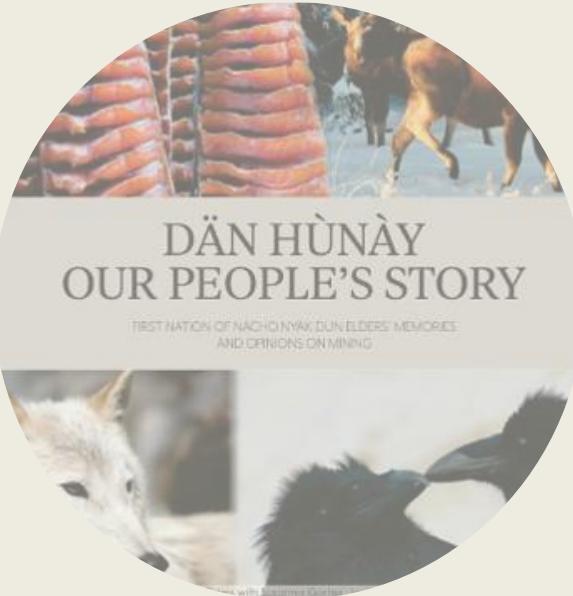


**Susanna Gartler**

**Austrian Polar Research Institute, University of Vienna**

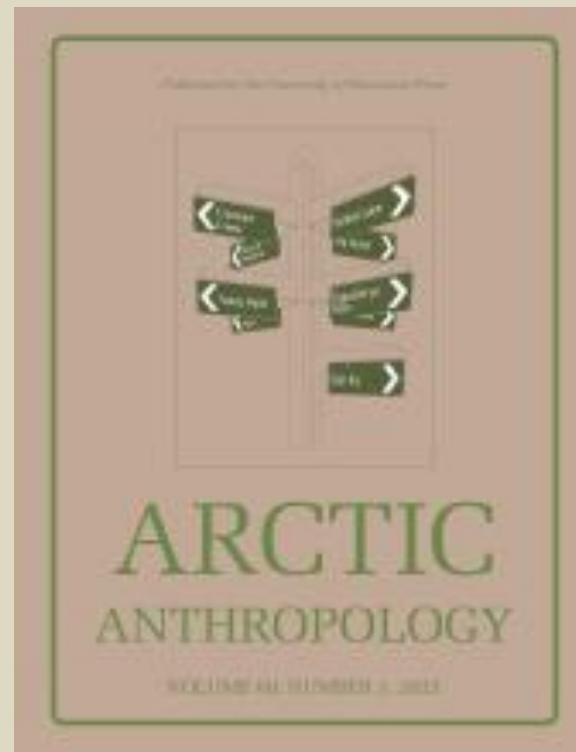


What does Indigenous planning for cultural infrastructures such as Heritage Centers amidst extractivist pressures mean?

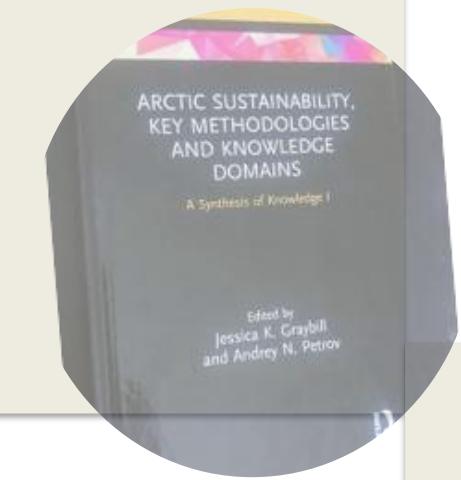


How do FN NND Elders perceive the changes and recent history of their First Nation and the Mayo region, and how did extractivism in the form of mining influence their and their communities' lives?

# How do Yukon First Nations engage with and contest the dominant resource imaginary through narrative reinhabitation?



What is the relationship between culture and sustainability in Arctic Indigenous contexts?



