

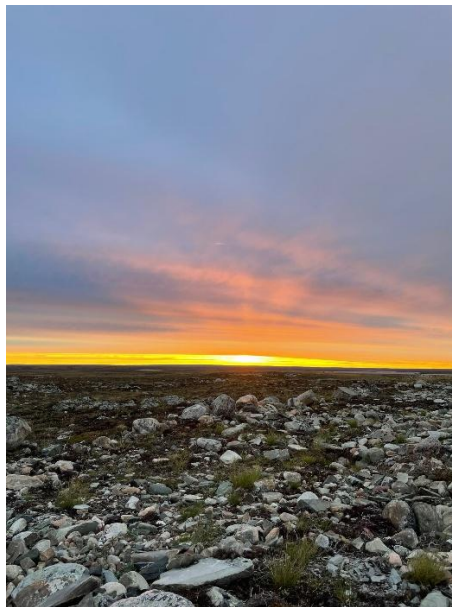
University of Bern - SAKS - Social Anthropology

Sector/regional exercise by Andrea Bordoli:

Critical indigeneities, extractive environments: Canadian perspectives. HS 2024

Final Paper

***Ovid's Ancient Connotation of Gold Extraction & War in an
Anthropological Projection onto the Mining Expansion in the Modern
Mineral Age in Nunavut. Rankin Inlet Communities and Daily-Life-Insights
of a Warehouse Worker at Meliadine Mine.***



10.1.2025

Katharina Leisi

Matriculation No. 20-128-922

Route du lac 264, CH-1787 Mont-Vully (Môtier)

katharina.leisimueller@students.unibe.ch

Major - Science of Religion, Minor - Social Anthropology

*For My Family***Preface**

Even in ancient times, it was noted that the extraction of metallic raw materials by humans harbours conflicts. These conflicts seem to become more pronounced in proportion to the economic potency of the metal's added value. The Roman poet Ovid even expressed the opinion that the mining of gold leads to war. In the more than 2000 years following the writing of Ovid's *History of the World*, countless scholars have analysed the problematic effects that mining in its various forms has on societies and communities around the world.

Using the example of Canada's Arctic North, this work asks whether these conflicts are inevitable or whether there could be ways to break the eternal curse that seems to lie over mining. The topic will be analysed from different perspectives by those affected and scientists. Current key figures, also in relation to climate development, are included. The source of the narrative are several conversations with a former Canadian worker at the Meliadine Gold Mine, whose name has been anonymised.

Keywords: Mining. Gold Mining. Mining in the Arctic. Critical indigeneities. Canada. Nunavut. Meliadine. Rankin Inlet. Mine Work. Inuits. Inuktitut. Metamorphoses by Ovid. Mineral Age. Extractivism. Northern Identities.

**Content**

Preface.....	1
Ovid's Prophecy.....	2
<i>John</i>	3
Arctic Nature : Stressed Living Environment.....	4
<i>John's 12 Hours 14 Days</i>	5
Rankin Inlet : Community and Identity.....	6
<i>John and the Community</i>	7
Conclusion.....	8
Bibliography, Sources, Declaration of Independence	9

Ovid's Prophecy

*And not only was the rich soil required to furnish corn and due sustenance,
but men even descended into the entrails of the earth,
and they dug up riches,
which the earth had hidden and had removed to the Stygian shades.
Then destructive iron came forth, and gold, more destructive than iron;
then war came forth.*

OVID (Roman Poet, 43 BC - 17 AD): METAMORPHOSES, Book 1, Lines 137-143.



In describing the development of the world ages in his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid ascribes to metals in several passages of his work overarching, powerful effects on people and on the course of human history. The human activity of bringing metals to light is fateful and destructive. On the one hand, the metals themselves already harbour a potential for evil; on the other hand, it is human beings, their character traits and greedy aspirations to possess the metals that provoke conflicts. In the mythical, ancient work *Metamorphoses*, gold is given the strongest and most ambivalent role of all the metals; gold seems to influence the fate of mankind more than the other raw materials do.

