SVALBARD IN AND BEYOND EUROPEAN MODERNITY[1]

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Abstract
What does European modernity look like from the extremely peripheral perspective of Svalbard, a Norwegian High-Arctic archipelago located approximately midway between mainland Norway and the North Pole? This is a questions that informs my reading of two personal narratives describing twentieth-century Svalbard as an emergent form of place, in Eric Prieto's term an *entre-deux*, that is no longer "outside time" as an uncharted Arctic wilderness, yet still not a location that has become thoroughly subsumed into European modernity. Both are memoirs published in 1955, *Svalbard var min verden* by the former trapper and hunter Arthur Oxaas (1888-1972), *Nord for det øde hav* by Liv Balstad (1915-1966), wife of the first post-war Norwegian governor of Svalbard. While *Svalbard var min verden* is a predominantly nostalgic retrospective of a historical era of hunting and trapping that had come to an with the Second World War, *Nord for det øde hav* looks forward to a future in which Svalbard has become fully integrated in the modern Norwegian welfare society. However, both narratives share an emphasis on the Heideggerian topic of place-making through building and dwelling, as well as a gendered vision of an Arctic modernity based on the feminine-coded values of family, homemaking and everyday life.

Keywords
Svalbard, High Arctic, emergent place, modernity, gendered values, homemaking, Arthur Oxaas, Liv Balstad

With his 1967 lecture "Different Spaces" ("Des espace autres") Michel Foucault anticipated the spatial turn across the disciplines that opened up new ways of looking at history. If, as he argued, both history and time are now viewed in terms of "the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered" (Foucault, 1998, 175), even places conventionally considered "outside time", such as locations across the circumpolar Arctic, become historicized. As Susan Stanford Friedman, among others, has pointed out (Friedman, 2001; Friedman, 2012), this spatialization of time has also been a challenge to the predominant narrative of modernity, which is based on the notion that metropolitan Europe makes history through progress and innovation while the rest of the world represents a permanent periphery that imitates the centre(s) and therefore always lags behind (Blaut, 1993). Instead, when every

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geographical location is seen as constituting its own centre, there is a multiplicity of evolving versions of modernity (cf. Gaonkar, 1999).

A spatial view of history is the backdrop for my reading of two narratives of Svalbard, a High-Arctic archipelago located approximately midway between Norway and the North Pole. I use the texts to explore what European modernity looks like from the perspective of its most marginal geographical space, without an indigenous or permanent population, surrounded on all sides by the Arctic Ocean. Before the Svalbard Treaty of 1920, this group of islands, first discovered and named Spitsbergen by a Dutch expedition in 1596, was a *terra nullius* – an uncharted and unclaimed free-for-all for hunters, sealers, whalers, trappers, prospectors and coal-miners of many nations. It was a male stronghold where, until very recently, women were interlopers, and where people never raised families or settled for life. Until the late 1940s, when aeroplanes began flying over in early spring to drop bags of mail to the residents of the largest settlement, Longyearbyen, it was completely closed off by ice from the rest of the world between October and May. In hindsight those mail drops, announced on Norwegian national radio, might have been the most obvious sign of Svalbard's incipient modernity.

Now, in the twenty-first century, Svalbard has been incorporated into both the Norwegian welfare state and global modernity through technology, research, international tourism and daily flights throughout the year. Even so, this far-off archipelago with its distinctive and challenging treeless landscape, 60 percent of which consists of glaciers, its three-month polar night, lack of roads and tiny transient population, in most respects still remains a place apart. It therefore comes as no surprise that in literature Svalbard is consistently represented by way of its difference from the rest of Norway. The archipelago is clearly an Arctic version of what Eric Prieto calls an *entre-deux*, or an in-between (Prieto, 2013).[2] No longer a pristine Arctic wilderness nor yet a location that has been thoroughly subsumed into European modernity, it must be located between these two categories and understood as an "emergent" form of place (Prieto, 2013, 2).

Arguably, Svalbard's transition to modernity began with early twentieth-century coal-mining and continued with the gradual demise of hunting and trapping – now strictly controlled and limited to species like the Arctic fox and Svalbard reindeer. The negotiation of this historical in-betweenness is the topic of this article, in which I specifically consider how emergent modernity is textually represented.

The emergence of modernity in Svalbard

Encompassing expedition narratives, travelogues, memoirs and journals, as well as fiction, Norwegian Svalbard literature often represents the archipelago as both a contrast to and mirror image of the mainland. This duality is particularly noticeable in texts from the mid-twentieth century when, in the wake of the Second World War, the rapid rebuilding and expansion of settlements and mines began transforming the archipelago. The two very different memoirs that I discuss in this article both belong to this period. Both were published in 1955, each was its author's only book, and both are modern classics of Norwegian Svalbard literature. In both, Svalbard is a site of Arctic subsistence living as well as of an emergent European modernity.

[2] Thanks to Kristina Malmio, University of Helsinki, who alerted me to Prieto's text.

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According to Prieto (2013, 2), literature on emergent places tends to "oscillate between utopianism and nostalgia or mourning". *Svalbard var min verden* [Svalbard was my world], written by the trapper and hunter Arthur Oxaas (1888-1974), gravitates towards the latter. It is a retrospective of a historical era that was coming to an end with the Second World War – an era when Svalbard, with the exception of Norwegian and Russian coal-mining company settlements, lay outside of European modernity. From the 1890s until 1941, when civilians were evacuated from Svalbard by Allied Forces, the archipelago was a hunting ground for about 400 Norwegian over-wintering hunters and trappers (Drivenes and Jølle, 2006, 140). Oxaas' career spanned almost the whole of this period, and his book belongs to a non-fictional genre – the High-Arctic trapper's memoir – that gained a brief popularity during the mid-twentieth century in Norway, not coincidentally at a time when there was very little hunting and trapping left in Svalbard. Its title promises an insider's account of the archipelago, based on the experiences of a lifetime, as well as a nostalgic recollection of a vanishing way of life.