How do YFN Youth perceive the influences of mining and extractivism on their lives and communities?

# Cumulative dissertation



**Backdrop: The (more than a) century long history of colonization and/through mining in the Yukon**



**Approach: decolonizing, community-based participatory research**

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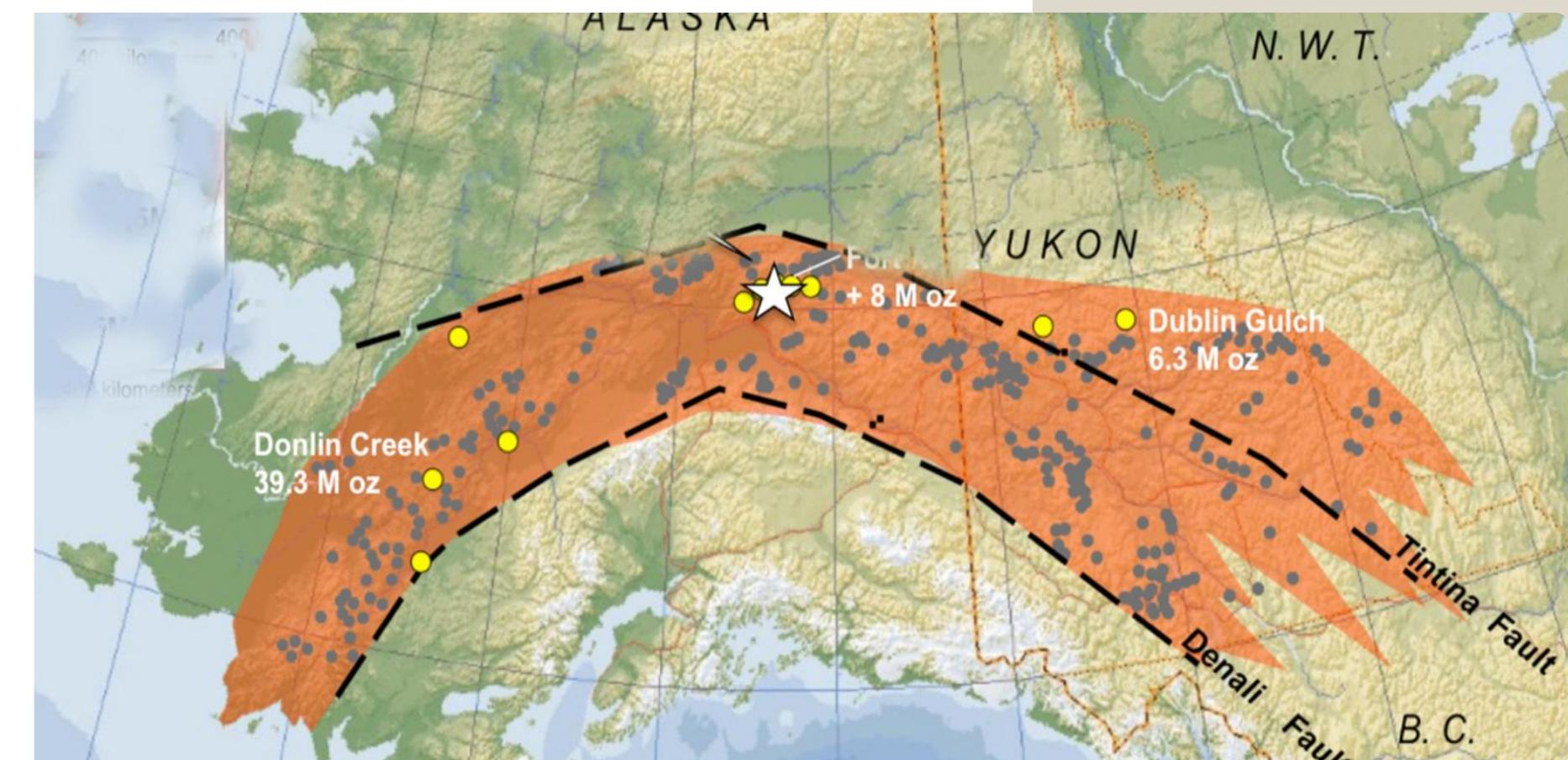
**SQ1: First, How, where and by whom are the central tropes of the resource imaginary contested?**

