“Like Tearing Out My Lungs”: Mining and Contested Worldviews in the Sami Community

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I wish to thank my supervisor Brian Palmer for his support, wisdom and humor in the work of this thesis.

I also want to take the opportunity here to show gratitude to the conversation partners that took part in this work, for it would not exist without them.
Abstract

This is an exploration of concepts and identities of Sami people in northern Sweden regarding conflicts on mining. The Sami have a history of feeling that others are encroaching on them and ignoring them and their wishes, the latest being the mining companies. There is also the issue of who gets to be considered as Sami and how the Sami identity is characterised. There are different positions among the Sami, some are enthusiastic and some are opposed. The view of the traditional land can be understood as a sacred connection with nature that is not understood by the majority society. Connecting with the land is vital as the link between the generations.

Sweden has been ranked as one of the world’s most attractive places for mining investments in recent years and it is seen as one of today’s biggest challenges for the survival of the Sami culture. The majority society’s and the mining industry’s view on sustainability includes opening of mines, to be able to extract minerals to use in wind parks and electric cars where the Sami are seen as standing in the way. A discourse in Sweden is that all of the north is a vast space, with fewer and fewer inhabitants. With many who are moving to the bigger cities in the south, this is also seen as a way to create jobs for a hopeful future in the towns up north. The Sami faces a misunderstanding majority society where their history is not recognised and the strengthening of indigenous peoples’ rights in recent years have only lead to symbolic gestures for the Sami.

This thesis has been made through spending time with these groups as well as trying to be a sensitive researcher who will contribute to the interest and understanding of those written about.

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Keywords

Indigenous peoples’ rights, Majority society, Mining Industry, Sustainability, Kallak, Rönnbäck.
# Table of Contents

1. An Introduction
   1.1 Purpose .................................................................................................................. 5
   1.2 Limitations ............................................................................................................ 6
   1.3 Background, Method and Theory ......................................................................... 6

2. Material and Ethical considerations
   2.1 Exploratory Research and Participatory Action Research .................................... 13
   2.2 Conversation Partners ......................................................................................... 14
   2.3 Observations ....................................................................................................... 17
   2.4 Ethical Considerations ......................................................................................... 18

3. Mining and Contested Worldviews in the Sami Community
   3.1 Sacred Land ......................................................................................................... 19
   3.2 Who is Sami ........................................................................................................ 24
   3.3 I Can Only Represent Myself ............................................................................... 32
   3.4 To Be of Greater Use ........................................................................................... 34
   3.5 Studied But Unheard ............................................................................................ 44

4. Concluding Reflections ............................................................................................. 52

5. Reference List .......................................................................................................... 58
1. An Introduction

This thesis is an ethnographic portrait of a people and a milieu in Sweden, where Sami and others have contrasting views regarding community, representation, natural resources and feelings of how they are viewed by the rest of society. It focuses on the people involved in these issues and Sami indigenous rights and way of life. The experiences and knowledge from my conversation partners have come to form the basis of this thesis. The people I have met have different backgrounds and views, they are Reindeer Sami, Forest Sami and a non-Sami who has lived in Sápmi. I have also included the thoughts of an indigenous person from South America, as well as one who wants to be recognised as a Sami. This is an account of them, their vision, their stories and their worlds in the spring of 2019.

1.1 Purpose

There has been a greater interest for mineral that can be mined from Northern Sweden. This has led to a surge in the interest of opening more mines. The threat of opening more mines in what is called the “mining boom” has escalated the debate of who has rightful ownership of the land. The issue concerning indigenous peoples’ rights are tied to a discussion on how to best use natural resources and the potential environmental issues that might follow. The boom is caused by the fact that Sweden has been ranked as one of the world’s most attractive places for mining investments in recent years. The suggested exploitations have been described as one of today’s biggest challenges for the survival of the Sami culture (Liliequist & Coppélie 2017:119).

I explore the subject of struggle for and against mines in the north of Sweden, where I have conversation partners from two of the most affected areas at the moment, Gállok (Kallak) in
Jokkmokk and Rönnbäck in Tärnaby. The topic of land rights for the Sami and how the natural resources should be used is splitting these communities. The local people, Sami and non-Sami, are not in an agreement in the debate of opening of mines. Opening them can create job opportunities and the extracted minerals can be used to make batteries for wind parks or electric cars (Åhman 2017). Those against the opening of the mines say it will change nature permanently as well as change the way of life for the Sami and others. It is also considered abuse of power from the Swedish government where the Sami are left without rights to make decisions themselves. It has become more dangerous to defend human rights in the world, and among those who are the most vulnerable are those who defend natural resources, land rights and or indigenous peoples’ rights (Front Line Defenders 2017:6).

1.2 Limitations

This thesis will only focus on the Sami people within Sweden’s borders and not cover stories concerning the situation for Sami people in Norway, Finland or Russia. The reason for this is that the Sami situation differs greatly between the countries and it is vital to limit the scope of the thesis in order to reach relevant concluding reflections. This thesis will focus mainly on mining, however it also mentions wind parks and water power.

1.3 Background, Method and Theory

My first contact with the Sami people was when I joined them at a protest which they hold every week on Thursdays at a bridge next to the Parliament House in Sweden. I had just heard from a friend that this was taking place and that it has been held for five years and I wondered why I had not heard of this protest before. I revisited the protest during the making of this thesis and wrote down what I saw. I saw a flood of people cross the bridge, many of them were tourists and every
other person that passed by were wearing suites that showed that they were employees of the Parliament. Some stopped to look at the colourful banners or took a brochure from the small group of protesters. As I walked further west I crossed a bridge parallel to the bridge where the protest was held. I saw the Sami protest on the left, the Parliament House in the middle and on the right hand side the square where the now world famous Greta Thunberg holds her weekly demonstration. Recently she has been invited to meet with Pope Francis, been on the cover of Time magazine and been given an honorary doctorate. I came back and saw this protest held by Greta. She was joined by thirty people and one camera team followed her every move. A group of boys yelled out ‘It’s her!’ As they pointed to the girl with braids. I noticed the contrast between the enormous attention that Greta received and the occasional rare looks of baffled curiosity that the Sami activists received from passing tourists. As I wondered why I did not know about this demonstration I also thought of what else I did not know concerning the Sami present as well as their past.

There are several parts of the Sami history I wish I could include in this thesis. Shown here, is merely a small piece chosen to give a short history to the themes presented in this work.

Several of those I was interested in interviewing were sceptical when I mentioned I was researching for a Master’s programme in religion, one person explained to me that this hesitation could be due to the fact that religion could be seen as too private to share with someone that was not known to them. It did not help either that it was a programme connected to Uppsala University. This is because the university has a complicated history with the Sami people, especially concerning the State Institute for Racial Biology which which was active during 1922-1958. Central for the science was the practice of eugenics, where the Sami were placed as a low form of race which was determined through documentation of measurements, weights and photos (Samiskt informationscentrum).
I was intrigued by the fact that the brochures, reports and websites concerning the Sami way of life always had a section with religion. However, there was a tendency of writing about religion in a past tense, as something that had disappeared when Sápmi was secularised and during the 1600s the Sami religion was banned (Virdi Kroik). Svenska kyrkan (The Church of Sweden) published an anthology in 2016 called “White Paper Project” where the Church reports on violations of rights committed during the colonial past (Lindmark & Sundström 2018). The word “colonisation” still surprises many Swedes, since many are not aware of the history. One part of the colonisation had religious motives where the goal was to christen those who were seen as heathens. There are for example accounts of priests who collected and burned religious symbols and issued bans against the joik (traditional form of song) (Ryd 2015).

Seeing that the Sami religion had suffered through these historical episodes I wondered how much of it remained, and in what way it is expressed. From my experiences in the civil society in Stockholm I noticed a fascination for indigenous people around the world, where the contrast was more black and white of indigenous people versus the modern industry. I was aware of the fact that it was easy to view the Sami and other indigenous people as exotic, pure, simple and in a deep connection with nature, who should not be changed. As well as the idea that if we would all regress and live like the indigenous people have traditionally done, we would not have climate change etc. My approach was coloured by this even though I was aware of it. I suspected and approached this question with an expectation of “natural mystery”. With this phrase I mean expectations of the Sami having a unique window of the majesty of nature. It was quite possible that this expectation would not be met and that this was a question of power and money rather than religious beliefs. I came to understand that land was both sacred and at the same time valuable in an economic sense.

Regarding the topic of nature and indigenous people it is often an idealised picture of being in
In past laws, it was expressed that the Sami were those who had reindeer and engaged in reindeer herding. Sametinget (The Sami Parliament of Sweden) has enforced a new law with a definition of who is considered to be Sami (Skielta & Enoksson 2018:7). This definition is based on three aspects: To be able to speak a Sami language, to consider yourself as Sami and that you or your parents practised a Sami language in your home. Three components are considered to create your identity: your origin, your upbringing and the individual’s own choice (Skielta & Enoksson 2018:7). However it is a complicated issue. A Sami village is a geographical area where reindeer herding is performed. It is organised as an economical and administrative association through the leadership of a board. Only reindeer herding Sami can join a Sami village, and being included in a Sami village gives you the right to perform reindeer herding. Out of all Sami in Sweden about ten percent are members of a Sami village. Reindeer herders are allowed to perform reindeer herding, fish and hunt within their area, as well as have cabins et cetera. The reindeer herding law is based on “usucaption” which is an owning right that is based on having hunted, fished and used the land a long time without disruption (Skielta & Enoksson 2018:26). When the reindeer herding law was established in the 1800s the state defined a Sami as a nomad who had reindeer. At that time a lot of Sami were reindeer owners but there were also those that hunted or fished for a living. Today all Sami, no matter what industry, are considered a part of the indigenous people that are the Sami from an international legislation (Skielta & Enoksson 2018:26). To be considered as an indigenous people is not connected to who was there first, it is a legal definition of an indigenous people who lived in a geographical area before it was colonised (Skielta & Enoksson 2014:3).
The Sami Parliament was established in 1992. It is an elected body where all Sami have voting rights. It is not a parliament in the ordinary sense. Instead, it is a hybrid of a state administrative authority and an association that should promote Sami culture (Ryd 2015). To be able to vote in Sametinget you need to have either had a parent who has voted before or have documented knowledge of a Sami language and identify yourself as Sami (Sametinget 2019).