Liv Balstad (1915-1966), in contrast, looks ahead and towards a bold new future for the archipelago. Arriving in Svalbard in 1946 as the fiancée, soon-to-be wife, of the first governor (*sysselmann*) after the war, Håkon Balstad (1904-1964), she stayed for nine years and by her own account left with "a stack of papers", the manuscript of her book *Nord for det øde hav* [North of the desolate sea] (Balstad, 1955, 428).[3] As its title indicates, this memoir brings to bear a southern outsider's perspective, from which the Svalbard archipelago is defined not only as a marginal place (cf. Shields, 1991), but literally – if we understand the Arctic Ocean as a boundary to the north – as a place beyond the margin. It recounts the challenges of living in Longyearbyen during the period of reconstruction following the devastations of the war. Well-received and widely read and debated, it was translated into several languages including English (in 1958, as *North of the Desolate Sea*, a version unfortunately based on an abbreviation of the original).

Whereas Oxaas' narrative covers almost half a century, ending with a final post-war over-wintering, Balstad's starts almost exactly when his concludes. When the trapper makes a brief appearance towards the end of her book, as a visitor to Longyearbyen before returning to the mainland for good, he is held up as an admirable example of a dying breed. "What Svalbard can give in return for toil and trouble and loneliness and darkness and cold, does not meet the expectations of modern people in a welfare state," she notes in explanation for his decision to retire (Balstad, 1955, 345).[4] Her own focus is on those expectations, a utopianism that is thwarted but not undermined by the uphill struggle to incorporate Svalbard into a post-war Norwegian welfare society and transform Longyearbyen from a coal-mining company town into a modern municipality.

Both books may be read for the insights they provide into transitional Svalbard, and both have been and can be used as historical sources. But, as I have indicated, my aim is different. As Prieto points out, literary representations can help us gain a deeper understanding of those uncategorizable places that he characterizes as *entre-deux*. The reason is not that literary

[3] "[…] en bunke papirer." All translations are my own.

[4] "Det Svalbard kan gi igjen for slit og savn og ensomhet og mørke og kulde, svarer ikke til det et moderne menneske krever av et liv i en velferdsstat."

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representations are imitative and should be "judged in terms of accuracy and conformity to the original", but that, as creative and performative acts, they are "part of the process that brings places into being *as* places" (Prieto, 2013, 11). Significantly, both Oxaas and Balstad approach the *entre-deux* of Svalbard through narratives of coping with familiar everyday activities in a challenging environment. That context itself works as a form of defamiliarization (Felski, 2000, 90; Felski, 2002, 609; Haugdal, 2017), since during the isolation, darkness and extreme climate of the polar winter, activities that are usually routine and prosaic can easily turn into matters of survival.

A central theme for both Oxaas and Balstad is the civilizing practice of homemaking in the dual sense of literally building a home – in Oxaas' case many temporary homes – and managing a home. It is therefore helpful to view their narratives in terms of a Heideggerian emphasis on the relation between the material practice of building and the human experience of dwelling. In his 1951 lecture "Bauen Wohnen Denken" ("Building Dwelling Thinking") Heidegger emphasized the essential interdependence of building and dwelling: "For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling," he writes, "to build is in itself already to dwell" (Heidegger, 1971, 348). He supports his argument with a discussion of the etymology of the word *bauen*, which is derived from the Old German *buan*, meaning to dwell. Moreover, he notes that *bauen* and *buan* are connected to the verb *bin* as in *ich bin*, I am. In other words, to *be* is to dwell: "The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth is *buan*, dwelling" (Heidegger, 1971, 349). How do Oxaas and Balstad describe building, dwelling, *being* – in the sense of immersing themselves – in an emergent place like Svalbard?

Building and dwelling in the Svalbard wilderness

Arthur Oxaas' *Svalbard var min verden* could be used as a down-to-earth illustration of Heidegger's threefold concept of building, dwelling, thinking. Much of his memoir deals with the practice of building and maintaining hunters' huts, the more or less primitive shelters representing the material basis for surviving in an inhospitable environment. In this way the book reflects Oxaas' sense of belonging to that specific landscape and of being in that world. The same can be said about his over-wintering diaries. Of the nine that have been preserved, two – which unfortunately only exist in copies – contain sketches of ground plans of hunters' huts.[5] Even in his diaries, which are brief and factual like log books, Oxaas makes it clear that Svalbard is where he feels at home – in contrast to Bjørnøya (Bear Island), where he wintered one year and sums up as "a living hell" (Oxaas, 1916).[6]

Oxaas opens his memoir with his first voyage to the Arctic from his home town of Tromsø in northern Norway in the summer of 1902, when he is only 14 years old and has just finished school, and concludes it with the return from his 29th and final Arctic over-wintering in 1946-47 after an enforced break during the war years. Apart from the one winter on Bjørnøya and another on the island of Jan Mayen, his time was spent in Svalbard. Unlike his most famous

[5] Oxaas' over-wintering diaries are kept in the library of the Norwegian Polar Institute in Tromsø, and all have been digitized. Three of them (for the years 1936-37, 1937-38 and 1939-40) were written for Adolf Hoel, the leader of the Norwegian Svalbard and Arctic Ocean Survey, the forerunner of the present-day Polar Institute.

[6] "En helvetes plads."

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Norwegian contemporary, Hilmar Nøis, who over-wintered nineteen times at his station in the Sassen Valley, Oxaas initially had no permanent base. For the first part of his career as a hunter and trapper, he did not return to the same place from his summers on the mainland. Before spending six winters at Flathuk, on the very northern tip of Spitsbergen (the main island in the archipelago), followed by nine at Kapp Wijk at the entrance to Dickson Fjord, he tended to winter in different locations, where he established himself in the autumn either by building new huts or repairing existing ones. Indeed, he became one of the foremost builders of hunters' huts in Svalbard, and the work of building, repairing and furnishing huts constitutes a recurrent theme in his memoir.

As was the common practice, Oxaas had one main hut or station and a few minor ones where he could stay overnight when out and about hunting reindeer and polar bear and tending his fox traps. He usually wintered with only one companion or alone and often saw no one else for several months, mainly because the stations were situated so far apart. Hunting and trapping in Svalbard was never a common occupation. Even during the 1930s, the peak years of Norwegian fox trapping on the archipelago, only an average of 25-35 persons over-wintered each year (Rossnes, 1993, 8). A map in the geologist Anders K. Orvin's survey of settlements and huts in Svalbard in 1939, showing the scattered locations of buildings and dwellings along the coast, gives a poignant sense of the hunters' isolation (Fig. 1).