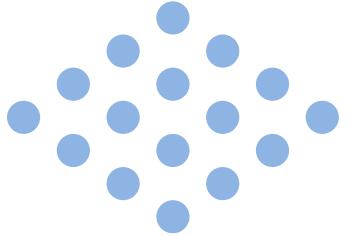
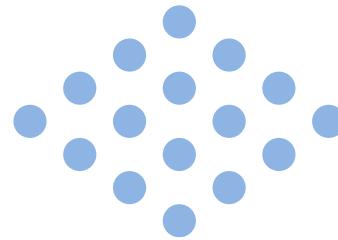


**SQ2: Second, how do both First Nations collectives and individual Yukon First Nations citizens, and in particular mine workers, relate to the extractive industry today?**



**SQ3: Third, in a broader societal context, how is sovereignty over land and narrative interconnected?**





# THE RESEARCH

Duration

2014 - 2023

## Multilocal Jojo Research

**Total time: 18.2 months**

**Mayo: 8.6 months**

**Whitehorse: 4.8 months**

**Other Yukon communities:  
1.2 months**

**Other parts of Canada:  
2.3 months**

**Alaska/US: 1.3 months**

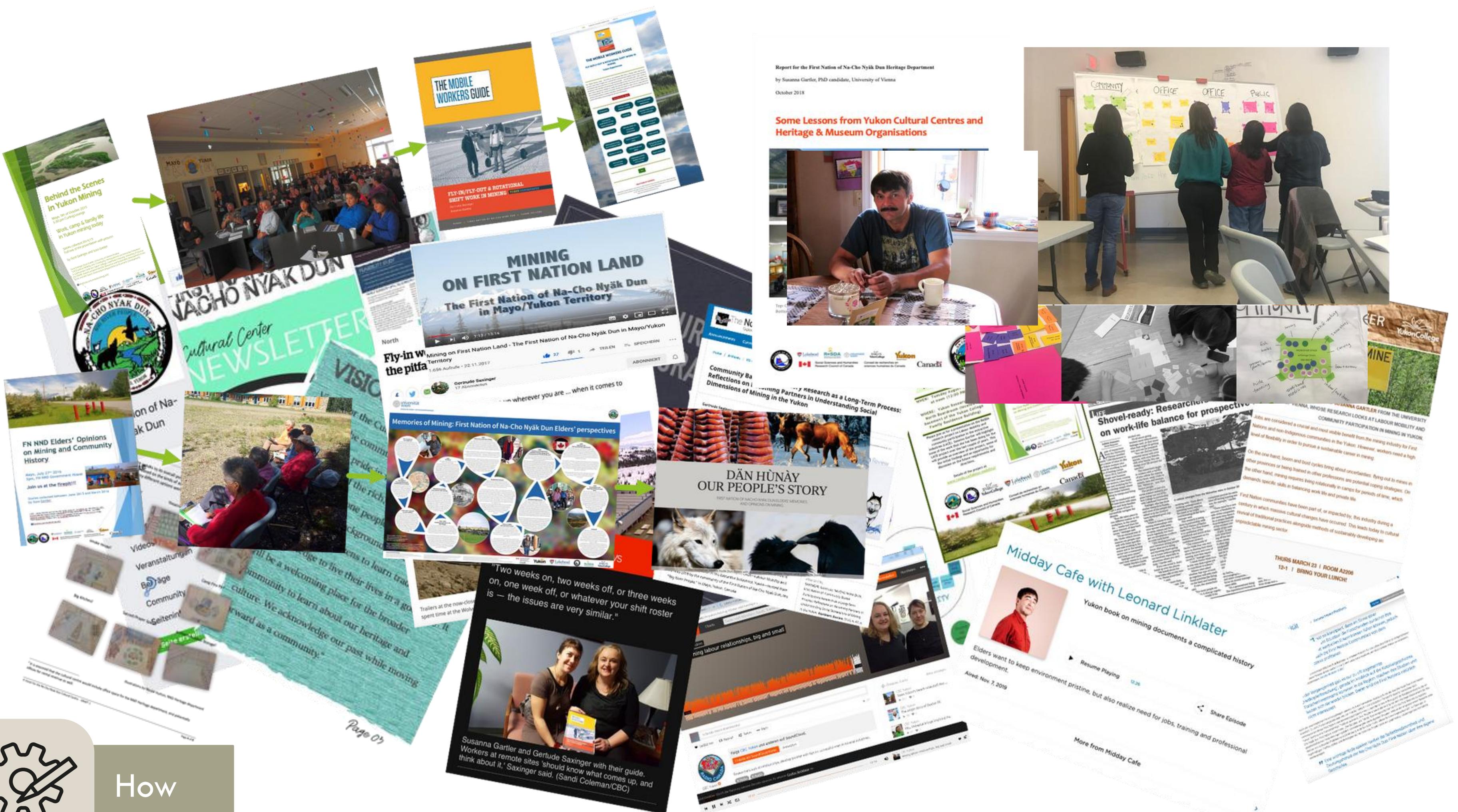
Where



Who



- First Nation and other political and cultural proponents (political representatives, heritage managers, culture center managers, planners, etc.)
- First Nation and other mine workers, spouses and families
  - Other mining proponents (community liaisons, affiliated sectors etc.)





# The Resource Imaginary



**mining was the primary driver for colonial transformations in the Yukon**



**need arises to formulate a concept to draw attention to the fact that the mining industry has structured the Yukon profoundly in sociopolitical, ecological, economic, spatial, cultural, linguistic, legal and symbolic ways**

**Mining, and the Klondike Gold Rush in particular, has ingrained itself in the imaginary of the Yukon. The extraction of minerals has also contributed to global warming. As climate change impacts increase, it is critical to interrogate imaginaries**

His arm stretched out wide Donnie

Germaine points towards the nearby

Eagle gold mine: "This is where the mine is.