Ovid calls the first of the four ages, which describes a paradisiacal, harmonious world in which man lived in harmony with himself and nature without great effort, "The Golden Age". At this stage, gold still symbolises peace, harmony and ideal morality. But in the course of the following ages, man changes, becomes increasingly greedy, seeks more and more his own material advantages and becomes corrupt. Metals are brought to light from the dark depths through mining in order to possess and utilise them. Gold, the most beautiful of metals, not only gives rise to envy and greed, Ovid also ascribes to gold the quality of a war-maker. Ovid also symbolises the evil, destructive flip side of the coveted raw material with its hidden whereabouts in the underworld near the river Styx, which is already understood as a curse in itself. The arc of the progression from the paradisiacal original state to the decline of morality is closely linked to the complexity of man's extraction of gold.

Read in the anthropocene modernity of the 21st century, Ovid appears to us as a prophet of the global, dramatic controversy of the history of expansion in the extraction of raw materials. Even at the beginning of our era, he recognised that man's endeavours to extract the valuable materials that the earth holds are fraught with conflict. Colonialism, industrialisation and the capitalist pursuit of growth ruthlessly created asymmetries in the relationships between those involved and affected by the extraction of metals. Warren Bernauer describes the complicated and arduous discussions in the context of the Nunavut Agreement, which was signed in 1993 by illuminating in his work the complex fronts of the negotiations.¹

¹ Bernauer, Warren. "Land Rights and Resource Conflicts in Nunavut". *Polar Geography* 42, no. 4 (2 October 2019): 253-66.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2019.1648582.p.253-257>.

There are reasons for what Jerry K. Jacka describes in his work about anthropology of mining as the bad image of this industry.² Land appropriation, oppression, as well as threats and destruction of habitats for humans and animals, are just some of the ominous themes that fit into the fulfilment of Ovid's prophecy.³

The rise of gold as a profitable commodity and financial asset is unstoppable and the expansion of industrial mining of metallic raw materials is seen as an unbroken capitalist imperative. On the other hand, there are the conflicts and the sad traces that mining leaves behind in global and glocal contexts.

Jacka, who also includes Ovid's visions of the world ages in his article, illuminates the anthropology of mining in a very broad global and temporal context. Finally, he points to the company Planetary Resources, which focusses on mining in space (71). In doing so, he shows that man's need for metals does not even stop at the limitations of the earth. The space travel activities of the manufacturer of Tesla cars, which rely on powerful batteries, could also be interpreted in this way, showing that mankind's endeavours to extract raw materials have already exceeded global dimensions and have reached the dimensions of outer space.

Is Ovid's curse of war and destruction really an inescapable imperative of the Anthropocene? Or can mankind, instead of war, manage to find ways of solidarity among equal partners?



John

He tells me about his work in the gold mine in Nunavut as if it were nothing special. A six-hour flight from Montreal, flight in - flight out, 14 days of work without interruption, a 12-hour working day in the mine, which is nothing unusual in Canada. Afterwards, another 14 days off at home before starting all over again, off to the arctic north of Canada, to Rankin Inlet in the Kivalliq region.



The salary was unprecedented.
"You can save a lot of money"

² Jacka, Jerry K. "The Anthropology of Mining : The Social and Environmental Impacts of Resource Extraction in the Mineral Age". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47, no. 1 (21 October 2018) : 61-77. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102317-050156>. p. 64

³ Bernauer, Warren. "Land Rights and Resource Conflicts in Nunavut". *Polar Geography* 42, no. 4 (2 October 2019): 253-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2019.1648582.p.256>. p.261.

And at work, the stay was all-inclusive, so to speak, you don't need any money there. You hardly have time to spend it either.

John had lost his job as a sales manager in Montreal during the coronavirus crisis when a long-time hockey friend asked him if he would like to try his hand at the Meliadine Mine warehouse near the town of Rankin Inlet in Kivalliq. For John, this offer was an opportunity to get a well-paid job and escape the monotonous lockdown routine of the pandemic in Montreal. But he was not at all sure about this, because as an Iron Man-tested endurance athlete, he was used to intensive sports training, and he would probably miss not being able to run regularly in his running community in Montreal. He also wondered how he could manage his diet. As a purist vegan, he could hardly imagine eating food from a company canteen.