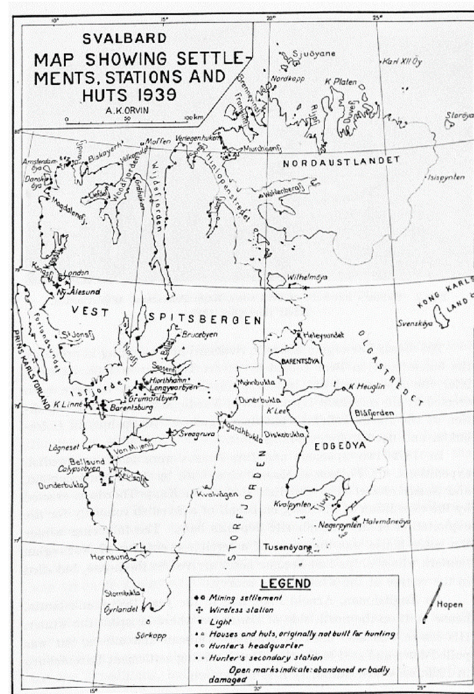

Fig. 1

Oxaas participated in the construction of his first hut in 1906, at the age of 18, ahead of his first over-wintering in Svalbard. It was located on Halvmåneøya (Half Moon Island), a small island

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off the south-east coast of Edgeøya (Edge Island), known as a good hunting ground for polar bears. Another reason for choosing this site was the amount of driftwood from Russia to be found nearby, but the over-wintering team he belonged to had also brought materials from the mainland. In his memoir, Oxaas describes the building of this first hut in detail:

> The timber frame was quickly raised, and it did not take long to clad the walls with one and a half inch boards. The whole house was 24 square metres, and attached to it we built a 4 x 4 metre shed for supplies. Inside the over-wintering house we put up four bunks along one of the end walls. In the corner by the shed we placed a little stove with an oven. On each long wall there was a window. Under one there was room for a table and under the other a kitchen cabinet. When we had brought in a couple of benches, the house was ready for occupation. […]
> We were now into September, and it was urgent to finish all the external work before winter arrived. The first thing we did was to lay a thick stone wall around the house. We used moss as padding between the wall and the rocks. In addition we covered both roof and walls with birch bark and peat. (Oxaas, 1955, 23)[7]

Based on Oxaas' description, the interior was obviously extremely simple, containing only the most essential – clearly homemade – pieces of furniture. Little was done to make it cosy or comfortable.

Oxaas spent the winter on Halvmåneøya with two other inexperienced young hunters. Their leader, who over-wintered in a another newly built hut in Dianabukta (Diana Bay) further north on Edgeøya itself, had to teach them the ropes before he left: "First we learned to bake bread, then to use the spring-guns, the traps and the poison" (Oxaas, 1955, 24).[8] (This was twenty years before the use of poison would be prohibited.) The leader's priority is clear and significant. Domestic proficiency was obviously of equal or greater importance for survival than hunting and trapping skills – apart from the ability to handle a gun, which in Oxaas' narrative seems to have been taken for granted. In an article about his female contemporary, Wanny Woldstad, Marit Hauan argues that what makes Woldstad's Svalbard diary "feminine" is that she does not distinguish between indoor and outdoor tasks such as baking and shooting seagulls (Hauan 1992, 37). However, as Oxaas' memoir and diaries show, neither did the men. A note in his Jan Mayen diary on 14 December 1917 that he has "made waffles and skinned 2 blue foxes" (Oxaas,

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[7] "Selve reisverket kom opp i en fart, og det var snart gjort å kle veggene med [en og en halv] toms bord. Hele huset var på 24 kvadratmeter, og i flukt med det førte vi opp et proviantskur på 4 x 4 meter. Inne i overvintringshuset slo vi opp fire køyer langs den ene tverrveggen. I kroken mot tilbygget plasserte vi en liten komfyr med stekeovn. På hver langvegg var det et vindu. Under det ene fikk vi plass til et bord og under det andre et kjøkkenskap. Da vi så hadde fått inn et par benker, var huset ferdig til innflytting. […] Vi var kommet ut i september, og det gjaldt å få ferdig alle utearbeidene før vinteren satte inn. Det første vi gjorde, var å legge opp en tykk steinmur rundt huset. Vi fôret dyktig med mose mellom veggen og steinene. Ellers kledde vi både tak og vegger med russenever og torv."

[8] "Først lærte vi å bake brød, dernest å bruke selvskuddene, fellene og giften."

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1917-18), is a not uncommon linking of domestic and hunting activities.[9] The Arctic wilderness was clearly no place for a gendered division of chores.

When Oxaas returned for a second over-wintering two years later (1908-9), he was hired as leader of a group of four hunters/trappers. They wintered on Kapp Lyell in Bellsund, where they built a hut that has now disappeared. Oxaas writes nothing about it in his memoir, except that the construction was swiftly accomplished. Likewise, while his first over-wintering is described from month to month, he writes little about their daily life the second time around. Clearly, after describing his first hut and over-wintering in detail, he does not find it necessary to repeat himself. Instead, the emphasis in the rest of the book is on unusual events and over-winterings that were exceptional, either because he had a particularly congenial companion or (very rarely) the opposite, spent several winters in Svalbard without returning to Tromsø in the summer, or over-wintered alone.

At least seven of his winters in Svalbard Oxaas spent by himself, miles away from other people, the first (in 1912-13) in a small and primitive hut in Hornsund. It was the site of one of the many dramatic incidents that enliven Oxaas' narrative, when he returns from a hunting expedition in February to find that visiting polar bears have more or less wrecked it. Attracted by his store of polar-bear meat, they have destroyed the interior, torn off part of the roof and broken the stovepipe:

> I told myself that I after this would be careful not to go too far from the house. Now I had experienced how intrusive polar bears can really be. I could simply risk being without a roof over my head another time. The small hut with the small boat stove was the only place for miles around where one could survive here in the polar winter. Well, I rolled up my sleeves and started clearing up. First I had to mend the stove pipe to be able to get heat back in the room. But before I began repairing the roof, I had to carry out some loads of snow and assorted trash that covered the floor inside. I shovelled and swept until it finally began looking like the floor of a house again. And by the time I had been on the roof and nailed down loose boards and replaced broken planks with new ones, night had fallen […] (Oxaas, 1955, 89)[10]

This episode is representative of Oxaas' attitude throughout – as both narrator and protagonist of his own narrative. He deals with the issues of subsistence and survival from day to day in a thoroughly practical, unsentimental and straightforward manner. He never dwells on loneliness, tedium or fear, but takes things as they come. Only occasionally – as in the reference to his

[9] "Har […] stegt vafler og flaaet 2 Blaaræver."