The river comes down that way. I hear they

want to use the heap bleach method to

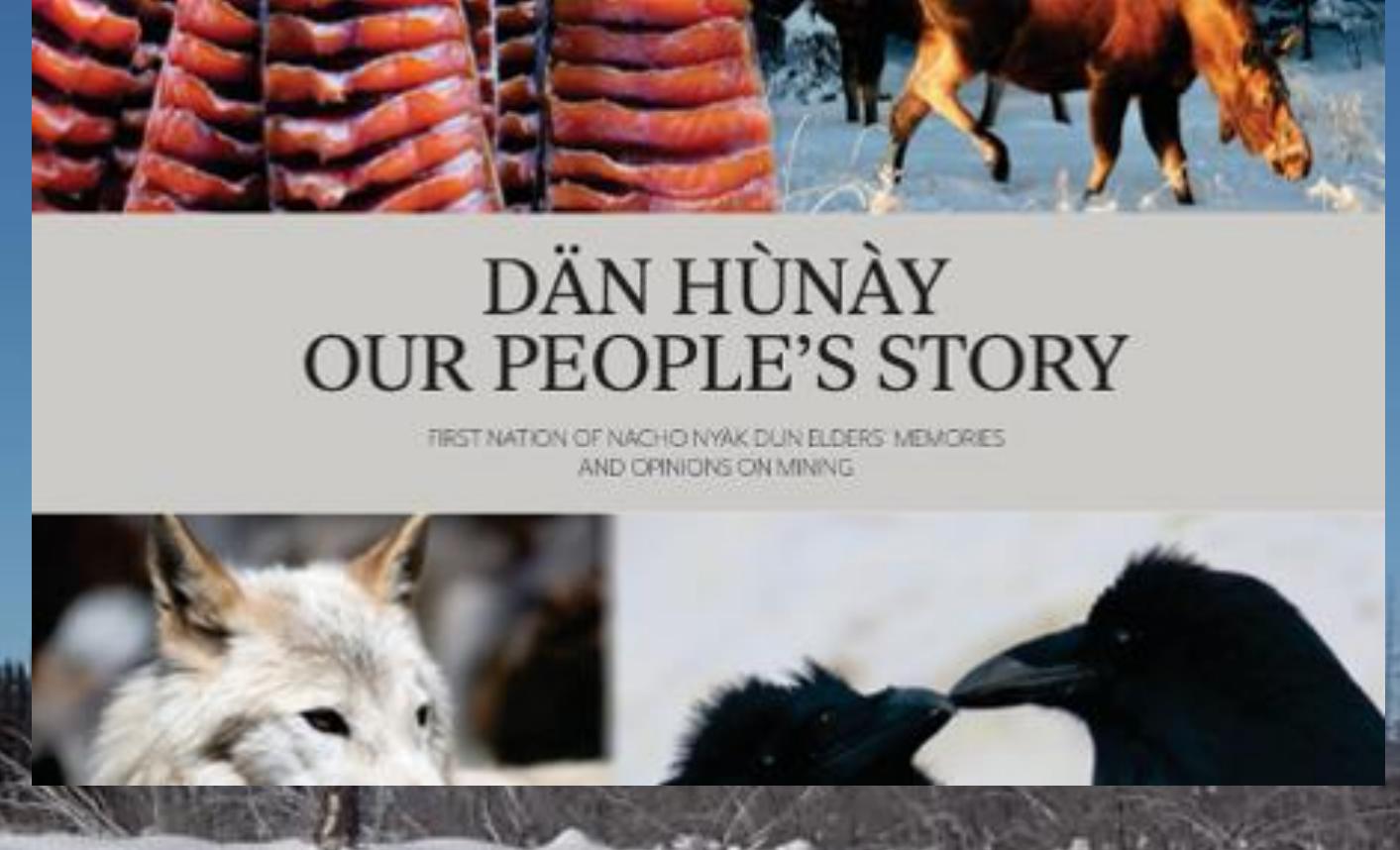
mine the ore. What if some of those

chemicals leak into the McQuesten river?

That is where we get our fish, grayling,

pike, whitefish... depending on the season

we always fish here. (23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016)