He initially embarked on a kind of trial period at Agnico Eagle's well-structured, highly secure Meliadine gold mine, where around 600 people were working at the time.

From our first conversation, it is clear that he appreciated this work, which he carried out for two and a half years in one of the northernmost regions of Canada, where the temperature can reach over 50 degrees below zero. This is despite the fact that the working conditions are anything but ordinary. I ask him whether his general experience was predominantly positive or negative. He doesn't have to think for an answer:

"Positive. It must be positive, otherwise this is not possible. They did a lot for us. But the job is undoubtedly tough. The extreme cold, isolation and gruelling 12-hour shifts can be physically and mentally taxing."

He was given food that corresponded to his diet at home and it was possible to keep in shape. Once in the summer, a marathon was even organised on a road where normally only lorries are allowed to drive. But even lorries are not allowed to pass and are not allowed to honk when there are caribou on the road. This is because they have absolute right of way, even over aeroplanes, which can sometimes lead to blockades for several hours. The strong wind affected him the most during the marathon, but he still enjoyed the run. Nature and the landscape were his favourite impressions in Nunavut anyway, so he took lots of photos whenever he had the chance. Most of them show fascinating sunrises and sunsets, with breathtaking light conditions, water and land, and in summer also flowers. He explains that all activity at the gold mine must be in harmony with the environment:

"Wild Life Rules is number one and the community is strongly observing. We are respectful."

But in the same breath, he says that although everything imaginable and possible is being done to protect nature and water, this is not enough. It is clear that mining is a brutal act against the environment. And despite structured planning, it is only many years after the reclamation of the mine that we know what it really looks like.

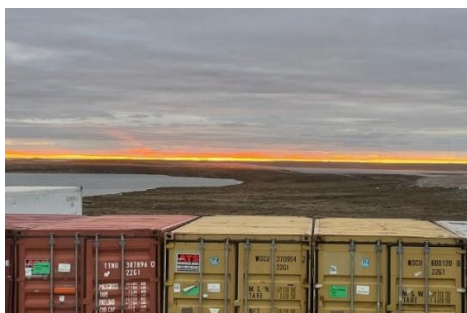


Arctic Nature: Stressed Living Environment

Mining, like resource extraction in general, always means a drastic, major intervention in the natural conditions of both the local area that is being exploited and within higher-level ecosystems. Habitats for animals and humans are altered, disturbed, threatened and sometimes destroyed. This applies not only to LSM (large-scale mining), but also to ASM (artisanal and small-scale mining). The relentless increase in all forms of mining, which Jacka defines as a *mineral rush* (63), is particularly threatening to water systems. A. S. Medeiros et al. show how complex and demanding freshwater management is in Nunavut. The risk of contamination exists not only from mining operations, but also from other waste and military activities.⁴ However, the biggest problem for securing clean water today is considered to be the rise in temperature, which is causing the permafrost to melt. The example of Rankin Inlet shows how the pressure for system protection is becoming more and more

⁴ Medeiros, Andrew S., Patricia Wood, Sonia D. Wesche, Michael Bakaic, and Jessica F. Peters. "Water Security for Northern Peoples: Review of Threats to Arctic Freshwater Systems in Nunavut, Canada." *Regional Environmental Change* 17, no. 3 (March 2017). p. 639 – 642.

pronounced. When the North Rankin Inlet Nickel Mine was operated from 1957 to 1962, little emphasis was placed on resource development, which led to corresponding pollution due to negligence, which was only recognised later. The Meliadine Gold Mine is pursuing progressive freshwater protection and ensuring the renewal of fish stocks. An improvement in environmental awareness is based on scientific findings, but also on protest and pressure from the local population. Other studies, such as that of Warren Bernauer, which is relating to the uranium mining context and the conflicts over the habitats and caribou calving grounds, note that the conflicts between resource-producing capitalism and the Inuits do not always lead to satisfactory results. The example of the Nunavut Agreement shows that if too many organisations and groups are involved, rivalries can also arise among the indigenous people and their villages. The result is that neither the Hunters and Trappers nor the Mining Company are served.⁵



The study by A. S. Medeiros et al. concludes that for successful adaptation of necessary environmental measures, technologies in the form of hydrological and hydrochemical monitoring systems must be applied. This can only be successful if the processes are based on both scientific and indigenous knowledge, hand in hand with the community. An inclusive construction of knowledge goes hand in hand with interdisciplinarity and the willingness on both sides to build bridges between traditions or to break with tradition. With the final claim that northern natives must not only be counsellors but also effective leaders in the upper positions,⁶ this study goes further than most other researchers.