[10] "Jeg sa til meg selv at jeg etter dette skulle jeg være varsom med å dra for langt vekk fra huset. Nå hadde jeg opplevd hvor nærgående isbjørn virkelig kan være. Jeg kunne simpelthen risikere å bli stående uten tak over hodet en annen gang. Den vesle hytta med den lille båtovnen var det eneste sted i mange mils omkrets, hvor man kunne livberge seg her i polarvinteren. Først måtte jeg forsøke å skjøte ovnsrøret, så jeg kunne få varme i stuen igjen. Men før jeg begynte på reparasjonen av taket, måtte jeg bære ut noen lass med snø og forskjellig avfall som dekket gulvet inn. Jeg spadde og børstet og omsider begynte det å se ut som stuegulv der inne igjen. Og da jeg hadde vært oppe på taket og spikret fast løse bord og erstattet brukne planker med nye, var kvelden falt på […]"

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small hut as "the only place for miles around where one could survive here in the polar winter" – are there indications of the desperate precariousness of his existence.

It is often taken for granted that Arctic writing is not only primarily male-authored, which is certainly the case, but also strongly masculinist in orientation. "Heroic, rugged individuals, usually male, people the literature set in the north," as Renée Hulan has observed (Hulan, 2002, 99). In many respects, Oxaas' memoir fits the bill. However, I would like to suggest that Arctic masculinity is considerably more complex than has been acknowledged. Nils Magne Knutsen's attempt to define the Svalbard hunters' memoir as a genre is a case in point. Using a heroic stereotype as a template, he labels it "Arctic life as a robinsonnade". Over and over again, he writes, we get new stories "about a man standing on a deserted beach with some cases of equipment and a gun, and then he builds an existence and takes possession of the area as absolute ruler" (Knutsen, 2013, 184). But Oxaas and his colleagues were neither castaways nor sovereigns. They had come north as migrant workers, in the hope of making a modest living at a time when there were few opportunities on the mainland, especially in northern Norway, and – as in the episode above – there is little sense of conquering masculinity in their memoirs. Instead, the wreckage of Oxaas' hut by polar bears shows how easily nature (or natural beings) reclaims the ground that the visitors had attempted to make their own.

As Silje Solheim Karlsen has convincingly argued, Knutsen makes the mistake of conflating narratives of polar expeditions and trappers' memoirs (Karlsen, 2014, 7). Although the former may perhaps be read as "masculine self-heroizing" (Knutsen, 2013, 187), trappers' memoirs usually emphasize more mundane qualities, such as competence, experience, adaptation, collaboration and hard work, indoors as well as outdoors – all needed for survival during polar winters. If the trappers sometimes escape life-threatening situations – caused by violent storms, ice or polar bears – they represent themselves as lucky rather than heroic. Oxaas is certainly not alone in highlighting the everyday struggle of making the Arctic wilderness into a dwelling place in the Heideggerian sense.

A good example of this is a chapter dealing with three years – summers as well as winters – that Oxaas spent in Svalbard without his customary summer visits to the mainland. It opens with the following statement: "It may sound strange, but it is actually possible to get used to a lack of civilized surroundings" (Oxaas, 1955, 171).[11] Svalbard, in other words, belongs to the category of places Kevin Hetherington ironically calls "the badlands of modernity": as "uncivilized", it is a "marginal space in relation to modern societies" (Hetherington, 1997, viii). As Oxaas notes, the absence of civilization may not be ideal, but neither is it entirely negative; one can simply get used to it. In fact, he goes on to say that during this period (1928-31) he never felt the urge to return to the mainland. He spent the winters at the same station, at Flathuk, where he had over-wintered since 1924, felt happy and became familiar with every rock and spot. His attachment is described in Heideggerian terms: "Even if nature is bleak," he writes, "and it can seem desolate and barren up there during the cold winter months, one somehow grows attached to the place and becomes fond of it" (Oxaas, 1955, 171).[12]

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[11] "Det lyder kanskje underlig, men en kan simpelthen venne seg av med siviliserte omgivelser også."

[12] "Selv om naturen er karrig, og det kan virke ødslig og goldt der oppe i de kalde vintermånedene, gror en liksom fast på stedet og blir glad i det."

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Arctic homemaking

A few years later, however, Oxaas seems to have had a change of heart about the value of civilization. During the summer of 1936, at home in Tromsø on holiday, he became engaged to Anna Andreassen (1890-1975). Back in Svalbard at the end of August, he made a note in his diary that signals a momentous life change: midnight the Lyngen arrived […].[13] My fiancée came along to stay here during the winter. Perhaps this is a blunder, – time will tell" (Oxaas, 1936-37).[14] He was 48 and had spent over twenty winters as a hunter and trapper in Svalbard, alone or with other men; she was two years younger and a widow. Yet, after what seems to have been only a brief acquaintance they were prepared to spend the winter together in a ramshackle hunter's station in Kapp Wijk, at 78°34' north, many miles away from their nearest neighbour – and with no possibility of leaving until the following summer.

Oxaas' apprehension is easy to understand. As a photo of him in front of the Kapp Wijk hut shows, the accommodation he had to offer was far from luxurious (Fig. 2). But three weeks later he notes that his fiancée has settled in well: "Anna is busy taking care of the house, and well content" (Oxaas, 1936-37).[15] After New Year there was a torrential downpour, and he had to dig a ditch around the hut to prevent the water from rising over the floor. "Hope this is the last year I have to use this hovel," he commented in his diary. "Everything is destroyed, our clothes rot, and one becomes quite disabled by gout." He added that one side of the house had also been sinking several degrees: "Yes now it is less pleasant here." But soon after, their life was obviously back to normal: "Anna baked today. She works hard every day and is very content" (Oxaas, 1936-37).[16] Only the many diary entries registering how Anna copes and adapts to her new circumstances indicate Oxaas' initial concern and eventual relief.