# What if...?

North

Latest Update: May 29th, 2025

15 Months | 46

Time since disaster

26 km

Downstream of cyanide aquatic eff

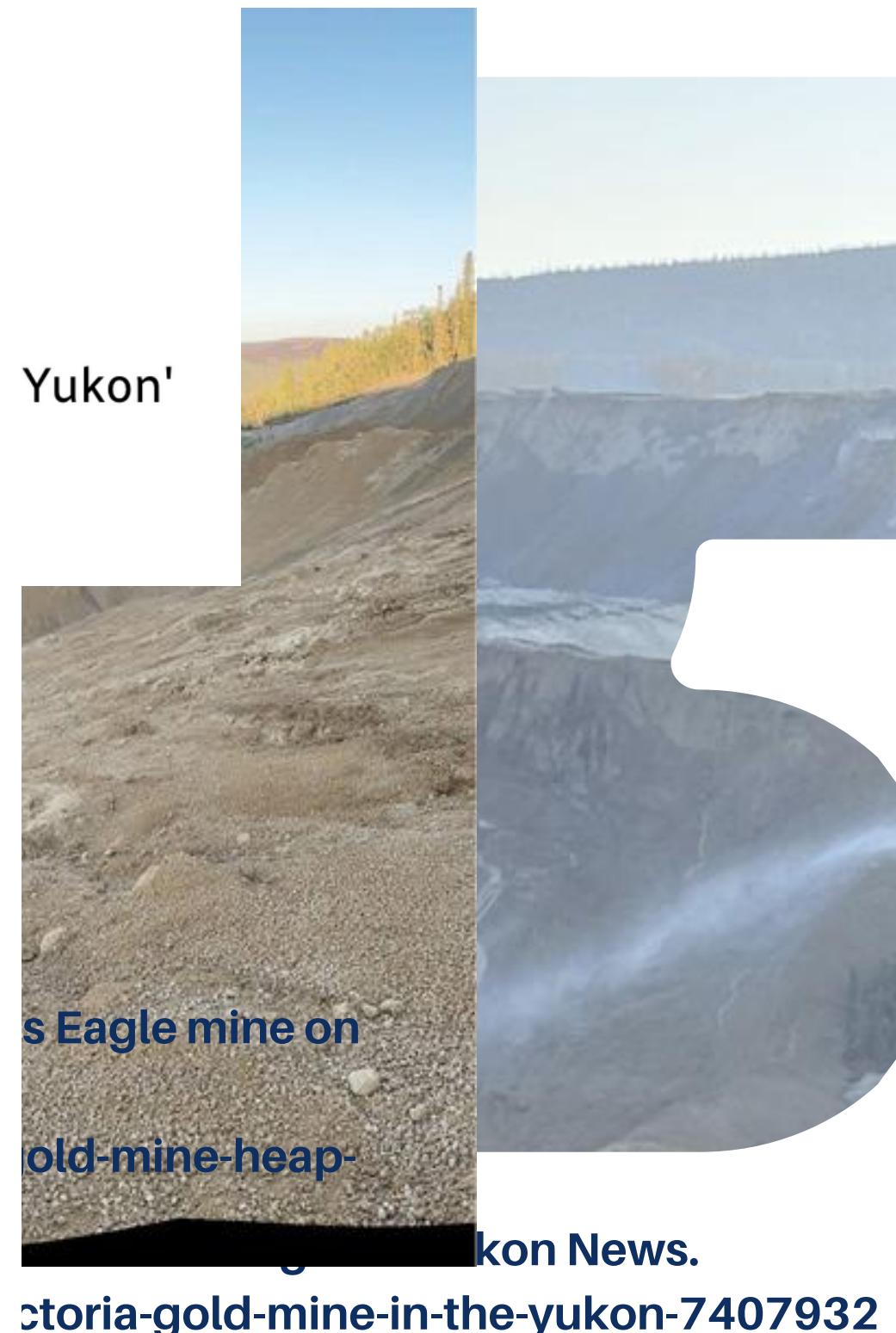
## **Yukon First Nation says mineral staking 'unwelcome, unlawful' during land-use planning process**

**First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun Notice re Mineral Staking**

*First Nation initiates long-awaited land use planning process with Yukon Government; advises all mining companies and investors any new staking will be opposed*

**(August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025; Mayo, Yukon)** The First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun (“FNNND”) has initiated a regional land use planning process with the Government of Yukon, as [announced](#) publicly yesterday. On the heels of this announcement, FNNND is issuing this notice to industry—mineral prospectors, proponents, and their financial backers—that any claims staked in the FNNND Traditional Territory during the pendency of the planning process are unwelcome, unlawful, and will be opposed through all available legal and political avenues.

Yukon'





These place and street names illustrate how the Yukon's dominant imaginary—I call it the *resource imaginary*—has been heavily structured by tropes of mineral resource extraction.

At the same time, Yukon First Nations actively challenge extractivist constructions of Canadian history and associated imaginaries of the Yukon's natural, intellectual, and spiritual landscapes.