Sápmi is the territory that is, and has been, inhabited by the Sami in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:107). In the 1600s, the Swedish Crown encouraged settlers and farmers to head north, to increase the tax basis and “spread the civilisation”. (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:107). Into the 1800s the state had an interest in supporting the Sami due to the increase in trade (Lundmark 2011:53). The Sami rights transformed from the time title of ownership to an usufructuary right (using right). During this time ideas of culture levels and racist discrimination were spreading in Europe (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:107&108). The nomadic lifestyle that some Sami had, were seen as a lower form of living. In the early 1900s water power establishments dammed up the big rivers in Sápmi, which made it harder for the reindeer herders since the land was changed (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:109).

With Elsa Laula Renberg, a Sami resistance movement started in the late 1800s, where one of the main ideas was to gather the reindeer herders and non-reindeer Sami to work as one, on shared interest (Lantto 2002:58). In 1977, the Sami were acknowledged as an indigenous people by the Swedish Parliament, and the constitutional recognition as a people was granted in 2011 (Regeringskansliet 2015). The fight for land and resource rights have continued and escalated, where the natural resources are interesting for investments in energy production (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:110).
When industrialisation came to Sápmi the need to use reindeer as a form of transport became obsolete. This became a further hindrance in the debate of the Sami right to land (Ryd 2015).

Historian Lennart Lundmark writes that indigenous people are almost always a minority, even within their own areas. The formal democratic process is not enough to guarantee their most basic rights. The United Nations bears the responsibility on the ILO 169 (International Labour Organisation) which was voted in as a new convention in 1989 and gives indigenous people owning and tenure rights to the land they traditionally hold. This is something that the Swedish government has not signed with the explanation that it was not compatible with Swedish legal relations (Lundmark 2011:222). The Sami have been recognised as an indigenous people, but not in a practical sense, in land rights. This is something that the United Nations criticised Sweden for (Liliequist & Coppélie 2017:140).

As the last chapter shows, parts of this topic is rather well researched, as well as highly current as several mines are in the process of opening. Used here are various sources, from articles in the biggest newspapers in Sweden, brochures from Sami organisations to books concerning land rights, Sami activism and the mining industry. Through joining Facebook groups that focuses on fighting against the mining industry I was constantly notified of news articles and debates concerning the issue. The anthology “Samisk kamp” (Sami struggle) from 2017 and the book “Svensk gruvpolitik i omvandling: Aktörer, kontroverser, möjliga världar” (Swedish mining policy in transformation: Actors, controversy, possible worlds) from 2018 both become a big part of this thesis, as they are recently published and show how the Sami community handles this interest in natural resources. The former focuses on identity issues and power issues and the role of activism in the Sami community. It shows different forms of resistance and helped in this thesis in that it explained how the Sami are seen as a people in the periphery of Sweden, which is something used by the mining
industry. The latter gave keys to understanding the north as a commodity port through the lens of the majority society (the Swedish society outside of Sápmi), in the past as well as today. It also contributed with the insight that Swedish media have not given Sami questions much attention.

It is usual for ethnographic researchers to say something about themselves early in their works. In my case, through acts such as helping refugees and new Swedes to learn Swedish in language cafés and help with homework as a Red Cross volunteer as well as deeds such as donating to hospital research, I view myself as a caring person. I strongly believe that our human rights are to be valued and cared for and I try to understand why this does not always happen in all places. Through being active in the civil society, I realised just how much democratic spaces are decreasing around the world and that during 2017 over 300 human rights defenders were killed (Front Line Defenders 2017:6). Among those who are most vulnerable are those who defend natural resources, land rights or indigenous rights. I kept thinking about the fact that indigenous people usually tick all of these boxes and realised that there is a strong focus in Sweden to strengthen the “global south” (a term that aims at regions outside of Europe and North America, mostly low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised) (Dados & Connell 2012). I then asked myself “How come I know more about other continents and their cases concerning indigenous rights than about the indigenous people in Sweden?”.

Like most ethnographers I draw upon several theories to make sense of the situations and contexts that I encounter. The different chapters portray different scenes based on the fieldwork material. Each scene needs a summary to situate it in a broader sense of time and space, as anthropologist Kirin Narayan describes as “identifying the tallest redwoods of story” that rise from this ground of experience, it makes us see the main story (Narayan 2012:14). All scenes are connected in the way that they show the contrasting views concerning these Sami issues today.
The main thesis’s used are that of how different views of value, with a focus on industries and economical value, Karl Marx’s theory regarding free trade helps to understand that viewpoint, as well as neoliberalism. To help with understanding of why the knowledge of the Sami history and connection to land is lacking in Sweden, the theory of cognitive dissonance coined by social psychologist Leon Festinger is used. This is the act of ignoring or pushing away a fact to be able to continue with the act even though one knows it is wrong.

2. Material and Ethical Considerations

2.1 Exploratory Research and Participatory Action Research

The chosen method is to perform a bounded ethnographic case study and use qualitative methods where I as a researcher am a part of the social reality being analysed. The collected data and analysis was understood alternately as I attended Sami social gatherings and returned to learn more about what I had experienced. Ethnographic research and methods seek to describe and understand the natural social world as it is, in its richness and detail. Much ethnographic research share the same characteristics but there is not a set methodological technique, other than just “being there”. The analytic process of this relies on the interpreter, in this case me, and how I “tell it like it is” or how I experienced it through participant observations and in-depth interviews (Schutt 2011:334).

The text here should be viewed as a bounded ethnographic case study and an exploratory research as it explores social interactions, by observing and interviewing to find an explanation of what has been found. The questions are broad since they are trying to make sense of a social phenomenon rather than testing a hypothesis. Questions such as “What is going on here?” or “How do the people interpret these experiences?” become vital (Schutt 2011:45). Through ethnographic methods I have
explored the contrasting views that exist in this context, where the findings show a field that is worth to study, with several unanswered questions relevant for our time and future. Through the exploratory research this also shows that even as an outsider this is a field that can be studied through building relationships and trust as well as giving something in return. On the point of giving something in return, this thesis also had elements of PAR (Participatory Action Research) per request by my main conversation partner. PAR has varied definitions, but common to all is that PAR projects are a collective commitment (between researcher and participants) to investigate an issue, with a desire to clarify and engage in an action that leads to a useful solution (McIntyre 2008:1). While participating in the project, I was asked to contribute with my findings to support a document to spread knowledge of the Sami disadvantages in power relations. The focus area for the document regarded state funding in how strengthening the civil society and culture differs from the majority society. I therefore kept this in mind when conducting interviews as well as while searching for sources. Note that the PAR contribution is something separate from what is presented in this thesis.

2.2 Conversation Partners

The method for this thesis is ethnographic, through conducting interviews with a total of six conversation partners, many informal conversations as well as observations from events in and around Stockholm. By conversation partner I am referring to the people I have met and interviewed, other terms for this is an interviewee or an ethnographic host. The thesis is an ethnographic portrait of people with contrasting views on the Sami situation today and the aim is to provide an intimate depiction of their acts and views on the situation, rather than to prove anything in particular. I have interviewed people involved in issues concerning Sami rights to land with different viewpoints, showing a breadth of views and ideas. I wanted to talk to people, observe and present a detailed description of those experiencing the issue of land rights and views of the future. I did not know any of my conversation partners beforehand and could only hope to get an as diverse group as possible.
Since there was a limited amount of time, it would not have been possible to portray this in total since I was not by their side each day. However I have captured glimpses from engaging with them in meetings, conferences as well as interviews. My goal was to gather as much as possible of the complexities of particular individuals and their social interactions and context, and to also include the viewpoints and stories that created a collision.

When meeting my conversation partners I informed them of my broader topic – my interest in what it is like to be Sami in Sweden. All of the interviews were performed with oral consent and I gave them the full information that this process was made with an appropriate research ethics, such as the offer of being anonymous. My main conversation partner was also able to correct her quotes during the process to be made sure to be fully understood. One of the most important question for me to ask was if they wanted to answer something I had not asked, something that is usually not included or unknown to the person asking. In hindsight the answers to this question became the most powerful pieces of information in the thesis. I used my tape recorder in all conversations, asking for permission to do so by my participants. All conversations were made in Swedish and were translated by me into English.

A project between Naturskyddsföreningen (Swedish Society for Nature Conservation) and Civil Rights Defenders in Stockholm focuses on Sami rights in a three year project work together to strengthen the Sami rights in Sweden. With an expert group from the Sami civil society they have a diversified group that all certainly live with Sami questions today. When I met them the project was halfway through and they had clear goals on what to achieve and how to do so. I was invited to join their meetings and to have interviews with them, this was my way into the community and from there on I made contacts using the snowball effect for interviews in the future. The central conversation partner for this thesis is Ruona Burman, of whom I have come to know through
regular visits this spring. She has been engaged in Sami issues her whole life since she grew up in the south of Sápmi. Her father was placed there as a “Lapptillsyningsman”, a non-Sami who had a great authority over Sami issues, where all industries and Sami villages were to be controlled (Ryd 2015).

Today Ruona lives in Norrtull in Stockholm with her two dogs and returns to her childhood village for vacations together with her sister. I met with Ruona once or twice every week. “Coffee?” was always her second word after “Hello” when she came to get me at the reception. “Coffee” I replied. We sat down in different office spaces each time “I have not made a reservation but if someone comes we can move”. Nearly each time I met her she had wounded herself somehow, one week she was lingering because her foot was aching, and once she said “It looks like I have dirt under my fingers but actually I accidentally got them stuck and there are bruises underneath the nails”. She is always on her toes, heading out somewhere. Today Ruona is considered to be included in the Sami context, she has been told that “you have earned our trust” since she has been devoted to this issue her whole life. As she is in charge of the project from Naturskyddsförening, she has helped me come closer to this subject that was almost unknown to me before this thesis started. “We never say ‘our indigenous people’” Ruona said. “It shows a colonial thinking and can damage the bond”. This information became of vital importance and was added with “majority society”, which is used when talking about non-Sami people without having to say Sami and Swedish people, because Sami are Swedish too. Ruona has invited me to conferences, meeting with the Sami expert group, to Tensta Konsthall to see an exhibition on the Alta conflict in Norway. Once she brought me to Eskilstuna where she held a lecture for a teenage group about their upcoming trip to Sápmi and what they should know about Sami culture before arriving. Here I got an insight into what an elevator pitch of the Sami history can consist of.
My five other conversation partners were Henrik Blind, who is a reindeer Sami and politician for the Green Party in Jokkmokk, who I met at a café in Stockholm. Marie Persson Njajta, founder of the Facebook group “Stop the mine in Rönnbäck” and member of Sametinget who I have met at many informal meetings during this spring. We had a phone conversation for our official interview. After our interview she invited me to come to her home in Tärnaby, which for me is the biggest recognition that my thesis has been appreciated and welcomed. Carmen Blanco Valer, very familiar with indigenous issues around the globe, herself also being from an indigenous group in Peru. Today she is dedicated to the issues affecting Sami people. I went to have a coffee with Carmen in her hometown Gottsunda, just outside of Uppsala. I also interviewed a reindeer Sami called Hanna (not her real name) that I Skyped with. I went north to see Linda (also not her real name) who is not considered Sami by all.