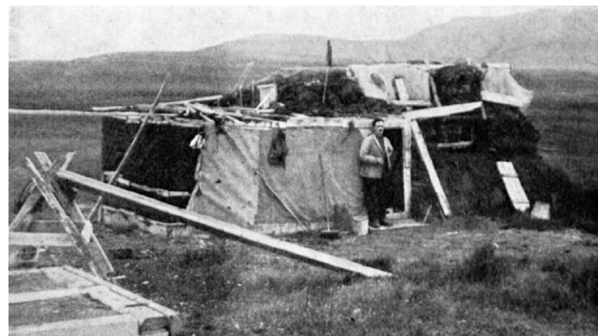

Fig. 2

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[13] From 1934 the ship *D/S Lyngen* had made regular trips between the mainland and Svalbard five or six times each summer.

[14] "Kl. 24 kom Lyngen hertil […]. Min forlovede kom da også med for at være her i vinter. Kanskje er det en dumhet, - man får se."

[15] "Anna beskjeftiger sig med huslige sysler, og trives bra."

[16] "Håber det er siste året jeg må bruke denne torvsjåen. Alt ødelegges, klærne rådner op, og selv bliver man aldeles maroder av jikt. […] Ja nu er her mindre hyggeligt. […] Anna bagte idag. Hun stræver vær dag og trives bare godt."

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Nothing in Oxaas' memoir or diaries suggests that he had been foolish to invite Anna to share his life in Svalbard. She, likewise, seems not to have regretted her decision to come. Interviewed in a local Tromsø newspaper after their retirement in 1947, she compared living conditions in Kapp Wijk favourably with those on the mainland, in spite of the long dark winters, which the routines of "daily work" helped her endure (En av dem, 1947). In his memoir, Oxaas concludes that his marriage had led to "a complete change in habits and routines", adding that it was "a change for the better. Now everything was in order. Food, clothing and the house were capably taken care of. Somehow there was more civilization up here with a woman in the house" (Oxaas, 1955, 190).[17] As his diary notes indicate, Oxaas connects "civilization" with the establishment of a gendered division of tasks – even in the context of an isolated Arctic hunting hut – conforming to the common pattern on the Norwegian mainland.

As a builder, Oxaas was himself responsible for much of this change "for the better". Soon after his fiancée arrived, he began the construction of a new and more solid house, describing the process in detail both in his diary and the memoir. The following summer, he and Anna got married in Longyearbyen, and after a trip to the mainland they returned to Kapp Wijk in September to finish the house. On 11 September 1937, Oxaas noted in his dairy that they had moved in:

> This pm we moved into the new house. All the time since we came I have had enough to do to finish the building. It has a double roof, floor, walls throughout. Final covering inside and outside, likewise painted inside. We feel like gentlefolk after moving from the hovel. The interior here is pleasant and practical. Large bright living room, bedroom next to it, a large room for storage, room for skins, expecting WC hall and a large shed with floor and window. I have also brought a radio that will now be rigged up, so it looks like we will now be able to keep up with everything, or anything, that happens outside our little world. (Oxaas, 1937-38)[18]

Compared to his earlier huts, the new house was quite spacious. It had a ground plan of 5 x 8 metres (Reymert and Moen, 2015, 337) and a separate bedroom like houses on the mainland. The old hut was converted into a shed. Most importantly, Oxaas' emphasis on the instalment of a radio – which required a 10-metre antenna to work – signals the incorporation of the new station into the modern world.

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[17] "For meg betydde dette en hel omlegging av vaner og livsrytme, men en omlegging avgjort til det bedre. Nå ble det orden i sakene. Mat, klær og hus ble stelt av kyndige hender. Det ble liksom mer sivilisasjon her opp med en kvinne i huset."

[18] "I em flyttet vi in i nyhuset. Har hele tiden siden vi kom havt nok at jøre med at få bygget ferdig. Det har dobbelt tak, gulv, vegger overalt. Topslået in og utvendig, likeså er der malt inne. Vi føler os som goseiere efter at være flyttet fra torvsjåen. Her er da også triveligt og praktisk inredet. Stort lyst dagligværelse, soveværelse ved siden, et stort rum som proviantrum, skindrum, ventes W.C. gang og en stor sjå med gulv og vindu. Jeg havde også med et radioapparat som nu skal rigges op, så det ser da ut for at man nu skal få følge med alt, eller noe av det som forregår utenfor vår lille verden."

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According to Odd Lønø, radios became quite common in Svalbard trappers' huts during the period 1935-41, although not everyone was able to receive a signal (Lønø, 2014, 382). It is therefore more than likely that Oxaas would have embraced this modern technology even without a wife. His narrative makes it clear, however, that he viewed the radio together with his marriage and the building of a new house fit for "gentlefolk" as steps towards the incorporation of the Kapp Wijk station into the modern world. Implicitly, he considered himself more at home in the pre-modern Arctic wilderness as a lone hunter/trapper than as a married man.

Oxaas' stasjon på Kapp Wijk i Isfjorden. Til høyre hans eldste fangsthytte, en gammel jordgamme. Nedenfor huset han bygde da han giftet seg.

Fig. 3

A photo of the new station illustrates Oxaas' memoir (Fig. 3). It is still intact and is now one of Svalbard's most important cultural heritage sites. Although the house was vandalised after the couple left for good in 1947, and there are no surviving signs of Anna's contribution, her role is commemorated in her husband's memoir. In the chapter dealing with this building project – the final one of his career – Oxaas highlights the importance of her attention to homemaking, not only in the sense of everyday maintenance such as cooking, baking, cleaning and mending, but also in the sense of making the house into a welcoming domestic space through the use of furniture, textiles and decorative objects. This is demonstrated in one of the illustrations, a photograph taken by Oxaas of his wife in the living room (Fig. 4). While the caption tells us that she has "transformed the primitive hunter's hut into a comfortable home", the text itself explains how:

> Anna furnished the house with rugs on the floors and curtains over the windows. Between the sitting room and the bedroom she put up draperies instead of a door. With her feminine sense of the importance of small things, she made this house into a real home that made everyone thrive. (Oxaas, 1955, 194)[19]

[19] "Anna utstyrte huset med filleryer på gulvene og gardiner i vinduene. Mellom stuen og soveværelset hengte hun opp nye portièrer istedenfor dør. Med sin kvinnelig sans for småtingenes betydning, gjorde hun dette huset til et virkelig hjem, som var egnet til å skape trivsel for alle."