John's 12 Hours 14 Days

High protection, safety and security: this is the motto above all else. It begins on arrival at the airport with various security checks, bags are checked and drug dogs are also deployed. Surveillance is everywhere, even in the workplace itself, not only because of operational safety, but also because of the high value of the gold. He denies my question as to whether he didn't feel constricted or harassed under this constant surveillance. On the contrary, he felt safe because no risks are taken anywhere and great importance is attached to the safety of the workers; accident prevention, discipline and a zero alcohol policy are emphasised.

"You are definitely out of comfort zone."

He describes the warehouse as a large shopping mall with very high ceilings and several levels for efficient storage: *"big stuff, big engines"*. Part of the computerised storage system is located outside in shipping containers. The outdoor storage location is only possible for certain goods, mainly due to the extreme temperatures. Everything has to be under control.

⁵ Bernauer, Warren. "Land Rights and Resource Conflicts in Nunavut". *Polar Geography* 42, no. 4 (2 October 2019). p.263.

⁶ Medeiros, Andrew S., Patricia Wood, Sonia D. Wesche, Michael Bakaic, and Jessica F. Peters. "Water Security for Northern Peoples: Review of Threats to Arctic Freshwater Systems in Nunavut, Canada." *Regional Environmental Change* 17, no. 3 (March 2017). p. 644.

The employees who are flown in like him come from all regions of Canada. There are only a few women among them, and John says that they don't always have it easy. He reports a strong camaraderie that he has never experienced before. The sense of social togetherness is very strong.

"We are strong together."



Common goals and values weld employees together and lead to shared strength. The company also does a lot to promote a social life

A certain pride can be heard in John's descriptions, which reminds me of the article by Keiling/Boulter, who attributed an identity formation to the activity of mining.

What was the most difficult thing for him?

"Being away from friends and family, missing christmas and birthdays.»

"But you can see the benefit."

Rankin Inlet Community and Identity

Rankin Inlet was the first Arctic town to be established as a result of mining.⁷ Starting in 1957, nickel and copper were mined and it was the first mine in northern Canada where indigenous people worked underground. There was a kind of urbanisation of the Inuits, who changed their lifestyle due to the new work in an employee relationship. Not only the landscape underwent changes, but also the patterns of life, such as hunting and fishing. Traditional cultural forms were changed and adapted to the new living conditions, also under the influence of the Qallunaats, as the white inhabitants are called. This group makes up around ten per cent of the population. Tara Cater and Arn Keiling provide an ethnographic analysis of the social impact of the mine and its closure on the community in Rankin Inlet in their article from 2013. For the Inuits, the mine meant a regular, economic income on the one hand, and losses, tensions and conflicts of interest on the other. When the nickel mine was

⁷ Cater, Tara, and Arn Keiling. "That's where our future came from': Mining, landscape, and memory in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut." *Études/Inuit/Studies* 37, no. 2 (23 June 2014): 59-82. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025710ar>. p.60.

closed in 1962, they were faced with a problematic void. The community created by mining had never existed in this form before. The forms of coping were primarily based on a collective memory of mining and the formation of a new hybrid community of Inuits and Qallunaats, which helped to build identity in the contact zone of Rankin Inlet.⁸

Another article by Patricia Boulter and Arn Keiling « *From Igloo to Mine Shaft: Inuit Labour and Memory at the Rankin Inlet Nickel Mine* » shows, that this new hybrid identity was also characterised by a certain pride in being part of the modern economy.⁹ This is convincingly documented on the basis of the interviews conducted and with authentic black and white photos. But the mine also remains a symbol of transformation and loss.