I have used information found on the platform Facebook, though this is not a social media analysis per se, it is useful to further describe the conversation partners’ lives and worldviews. The core of my material is however from interviews with a few additions from their Facebook activities.

2.3 Observations

This thesis has gained ethnographic material through observations. The range of observations is intended to give a depth to this thesis. I attended a meeting of the Sami expert group, who cooperate together with Civil Rights Defenders and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation on “the Sami cooperation”, where a gathering of a diverse group of Sami people discussed how to strengthen the Sami position. I attended the demonstration outside the parliament as well as a big demonstration at Sergels torg against the mineral law, where representatives from both the north
and the south came to give their views on the mining issue in Sweden. I also went to a conference called World Water Day that showed the link between water and indigenous peoples’ rights. I visited the museum Skansen in Stockholm on the day of the Sami National day in February, in hopes of meeting someone Sami to interview, this observation is however not included in the thesis since it was not fruitful.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

I had several ethical considerations concerning studying the Sami people, where I as a researcher had to acknowledge the Sami history with racism since it was not that long ago that the Sami people experienced a traumatic episode of scientific racism. I knew I was approaching a delicate matter where I was careful not to use my majority society privilege in a way that denigrated others. In the beginning I definitely felt like I was aware of this issue but I was afraid of embarrassing myself and had a feeling that doing this could only end badly. To use the correct words, such as to not use “wilderness”, since it has negative connotations and instead bring up current issues, such as the question of ILO 169, could help the relationship with my conversation partners. The issue broadens out into who has the right to call themselves Sami which made me careful concerning my transparency when it came to who I had interviewed and what my own views were. From my observations I have also tried to be sure not to write details that might tell who I am describing, since that person is not a part of my research as an individual and has not agreed to the terms connected to it, such as in the Sami expert meeting.
3. Mining and Contested Worldviews in the Sami Community

3.1 Sacred Land

I got an email from Marie Persson Njajta saying “You probably have to call instead. It does not want to start today”. By “it” she meant her computer so I closed down Skype and found my phone instead. I started my recording device as the call was connected. This interview had been a long time coming. Marie and I have met on several occasions, and it was in fact she who inspired me to write about the Sami situation today. I had, a few months earlier, met her at a café where she asked two representatives from the indigenous people of Ecuador: “How do you keep on fighting when you never know when the fight is over? We have lost so many of our allies and it is splitting our communities and families. How do you do it?”. Their answer came directly, in Spanish but translated into English “Sure, we get treated badly, we have not rested for 10 years and we often have to prioritise the cause rather than our friends and family. But meeting people like you makes it all worth it. We find the strength in each other, at least we know that we are not terrorists or that we are not fighting against something impossible. Listening to each other like this and getting the opportunity to talk, we realise we are many, many, who are crazy enough to do this”. All of my bells were ringing, saying that this theme should be the topic of my Master’s thesis, as it is what I have learned through the programme, of how to organise and fight for change. I was also curious about the connection to religion and I asked Marie what she thought about that. She explained that her dad and her ancestors lie in the ground and of how land is something greater than just a natural resource.

Back to present day, Marie and I are having a conversation over the phone. “There is a spiritual connection to land and water”. She used the Swedish word “andlig” which is often translated to
spiritual. “This cultural heritage is cared [about] by all and especially in traditional areas, if you live there… If you try to still live there”. She explains how land is connected to the reindeer but also that hunting, fishing, handicrafts, food and herbs are a part of a spiritual connection. “Walking in your ancestors’ trails, with your children. There are places that are very important with particular importance. There are names in the landscape and terrains that testify about the meaning of the land, sometimes purely spiritual connections”. Marie’s words of passing on the land to the children gives a sense that the key part of the sacredness here is the connection to land. There is also an intergenerational aspect where the elder generations are seen as being a part of the land and nature as a whole. “We have our ancestors in the ground” Marie continues. She tells me of a family member “who spent her last days in a goathie [building] there on the slope which is within the planned mining area”. This shows a connection between the Sami people, in the past and present.

“It is when you are out in the land and spend time there that the language as well as culture and way of life is passed on to our children […] It is so simplified to say that it concerns reindeer herding, it is about so much more than that. The cultural heritage are both material and immaterial things”. This shows the complexity in trying to explain the importance of land, it is both practical, cultural and spiritual at once. “It is also when you walk there and tell the stories that you remember things”. She tells me it is a way of keeping them alive. “It is a part of our history and for us the spiritual connection is really strong, when we are on the mountains we meet our ancestors, we have them with us. But I think a lot of people do not talk about this, some think it is hard to talk about the spiritual and I think we need to talk about it more. Many believe it is important but maybe do not say that much about it, you want to keep it to yourself. I want to point out here though that there is a difference between religion and the spiritual”. As we can see Marie makes a difference between using the word spiritual and the word religion. In the United Nations declaration, the word “sacred” is used, they are not so far apart but worth noting.
“The spiritual aspect that is mentioned in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is very good, that there is a connection and that you have your right to the sacred. For indigenous people it is often connected to land and water where you have been. It is important to understand this. But how do you explain all this in a few rows in an appeal?” she laughs and adds “It is an impossibility!”.

I went onto the web to see what the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People said about the sacred aspect. In article 12 I found the paragraphs:

1. “Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains”

2. “States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned”

(United Nations 2008)

The fact that Sweden has signed this document is a recognition of the Sami way of life, however it fails to be useful in a practical sense when Sami areas are approached without concern for the Sami spiritual and cultural connection to the land.

“Indigenous people around the world share this and we understand each other” Marie says. “It can be harder to explain to someone who is not connected to land and water and who are indifferent to
land and water”. Another thing that Marie says they share is a colonial past “Sadly it very often looks like this, the experiences of an indigenous people being oppressed. All of these aspects are strikingly similar, you share experiences in different ways that have resulted in similar situations today”. I can tell Marie is trying to explain her worldview, even though she knows I am not a person connected to land or water myself, and that might be why it is hard to explain it further, in a detailed way where she will know that I understand. I see that on Marie’s (public) Facebook page, she writes similar thoughts with quotes such as “Spring has come and with it traces of my father. He is everywhere. In the wind, spring birds, spring river, the first butterfly, in all that is melting” as well as “Gratefulness to all the ancestors who have lived, worked and still are in our land and water, despite all acts from the state, authorities and exploiters”. This helps in understanding that she is open about her spiritual connection with nature, and also that she is consistent in her beliefs. This is comforting to the thesis since sometimes an interviewee gives the interviewer answers that they think is wanted.

Ideas such as those presented here, with spiritual values connected to nature can be understood as a “nature religion”, a term coined by the historian Catherine L. Albanese in the nineties. She defines it as "a symbolic center and the cluster of beliefs, behaviours, and values that encircles it” (Albanese 1990:7&8). This broadens what is usually viewed as religion. Albanese shows an example of an Amerindian people that lived symbolically with nature at the center. They saw the world as one that personally answered to needs and words and the people were a part of a sacred landscape. The correspondence was a controlling metaphor, and with it they mastered and controlled, through harmony, in a universe where they were a part of the natural world (Albanese 1990:23). The Europeans saw the indigenous peoples as having a “savage mind” that the Europeans found hard to grasp (Albanese 1990:16). Marie's words can be seen as lighter, partially secularised version of the Amerindian peoples’ connection with nature that Albanese describes. This also applies to the Sami
people as well as what Marie is saying in that all indigenous people share a common view on the
connection between nature and the people that live in it.

Carmen wrote me a message saying she might have time for a cup of coffee with me as she was
making her way into town anyway so if I had time I could meet her there. I packed my bag and
hopped on the next train and met her a few hours later in Gottsunda centrum. She jokes that it was
somewhat of a test to see if I would come this far out on the periphery, “people rather go to Ecuador
than come visit me here, they feel it is too far”. Carmen has her hair in one big braid and is wearing
colourful clothes. “We have to ask for consent to nature and to the Sami as well.” Carmen laughs a
little, she is referring to the new consent law in Sweden which made it illegal to have sex with
someone who has not expressly given their consent (Ascarelli 2018). “It is a collective silent
memory, the spiritual is not something expressed externally”. She says that the hesitance of
expressing the sacred externally is partly because of past persecution of the Sami for their beliefs,
and it is also because secularisation and New Age devotees have made it sometimes embarrassing to
declare devotion to the sacred.

I ask Carmen how come the Sami religion is explained as something only in the past. “Maybe not
much has happened, or maybe it has but we do not have access to it. I have not asked though, I
know it is a sensitive topic”. Both Carmen and I are outsiders when it comes to this topic. “It has to
be at their pace, the subject of religion can be more like ‘easy does it!’ . They rather show it than
voice it”. Carmen tells me about sitting by a fire in Sápmi and feeling the spiritual connection,
without someone adding the caption of it being a religious experience. She herself is more
comfortable with using religious terms from her background in Peru and do not see religion as a
separate realm and a part of “every day taken for granted” way in how some live their lives.
I went on a longer train ride to see my next conversation partner, Linda. She lives in the north and had invited me to come see her in her office. I arrived early since the train arrived hours before our meeting, as I approached the address I realised her office was in a residential building. I waited with a bag of cinnamon buns in my hand and soon enough Linda let me in. She works with Sami themes and we quickly started to talk about feelings towards nature. Linda told me that one thing most do not think about is to just walk in the forest, without having a purpose. “Tears fall when I start to think about it” Linda says when explaining her walks up on the mountains. “It is a powerful feeling to feel taken care of like that, it can not be described. It is religion and sacredness. It is because I listen, that is what it is all about, listening”. As I wrote down her answer she said something I will not soon forget “That foreign companies can come here and drill, for no money at all, it is like tearing out my lungs”. In one sentence two ways of thinking is shown. At the same time as sacredness is brought forward, so is the price level of this same matter, a commodity that is not given enough economic value. Two contesting ideas like this is a reminder that all of us are caught in different systems of value. Linda continues “I would not be able to handle if something would happen on my land, no, that would be such a despair”. I ask her if she believes there are others who feel like her towards nature, with the sacred aspect, but do not speak of it “Yes! Because… How are you supposed to believe in nature?”.