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The picture of Anna in the living room shows a modest 1930s interior that could have been anywhere in Scandinavia. It is the result, as Oxaas notes, of his wife's emphasis on comfort and her "feminine" attention to detail (cf. Schor, 1987, 97).

Fru Oxaas forvandlet den primitive fangsthytta til et koselig hjem.

Fig. 4

However, Oxaas neglects to note his own contribution to the decoration of the living room, the hand-carved picture frames that we see on the wall behind Anna on the left. According to Oxaas' friend Jacob Jacobsen, who in August 1963 rescued three of the frames after vandals had demolished the interior of the Kapp Wijk house, they had been left there when Arthur and Anna returned to the mainland for good. Jacobsen found them in a cardboard box on the beach and restored them before presenting them to Svalbard Museum in 2002.[20] In a summary accompanying the frames, he explains that Oxaas carved them from driftwood during his winter on Jan Mayen in 1917-18, and that he had used them to display photos of the royal family cut from magazines and newspapers. The reason Jacobsen gave the frames to the museum was that he wanted others to know "what kind of man and artist Oxaas really was" (Jacobsen, n.d.).

[20] Thanks to Herdis Lien and Sander Solnes at Svalbard Museum for helpful information about Oxaas' picture frames.

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Jacobsen also writes that Oxaas had a special gift for making his surroundings comfortable – exactly the special gift that Oxaas himself attributes to Anna.

After Anna's arrival in Svalbard, Oxaas not only physically replaced the primitive hunting hut with a proper small house, but also, in his diary, abandoned his gender-neutral account of everyday tasks. When narrating their domestic life together in his memoir, he does so in terms of a conventionally gendered spatial ordering. *His* work is outdoors, as builder and hunter/trapper, *hers* primarily indoors as homemaker and housewife – although he does mention that she participated in outdoor activities and contributed to the family economy by tending her own fox traps near the hut: "When the weather was good, she always went out to look after the equipment, and she was a very precise and capable trapper" (Oxaas, 1955, 195).[21] The couple's division of labour suggests that they transposed to the Arctic wilderness the "strong male breadwinner model" in which married women were by definition homemakers that characterized Norwegian modernization during the mid-twentieth century (Åmark, 2006, 324).[22]

As described in Oxaas' memoir, the living quarters he and Anna created together are clearly a version of Prieto's *entre-deux* – neither a typical hunter's hut nor entirely an ordinary 1930s Norwegian home, or more correctly a liminal space between *both*. Trying to explain why Anna decided to accompany him to Svalbard even before they were married, Oxaas surmises that she must have been motivated by a sense of adventure (Oxaas, 1955, 190). In fact, her decision to move there with a man she hardly knew must have been a radical break with contemporary sexual norms, even if so-called "loose connections" were both more common and more accepted in Svalbard than on the mainland (Evjen, 2006, 60-61). But, by fulfilling the daily routines of an accomplished housewife, as well as by transporting to Kapp Wijk objects representing domestic comfort at home, Anna as represented in her husband's writings signals the opposite – that there is *no* clear rupture between the Arctic wilderness and familiar everyday modernity, between her new life and the old. As Iris Marion Young puts it in her feminist critique of Heidegger's "Building Dwelling Thinking", "[t]he activities of homemaking […] give material support to the identity of those whose home it is" (Young, 2001, 271). In the case of Anna Oxaas, this obviously meant a respectable female identity unchanged by displacement.

In Young's view, Heidegger's "division of dwelling into moments of building and preservation", as well as his privileging of "building as the world-founding of an active subject", reveal a male bias (Young, 2001, 253). Even if he does underline that *bauen* "*also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for" (Heidegger, 1971, 349; original emphasis), according to Young he then "leaves preservation behind to focus on construction" (Young, 2001, 255). The consequence is a devaluation of an important mode of meaning-making that is usually performed by women, coded as feminine and connected to traditional household tasks. Although Young warns against romanticizing the activity of preservation, her argument for the revaluation of homemaking helps us to appreciate the equal contributions

[21] "Når været var bra, dro hun alltid ut for å se etter redskapene, og hun var en meget nøyaktig og flink fangstmann."

[22] Åmark notes that "the idea that married women should not work" was stronger in twentieth-century Norway than in the other Nordic countries (Åmark 2006, 310).

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made by Anna to her and Arthur's mutual project of not only building, dwelling and place-making, but also of materializing an emergent modernity in the Arctic.

Integrating Svalbard into modern Norway

Turning from Oxaas' memoir to Liv Balstad's *Nord for det øde hav* means moving from the establishment of modernity in the form of a proper house and a gendered division of tasks in the practically uninhabited wilderness to Svalbard's most urban area, Longyearbyen. One of the illustrations in Balstad's book makes it clear that the designation "urban" was relative, however. The image has the ironic caption "Svalbard's metropolis" and depicts a scattered settlement of between 800 and 1000 inhabitants in moonlight during the dark season (Fig. 5). Turning from Oxaas to Balstad also means ascending the social ladder, to the very highest echelon of Svalbard society.

Whereas Oxaas writes retrospectively about a period of his life that is over, Balstad's book reflects a developing perspective as she narrates her personal journey from innocence to experience. But even as she adapts to everyday life in an Arctic outpost, she continually reminds her readers of the utter *otherness* of Svalbard. Its enormous distance from both Oslo, where she used to live, and the traditional rural inland valley of Valdres in southern Norway, where she grew up, is not only geographical but also conceptual. All the same, Balstad has more than a little in common with Anna Oxaas. Like Anna, Liv Gullvåg as she then was, came to Svalbard as the fiancée of a man she had only recently met – in love but clearly also looking for adventure. Moreover, the book she later published about her experiences shows that, in much the same way as Anna, she tried to assimilate by becoming an Arctic homemaker.