In the course of the commissioning of Agnico Eagle's Meliadine Gold Mine, relations with the Inuit organisations were relaunched through new agreements. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* of 2007¹⁰ appears to be gaining a foothold in these various negotiations. However, the fact that equal rights and the free will of the indigenous people are not fully realised is also reflected in the high suicide rate of mainly young, male Inuits. Michael Kral's medical anthropological article explains, the direct motives for taking one's own life are complex, often involving for example generational or partnership problems.¹¹ Kral also defines how the act of suicide can be contagious in the form of a shared expression of hidden social dysfunction.¹² Colonialism and oppression are not the direct triggers, but the breeding ground for the development of mental illness.¹³ Genuine self-determination of the Inuits is the subject of work by many researchers. At this point, Kunuk (Sandra) Inutiq, whose topic is indigenous self-determination, should be mentioned. Inutiq was the first Inuk woman from Nunavut to pass the bar exam and is therefore also a symbol of the development of her own resilience and power.¹⁴

The *Responsible Gold Mining Principles* of the World Gold Council¹⁵, to which Agnico Eagle also belongs, reflect a new sense of responsibility and a striving for solidarity that was not previously present in this form. In the new era of mining, terms such as *corporate social responsibility* and *sustainability* are key objectives. Conflicts and asymmetries still exist. Jacka uses several examples to show that these problems can be of very different kinds and very complex.¹⁶

Valeria Alia makes the expression of cultural identity largely dependent on names and language and demonstrates the great significance of Inuktitut for the people of Nunavut. In the course of a worldwide retribalisation, aboriginal people are increasingly regaining control over their culture.

The preservation and the restoring of names are essential for the preservation of an individual identity.¹⁷ It becomes clear that the appreciation of the Inuktitut is a key function for the resilience of the Inuit.



⁸ Ibid.p.67.

⁹ Keiling, Arn, and John Sandlos. *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada : History, Politics, and Memory*. Canadian History and Environment Series, no. 3. Calgary (Alta.) : University of Calgary Press, 2015.p.63.

¹⁰ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Declaration_indigenous_en.pdf.

¹¹ Kral, Michael J. ""The Weight on Our Shoulders Is Too Much, and We Are Falling": Suicide among Inuit Male Youth in Nunavut, Canada". *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (March 2013): 63-83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/maq.12016>.p.71.

¹² Ibid.p.70.

¹³ Ibid.p.63.

¹⁴ [Kunuk \(Sandra\) Inutiq, Author at Yellowhead Institute.](#)

¹⁵ [Responsible Gold Mining Principles | World Gold Council.](#)

¹⁶ Jacka, Jerry K. "The Anthropology of Mining : The Social and Environmental Impacts of Resource Extraction in the Mineral Age". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47, no. 1 (21 October 2018) : 61-77. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102317-050156>. p. 64

¹⁷ Alia, Valerie. *Names and Nunavut: Culture and Identity in Arctic Canada*. New York: Berghahn, 2007.p.143.

John and the community

There is not much going on in the town, apart from the coffee shops, sports activities and hockey, which is very important in Rankin Inlet. Significantly, the ice stadium is called *the Agnico Eagle Arena*. Alcohol, if available at all, is subject to strict licences and is expensive, as it is a big problem for the locals to deal with it. They don't have it under control and are prone to "binge drinking", which sometimes leads to violence, reports John. We come the subject of the high suicide rate among the indigenous people and here he becomes very thoughtful. The problem is probably not just the mining itself, but the overall context of the capitalist takeover.

"Their voices must be central in the shaping of their own destiny."

John felt like a guest worker, an Other of the Others, so to speak. The striking difference between the Inuits and the "flight in-flight out" employees is that the Inuits go home every day. They are at home there, they have their lives and their families there. And this life is also highly respected within the working relationship with the company.

"We from outside are migrant workers."

For example, if someone simply doesn't come to work because they're going hunting, even without giving notice, that's okay. It is accepted, it is completely normal. The activities of the Inuits, however, are limited to manual labour, although they are given preference over employees from outside Canada, who are often hired via contractors. The locals are employed directly by the company from the outset, which includes a better bonus programme and better medical care.

"They get the job, if they can do it, they always get the position, if they are qualified. But they must speak English."