3.2 Who is Sami

The day was finally here for the Sami expert group to meet. I had wondered what they would look like, talk about and what the plan ahead was. As I was waiting outside I suddenly saw Ruona holding up a door for me. I followed her up to one of the top floors, where the room was already full with people. Coffee and buns were being served and people stopped their conversations to greet me but quickly continued. Most of them had met before as this was halfway through the project.
The group is diverse in the way that it consists of young, old, reindeer herders, forest Sami as well as Sami living in other places than Sápmi. As I looked around the room I realised I did not understand the symbols of scarfs and jewellery in the way that I wished I could. We were sitting in a room big enough for about 15 people and the room was almost full. I informed the group that I would like to interview them, but the reaction was different from what I had expected. I thought people would nod or maybe raise a hand, instead the room went silent. I realised it might be hard to find conversation partners. As the meeting continued several topics were discussed, one being that they felt there was a lack of knowledge from the rest of society what it actually meant to be considered an indigenous person rather than “only” a minority. Another participant informed us that there had been a seminar bringing up the issue of the opening of a mine in Norway, that had been both successful and had a bigger crowd than usual. Someone said that this might be because the focus was not on Swedish politics affecting the Sami community, otherwise there are usually fewer interested. Another participant had since the last meeting been in a panel where a representative from the Ministry of Culture had said that “You really should put your best foot forward”, aimed at the Sami, which was seen as a condescending comment. Two officials from the Ministry of Culture joined the meeting and informed us of where the Sami issues lie within the department, which is split into several different ones, some belong to the culture department, such as Sametinget, others such as the reindeer industry is placed within the industry department. The Sami representatives express that when the Sami are invited to meetings it is mainly SSR (“Svenska Samernas Riksförbund” meaning the Swedish Sami Organisation) and Sametinget who are invited, but that all organisations should be invited. The men say they will take this into account in the future. Through attending the meeting I got an insight into what topics are being discussed within the community right now, those mentioned here are just a few. I mainly brought with me the realisation that it was clear that there was an underlying divide between the reindeer Sami and the others, as heard in the last comment. This was something that I had been told before the meeting by my main conversation
partner, Ruona. She explained that many have the same rights as everyone else, but that the reindeer herders have greater rights on paper. Some individuals even express that especially non reindeer herding Sami can not speak for the whole Sami people. I took this knowledge with me in meeting my conversation partners and asked them as subtle as I could to approach this subject.

“It is not us Sami who have taken away our identity and all that defines a person. We live with being powerless, in that nonchalance. Then, of course, we start to bicker on each other instead”. I had discovered Henrik Blind’s commitment to the issue in the various groups on Facebook that are against the opening of mines. For example, he wrote in the group “Gruvfritt Jokkmokk” (Mine free Jokkmokk) “It is like the forests, lakes, mountains, water, plants, animals, cultural environments and people who live in its closeness are instrumental things that you can measure like baking measurements to a pound cake or according to its hectare. An on/off button on an Xbox or to a boiler room”. This intrigued me and I was thrilled that just a few hours after I had sent him an email he responded that he would gladly be a part of my study. We were going to use Skype for our interview since Henrik lives in Jokkmokk but one day I got an email saying he would be in Stockholm for two days, where I live, asking if I would want to grab a coffee instead. At the café we found our own room to sit in, separated from the crowd. Henrik speaks with a northern accent in an articulated way. I felt grateful since it would be easy to write down all of these quotes after the interview.

“This is connected to shame, and guilt as well” Henrik said “Many Sami, with good intentions, chose not to teach their children Sami languages and chose a different life. I understand them too. This is connected to half Sami and race biology that your whole identity was something in your blood”. Henrik himself is from a reindeer herding family and told me how the history of treating the Sami have affected the community as well as those who have left their Sami identity “I met with
someone who said her grandparent was Sami, I said, ‘then you are Sami too, if you want’. He thinks
more people should take back their identities of being Sami that was lost not that long ago. I
wondered how you can claim back this Sami identity, and how you would be perceived.

Carmen and I entered the same topic a while into our conversation when she said “At first I did not
understand why more people were not upset by the fact that they burned down that goahti recently
you know. I was like, should we not do something? Even those I know who are Sami were very quiet. And then someone gave me the key to understand this”. Carmen explained that this is
connected to an internal conflict, where this case can jeopardise existing rights within the Sami
community. She was referring to a goahti that was recently burned down by the Enforcement
Authority (Moreno 2018). I answered Carmen that these are things that are hard to see as an
outsider and that I have come to understand is an important part of this subject. Carmen agrees and
continues with “There are other things too” she says “This one time when I had my class [she is a
teacher], a teacher came, who I think taught Sami crafts, I thought she was very much up on the
surface. One of the participants asked about the conflict area and she replied ‘Oh no’, denying it. I
thought ‘how weird, why does she want to smooth it over? Is she that scared of reprisals?’ Then
when I spoke to another Sami he said he could see the connections, probably she was part of the
group who had gotten rather big benefits by the Swedish state”. I wondered how the near future
looked for this divide within the community, that perhaps the mining issue brought all of the groups
together. Carmen said ”The mining issue has after all become quite good, the Sami in Stockholm
and different parts of Sápmi unite. Even the Sami villages. I guess it is that too, the Sami villages
are very careful, they have been given privileges that they are probably scared to lose if they fight”. I thought to myself that Carmen felt fearless and well informed on the issue when she continued
“Everyone was not pro Sametinget because then others lost power. In the past the supporting pillar
was the reindeer but Sametinget is more diverse. Sametinget is wearing two hats now”. Carmen
explains that Sametinget is in a difficult position, with trying to use the money given by the state in a useful way but the money is not enough, making Sametinget the villain instead.

A while into the conversation with Linda I can tell that the atmosphere had shifted. “I am not recognised as a Sami”. Linda says “You know it is very arbitrary who gets to vote in Sametinget, and that is because of the reindeer herding law, they were the real Sami”. She tells me that some in her family gets to vote but not she herself. She became frustrated, speaking with a louder voice “I am a little bit afraid of the new Minister for Culture. It will crush us. Is it the law of reindeer herding they will strengthen? Then I have nothing to do with my origin what so ever, then I do not exist. It is like they get salvation by the Sami who then become victims. But I am not the big Swede here, I have been here for six generations damn it”. She raised her voice and put her arms out waving them “Hello! No, I am not some damn mixed race here. Please, nuance the picture!”. I recognise the discussions from my other conversation partners and sympathise with Linda’s position. “It is our land, we have been here for generations. Give me a break. And now they might have even more orders to give?”. Linda is referring to reindeer herders being seen as the Sami with rights. “It is like freaking Sicily, three big families who perform poaching. Everyone knows”. I realised this is a topic that Linda has many feelings and thoughts around as she says in a somewhat exhausted voice “You become an immigrant in your own country”. Linda quickly adds “You anonymise this right? Because if I speak openheartedly, what happens to me then?” As she asks this I reassure her she will be made anonymous.

I see an article in the newspaper about the Minister for Culture she referred to. Her name is Amanda Lind and she has recently been appointed Minister for Culture and Democracy, with responsibility for sport. The article starts with saying:
With responsibility for Sami rights the Minister for Culture Amanda Lind (Green party) has been given one of Sweden’s biggest conflicts on her table. On one side there is the indigenous people Sami with their constitutional right to land and reindeer herding, and on the other the government’s ambitious mineral politic and big plans for wind power, where nine of ten new mining projects are on reindeer land. Of seventeen planned wind parks nearly 100% are on reindeer land (Fröberg 2019).

The article focuses on the Sami villages right to have a dialogue and voting right with new mines as well as talking about reindeer land. I realise that maybe Linda is right, that the focus is on the Sami villages and the reindeer herders, even though 90% of the Sami are not included in this picture. With phrases like “Can the mining industry and reindeer herding live side by side?” both the interviewer and the interviewee maintains the hegemony that the reindeer herding Sami are the main Sami. The article explains that the Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (Social Democrats) do not give comments on the issue. In another article I find that Svenska Dagbladet (The Swedish Daily News) have tried to get in contact with the Prime Minister for half a year in order to get a comment on the Sami issue, only to be responded by the Party Secretary that he will not answer questions regarding Sami politics (Fröberg & Olsson 2019).

Ruona told me that the response when talking about the Sami issue to decision makers are usually that “you do not win elections on the Sami”. When researching this statement I found an article saying that you can even lose votes when considering to strengthen Sami rights. It is described as a sensitive topic to comment on, especially before an election (Fröberg & Dahlberg 2018). At the start of this year a new government was put in place, and now it is possible to see that even after the election the Prime Minister is not commenting on the issue. I wonder if the Prime Minister’s hesitation to comment is due to lack of knowledge, that he is experiencing a hesitation in the same way that I felt when approaching the subject or if this is a political strategy because of the interest in the commodity that is mining.
Over Skype I hope to see my next conversation partner, Hanna, but the technology fails and instead I see only myself, and Hanna’s picture. “I feel like I can not answer generally for Sápmi, absolutely not! These are my personal feelings”. This became a frequently said sentence in all my interviews. “I do not know all that has been said here but… yeah about this anonymity thing” she sighs. ”But I am thinking about this issue of ‘who gets to represent who’ can be very sensitive in Sápmi sometimes […] That is why I am sometimes careful to say this is true for Sápmi or me. I do not know if I want to lay that on me or not, I do not know, what do you think? Can you make this anonymous?” I started to see a pattern that whenever the questions came up on who can be considered to be Sami, the interview was entering a sensitive topic, one that was usually followed by the question of anonymity. I thought that the same would happen in my talk with Marie, however she surprised me with her answer. Marie said she does not have to be anonymous regarding this, she stands for caring for all Sami. She explains that sometimes she gets the question of “Oh, so you mean you dislike reindeer herders?” just because she says that all Sami are important, no matter the industry. “It is not at all like that, to me those are two separate things”. She says that the situation needs to improve for the whole people.

“I know that many feel bad for always having been made invisible but it can also be sensitive, to say these things”. She explains that SSR has resources she could only dream of, they get information that reaches her late, even though she is a part of Sametinget. “The invites go straight to SSR, maybe Saminourra, possibly a representative from Sametinget but the rest get the information too late”. Saminourra is an organisation for young Sami people. Marie is notably disappointed in the system as it is today. I remember this feeling of exclusion from the Sami expert meeting. She continues “Considering what the state and authorities have done to us it is extra important that we stop categorising so as to not maintain the template of how a Sami should be, that was actually something that was created during the scientific racism era”. I am reminded of what Henrik and
Linda said earlier, that this is something that had lingered even though they are officially discarded. “Sami culture has never been homogeneous, traditional south Sami culture or forest Sami culture never fitted in the mountain Sami or north Sami template that was created, where everything was about the reindeer”. Several of my conversation partners have witnessed on how narrow the view of the Sami still are, that it is still tightly connected to the reindeer industry, both from the majority society but also within the community itself.

