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Abstract:

This paper shows how to reframe the Arctic by recognizing the existence of different ontological assumptions about what is the Arctic and who dwells in it. This ontological divergence can be appreciated in the different relationship with animals of the genus rangifer (caribou, reindeer) that western and indigenous peoples have. This paper illustrates such differences by bringing two examples of interactions between indigenous peoples and rangifer in two very different parts of the world, Labrador in Northern Canada and Northern Scandinavia. These examples show that indigenous peoples give rangifer a sentient, social status whose level of autonomy is comparable to the humans. In the current framing of the Arctic as a land of resource development claimed by several Nation-states, conflict between states and indigenous peoples cannot be avoided because even when legislation attempts to accommodate cultural differences, it is powerless to recognize the universal validity of the assumed entities that exist in the legislation's jurisdiction. If a re-framing of the arctic aims to facilitate the coexistence of different worlds in which animals are a different type of entity, it has to promote mutual understandings that are as balanced as possible.

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