In reality, however, there is hardly any indigenous leadership. In the area of education, more needs to happen than just the mine's training programmes. The co-operative efforts for the training of equal, genuine indigenous value must come from all sides, from the universities, from the government, from the company and also from those affected themselves. He describes the indigenous employees as nice, simple people who inspired him greatly with their direct, straightforward approach to life.



Conclusion

The ancient author Ovid already connoted the profit-orientated, capitalist activities of gold mining with war in the Roman Empire, which leads to the conclusion that the topic was already socially explosive in antiquity. With the Anthropocene expansion of raw material extraction, the complex problems also grew. Reciprocally, movements of resistance and forms of rebellion and extractivism emerged. Scientific findings from various disciplines and insights, both from the natural sciences as well as from the social sciences and cultural anthropology, help to dismantle asymmetrical disproportions and to thematise them. Apologies by capitalist oppressors for what has happened are part of the far-reaching, global realisation that the appropriation of the earth's material matter also meant colonialist oppression in addition to the negative effects on the environment and living spaces. However, this does not undo what has happened. Apologies from governments are often only issued once the underlying facts have been made so visible and clear that they can no longer be glossed over or denied. Although they are morally and ethically necessary, they are also an instrument for demonstrating political correctness. For a genuine equalisation, we need an understanding on an equal footing that goes beyond welfare actions and assimilation efforts. In addition to real opportunities for empowerment, such as the provision of educational programmes aimed at indigenous leadership, it is certainly also necessary for the Inuits themselves to actively develop their identity and resilience from their position. The example of Rankin Inlet and its community, which has its founding origins in mining, shows that approaches and processes exist in these directions. They are constantly learning and working on their cultural identity. It is impossible to predict what the situation will really be like once the Meliadine Gold Mine has closed. However, based on the research findings of the scientists on which this work is based and the development of the town's history, Ovid's destructive war curse of gold mining can be relativised. There is not only tension and conflict, there are also forms of common togetherness and solidarity.



Bibliography & Sources

- Alia, Valerie. *Names and Nunavut: Culture and Identity in Arctic Canada*. New York: Berghahn, 2007.
- Bernauer, Warren. "Land Rights and Resource Conflicts in Nunavut". *Polar Geography* 42, no. 4 (2 October 2019): 253-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2019.1648582>.
- Cater, Tara, and Arn Keeling. "'That's where our future came from': Mining, landscape, and memory in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut." *Études/Inuit/Studies* 37, no. 2 (23 June 2014): 59-82. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025710ar>.
- Jacka, Jerry K. "The Anthropology of Mining : The Social and Environmental Impacts of Resource Extraction in the Mineral Age". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47, no. 1 (21 October 2018): 61-77. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102317-050156>.
- Keeling, Arn, and John Sandlos. *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada : History, Politics, and Memory*. Canadian History and Environment Series, no. 3. Calgary (Alta.): University of Calgary Press, 2015.
- Kral, Michael J. "'The Weight on Our Shoulders Is Too Much, and We Are Falling': Suicide among Inuit Male Youth in Nunavut, Canada". *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (March 2013) : 63-83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/maq.12016>.
- Medeiros, Andrew S., Patricia Wood, Sonia D. Wesche, Michael Bakaic, and Jessica F. Peters. "Water Security for Northern Peoples : Review of Threats to Arctic Freshwater Systems in Nunavut, Canada." *Regional Environmental Change* 17, no. 3 (March 2017): 635-47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-016-1084-2>.

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Declaration_indigenous_en.pdf. 9.01.2025,
6.30 AM

Responsible Gold Mining Principles | World Gold Council. 9.01.2025, 5.30 PM

Kunuk (Sandra) Inutiq, Author at Yellowhead Institute. 9.01.2025, 6.15 AM

Photographies

Frontpage & p. 3, 5, 8 by *John*

P. 2 : Agnico Eagle Mines Limited. Sustainability Report 2023.

Declaration of independence

I hereby declare that I have written this paper independently and have not used any sources other than those stated. I have labelled as such all passages that were taken literally or analogously from sources. I am aware that otherwise the Senate is entitled to withdraw the grade awarded on the basis of this paper in accordance with Article 36 paragraph 1 letter o of the Law of 5 September 1996 on the University.

10th of january 2025