Ethnologist Christina Åhrén describes that depending on heritage and cultural competence within the Sami community, different values are given. An etnocentrism exists among the Sami community, it is expressed in the way that different Sami symbols are given different values, some higher than others like reindeer herding or languages (Åhrén 2008:167&168). In what Åhrén calls the “cultural ladder” she explains that no one can be a perfect Sami, making it a blurry hierarchy where everyone can be at the bottom or top depending on who you ask (Åhrén 2008:162). These conflicts and expressions of culture are not visible from the outside, partly because the Sami show specific cultural features in public contexts and give the appearance of homogeneity (Åhrén 2008:164). When discussing this, anthropologist Mikael Hertzfeld’s theory of “cultural intimacy” can make sense of the situation. These aspects of the cultural identity can be seen as an external embarrassment and are therefore not shown. A paradox is found here as these aspects provide the insiders with a common sociality (Hertzfeld 2007:3). I noticed that these acts of internal conflict were not shown externally. As soon as the topic of the criteria of what makes you Sami arose, it was a sensitive topic that many felt uncomfortable sharing with me as an outsider, as well as including it in a thesis for others to see.
3.3 I Can Only Represent Myself

With the previous chapter in mind, the question of who can represent the Sami community in a public context is more complicated than one might think. All of my conversation partners were very clear on the fact that they only spoke for themselves and not all of Sápmi.

Henrik and I have both finished our coffees as a woman came by our table and asked if we might want a refill. As I pushed my cup closer to her she lifted it up and said with a smile “I do not want to spill on your important papers”. I realised I had been writing a lot on the paper around my questions, trying to fit as many questions as possible for one meeting. I asked Henrik what he thought concerning the topic of representing the Sami people as a whole. Henrik explained “There is a current example of where two Sami people met with Björn Söder [Then Party Secretary of the right wing party Sweden Democrats] that said ‘we have met with the Sami people’”. In the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter (The Day's News) Söder said in an interview that Jews and Sami are not Swedish (Orrenius 2014).

Henrik says “That is a common misconception among the majority society. I myself am not a robot who can say what the average of what all Sami thinks. You quite quickly catch up on that, when you are invited as the only Sami, for example. Then you get to represent a whole collective, where the risk is also that you simplify things, you get a stereotypical Sami. The Sami with the reindeer is the typical picture but we are only ten percent of the Sami who happened to end up in Sweden”. By this Henrik means that of the Sami in Sápmi, who happened to end up within Swedish borders, only a few are part of a Sami village and perform reindeer herding.
Carmen and I moved seats since the bright sun was making it too hot to sit by the window. I had
time to double check my recording and saw we had already spoken for an hour, as time was ticking
I wanted to ask my question concerning differences between the generations. I had noticed that
those who are shown in a public context are usually younger, such as Maxida Märak, Jon Henrik
Fjällgren or Jonna Jinton. Carmen answered me in a way that made me feel like she had thought
about this before. “There are differences between the generations, it is harder for the elder, the
stigma of oppression is still there. Their children who barely know that they are Sami et cetera. The
wound is still alive for them. Then there are those that are in between, who are the poorest when it
comes to the Sami way. And then there are the younger people who are starting to grow now, they
are a little cockier and talk about colonisation and such. But the in-between group is still the way it
is, they do not want to fight or bother anyone, and do not talk about Sami rights. They have wanted
to assimilate as much as possible. The elder have it inside of them in a natural way but they also
have the wounds and scars, the younger have a perception of oppression and get a feeling from their
parents but are not as afraid”. I wondered about how one can become a spokesperson and leader of
a group and in what way, when I came across a useful term by sociologists Howard Aldrich and
Roger Waldinger in what is called “ethnic entrepreneurship”. One component of this theory of how
to become a successful ethnic entrepreneur is to use the characteristics of the group (Waldinger &
Aldrich 1990:31). To be seen as a leader of a group and reach a position of power you must both be
recognised within the group as well as strive for it, like all forms of leadership. The wearing of colts
and jewellery can be viewed as a way of reaching leadership, to be perceived by others as rightfully
Sami or for strengthening your own self perception of being Sami. This becomes an issue also in
reclaiming a Sami identity as well as when working in the tourist industry within the community.
Worth noting is that this way of seeing it is not very flattering. To depict a person as a representative
of a whole group is rather seen as something organic than a thought out strategy, which this theory
claims.
3.4 To Be of Greater Use

As a phenomena around the world the mining industry focuses on areas that are low in population density (Liliequist & Coppélie 2017:117). The government has said that “the growth of the mining industry contributes to a changed perspective of the north of Sweden, from a depopulation to a future region” (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:110). The mining industry is seen as vital for creating jobs and growth in Sweden, especially in the countryside of Norrland, the north. Of the 16 active mines today in Sweden, 12 of them are in Norrbotten and Västerbotten (Bergsstaten). Sami also work in the mines, some to afford being reindeer herders (Sjögren 2012). One aspect important to include is that not all Sami are against the opening of mines.

Map of places discussed in this thesis and nearby places. Notice Jokkmokk and Rönnbäck, Tärnaby, where the opening of mines are currently being investigated.
I read about a conference where a picture of a clearcut forest was shown and Clive Sinclair-Poulton, the president of Beowulf Mining Plc, said “One of the major questions I get is ‘what are the local people going to go ahead and say about this project?’ I show them this picture [the clearcut forest] and say — what local people?” The picture was taken of Gållokk in Jokkmokk where a conflict surrounding the opening of a mine arose in 2012 (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:101).

I asked Henrik what he felt hearing those words of “What local people?” directed toward him and his community in Jokkmokk. “Ohf, it was like a punch in the stomach, it almost made you lose your breath. That was so…” he lowered his head and shook it while he said “it was so humiliating”. He looked up at me and said “to be made completely invisible, there is this feeling that you do not count at all”. Henrik tells me that even though he is used to it, this time it was different. “In this case it was perhaps good that the exploitation company were so honest because this is what it looks like. And this quote, you can not get rid of it. For my part this became my rocket fuel, it made me really, really angry. This can not go unnoticed without an answer. What local people? Well, all of us who live in the area, we have to give it a voice. This was maybe the best thing the company could do. To give a context to this situation, it was said at a conference held here in Stockholm where the company were looking for investors, he put up a slide with a picture of an empty clearcutting which makes is even more powerful. You are just showing a dead area. Clearcutting is also an abuse in itself. The forest and the reindeer have disappeared”. Henrik explains that former exploitations are a part of the region's history now. “And this is a cultural landscape that tells the story of my people, traditionally we are a storytelling culture where we are a part of nature, it is our library that is used with a pedagogical aim when raising children but also to understand your place in the world or in the area”. I think of Linda’s words of being in the forest without a purpose as Henrik continues to describe how by not disturbing the nature and the animals, one can experience a togetherness in the most rewarding way, such as getting eye contact with a reindeer.
“It is not a virgin land, it is inhabited by people. It has the spirit of my people’s history but also a basic requirement for us to keep existing”. This comment can be understood as both seeing the land as spiritual as well as practical in the sense that it is vital for the Sami people. Comments of the mountains as being a wilderness is something many Sami face (Ljungdahl 2017).

“It is clear that it is a mechanic and material view on nature, something that you can solve through a formula, an area”. Henrik further explains how the different views clashes “It is a mathematical view, the view on land and on nature. On the regional and local field it is urgent ‘you have to hurry up’ with for example giving permission to mines, that it is important for our region”. He continues with "And another argument I am tired of is ‘but we can all fit’, it is an incredibly difficult argument. Then you look at a map mathematically, I mean even a car garage can fit all cars but then not all cars can be there at the same time, it is such a brain dead discussion”. Henrik gives me several metaphors of how the view differs from being connected to land and viewing it as a commodity. Henrik adds “If I could rewrite the Sami history I would have put a lot of Easter Island statues all around Sápmi just to show presence. Now we are punished because we did not do that, that we have been respectful towards the nature, and that nature is not a part of us but the other way around”. Henrik smiles and says “That is something I wish the modern human would understand, that you can not see everything. You can not value everything in crowns. There are things that are bigger than yourself, for me the nature” he pauses for a while and adds “Is just that”. This can be viewed as relating to the spiritual aspect, of something greater that is not seen by the majority society. “You easily fall into the ‘industry thinking’, calling it the reindeer industry. Then the big industry will always be Goliat, if you are only to look at revenue. The reindeer industry is something the majority society have created. Like farming, and then copy and paste that to reindeer. I do not use the word industry, it is not my or our concept. Reindeer herding is a cultural expression.
Economists think of it as a consuming industry, but then maybe you should ask yourself ‘why do people do this willingly even though you only break even?’ it shows that it is something else that drives these people. Something greater”. Henrik is talking about this as being a culture and a way of life, not a way to make money “To be a reindeer Sami is not simple. It is physically demanding and then you also have these [investors] coming knocking on your door”. With this Henrik means that not only is being a reindeer Sami hard work, it also means you need to fight off investors interested in the land. We started talking about this being a global pattern, the interest of natural resources as increasing when Henrik said “To realise that I do not have to be afraid to say ‘I do not want a mine here’, but if I do that in another place, maybe to protect a rainforest, well, then I can be killed. If my brothers and sisters in the Amazon or wherever they are, despite that do it, then why should I not? Take the microphone and speak up. I am not afraid of being murdered. Or like the indigenous people in Canada where women are kidnapped and just disappear. It is important to see that this is a global pattern. I feel that genuine feeling that we all belong, we do not speak the same language but you still feel this unbelievable love. You have the same foundation, that is the way on your place on this planet. The fundamental values. Maybe it is the Māori people from New Zealand and me from Jokkmokk, it is like we are in the same family. An unbelievably strengthening feeling that gives a lot of energy, that we exist!”. Henrik brings up the fact that the democratic spaces are shrinking in the world, and that many around the world are injured and killed for caring about the nature and indigenous rights. “Us Sami have a responsibility, to engage in the Swedish politics […]. I know several Sami who now study law and are getting an education. We need to be in all different arenas and use the space provided by different work titles. Just to be in a room, that who they are talking about, that is actually me. It is actually a person of flesh and blood, so that you can not say ‘what local people’. Had there been an indigenous person there […] it would be very hard to say ‘what local people’ as you are looking at them!”
As I thought back of this meeting with Henrik I came across a clip on SVT (Sweden’s Television) where he met what can be viewed as his nemesis, the then municipal commissioner in Jokkmokk, Robert Bernhardsson. Robert and Henrik sit in front of the camera and answer questions regarding what they want to do to strengthen the job market within the municipality. The discussion starts directly with a quote from Robert.