Fig. 5

As previously mentioned, Balstad's book recounts her nine years as governor's wife in Longyearbyen during the first decade of reconstruction after the devastation of the Second World War:

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> The Germans had made a clean sweep, only three or four houses were left standing in Longyearbyen itself, so everything had to be rebuilt from scratch. […] Everything revolved around the reconstruction. Only work mattered; what it meant to *live* was hardly in anyone's thoughts, nor was there any time for it. Everywhere there were stacks of material, heaps of timber and boards and planks; cement, machines; a confusion seemingly impossible to disentangle. (Balstad, 1955, 82-83)[23]

Among the buildings destroyed by bombing was the original governor's residence. Arriving in 1946, Balstad therefore moved with her fiancé into a dilapidated and draughty Swedish prefab barracks (*svenskebrakke*), with rats under the floorboards and derelict furniture, which housed all government services in addition to the living quarters of the governor and herself. Her memoir recounts how, at the beginning, she was able to find some humour in the situation – particularly in her futile attempts to be an efficient housewife in a primitive kitchen with an antiquated stove that eventually exploded like a volcano in clouds of smoke (Balstad, 1955, 72) – if only because she believed her husband's promise that a new residence would be built soon.

Unlike Oxaas, the Balstads cannot simply build a new house. Instead, they are dependent on a centralized bureaucracy that in a period of post-war austerity has other priorities than the reconstruction and modernization of a small Arctic settlement. The prolonged struggle to get the government to accept the necessity for a new governor's residence is a cause of mounting frustration, a sentiment that informs much of Balstad's memoir. It is also a source of tension, if not outright conflict, with her husband, who comes across in her text as a self-effacing civil servant constrained by loyalty and a reluctance to spend government money. Although she declares that what is most needed for life in Svalbard is "the talent for adaptability and the art of resignation" (Balstad, 1955, 175), she adamantly refuses to resign herself to living in the temporary barracks.[24] In fact, this statement introduces one of several chapters that are sharply critical of the Norwegian government's indifference to Svalbard's affairs.

However, both the Balstads oppose government plans to rebuild the pre-war residence. "Times have changed," as the governor informs the Ministry in 1947 (Balstad, 1955, 171).[25] Looking ahead towards a future Arctic modernity, Liv Balstad herself uses her narrative to stress the importance of transforming the archipelago from a primitive and neglected coal-mining outpost into a truly integral part of Norway. Only a governor's residence that is "more spacious, more modern and also more suitable for official functions" would suffice as a proper symbol of this development (Balstad, 1955, 171).[26] Moreover, it would have to be a suitable home not only for the governor – who, before the war, was expected to be a bachelor (Balstad, 1955, 171) – but also for the governor's family.

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[23] "Tyskerne hadde gjort rent bord etter seg, bare tre-fire hus sto igjen i selve Longyearbyen, så alt måtte bygges opp fra grunnen av. […] Alt dreide seg om gjenreisningen. Det gjaldt å arbeide; det å *leve* tenkte så menn ingen på, og ikke var det tid til det heller. Overalt lå det materialstabler, hauger av tømmer og bord og plank; sement, maskiner; et virvar som man ikke skulle tro var til å finne ut av."

[24] "Tilpasningens evne og resignasjonens kunst er noe av det som trengs mest for den som skal bo på Svalbard."

[25] "Tiden har blitt en annen."

[26] "[…] romsligere, mer tidsmessig og også mer representativt."

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Via connections, Håkon Balstad finally enlists the services of a private architect, Eindride Slaatto, an acquaintance of Liv's from the Valdres Valley. After a three-week visit to Longyearbyen, Slaatto leaves with finished plans for a residence that will combine the function of being the Balstads' home, the governor's office and an official symbol of Norwegian sovereignty. Dreaming over the architectual sketches, Balstad sees the residence as "Slaatto's poem":

> the simple lines expressed a proud dignity. The large timbered banqueting hall with a fireplace – "Liv, I shall bring the forest into your hall!" – the concrete tower that connected the building – the guest rooms, the kitchen, the living rooms, – for me it became not only a house, but also a poem. (Balstad, 1955, 179).[27]

Balstad's allusion to poetry may refer to Slaatto's statement about creating a residence that in the treeless Svalbard landscape will remind her of the woods back home. However, the architectural drawings show a building that in its harmonious combination of modern international functionalism with elements inspired by traditional Norwegian architecture may easily be interpreted as a poetic composition.

When the governenor's residence is finally completed – in 1950, after Liv Balstad herself has had to travel to Oslo to confront the Minister and demand action – she delights in the way the architect has kept his promise to her by including in his design a large sitting-room with timbered walls and an open fireplace. As Hege Skogvang (2004) has noted, the sitting-room, a brown one-story wooden building with a saddle roof, reminiscent of a traditional Norwegian log house, is one component in a complex of four very different buildings. It is connected by a portico to a three-story square tower with white-plastered concrete walls and a low pyramidal roof that constitutes the corner of an L-shape completed by a rectangular red two-story main building. Like Anna's homely touches to the Oxaas house, these components, which are all transposed from the vernacular architecture of rural Norway to the High Arctic, make the new governor's residence evocative of the *entre-deux* of an emerging Svalbard society (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6

[27] "'Slaattos dikt' kalte jeg det i et poetisk øyeblikk - de rene, enkle linjene hadde en stolt verdighet i seg. Den store peisetua i rundtømmer - 'Liv, jeg skal bringe skogen inn i stua til deg!' - tårnet i mur som bandt bygningene sammen - gjesteværelsene, kjøkkenet, stuene, - for meg ble det ikke bare et hus, men et dikt."

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Obviously, the connotations of an official building like the governor's residence are very different from those of the Kapp Wijk station. In a settlement like Longyearbyen, where buildings were (and are) primarily functional, it stands apart – literally, by being situated on a hill overlooking the town – as an Arctic equivalent of the royal castle in Oslo. Like the name Svalbard, which first appeared in twelfth-century Icelandic annals and was popularly – though erroneously – believed to prove that the archipelago had been discovered by the Vikings centuries before the Dutch (Arlov, 2003, 50-51), it constructs the archipelago as a native Norwegian space with roots in medieval history. More than just a dwelling place, the new residence symbolises the full integration of Svalbard into Norway as a modern country, but it does so by harking back to and renewing long and venerable traditions.