# Revitalizing practices



**Yukon First Nations, such as the Nacho Nyák Dun, are revitalizing through**

- Artistic practices, also by incorporating new technologies
- Political and legal avenues (court cases, land use planning, Yukon mining act)
- Socio-cultural, linguistic, and narrative means (language revitalization, place names, (his)story telling)
- Indigenous planning: Rooted in egalitarian relations, however not sine capo
- Mobilizing values : Doolí



**Re-imagining Indigenous practices in the sense of remembering (both Indigenous ways and injustices), relearning, revitalizing, living Dän Ké and resisting ongoing repression**





**Claire Lake** – The Northern Tutchone name for this lake is Deyę, with no English translation because of its antiquity. It is one of several fishing lakes utilized traditionally by people from Big Salmon and Little Salmon villages. The English name, Claire Lake, is believed to derive from the name of a prospector who was reported to be in the region in the early 1900s.

*AUDIO: Sound recorded by Ms. Gertie Tom at Yukon Native Language Centre, 2004.*



According to narrative theory **place names and narratives** contribute to acts of **world-making**.

**Tekwänt'e Män**, known in English as "**Ethel Lake**," is a popular recreation site and historic site on the traditional territory of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun (FN NND). "**But, who the hell was Ethel?**"

Ethel was the daughter of a land surveyor during the **Klondike Gold Rush**.

In Northern Tutchone, **Tekwänt'e Män** means "**Fire Lake**," and it was so named because Dän handled fire torches on the shores of the lake to attract fish.

**Placenames codify historical legacies, symbolic representations, and social relations** stored in landscapes into mental maps of meaning.

**Places and their names are part of imaginaries** that convey values and knowledge through the stories, narratives, and memories embedded within them.



# Narrative Reinhabitation

the resource imaginary is being challenged by narrative reinhabitation, a particular form of resistance and closely interlinked with land struggles

- narrating (imagining) new origins and endings
- Relationship between land and narrative: Indigenization involves reappropriating ownership, control and access to resources that sustain life, but also interweaving, replacing, or speaking against Western narratives of place





# How do Yukon First Nations engage with and contest the dominant resource imaginary through narrative reinhabitation?



SQ1: First, How, where and by whom are the central tropes of the resource imaginary contested?

**Courts, commemorative events, and festivals emerge as examples of spaces where the resource imaginary is contested and where the Yukon is reimagined towards a diverse audience mostly by political actors and heritage proponents**

SQ2: Second, how do both First Nations collectives and individual Yukon First Nations citizens, and in particular mine workers, relate to the extractive industry today?

- **impacts of the extractive industry are perceived as ambiguous, individuals can hold seemingly contradictory opinions**
- **many advocate for both protecting nature and employment opportunities in mining**
- **situated engagement with the extractive industry, grounded in place-based personal, collective, environmental, and sociocultural histories**



SQ3: Third, in a broader societal context, how is sovereignty over land and narrative interconnected?

**Regaining ownership, control, and access to the natural resources that sustain living and spirituality is linked to the assertion of narrative sovereignty, which is therefore an essential component of the reinhabitation of Yukon First Nations' traditional territories.**

# Final Remarks/Results



**Cultural Revitalization: a creative and resistant process that goes far beyond the cultural by taking place not only within the social, political, economic, and environmental but also in narrative, spatial, linguistic, symbolic, legislative, spiritual, and temporal realms of life.**



What is emically termed cultural revitalization is far more than "just" cultural. Why the emphasis on culture?



Reinhabitation in the context of extractivism aims at a **balanced coexistence between “modern” and “traditional” worlds**. These “worlds” are not mutually exclusive; rather, the intermingling of First Nation, settler-colonial, and mining heritages is acknowledged.



- Rooted in North American anthropological discourse around culture
- Culture as a safe way to speak about politics?
- Culture vs. Society
- Appropriation of the same language by far right/white supremacist groups: Problematic, but context is everything.



THANK  
YOU,  
MAHSI  
CHO!