ROBERT: We need to have more jobs in the Jokkmokk municipality and then we need more external investments. And with external investments I mean already consisting ones but also new ones who can come here. It is this way we can create a good tax base for the future.

HENRIK: I think we in Jokkmokk have a unique placement in the polar circle in that we have many strong values in our municipality with our nature and our unique culture. It makes it possible to be a place which can grow innovative, new, creative businesses within the creative industries and in combination with the existing ones.

INTERVIEWER: You talk about external investments, then I think of Kallak and the mining industry, how important is that to you?

ROBERT: I think it would be very significant. We know that an industry investment on this scale like a newly established mine would bring, it would create many, many jobs and it would also create a lot of jobs within service occupations, the tourist industry and so on. Exploitation companies and those things. So it would have a really positive element. We should remember that we live in a municipality that is almost as big as half of Denmark but we are only 5000 inhabitants.

HENRIK: About these mining plans one should remember that these are numbers that are built upon speculation simply put and we know nothing about what the end result will give. And another aspect that I also think is important to include is that there is also an environmental aspect. What consequences will a mining establishment give and do to our environment and how will that affect the attractiveness of our municipality and also those values who makes a whole world want to come and visit us.

INTERVIEWER: Is it worth it then?

ROBERT: It is not correct at all what Henrik says here in fact we have strong environmental laws and those should of course be applied in all of Sweden and they are applied here in the Jokkmokk municipality as well. What the Green Party does now with being so dominant politically when it comes to this mining issue is that you stop a negotiation of a legal trial for a mining establishment in Jokkmokk municipality by short-circuiting the process because of their powerful political activities.

HENRIK: It will probably require both one and two, maybe even three family therapy sessions before we will cooperate on a local level.

All three laugh (Haupt 2018).
Notice how Henrik is focusing on future generations and how the municipality has a future that does not include mines being opened. Notice also how Robert focuses on new jobs and saying that Henrik and the Green Party are stopping the development of the municipality. This can be viewed as a concentrated picture of this debate in general.

The philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels introduced the dilemma of free trade, valuing money above all else as early as 1848 in The Communist Manifesto.

It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, relied by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-laborers (Marx & Engels 1948:11).

This describes the importance of how economical values become superior to other values, such as the sacred, making exploitation desirable. In a capitalist society, businesses and the market value become the focus above all else. The same theme has been expressed by a more recent thinker, author Raman Selden, with the phrasing:

The discourse of the new market economics appears irresistible, as it washes over and overwhelm the languages of collectivism, humanism, egalitarian Christianity and the ethical discourses of the professions (Selden 1991:58).

It is a trend that has continued since the days of Marx and is still relevant today in 2019. This is also connected to neoliberalism, which can be understood as valuing two things above all else, to increase competition and to decrease the role of the state, which can be achieved through privatisation et cetera (Martinez & Garcia 1997). The Swedish state encouraging the mining industry illustrates this lens of viewing the land as a commodity, where the people living in the area do not have as much power as the companies and the state. The dominant discourse for opening a mine in Jokkmokk is in relations to monetary values, which makes the value of reindeer herding
and Sami culture to be assessed by the same basis (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:115). As the communication focuses on industries and best use of land in an economic sense, the Sami can not compete.

Hanna explained this further when she talked about reindeer herding “It is just an industry and they say ‘well, do something else instead then!’ It is like they say the Sami culture will not go away with the reindeer since it is just an industry but it is very important for our identities!”. Hanna expressed herself similarly to what Henrik had said, that reindeer herding is not a job or an industry in the traditional sense. This quote further confirms the words of Selden. “In these discussions I like to discuss who we are and where we come from, in my class we usually discuss that as well, about how differently we view the problem. Once a guy said ‘if we were to look at the same picture you and I, then I would see the potential economic interest but you see it from a totally different perspective’. He was…” she pauses, “from a big city in the south so to say”. She laughs a little and says “They are fundamentally different ways of perceiving and valuing nature’s attributes”.

Hanna continued ”What is happening concerns the view on sustainability. Our traditional knowledge of how to handle resources has been acknowledged and has to be made visible and be anchored in the sustainable development on a global scale”. What is seen as sustainable by Hanna is to not open mines, when the majority on the other hand sees it as the solution to the sustainability issue. Hanna says ”Concerning transitioning to renewable energy and the right issue concerning it, it worries me actually, for Sami rights […] A lot of people are saying we can expect a mining boom since we need to transition to renewable energy, which sounds absurd. Because we need metals for batteries and electric cars and what not, which means we have to open up more mines to provide for the need, I mean even wind parks need metals. That aspect is concerning. A lot of metal exploitations occurs in Sápmi, and the democratic implications for our rights get put aside”. Hanna
pauses “People can think that it is selfish of us, but just like everyone else we want to keep our
culture and way of life and everything it means. At the same time we understand we need to change.
[...] We have two burdens on our shoulders and it is unfair’. How are we suppose to cooperate?
Green energy can never be green if it happens on Sami land without consent. It is not okay”. Hanna
sighs and says “Just because we say no to the opening of mines and big wind parks on our land
which will hurt our industries and cultural way of life you can also point at the Sami group as being
selfish, but then we are asked to come up with other solutions. If we say no, then we are asked what
the other alternative is. Which of course is unreasonable to ask us [...] We should definitely switch
to renewable energy but it can not be at the expense of us”. This illustrates how the enormous value
of the commodity and the Sami rights creates a danger to our democratic society, since the decisions
are made above the heads of the affected people.

Henrik told me more about the connection to nature as something that is becoming more and more
valuable “We should be really proud of our sustainable work, we have lived in this area for so long
and still do. That is why today there are old-growth forests that are only possible to experience in
place, that you have to go here to experience. It is not an app or a Youtube clip. Look at what is
happening in Norrbotten with tree hotels and the eco tourism industry, it is growing. For example
Northern lights tourism. We have resources that can not be taken away from us. I think this gets
even more important in our modern world, our stress level demand recreation and we are ready to
pay for it. A simple thing such as not having reception on your phone, you are out of reach. Now we
are constantly eaten up by being in a news feed or a social feed where you are suppose to be
connected all of the time. Here you cannot do that. At the same time as we are not a wilderness. The
area is populated by people, it is an area where you can see human presence, but not an abuse of the
nature. There are small traces you have to learn to see”.
Archeologist Gunilla Larsson writes that today's technology is capable of finding Sami remains, for example with a ground probe. There are still many areas in Sápmi that are not included in The National Heritage Board's memorial inventory (Larsson 2017:42).

Ruona told me “I think this is a part of the ignorance in Sweden, this nature versus technology and the fact that the Sami have not left great monuments to show that they lived there […] still today, a lot of Sami do not want to reveal places […] like ‘no, do not show this on the map!’”. I learned that Ruona had suggested marking and showing spiritual places in the Sami areas but that it did not coincide with the Sami view.

I asked Marie what she thought of the view of minerals as the only way for our society to become sustainable when she sighed “The mining industry swings in what kind of arguments are used in order to exploit and you begin to see that the environment starts to be talked about more and more. Then you started using greenwash, you talked about environmentally friendly mines and that we should do everything as environmentally friendly as possible but at the same time you did not want to talk about the violations being made on Sami rights or that there might be big consequences”. She continued “The climate question has gained a boost, you start to talk about a climate adaptation”. Marie said that the mining industry has picked up on this and now use that as their argument, but it is also heard from ministers and politicians. She talked in a different voice to impersonate the mining industry “Oh, now it is really important that we get to mine metals and minerals to batteries and such”. I realised that this environmental viewpoint has arisen in recent years but are expressing the same ideas of the Sami not being factored in.

Marie continued “You talk as if this is the only option. You are often faced with someone saying ‘Well, so then that means you think it is better that they do it somewhere else where the working
conditions are even worse?!’. Marie said that she often has to answer questions proclaiming that “we also need to contribute!” The view of the Sami as standing in the way of the future and of the progression of the society is shown again in this quote. Marie said “But then you simply do not care about the history and the exploitations in Sápmi and the violations that have actually already happened. You have already contributed with a lot of resources […] You contribute to the power supply and nearly all the rivers are embanked. The best lands and waters are already embanked. Cultural remains have been drowned and all of that“. Marie explained that in terms of contributing, the Sami have contributed beyond of what she sees as a reasonable amount “The most exploitations comes from Sápmi and with it Sweden accounts for over 90% of all produced iron ore in Europe and the European Union. We are the leading mining nation, so it is not like it has not already happened but people do not care”. She replied to the question if it is better to do it somewhere else with “That is truly a truth with a modification. It is the prices who are in control. It is not like someone says ‘let us start a mine in Sweden, well, then we close this one in Congo’ it simply does not work like that!”. Marie said that in other contexts Sweden realises that we can not decide what other countries do or not “but what we can do is to set up terms here and show, this is the way to do it and this you can not do”. Marie told me that Sweden is already a country that others look up to and they believe Sweden has a respectful way of using the land. Marie expressed that it is the economic value that is in control, just as expressed by Selden.

Marie said she tries to give a picture of what land can mean, that it is a part of a whole and can not be chopped off and be compensated in other ways. “I mean it falls flat when it comes to the perspective we have of land. It is not about a small assault but actually about chopping of a piece of our soul and our whole foundation. With taking away the land you also take away us, it is actually that way, that is the way I see it”. Marie said that this is not something unique to the Sami, there are big similarities with other indigenous peoples' relationship to land and water. “And that spiritual
connection, that lies where you have your roots and where you reside. Something that just is”.

Marie explains that there are layers of colonial violations on top of each other “These places are already deeply pursued, and what does that do to a person? It is important to increase knowledge about this. We have already been through so much […] I think it is good that the environmental movement is growing strong and fights, we all need to fight against climate change but I believe indigenous people and the Sami have a big responsibility to increase knowledge, this becomes a problem when Sweden does not know its own history. You do not feel comfortable like ‘what do you mean colonialism!? That is nothing Sweden has been doing’ but we know that the historiography concerning the Sami people does not exist. Neither the Sami themselves or the rest of Sweden is taught this”. Marie expresses a desire for the majority society to recognise the past as a way of understanding the Sami people of today.