Everyday modernity in the High Arctic

Balstad's background and role make her extremely sensitive to the spatialization of modernity. While Oxaas, at least until his marriage, rarely reflects explicitly on how Svalbard is being gradually incorporated into the modern world, this is a major theme of Balstad's book. As an observer of everyday life, she registers how Longyearbyen is being transformed from the wreckage of war into a modern Norwegian welfare society. This, she repeatedly underlines, means a society that accommodates not only male breadwinners but also women, children and families. In fact, as Ingrid Urberg has argued, she seems to have felt it as her special responsibility to record the contributions made by women and wives to Svalbard society (Urberg, 2007, 187).

An important theme in *Nord for det øde hav* is the conflict of interest between the mining company and civil society. Modernity before the war had meant coal-mining. The population was predominantly male, and the few women over-wintering in Longyearbyen were either wives of coal-company functionaries or service personnel. While Balstad is well aware that coal-mining constitutes the economic basis of modern Svalbard, and that Longyearbyen is still – as it was before the war – primarily a company town, she argues that the future of the archipelago lies in the development of a viable civil society. She therefore applauds efforts at "normalizing" life in Longyearbyen by providing facilities for families and children and improving connections with mainland Norway. Important examples of the latter are better radio transmissions and the annual mail drop onto the Longyearbyen sports field a month or so before the first ship can get through the ice. But because of the demand for coal in post-war Europe, the welfare of the miners always has the highest priority, and she complains that as a consequence there is a continual shortage of provisions for other inhabitants.

One of many everyday issues signifying Svalbard's difference from the mainland, and one of great concern for housewives and mothers, is the shortage of ice to melt for water during the winter. A lack of ice in the Arctic may seem absurd to outsiders, Balstad explains, but because the snow and ice in Longyearbyen is contaminated by sand and coal dust, blocks of ice have to be laboriously transported from a frozen reservoir in the Advent Valley, some miles east of the town: "First the tanks of the mess halls were filled, then the bath tubs of the coal miners, and

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then finally it was the turn of private households" (Balstad, 1955, 74).[28] Babies have no precedence, as she discovers for herself after her son is born in 1947. It is therefore as a representative of Svalbard mothers in general that she exhorts government officials – whose children doubtless get daily baths in tubs easily filled with hot water from a tap – to come north to view the primitive conditions in Longyearbyen for themselves (Balstad, 1955, 181).

As the mother of both a young child and an older son from her first marriage, who joins her after two years in Longyearbyen, Balstad makes her own experiences exemplary of both the challenges and the joys of bringing up children in a High-Arctic environment. She writes that children in Longyearbyen are well taken care of and enjoy the freedom of being outside in every kind of weather, even through the dark winter months. One of her illustrations, of two happy toddlers playing in the snow underscores this point. The caption "ruddy-cheeked children – *that* too is Svalbard" posits a modern family-friendly Arctic, even what we may call an Arctic pastoral (cf. Wærp, 2017).[29] At the same time, she argues that children ought to visit the mainland every summer to recuperate from the long polar winter. Moreover, she believes that they need to learn through actual contact that the world as a whole is different from Svalbard, "that there are trees and animals in reality and not only in fairytales" (Balstad, 1955, 152).[30] Unavoidably, that reality is her own frame of reference throughout the text. Although the overall mission of her book is to promote Svalbard as an integral part of modern Norway, she clearly – in contrast to Oxaas – would never have called the archipelago "my world".

Like Oxaas, Balstad complies with the gender system of the mid-twentieth century. She defines herself as "a housewifely woman" (Balstad, 1955, 187) and never explicitly questions this role.[31] Nor does she express much resentment at having to function as her husband's unpaid secretary – even, on occasion, as unpaid prison guard and radio announcer. Nevertheless, there is an incipient feminist protest in her defence of "the Svalbard woman", whose important work in the community is usually overlooked. As she puts it, "nobody considers dealing with woman as a member of society. She seems to be taken for granted. Woman as a human being and citizen seems to be something that nobody has begun ticking off in questionaires and tables" (Balstad, 1955, 304).[32] In a long digression from her personal narrative she attempts to remedy this by paying homage to some of the women who have braved the elements, over-wintered in Svalbard and thrived. There she also suggests that – contrary to received opinion – being a woman is no disadvantage in the Arctic: "Perhaps it takes longer before she puts down roots, and perhaps there are fewer women who actually do so. But once she finds the Svalbard melody, she

[28] "Først ble beholderne i messene fylt, så badene til gruvearbeiderne, og så til sist kom turen til privathusholdningene."

[29] "[…] rødmussede barn - også det er Svalbard."

[30] "[…] at det er trær og dyr til i virkeligheten og ikke bare i eventyrene."

[31] "[…] en husmoderlig kvinne […]"

[32] "[…] ingen finner på å befatte seg med kvinnen som samfunnsmedlem. Hun går liksom med i slengen. Kvinnen som menneske og borger er liksom noe som ingen har begynt å prikke inn på skjemaer og tabeller."

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becomes more attached to the land and the surroundings than the man" (Balstad, 1955, 304-305).[33]

By highlighting the importance of a capacity for emotional connection rather than such qualities as mastery or physical stamina, Balstad accomplishes a rather startling reversal of Arctic stereotypes. But the utopian impulse of her book is clearly inspired by a vision of a Svalbard society in which the feminine values of relationships, family, homemaking and good childcare prevail. Although Oxaas is neither an advocate nor explicitly oriented towards the future development of the archipelago, his final chapters on married life imply that he shares this vision.

Balstad's goals have not been achieved when she and her husband leave Longyearbyen for good in 1955, and in contrast to Oxaas she is equivocal about whether she herself found "the Svalbard melody". However, the case that both authors make for a Svalbard *within* European modernity cannot be separated from the issues of gender, citizenship and welfare developments. The frontispiece of Balstad's memoir, a photograph of a group of school girls in Longyearbyen pointing out their home at the top of a globe is the clearest indication of this. As an image of both modernity and gender equality it signals that geographical distance apart, Svalbard in no way lags behind more metropolitan centres.

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[33] "Kanskje tar det lenger tid før hun slår rot, og kanskje er det færre kvinner som overhodet gjør det. Men finner hun først Svalbardmelodien, knytter hun seg sterkere til landet og omgivelsene enn mannen."

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