3.5 Studied But Unheard

Sami questions have been non issues in Swedish media for a long time (Ledman 2012:188-190). There is a national discourse in Sweden that the north is seen as regressive and unimportant where Sami issues are combined with the view of the north in general, and thereby do not reach national media (Eriksson 2010:5). Journalist Po Tidholm writes that there is an old, deeply rooted idea that the north of Sweden is a commodity port. That it is made to build mines and that the norm makes it hard to see other alternatives (Tidholm 2015).

Ruona told me “There is zero knowledge. We have to come in and give that perspective”. Ruona talked about the Sami project. The goal is to reach people of power and I asked Ruona how come most do not have enough knowledge, even decision makers “They can be genuinely interested but some are actively pushing it away […] In the north there are so many natural resources with high
economical values for the whole of Sweden. Northern Sweden is like a foie gras [to be used to the limit] for all of Sweden. The north of Sweden provides the rest with resources. A big part of Sápmi is populated with indigenous people but the politicians in Norrland do not want to acknowledge them, but rather continue with the investments that exists”. I asked her what she meant by actively pushing it away when she continued “Yeah, it is probably easier that way, to continue with business as usual. Because it complicates things, like, do I have to take the Sami into account as well?”.

Historian Åsa Össbo summarised her lecture with “To sum up one can say that we have not learned much during these 100 years. Knowledge about the Sami conditions were not included in the water law of 1918 and not today either in 2018 when you investigated the provisions for water environment and water power. And in a modern democratic state it should not be like this, this story should be known and it is resurrected in each new exploitation case that concern the Sami areas. It is an active now, not a past history. In a modern democratic state investigations concerning land and water in Sápmi should of course include the indigenous people Sami through Sami organisations and Sami authorities”. Össbo emphasised the importance of democratic values, that are now in jeopardy. Researcher Rasmus Kløcker Larsen joined the stage in a panel discussion with Åsa Össbo as well as Peter Rodhe, the President of the national organisation “Same Ätnam”. Kløcker Larsen speaks Swedish with a Danish accent “As we have already heard here it is the case that even though there are clear, as well as less clear, demands in the legislation it is in the implementation where it fails”. He says that one can see again and again consultations that do not lead to influence, rights are merely symbolical.

In a report that Kløcker Larsen refers to in this panel I find that Sweden received the worst result when it comes to indigenous peoples' influence regarding environmental assessments, placing worse than countries such as Norway, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Kløcker Larsen
2017:8). In line with an increasing international recognition of indigenous peoples' rights, the requirements for environmental assessments are also increasing. “Good practice now includes that authorities and indigenous people jointly control the process for environmental assessments. As well as that indigenous people who wish to receive a mandate and funding should be granted these in order to be able to lead their own studies. Sweden is generally behind in this area” Kløcker Larsen says (Kløcker Larsen & Rylander 2017).

During the debate he continued with adding that “Another important point, that has already been brought forward here, is that it is not enough with these general obligations, it is not enough with the international commitments and minor adjustments in the constitution and so on, we have to look at all sector laws [...] If it does not say very clearly how to take the Sami into account we will not see a change in the near term future”. Össbo added that “It should not only be adapted from one way” and said that companies need to read up on the case before showing an interest in it. Rohde says “And you should not think all Sami and Sami villages have the resources and the strength to push their cases to the limit”. Rohde pointed out the absurdity of expecting the affected to always stand up for their rights. Kløcker Larsen said “It is hard if you have been run over for hundreds of years and know that the law is the way it is. And if you know you will not be heard, how are you then suppose to be able to dream and think to yourself ‘if we could choose, how would we like it to be’. To dare to take up new battles, when you are deeply affected it takes a lot of effort, and there are conflicts internally as well”. Össbo said “The real compensation is land” she stops and nods “and land has never been given back”.

I think of Linda’s quote of tearing out her lungs, even though it can be viewed as only taking a piece of the land, the land as a whole is lost. I am reminded of the information Henrik posted in the Facebook group Gruvfritt Jokkmokk (Mine Free Jokkmokk). The text mentioned earlier continued
with “It is not the amount that is the big problem, rather what affect the mine will have with their circling poisonous ponds, residual waste and infrastructure. A knife stab does also not take up a lot of space on the body but can still give a huge physical injury depending on where it hits”. By not strengthening the owning rights to land, the Sami can not influence how the land is used and therefore will be more and more marginalised.

I told Henrik that it has been challenging to find conversation partners for this thesis, as he answered I could understand why. “There is a Sami joke that says that an ordinary Sami family consists of a husband, a wife, two children and an ethnologist” Henrik laughs loudly. I laugh too. He added “and I can understand, it takes a lot of energy to talk about this”.

Concerning the lack of knowledge in the differences between indigenous rights and minority rights Henrik said “It is like we have left-handed traffic in this country but everyone keeps driving on the right” I nodded along and added “And no one reacts”, “And no one reacts! Exactly” he replied nodding.

The lack of real acknowledgements from the Swedish state can be seen as giving the result that the Swedish people, and therefore also Swedish journalists, are relatively ignorant of what indigenous rights actually entail, and about the struggles that are connected to the issues in these areas (Liliequist & Coppélie 2017:140).

Carmen told me “It is scary how little people know”. She said she once went to a conference where she “noticed on the questions and such that they know more about other cultures in say Latin America than the Sami, but it is the same country! They know more about Latin America and
understand that oppression”. This confirms my own experience, that the majority society in Sweden gladly focuses on other countries and their indigenous people rather than those closest. Carmen continued “But the Sami representative had to start from the beginning, ‘hello we are Sami who exists in four countries’ to even explain the problem. I felt shame and guilt that they knew more about other things, even though it is not wrong, but the Sami had to begin at such a basic level”. Hearing this made me understand that people might not want to talk with just about anyone, if the knowledge is limited. Carmen said “It depends, if they have done their homework. Sometimes I get a request to have conversations about the Sami or other indigenous people when you notice that ‘eh, maybe you should Google first. Then it is almost like you have to do everything for them from the start”. She pointed to the problem that without knowledge there is also no curiosity. It creates a gap of how much weight is supposed to be on the indigenous peoples' shoulders to educate others. “In other places the indigenous people are more visible” Carmen continued “it can be called the indigenous people issue, but it is rather like saying that the indigenous people are an issue. There is also the cultural aspects, once a year you are acknowledged, quite general. And in the schools you are taught dances and maybe wear costumes, even if they are pretend costumes. But here with the Sami it is more hidden, they are made invisible and it is a non issue, the question is ‘what is worse?’”. Carmen showed that there are degrees of ignorance. ”There are definitely no requirements in the all-round education. I mean, people know more about tv shows than about the Sami. Even for those who you would think are allies, maybe antiracists, left wing people or people interested in human rights this is not an issue. Then you blame the school and say ‘I was not taught anything in school that is why’. During these last years I have become annoyed by this talk about the school with thinking ‘hello, how many other things do we never learn in school either?’, there are other social issues we learn anyway, say feminism. You put in effort to understand och know it. Or say the Palestine issue, you get a little insight about these issues to be able to talk about them at dinner or what do I know. But you do not do this with the Sami, it is a non issue for most”.

48
Henrik and I were finishing up our conversation. He looked at his phone quickly and said he needed to go soon to check out from his hotel. I told him we could end with a last question of feeling ignored. He said “The ignorance has a tendency to pacify you. You feel that ‘they do not understand anyway’. It is on such a basic level that it feels like trying to explain the color blue. The basic level is combined with a lot of prejudice. You experience that people do not know but also that they fill that void with lies. I can feel that it is not worth it, if you do not have any understanding around what a Sami is. How are we then to talk about ILO 169 or consultancy procedures?”.

Hanna told me that “The lack of knowledge is a huge factor to why racism occurs. If you do not understand then you do not understand. That is a goal I am working towards, because some does not even know we exist, even though it has gotten better […] We learn a lot about other indigenous people, especially in North America. But we exist too, we are visible and we will demand it”. She mentioned what Carmen had also told me, that the interest is there however it is not focused on the Sami “They say ‘Oh, I had no idea about this!’ Or ‘I have to go home and read about this’ it is really sad. You feel useless, it is sad that they do not know. That we as individual people are suppose to represent a whole ethnic group and at the same time educate people. There is also an issue with recognition, to not be made visible, it is about not being recognised. But you stop being surprised, they can be really educated people and people who live in Sápmi for example. They can express themselves ignorantly and racist”.

Journalist Herman Lindqvist said in an article that while watching the demonstrations by the Sami against the opening of mines in Jokkmokk that if the Sami would be indigenous people from North America probably all Swedish media would be reporting on the issue. Lindqvist explained that the history about how the majority society have treated the Sami has not really been written yet. He
writes that the Sami have always been pushed away and been treated less than, in a non dignified way while at the same time Swedish politicians have fought for other indigenous peoples' rights around the world (Lindqvist 2013).

Issues concerning mines in Sápmi has systematically been ignored in Swedish media (Anshelm, Haikola & Wallsten 2018:122). This can explain why the focus on the program Agenda concerning the mining issue was on the south of Sweden and not on Sápmi, even though the majority of all mines are there. Instead, the potential mine discussed would be located in an area called Österlen, a place known to be habituated by Stockholmers during the summer (Gäre 2017). The program included an interview with the director-general of the Geological Survey of Sweden, Lena Söderberg. Lena argued that mines have to be opened and that the companies are looking for other minerals than previously, hence the increase in potential mines, as well as protest groups. Lena also argued that if the minerals (that are needed for our society to become more environmentally friendly) are not taken from within Sweden it will be from China, Russia and Congo which has insufficient environmental and labour laws. Lena said that the process of opening a mine should be faster and more predictable, which would benefit both those who want to open a mine and those living in the areas affected (Agenda 2019).

Marie sighed on the other line of the phone “We are continuously being made invisible and are viewed only as something, something that does not belong or that you are a problem that do not fit […] We know that there is lacking a lot of research that includes the whole people”. She emphasised and continued “That! I wish there was more space for, to get more information regarding all the Sami”. Marie said that the issue of who is considered Sami is important. Then when the focus is on Sami questions, it is on the reindeer herders. Marie continued “We often see actors come, or researchers who interview people” she explained that just last week she had several
visitors. “People come by or maybe you write something and spend a lot of time on it, and then that
might result in a few sentences or you do not get any feedback at all. Maybe someone makes
something happen and then nothing more, and you are still in the same place as you were before”. I
said I felt bad, for that sounds a lot like what I have been trying to do for this thesis when she
quickly replied “No! I really did not mean that directed towards you”. Marie continued and said that
she tries to get people involved when people come by to understand more of the Sami situation
today. She said it has become harder recently, and those who come from within the community says
“I am here but I am sceptical!” Marie explained that they worry that they will not be able to include
their view “It will end up focusing on reindeer herders either way […] In the end you still feel
invisible”. Marie said she can not really force people to join or even say “now you have the chance
to make your voices heard” since they have already done it so many times before and still it all ends
up with “the Sami village picture that is presented because others are not seen as equally
important”. She told me these people become more and more isolated.

To make sense of this inconsistency one will find the cognitive dissonance theory valuable, coined
by social psychologist Leon Festinger. The dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling, making the
person feel it wants to reduce the dissonance. To be able to do so one actively avoids situations and
information that would increase the dissonance. Festinger uses an example of a person that knows
that smoking is bad for his health, but continues to smoke. The reason for smoking despite the
knowledge is because it is joined with reasoning such as for example that the chances of his health
suffering are exaggerated or that there are other things that are dangerous as well and avoiding them
is no way to live (Festinger 1962:2&3). The majority society can hence be seen as actively trying to
not gain information, as Ruona said, since then it makes it harder to use the north as a commodity
port. Instead of changing the actions, the belief is amended to confirm with the action. Henrik
explained that if a Sami representative would have been in the room that day of “What local people?” The question never would have been asked.

4. Concluding Reflections

Toward the end of my research I attended a demonstration against the mineral law in Sweden where many of the themes I was writing about came up, such as the contrasts in how land is viewed and who is allowed to call themselves Sami, as Nijajta spoke of. Questions of who gets to represent the Sami people, as Märak asked. Nijajta used the word “green colonialism” to explain her feelings towards the mining industry.

The demonstration was held in central Stockholm, in Sergels torg. I arrived a bit early and quickly saw people who I have met through meetings and conferences during the writing of this thesis. As people started to arrive I saw taps on shoulders followed by long hugs, it seemed like everyone knew each other. Behind me I heard a conversation that started with “Ah it is nice to finally meet outside of the Internet“. A big part of this movement against the opening of mines is held in Facebook groups, to name a few it is the already mentioned “Gruvfritt Jokkmokk” (Mine free Jokkmokk), ”Stoppa gruvan i Rönnbäck i Björkvattdalen, Tärnaby” (Stop the mine in Rönnbäck in Björkvattdalen, Tärnaby) and “Urbergsgruppen” (The Bedrock group). Here posts recommending articles, comments on debates and pictures from demonstrations are frequently posted. The demonstration seemed to be starting soon. I saw two men with ponytails at the back, that I assumed were responsible for the audio, they started pushing buttons and moving cables around. After a few audio feedback problems making the first talker take pauses and the crowd slowly lifted their fingers to their ears, the men in ponytails ran up and down pushing more buttons and adjusted the microphone stand.
Marie Persson Njajta stood up on the podium, wearing a colt and held a big flag of Sápmi that fell back on her shoulder. “Last year I visited the UN:s Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. There the committee asked the Swedish state why not all Sami have been consulted. The project affects many Sami, the majority of which have been shut out from the process because we are not considered to be a part of the Sami village, even though we south Sami have always lived and worked in the area. But we have thoughts anyways. We are all dependent on land and water to be able to live here – to bring our culture, knowledge, language, nature and our way of life to our children. In the Sami context the land bears our history and our future. They hold our heritage, our memories and our ancestors. If you take away the land you take away us. That means all the Sami people”. She pointed out the dilemma in recognising only a few as real Sami. “We do not want any green colonialism!” She continued “Sami land will yet again be exploited – now with wind power and electric cars as the excuse”. As I had come across in my research this was strikingly true, from the mining industry, the state as well as the media. “We demand that the state and companies live up to their obligations towards the Sami people. And I mean all Sami, whether you live off reindeer herding, fishing or something else”. Marie yet again brought up the importance of opening up the view of who is considered Sami, something she explained to me was appreciated by many.

A young woman, Tilda Pontén from Civil Right Defenders, entered the stage. “The relation between human rights and the protection of nature and the environment is crystal clear. The UN reminds us of that, time and time again. And the Swedish government agrees, as long as you are talking about the situation in another country, preferably outside of Europe”. Civil Rights Defenders and Pontén are a part of the Sami project, which she referred to in her speech. “Since we started working with this we noticed the reoccurring and widespread ignorance and in many cases arrogance that prevails
among many Swedish politicians but also the law that regulates natural exploitations on Sami traditional land by mining extraction”. The mentioning of “traditional land” is often seen in debates surrounding these issues, it emphasises a viewpoint of rightful owners of the area based on its long history. She talked about the double standard she sees, of money that goes to other countries every year to help in the protecting the environment and human rights concerning the mining industry, but not here. “The system is not built for the small person or for our environment to survive. Sweden will keep getting critiqued by the UN until a change is made”.

One of the last presenters at the demonstration, a young and well known person, Timimie Märak walked up to the stage. Märak was wearing a big coat in black and white and talked in a calm voice, signalling that this is not the first time this person is behind a microphone. “If Sweden would have been a partner of ours, hopefully our friends would have told us to break up, yesterday […] Always on the edge of what is ok, never leaving enough bruises to make you worry”. Märak looked out at the crowd “I am very happy to see you all here today. It is interesting how many we are after all. And how many who stop to see the tourist attraction. I am not wearing a colt and I am not going to joik so I wonder if I am interesting enough for Sweden right now”. Märak pointed to the idea of ethnic entrepreneurship, of how you are viewed and categorised as Sami.

Märak started to speak in a louder voice, in the style of a spoken word performance. The rhythm and rhyme was well composed in Swedish, where the translation lacks these elements in this English version. “Now I am saying things that concerns us, that concerns my people and I do not know where to start because they stand there and hold their fingers in their ears like a couple of grumpy kids” this saying connects to the cognitive dissonance theory, of choosing not to listen. “So welcome. We are the suburb’s suburb. We are promised the moon and the stars, the big speak, big but which leave us in the dirt with a broken cup, the cup always half empty. We are the suburb’s
suburb. World’s most beautiful ghetto”. Märak said with one arm raised “Because the rest of Sweden do not give a crap about us!” The conversations and small talk around me stopped. There was a pause that made the next sentence fill the whole square. “And they think we cost them more than they cost us. Some of us pleases the picture. Some sigh of surrender. Some want to but do not dare to anymore because some have already tried, have sought help and been dissed, been pissed on because the police does not come here […] And you want US to develop. I am sickened by your hypocrisy. You think WE are the cheap ones, that we should be able to bear that you toast in our places’ names. To take you into our arms while you thank us and give us a fake wide smile, lying to our faces”. Märak screamed “even though you know we have seen the hell that is just around the corner!” With a calmer voice Märak finished the speech “So with my fist tight, firmly determined. I turn to you Stockholm. Come and see us, so you can try to understand, the most unseen, most misleading and misled but fully prepared to stand there with open arms. Welcome to us. Welcome to Sápmi, the north, Norrbotten”.

The Sami community has, as this description has shown, many contrasts and creates a diversity within it. Three themes stand out as I summarise this thesis.

i) To recognise that the land that has been, and today, is used by the Sami people can be viewed as sacred and spiritual land is worth noting. It is hard to get access to this aspect and the possibility of documenting it as well as there are differences in individual experiences. The land is seen as sacred by some and this is expressed in different ways. Henrik explained that being in harmony with nature is achieving “something greater” that the modern person can not grasp and Marie explained how land is crucial for the connection between generations. Quotes such as “tearing out my lungs” added with “for no money at all” show that individuals cherish both sacred and profane values at the same time. Sacred and traditional land is necessary to view in a
multifaceted and multi rational way. Land is also an economical resource. The Sami have been mistreated in the past where land has been exploited, and now the mining industry is performing the same act as the Sami have already been through. To share experiences of the sacredness is almost always hard to articulate, and in this case it seems there was a disadvantage in my position as well. In the future it can be strategic to open up more about the sacred connection as a way of explaining the set of values connected to land as something greater than a natural resource. However there are feelings of meaninglessness of putting up signs for outsiders, who will not understand or respect them anyway. Also, it interferes with the Sami way of not leaving traces in nature.

ii) As the need for batteries grow, in order to live in a sustainable way with electric cars et cetera, the pressure is on for a fast solution. Marie’s quote of “green colonialism” is telling that this rhetoric is way of saying that this is the only option, or there is no future. People will move away, other countries will open mines that will cause worse harm to the people there and we will not reach our sustainable goals. The Sami become an obstacle in this worldview and are seen as selfish and regressive. When the Sami are reduced to an industry that can be valued through economic values, it can never compete with what the mining industry gives hopes of earning. The hegemony of the Sami as having the core of the reindeer herding is upheld by the mining industry, media as well as the government.

iii) The hegemony of the Sami as a reindeer herding culture, even though this is true for only 10% of the people creates a misleading debate outside as well as within the community. The status of an indigenous people is not linked to an industry. The Sami people are an indigenous people, not only a minority, and with it comes rights. Questions of how one defines identities, boundaries and rights connected to membership may become an increasingly difficult issue. Today in theory
the Sami are not connected to an industry, but they are in practicality, which makes it harder to claim rights to membership when for example moving to a big city in the south of Sweden. It is clear that more research is needed that focuses on the whole Sami people and that the term is broadened within the community as well as for the majority society. Only then can the existing rights be put into practice. Just like Greta Thunberg says “Some people say that we should study to become climate scientists so that we can ‘solve the climate crisis’. But the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we need to do is to wake up and change”. It is clear that Greta’s ideas are more easy to join in since today it is rather uncontroversial to say one wants to prevent climate change but it is still seen as controversial to view Sweden’s history as consisting of colonialism. The Sami question is also harder to grasp since there is no consensus within the group of who has the right to be Sami. Increased knowledge will lead to us being able to make use of already consisting legal frameworks. If they can be put into practice, they can change symbolic actions to a powerful force.

I would like to end this thesis with a few sentences from a popular epic poem in the Sami community, called Ædnan. This work won the literary award August Prize in 2018, here the words have been translated by me into English.

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\begin{align*}
Hur ska våra spår & \quad How can our tracks \\
nånsin höras & \quad ever be heard \\
Bland svenskarnas vägar och kraftstationer & \quad Among the Swedish people’s roads and power stations \\
(\text{Axelsson 2018:373}).
\end{align*}
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5. Reference List


